



IDEN - DEE FY

1 MAY - 17 JULY 2021

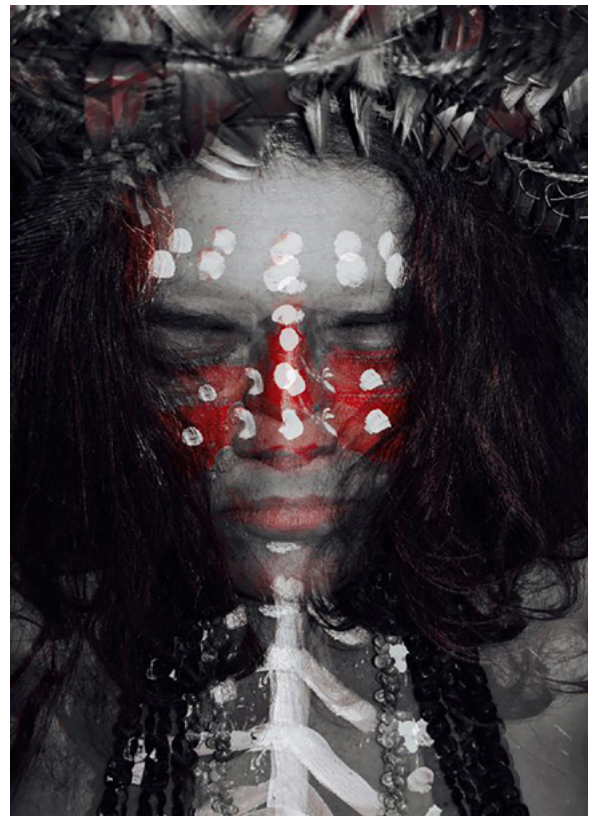


IDEN- DEFY

IDEN-DEFY brings together a collection of portraits by First Nation artists that engage in the discourse around individual and communal identity. Portraits of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are inherently political, the act of identifying as such defies the last 200 years of forced assimilation and asserts the living continuum of blood lines of the Traditional Owners of our continent.

IDEN-DEFY explores the threads that connect us to our ancestors, to country, to history and to inherited responsibilities. Together they represent the diverse community discourse around defining modern Indigenous identities.

For Indigenous communities the entirety of colonial history has been an experience of identity-interference. Despite the existence of hundreds of self-identifying, named and autonomous groups within Australia, they are forced into accepting the broad brushed identifier of Indigenous or Aboriginal. This terminology was a result of derisive colonial classifications which were utilised to identify communities that would be targeted for violent and destructive policies of assimilation. These policies dispossessed communities of their land and culture. Then placed these communities under false pretences of 'protection' which were used to control and eradicate traditional ways of life. They were used to further aggravate intra-cultural conflicts through the creation of false hierarchies and constantly moving goal posts for limited freedoms. These policies stripped communities of their humanity and imposed enormous barriers in the ongoing fight for Indigenous rights.



Bianca Beetson

Warrior Woman - Martuchi (Maroochy) 2015

Inkjet print on paper

USC Art Collection. Acquired 2017.

The act of Identifying defies this history. It defies dispossession, violence, theft of language, theft of lore, theft of children and community. It defies monumental powers of assimilation. It declares incredible strength, survival, autonomy and self-sufficiency. It weaponizes and redefines the words 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal'. These identities are not political because they want to be, but because politics crashed around them, defining, re-defining and un-defining them as they endured waves of attempted eradication.

IDEN-DEFY comprises of Indigenous artists engaging in an individual and community-based discussion about what Indigenous identities are, in spite of 200 years of extreme colonial interference. How have Indigenous identities changed? What has been lost and what has been gained? How are they identified and how do they identify? These are discourses that are embedded in every aspect of contemporary Indigenous life, they are discourses that have gone on in this continent for centuries and will continue for centuries more. These artists and their works are representative of the continuity of Indigenous oral histories, of songlines and connection to Country.

In 1935 a fair-skinned Australian of part-indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being an Aboriginal. He returned to his home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because he was not an Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During World War II he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal person. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act - and was told that he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not an Aboriginal. He was denied permission to enter the Returned Servicemen's Club because he was [sic.]. In the 1980s his daughter went to university on an Aboriginal study grant. On the first day a student demanded to know, 'What gives you the right to call yourself Aboriginal?'

- Peter Read



Michael Cook

Ashtray from Object series 2015

Giclee print on archival paper

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Cook, Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection



Christopher Bassi

Black Palm 2019

Oil on canvas

Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection



IRENE MBITJANA ENTATA

Irene Mbitjana Entata, born in 1946, attended the Mission school in Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and is one of the founding members of the Hermannsburg Potters. The Potters capture the vibrant landscape and spirit of Central Australia, taking inspiration from Country, culture, history and the day to day lives of community and family. They depict family, birds, animals, bush tucker, mission days, stories of Country and current life in Ntaria.

Creative practices were strongly encouraged at Hermannsburg Aboriginal Mission, with pottery being introduced in the early 1970s when a small kiln was built. This was the beginning of the tradition of making sculptures using the hand-coil technique, a tradition which is inseparable from their land through the use of locally sourced clay, "part of the skin of the earth itself." Over time, women became the principal pottery makers, as the creative process became an important way of life for many young women in the community. Their practices made room for a return to traditional ways of relating, sharing and learning, as well as paving the way for financial autonomy and self-determinacy.

"We sit around talking as we make our pots, with the younger ones learning from the older ladies about pottery and life, and because the centre is women's only, the ladies feel comfortable talking about important issues"- Judith Inkamala¹

Irene Mbitjana Entata's practice is centred around her own interpretation of the history of her people over recent generations. Many members of her family worked for the missionaries at Hermannsburg, Entata herself was employed as a health worker and cleaner. Entata calls the series of pots exploring these histories *Mission Days*.

Irene Mbitjana Entata

Mission Days 2001

Painted terracotta with underglaze

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Simon Turner, Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection

Hermannsburg Potters 2002

Painted terracotta with underglaze

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Simon Turner, Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection

The *Mission Days* pots are emblematic of Entata's practice. The first depicts a female potter on the lid with a circle of potters painted onto the side and is a self-portrait of the artist and her community. The choice Entata makes to include the creative process in her depiction shows how intrinsically rooted their practice is to their individual and community identity. The second work provides an insight into day-to-day life on Hermannsburg Aboriginal Mission. While Entata does not engage so directly in political discourses as other contemporary Indigenous artists, her work provides an expression of Indigenous world views, the continuation of oral histories and the importance of both pre- and post-colonial traditions and experiences.

¹ Accessed from <https://hermannsburgpotters.com.au/>





MICHAEL COOK

Michael Cook is a prominent Australian photographer of Bidjara and European heritage. Cook creates constructed and highly surreal photographic images that explore the complex history of colonisation and its effects on Australian Aboriginal communities.

Cook's practice is informed by an acclaimed career in commercial photography. However, he deviated from this career trajectory through a growing desire to engage in discourses around Indigenous identity and historical representation. His works are highly technical in nature, seamlessly merging multiple layers of imagery, resulting in his photographic images often reading as paintings or collages.

Cook utilises these familiar and beautiful aesthetics as a medium for audiences to perceive histories and truths that are often hard to look at. Unlike traditional photography, the works do not represent a single moment in time, instead capturing a surreal timeless aesthetic through which he explores the nuanced and compounding moments in history that have created and undermined contemporary indigenous identities.

Michael Cook

Object 2015

Giclee print on archival paper

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Cook, Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection

Cook's *Object* series challenges ingrained belief systems through a theatrical staging of alternative histories. Role-reversal is a motif in many of Cook's series, through which he flips historical cultural power dynamics. Here he depicts colonial styled Aboriginal characters of great wealth and perpetrators of slavery. He calls to attention the impacts of these practices in Australia through the depiction of bodies as owned objects. These bodies are tagged and reduced to the functionality of the inanimate, stripped of their humanity and identity.

Michael Cook


Mother (Pram) 2016

Inkjet print on paper, AP 2/2.

USC Art Collection. Acquired 2018. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Cook.

Cook's *Mother* series is a tribute to the Stolen Generation and a homage to the matriarchs who have held together communities and culture despite suffering the theft of their children. Cook's 'mother' is always alone, her baby missing, caught in a moment of timelessness. Her pram empty, calling the audience to aid her in what we know is an impossible search. The works are embedded with memory of past joy and connection. This memory bridges the past with the present and allows these highly personal experiences to be understood by a broader audience.

In spite of the confronting nature of the imagery, Cook's works do not read as forceful or antagonistic. Through the process of role-reversal Cook controls the lens the viewer uses, enabling a positioning close to a universal perspective on the moral issues depicted. His works force the viewer to confront the past and to think critically about the experiences of both historical and contemporary Aboriginal communities.





CHRISTOPHER BASSI

Christopher Bassi is an Australian artist of Meriam, Yupungathi and British descent. His paintings weave together multiple narratives that conjure the complexity of contemporary transcultural experiences. Subverting archetypal models of representation his work draws on art history, politics, and personal references. Reflecting on his mixed Meriam and Yupungathi people from the Torres Strait and Cape York along with British heritages as a point of departure, his work explores the entangling of social and cultural identities and aims to test the limits of painting to act as an imaginative space and tool for locating oneself in the world.


Christopher Bassi

Black Palm 2019

Oil on canvas

Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection

Bassi's *Black Palm* employs the iconography of a black palm frond to suggest a sense of place, constructing a layered narrative that plays with time, reality and meaning. He likens his painting practice to the way a writer constructs fiction using lived experience; his works are not autobiographical, but draw on history and heritage to form a personal cosmology that blurs fact and fiction. Deliberately engaging with archetypal modes of painting and the Western art history canon in order to offer a new perspective, Bassi's work speaks to his reflections on contemporary life and those living between cultures.





BIANCA BEETSON

Bianca Beetson is a multi-disciplinary Kabi Kabi artist. Beetson's work is concerned with her individual identity as an Indigenous Australian, as well as the identity of Australia as a nation in terms of its history and its concept of self.

Her *Selfie* series is an ongoing body of work through which she controls and re-invents representations of herself, herself-as-other and herself-as-touchstone for others. Beetson reclaims the narrative of Indigenous bodies in photographs, no longer captured as doomed subjects in anthropological studies, now an autonomous expression of strength, self-determination and humour.

Bianca Beetson

Warrior Woman - Martuchi (Maroochy) 2015

Inkjet print on paper


USC Art Collection. Acquired 2017.

Warrior Woman - Bonyi (Bunya) 2015

Inkjet print on paper

USC Art Collection. Acquired 2017.

Warrior Woman - Marutchi and *Warrior Woman - Bonyi* are two self-portraits that depict Beetson wearing a crown of thorns made from the bunya tree. The bunya were a central component to Kabi Kabi way of life, with seasonal harvests bringing communities together. These harvests became culturally significant events where ideas, songs, dances, stories and relationships were shared, traded and formed. The trees offered a system of governance and operated as environmental markers of identity based on connection to place, time, people and land. *Warrior Woman*, with its strong biblical references of martyrdom, fights against the widespread destruction of bunya forests and the way of life they represent. Beetson's *Selfies* offer a glimpse through the artists representation of self, into a deeper and more informed understanding of contemporary Indigenous identity.





JANDAMARA CADD

Jandamara Cadd is a contemporary Indigenous painter of Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Warung descendant. He is a storyteller who utilises vibrant and expressive portraits to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and mainstream Australia. Cadd embraces art making as a way of life to find peace and unity through exploration of the human condition. Utilising individual experiences and identities to share narratives of community, spirituality and kinship.

Jandamara Cadd

Ancestors 2015

Oil on canvas

USC Art Collection. Acquired 2018.

Cadd's Ancestors is a portrait of Gubbi Gubbi artist, performer, and educator, Lyndon Davies. Cadd captures Davies' connection to ancestors through embracing traditions of dance and ceremony. Davies plays clapsticks (Yadaki) and shares traditional stories with respect and authenticity. Wearing traditional ceremonial dress and surrounded by ancestral spirits that give him wisdom and strength, Davies' presence is commanding and yet never confronting. The portrait embodies the responsibility of reclaiming, protecting and passing on culture.

The warmth and regard that Davies demands in this portrait defies the perverse, clinical, colonial views of Indigenous ways of being. The work invites the viewer to participate, to learn and to engage personally; not through stereotypes.

"Share in our song and dance (yuar warrai) as we pass on the stories and language of our people. Drawing inspiration from our elder generation who taught us only to take what we needed and always give back to mother earth, keeping the balance between nature and man"

-Lyndon Davis²

² Accessed from <http://jandamarrasart.com/artwork/ancestors/>





TONY ALBERT

Tony Albert is a politically minded contemporary Aboriginal artist with strong family connections to the Girramay and Kuku Yalanji nations. Albert is driven to deconstruct and rebuke stereotypical representations of Aboriginal people and the colonial history that attempts to maintain and control what modern Aboriginality is and how it is expressed. Albert is a member of the acclaimed Indigenous collective, proppaNOW. His practice spans across a wide range of mediums, including installation, sculpture, painting, video and photography.

Tony Albert

50perCENT feat. SISSY 2006

Type C photograph, ed. 1/5

Winner 2007 Sunshine Coast Art Prize. Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009. Sunshine Coast Art Collection

50perCENT #1 2006

Type C photograph, ed. 1/5

Winner 2007 Sunshine Coast Art Prize. Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009. Sunshine Coast Art Collection


50perCENT feat. B.E.L.L 2006

Type C photograph, ed. 1/5

Winner 2007 Sunshine Coast Art Prize. Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009. Sunshine Coast Art Collection

In his photographic series, *Gangsta Supastar*, Albert assumes the persona of 50perCent, a rich and glamorous hip-hop superstar. The pseudonym is a reference to his dual heritage of white mother and black father and recontextualises the anthropological terminology of half-caste. *Gangsta Supastar*, is a comedic take on modern urban experiences that rests on Albert's personal relationships with family, friends and mentors depicted as supporting characters alongside 50perCent. Humour is a key tool in Albert's practice which he uses to break down cultural barriers and challenge notions of adversity.

This series does away with the colonial Indigenous identity of the victim, whose culture and genes are doomed to be absorbed and assimilated into all that is Western. Albert asserts the impossibility of such assimilation and demands serious engagement with the social and political undertones within race relations in Australia. With clear reference to American artist 50 Cent, Albert explores the influences of black America on contemporary urban Aboriginal communities and illustrates counter-colonial cultural reactions and movements of solidarity shared by First Nations people globally.





MEGAN COPE

Megan Cope is a Quandamooka woman of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). Her practice rejects prescribed notions of Aboriginality and explores ways of recontextualising colonial narratives held within Australian archives. While her general practice is painting, she also works across sculpture, video and installation. Cope is an active member of the Brisbane based collective proppaNOW.

Megan Cope


The Blaktism 2014

Single channel HD video, 7 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery

Cope's *The Blaktism* is a baptism-like ceremony. It explores the tensions and intentions Aboriginal people have to navigate to be deemed authentic by White Australia. An authenticity proven through the controversial form of a Certificate of Aboriginality. The work is motivated by an overwhelming sense of doubt and insecurity around obtaining this documentation, due partially to being a fair skinned Aboriginal. Cope navigates the interrogations and suspicions Aboriginal people experience about who they are and why they identify themselves as Aboriginal. Capturing the way in which humour is used by Aboriginal communities to make sense of social and political issues, the work satirically highlights Australia's obsession with authenticity, while simultaneously and hypocritically insisting on processes of assimilation that rely on the abandonment of authentic identities. Through references to the institution, religion and pop-culture, Cope addresses systematic interference in Aboriginal identities on an individual and community level.

The Blaktism embodies a deeply personal process of catharsis of personal insecurities that reiterates that Aboriginality is more than skin deep.





VERNON AH KEE

Vernon Ah Kee is a multi-disciplinary contemporary Indigenous artist and founding member of proppaNOW. Born in Far North Queensland, Ah Kee has strong connections to the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr people. Ah Kee's practice dives into the dichotomies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through a range of works including large charcoal drawings of his family, comedic yet hard hitting text-based works and documentary-style video installations. Ah Kee fuses pop-culture, the history of colonisation and contemporary political issues to expose racism and share Aboriginal experiences. His work aims to reposition Aboriginal identities from 'the other' trapped within museum and scientific records to a contemporary community of people.

Vernon Ah Kee

Unwritten 1 & 2 2010

Charcoal on paper

Winner 15 Artists 2014, Moreton Bay Regional Council Art Collection.

Born three months before the 1967 referendum, Ah Kee reflects on the history of Aboriginal rights in Australia. Particularly the classification of Aboriginal people as flora and fauna and property of the state. *Unwritten* is an ongoing series of portraits that explores the history of Aboriginal people in this country, a history of always becoming human. The drawings are unwritten reflecting the exclusion of Aboriginal people in the writing of the Australian Constitution and the doctrine of terra nullius, which wrote Aboriginal people out of existence.

Ah Kee's portraits capture the way colonial Australia views Aboriginal people. As formless faces emerging from chaotic scratches and marks, they have no eyes, no ears, no mouth, no discernible features. They are dumb. In that they can't see, speak or hear, they are silent and bound. These are portraits of ordinary Aboriginal people, they are friends, family and community. Throughout the series, Ah Kee has made iterations of *Unwritten* that captures the rising and falling approval of the stereotype of the Aborigine, occasionally emerging with hints of humanity.

With an emphasis on a brow, cheek bone or nose, these emerging features are western ones. As, for the entirety of Australia's colonial history, the only way for Aboriginal peoples to gain acceptance, freedom and autonomy is to mimic and assimilate with Western ideals, ways of talking, walking, naming and being.


Vernon Ah Kee

Whitefellanormalblackfellame 2007

Single channel video, 28 seconds

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery

Whitefellanormalblackfellame is a departure from the charcoal portraits that Ah Kee is known for. The video is a multilayered collection of text, image and voice. While the work demands engagement through eye contact with the artist, humorous text and spoken word, the barrage of information forces the listener/viewer/reader to work to comprehend what is going on. This barrage creates a sense of urgency and forces its audience to make a choice to engage or ignore. The written words and portraiture capture internal narratives of personal identity while the spoken word informs the "white" viewer of their position engaging with the Indigenous world.





KARLA DICKENS

Karla Dickens is a Wiradjuri artist known for her provocative reflections on and critiques of Australian issues of race, gender and sexuality. Dickens' practice is grounded in an exploration of her own identity and shared experiences. Born in 1967, the year of the Referendum that recognised Aboriginal people as human, Dickens has lived and born witness to both greatly healing and destructively violent acts in a time of national, political and social upheaval. Her works take a variety of forms, including painting, drawing, collage, sculpture and photography.

Dickens is also a poet and accompanies her works with visually and emotionally charged poems in place of conventional artist statements. Dickens feels that the academic confines of an artist statement fail to contain the emotional sensitivity necessary to talk about heavy hitting subjects, such as rape and abuse of women. Instead, she utilises the freedom of articulation and interpretation of poetry to engage the viewer in an emotional and vulnerable discourse that is more appropriate and conducive to a genuine cross-cultural dialogue between people.

Karla Dickens

Ms Ready and Mr Willing 2019

Inkjet print on paper


Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer





Ready, willing and able

No erected Big Top today
no sawdusted arenas or rolls of painted canvas
a dark sideshow has found its way
into a womb of Colonial privilege
Star-spangled banners exert unease
Ms Ready emphatically reclaims this sacred space
her legs mirroring the strength of its marble columns
an exotic Koori knockout, she harnesses the spirits
stolen from those caged
in the rusty menagerie over which she towers
These Aboriginal faces reflect historical human zoos
sadly mirrored today in jails countrywide
unnatural spectacles without safety nets
spell-binding juggling acts are needed to sidestep those circuses
as the magicians who manipulate such entertainments continue to shine
ticket prices skyrocket as risks and casualties increase
Mr Ready firmly stands his ground
not just a boxing-tent performer
his fists help him to protect and survive—day in, day out
tattoos share daredevil stories and legacies
scars of resilience
just like tightrope walkers, who demand respect
Knife dodging acts, gun shooting cowboys and bareback riders
fires rage with spectacular damage
evidence of a nation with holes in buckets
which leak more than water
“There’s a gaping hole in this bucket, dear Liza,
how on earth can you fix it dear Henry, dear Henry?”
The clowns enter and the show goes on...





FIONA FOLEY

Fiona Foley is Badtjala and an acclaimed curator, researcher and internationally recognised artist. Foley has a diverse artistic practice that encompasses painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, found objects and installation. Her work examines colonial histories of dispossession and challenges the stereotypes and narratives that form them. In 2017, Fiona completed a Doctorate examining "The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897". This body of research informed numerous artworks revealing a history of Aboriginal people being paid for their labour in opium, which exacerbated the intergenerational issues of trauma and drug dependency within communities. Foley is constantly re-inventing her approach to art, continually searching for niche moments in history that have yet to be highlighted. She explores themes of politics, culture, ownership, language and identity with both gentle sincerity and biting humour.

Fiona Foley

HHH #1 2004

Epson UltraChrome K3 inks on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Bright White 310 gsm paper

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer

Foley's practice is heavily engaged with international histories of colonisation and human rights movements. For example, Foley took on the race tensions following the Cronulla Riots in her work *Nulla Eva* (2014) and explored the use of photography as a colonial tool in America in *Wild Times Call* (1994). This exploration and engagement of issues outside of the sometimes-insular Australian art world challenges and expands upon the expectations of what an Aboriginal artist can be.

HHH (Hedonistic Honkey Haters) is a collection of photographs and costumes that inverts the symbolism of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in an imagining of alternative history from the American white supremacist movement. *HHH* depicts the surviving members of a secret society of African-Americans dressed in brightly coloured fabrics and black hoods, a parody of the white outfits worn by the KKK. The work purposefully plays with the viewers emotions. "Audiences bring their cultural baggage with them to the show and that activates when they see the pictures - they're in a quandary. How do I process it? Is the artist racist? Who is this person creating the work?"³ However, its not meant to be taken seriously, the work aims to subvert conceptions of race and racial hatred through a humorous desecralisation and mockery of the KKK.

³ Fiona Foley in conversation with Kerrie O'Brien from O'Brien, K. "Is the artist a racist? Fiona Foley adds an edge to Ballarat Biennale". *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2018, Accessed 15 April 2021.

