

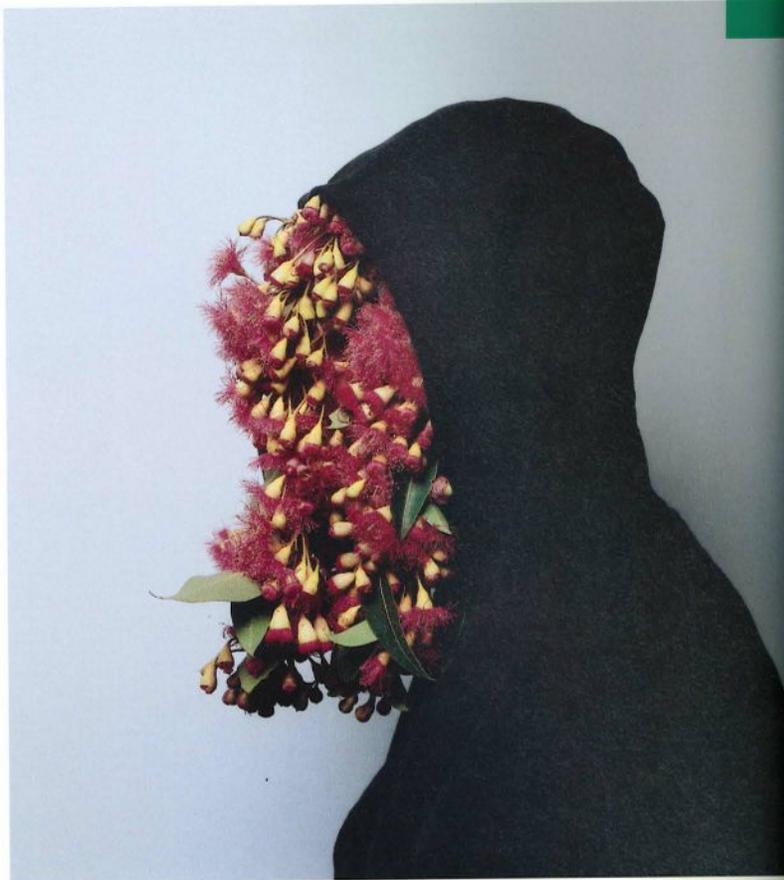
# AUSTRALIA



Rover Thomas (cats 29, 30) and Paddy Jaminji (cat.28) initiated a renewal of painting in the Eastern Kimberley by lifting the lid on the secret histories of Australia with paintings of country drenched with the blood of Aboriginal victims of massacres; in 1990, with Trevor Nickolls, Rover Thomas was the first Aboriginal artist to appear at the Venice Biennale. Djambawa Marawili (cat.8) and John Mawurndjul (cats 3, 6, 7), two of the most renowned contemporary Australian artists with a string of international contemporary art appearances to their names, have revolutionised bark painting to make us feel the hum of ancestral powers in the earth itself. And that is not even to mention Albert Namatjira, who beguiled a generation but whose life ended in tragedy.

The strong photographic and video component in the last part of the selection reflects the burgeoning of these media around the globe. Tracey Moffatt, one of the most internationally acclaimed contemporary Australian artists, came to prominence in the 1990s with her vibrant, quasi-narrative series of photographs (fig.7), and her film and video compilations looking at gender, popular culture, racial politics and stereotypes (cat.191). Simryn Gill, representing Australia at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, considers questions of place and history in her work (cat.188). The displacement of objects in her photographs echoes our modern-day journeys and migrations.

The Australian population, now 23 million, has more than quadrupled in size since 1918, much of that increase from immigration. Since 1945 more than 7 million people have settled in the country as new immigrants, including more than 800,000 refugees. Today one in two Australians were either born overseas, or have at least one parent born abroad. That diversity of origin, and thereby of influence, is reflected in the Australian artists working today (fig.8). Although their art may respond less to their sense of place, their visual representations of Australia continue to be informed – led even – by land and landscape.



**Fig. 8**  
CHRISTIAN THOMPSON, *Black Gum 1*, from the series *Australian Graffiti*, 2008. C-type colour photograph, 100 × 100 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 2009

**Fig. 7**  
TRACEY MOFFATT, *Selling Aluminium Siding 1978*, 2008. Digital colour photograph, 71 × 91.5 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Gift of Rupert and Annabel Myer, 2008

In 2013, in the present selection of works for the Royal Academy, half of those made during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II are by Aboriginal artists, and many settler and immigrant artists are influenced by Aboriginality. Already in 1954, during the first of Her Majesty's sixteen tours of Australia, she was asked to receive, in Canberra, the Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira. He was a celebrity in the popular media, but to art insiders Namatjira's watercolour views of his desert country in the remote Red Centre were 'tourist art', and imitative of more fluent pastorals by Hans Heysen. (For the Queen's subsequent visit to Australia, organisers arranged a presentation by Heysen of his own *White Gums, Summer Afternoon* of 1963 [Royal Collection].) Modernists preferred 'authentic' Aboriginal art, the creation myths and land-care stories from tropical coasts of the Northern Territory, painted on rough sheets of gum-tree bark. However, after Postmodernism taught us to accept hybridity and popularity, we reconsidered Namatjira's (and Heysen's) watercolours, and new Conceptualists honoured them by appropriation. Imants Tillers's *Untitled* (1978), comprising huge photographic blow-ups on canvas of a small Heysen gum-tree *Summer* (1909; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney), was on view when the Queen opened the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, in 1982.

The Elizabethan period began just after Australians had become, in 1949, Australian citizens as well as British subjects; during her tenth visit, in 1986, Queen Elizabeth proclaimed the Australia Act that formalised independence from the United Kingdom and confirmed direct access to the Crown. Though Australian artists in the first years of the young monarch's reign were less interested in nationalism than with catching up with post-war modernity, few abandoned landscape. Young painters in the 1950s, John Brack and Fred Williams among them, drew upon the classic Modernism of Seurat and Cézanne to express timeless aspects of Australian life and landscape. A somewhat later cohort, typified by John Olsen, took up the Abstract Expressionist style but seldom abandoned all reference to landscape. From the 1970s onwards, postmodern postcolonialist ideas encouraged widespread familiarity and engagement with Indigenous issues, and today Australian Aboriginal culture and Australian nature have equal weight as signifiers of Australianness in art.

#### ABORIGINALITY

Within the mainstream Euro-Australian art world, Sydney Long in around 1905 had painted Symbolist compositions in which Aboriginal figures were spirits

of the land. Margaret Preston in the 1920s had been a lone pioneer in appreciation of Aboriginal aesthetics and, later, one of several expressing social concern for Aboriginal people.

G. W. Bot in the 1980s decided 'to be an Aborigine'. The first description of a wombat in French scientific writing, 'le grand Wam Bot', led to her playful *nom de plume*, a way of adopting an Aboriginal-style totemic relationship with the marsupials that flourish in her Canberra suburb.

Contrariwise, some artists of Aboriginal descent decline to be categorised as makers of 'Aboriginal art'. Two in the present exhibition are Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett.

Moffatt insists she doesn't even make 'Australian art', just art about 'the human condition ... desperation and longing'.<sup>2</sup> She prefers ignorance of the wasteland location shoot for *Up in the Sky* (1997; cat.191), a narrative series of 25 photolithographs.<sup>3</sup> The retro technique, printed in monochrome blue, grey or sepia, recalls old film stills, once made to tempt customers into cinema screenings. Ambiguities are intended: white nuns who hold an unhappy black baby up to the sky could be at loving play, or else celebrating their well-intentioned theft of a neglected child. Says Moffatt, 'I'm not trying to be overtly political ... too boring to do and too boring to look at. I'm just trying to make images that "hold", using beauty and composition.'<sup>4</sup>

Bennett's *Possession Island* (1991; cat.176) appropriates an old schoolbook illustration – of Captain Cook taking possession of Australia's Pacific coast for the British Empire – veiled in Aboriginal dots and a whiplash of Abstract Expressionist drip painting. At the centre of the composition, with emphatic clarity, stands an inserted figure: a black Aboriginal servant dressed in red and yellow.

Black, red, yellow. Signifying Indigenous 'Blak' pride, red earth and sunlight, these are the colours of the Aboriginal flag, designed in 1971 by a Central Australian artist of Luritja/Wombia origin for Aboriginal land-rights activism and in 1995 recognised by Parliament as a statutory Flag of Australia. Bennett's *Possession Island* paints a story of subservience to and dispossession by land-takers (figs 37, 38).

Tim Johnson, visiting Papunya, asked the elders for permission to fill his own paintings with dots, and also invited Aboriginal artists to collaborate on his canvases. Permission was granted but, as they earlier told Hossein Valamanesh, 'as long as you paint your own story'.<sup>5</sup> Johnson saw a similarity between Aboriginal culture and Buddhism. So both in his *Dewachen* (1987; cat.177), named after the Tibetan 'Land of Bliss', and



as a trainee photographer at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, he was confronted with the powerful nature of the medium and how it can oppress the vulnerable. He determined that he would spend substantial time with his subjects so that the work became a collaboration between equal parties. In 1990 Maynard trained at the International Center of Photography, New York, and, on his return to Australia, produced a remarkable series of photographs of his culture, his people and his homeland. He has won many awards, including the Mother Jones International Fund for Documentary Photography Award, New York, in 1994, and the Australian Human Rights Commission Award for Photography in 1997.

#### CHARLES MEERE (1890–1961)

Born London, 6 December 1890; worked in Sydney, 1927–30; returned to Sydney, 1933; died Sydney, 17 October 1961

Charles Meere was one of a group of Sydney artists who depicted national life during the interwar period using a modernised, classical approach. Born in London of Irish parents, Meere studied Design and Mural Painting in London at the Royal College of Art from 1919 to 1922 and the Atelier Colarossi, Paris, from c. 1923 to 1927. He visited Australia in 1927 in search of employment as a commercial artist, and, following his return in 1933, he established a commercial art studio. He was an influential teacher at the East Sydney Technical College in the late 1930s. He is best known for his stylised Art Deco paintings of Australian life in the 1930s and 1940s, in particular *Australian Beach Pattern* (1940; cat. 139). He worked as an illustrator for the *Daily Telegraph* from 1942, and for the *Sydney Morning Herald* from 1945 to 1949.

#### DANIE MELLOR (b. 1971)

Mamu, Ngagen people. Born Mackay, North Queensland, 13 April 1971; lives in Bowral in the Southern Highlands, New South Wales

Danie Mellor's art investigates the history of the colonisation of Australia through reconstructed images from the Ages of Enlightenment and Exploration, and of the land of his Aboriginal ancestors, the rainforests of the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland. Mellor studied at North Adelaide and Canberra Schools of Art, completed a Master in Fine Art at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, and was awarded a Ph.D. from the Australian National University, Canberra, in 2004. He now teaches Art Theory at the Sydney College of the Arts. Mellor works mainly in drawing, printmaking and ceramics. In 2009 he won both the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award and the Shepparton Indigenous Ceramic Art Award. Mellor was selected for the first National Indigenous Art Triennial, 'Culture Warriors', at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, from 2007 to 2008.

#### MICKEY OF ULLADULLA (c. 1820–1891)

Yuin Dhurga people. Born on the south coast of New South Wales, c. 1820; lived in an Aboriginal reservation at Ulladulla, New South Wales, 1880s; died Ulladulla, 13 October 1891

We may never know the Aboriginal name of Mickey of Ulladulla (also known as Mickey the Cripple), who was named after the port of Ulladulla. The first known reference to him dates back to 1875 in an illustration 'Drawn by Mickie, An old crippled blackfellow of Nelligen [a nearby river port]' held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. His figurative drawings describe Aboriginal ceremonies, domestic activities such as fishing and hunting, and European endeavours in the region. Some of his most accomplished works depict sailing ships. Mickey was encouraged to draw by a non-Aboriginal woman who lived close to the reserve at Ulladulla. His rare historical drawings can be found in state and national libraries, museums and galleries around Australia.

#### TRACEY MOFFATT (b. 1960)

Born Brisbane, 12 November 1960; moved to Sydney, 1984; worked in New York, 1990–2010; lives in New York and Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Tracey Moffatt is one of the most internationally exhibited and acclaimed contemporary Australian artists. The daughter of an Indigenous mother, she was born in Brisbane and raised in foster care. She graduated from Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, in 1982. Moffatt moved to Sydney in 1984, where she initiated the first exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander photographers in 1986. She came to prominence in the 1990s with vibrant theatrical, quasi-narrative photo series, film and video compilation works addressing gender, popular culture, racial politics and stereotypes, ambition, childhood, sexual abuse and sadomasochism. Her later photo series became more enigmatic, heavily rendered with painterly texture and open to multiple readings. Recent works also address winning, losing, fame and celebrity. Her work is held by Tate, London, the Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Surveys were organised by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, from 2003 to 2004, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, in 2011 and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2012.

#### CALLUM MORTON (b. 1965)

Born Montreal, Canada, 1965; arrived Melbourne, 1967; lives in Melbourne

Callum Morton's art reveals a persistent interest in modernist architecture as an area for open-ended critical reflection. During the 1980s and 1990s in Melbourne, he studied Architecture and Fine Arts. In drawings, installations and digital prints of houses, cinema screens, monuments and vortexes, Morton combines pathos and deadpan humour. He often adds sound and film recordings, weaving disjointed stories in urban or suburban

theatres of mind. His work has been included in international exhibitions, such as 'Face Up: Contemporary Art from Australia' at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, from 2003 to 2004. For the Venice Biennale in 2007 he reconstructed a life-size version of his family home *Valhalla*, which was designed by his father and never finished, revealing his ongoing fascination with the built environment as a site of lost and found dreams. Morton has taught and exhibited nationally and internationally and in 2012 was appointed as Head of Fine Arts at Monash University, Melbourne. A survey of his work was held at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, in 2011.

#### BARDAYAL NADJAMERREK (c. 1926–2009)

Kuninjku people. Mok clan. Born Kukkurlumurl, Mann River region, Western Arnhem Land, c. 1926; died Kabulwarnamyo outstation, Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 16 October 2009

(Lofty) Bardayal Nadjamerrek was taught the art of rock painting by his father Yanjorkluk in the 1940s. As an adult he worked in the mining, pastoral and buffalo industries and also participated in the war effort. Nadjamerrek began to produce bark paintings at the end of the 1960s. In 1999 he won the Work on Paper Award at the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. He received the Order of Australia in 2004 in recognition of his contribution to Australian culture through his art and rock art research. Nadjamerrek was selected for the first Australian Indigenous Art Triennial, 'Culture Warriors', which opened at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, in 2007. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, mounted a retrospective exhibition of his work from 2010 to 2011.

#### DOREEN REID NAKAMARRA (c. 1955–2010)

Pintupi people. Born near Warburton, Western Australia, c. 1955; moved to Papunya, Northern Territory, early 1960s; moved to Kiwirrkura, Western Australia, c. 1990; died Kiwirrkura, 2010

Doreen Reid Nakamarra is renowned for paintings of her ancestral desert lands that dazzle the eye through the optical effects created by repeated sections of narrow, parallel undulating lines. The daughter of the painter Pirmangka Reid Napanangka (c. 1940–2001), Reid led a traditional semi-nomadic life with her extended family before settling first at Papunya, then at Kiwirrkura, where she commenced her artistic career. Reid's work was selected for the first National Indigenous Art Triennial, 'Culture Warriors', at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, from 2007 to 2008, the 3rd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2009 and 'DOCUMENTA (13)' in Kassel, Germany, in 2012.

#### MICK NAMARARI TJAPALTJARRI (c. 1926–1998)

Pintupi people. Born Marnpi, Northern Territory, c. 1926; moved to Papunya, Northern Territory, late 1960s; died Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 16 August 1998

Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri was most innovative and influential of the Western Desert movement encountered white people as a anthropologist Norman Tindale Namarari at Yamunturrngu (Mo in 1932. In about 1940 his family Hermannsburg, where he attended school. Namarari was a founder of the Papunya painting group in 1971. He was the first recipient of the National Gallery of Australia's prestigious F Award in 1994 for his contribution to culture at home and abroad. His work in several major exhibitions, including 'Aratjara: Art of the First Australian' at Hayward Gallery, London, in 1999 and the Biennale of Sydney in 2000.

#### ALBERT NAMATJIRA (1902–1959)

Western Arrarnta people. Born Hermannsburg, Northern Territory, 8 August 1902; died Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 8 August 1959

Albert (Elea) Namatjira is one of the best-known Aboriginal artists. He was taught to paint watercolour by the non-Aboriginal artist Rex (1893–1973), who guided his early years. Namatjira's outstanding ability to capture the natural features and light of the desert in paint. He had a solo exhibition at the Fine Arts Society, Melbourne, in 1938, followed by several sell-out exhibitions. The Art Gallery of Australia, Adelaide, was the first art museum to acquire the work of an Aboriginal artist when it bought *Illum-baura (Haasts Bluff)*, Central Australia, Adelaide, in 1939. He was presented to Her Majesty Elizabeth II in 1954. In 1957 he was an Aboriginal person to be granted full citizenship. A major touring exhibition was mounted by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, from 2002

#### DOROTHY NAPANGARDI (c. 1955–2013)

Warlpiri people. Born Mina Mina, Northern Territory, c. 1950; moved to Yuendumu, Northern Territory, c. 1957; moved to Springs, Northern Territory, by 1961; 1 June 2013

Dorothy Napangardi Robinson is known for her minimally painted black-and-white of her ancestral lands around the Mina Mina in the Tanami Desert. She led a traditional life and remembered white people for the first time when about seven years old. She began her career in Alice Springs in 1987 with coloured canvases of native food and her subject matter focused on the Women's Digging Stick Dreaming. Napangardi won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2007 and the Museum of Contemporary Art mounted a retrospective from 2002