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## WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are warned that this education resource and exhibition contains images and voices of deceased persons.

Users are warned that there may be words and descriptions in the exhibition that may be culturally sensitive, and which might not normally be used in certain public or community contexts.

An exhibition from The University of Queensland Art Museum touring with Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. This project is assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.











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## About this Education Resource

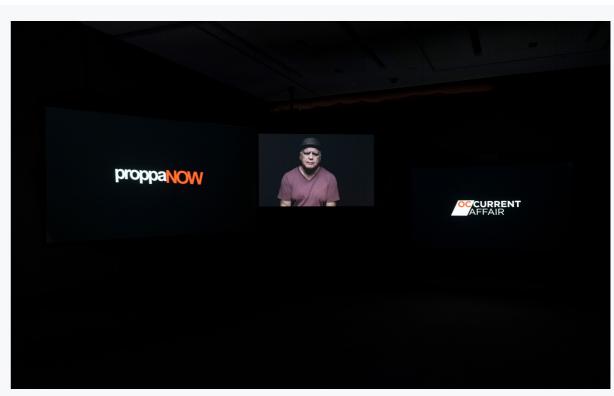
This education resource has been written by Merindah Funnell, Emma Hicks and Nicole Barakat for FLENK Collective and produced in partnership with Museums & Galleries of NSW and UQ Art Museum for the touring exhibition OCCURRENT AFFAIR. This exhibition, showcasing work by influential urban Aboriginal collective proppaNOW, was initially exhibited at UQ Art Museum in 2021 and is now touring across Australia.

Established in 2003, proppaNOW is one of Australia's leading intergenerational artist collectives. As a collective they play an important role in talking about the realities and issues of the urban Aboriginal experience, as well as exploring the politics of Aboriginal art and culture, re-thinking what it means to be a 'contemporary Aboriginal artist'. Individually they are also all highly renowned and respected artists, making their collaborative voice even more unique and powerful.

This resource offers:

- Insight into the practice and history of the proppaNOW collective,
- a glossary of terms, guide to cultural safety and introduction to how to Acknowledge County,
- Thematically based activities for students and teachers for use in the classroom, or the gallery,
- Links for further reading and exploration.

The activities in this resource aim to be used flexibly by all ages and abilities but particularly aimed towards high school students and adult learners. They may be undertaken before, during or after an exhibition visit. While these activities have been written with secondary students in mind, teachers are encouraged to adapt these learning activities to suit their context and their students. We also encourage community groups and gallery staff to use the information and activities in this resource to aid the visitor experience.



Vernon Ah Kee, proppaNOW video, 2021, video documentary, colour video with sound. Installation view at UQ Art Museum. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo by Carl Warner.

# About the Exhibition

OCCURRENT AFFAIR is a major exhibition featuring new and recent works by Brisbane-established Aboriginal artist collective proppaNOW, who have had a five-year hiatus to focus on their individual careers.

Established in 2003, proppaNOW is one of Australia's leading cultural collectives, exploring the politics of Aboriginal art and culture, and provoking, subverting and re-thinking what it means to be a 'contemporary Aboriginal artist'.

Conceived as a collaborative activist gesture, OCCURRENT AFFAIR addresses current socio-political, economic and environmental issues, while celebrating the strength, resilience and continuity of Aboriginal culture.

Engaging wordplay through its title, OCCURRENT AFFAIR references the sensational journalistic style of some television current affair programs. OCCURRENT AFFAIR embraces the slippage between language and its associated readings to probe and present new narratives. The exhibition reflects on the ongoing state of affairs affecting Aboriginal communities issues that are relevant to all Australians.

## About proppaNOW

proppaNOW provides a constantly innovative approach to Aboriginal Art and urban expression in Australia and the position that is ascribed to Aboriginal people and culture within the national Australian context. proppaNOW's central premise is to advocate and produce artists and exhibitions that question established notions of Aboriginal Art and Identity.

## proppaNOW Mission Statement (2004)

proppaNOW is a Brisbane-based Aboriginal artist collective. It was conceived in 1997 and formed in 2003 with the intention of challenging the institutional discrimination of 'urban' Aboriginal artists. Through the strength of the collective, its artists provoke, subvert and rethink damaging stereotypes of what Aboriginal art is and can be.

Artists: Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Megan Cope, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, and Laurie Nilsen.

What does 'proppaNOW' mean?

**Proppa** comes from the Aboriginal colloquial expression 'proper way', meaning to do things with due regard to appropriate protocols and community respect. **Now** of the present time; modern.

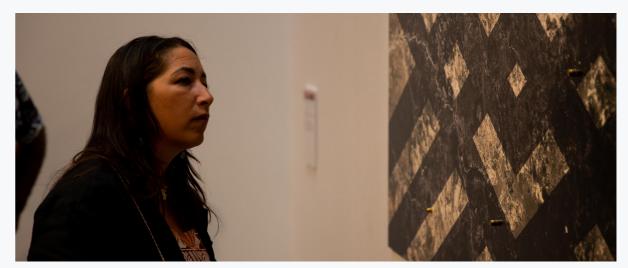
The name 'proppaNOW' reflects the strong moral and political principles which guide the group to challenge institutionalised racism.

'proppaNOW' - it's about being proper; it's about the protocol. And 'now' is about reacting to now. We don't make art about what happened in the Dreaming. We don't make art about what happened in the Creation Time. We make art about now.

Gordon Hookey, proppaNOW exhibition catalogue, **Brisbane Powerhouse**, 2014

## **Cultural Safety**

- 1. Remind students that they are welcome to share their responses only if they feel comfortable to do so.
- 2. Never expect any individual, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or not, to speak on behalf of their culture.
- 3. Create a safe space for students to check in about how they're feeling before, during and after engaging with the education resource.
- 4. Ensure there is space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to have time for themselves if they need during and/or after the activities.



Megan Cope admiring Jennifer Herd's work Still War! Mother's Country, 2021. Installation view at UQ Art Museum, 2021. Photo by Simon Woods.

- 5. Teachers are encouraged to participate in the activities and share, as a way of creating a safer space for students.
- 6. Respond promptly to any behaviour that could be considered prejudice, bias or discriminatory.
- 7. Give everyone the time and space to respond in their own way, without placing time limitations on them.
- 8. Be critical and aware of language used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

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## **Terminology Guide**

When discussing the OCCURRENT AFFAIR exhibition, it is important to use respectful language in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Using respectful and inclusive language and terminology is a key component of the right to self determination and cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The following resource may assist you in navigating respectful terminology:

University of Queensland: Terminology Guide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

When seeking best practice for terminology, language and communication, it is always best to ask the artist, individual or community for the preferred terminology or reference the language used in the exhibition signage or this kit as a guide

## **Glossary of Terms**

Agency	the capacity of an individual and communities to have choices and resources to determine their own futures
Self determination	the entitlement of groups peoples to have control over their destiny and be treated respectfully. An on-going process of choice to ensure that groups are able to meet their social, cultural and economic needs.
Tribute	an act or statement that intends to express gratitude and respect
Sovereignty	a state or a governing body that has the full right and power to govern itself without any interference from outside sources or bodies

# **Acknowledging Country**

Country is everything. It's family, it's life, it's connection.

Jude Barlow, Ngunnawal Elder

Acknowledging Country is one way of showing your respect for the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and sky where you live. If you do not already know, find out who the Traditional Custodians are of the Country you live on.

Read more about Country and hear Jude Barlow explain Acknowledgment and Welcome to Country on the AITSIS site here.

How can you actively Acknowledge Country every day at your school and in your classroom?

## **Activity** Acknowledgement of Country

- 1. Take a moment to connect and ground yourself.
- 2. Plant your feet firmly on the ground and/or place your hands on your knees to feel a connection with the land that you are on.
- 3. Sit or stand at least an arm's length apart from other people to help create a safer space.
- 4. Close your eyes or focus your gaze softly towards the ground if you feel comfortable to do so.
- 5. Take a moment to focus on your breath and the breath of the earth on your skin.
- 6. Listen to your own heartbeat and Country's heartbeat, through its sounds.
- 7. Open your other senses and pay close attention.
- 8. When you feel ready, open your eyes slowly.
- 9. Take a moment to Acknowledge the Country that you are on and pay your respects to the Elders of that Country.
- 10. Carry this respect with you as you learn, work and move on Country.

## About the Artists

**Richard Bell** was born in Charleville, Queensland and is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. Bell grew out of a generation of Aboriginal activists and has remained committed to the politics of Aboriginal emancipation and self-determination. One of Australia's most significant artists. Bell's work explores the complex artistic and political problems of Western, colonial and Indigenous art production. In 2003 he was the recipient of the Telstra National Aboriginal Art Award, establishing him as an important Australian artistic figure. Bell is represented in most major National and State collections and has exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions at major institutions in Australia and America.

Megan Cope was born in Brisbane and is a Quandamooka (North Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland) artist. Her site-specific sculptural installations, video work and paintings investigate issues relating to identity, the environment and mapping practices. Cope's work often resists prescribed notions of Aboriginality and examines psychogeographies that challenge the grand narrative of 'Australia' and our sense of time and ownership in a settler colonial state. These explorations result in various material outcomes.

Jennifer Herd is from Eumundi, Queensland. Herd is a Mbarbarrum woman whose family roots lie in far North Queensland. Herd draws on her past experiences and knowledge in costume design, often incorporating stitching and pin holes in her installations, painting, drawing and sculptural works. She creates shield designs as a way of connecting to her heritage and culture. Herd's shield designs are presented as a reminder of speaking truth to power, frontier resistance and the aftermath of cultural identity stripped bare.

Laurie Nilsen was born in Mandandanji country, also known as Roma, Queensland. Nilsen (1953-2020) was an artist who worked with drawing, painting and mixed media, and was best known for his barbed wire emu sculptures. Nilsen moved to Brisbane as a teenager in the late 1960s to become a jockey, although he soon found a love for art. In 1988, Nilsen became one of the first 'urban' Aboriginal artists to have work acquired by the National Gallery of Australia. He was been considered a paternal figure in the Brisbane Aboriginal art scene, and was a founding member of both Campfire Group and proppaNOW.

Gordon Hookey was born in Cloncurry, Queensland and belongs to the Waanyi/ Waanjiminjin peoples. One of Australia's most renowned contemporary Indigenous artists, Hookey's figurative paintings layer visual puns and linguistic wit to occupy a space where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures converge, in a style that is urgently political and often darkly humorous.

Vernon Ah Kee was born in Innisfail, North Queensland and belongs to the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji, Gugu Yimithirr and Koko Berrin peoples. Ah Kee has risen in prominence as one of Australia's most dynamic artists, his multi-faceted practice ranges from large-scale drawings of his ancestors to hard-hitting text-based works and installations. Ah Kee investigates the mistreatment of our country's First Nations Peoples since colonisation, focusing on lived experiences and those of his ancestors.

Tony Albert was born in Townsville, Queensland and is a descendant of the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. He works across a range of media, often recycling kitsch, mass-produced objects that feature stereotypical depictions of Indigenous people. Over the past 10 years Albert has achieved extraordinary visibility and much critical acclaim for his visual art practice. His multidisciplinary artmaking investigates contemporary legacies of colonialism, prompting audiences to contemplate the human condition.



Gordon Hookey, Jennifer Herd, Tony Albert, Megan Cope, Richard Bell, Vernon Ah Kee (left to right). Photo by Rhett Hammerton.



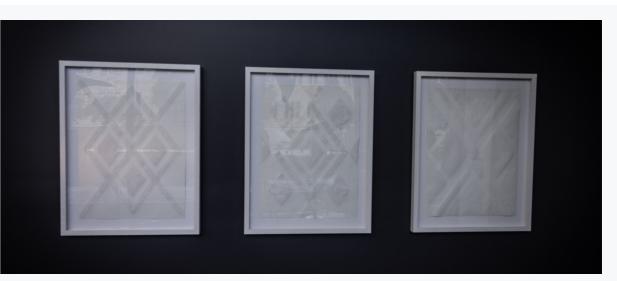
# **Engagement One** Protest and Resistance // **Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd**

Consider the concept individually or through a group discussion.

- Have you ever been to a protest?
- Why did you go? How did you feel before, during and after the protest?
- Why do you think people protest at prominent/high profile events like the Commonwealth Games? Or on particular days, like January 26?



Richard Bell, Kessel Road Protest, 2022, acrylic on canvas 180 x 240cm. Private Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Above: Jennifer Herd In defence I, II and III, 2017, pinholes in Arches paper, 94 x 73.5 cm each. Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2021. Previous page: Detail of In defence I, 2017. Photos by Simon Woods.

## ENGAGEMENT ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd // ENGAGEMENT ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jenr

# **Engagement One Protest and Resistance // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd**

In these artworks, Richard Bell and Jennifer Herd honour important people who have resisted the on-going impacts of colonisation and fought colonial occupation on the front lines. Richard Bell documents key moments in the Aboriginal rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Jennifer Herd honours Bama warriors from her County in the North Queensland rainforests, who fought over many generations to defend their ancestral lands from frontier expansion.

#### Talking points:

- Recording history and truth telling
- Agency and self determination
- Honouring important figures of resistance

#### Artwork Engagement Richard Bell Kessel Road Protest, 2022

- 1. Take a moment to look at Richard Bell's artwork Kessel Road Protest.
- 2. What do you see when you look at this work?
- 3. Describe how you feel when you look at this artwork?

## About the Artwork Richard Bell. Kessel Road Protest, 2022

I describe myself as an activist masquerading as an artist.

#### **Richard Bell**

Kessel Road Protest, 2022 is part of a series of history paintings in which Richard Bell documents key moments in the Aboriginal rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s. In September 1982, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists threatened to disrupt the Brisbane Commonwealth Games by calling for attention towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander injustices, the Premier of Queensland Joh Bjelke-Peterson (who held office from 1968 to 1987) declared a State of Emergency and proclaimed all street marches illegal. Those at marches faced a fine of up to \$2,000 or two years in prison. The demonstrations went ahead anyway and the Queensland Police carried through with Bielke-Peterson's threat, with hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists and their supporters arrested.

In this particular painting, Bell documents a photograph taken of the Brisbane Commonwealth Games Demonstrations on 30 September 1982 at Kessels Road Mt. Gravatt, Queensland. A crowd of policemen stand menacingly over a small group of activists, who are sitting down, peacefully protesting during the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games. Thirty-nine protesters were arrested. As the police moved in to arrest demonstrators chanted 'the whole world is watching.' News of their protests was brought to the attention of international media, shedding light on the racist policies of both QLD and Federal governments in so-called Australia.

Reflection Question Why do you think activists choose prominent events to protest?

## ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd // ENGAGEMENT ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd // EN

## **Engagement One** Protest and Resistance // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd

#### Artwork Engagement Jennifer Herd In defence I, II & III 2017

- 1. Take a moment to look at Jennifer Herd's artwork In defence I, II & III 2017
- 2. What is your first response when looking at this artwork?
- 3. What senses does it evoke?
- 4. How do you feel when you look at this work?

About the Artwork Jennifer Herd, In defence I, II & III 2017 pinholes in Arches paper.

This particular series of works pays tribute to the Bama warriors of the North Queensland rainforests in the Atherton Tableland region. These warriors fought valiantly over many generations to defend their ancestral lands from frontier expansion. These shields were not only objects of defence but also symbols of identity and conveyors of cultural knowledge and place.

Jennifer Herd

Jennifer Herd draws on her past experience in and knowledge of costume design, often incorporating stitching and pinholes in her installations, painting, drawing and sculptural works. For these works, Jennifer Herd uses a minimalist style, utilising the shield to reference her Aboriginal ancestry of Far North Queensland and to symbolise strength and defence. During Herd's research, she noted words from early explorer Christopher Palmerston: "Their shields may answer very well for the purposes of their wars, but my rifle drilled through these as if they were sheets of paper." In defence references this quote and is made through a process of meticulously pinholing archival rag paper. Without the traces of drawing or paint, the imagery is almost invisible as it arises from its substrate like a wound.

**Reflection Question** How do you feel about this artwork after learning more about it?

# CURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFA

## AGEMENT ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd // ENGAGEMENT ONE PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Richard Bell & Jennifer H

# Activity Protest and Resistance // **Richard Bell & Jennifer Herd**

You will need Art making materials that are readily available, this could be paper, fabric, drawing pens etc

Make a tribute (see glossary) to honour and remember a powerful person in your lineage. Before you make the tribute, be sure to get consent from the person if they are living or permission from family if the person has passed away.

- 1. Think of a person in your family's lineage who you recognise as powerful and important.
- 2. Take a moment to consider what makes this person powerful and important.
- 3. Speak to your family members to broaden your understanding and connection with this person and their story.
- 4. Find an object or a photograph associated with this person. How can you use this object or photograph to inform your tribute?
- 5. Your tribute could be made in any form including; writing, installation and visual art.
- 6. Consider the medium that you use and how it might relate to the story of that person.
- 7. The techniques that Jennier Herd and Richard Bell use are slow processes that require mindful practice. Work slowly and mindfully as you make your tribute. Use this slow process as a time to reflect on the person you are paying tribute to.
- 8. Share your tribute and your story with other people if you feel comfortable to do so. Remember that you can keep this tribute between you and your family, you don't have to share it if you do not wish to do so.

## Reflection

- Why is it important to pay tribute and tell the story of this important and powerful person with agency and on your own terms?
- What emotions were evoked through the process of making this tribute?

Go deeper Individually or as a class

- 1. Research and find out more about the stories of the Frontier Wars and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led protests and resistance close to where you live.
- 2. Who are the First Nations warriors and activists remembered for their strength, defiance and resistance?

Frontier War Stories by Boe Spearim is a podcast dedicated to truthtelling about a side of Australia that has been left out of the history books.

What you need to know about the Frontier Wars by Alexis Moran NITV

The Australian Wars Directed by Rachael Perkins a three-part series on SBS on Demand



## Engagement Two Sovereignty // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope

Consider the concept individually or through a group discussion.

- What does the term **sovereignty** (see glossary) mean?
- What does it mean in the context of this continent?
- What does it mean to say "sovereignty was never ceded"? •



Courtesy of the artist, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen, and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.



## EMENT TWO SOVEREIGNTY // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope // ENGAGEMENT TWO PROTEST AND RESISTANCE // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope // EN

## **Engagement Two** Sovereignty // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope

In these artworks, artists Megan Cope and Laurie Nilsen highlight the environmental consequences of European invasion. The artists speak to the detrimental practices of land management by British colonisers conflicting with the reciprocal care and sustainable cultural practices employed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for thousands of years.

#### Talking points:

- The politics of materials
- Colonial impacts on environment
- Caring for Country

#### Artwork Engagement

- 1. Take a moment to look at the artworks by Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope.
- 2. What do you notice about them?
- 3. Look at the list of materials that the artworks are made from.
- 4. Where have you seen these materials in your own home, school or neighbourhood?
- 5. Take a moment to consider how each of these materials are used in everyday life.

Learn more about each artwork below.

**Reflection question** How might your understanding of these materials change after reading about the artworks?

**About the Artwork** Laurie Nilsen *Signage VI*, 2012 *Signage I*, 2012 *Signage II*, 2012 Hannemuhle 308gsm 100% cotton photo rag paper

I've come across a lot of these [emu] skeletons hanging on fences in the bush. An emu will walk up and down a fence trying to get to water. They'll walk up and down 'til they drop. Others will try to go through the fence...

...it's about entrapment, and that goes along with barbed wire ... You know, barbed wire's not only meant to keep cattle in – it's meant to keep Aboriginal people out too...

Laurie Nilsen

In Signage VI, Signage I, and Signage II, the late Laurie Nilsen documented Musgrave Park and the Magistrates Court in Brisbane as sites of violence, resistanceand protest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. Growing up in rural Queensland, Nilsen observed barbed wire as a dominant structure created by European farmers to create forceful boundary lines. He repurposed this material, placing his totem of the emu in the photograph to consider ideas of entrapment, as well as the regeneration and resilience of Aboriginal people.

In this series, Nilsen made visible the boundary zones of places like the Magistrates Court by placing barbed wire, a tool used to hurt and kill Native species, in inner city locations. Nilsen's emus bear witness to this site where massacres occurred, and where mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to occur. In another photograph, Nilsen positioned his totem, the emu, in Musgrave Park, framing the site as one of Aboringal sovereignty. Musgrave Park has historically been a site of knowledge sharing between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, connecting families who were forcefully displaced and separated by the Australian government. During the Commonwealth Games land rights protest in 1982, hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occupied the park to bring attention to racist policies. In this exhibition, proppaNOW artist Richard Bell similarly documents Commonwealth Games protests as key moments of Aboriginal history that have been ignored by colonial media or misconstrued. Signage I and Signage VI were both shown in the exhibition Insurgence with proppaNOW Artists Collective at the Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House, Canberra, 2013.

# CURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFA

## Engagement Two Sovereignty // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope

About the Artwork Megan Cope Deadwood 2021 paperbark, tissue paper, beeswax

I choose to focus on the dualisms that lie within Australian psychogeography, and to challenge those notions of purity, history, power and property or land.

Megan Cope

Megan Cope uses art as a platform to assert her identity as a Quandamooka woman and as a reclamation of her sovereignty. She holds deep cultural concerns for the environment and its degradation since colonisation. The idiom 'dead wood' refers to people or things that are no longer useful. Cope critiques current political agendas promoting mining and agricultural development over environmental protection, an issue of personal interest to the artist as it has affected her island home of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).

Dead Wood highlights the environmental consequences of European settlement. In this installation, large sheets of paperbark are suspended from the ceiling, each inscribed with significant information regarding cultural heritage and land and sea management. Acting as a condition report, the work imagines the Traditional Owners as landlords and the paperbark scrolls as an environmental assessment. Government and historical records frequently express the abundance of resources prior to colonial occupation of Australia. Dead wood acknowledges this pre-colonial history, the traditional sustainable practices of Aboriginal people, and their role as custodians and ongoing caretakers of Country.

The artist would like to acknowledge Elisabeth Gondwe as primary researcher and collaborator for the historical accounts on this work.

# Activity Sovereignty // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope

You will need Paper, drawing media

- 1. Spend twenty-minutes outside, taking time to sit with and notice your surrounding environment.
- 2. Make a series of written or drawn notes of all the things from nature; animals, birds, insects, trees, plants, shrubs etc.
- 3. Now make a series of written or drawn notes of all the built environment that could impact those from nature (insects, birds, trees etc) that you've noticed. For example, powerlines often electrocute flying foxes and cars often kill or injure kangaroos and other wildlife.
- 4. Consider some of the small or big changes that could be made to lessen the impact of the built environment on nature.
- 5. What could you do to influence this change? It could be as simple as putting a tray of water out on hot days for birds and lizards to drink or more involved like lobbying your local council to slow the speed of traffic in areas with large wildlife populations.
- 6. Come together as a group to come up with more actions that respectfully contribute to the on-going care of Country.

## Reflection

• How does it feel to make a change that respectfully contributes to the care of Country?

ppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFA SOVEREIGNTY // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope // ENGAGEMENT TWO SOVEREIGNTY // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope // ENGAGEMENT TWO SOVEREI

# Activity Sovereignty // Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope

#### Go Deeper

You will need Paper and drawing media, a photocopier

- 1. Design and make a poster to educate people in your community of the actions they could take to respectfully contribute to the on-going care of Country.
- 2. Consider who you would like to share this poster with and how that might direct your design.
- 3. Where would you like to put your poster up? Think about the audience you would like to reach.

#### Reflection

• Why is it important to educate others about respectfully contributing to the on-going care of Country?



Laurie Nilsen & Vernon Ah Kee, Conversations I (detail), 2022 barbed wire, aluminium & patina, 60 x 80 x 80cm Courtesy of the artists, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen, FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

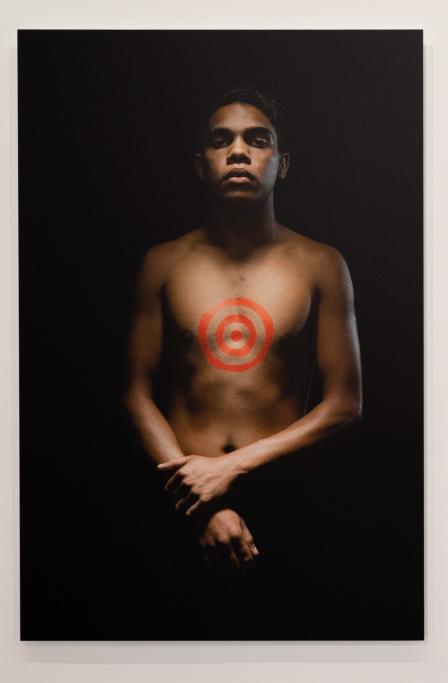
# **Engagement Three Futures //** Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert

Consider the concept individually or through a group discussion.

- How do you feel when you think about the future?
- How do you think contemporary artists and art can influence and help shape the future?



Gordon Hookey, WAM / Ethics, 2021. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2021. Photo by Rhett Hammerton.







Tony Albert, 'Brothers' series, 2013, reproduction on di-bond. Collection of The University of Queensland. Gift of Tony Albert through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift program, 2014. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney. Photo: Sharon Baker.



Gordon Hookey, WAM / Ethics, 2021, canvas, synthetic polymer paint, metal eyelets, on wood dowels, traffic cones and castors, 265.0 x 270.0 x 50.0 cm. Installation view at UQ Art Museum, 2021. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2021. Photo by Carl Warner.

# **Engagement Three Futures //** Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert

In these artworks, artists Tony Albert, Gordon Hookey and Vernon Ah Kee look critically at prevailing societal prejudices. Each artist has a different way of questioning and challenging these dominant and oppressive stereotypes that have real impacts on the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. Through their art works, these artists also acknowledge the strength, resilience and continuity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, communities and culture.

#### Talking points:

- Unpacking and questioning dominant narratives and representations
- Having control and agency of one's own narrative
- Opportunities to talk back to dominant and oppressive stereotypes

## **Artwork Engagement**

- 1. Take a moment to look closely at each artwork, one at a time.
- 2. What do you notice about this artwork?
- 3. How do you feel when you look at the artwork?

Learn more about the artworks.

FUTURES // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert // ENGAGEMENT THREE FUTURES // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert // EN

# Engagement Three Futures // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert

## Warm-up Activity

- 1. Think about who you are and how you identify your age, gender, your culture, sexuality, religion, race, where you live or where you are from etc.
- 2. Have you ever felt misunderstood or misrepresented?
- 3. Have you felt like your voice hasn't been heard?
- 4. Visualise a space where you feel safe, strong and grounded in who you are.
- 5. What does it look like? How do you feel there?
- 6. Use this as a space to ground yourself as you go through the next activity.

**About the Artwork** Tony Albert Brother (Our Past), Brother (Our Present), Brother (Our Future) 2013 reproduction on di-bond

Art can say something, art can change the way people think, change the way we feel, change the world...

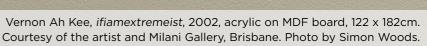
Tony Albert

Tony Albert created this body of work in response to a car chase that occurred in Sydney's Kings Cross in April 2012, in which two teenage Aboriginal Australian boys were shot and wounded by police after crashing their car and injuring a female bystander. Racial tensions flared in the aftermath of the shootings. At a community protest, Albert saw a group of young Indigenous Australian men arrive shirtless, with their chests marked with red targets. Later in the same year, Albert volunteered at Kirinari Hostel, which provides accommodation to Indigenous Australian young people attending high school in Sydney.

Albert's 'Brothers' series was inspired by the strength and vulnerability of the group at the protest as well as the determination of the Kirinari students, some of whom Albert photographed for this series. Albert's portraits comment on prevailing societal prejudices that promote Indigenous Australian men as lawbreakers. The three images of brothers in the past, present, and future creates a connection between generations of Indigenous Australian people who have faced police brutality. Despite this, the strength and power of the young men in the photographs presents a readiness to face the future regardless of discrimination and stereotyping.

# CURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFA

# ifiamextremist itisbecause mypeoplelivein extremelybad conditions



## ENGAGEMENT THREE FUTURES // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert // ENGAGEMENT THREE FUTURES // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee

About the Artwork Vernon Ah Kee Ifiamanextremeist 2002 acrylic on board

In the early days, we had to be aggressive, and we had to display our anger. We knew we were being a voice for ourselves and our mob. We were very much surrogates in terms of expressing anger, and that needed to happen and we had to be unafraid of doing that.

#### Vernon Ah Kee

Vernon Ah Kee's text-based works invest words with sardonic humour as a way to show how language is used to reinforce bias and incite racism. Ah Kee employs clear typographical design to lend a sense of institutional, colonial authority. In this work, the artist plays on the meaning of the word 'extremist,' which has been used in the media to describe protestors attending rallies for Aboriginal rights as 'far-left extremists'. The phrase is in first person, making it seem as if the artist is talking directly to the viewer. Ah Kee's signature text works use a universal font, bolded and lowercase, and they play with composition and sentence structure. In this work, there are no spaces between words within the sentence, causing the audience to concentrate slightly more than usual and to possibly re-read and process the words and their meaning more prudently. Ah Kee explains that actions of resistance can be perceived as 'extreme' because they reflect the critical conditions that many Aboriginal people face in Australia.

About the Artwork Gordon Hookey WAM / Ethics 2021 fabric, paint, wood dowels, witches hats, castors

Australia would rather live with a comfortable lie than the uncomfortable truth.

#### Gordon Hookey

In this banner, Gordon Hookey writes an acrostic poem that spells out 'Whiteout Aboriginal Movement', with 'WAM' referencing the non-Indigenous company WAM Clothing. He employs the ubiquitous office staple of Wite-Out to portray the idea of whitewashing: a practice of deliberately concealing unpleasant or incriminating facts through censorship, often imposed by the media and the government. The text at the bottom of the canvas, "It's too strong for you Karen", refers to a video that went viral in 2019 of a woman from Mildura who slung racist insults at her neighbours for having the Aboriginal flag installed in their front yard. In the video, Karen attempts in vain to take down the Aboriginal flag from their house and one of the family says to her, "My flag is too strong for you, Karen". Since this event, 'Karen' has entered the common vernacular globally to describe someone (usually a white, middle-aged woman) who complains unnecessarily and from a position of entitlement and privilege. Similarly, on the reverse side of the banner, a wordplay on 'ethics' is used to question moral principles.



Tony Albert with University of Queensland students participating in the artist residency program to create the communal artwork mural *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*. Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney. Photo by Simon Woods.

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# **Activity** Futures // Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee and Tony Albert

Have you ever watched the news or read a news article that has evoked strong emotions in you?

- 1. Find a headline or an article that stirs something in you and you feel you want to speak back to. You might also want to use the idea that came up with earlier to say something in response to.
- 2. Or you might like to choose an article that speaks to you and you want to highlight that message
- 3. Use an existing newspaper or media article as your medium to speak up and speak back.
- 4. You might want to remove works, add words, paint or draw over the top, cut up the words and rearrange them.
- 5. You are shaping a narrative and telling a new perspective of a story.
- 6. From this activity, find a strong message you want to communicate to the world. How might you do this in an artwork that does use photography or text?
- 7. How might you use humour and satire to talk about complex issues?

## Reflection

- What effect can the media have on the ways that people perceive and engage with the world?
- Why is it important to use your voice to speak up and speak back to issues that can impact you and your communities in negative and harmful ways?



Installation view at UQ Art Museum, 2021 featuring Gordon Hookey, Solidarity/You Are Here, 2020; WAM / Ethics, 2021; and Austika / Austrailya, 2020. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2021.

#### **Curriculum Links** Curriculum Code Description The resources support outcomes of the Australian and NSW Curriculum. AC9AVA10D01 Visual Arts: personal expression Year 7-8: AC9AVA10D02 Curriculum Code Description AC9AVA8E01 investigate ways that visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated to represent History: ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in artworks Year 7: created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts Curriculum Code Description AC9AVA8E02 investigate the diversity of First Nations Australians' artworks and arts practices, considering culturally AC9HH7K04 responsive approaches to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights AC9HH7K07 AC9AVA8D01 experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to develop skills AC9AVA8D02 reflect on the ways that they and other artists respond preservation to influences to inform choices they make in their own visual arts practice Year 8: Year 9-10: Curriculum Code Description **Curriculum Code** Description AC9HH8K14 AC9AVA10E01 investigate the ways that artists across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts develop personal expression in their visual arts practice to represent. communicate and/or challenge ideas, perspectives Year 9: and/or meaning AC9AVA10E02 investigate the ways that First Nations Australian Curriculum Code Description artists celebrate and challenge multiple perspectives **AC9HH9K06** of Australian identity through their artworks and visual arts practice

experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to refine skills and develop

reflect on the way they and other visual artists respond to influences to inspire, develop and resolve choices they make in their own visual arts practice

how First Nations Australians have responded to environmental processes and changes over time

the cultural obligations of First Nations Australians about significant heritage sites, including ancestral remains, material culture and artefacts, and the role of collaboration between First Nations Australians and other individuals and groups to ensure cultural

the experiences and perspectives of rulers and of subject peoples, and the interaction between power and/or authority in the Asian-Pacific society

different experiences and perspectives of colonisers, settlers and First Nations Australians and the impact of these experiences on changes to Australian society's ideas, beliefs and values

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Year 9 (continued):

Year 8:

Curriculum Code	Description
<u>AC9HH9S07</u>	analyse different and contested historical interpretations
ar 10:	
Curriculum Code	Description
<u>C9HH10K10</u>	the contributions of significant individuals and groups in the campaign for the recognition of the rights of First Nations Australians and the extent to which they brought change to Australian society
<u>C9HH10K11</u>	the significant events and methods in the movement for the civil rights of First Nations Australians and the extent to which they contributed to change
<u>C9HH10K13</u>	the continuing efforts to create change in the civil rights and freedoms in Australia, for First Nations Australians, migrants and women
C9HH10K14	changing historical perspectives over time in relation
<u>0011110114</u>	to the developments in technology, public health,
	longevity, standard of living in the 20th century, and concern for the environment and sustainability
<u>29HH10S07</u>	analyse different and contested historical interpretations
<b>graphy:</b> 7:	
urriculum Code	Description
<u>9HG7K01</u>	classification of environmental resources and the way

that water connects and changes places as it moves

through environments

thetic and cultural value of landforms for people, including of First Nations Australians

isation and its impacts on places and rawing on a study from a country such ates of America, and its implications

nage the sustainability of Australia's places

nvironments of human alteration of uce food, industrial materials and

ced changes that challenge the places and environments

stralians' approaches to custodial ad environmental management in s of Australia

## Media Arts:

## Year 7-8:

Code	Description
<u>AC9AMA8E02</u>	investigate the diversity of First Nations Australians' media arts works and practices, considering culturally responsive approaches to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights
Year 9 - 10:	
Code	Description
<u>AC9AMA10E02</u>	investigate the ways First Nations Australian media artists and/or producers celebrate and challenge multiple perspectives of Australian identity through media arts



Megan Cope, *Bated Breath*, 2021, chrome-plated ceramics on steel support, fishing line and mirror, total approx. 3m high; mirror 120cm diameter. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo by Simon Woods.

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n Ah Kee // Tony Albert // Richard Bell // Megan Cope // Jennifer Herd // Goro

Education Kit // Education Kit

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Gordon Hookey // Laurie Nilsen // Vernon Ah Kee // Tony Albert // Richard B

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