

EXHIBITION PROPOSAL

Tony Albert: *Invisible is my favourite colour*

Guest Curator: Maura Reilly

Host: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art

Dates: March to June 2018

In the decade since his graduation from the Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, in 2004, indigenous Australian artist Tony Albert has achieved extraordinary visibility and much critical acclaim for his visual art practice that combines text, drawing, painting, photography, installation, and three-dimensional objects. In 2003, along with Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, Laurie Nilsen, Albert became a founding member of ProppaNOW, Queensland's leading Indigenous arts collective, which was established to give urban-based Aboriginal artists a voice. The collective is renowned for the presentation of a controversial perspective of indigenous Australia, which is sometimes confronting and always thought-provoking. While still an active member of the collective, since 2008 Albert's practice has moved in a new direction—toward one of optimism and hope—or, as he states so eloquently, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." Now in his thirties (born 1981, Townsville, Queensland), Albert is already recognised as one of the most exciting young artists to emerge from the Asia Pacific region. Following his recent acceptance of two major Australian art prizes, the Basil Sellers' Art Prize (2014) and the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (2014), as well as the honour of being chosen amongst many applicants to build a monument in Hyde Park dedicated to indigenous soldiers (to be unveiled in 2015), Albert has firmly established himself as one of the leading contemporary artists working in Australia today, and is most certainly poised for major international recognition.

The exhibition, *Tony Albert: Invisible is my favourite colour*, aims to assist in this endeavor. It will present a survey of the artist's work from 2002 to the present—from photographic series such as *50 Percent* (2006), *Optimism* (2006), *Brothers: Our Past, Present, Future* (2012), to several series of drawings—including, among others, *My Sister's Future*; a Captain Cook triptych; *Colour By Numbers*; *Another White Expert on Black Culture*; and *My Grandfather's Story*, a powerful series about his grandfather, Eddie Albert, a soldier in WWII who was captured as a prisoner of war, escaped, survived execution, and returned to Australia in 1945, only to learn that unlike his white comrades, he would not be granted a parcel of land for his service to the country. Watercolour series are also featured in the exhibition, including an important homage to Gordon Bennett, *Daddy's Little Girl (After Gordon Bennett)*, 2010, as well as series about police violence against Aborigines, titled *Blak-n-Blue*, 2009.

Also exhibited will be Albert's smaller multi-media wall installations, including *Hunter's Collection*, 2008, as well as his collaged and painted works featuring Aboriginal characters alongside those appropriated from Disney cartoons. Also installed will be Albert's now infamous *Pay Attention Mother Fuckers* (2009-2010), which is arguably the most important political artwork made in Australia since the 1988 Aboriginal Memorial of 200 hollow log coffins, which stands at the entrance to the National Gallery of Australia to commemorate all the Indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land. (Albert's *Pay Attention Mother Fuckers* has also been exhibited at the National Gallery of Australia as well as the City Gallery Wellington in New Zealand.) The large installation, which spells out the title statement in forward and mirror reverse, is a collaborative work that brought together 26 artists from across Australia, including major senior practitioners such as the great late Arthur Pambegan Jr., internationally acclaimed Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell, as well as a number of younger artists already receiving great recognition for their work, such as Daniel Boyd, who was the recipient of the 2014 Bvlgari Art Award. Albert has said of this piece, "I feel my work is successful when it is a mix of being contemplative, conceptual, challenging, and intellectual. I don't wish to tell the viewer exactly how to think; rather, I want to engage him or her in a conversation, or plant a seed for thought. Perhaps a fifty-meter-long wall emblazoned with the statement *Pay Attention Mother Fuckers* is a little less subtle than I would usually aim for, but some works demand this abrasiveness. And when you spend time looking at *Pay Attention* and the incredible contributions from the twenty-six artists who collaborated on it with me, you see that it is clearly intended to be a lot more than a gratuitous one-liner. We really want people to pay attention to our stories and see our work as relevant contributions to contemporary art and life."

Most importantly, perhaps, will be the installation of *The History Trilogy*, which has never been exhibited together in one place. Begun in the early 2000s, *The History Trilogy*, a series of three ambitious wall installations, are now his most widely exhibited and recognisable works. The series—which includes *A Collected History* (2002-2010), *Rearranging Our History* (2002-2011) and *Projecting Our Future* (2002-2013)—have previously been exhibited at several international venues, including the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Singapore Art Museum, National Art Museum of China in Beijing, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, and College of Fine Arts, Sydney. Each of the installations is comprised of over a thousand objects of reworked "Aboriginalia," a term Albert coined to describe objects that depict naïve images of Australia's Aboriginal people and their culture. Collectively, the trilogy challenges the legacy of racial stereotyping as well as the cultural misrepresentation of Australia's Indigenous people. As Kelly Gellatly, Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art in Melbourne, recently explained, "Albert's work tackles such a difficult and emotive issue in Australian culture without being didactic or heavy-handed. The work is neither a lesson nor a sermon, and provides no answers, but instead creates a contemplative space that encourages the audience to think about these issues in a way that engenders a sense of hope and of the possibility of change."

Albert's most recent installation, *108* (2013-14), presented this year at the Art Gallery of South Australia, will also be a featured component of the exhibition, as well as interactive projects, like *Be Deadly* (2011-13) and *Alien Nation Embassy* (2008-11). Forthcoming, in March of 2015 Albert will unveil a major new monument in Sydney's Hyde Park dedicated to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military service men and women who were not officially recognized as citizens until 1967, despite having participated in every international conflict with which Australia has been involved, beginning with the Boer War in the late 19th century. Albert's memorial is entitled *Yininmadyemi - Thou didst let fall*. The monument will dramatically alter the landscape of one of Sydney's oldest parks with a group of seven-meter tall bullets sculpted from corten steel. The exhibition *Tony Albert: Invisible is my favourite colour* will feature the many renderings, sketches, and installation photographs associated with this historic project.

In addition to works produced in the lead-up to the exhibition (including two new installations and a series of paintings to be presented at Albert's next gallery exhibition at Sullivan + Strumpf in April 2015), other forthcoming projects would include *Moving Targets*, a newly commissioned work to be presented as part of the exhibition, "24 Frames Per Seconds," at Carriageworks in 2015. Taking as its

departure point the police shooting of two Aboriginal teenagers in King's Cross in April 2012, *Moving Targets* is a collaboration between Albert and internationally acclaimed choreographer Stephen Page. This multimedia installation involves the projection of Page and Albert's movement piece onto the bonnet of a beaten-up car, and pays homage to the vulnerability and strength of young men in the wake of this tragic event, which resonated globally.

Finally, for the exhibition *Tony Albert: Invisible is my favourite colour* institutions will have the opportunity to commission Albert for a site-specific installation, which will involve a museological intervention in the lineage of Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox* (1969) and Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992). For this very special component of the exhibition, Albert will mine local archives, museum storerooms, and libraries, in search of 'Aboriginalia', to develop a complex, site-specific, room-size installation. As such, each venue will have a unique artistic component. In the case of GoMA, Albert could cull objects from QAG's collection, as well as ones from the State Library.

For additional images of Albert's work, please visit: <http://sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/albert-tony/>

CATALOGUE

Tony Albert: Invisible is my favourite colour would be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, including a Preface by Hetti Perkins (Independent curator, Resident Curator at Bangarra Dance Theatre, and Creative Director for Corroboree Sydney), a substantive interview with the artist, as well as two scholarly essays by both the exhibition's curator and QAG/GoMA curator Bruce McLean, which will place Albert'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.

COLLATERAL MATERIALS

The curator would provide didactic texts, including an introductory wall panel and a selection of extended object labels. The exhibition could also be accompanied by a podcast featuring the artist and curator, who could discuss key works in the exhibition.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMMING

Educational

The educational component of the exhibition is crucial to both Albert and the curator and, as such, Albert has proposed a collaborative project with the West End Primary in Brisbane and the Alexandria State School in Redfern, where he will hold a residency for one year in 2016. During that residency he will produce a new site-specific work for the exhibition based on that collaboration.

Public

This exhibition provides many opportunities for dynamic and creative public programming including, for example, an artist talk, a panel with ProppaNOW, as well as an international symposium on urban indigenous art. Likewise, since Albert is currently hosting of Season 2 of the SBS series "Colour Theory," those 12 episodes would be available for screening, along with those from Season 1, hosted by Richard Bell.

PARTNERS

GoMA/QAG is the ideal first venue for this exhibition (and is the artist's preferred), especially given the artist's long history with Brisbane—as a student at QCA, an employee at GoMA/QAG, and as a local resident for many years. The museum has confirmed the March-June 2018 slot for this exhibition.

The aim is for the exhibition to travel to three venues in Australia. There will also be attempts to secure one international venue.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

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| <u>Number of Works</u> | 100 (Approximate) |
| <u>Location of Works</u> | See attached checklist |
| <u>Space Required</u> | 1,000 square meters (Approximate) |

BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST

Tony Albert's artworks are complex interrogations into the human condition. Mining imagery and source material from across the globe, and drawing upon personal and collective histories, Albert questions how we understand and imagine difference. Weaving together text appropriated from popular music, film, fiction, and art history, along with clichéd images of extra-terrestrials, photographs of his family in *Lucha Libre* wrestling masks, and an immense collection of "Aboriginalia" (a term Albert coined to describe objects that feature naive portrayals of Australian Aboriginal people and their culture, such as ash trays, drink coasters, velvet paintings, tea-towels and playing cards), Albert engages in sophisticated negotiations with his viewers, coupling his often confrontational and unapologetic stance with punching humour, and a glimpse of hope. Albert has exhibited at many national and international venues, including recent solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney (2013), Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney (2012 and 2013); Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Cairns (2011); and the City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (2010). Recent group exhibitions include *Dark Heart: 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Adelaide (2014); *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary art from Black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery/GOMA, Brisbane (2013); *string theory: focus on contemporary Australian art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2013); *The Weight of History*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2013); *unDisclosed*, 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial, NGA, Canberra; *Making Change*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2012); and *Roundabout*, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Israel, and City Gallery, Wellington (2011). Albert's works are held in numerous private collections, nationally and internationally, as well as major museum collections throughout Australia, including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Museum of Australia, Canberra Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Art Gallery

of New South Wales, Sydney; Queensland Art Gallery–Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria; Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne; University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth. This year Albert was awarded the prestigious Basil Sellers Art Prize, as well as the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. In 2015, he will unveil a major new monument in Sydney's Hyde Park dedicated to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military service men and women. Following the opening of the Hyde Park memorial in 2015, Albert will spend six months in New York City at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP), courtesy of the highly competitive Australia Council for the Arts residency. Albert received his BFA from Queensland College of the Arts, Griffith University, in 2004.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE CURATOR

Maura Reilly is a New York and Sydney-based curator, arts writer, and educator who has dedicated her career exclusively to contemporary visual culture in/of/from the margins. Currently an Adjunct Professor at Sydney College of the Arts at the University of Sydney, from 2010 to 2013 she served as Chair and Professor of Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Prior to that Reilly held Senior Curator positions at the American Federation of Arts and Location One, both in New York City. From 2003 to 2009, as Founding Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, she conceived and launched the very first exhibition and public programming space in a U.S. museum devoted exclusively to feminist art, where she organized several exhibitions, including the critically acclaimed *Global Feminisms*, co-curated with Linda Nochlin, the permanent reinstallation of *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, *Ghada Amer: Love Has No End*, and *Burning Down the House*, among others. Some of Reilly's recent curatorial projects include *Pace Gems: Selections from the Linda Pace Collection* (2014), *An Architect's Eye* (2012), *Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them* (2010–13), *Nayland Blake: Behavior* (2010), and *Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What It Became* (2009). She has authored numerous books and articles, including, most recently, on Tibetan artist Gonkar Gyatso, Thai artist Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook, Egyptian artist Ghada Amer, and indigenous Australian artist Richard Bell. Forthcoming publications include *Curatorial Activism: Toward an Ethics of Curating* (2015), *Paris-Lesbos* (2016), and an edited volume, *Women's Work: A Linda Nochlin Reader* (2015). Reilly is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including ArtTable's Future Women Leadership Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art. Dr. Reilly received her M. A. and Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. For additional information about the curator, please visit: <http://www.maurareilly.com>