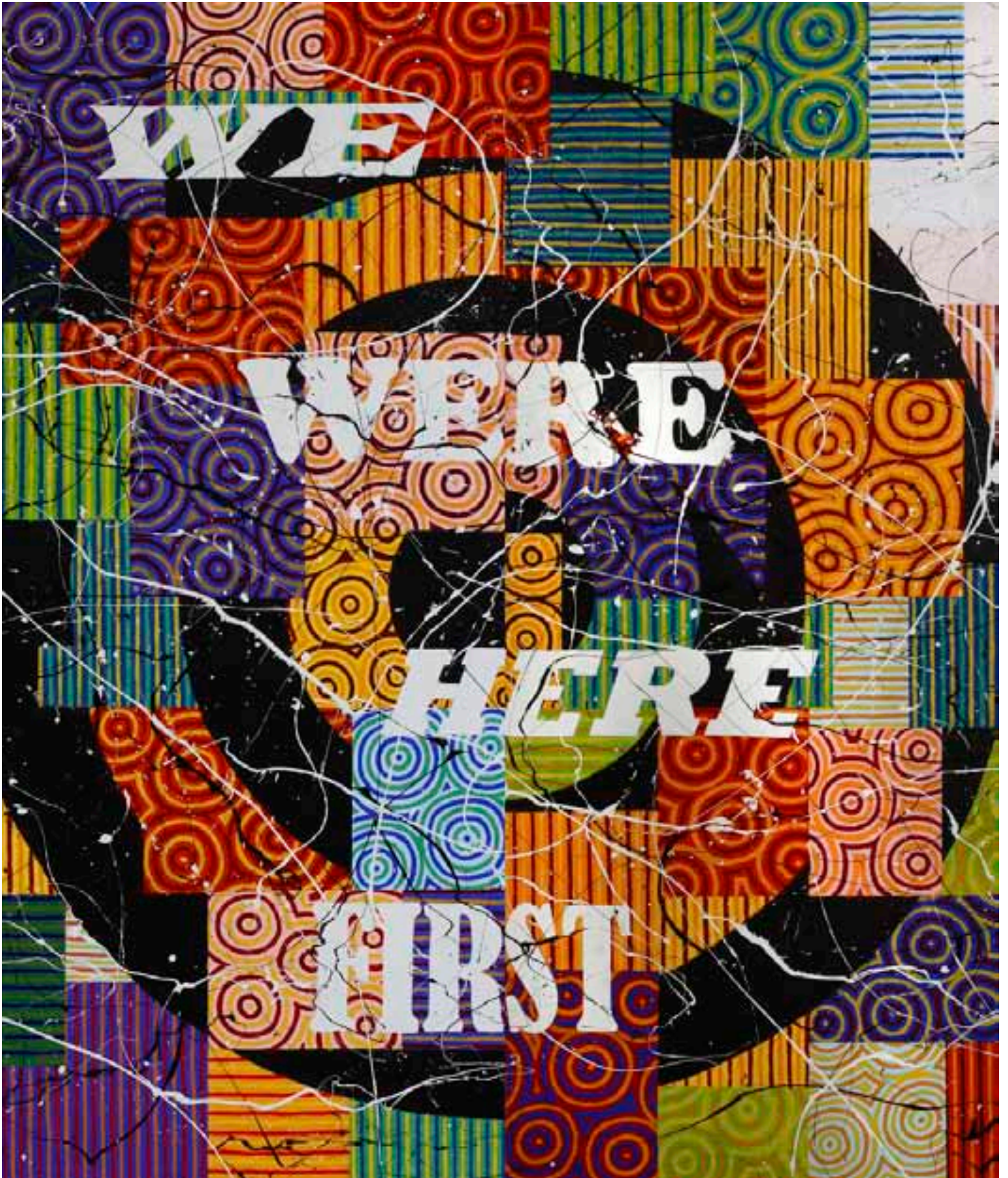


EXHIBITION PROPOSAL

Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them



Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them

Cover: *Wewereherefirst* (detail),
2007 (no. 18)

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and supported by generous funding from the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts and the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency (QIAMEA).

The curator is Maura Reilly.



American Federation of Arts
305 East 47th Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10017
212.988.7700
www.afaweb.org

EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them is the first traveling exhibition in the U.S. dedicated to the work of Aboriginal artist Richard Bell, one of Australia's best-known contemporary artists and a figure of increasing international stature. Mixing humor and political commentary, Bell's vivid and provocative paintings and videos signal an important and powerful voice in contemporary art.

Among Bell's American corollaries are Mark Bradford, Emory Douglas, James Luna, Daniel Martinez, Kara Walker, and Carrie Mae Weems, all of whom have taken "identity politics" as their subject, appropriating popular imagery against itself to subvert its often inherently derogatory message—be it slavery, the subjugation of indigenous Americans, and so forth. Bell invokes the formal aesthetics of Aboriginal desert painting (with their dot matrixes and expressionist drips) while usurping the mainstream Pop art styles à la Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein, all combined with pithy political statements that cry out for action against the racist Australian culture within which he finds himself.

Bell began his practice of Pop appropriation around 2001, as is most visible in his brightly colored Lichtenstein series, of which there are multiple examples in the exhibition, including a ben-day dot painting of the Sydney Opera House, as well as the *The Peckin' Order* (2007), a well-known work in which a young woman cries out, "Thank Christ I'm Not Aboriginal," reflecting the racist attitudes of the privileged. This important work also puts the viewer into a complicit position, asking oneself what word they might put in place of "Aboriginal" in that sentence. Like his American comrades, Bell's ideas about the subjugation of the underprivileged are universal.

Bell is probably best known for his "theorems," a series of paintings with declarative pro-Aboriginal statements. Among his most famous is *Aboriginal Art—it's a white thing* (2002), in which he accuses the contemporary art world of manipulating and exploiting indigenous art while he himself ironically utilizes in the work an earthy palette and brushstroke derived from traditional Aboriginal desert painting. Another in the exhibition, *Wewereherefirst* (2007), which features a multi-colored Jasper Johns target in the center, speaks to a universal indigenous voice in the struggle against the continued colonialist stronghold. In his most recent "theorem," *Pay the Rent* (2009), Bell demands back rent from the colonizers as restitution for what they owe to the colonized Aborigines since "the invasion" in 1788.

Likewise, in the provocative video *Scratch an Aussie* (2008), Bell overturns political and social norms by charading as a black Sigmund Freud who psychoanalyzes racist white Australians. The exhibition also debuts Bell's new video *Broken English* (2009), in which the artist plays chess with indigenous politics, asking white and black Australians why

Aborigines appear to lack a vision of their own future, often encountering strongly contradictory views.

In addition to recent work, this exhibition will also comprise critical works from the early 1990s, including a photographic series titled *Pigeon Holed* (1992), in which the artist represents himself in the stereotypical roles often imposed upon indigenous males (“drinker,” “failure,” trouble maker”) while in another early text piece, as spokesperson for all indigenous peoples from *The Lucky Country* (aka Australia), Bell seeks to initiate an “emigrant enhancement program” with countries like China, Iraq, South Africa, Taiwan, and so forth to implement treaties that would institute parliamentary representation and indigenous sovereignty of lands.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST



Richard Bell was born in 1953 in Charleville, Queensland, and is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. Bell has had a distinguished 20-year career. Based in Brisbane, he has held numerous solo exhibitions since 1990. He is represented in major collections in Australia and New Zealand and is internationally recognized through numerous exhibitions, including the significant European touring exhibition *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians* (1993); *Culture Warriors* (the National Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, 2007); the 9th and 16th Sydney Biennales (1992 and 2008); *Australian Perspectives 1993* (Art Gallery of New South Wales); the *Unfamiliar Territory* (Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, 1991); and *Half-Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (Art Gallery of New South Wales). His work was also the subject of the survey exhibition *Positivity*, presented by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, in 2006. Bell won the National Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2003. A previous member of the Campfire group, Bell is a founding member of proppaNOW, the Brisbane-based Aboriginal artists collective that also includes Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Kee and Gordon Hookey. Richard Bell is represented by the Milani Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by the curator that will place Bell’s work within the broader context of global indigenous politics and also investigate the formal qualities and art historical relevance of the artist’s conceptually complex work; and a reprint of a canonical essay by the artist titled “Bell’s Theorem: Aboriginal Art—It’s a White Thing” (2002). Also under consideration are scholarly essays by Greg Hill, Audain Curator of Indigenous Art, National Gallery of Canada; international critic and author Eleanor Heartney; and Jimmie Durham, a Wolf Clan Cherokee-born sculptor, essayist, and poet.

COLLATERAL MATERIALS

The AFA will provide didactic texts, including an introductory wall panel and a selection of extended object labels. The AFA may also produce a podcast of Richard Bell and Curator Maura Reilly discussing key works in the exhibition.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMMING

This exhibition provides many opportunities for dynamic and creative public programming including, for example, a film series about the plight of Aborigines in Australia, which could include the following: *Walkabout* (1971), *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), *Night Cries* (1989), *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), *Australia* (2008), *The First Australians* (2008), and *Samson & Delilah* (2009). The AFA would also recommend that each institution invite the artist to present a talk.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE CURATOR



Maura Reilly, AFA Senior Curator of Exhibitions, has had a long involvement with contemporary art and is recognized as a leading authority in the field. Prior to working at the AFA, she served as the founding curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, where she conceived and launched the first exhibition and public programming space in a U.S. museum devoted exclusively to feminist art. Ms. Reilly has curated dozens of exhibitions, most recently, the critically acclaimed *Global Feminisms* (co-curated with Linda Nochlin), *Ghada Amer: Love Has No End*, *La Mirada Iracunda (The Furious Gaze)*, and *Nayland Blake: Behavior*, and *Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What it Became*. Reilly is the author of numerous articles and books and has received various awards and accolades, including ArtTable's prestigious Future Women Leadership Award (2005) and the President's Award from the Women's Caucus for Art. Ms. Reilly received her M.A. and Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Number of Works	25
Space Required	2,000 to 4,000 square feet (depending on how the videos are installed)
Dates of Exhibition Tour	fall 2010–fall 2013
Venue Presentation Period	12 weeks
Audio/Visual Requirement	Each presenting institution will be responsible for sourcing the required audiovisual equipment at its own expense. The preliminary checklist currently includes 3 single-channel video works that require audiovisual equipment.
Contact	Maura Reilly, AFA Senior Curator, 212.988.7700 ext. 244 or mreilly@afaweb.org

PRELIMINARY CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

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1. *Wewereherefirst*, 2007
Acrylic on canvas, 2 parts
96 x 144 in.
Private collection, Brisbane



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2. *Scratch an Aussie #4*, 2008
Digital print on aluminum
38½ x 25½ in. (framed)
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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3. *Prospectus*, 1992/2009
Acrylic, digital photographs
and barbed wire on canvas
96 x 180 in.
The James C. Sourris
Collection, Brisbane



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4. *Pigeon Holed*, 1992
Series of six photos and one mirror mounted on aluminum
31 x 118 in. (overall; each photo and mirror 30 x 20 in.;
each text panel 8 x 12 in.)
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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5. *Bell's Theorem*, 2002
Acrylic on canvas boards
70 x 50 in. (overall)
Courtesy the artist



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6. *Untitled*, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
35 x 24 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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7. *Lations*, 1992/93
Acrylic on canvas in three parts
72 x 36 in. (overall)
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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8. *Meeting*, 1992/93
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 24 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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9. *No*, 1992/93
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 24 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



10. *Sword*, 1992/93

Acrylic on canvas
24 x 36 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



11. *Fuchen Messe*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas
36 x 24 in. (1 part)
Private collection, Brisbane



12. *Art Movements*, 1994

Acrylic on canvas
47 x 30 in. (overall)
Collection Annie Myer,
Brisbane



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13. *For the Gin Jockeys*, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
35 x 24 in.
Courtesy the artist



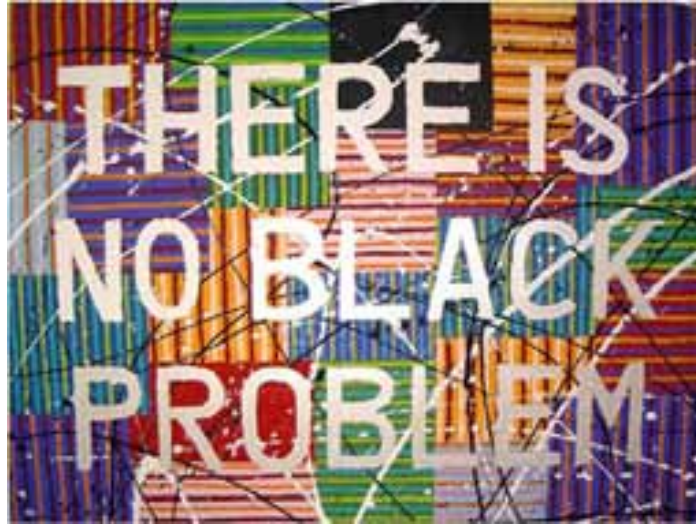
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14. *Pay the Rent*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 144 in.
Art Gallery of New South
Wales, Sydney



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15. *The Peckin' Order*, 2007
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in.
Private collection, Brisbane



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16. *Guilty*, 2003
Acrylic on canvas
35 x 47 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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17. *In This Land*, 2001
Acrylic and bitumen on canvas
54 x 36 in.
Collection Boe Lawyers,
Brisbane



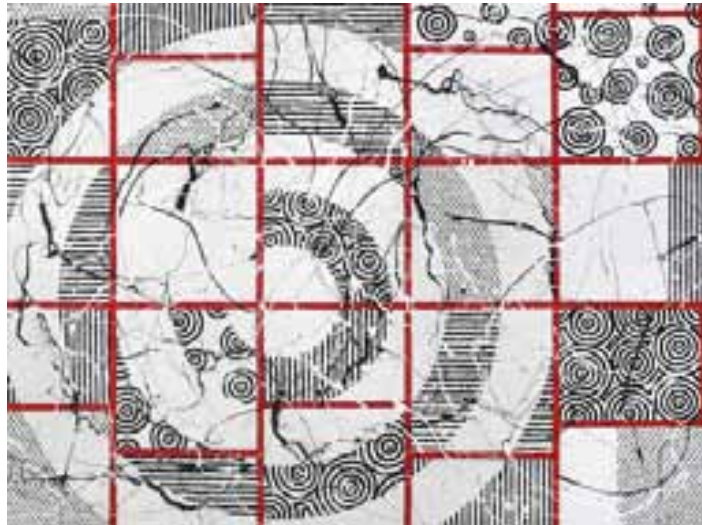
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18. *The Cleaner*, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 in.
Private collection, Brisbane



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19. *Psalm Singing Suite*,
2007/09
Installation of 30 paintings, all
acrylic on canvas
Dimensions vary
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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20. *Contra*, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
71 x 94 in.
Collection Tom Lowenstein,
Melbourne



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21. *I Am Not Sorry*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 47 in.
Kurilpa Collection, Brisbane



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22. *Scratch an Aussie*, 2008
DVD (10 minutes)
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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23. *Broken English*, 2009
DVD (10 minutes)
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane



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24. *GFC (Global Financial Crisis)*, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
96 x 144 in.
Courtesy Milani Gallery,
Brisbane
(not illustrated)

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25. *Uz vs. Them*, 2006
DVD (2 minutes 50 seconds)
Courtesy the artist

