



# DEFYING EMPIRE

3rd National Indigenous  
Art Triennial

Education resource

**NGA**  
National Gallery of Australia

  
**Wesfarmers Arts**

## **Defying Empire**

### **3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial**

*We defy: By existing; By determining our identity; By asserting our histories; our culture; our language; By telling our stories, our way; By being one of the oldest continuous living cultures in the world.*

Tina Baum, NGA Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

*Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial* brings the works of 30 contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across the country into the national spotlight.

Held at the National Gallery of Australia in 2017 and travelling to various venues around Australia from 2018–20, *Defying Empire* commemorates the 50th anniversary of 1967 Referendum that recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australians for the first time. It explores the ongoing resilience of Australia's Indigenous people since first contact, through to the historical fight for recognition and ongoing activism in the present day.

Be moved by powerful art that touches on the issues of identity, racism, displacement, country, nuclear testing, sovereignty and the stolen generations through many media: painting on canvas and bark, weaving and sculpture, new media, prints, photography, metalwork and glasswork.

*Defying Empire* in the media: NITV news bulletin

#### **Teacher's notes**

The *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial* education resource provides insight into the works of art in the exhibition, encouraging engagement with the key concepts and themes through responding and making. The 1967 Referendum and its effects over 50 years provides a thread of interconnected ideas that link the works and invite the viewer to explore the different ways the artists have engaged with materials and issues pertaining to this significant event and what followed.

These resources complement a visit to the exhibition through activities and ideas to assist with preparation for the gallery visit, as a reference when you are viewing the works and to deepen understanding and engagement with post-visit activities and discussion. The content can be adapted by educators to suit units of study and integrated into a broad range of outcomes.

The *Defying Empire* exhibition is perfectly suited to encourage critical and creative thinking. Enhancing thinking that is productive, purposeful and intentional is at the centre of effective learning. By applying a sequence of thinking skills, students develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the processes they can employ whenever they encounter problems, unfamiliar information and new ideas.

The invitation to create their own works of art directly engages each student's ability to organise elements, in particular inquiry-based learning, enhancing their ability in identifying, exploring and organising information and ideas.

Suggested vocabulary to enhance students' ability to articulate their thoughts and knowledge of creative practice and Indigenous Australia are highlighted and definitions are included in the glossary on each page.

#### **Artists and themes**

Seven artists from *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial* have been selected to feature in the educational resource material, one from each of the seven curatorial themes that make up the original exhibition:

**Forever Memory** Yvonne Koolmatrie

**Resistance and Refusal** Reko Rennie

**Disrupting Invisibility** Brian Robinson

**Asserting Presence** Sandra Hill

**Rising Passion** Karla Dickens

**Bearing Witness** Daniel Boyd

**Recount and Revive** Jonathan Jones

#### **Organisation of the education resource**

The educational content for each of the seven selected artists is divided into sections including:

**Speak your mind** Talking points or provocations to unpack the works through discussion and/or contemplation. Includes options for senior students.

**Get to work** Creative making suggestions that highlight key concepts.

**Think it through** Ideas to aid students in the creation of works. Includes options for senior students.

**Places to go** Links for more information, including

the artists' websites, collection links, previous National Indigenous Art Triennials and related material.

**Talk the talk** Glossary of words within the education resource and artist statement.

### **Australian Curriculum links**

The educational content developed for *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial* is directly linked to the Australian Curriculum and is designed to develop successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active, informed citizens within the context of the contemporary Indigenous arts practice represented in the exhibition.

This resource is designed for upper primary and secondary students and can be adapted for tertiary students.

### **Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures**

The cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is relevant to all students and teachers as this theme runs across all learning areas at all levels. The cross-curriculum priority of Sustainability may also be relevant to some artists/works.

### **Visual Arts**

Contemporary art is particularly relevant to senior students in Year 11–12, so a major exhibition with work by 30 living artists has strong connections. At all year levels students are asked to look at works of art created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, often comparing them to that of other artists.

[ACAVAM114](#), [ACAVAR117](#), [ACAVAM118](#), [ACAVAM120](#), [ACAVAR123](#), [ACAVAR124](#), [ACAVAM125](#), [ACAVAR130](#), [ACAVAR131](#)

### **Humanities and Social Sciences**

Year 4 includes the study of first contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Europeans with colonisation of Australia up until 1800. Year 5 refers to the ongoing colonisation of Australia during the 1800s.

[ACHASSK089](#)

### **History**

In Year 10 one of the depth studies for The Modern World and Australia is on Rights and Freedoms (including civil rights movement in US and Australia).

[ACDSEH104](#), [ACDSEH105](#), [ACDSEH106](#), [ACDSEH143](#)

### **Civics and citizenship**

In Year 7, students develop understanding of the process of constitutional change through referendums. In Year 8, students study how citizens can participate in democracy including through lobby groups and direct action, while the curriculum in Year 9 encompasses inquiry into how government policy is shaped and developed.

[ACHCK049](#), [ACHCK053](#), [ACHCK066](#), [ACHCK067](#), [ACHCS069](#), [ACHCS070](#), [ACHCS071](#)

# Travelling Exhibition Venues



Karla Dickens *Assimilated Warriors* (detail) 2014  
feathers, bone, fabric, leather, glass, seed on metal  
Purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported  
by David Paul, and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary  
of the 1967  
Referendum 016.15.A-M

## 2018/2019

- Museum and Art Gallery of the NT,  
Darwin NT  
24 March – 15 July 2018
- University of Queensland Art Museum,  
Brisbane QLD  
28 July – 11 November 2018
- Western Plains Cultural Centre,  
Dubbo NSW  
9 March – 26 May 2019
- Mildura Art Gallery,  
Mildura VIC  
Friday 26 July – Sunday 13 October 2019

## 2019/2020

- Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery,  
Launceston TAS  
15 November 2019 – 9 February 2020
- Australian National Maritime Museum,  
Sydney NSW  
5 March – 6 September 2020

[nga.gov.au/defyingempire/](http://nga.gov.au/defyingempire/)

## Daniel Boyd

Kudjla/Gangalu peoples  
born 1982 Cairns, Queensland  
lives and works Sydney,  
New South Wales



*When thinking about the physical nature of my paintings, installations and moving image work, I ask you to pay attention to the veil that exists between what I call lenses—lenses that hold information and represent perception—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. Where we can speak about relationships that we hold as individuals or groupings of people, a space between knowledge, where we can speak about the unconscious, where we can speak about memory and amnesia, where we can speak about difference as something beautiful.*

*Black is beautiful.*

### Bearing Witness

**bearing:** the act of enduring or capacity to endure; **witness:** to see, hear or know by personal presence and perception, to testify to; give or afford evidence of.

Indigenous artists ensure the continued witnessing of history by documenting and highlighting cultural, political and social issues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been categorised, scrutinised and documented since first contact. Through their work, contemporary Indigenous artists help to provide a more balanced view and make sure that our perceptions and experiences are shown.

Revealing historical and present day truths can be both painful and cathartic. Understanding the mentality of the time, dispelling myths and discovering the truth through official and unofficial records and oral histories can be enlightening, as is the interrogation and discussion of current issues today.

The artists in *Defying Empire* ensure we continue to bear witness, be present, take notice and be immersed in the now.

### Glossary: Talk the talk

**Perception:** the act or faculty of perceiving, or apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding

**Opaque:** not transparent or translucent; impenetrable to light; not allowing light to pass through

**Amnesia:** loss of a large block of interrelated memories; complete or partial loss of memory caused by brain injury, shock

**Pointillism:** a theory and technique developed by the neo-impressionists, based on the principle that juxtaposed dots of pure colour, such as blue and yellow, are optically mixed into the resulting hue, green, by the viewer

**Monotone:** sameness of tone or colour

**Appropriate:** to take to or for oneself; take possession of

### Speak your mind

- Can you see what is depicted or happening in Daniel Boyd's work?
- Why or how do the monotone colours impact on the meaning of the work?
- Discuss the impact of Captain Cook's 'discovery' of Australia.



Daniel Boyd *Untitled (DOC)* 2017  
oil, charcoal and glue on canvas,  
Purchased 2016 in recognition of  
the 50th Anniversary of the 1967  
Referendum

### Senior options

- What works are Boyd's based on? Why do you think he appropriated or reconstructed them?
- Why does the artist use the style of pointillism?
- How do history paintings influence or control historic narrative?

### Get to work

- Recreate an historic Australian painting in monotone colours. Try appropriating another style as you reinterpret the original work.

### Think it through

- Consider how the painting changes without the use of primary colours.
- How can you use white, grey and black to express light, shadow and tone?
- Discover the Indigenous names in your local area for everyday items such as stone, plants, seed, fruit, hill, valley, river, cave.

### Senior options

Think about the effects an historic moment has had on different groups in Australia. How could you highlight this in your work?

Can you use a different style, like pointillism, to change the meaning of your work?

Research a place of cultural significance to the Indigenous people of your region. Find out more about cultural practices that would have taken place before colonial intrusions. Talk about the ways your community could honour the legacy of the traditional custodians with a site-specific installation.

### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Museum of Contemporary Art](#)

[Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane](#)

[Splash ABC](#)

[20th Biennale of Sydney](#)

[Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery](#)

[Design & Art Australia Online](#)

[Art Gallery NSW](#)

[Culture Warriors: 1st National Indigenous Art Triennial](#)

## Karla Dickens

Wiradjuri people

born 1967 Sydney, New South Wales

lives and works Lismore, New South Wales



*I have two loves in life: art and family—and a passion for protest. To ask questions, to give voice and light, with a desire for change. To protest as an individual, art is my voice—yet walking and standing alongside others smooths the powerlessness. There is a power in asserting objection shoulder-to-shoulder—and disapproval of the obvious injustices, pains and truths of the unheard. It is an action that holds the hope that once a story is told, a change in the unacceptable will be born and grow.*

*I'm not a politician; I'm an artist, a storyteller. With my art, I talk about my personal experiences. I don't set out to make political statements. I am political, simply because I am who I am—a single mother, a lesbian, a first Australian. I am at a point in my life where I have a hell of a lot to say. Art is my voice—art is how I protest.*

### Rising Passion

*rising*: the act of a person or thing that rises; an insurrection; rebellion; revolt; *passion*: any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, such as love or hate.

A simmering rage of discontent at the injustices and conditions that Indigenous people were, and still are, forced to live under will always be present. Throughout history awareness of Indigenous issues has fluctuated in peaks and troughs, like the incoming and outgoing tides of time, with both black and white people of this country working together for change. The rising passion for activism within the

Australian psyche has slowly developed as more and more issues have become public.

The lead-up to the 1967 Referendum saw Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together to champion for equal rights. This collaborative relationship was a significant breakthrough for race relations and encouraged a better national understanding of the injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 similarly demonstrated a shift in the Australian consciousness. While it stirred up emotions for and against, this key landmark in Canberra is still a focal point for artists and activists to remember our sovereignty and rights.

Art and activism have always gone hand in hand. Contemporary Indigenous artists continue to ensure that the rising passion for justice is always present.

### Glossary: Talk the talk

**Marginalised:** treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral

**Upcycling:** reuse (discarded objects or material) in such a way as to create a product of higher quality or value than the original

**Post-colonialism:** of, relating to or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony

**Protest:** a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something

**Emphasis:** special importance, value, or prominence given to something

**Signify:** be an indication of

**Subverted:** to change or reverse a meaning

### Speak your mind

- Discuss how creativity can be used as a tool of empowerment for the individual and for marginalised groups within the wider Australian society.
- Some of the objects Dickens collects at markets, opportunity shops and rubbish tips become the



Karla Dickens *Assimilated Warriors* 2014, feathers, bone, fabric, leather, glass, seed on metal. Purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported by David Paul, and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

materials used to create her art. As Dickens says 'One man's waste, is another woman's treasure'. What do you think of this statement?

#### Senior options

- Dickens' experience as a single mother and as a lesbian gives her a complex perspective on our society and the treatment ascribed to different groups. Can you think of ways that different people or cultural groups are treated in your local community or even within the school environment?
- What does protest mean to you and how do you choose to voice your opinions? What rights does the individual have to make political statements without fear of persecution?
- What is post-colonialism? Are we living in a post-colonial society?

#### Get to work

- Find an object from your home and ask members of your family for their memories of it. Create a drawing of the object as it is now surrounded by a selection of images depicting its journey. You may like to emphasise the individual qualities of this object in contrast to other items of the same variety.

Extension: Write a short poem to describe the life of this object. Draw up a timeline that details the life of the object in relation to important moments of Australian history. Was the item around to witness

the 1967 Referendum?

#### Think it through

- Where can you source second-hand items in your community?
- What are the Indigenous language groups where you live? Do the Indigenous people of your area use different names for local landmarks or places?
- Do you know many places in regional Australia? Locate the Northern Rivers region and Lismore. Where are the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri people?

#### Senior options

- The NGA collection holds many works of assemblage created by artists from all over the world such as Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso and Rosalie Gascoigne AM. Visit the NGA website and find a work of art that uses an upcycled or found object.

#### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Artist's website](#)

[Design & Art Australia Online](#)

[Artlink](#)

[Museum of Contemporary Art](#)

[SBS On Demand](#)

[Andrew Baker Art Dealer](#)

## Sandra Hill

Minang/Wardandi/Ballardong/Nyoongar peoples  
born 1951 Perth, Western Australia  
lives and works Balingup, Western Australia



*My journey with art has been the one constant throughout my life. During the early years I found enormous comfort in making art, in being creative. 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.*

*My early work focuses on policies and legislation that gave the Western Australian government comprehensive control over its Aboriginal citizens. The power of WA's Aborigines Act 1905 took away four generations of my own family. As an emerging artist I made it my mission to expose the segregation, injustice, mental, physical and emotional cruelty meted out to my people since colonisation.*

*Making art has played an important role in reclaiming my cultural and personal identity.*

*Creating art helps me deal with my deep level of frustration over Australia's seeming indifference toward its First Nation people and the unjust legacy we've been left with. Art gave me a voice, which made me strong, it helped to guide me back home, back to my family, my people and my community.*

*Over the past 25 years my work continues to evolve, I'm finally in a space where celebrating our survival and culture is my greatest priority. My stories will still be shared through my art but my heart and my spirit are lighter and my work will hopefully reflect that. I have found my true and authentic identity, I've found my people, I found my culture and I've finally reclaimed my sense of belonging.*

## Asserting Presence

**asserting:** to state with assurance, confidence, or force; state strongly or positively; affirm; **presence:** the state or fact of being present, as with others or in a place.

Indigenous artists have always asserted their ongoing identity and presence through their works. The rock art and engraving galleries throughout the landscape attest to this. We have had deep, intrinsic, spiritual, physical, emotional, historical and cultural connection with this country since time immemorial.

Since first contact, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people have never stopped fighting for their Country or for recognition as the first peoples of this land. Indigenous artists today are now reclaiming their cultural rights and ensuring that their stories are driven by them and their communities. By asserting their presence through their art, Indigenous artists give rise to a broader dialogue on our stories and our histories from our perspective.

## Glossary: Talk the talk

**Stolen Generations:** Aboriginal children removed from their families and placed in institutions or fostered by white families between 1910 and 1970

**Legislation:** the act of making or enacting laws

**Comprehensive:** of large scope; covering or involving much; inclusive

**Segregation:** the institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority

**Colonisation:** to form a colony, or settle in a new land bringing in a new ruling power

**Priority:** something given special attention; the right to precede others in order, rank, privilege



Sandra Hill *Double Standards* 2015, lightbox, rice paper, shellac, Marri and Balga resin, ink and synthetic resin, purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported by 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

### Speak your mind

- What is the purpose of a flag? How is a flag important to a nation's sense of identity?
- Do you feel as though the Australian flag represents you and your experience of being Australian?
- Discuss the differences between immigrants and Indigenous people in Australia in the 1950s and 60s.

### Senior options

How can an artist use their work to explore their past and inform the present? How does Sandra Hill achieve this?

Explain the impact the Stolen Generations had on Hill's sense of belonging.

### Get to work

Create a work by overlaying the imagery of two histories to encourage an audience to consider differences in power and possession.

### Think it through

Discover the Indigenous names in your local area for everyday items such as stone, plants, seed, fruit, hill, valley, river, cave.

Could these words be added to your work? Would it change its meaning?

Will you use two images of history of the same people or place in different times, or two images from the same time from different perspectives?

### Senior options

Research a place of cultural significance to the Indigenous people of your region. Find out more about cultural practices that would have taken place before colonial interventions. Talk about the ways your community could honour the legacy of the traditional custodians with a site-specific installation.

### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Art Gallery of Western Australia](#)

[ABC Radio](#)

[Ideas on Design](#)

[Mossenson Galleries](#)

[Design & Art Australia Online](#)

## Jonathan Jones

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples  
born 1978 Sydney, New South Wales  
lives and works Sydney, New South Wales



*Uncle Stan Grant Senior often reminds me that language is in Country, and so to learn my language is to learn my Country. Following his guidance I find myself scratching away at the surface of things to reveal what's underneath, awakening old knowledge and seeing what's always been there. Understanding our Country in this way is to understand that Aboriginality is eternal, that the landscape retains knowledge. Wiradjuri people and Wiradjuri history didn't go away with white invasion and colonisation. Despite the odds, the Country still holds cultural knowledge and will continue to teach us. Wiradjuri knowledge is in Country—in the clouds and rivers, in the birds and animals, in the roads and the buildings. It's visible to those who know how to look in the very fabric of our Country.*

*Giving structure to our cultural language is murrwaygu (cultural design), witnessed in Wiradjuri Country, possessions and knowledge. Murrwaygu is most visible in carved objects such as the giran giran (broad shield), bundi (club), bargan (boomerang) and badhang (possum-skin cloak), all of which are important to Wiradjuri. While I work with found and repurposed everyday materials, including fluorescent lights, thread and paper, and historical images, murrwaygu and the knowledge embedded within Country informs and shapes my work. The repeating diamonds, chevrons and radiating lines that make up the complex network of murrwaygu hold deep ancestral knowledge waiting to inspire the next generation.*

## Recount and Revive

**recounting:** to relate or narrate; tell in detail; give the facts or particulars of; **revival:** to bring back into notice, use or currency; to quicken or renew in the mind; bring back.

Much of our history is present in living memory, either directly or indirectly through second-hand accounts. What is recalled and retold through oral stories, visual performances and art has been a primary means of communication for generations of Indigenous peoples.

Documenting experiences from our declining pool of Elders is becoming increasingly more important as time passes so that knowledge is not lost. Archives, libraries and recorded oral histories are also invaluable resources as we piece together our shared history of this country that has, for too long, been contested, hidden, denied or misdirected.

As we rally against the injustices done to our parents, grandparents, families and communities, Indigenous artists pay homage and respect and further our understanding of their experiences. By recounting and reviving histories, artists continue to reveal and express their cultural connection and reveal personal or community stories that need to be told.

## Glossary: Talk the talk

**Colonisation:** the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area

**Post-colonial:** of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony

**Superiority:** acting in higher in rank, status or quality

**Collaboratively:** two or more parties working together

**Mandala:** generic term for any diagram, chart or geometric pattern that represents the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically; a microcosm of the universe



Jonathan Jones, Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM *nguram-bang-dyuray* 2016, framed 19th-century prints, ink on paper, soundscape. Purchased 2017 in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

### Speak your mind

- Where are the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations located in Australia?
- Discuss the importance that language plays in affirming an individual's cultural identity.
- How does Jonathan Jones invoke memory as a powerful strategy to communicate his ideas about cultural loss?

### Senior options

- Are we living in a post-colonial society?
- How did colonialism infer an attitude of superiority towards Indigenous Australians?
- Discover the meaning of the Latin expression *terra nullius* and its relationship to Australia's colonial history.

### Get to work

Collect natural materials from your local area such as fallen trees, plants, shells, seeds and stone and work collaboratively to design a mandala for a site on your school ground.

### Think it through

- Discover the Indigenous names in your local area for everyday items such as stone, plants, seed, fruit, hill, valley, river, cave.
- Listen to Jonathan Jones speak about his works *Salt* 2010 and *Revolution* 2010–11 on the NGA's vimeo channel at the bottom of this page.

- Discuss the rationale for your final choice of site for your mandala, whether it is at the entrance to the school, the playground area or possibly a smaller internal contemplative space such as a courtyard.

### Senior options

- Research a place of cultural significance to the Indigenous people of your region. Find out more about cultural practices that would have taken place before colonial interventions. Talk about the ways your community could honour the legacy of the traditional custodians with a site-specific installation. What materials could be used and who could be involved? You might like to propose a number of respected local people to be an advisory board for this project.
- In traditional Indigenous practice shield decoration was the responsibility of skilled male carvers. Choose a sharp tool to carve the design you have chosen from the activity above into a hardwood square or diamond shape.

### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Artist's website](#)

[UnDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial](#)

[Kaldor Public Art Projects](#)

[NGA: Jonathan Jones talks about Revolution and Salt Museum of Contemporary Art](#)

**Yvonne Koolmatrie**

Ngarrindjeri people

born 1944 Wudinna, South Australia

lives and works Berri, South Australia



*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.*

*I attended a one-day workshop in 1981, and there was an Auntie there, Auntie Dory. She knew the basic stitch, about the material, how to prepare it, the time of the year to collect it. So that was all taught in one day's workshop. Then I got interested in that culture, my mother's culture. I sort of didn't realise how important it was until ... you know, I learned to weave. I couldn't put it down once I started, I just could not leave it down. Sort of in my blood, you know? I've got to keep the culture alive. Wherever I go, I will always say to them 'I'm not the boss of this weaving. It is yours as much as it is mine. It's up to you to create, whatever that river runs, if the material grows, this culture is yours'.*

**Forever Memory**

*forever: without ever ending; eternally, to last forever; memory: the mental impression retained; a recollection; the length of time over which recollection extends.*

Embedded in every landscape is evidence of human occupation. The intimate knowledge of and deep connection to Country, built up over 50,000 years and passed down through countless generations, is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.

Collectively, we have endured so much, yet we have actively and subversively continued to defy the odds, still fighting for recognition, self-determination and our sovereign rights as the first peoples of this country. Our cultural and contact histories play powerful parts in all our lives and, in many ways, inform who we are, where we come from and where we are going. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, knowing our history has never been more important than now.

Together, the artists in the exhibition revive, revitalise and share their cultural and historical knowledge and memories. Throughout Australia's history there have been multiple points of connection, of shared experiences (some good, some bad), but it is our defiance and resolve, like our Ancestors past, that will determine who we are while we maintain a strong presence today and for future generations.

**Glossary: Talk the talk**

**Sedge grass:** a group of native grasses that are part of the *Cyperaceae* or sedge family; usually tufted marsh plants related to grass

**Ancestral:** inherited from ancestor or ancestors and handed down through generation to the present

**Natural resource:** materials or substances occurring in nature which can be used by people

**Significance:** the quality of being worthy of attention; importance

**Speak your mind**

- Consider why Yvonne Koolmatrie harvests and prepares the sedge grass herself for weaving.
- Why is the art of weaving important to Indigenous groups?
- What images can you identify in her weaving?



Yvonne Koolmatrrie *River Dreaming* 2012 sedge rushes (*Lepidosperma canescens*), Purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported by Sue and Steve Dyer in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

#### Senior options

- How is the art of weaving connected to the identity of Indigenous women and their connection to land?
- Discuss the ancestral creation story of the Murray River and how it is depicted in Koolmatrrie's work mat.

#### Get to work

- Create your own piece of woven art using grasses and natural resources you can find within a block of your home or school.

#### Think it through

- Consider the environment you pass every day and how it connects to you.
- Which natural materials around you would weave the best?
- What uses, or purpose, could your weaving have?
- Discover the Indigenous names in your local area for everyday items such as stone, plants, seed, fruit, hill, valley, river, cave.

#### Senior options

- Think about the figures in Koolmatrrie's work. Can you create images that represent you through your surrounding natural materials?
- Is there a story connected to you or your family that you can tell through your weaving?
- Research a place of cultural significance to the Indigenous people of your region. Find out more about cultural practices that would have taken place before colonial interventions. Talk about the ways your community could honour the legacy of the traditional custodians with a site-specific installation.

#### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Art Gallery of South Australia](#)

[National Gallery of Australia](#)

[Aboriginal & Pacific Art](#)

[Art Gallery of New South Wales](#)

[National Gallery of Victoria](#)

[The Guardian](#)

[UniSA Samstag Museum](#)

[Sydney Biennale 2018](#)

## Reko Rennie

Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay/Gummaroi peoples  
born 1974 Melbourne, Victoria  
lives and works Melbourne, Victoria



*I've heard and seen stories of some Australian pastoralists back in the early 1900s owning old Rolls-Royce or Bentley vehicles, dressing up on a Sunday and then driving to church. During this time, there were many Aboriginal women, men and children enslaved on these properties working for nothing but rations, abused and mistreated.*

*It made me think of my grandmother, Julia, and how she was also enslaved on pastoral stations and missions due to former government policies.*

*I decided I would buy a Rolls-Royce in similar vintage myself. The marque of the vehicle is a symbol of wealth, privilege and royalty. I have hand-painted the Rolls, with a geometric camouflage, referencing the traditional diamond shape of the Kamilaroi and using a contemporary pattern of camouflage to promote visibility of identity. The video work is about a road trip, where I return to Kamilaroi land and make an emotional journey back to Country for my grandmother and myself, in a reclaimed (Reko Rennie) Rolls-Royce.*

*Referencing my own urban upbringing, I take the car on Kamilaroi earth and thrash the Rolls-Royce on Country, creating donuts on the land, also in reference to traditional Kamilaroi sand engravings.*

*Then I return to my other home.*

## Resistance and Refusal

*resistance: the act or power of resisting, opposing, or withstanding; refusal: an act or instance of refusing.*

There have been countless role models who have, over time, collectively given rise to new forms of conscious, overt, subliminal and subversive activism that have significantly changed our history. From the early Indigenous resistance warriors to the countless others who waged active campaigns fighting for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, resistance in all its multifaceted forms has been, and will always be, present.

From the past to the present, Indigenous artists have shown great courage and integrity by defying convention and challenging ideologies on what constitutes Indigenous art and identity. By resisting rigid notions of what Indigenous art is, refusing populist views of history and challenging stereotypes, artists continue to use their art as visual tools of resistance, replacing physical weaponry with wit, satire and juxtaposition to challenge and confront. Through visualising their stories, artists continue to challenge, raise awareness and open conversations about the shared histories of this nation.

## Glossary: Talk the talk

**Pastoralists:** a sheep or cattle farmer

**Rations:** allow each person to have only a fixed amount of (a commodity)

**Missions:** reserves of land to which Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated

**Marque:** a make of car, as distinct from a specific model

**Camouflage:** concealment by means of disguise

## Speak your mind

- What changes has Reko Rennie made to the Rolls-Royce in his work OA\_RR 2017? Why use a car?
- Are there symbols that you can see? Explore their meaning.



Reko Rennie *OA\_RR* 2017, 3 channel HD film, sound. Purchased 2017 in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

- Does the use of the colour gold mean something important?

#### Senior options

- In Rennie's work *Royal Flag* 2013, who do you think is intended to wear the crown?
- How does Rennie reflect on the changes in Australia since the 1967 Referendum by referencing an ancestor's history?
- Think about the title of the work *OA\_RR* and discuss what this could mean.

#### Get to work

Create a tool that can mark the land with a symbol representing you. Document the process.

#### Think it through

- Think of different ways to use your symbol.
- Is your symbol something that has been important to you for years? Or even handed both through generations? Perhaps you have only just developed it?
- Will your tool damage the land? Do you want it to?
- Discover the Indigenous names in your local area for everyday items such as stone, plants, seed, fruit, hill, valley, river, cave.

#### Senior options

- How is the connection between Rennie and his grandmother important to the creation of his artwork?
- Research a place of cultural significance to the Indigenous people of your region. Find out more about cultural practices that would have taken place before colonial intrusions. Talk about the ways your community could honour the legacy of the traditional custodians with a site-specific installation.

#### Places to go

[Search for works by this artist in NGA collection](#)

[Artist website](#)

[SBS On Demand](#)

[City of Sydney](#)

[ABC radio](#)

[National Gallery of Victoria](#)

[Broadstreet Melbourne](#)

[Australian Council for the Arts](#)

[Artlink](#)

[The Design Files](#)

[Art Gallery of New South Wales](#)

## Brian Robinson

Maluyigal/Wuthathi/Dayak peoples  
born 1974 Waiben (Thursday Island),  
Torres Strait Islands, Queensland  
lives and works Cairns, Queensland



*Art is everything; art is my life. I create art, speak about art, write about art, and when I sleep I dream about art, I would eat art if I could.*

*I often say that I was born with a pencil in my hand because I gravitated to art at a very young age. No flat surface was taboo ... I drew on, painted on, spray painted on and marker penned everything—paper, cardboard, plastic, walls in the house, the backyard fence, windows, basketball backboards ... you name it, I drew on it. If compared to a graffiti artist, my tags were everywhere.*

*Torres Strait culture has been infused within my arts practice for some time now, which I often draw upon when creating works of art. It provides the core inspiration that grounds my work but from time to time this focus shifts from Islander-centric themes to a more global view of cultural ideas and objects—hybrid imagery that infuses Indigenous Australian culture with a global exchange of ideologies that reinvigorates contemporary arts practice and traditional storytelling.*

## Disrupting Invisibility

*disrupting:* to cause disorder or turmoil in; to break apart; *invisibility:* not visible; not perceptible by the eye; withdrawn from or out of sight.

Indigenous people and their histories have been hidden for too long. Over time we have been actively disrupting the silencing, revealing the written, the photographed, the drawn and the recorded to reinforce our ongoing presence. There are many moments throughout history where the visibility of Indigenous people was challenged.

One of the defining moments in our rise in visibility was the creation of unifying symbols: the Aboriginal flag designed by Harold Thomas and first flown in 1971 and the Torres Strait Islander flag designed by the late Bernard Namok in 1992.

For Indigenous people today printed and digital media and mainstream television are collectively making our stories, content and voices more visible. The globalisation of communication empowers people over time and distance, and the use of online activism and e-participation is shifting ideologies and perspectives, providing a forum for all views to be aired while drawing strength from others.

## Glossary: Talk the talk

**Conceptualisation:** form a concept or idea of (something)

**Hybrid:** a thing made by combining two different elements

**Complexity:** the state or quality of being intricate or complicated

**Manifestations:** the action or fact of showing something

**Repatriation:** to bring or send back (a person, especially a prisoner of war, a refugee, etc) to his or her country or land of citizenship

## Speak your mind

Discuss the significance of gardening in the Torres Strait Islands and in particular the Mabo decision, which hinged on the ownership of an inherited



Brian Robinson *Custodian of the Blooms* 2014, wood, plastic, steel, synthetic polymer paint, feathers, plant fibre and shell. 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

garden plot. More information can be found on the [AIATSIS website](#).

What do you think about Brian Robinson's artist's statement: 'Art is everything; art is my life. I create art, speak about art, write about art, and when I sleep I dream about art, I would eat art if I could'?

Discuss the notion of a 'cultural trigger'. What does this term mean to you?

The area of Waiben on Thursday Island where Robinson was born is rich with cultural and spiritual complexity. Why do you think this is so?

How does the maritime environment of the Torres Strait Islands inform the cultural manifestations of its people?

Discuss the ways in which Robinson includes references to popular culture and science fiction in his creative practice. How does this approach mirror his sense of self?

### Senior options

What is the significance of Robinson's custodian figure?

What does the term 'hybrid' mean and how is this term relevant to Robinson's *oeuvre*?

Talk about the term 'Primitive art' in relation to art history. Do museums in Australia use this term today?

### Get to work

Several different materials and techniques have been used to construct these works of art. Name as many materials as you can see. Create a flower made from upcycled materials that are used every day.

### Think it through

How do the materials used by Robinson differ from the organic subject matter of his works?

What industries are important for the Torres Strait Islands' economies?

Investigate the flora of your region of Australia. How does it differ from the luscious blooms in Robinson's work?

### Senior option

Research the role of custodian figures in other cultures such as Sarasvati in Hinduism and Tang dynasty guardian figures.

### Places to go

Search for works by this artist in NGA collection

[Mossenson Galleries](#)

[Artist Profile](#)

[National Gallery of Australia](#)