MEDIA RELEASE
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DEFYING EMPIRE: 3RD NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ART TRIENNIAL
OPENS AT THE NGA

The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) today launched Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial in Canberra.

Coinciding with the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum—which granted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the right to be counted in the Census and, therefore, counted as Australians—Defying Empire presents works by 30 established, mid-career and emerging contemporary Indigenous artists from across the country:

Tony Albert
Brook Andrew
Sebastian Arrow
Daniel Boyd
Maree Clarke
Megan Cope
Brenda L. Croft
Karla Dickens
Blak Douglas
Fiona Foley
Julie Gough
Lola Greeno
Dale Harding
Sandra Hill
Jonathan Jones
Ray Ken
Yvonne Koolmatrie
Nonggirrnga Marawili
Archie Moore
Laurie Nona
Rusty Peters
Reko Rennie
Brian Robinson
Yhonnie Scarce
Ken Thaiday Sr
Judy Watson
Vicki West
Jason Wing
Pedro Wonaemirri
Raymond Zada

‘This exhibition challenges us and helps us all to understand the issues and stories presented by the artists, remembering the past and looking to the future,’ said Gerard Vaughan, NGA Director. ‘This is a remarkable opportunity for all Australians to see the work of these brilliant contemporary artists.’

Traversing various themes within the overarching context of defiance—from first contact, through to the 1967 Referendum, and ongoing activism today—Defying Empire does not shy away from Australia’s complex past.

‘From stolen generations, to nuclear testing; the Referendum to cultural appropriation; racism to family; traditional practice to contemporary firsts, Defying Empire proves art and activism have always gone hand in hand,’ said Tina Baum, NGA’s Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and curator of this exhibition. ‘Defying Empire challenges
stereotypes to use art as visual tools of resistance to open conversations about Australia’s shared history, defying convention to insert the Indigenous presence back into the national landscape.’

The third triennial features at least three works from each artist, making it NGA’s biggest survey of Australian Indigenous practice. Works include painting on canvas and bark, weaving and sculpture, video, prints, photography, metalwork, glasswork and more.

This exhibition is made possible by the continued generous support of the NGA’s Indigenous Art Partner Wesfarmers Arts. This inspirational partnership spans the Wesfarmers Arts Indigenous Fellowships—a major annual event at the NGA—the Gallery’s full range of Indigenous art programming, as well as this flagship exhibition as the presenting partner.

‘This exhibition gives all Australians an opportunity to see the exceptional work of Indigenous artists and to learn more about the important stories they have to tell,’ said Helen Carroll, Wesfarmers Arts Manager.

*Defying Empire* follows on from the success of the previous triennials: *Culture Warriors* and *unDisclosed*.

*Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial* opens on Friday 26 May and continues until 10 September.


**Social media:**
Facebook: @NationalGalleryofAustralia
Instagram: @NationalGalleryAus
Twitter: @NatGalleryAus
Hashtags: #DefyingEmpireNGA #1967Referendum

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DEFYING EMPIRE: 3RD NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ART TRIENNIAL
FACT SHEET

The Exhibition

- *Defying Empire* features 139 works of art from 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia.
- Each artist has contributed between 3–7 artworks.
- The artists are established, mid-career and emerging.
- This is the largest survey of Indigenous works the NGA has shown.
- *Defying Empire* is the 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial. It follows on from *Culture Warriors* and *unDisclosed*.

The 1967 Referendum

- On 27 May 1967 an overwhelming majority of 90.77% of Australians voted in favour of two amendments to the Australian Constitution relating to Indigenous Australians.
- Effectively, this meant that Aboriginal people were counted as Australians for the first time.
- Previously, state laws governed Indigenous affairs, varying dramatically from state to state. Before the Referendum, Aboriginal people had to seek permission to marry, or to move from state to state.
- These amendments altered sections 51(xxvi) and 127, having the immediate effect of including Aboriginal Australians in determinations of population, and also empowered the Federal Parliament to legislate specifically for this racial group.
- The changes to section 51 removed the clause ‘other than the Aboriginal race in any State’ from the legislation.
  - *The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: the people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special law.*
- Section 127 was removed entirely:
  - *In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.*
- It took more than five years for these changes to take effect, with the benefits beginning to flow from 1972.
DEFYING EMPIRE: 3RD NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ART TRIENNIAL
ARTIST BIOS

Tony Albert
‘Like other Australian soldiers, [Aboriginals in wartime] were tortured, they took bullets and shrapnel, some lost limbs and others lost lives.’ Tony Albert’s repurposed Indigenous iconography of kitsch objects reinserts their forgotten voice into history.

Brook Andrew
‘We are the sum of our Ancestors. We are not yesterday, we are today ... This is to be rejoiced.’ Brook Andrew challenges historical perspectives of colonisation through neon text on photomedia and found objects.

Sebastian Arrow
‘I am aware that every mark is weighted with significance, of what it is to be part of a community and carry culture forward.’ Sebastian Arrow has been given custodianship of ancient teachings. His carved pearl shells signify the ongoing presence of his people in the Broome region of WA.

Daniel Boyd
‘... I ask you to pay attention to the veil that exists between what I call lenses—making visible and acknowledging a space that we cannot comprehend. Blackness as an opaque space, where the world we see is not in our own reflection, but the reflection of many ... Black is beautiful.’ Daniel Boyd’s pointillist depictions of Captain Cook subvert the colonial history of the hero narrative to expose the ongoing effects Cook’s actions have had on this country.

Megan Cope
‘It is our place, it will always be our place and being there reminds me of who I am and where I am going.’ Megan Cope’s relationship to her people and Country of North Stradbroke Island resonates through her filmic look at Aboriginality.

Maree Clarke
‘I like to look at new ways to tell stories through art.’ Maree Clarke directly responds to the 1967 Referendum by showing memories of her grandmother’s lounge room during the 1960s at the time of the landmark Census decision. Through new technologies, Clarke reaffirms her family’s presence in a holographic time capsule.

Brenda L. Croft
‘In the two decades since my father’s passing that elusive concept of home/land has shape-shifted within me as I have retrac(k)ed his journey, and mine, through entangled pathways, connecting Country and (s)kin.’ Brenda L. Croft uses the lens of her camera to focus on memory and politics to remind the nation of its early successful protest movements by remote Aboriginal people.

Karla Dickens
‘I’m not a politician; I’m an artist, a storyteller. I am political, simply because I am who I am—a single mother, a lesbian, a first Australian ... Art is my voice—art is how I protest.’ Karla Dickens’ innate passion to highlight issues of injustice and history is key in her practice. Assimilated Warriors 2014 references Indigenous activists throughout history.
Blak Douglas

‘[My work] inserts historic images featuring dispossession in process; the very dark history that Australia has consistently attempted to sweep under the mat.’ In Blak Douglas’s satirical, tongue-in-cheek series, colloquial expressions such as ‘LOL’, ‘easy as’ and ‘no worries’ are encased by photographs of the horrific treatment of Aboriginal people.

Fiona Foley

‘My earliest interactions with ‘outsiders’ were at the primary school I attended at Urangan, where I intuitively sensed a point of difference from the other school children, and my classroom teacher, who I was fearful of.’ Fiona Foley’s self-taught historical perspective highlighting the intentional destruction of QLD’s Indigenous people and culture informs her minimalist installations and sculpture.

Julie Gough

‘Making these works allows me to experience Country, while revealing its tenacity, which parallels the survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people against the odds.’ Julie Gough reveals the massacre of Aboriginal people through early settlement paintings overlaid with the documented violent histories of those locations.

Lola Greeno

‘I think you’ve always got to be grounded in your own culture.’ Senior artisan Lola Greeno has transformed the long-held tradition of shell making to create personalised designs and patterns inspired by her maternal forebears.

Dale Harding

‘Popular versions of Australian histories are supported by convenience. The burden of the truth is shouldered by those who are silenced.’ Dale Harding gives voice to the maternal side of his family, telling stories of their indentured labour as domestics in central Queensland through his installations.

Sandra Hill

‘As a member of the Stolen Generation, art became a way to immerse my sense of loss, sadness and grief into something more tangible and concrete.’ In her lightbox works, Sandra Hill shares the personal, emotive stories of her family and community.

Jonathan Jones

‘Wiradjuri knowledge is in Country—in the clouds and rivers, in the birds and animals, in the roads and the buildings.’ Jonathan Jones reclaims cultural and historical perspectives using inspiration from Country, research and the teachings of his Elders, in particular Uncle Stan Grant Sr.

Ray Ken

‘When we are resting, it will be the young fellas turn to look after our Country.’ Ray Ken is a master who teaches kulata tjuta (spear making) to the younger generations, ensuring that this cultural tradition is not lost. It’s a testament to the importance of sharing and passing on ancient cultural knowledge.

Yvonne Koolmatrie

‘Every time I go to the river, I’ll always think of these people that were here many years ago. When I come back to this land, I’ll always respect it. It is their land.’ Master weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie exudes ancient memory through techniques that have been handed down to her through generations.
Nonggirrnga Marawili
‘Water. Rock. Rocks that stand strong. And the waves that run and crash upon the rocks. The sea spray. This is the painting I do.’ Contemporary bark artist Nonggirrnga Marawili challenges the conventions of traditional design to represent the environment of the Top End.

Archie Moore
‘Skin was an identifier of who I was and what status I held … racist slurs that we’ve all heard at some time and continue to hear today.’ Archie Moore’s revealing self-portraits show multiple sides of Aboriginal identity, inviting you to engage in deeper conversations about self and racism.

Laurie Nona
‘I would like to see our future young people be proud of our identity and know that as long as the warup (drum) is beating, our culture is still alive.’ Badu Island artist Laurie Nona merges ancestral stories with contemporary views on preserving cultural knowledge and resources for future generations.

Rusty Peters
‘I keep going, painting my Country, Ngarrangkarni (Dreamtime stories), for my father and grandmother’s Country, where I was born, the trees, milky way, all them things.’ Rusty Peters depicts his Dreamtime stories through stunning renditions of the Kimberley landscape, keeping ancestral memories visible for generations to come.

Reko Rennie
‘I decided I would buy a Rolls-Royce in a similar vintage myself. The marque of the vehicle is a symbol of wealth, privilege and royalty.’ Reko Rennie reclaims the status symbol of 1900s pastoralists, bringing his grandmother’s personal enslavement on their properties into focus through an emotive video work.

Brian Robinson
‘I drew on, painted on, spray painted on and marker penned everything—you name it, I drew on it. If compared to a graffiti artist, my tags were everywhere.’ Brian Robinson seamlessly merges his traditional Torres Strait art with pop culture references, incorporating comic book heroes with his ancestral warriors.

Yhonnie Scarce
‘Thunder Raining Poison is a work relating to the nuclear bomb tests that happened in the 1950s at Maralinga … I felt quite uneasy at the Breakaway bombsite—that particular bomb blast turned the surrounding dirt into glass—so it seemed fitting that I made the cloud out of glass yams.’ Yhonnie Scarce’s 2000 hand-blown yams cascade from the gallery ceiling, ensuring we witness the untold tragedy of the nuclear testing on Indigenous people and Country.

Vicki West
‘The denial of our existence and vile restraints of the ‘half-caste’ act fell away (with the 1967 Referendum) as all Aboriginal Australians stepped within the gaze of the Commonwealth and were seen for the first time in nearly 90 years.’ Vicki West scrutinises the effect of the Referendum on Tasmanian Aboriginal people who had the ‘myth of extinction’ surrounding them after a brutal campaign to rid the island of Indigenous people since settlement.

Ken Thaiday Senior
‘I love my art, I love my culture, I will never let it go.’ Ken Thaiday Senior, an artisan, performer and singer from the Torres Strait Islands, has always participated in the Meriam Mer traditional teachings handed down for generations.
Pedro Wonaeamirri
‘As a clan leader for my family I have a big responsibility, taking control of my land or Country of my father and grandfather.’ The weight of ancestral knowledge lies upon Pedro Wonaeamirri’s shoulders, not only in his traditional Tiwi visual art, but also in his ritualistic singing, dancing and ceremony.

Judy Watson
‘Since the late 1970s certain aspects of my work focused on massacres of Aboriginal people. the names of places is an ongoing investigation into this subject … spooling place names of massacre sites across maps of Australia and images of my artworks like credits in a movie.’ Judy Watson’s video work looks to the past to inform the present on atrocities committed against Indigenous Australians, and the flow-on effects these acts have had on communities today.

Jason Wing
‘We fight for re-writing Aboriginal history that has been erased, destroyed, hidden and lost. We fight for equal human rights.’ Jason Wing’s courageous reinterpretation of Captain Cook in a balaclava references Cook’s role in the invasion of Australia and the after-effects that are still felt today.

Raymond Zada
‘Being Aboriginal and same-sex attracted, I’ve never felt I’m part of the mainstream … My art practice gives me a voice. Many of my works address negative issues but I’m not an “angry black” or “bitter queen”.’ Raymond Zada’s powerful work highlights the importance of recognising identity and diversity through morphing the faces of Aboriginal people from his community.

ENDS
Tony Albert
*The Hand You’re Dealt* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and
Sullivan + Strumpf
Photo: Sam Noonan

Brook Andrew
*Beginning of the shape (Morphogenesis)* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery
Photo: Jessica Maurer

Sebastian Arrow
*Jalinyi* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and
Short St Gallery

Daniel Boyd
*Untitled (DOC)* 2016
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2016
Maree Clarke  
Made from memory (Nan’s house) (detail) 2017  
Courtesy of the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery  
Photo: Ralf Haertel

Megan Cope  
The Blaktism 2014  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2016

Brenda L. Croft  
shut/mouth/scream (detail)  
2016  
Courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery

Karla Dickens  
Assimilated Warriors 2014  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2016  
Photo courtesy of Andrew Baker Art Dealer
Blak Douglas
*Really Bin* 2012
Courtesy of the artist

Fiona Foley
*Pontificate on This* (detail)
2016
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Gallery
Photo: Bill Shaylor

Julie Gough
*Hunting ground (Pastoral) Van Diemen’s Land* (detail) 2016
Courtesy of the artist and Bett Gallery
Lola Greeno
*Green Maireener shell necklace*
2016
Courtesy of the artist and Handmark Gallery

Dale Harding
*Black days in the Dawson River Country – Remembrance gowns* (detail) 2016
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery

Sandra Hill
*Double Standards* 2015
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2016 with the support of Warwick Hemsley and The Hon Melissa Parke, to mark Mr Hemsley’s tenure on Council and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum
Jonathan Jones
*nguram-bang-dyuray* (detail)
2016
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Geoff Boccalatte

Ray Ken
*Kulata Tjuta* 2013
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2014

Yvonne Koolmatrie
*River Dreaming* 2012
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2016
This acquisition has been supported by Sue and Steve Dyer in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum
Nonggirrnga Marawili
*Baratjula* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre
Photo: Will Stubbs

Archie Moore
*Aboriginal Anarchy* 2012
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra
Purchased 2013
Laurie Nona
*Badhu Harbourka* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and KickArts Contemporary Arts
Photo: Jon Linkins

Rusty Peters
*Manambarram* 2013
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2013
This acquisition has been supported by David Paul in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

Reko Rennie
*Royal Flag* 2013
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2013
Brian Robinson  
*Custodian of the Blooms* 2014  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2016  
This acquisition has been supported by John and Janet Calvert-Jones to mark Mr Calvert-Jones’s tenure on Council and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum  
Photo courtesy of Mossenson Galleries

Yhonnie Scarce  
*Thunder Raining Poison* 2015  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2016  
This acquisition has been supported by Susan Armitage in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum  
Photo: Janelle Low

Ken Thaiday  
*Eastern Island Warrior Headdress* 2014  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 2016
Judy Watson
*the names of places* 2016
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery

Vicki West
*In my name* 2017
Courtesy of the artist and Vivien Anderson Galleries
Photo: Ralf Haertel

Jason Wing
*Captain James Crook* 2013
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2013
Pedro Wonaeamirri
*Jilamara* 2014
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2016
This acquisition has been supported by Ray Wilson in memory of James Agapitos, and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

Raymond Zada
*Racebook* 2012
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2012