

WILMA WALKER | KUKU YALANJI PEOPLE KAKAN (BASKETS) 2002

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Wilma Walker's baskets use traditional forms and styles of weaving to reflect on events from the artist's own history. Walker taught herself to make these baskets by recalling childhood memories of watching women weaving them. As a child, Walker was hidden inside baskets by family members to prevent government officials removing her from her family, as was the government policy at the time. Walker has told of her story:

I born up the (Mossman) Gorge on the riverbank in a gunya and police come along look for all the half-caste kids, but they hid me . . . my mother, we had to hide. In them baskets . . . and they hid me in that and give me (seed-pod rattles); lot, put in there, keep me quiet . . . when them police come say 'No one here. No more kids. All gone . . . take 'em all away'.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Wilma Walker (1929–2008) was an elder of the Kuku Yalanji people from Mossman Gorge, east Cape York. Her Aboriginal names are Ngadjijina and Bambimilbirra. She was one of the few women from her community who continued to weave baskets in the traditional way. Walker promoted her Indigenous culture, particularly by teaching weaving to the children in her community.

CONCEPTS

Wilma Walker's art addresses family, race and history, with particular reference to the Stolen Generations. Walker used traditional basket-making to explore historical events, drawing attention to the impact of European settlement on Aboriginal Australians.

PRIMARY

Question: Why was it important to Wilma Walker to share her childhood memories by weaving baskets?

Activity: Think of a memory you have about your family that is important to you. Draw this memory to share with your class.

SECONDARY

Question: How has Wilma Walker conveyed her childhood experience in the making of these baskets?

Activity: Choose an important event in your life and select an art form to best represent your memory of it. Consider how materials and objects can communicate memory through the senses.



GLOSSARY

Stolen Generations: 'The Stolen Generations' refers to children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were taken from their families between the 1890s and 1970s, in accordance with the Australian government's policy at the time. These children were raised on church missions or by foster families, in an attempt to assimilate them into white Australian society.

Wilma Walker / Kuku Yalanji people / Kakan (Baskets) 2002 / Twined black palm (*Normanbya normanbyi*) fibre (basket), with lawyer cane (*Calamus* sp.) fibre (handle) / Commissioned 2002 with funds from the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

OVERVIEW

'My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Queensland' examines the associations and interpretations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have to country. Indigenous artists have long been an important voice for their communities and have been instrumental in telling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories; presenting alternative views of history, asserting their presence in country, both urban and regional, responding to contemporary politics, and highlighting contemporary Indigenous experiences in Australia. The exhibition also addresses the cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (ATSIHC).

Students will:

- **explore** how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People express their heritage, history and personal connections
- **develop** an awareness of the historic and contemporary effects of colonisation
- **compare** the life experiences of different Indigenous artists, and
- **investigate** the unique belief systems that connect people both physically and spiritually to Country/Place.

Key subject areas: Visual Arts, Media Arts, History and Geography

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MY COUNTRY I STILL CALL AUSTRALIA HOME

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM 'BLACK QUEENSLAND'



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MICHAEL COOK | BIDJARA PEOPLE *CIVILISED #2 AND CIVILISED #13* 2012



ABOUT THE ARTWORK

In Michael Cook's 'Civilised' series, Indigenous Australians are dressed in the period fashion of the four European countries — Spain, the Netherlands, England and France — whose explorers first visited Australia. He incorporates text from the explorers' writings and journals, in which they recorded their first contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In restaging the past from an Indigenous perspective, Cook challenges the perceptions that underpin what it means to be civilised.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Michael Cook (b.1968) is a descendant of the Bidjara people of south-west Queensland. Adopted as an infant by a non-Indigenous family, he was later encouraged to find his Aboriginal birth mother and to learn about his heritage. A successful commercial fashion photographer in Australia and overseas for over 25 years, Cook was drawn to art photography as a means to explore his ancestry. His expertise in digital image-making and post-production techniques lends an ethereal quality to this re-imagining of Australian history. Cook constructs his images in a manner more akin to painting than to traditional photographic studios or documentary models.

CONCEPTS

Michael Cook re-evaluates Australian history from an Indigenous perspective. His use of historical text and imagery highlights the prejudices of the European explorers who were witnessing a new race and culture for the first time. In doing so, he encourages the viewer to think about how history might have been different, had the European explorers understood that Indigenous Australians lived in harmony with the land.



PRIMARY

Question: List and describe the elements of clothing that are worn by the people in Michael Cook's 'Civilised' series. What do the symbols, colours and patterns tell you about clothing from different places and times throughout history?

Activity: Imagine yourself in a strange country. Make an artwork of yourself in this new place. Consider how you might represent your nationality or ethnicity in an unfamiliar landscape.

SECONDARY

Question: Discuss Michael Cook's use of traditional styles of European portraiture and costume to comment on contemporary issues. How do these photographs encourage us to re-evaluate Australia's colonial history?

Activity: Research Indigenous Australian artists who use photography to explore Aboriginal identity and history — for example, Bindi Cole, Destiny Deacon and Christian Thompson. Create a digital self-portrait, incorporating the techniques used by some of the artists mentioned.

Michael Cook / Bidjara people / *Civilised #13* 2012 (left) and *Civilised #2* 2012 (right) / Inkjet prints on paper, ed. 5/8 / Purchased 2012. Queensland Art Gallery / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI | KAIADILT PEOPLE *DIBIRDIBI COUNTRY* 2007

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Dibirdibi Country 2007 conveys the story places of Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod ancestor, and charts his creative journey along the coastlines of Bentinck Island and Sweers Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, in far north-west Queensland. These stories and their associated places belonged to the artist's husband, Pat, whose traditional name was also Dibirdibi. Sally Gabori's paintings seem abstract in nature, but retain certain representational elements crucial to mapping her country through shape, form and colour. By depicting the country they both loved, her paintings brought her closer to her late husband.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (c.1924–2015), who came to painting at the age of 81, was one of a handful of leading artists from Indigenous communities who worked in a bold personal style outside the established local traditions. Other such artists include Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Ginger Riley, Makinti Napanangka, Wakartu Cory Surprise and Nora Wompi. Her paintings are widely acclaimed for their vibrant use of colour. Born into the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island, the largest of the South Wellesley group of islands in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, where she remained until her early twenties, Gabori lived a largely traditional life, gathering bush foods and fishing using complex stone-walled fish traps. In 1948, following drought, high tides and the resulting salinisation of underground freshwater stores, the people of Bentinck were moved to the Presbyterian Mission on nearby Mornington Island — the country of the Lardil people. Gabori maintained a strong connection to her Kaiadilt country through language, song and storytelling, all of which she incorporated into the act of painting, and she returned to Bentinck whenever possible.

CONCEPTS

Sally Gabori's application of paint creates striking contrasts of colour and transition and, although produced quickly, her compositions are deeply considered. Working paints into and over each other at different stages of the drying process results in certain visual effects: colour fields meet and patches of wet paint blend together, while painting over dry sections creates hard, bold edges. These techniques create evocative representations of her island home, with hard, bold edges reminiscent of rock-walled fish traps and the rocky structures that ring Bentinck Island, while softer edges evoke the gradual recession of the land into the sea, or as saltpan turns into swamp then open forest. These 'edges' of country and changes to the landscape — seasonal, tidal or environmental — and the things these changes revealed and concealed, are a key aspect of the artist's works.

PRIMARY

Question: This is a painting of the artist's country. This place was very important to the artist because it represents her life and the stories of Bentinck Island. If you were to paint a picture of where you come from, what places and stories would you include?



Activity: Make a map of the route you take to school each day. Use symbols, shapes and colours to identify important objects, tracks and landmarks. Include a key to the map so someone else can follow it.

SECONDARY

Question: How do Indigenous artists communicate stories and places significant to their culture through painting?

Activity: Find an aerial map of your suburb on the internet and print out a copy. Identify its major natural and manmade landmarks, such as rivers, parks and shopping centres. Create an artwork about your suburb that includes the landmarks you identified.

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori / Kaiadilt people / *Dibirdibi Country* 2007 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / Purchased 2008. The Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda, 2007. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney, 2016

VERNON AH KEE | KUKU YALANJI/WAANYI/YIDINYJI/GUUGU YIMITHIRR PEOPLE ANNIE AH SAM 2008

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Annie Ah Sam 2008 is part of a series of large-scale charcoal portraits of Vernon Ah Kee's family members, both living and deceased. Many of these portraits are based on photographs taken by Norman B Tindale (1900–93), an anthropologist who documented Aboriginal people between the 1920s and 1960s, in the belief that Indigenous Australians were a 'dying race'. Tindale's images were small and included identification tags, in a similar way to the documentation of a plant or animal species for scientific purposes. Ah Kee re-creates Tindale's image in large-scale, hand-drawn portraits, from which his relatives gaze directly at the viewer. *Annie Ah Sam* depicts the artist's great-grandmother, who was photographed by Tindale on Palm Island in north Queensland.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Vernon Ah Kee (b.1967) is a Brisbane-based artist at the forefront of conceptual art practice in Australia. He was born in Innisfail and is a descendant of the Kuku Yalanji, Yidinyji and Guugu Yimithirr people of north Queensland. He also has kinship connections to the Waanyi people of north-west Queensland. Ah Kee developed an interest in art when his family moved to Cairns during his high school years. He studied at the Cairns College of TAFE (now the Tropical North Queensland TAFE) before moving to Brisbane in 1990. He completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (with Honours) in 2000 and a Doctorate of Visual Arts in 2007 at Griffith University's Queensland College of Art. In 2009 he was selected to represent Australia and exhibited at the Venice Biennale. He currently lectures in contemporary Indigenous Australian art at Griffith University.

CONCEPTS

Like many contemporary Indigenous artists, Vernon Ah Kee is attuned to the politics of representation, and the social and economic implications of unequal cultural exchange in Australian society. Ah Kee often draws on ethnographic archives to challenge colonial legacies and to engage audiences with the strong and continuing presence of Indigenous Australians, their histories and their cultures.

PRIMARY

Question: *Annie Ah Sam* is a portrait of the artist's great-grandmother. What words would you use to describe her? Consider the finer details of the image — her facial expression and body language, for instance.



Activity: Create a self-portrait using a digital camera or phone. Construct your photograph as though you were sitting for a licence or passport photo. Using different filters on Instagram or Photoshop, change your portrait to influence the way you want people to view you.

SECONDARY

Question: Vernon Ah Kee is interested in the politics of representation. How does the original depiction of this Aboriginal woman as an anthropological or ethnographic study influence our interpretation of the work?

Activity: Discuss the concept of marginalisation. Identify a group in Australia that you feel is marginalised. Considers the impact of marginalisation on this group and choose a medium that you think best represents it.

GLOSSARY

Anthropologist: A scientist who studies the origin, behaviour, and physical, social and cultural development of humans.
'Dying race': An idea from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that indigenous peoples around the world were destined to die out, based on mistaken concepts derived from evolutionary theories.

Vernon Ah Kee / Kuku Yalanji/Waanyi/Yidinyji/Guugu Yimithirr people / *Annie Ah Sam* 2008 / Charcoal, crayon and synthetic polymer paint on canvas / The James C Sourris, AM, Collection. Gift of James C Sourris, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2012. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery