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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.

## About this Education Resource

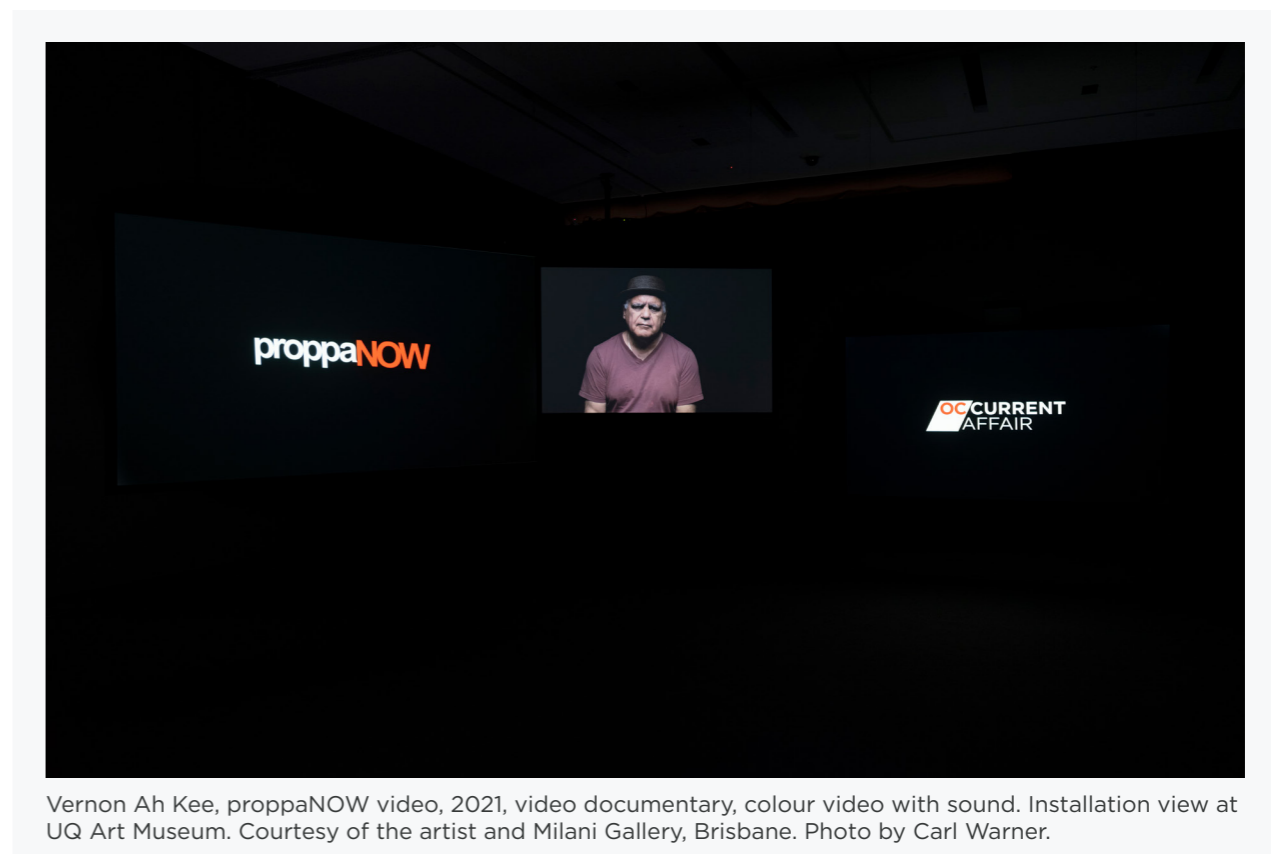
This education resource has been written by Merindah Funnell, Emma Hicks and Nicole Barakat for FLENK Collective and produced in partnership with Museums & Galleries of NSW and UQ Art Museum for the touring exhibition *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*. This exhibition, showcasing work by influential urban Aboriginal 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 Country,
- 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.
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.



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

## 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

<b>Agency</b>	the capacity of an individual and communities to have choices and resources to determine their own futures
<b>Self determination</b>	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.
<b>Tribute</b>	an act or statement that intends to express gratitude and respect
<b>Sovereignty</b>	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?

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### 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.













## 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?

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**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?

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[Frontier War Stories by Boe Spearim](#) is a podcast dedicated to truth-telling 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](#)

**Quandamooka Sovereign Owners  
Country Condition Report**

Quandamooka Country  
Quandamooka Country is a traditional Aboriginal land in Queensland, Australia. It is the traditional land of the Quandamooka people, who are the traditional custodians of the land and its resources. The Quandamooka people have a rich and diverse culture, and their traditional knowledge and practices are an important part of the region's heritage.

The Quandamooka Country Condition Report is a document that provides information about the current state of the land and its resources. It is a key document for the Quandamooka people, and it is used to inform decision-making about the land and its resources. The report is a collaborative effort between the Quandamooka people and the Queensland Government, and it is a key document for the Quandamooka people's ongoing efforts to protect and manage their land and resources.

**Entry Comments**

Comments on the entry, including any feedback from the judges and the public. This section provides a platform for the artist to respond to the feedback and to share their thoughts on the entry. It is a key part of the entry process, and it is used to inform the artist's future work.

**Eviction Notice Form**

Form for reporting an eviction, including details of the property, the tenant, and the reasons for the eviction. This form is used by the Queensland Government to track and manage evictions in the state. It is a key document for the Queensland Government's efforts to protect and manage the state's housing market.

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Megan Cope, *Deadwood*, 2021 wax, paper on paperbark 218 x 132cm (condition report); 205 x 130cm (entry comments) 204 x 121cm (evictions notice). Installation view art UQ Art Museum, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo by Carl Warner.





Gold Coast  
Maroochydore  
Ipswich  
Townsville

## 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?

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**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, resistance and 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 Aboriginal 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.

## 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?

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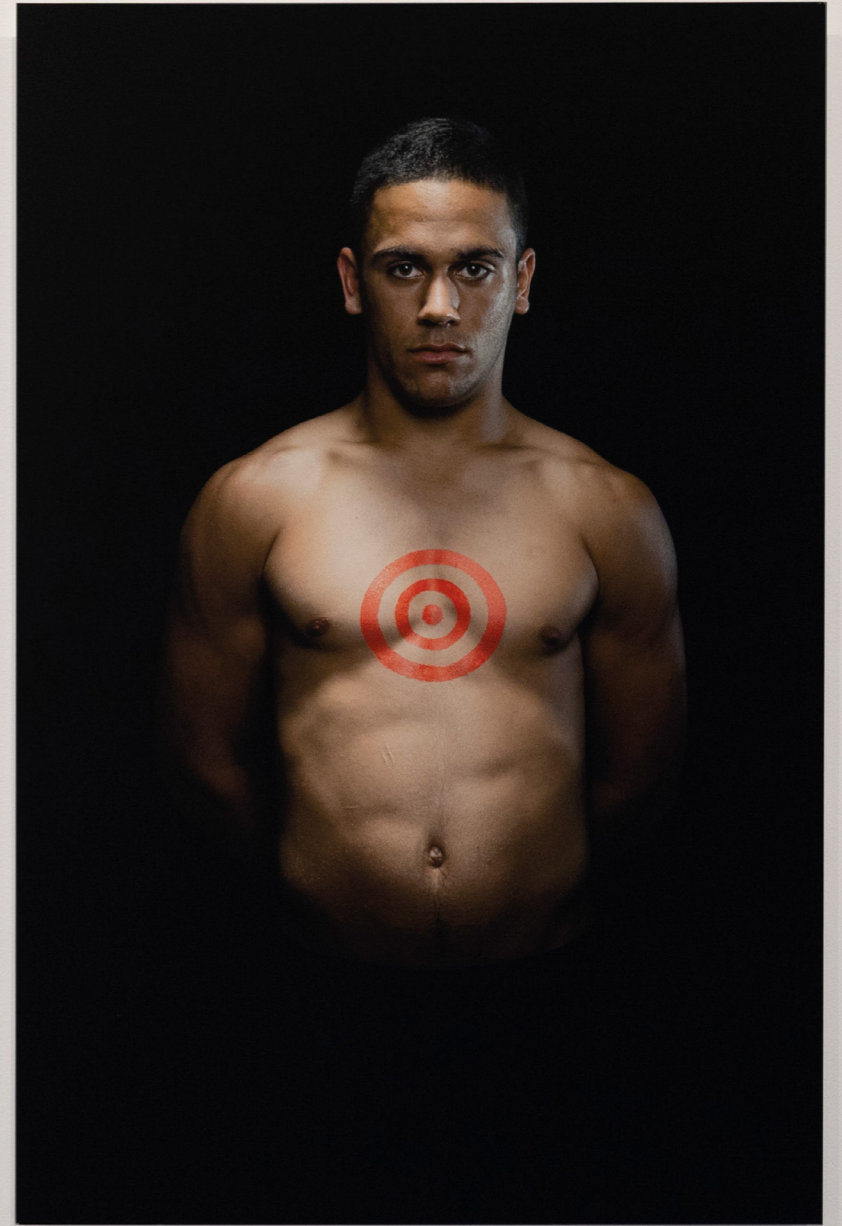
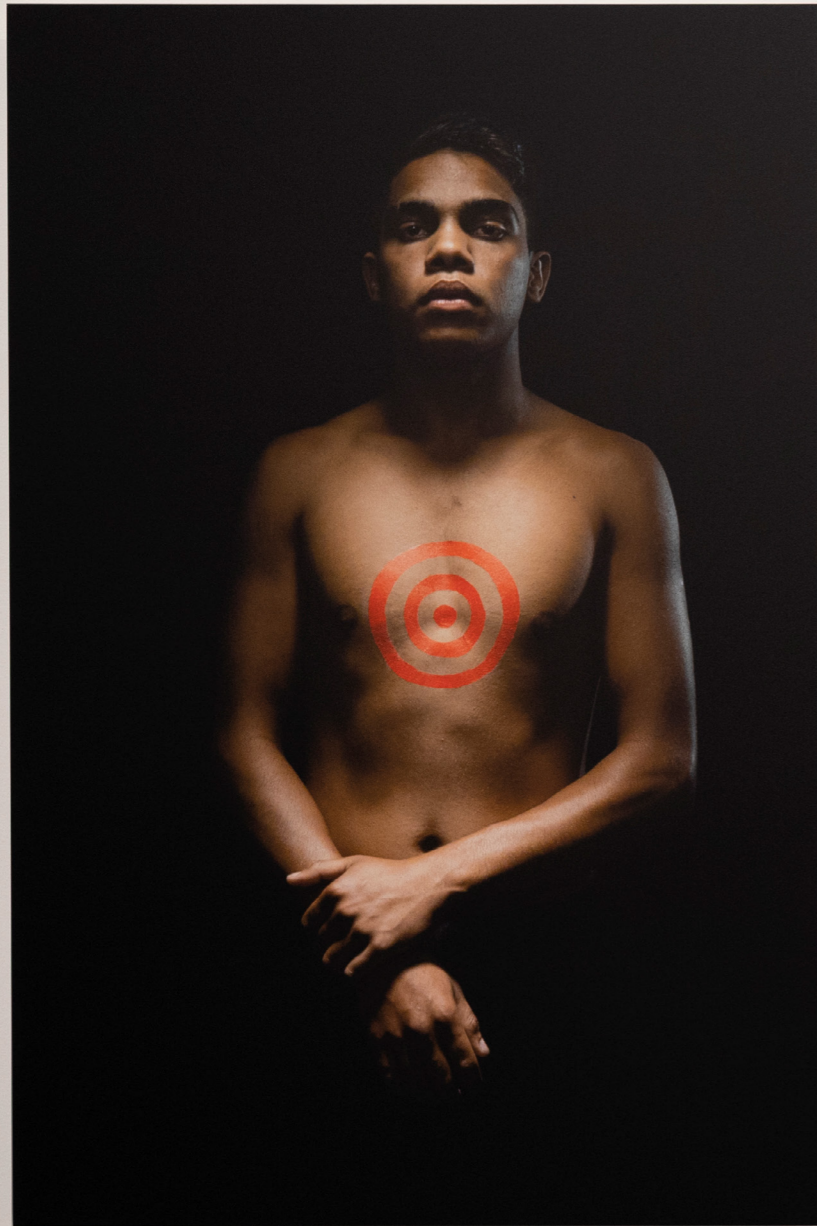
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Tony Albert, 'Brothers' series, 2013, reproduction on di-bond. Collection of The University of Queensland. Gift of Tony Albert through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift program, 2014. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf,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





**ifiamextremist  
itisbecause  
mypeoplelivein  
extremelybad  
conditions**



## 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?

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



## Curriculum Links

The resources support outcomes of the [Australian](#) and NSW Curriculum.

### Visual Arts:

Year 7-8:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9AVA8E01</a>	investigate ways that visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated to represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in artworks created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts
<a href="#">AC9AVA8E02</a>	investigate the diversity of First Nations Australians' artworks and arts practices, considering culturally responsive approaches to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights
<a href="#">AC9AVA8D01</a>	experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to develop skills
<a href="#">AC9AVA8D02</a>	reflect on the ways that they and other artists respond to influences to inform choices they make in their own visual arts practice

Year 9-10:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9AVA10E01</a>	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 and/or meaning
<a href="#">AC9AVA10E02</a>	investigate the ways that First Nations Australian artists celebrate and challenge multiple perspectives of Australian identity through their artworks and visual arts practice

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9AVA10D01</a>	experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to refine skills and develop personal expression
<a href="#">AC9AVA10D02</a>	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

### History:

Year 7:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HH7K04</a>	how First Nations Australians have responded to environmental processes and changes over time
<a href="#">AC9HH7K07</a>	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 preservation

Year 8:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HH8K14</a>	the experiences and perspectives of rulers and of subject peoples, and the interaction between power and/or authority in the Asian-Pacific society

Year 9:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HH9K06</a>	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

Year 9 (continued):

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HH9S07</a>	analyse different and contested historical interpretations

Year 10:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HH10K10</a>	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
<a href="#">AC9HH10K11</a>	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
<a href="#">AC9HH10K13</a>	the continuing efforts to create change in the civil rights and freedoms in Australia, for First Nations Australians, migrants and women
<a href="#">AC9HH10K14</a>	changing historical perspectives over time in relation to the developments in technology, public health, longevity, standard of living in the 20th century, and concern for the environment and sustainability
<a href="#">AC9HH10S07</a>	analyse different and contested historical interpretations

**Geography:**

Year 7:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HG7K01</a>	classification of environmental resources and the way that water connects and changes places as it moves through environments

Year 8:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HG8K03</a>	the spiritual, aesthetic and cultural value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Country/Place of First Nations Australians
<a href="#">AC9HG8K06</a>	causes of urbanisation and its impacts on places and environments, drawing on a study from a country such as the United States of America, and its implications
<a href="#">AC9HG8K09</a>	strategies to manage the sustainability of Australia's changing urban places

Year 9:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HG9K02</a>	the effects on environments of human alteration of biomes to produce food, industrial materials and fibres

Year 10:

Curriculum Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9HG10K01</a>	the human-induced changes that challenge the sustainability of places and environments
<a href="#">AC9HG10K03</a>	First Nations Australians' approaches to custodial responsibility and environmental management in different regions of Australia

**Media Arts:**

Year 7-8:

Code	Description
<a href="#">AC9AMA8E02</a>	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
<a href="#">AC9AMA10E02</a>	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.

