

# LEARNING RESOURCE

## How to use this resource

# BLACK WHITE & RESTIVE

CROSS-CULTURAL INITIATIVES IN AUSTRALIAN  
CONTEMPORARY ART

### ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In 21st century Australia 'black' and 'white' artists are sometimes exhibited together, however there is still a restiveness – an uneasy tension – when artists blur the boundaries of cultural identity. This happens most commonly when artists work collaboratively, or when non-Indigenous artists 'borrow', 'appropriate' or 'reference' Aboriginal art styles or imagery.

Eighty years ago when Albert Namatjira (1902-1959) began depicting his Western Arrernte homelands in watercolour with his painting ally Rex Battarbee (1893-1973), the Australian art world was similarly restive – and often downright hostile. Though much-loved by the public, the innovative landscapes were originally treated with suspicion, dismissed as 'inauthentic' by white art critics and anthropologists.

In 2016 these same Hermannsburg watercolours, a number of which are held in Newcastle Art Gallery's collection, are recognised as unique examples of Indigenous modernism. They are celebrated as foundational to the revolutionary Aboriginal 'dot' painting movement that emerged from Papunya in the Western Desert in 1971.

A single exhibition can only scratch the surface of engagements between Western and Indigenous traditions. In curatorial terms *Black White & Restive* continues a conversation initiated in *Balance 1990: Views, Visions, Influences* at Queensland Art Gallery, albeit in its own way: twenty-six years on there are new challenges and local particulars, but these art-driven conversations remain critical to our time.

Works of art presented on the Gallery's ground floor pay tribute to the powerful symbolism of Namatjira and Battarbee's long-term creative friendship, a rapport that finds parallels in many contemporary cross-cultural relationships. Through large-scale collaborations, homages, narrative and landscape paintings, *Black White & Restive* is founded on shared, if still politically unsettled, country.

On the Gallery's upper level the exhibition continues in two distinct parts: *Two Laws: One Big Spirit* by Rusty Peters and Peter Adsett, and conceptually driven works of art that challenge ways of thinking about cultural and political identities. Margaret Preston, Imants Tillers, Michael Nelson Jagamara, Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffatt and other artists test the risks of appropriation and the long shadow of Primitivism: Western art's historical fascination with other cultures.

A total of thirty four works of art in *Black White & Restive* are drawn from the Newcastle Art Gallery's collection, with sixty-seven artists from every state and territory of Australia represented. There is no single unified position here: artists, and audiences, are sharply divided on how to approach cross-cultural initiatives. Bringing these differences together is only a starting point if we are to share any ambitions for greater mutual respect and understanding.

Una Rey, curator of *Black White & Restive* exhibition

### ABOUT THIS LEARNING RESOURCE

This learning resource is intended for use in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition *Black White & Restive* and may be used prior to and/or following a visit. It may also be used independently as a resource for primary and secondary visual arts classroom activities.

- The artists featured in this resource are Gordon Bennett, Tim Johnson, Ildiko Kovacs, Martumili artists, Danie Mellor, Albert Namatjira, Margaret Preston and Imants Tillers. The information and activities in this learning resource focus on these eight artists and will help you to understand the work of other artists in *Black White & Restive*.
- Each artist page provides key information relating to the artist, their practice and at least one of their works of art selected for *Black White & Restive*.
- Included in this learning resource are discussion points and art-making activities (*making and responding*) in line with the Australian Curriculum Learning Areas, with particular focus on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples's histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. Underlying elements of *Identity and Living Communities* and the key concepts of *Country/Place, Culture and People*.
- The learning resource is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Students are encouraged to understand that identities and cultures have been and are a source of strength and resilience for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples against the historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.
- Generally, one key concept from the exhibition is explored in the discussion of each artist. Key concepts and terminology introduced in this learning resource include ie. **anthropologist, appropriation, collaboration, colonialism, contemporary, Country, design elements, Dreaming, homage, identity, medium, Modernism, narrative, painting, Primitivist, recontextualisation, restive, tribute.**

An illustrated exhibition catalogue entitled *Black White & Restive*, with essays by Una Rey, Margo Neale and Ian McLean, is available should further research be required.

Nicole Chaffey, writer *Black White & Restive*  
Nicole Goodlad, Audience Programs Officer

The discussion points in this section are designed for secondary school students and tertiary, and offer additional and deep involvement with the *Black White & Restive* exhibition through writing and discussion.

## ACTIVITIES

Discuss a work of art or an artist in the exhibition which you connect with. Is this connection to a place in Australia? To a **collaborative** experience? To a feeling or emotion that is restive? To a cross-cultural issue?

Write a review of the *Black White & Restive* exhibition. Read the exhibition information on the previous page by curator Una Rey or essays in the **exhibition catalogue** to get you started. Select one of the three options below to frame your review.

Select one of the following:

- A. Select the work of one artist in the exhibition. Research the artist's other work and write a review of their work in this exhibition. How is this work the same or different to the artist's other work in ideas, **medium** or **scale**? How do you think this work relates to the *Black White & Restive* theme?
- B. Write a review of the exhibition. Focus your review on your overall impressions. Identify some of the key ideas of the exhibition. Why do you think the exhibition is named *Black White & Restive*? If you were in charge of curating the exhibition, what would you do differently? What is your overall conclusion about the exhibition - did you like it or dislike it?
- C. Select 2-4 artists in the exhibition who express a similar idea and/or work in a similar medium. Write a review of the exhibition focusing on the work of this group of artists. How does each artist's work differ from others in the group? How are they the same? Whose did you like the most, and why?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**anthropologist:** is someone that studies human culture, society, and difference. The discipline emerged in the twentieth century as a critical response to explanations of human difference in terms of 'race'.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and to place it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**collaboration:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**colonialism:** refers to the period of time and government after the British invasion of Australia.

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**Dreaming:** the term that encompasses the eternal nature of Aboriginal cosmology and belief systems. It incorporates the ancestral beings, the creation of the universe and the laws of social and religious behaviour. The Dreaming is known by various local terms such as Tjukurrpa or Jukurrpa in the desert and Ngarrangkarni in the Kimberley.

**exhibition catalogue:** a document or record of the contents of an exhibition, including technical information about each item. Often accompanied by images of the works and essay(s) or introduction by the curator and/or specialists in the field.

**homage:** to pay tribute to.

**identity:** all of the things by which a person or thing is known or is considered as being.

**medium:** can refer to both the type of art (e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking), as well as the materials an artwork is made from.

**Modernism:** a style or movement in the arts that aims to depart from classical and traditional forms.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected

events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**Primitivism:** refers to the fascination of early modern European artists with what was then called primitive art – including tribal art from Africa, the South Pacific and Indonesia, as well as prehistoric and very early European art, and European folk art.

**recontextualisation:** is a process that removes text, signs or meaning from its original context (decontextualisation) in order to introduce it into another context. Since the meaning of texts and signs depend on their context, recontextualisation implies a change of meaning.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**tribute:** something given, done, or said to express respect or thanks.

**Museums  
& Galleries  
of NSW**



This project is supported by Arts NSW's Curatorial Support Initiative grant, a devolved funding program administered by Museums & Galleries of NSW on behalf of the NSW Government. This project is supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.



**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**



1 LAMAN STREET NEWCASTLE 2300 | NAG.ORG.AU |  
OPEN TUESDAY TO SUNDAY | 10AM-5PM | FREE ENTRY

**BLACK  
WHITE  
& RESTIVE**

**GORDON BENNETT**

*Number five 2003*

Learning resource



**Gordon BENNETT**

born 1955 Monto QLD

*Number five 2003*

acrylic on linen

167.0 x 152.0cm

Gift of Terrey P Arcus through the Australian

Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2012

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Copyright The Estate of Gordon Bennett

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## GORDON BENNETT

Gordon Bennett was born in Monto, Queensland in 1955 and after pursuing careers in fitting and turning and telecommunications, he entered art school at the age of 30 to study fine art at Queensland College of Art. He continued to live and work in Brisbane developing his **practice** and over time gained an international reputation as one of Australia's most significant **contemporary** artists. Bennett drew on his Indigenous Australian and **Anglo-Celtic** heritage to examine a broad range of questions related to social, cultural and political **identity** and Indigenous and Western art history in his works of art.

Much of Bennett's work has been concerned with Australia's colonial past and the ramifications of a **postcolonial** present, in particular focusing on Indigenous Australian culture, and the dominant role that white, Western culture has played in constructing the social and cultural landscape of Australia.

He says, "I didn't go to art college to graduate as an 'Aboriginal Artist'. I did want to explore 'Aboriginality', however, and it is a subject of my work as much as **colonialism** and the **narratives** and language that frame it, and the language that has consistently framed me."<sup>1</sup>

Working within a practice which included painting, photography, text, print-making, installation and performance, Bennett's work

is layered and complex often referencing sources drawn from social history, Indigenous and Western art history and his artist contemporaries. Appropriation and **recontextualisation** of familiar imagery challenges the way these images are perceived and interpreted. Much of his work maps alternative histories and questions racial categories and stereotypes.

In 1990, Bennett made a strong stand against Imants Tillers for his 1985 painting *The Nine Shots*, which appropriated Warlpiri artist Michael Nelson Jagamara's painting, *Five Stories* 1984. Bennett's, *The Nine Ricochets (fall down black fella jump up white fella)* 1990 "was a way of taking back what belonged to [Jagamara] while questioning the colonisers" (in this case, symbolised by Tillers) ... "actions. "*The Nine Ricochets*" is an unapologetic investigation of the multiple voices that simultaneously deny and create identity, and the moral and ethical dimensions behind how individuals wish to be represented."<sup>2</sup>

Bennett's critique made art history. Over a decade later in 2001, Jagamara and Tillers began a series of **collaborations** as a way of reconciling some of the damage. The paintings were exhibited in *The Loaded Ground: Michael Nelson Jagamara and Imants Tillers* at Canberra's Drill Hall Gallery in 2012.

Since 1997, Bennett has addressed the **appropriation** of Aboriginal art by modernist artist Margaret Preston in his *Home Décor (After M Preston)* series. Preston was one of the first Anglo-Australian artists to recognise the significance of Aboriginal art and by incorporating Aboriginal **motif** in her work she attempted to create a national identity. However, her appropriations also trivialised the way Aboriginal people were depicted. Most troubling was the way she ignored the cultural and ritual context of Aboriginal art. As such, Bennett responds to her work as a form of visual colonisation and misrepresentation of Aboriginal culture within Australian art history.

In 1995 Bennett created his alter-ego John Citizen. This character came into existence in an attempt to question the construct of identity. It was representative of the "everyday Australian", a preoccupation within the Australian nation. Bennett adopted this persona to liberate himself from the preconceptions that were often associated with his Indigenous Australian heritage and his identity and reputation as Gordon Bennett.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gordon Bennett, 'The manifest toe', Ian McLean & Gordon Bennett, *The Art of Gordon Bennett* Craftsman House, 1996, p. 58

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Bennett, <http://www.collectiveidentities.com.au/gordonbennett.html>, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

<sup>3</sup>Bill Wright's interview with Gordon Bennett in Gellatly K with contributions by Clemens, Justin; Devery, Jane; and Wright, Bill

### FURTHER READING

Ian McLean, 'Who is John Citizen?', 2006 Greenaway Gallery Adelaide John Citizen: Interiors and Coloured People at

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1490&context=creartspapers>

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/gordonbennett/education/intro.html>

<http://www.suttongallery.com.au/artists/artistprofile.php?id=14>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/visual-arts/the-ethics-of-cultural-borrowing/story-fn9d3avm-1226538593187>

## ACTIVITIES

1. What makes you who you are? Write down three things that interest you, or that you can remember or imagine. Make an artwork where you combine these three very different things into one image or object.
2. Create a survey to establish the different places where students in your class have visited in Australia. What symbols and colours would you use to represent these locations as one collaborative piece?
3. Look closely at the colours you can see in Bennett's painting *Number five* 2003. What style of painting is this? What types of shape and line does Bennett favour?
4. Compare and contrast the five paintings in *Black White & Restive* exhibition by Bennett, paying attention to line, shape and colour definition and texture. Can you see similar ideas being explored across his body of work? Discuss. How do they differ in style and technique?
5. Compare Bennett's style with that of American **Abstractionist** artist Frank Stella, along with Robert McPherson, Ralph Balson, Richard Dunn, John Firth-Smith, Ildiko Kovacs, Rosella Namok, and Robert Owen. Does the audience respond differently to these works of art, why?
6. Research other artists who explore the issue of **identity** in their artwork using iconographic and symbolic forms. Compare and contrast the contemporary representations by artists such as Mariko Mori, Chris Ofili, Judy Watson and Hossein Valamanesh with the more traditional depictions by artists such as the Papunya Tula painters. Discuss the differences and similarities in approach.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**abstraction:** not representing a pictorial subject such as a tree; using colour, form, composition, texture as the focus point.

**Anglo-Celtic:** a person of European ancestry.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**collaboration:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**colonialism:** refers to the period of time and government after the British invasion of Australia.

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**identity:** a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).

**motif:** ornament, distinctive feature.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**postcolonial:** refers to the need for groups which have been victims of colonisation to achieve an identity empowered and autonomous; a critique of colonial ideas and power structures by Eurocentric concepts or images.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**recontextualisation:** is a process that removes text, signs or meaning from its original context (decontextualisation) in order to introduce it into another context. Since the meaning of texts and signs depend on their context, recontextualisation implies a change of meaning.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**symbolism:** the use of symbols to represent ideas.

**BLACK  
WHITE  
& RESTIVE**

**TIM JOHNSON**

*Sandy desert 1987*

Learning resource



**Tim JOHNSON**

born 1947 Sydney NSW

*Sandy desert 1987*

acrylic on linen

121.0 x 152.0cm

Purchased 1993

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Courtesy the artist

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## TIM JOHNSON

Tim Johnson was born in 1947 Sydney and continues to live and work in Sydney. He studied at the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney. Now known for his paintings, Johnson began his exhibiting career as a maker of kinetic sculptures and conceptual art installations.

In 1980, Johnson became intrigued by the Aboriginal paintings that had begun appearing in Sydney. He and his wife Vivien visited Papunya, a settlement 240 km north west of Alice Springs famous as the site of the 'dot painting' or 'Western Desert painting movement' which emerged in 1971. The company Papunya Tula was formed by the artists to market and sell their work, with initial support from school teacher Geoffrey Bardon. Papunya was home to some of Australia's most significant desert painters including Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Michael Nelson Jagamara. Tim Leura and Clifford Possum gave Johnson the skin name 'Tjapaltjarri', making him their 'kinship' brother.

Johnson made repeated visits to Papunya during the following decade, collecting art and building a relationship with the community. He and Vivien also arranged exhibitions of Papunya Tula artist's work in Sydney and promoted the paintings in their circle of artworld influence.

Taking advantage of his close relationship with the Papunya Tula painters, Johnson collaborated on works with Turkey Tolson, Clifford Possum and Michael Nelson Jagamara. During these **collaborations** the artists and other senior figures allowed Johnson to borrow their designs and techniques, which eventually led to Johnson's use of dotting in his solo practice. Questions were raised as to whether his '**appropriation**' of the dotting technique was a form of exploitation, however Johnson argued that his collaborations were attempts at cross-cultural dialogue. He ensured that his collaborators shared in the profits when paintings were sold, and always asked permission before using any Aboriginal **motifs**.

Johnson saw the artists as 'Masters' of which he was the student, and through long interactions with the Papunya community he began to grasp the deep significance of **Country** and the custodianship of sacred places.

The dots that appeared in Johnson's painting at that time are now a permanent pictorial tool in his work and his most recent paintings draw not only on Aboriginal art, but Buddhist **iconography**, American Indian **motifs**, Christian **symbolism** and Japanese anime. Collaboration remains a major element in his art practice and he works with artists from a range of cultural backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup> <http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2009/tim-johnson/>

### FURTHER READING

<http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2009/tim-johnson/>  
<http://tolarnogalleries.com/artists/tim-johnson/>  
<http://papunyatula.com.au/history/>

## ACTIVITIES

1. Look carefully at Johnson's *Sandy desert* 1987 displayed in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition and list all the things you can see. Using this word list create your own poem inspired by your emotive response to the **motifs** and **iconography** in Johnson's work of art.
2. Research the geography and desert landscape of Papunya. Make a visual diagram or create a work of art to demonstrate your understanding.
3. Construct an image map of the world. Find visual art images that could represent particular regions, countries or people. Think about how this kind of map represents place and different cultural backgrounds.
4. Give Tim Johnson's *Sandy desert* 1987 a new title, one that succinctly describes your reaction to the work. You might like to be inspired by the Australian desert landscape.
5. What is the Western Desert art movement? Investigate the cultural traditions, designs and regions that define this painting movement. Research Papunya Tula artists, subjects and techniques. Present your research to the class and compare your findings.
6. What other art movements are known for their use of dotting techniques? Research the dotting technique of European Post-Impressionism and pointillism in the works of art by artists such as Seurat and Monet. Compare the style and subject matter with Johnson's work *Sandy desert* 1987.
7. Visit Johnson's *Sandy desert* 1987. Compare and contrast his work with the dotting techniques in works of art by other artists in *Black White & Restive*. You might like to start by looking at the work of Jagamara, Veronica Lulu, Rod Moss, Kim Mahood, Napaltjarri and Nakamarra, Trevor Nickolls, Margaret Preston and Rusty Peters. Have a discussion where you look at several examples of their work in detail. Discuss the difference or similarity in size, regularity, colour and form.

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**aerial view:** looking down from above either from a high geographic point, building or airplane.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**collaboration:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**Dreaming:** the term that encompasses the eternal nature of Aboriginal cosmology and belief systems. It incorporates the ancestral beings, the creation of the universe and the laws of social and religious behaviour. The Dreaming is known by various local terms such as Tjukurrpa or Jukurrpa in the desert and Ngarrangkarni in the Kimberley.

**iconography:** the use and interpretation of images, signs and symbols to convey meaning.

**identity:** a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).

**medium:** can refer to both the type of art (e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking), as well as the materials an artwork is made from.

**motif:** ornament, distinctive feature.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**ochres:** natural earth pigments, often reds and yellow, but also white used to make paint.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**postcolonial:** refers to the need for groups which have experienced colonisation to achieve an identity empowered and autonomous; a critique of colonial ideas and power structures by Eurocentric concepts or images.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**symbolism:** the use of symbols to represent ideas.



**BLACK  
WHITE  
& RESTIVE**

**ILDIKO KOVACS**

*Roadworks #2 2005*

Learning resource



**Ildiko KOVACS**

born 1962 Sydney NSW

*Roadworks #2 2005*

oil on board

76.3 x 99.2cm

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2011

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Courtesy the artist and Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## ILDIKO KOVACS

In 1980, Ildiko Kovacs travelled across Europe, absorbing the artistic culture of museums and art galleries before returning to Australia to begin her painting career, and the Sydney born painter has been working and exhibiting since. Like many other Australian artists, such as Tony Tuckson who has also influenced her, Kovacs was once primarily influenced by European and American art. She spent ten months in Broome in 1996 working directly with community art centres and this trip shifted her concentration towards the Australian landscape and Aboriginal artists such as Emily Kngwarreye, Rover Thomas, as well as Papunya Tula artists, whom made an impact. It also brought about a new found clarity in her **painting**.

More recently she began experimenting with paint-rollers, opening up a new process of mark making. Over the last decade the impact of Aboriginal art has been observable in her work. Kovacs paintings initiate a dialogue between Western **abstraction** art and those of Aboriginal art. Kovacs has made trips to communities surrounding Broome since, deepening the engagement between her **practice** and the Aboriginal artists and their work.

Kovacs has said she throws herself into each painting. "I am very physical. I work large, I work on a human **scale**, I throw myself into

it, work with large gestures, and work with the rhythm of the body. And I work with rollers, not brushes."<sup>1</sup> This allows her to respond to "internal rhythms and emotions" and work spontaneously.

Core aspects of the artist's art practice are her processes of layering, building and removing paint over time. Kovacs applies paint to plywood boards using paint rollers, which she says allows her to "get across the board in one gesture and work quite fast".<sup>2</sup> She works quickly, often using her hands to apply paint to the roller, creating works that speak of spontaneity, movement and energetic expression. Her work is unmediated, like Aboriginal artists working directly from ancestral templates, memories or a deep knowledge of **Country**. Kovacs works directly onto the canvas without pre-drawing or planning. However, she is responding to the traditions of Western Abstraction and Expressionism.

Kovacs maps the movement of the landscape, responding intuitively to land and canvas, evoking the sensation of journey into painted form. Painter Roy Jackson wrote of her work "As people move from place to place across the landscape, paths become lines traced on the land".<sup>3</sup> That path follows the uniform width

of her roller, creating a mark which is more like a highway than a bush track, yet it wanders snake-like across the plane, reminiscent of not only Aboriginal art, but the work of Australian artist Tony Tuckson or American artist Cy Twombly. The visual investigation of how we traverse the landscape is subject matter that intrigues artists across cultural boundaries.

Now based at Bundeena, south of Sydney, Kovacs says it is the ocean and the natural world in general that provides her with inspiration. "It's part of my psyche, really, responding to nature when I'm working. But my paintings aren't literal, I want them to echo my rhythm, my feelings and emotions. That's ultimately where my work stems from... I love the sensuality of oil paint; I love the medium. Paint has a nature of its own."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/bulgari-art-award-2015-winner-ildiko-kovacs-is-riding-a-wave-to-italy-20150423-1mrjd1.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.artnomad.com.au/artists/artist.cfm?id=1130>

<sup>3</sup> Ildiko Kovacs Down the Line 1980 - 2010, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2011, p14

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/visual-arts/when-you-get-into-the-space-its-sublime-says-artist-ildiko-kovacs/news-story/91307ae257190b8e739a249501b3c740>

### FURTHER READING

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/bulgari-art-award-2015-winner-ildiko-kovacs-is-riding-a-wave-to-italy-20150423-1mrjd1.html>

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/123.2015/>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/visual-arts/when-you-get-into-the-space-its-sublime-says-artist-ildiko-kovacs/news-story/91307ae257190b8e739a249501b3c740>

## ACTIVITIES

1. What colours can you see in Kovacs' *Roadworks #2* 2005 on display in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition? How do these colours relate to the subject matter or title of the work? Tell your class what you think that this painting is about?
2. Look for other artists in *Black White & Restive* exhibition who have an **abstract** painting style. You might like to start with Peter Adsett and Rusty Peters' work *Two Laws: One Big Spirit*, a conversation between two painters that draws on Western Abstraction and East Kimberley Gija Law. What ideas and processes do they have in common with Kovacs? Discuss. Share with your class.
3. Ildiko Kovacs' works of art often take inspiration from the landscape. Create a painting by minimising your **representation** down to simple lines and shapes. Try experimenting with the marks you can make with paint-rollers. How does your gesture affect the mark?
4. Research other artists who use abstraction to make works of art. You might like to start by looking at the work of Tony Tuckson and Cy Twombly. Which of these artists are inspired by the landscape as a subject matter in their work?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**abstraction:** not representing a pictorial subject such as a tree; using colour, form, composition, texture as the focus point.

**aerial view:** looking down from above either from a high geographic point, building or airplane.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**audio visual:** the use of sound and image, for example film, TV, or projector using presentation software etc.

**collaborate:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**colonialism:** refers to the period of time and government after the British invasion of Australia.

**convention:** a visual code or accepted standard.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**dialogue:** a talk between two or more people or between characters.

**identity:** a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).

**medium:** can refer to both the type of art (e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking), as well as the materials an artwork is made from.

**motif:** ornament, distinctive feature.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**ochres:** natural earth pigments, often reds and yellow, but also white used to make paint.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**postcolonial:** refers to the need for groups which have experienced colonisation to achieve an identity empowered and autonomous; a critique of colonial ideas and power structures by Eurocentric concepts or images.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**recontextualisation:** is a process that removes text, signs or meaning from its original context (decontextualisation) in order to introduce it into another context. Since the meaning of texts and signs depend on their context, recontextualisation implies a change of meaning.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e. a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e. a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**scale:** how big or small something is. The size of the work of art.

# BLACK WHITE & RESTIVE

## MARTUMILI ARTISTS

Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500  
(or thereabouts) 2013

Learning resource



### ABOVE

**Martumili Artists**

*Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500  
(or thereabouts) 2013  
acrylic on linen*

### BELOW

**Lynette WALLWORTH, Martumili Artists**

*Always Walking Country: Parnngurr Yarrkalpa 2013  
3 channel HD video installation, sound*

### Antony

*The Name Song and improvisations; sound recording  
and mix by Liam Egan*

For the full captions and artists names see back page

NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY

## MARTUMILI ARTISTS

*Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500 (or thereabouts) 2013* depicts **Country** surrounding the Parnngurr (pron: Bung - or) Community, around 370 kilometres east of Parnpajinya (Newman) in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Like much of the art produced in artistic communities such as the Martumili art centre at Parnngurr it represents a powerful, intimate and continuing connection with the land. Martu artist Amy French adds, "It's my country, Warnman country, its inside me, the country is full of colour, I can show all of that colour with my paintings."<sup>1</sup>

*Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500 (or thereabouts) 2013* emerged from a collaboration between Lynette Wallworth, Martu artists and opera-pop singer Antony, which resulted in *Always Walking Country: Parnngurr Yarrkalpa 2013* an immersive video **installation** comprising of sound, song, painting and the **moving image**. Wallworth and

Antony spent ten days in late 2013 living in the Pilbara and working alongside Kumpaya Girgirba, Yikartu Bumba, Karnu (Nancy Taylor), Ngamaru Bidu, Janice Yuwali Nixon, RR (Reena Rogers), Thelma Judson and Nola Taylor. The installation was commissioned for the 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: *Dark Heart*, at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Underpinning the **painting** *Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500 (or thereabouts) 2013* composition are two white lines that represent the Wanarl Creek and the Parnngurr River. These two important waterways were the first markings made on the acrylic on linen. From these reference points, each of the eight artists then painted their own area, depicting it at a different time of the year, incorporating Martu land management and hunting practices such as burning the **spinifex** grasses and the hunting that occurs when new growth emerges after the fire.<sup>2</sup>

**Collaborative** paintings are not unusual in contemporary art **practice** and for artists from Martu and many similar communities, painting is an important social activity. As Martu artist Nola Taylor notes, People don't like painting alone. People come together to talk, tell stories and sing as they paint. It allows elders to spend time with younger people, which creates opportunities to keep language and culture alive, passing on the law.

For many Aboriginal artists painting Country or their **Dreaming** is a **symbolic** ritual experience which reunites their spirit with place; the act of painting takes them back to their Country. Galarrwuy Yunipingu, a prominent member of the Yolgnu people, describes the purpose of painting is "to demonstrate our continuing link with our Country and the rights and responsibilities we have to it."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>We Don't Need a Map. A Martu Experience of the Western Desert, 2012, Fremantle Arts Centre, p31

<sup>2</sup>Hetti Perkins, Art + Soul, 2010, The Miegunyah Press, p230

### FURTHER READING

<http://www.wedontneedamap.com.au/>

<http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2014/dark-heart-2014/>

[http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Exhibitions/Past\\_Exhibitions/2014/2014\\_Adelaide\\_Biennial](http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Exhibitions/Past_Exhibitions/2014/2014_Adelaide_Biennial)

<http://www.mca.com.au/discover-martu-art-far-western-desert/>

## ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the large **scale** collaborative painting by the Martumili artists titled *Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500 (or thereabouts) 2013* included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition. Name the different colours you can see. Can you identify the eight different artists and their unique styles of **painting**? Describe to your class.
2. Think about the geography of 'your place'... The street where you live, or where your school is located in relation to other important places, like your grandparent's home, or where you play sport. Look at an online map for information about your area. Draw or paint these locations in relation to each other from an **aerial view**. Include some of the main landmarks like buildings, parks or trees that you would see. What colours would you view from above? Choose a selection of dominant and harmonious colours to use in your painting.
3. Study a map of Western Australia, understand the **topography** and geographic relationship between the communities named above. Find out more information about the history of the area, communities who live there and natural features. Collaborate with a small group on the same sheet of paper to create a visual diagram or map.
4. Many artists have discovered and learnt about the land by looking at it from an aerial view - this is a view with a perspective as if you were a bird. Such a view could be from the top of a tall place, from the air or from your imagination. What do the Martumili artists show us of Australia that we don't usually see?
5. The Martumili artists and their paintings include collaborations, yet each artist tells their own story within the whole. Can you see the different styles of the individual artists? How do the different markings within the collaborative painting contribute to an understanding of the work? Have a discussion about the artist's collaborative process.
6. Visit the multi-media installation in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition by Lynette Wallworth, Antony and the Martumili artists titled *Always Walking Country: Parnngurr Yarrkalpa 2013*. The immersive **audio visual** surrounds the viewer with sound, song, painting and **moving image**. Elaborate on your understanding of the term immersive when viewing this work in the Gallery space? How are your sensory experiences affected when viewing a multi-media installation in comparison to standing in front of a painting, and why?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**aerial view:** looking down from above either from a high geographic point, building or airplane.

**audio visual:** the use of sound and image, for example film, TV, or projector using presentation software etc.

**collaboration:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**Dreaming:** the term that encompasses the eternal nature of Aboriginal cosmology and belief systems. It incorporates the ancestral beings, the creation of the universe and the laws of social and religious behaviour. The Dreaming is known by various local terms such as Tjukurrpa or Jukurrpa in the desert and Ngarrangkarni in the Kimberley.

**identity:** all of the things by which a person or thing is known or is considered as being.

**installation:** mixed-media constructions or assemblages usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time.

**medium:** can refer to both to the type of art (e.g. painting, sculpture, printmaking), as well as the materials an artwork is made from

**moving image:** a series of photographs sequenced to appear as moving objects when projected onto a screen.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**ochres:** natural earth pigments, often reds and yellow, but also white used to make paint.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**scale:** how big or small something is. The size of the work of art.

**spinifex:** (*Triodia* species): a tough, spiky tussock grass found in the red sandy desert country of Central Australia.

**symbolism:** the use of symbols to represent ideas.

**tableau:** a scene that is created and staged to show an event in history or story using props and actors or models.

**topography:** the shape of the earth's surface across an area or region. The topography of an area includes the size and location of hills and dips in the land.

### Front cover ABOVE

Martumili Artists:

**Ngamaru BIDU**

born c1950 Martilirri area WA

**Yikartu BUMBA**

born c1940 Lalyipuka WA

**Kumpaya GIRGIRBA**

born 1933 Kunawarriritji WA

**Thelma JUDSON**

born c1956 Percival Lakes region WA

**Janice Yuwali NIXON**

born c1947 Yulpu soak WA

**RR (Reena RODGERS)**

born c1940 WA

**Karnu (Nancy TAYLOR)**

born c1940 Karnu WA

**Nola TAYLOR**

born 1950 Lake Percival WA

*Yarrkalpa (Hunting Ground) Scale 1:2500*

*(or thereabouts) 2013*

acrylic on linen

300.0 x 500.0cm

Martumili artist's collection

Courtesy the artists

### Front cover BELOW

**Lynette WALLWORTH**

born 1961 Sydney NSW

Martumili Artists:

**Ngamaru BIDU**

born c1950 Martilirri area WA

**Yikartu BUMBA**

born c1940 Lalyipuka WA

**Kumpaya GIRGIRBA**

born 1933 Kunawarriritji WA

**Thelma JUDSON**

born c1956 Percival Lakes region WA

**Janice Yuwali NIXON**

born c1947 Yulpa soak WA

**RR (Reena RODGERS)**

born c1940 WA

**Karnu (Nancy TAYLOR)**

born c1940 Karnu WA

**Nola TAYLOR**

born 1950 Lake Percival WA

*Always Walking Country: Parnngurr Yarrkalpa*

2013

3 channel HD video installation, sound

Film in collaboration with Martumili artists, Pete

Brundle and

Liam Egan

**Antony**

*The Name Song*

and improvisations; sound recording and mix by

Liam Egan

all compositions and masters c.2013 rebis

music (ascap/kobalt)

Courtesy the artists

# BLACK WHITE & RESTIVE

**ALBERT NAMATJIRA**

*Boomerang 1950*

**DANIE MELLOR**

*Hearts of ranges 1 2006*

Learning resource



## ABOVE

### **Albert NAMATJIRA**

born 1902 Hermannsburg NT  
died 1959 Alice Springs NT

#### *Boomerang 1950*

synthetic polymer paint, watercolour and  
pencil, clear varnish over carved wood

47.5 x 5.8 x 0.4cm

Gift of Newcastle Region Art Gallery

Foundation 2010

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

© Legend Press

## BELOW

### **Danie MELLOR**

born 1971 Mackay QLD

#### *Hearts of ranges 1 2006*

earthenware with underglazes

111.0 x 48.0 x 1.0cm

Gift of the artist through the Australian

Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2009

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Courtesy the artist

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## ALBERT NAMATJIRA AND DANIE MELLOR

Western Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira is the most recognised Aboriginal artist in 20th century Australian history and presents an early example of cross-cultural art-making. His iconic watercolour paintings depict the scenery surrounding the Hermannsburg mission, also known by its Arrernte name Ntaria. Despite his outstanding legacy, Namatjira's story is often held up as tragic: an artistic visionary who straddled two cultures – Aboriginal and European – but was ultimately shunned by both. However, his commitment to painting his **Country** started a movement: his extended family also began painting and today Hermannsburg/Ntaria painters, many direct descendants of Namatjira, continue to translate their country in the 'Hermannsburg School' style.

The English term 'boomerang' commonly used today comes from the word 'Bou-mar-rang' from the Turuwal people of the George's River near Port Jackson. Turuwal is a dialect of the Dharug language, spoken from coastal northern Sydney to the Blue Mountains Ranges. Due to their proximity to the first colonisers many Dharug words have been anglicised and now form part of the Australian

vernacular. 'Bou-mar-rang' refers to the returning boomerang, a cliché/or regarded as typical of "traditional" Aboriginal life. However, the returning boomerang was not a hunting implement, rather an **object** made for play-fighting, display and trade.

Albert Namatjira's *Boomerang* 1950 included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition, and his other boomerangs, were decorated with images of Country\* and created for the souvenir market. An important object in the life of Aboriginal people the boomerang was becoming increasingly commercialised for a growing tourist trade, however they carried a personally meaningful message for Namatjira.

Mackay born, Danie Mellor is descended through his mother's family from the Indigenous people of the rainforest area of the Atherton Tablelands. He also has Mamu/Ngagen/Ngajan heritage. His **contemporary art practice** explores themes that are linked to cultural histories and the landscape.

Mellor's **installation** of three large earthenware boomerangs included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition are fragile and unfit for the

boomerang's purpose, deliberately recalling 19th century displays of anthropological curiosities.

The mutual influence between historical and contemporary Aboriginal art reflects individual, communal and ancestral connections to culture. The decoration on *Hearts of ranges 1* 2006 is about Country, where geography and ancestral **narratives** join to tell stories. Map-like, the designs are a reference to the desert painting movement with its **aerial view**.

Mellor recognises the importance of symbolically marking of the tools of everyday life on Country. Of the *Hearts of ranges* series, he explains, "The boomerangs are big... the boomerang looms large in our consciousness. It is one of the most unique and important tools and survival depended on its skilful use. It is also a highly commodified object - exported, transported, translated and interpreted. Hearts of Ranges encompasses these things, and lays out a new map – a map of the imagination, of land and culture."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[http://dharug.dalang.com.au/plugin\\_wiki/page/Dharug\\_History](http://dharug.dalang.com.au/plugin_wiki/page/Dharug_History)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.sheppartonartmuseum.com.au/archive-item/1/411/post/artworksdonatedtothegallery>

### FURTHER READING

<http://hermannsburgschool.com/history/>

<http://ngurart.com.au/>

<http://boomerang.org.au/wp/articles/what-is-a-boomerang/>

<http://www.janmurphygallery.com.au/artist/danie-mellor/>

\*Country: Land is fundamental to Aboriginal people. When we refer to Country in relation to Indigenous culture, we are describing an intrinsic spiritual, ritual and personal relationship to place (which is alive with stories, histories, creativity). A personal relationship to place creates Country, e.g. singing it, dancing it, caring for it. When we write about Country in this context the C is capitalised, conveying respect for that relationship.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Think about the "tools" we use today in our everyday lives. Our computers, tablets, school books, bags and pencil cases. How would you use **design elements** to decorate one of these contemporary tools? Consider your own personally meaningful messages in your design.
2. Look closely at the installation of Danie Mellor's **3D** works of art included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition. How do you think Mellor has made the unique shape of each boomerang in his *Hearts of ranges* series? Boomerangs are usually meant to be a functional artwork or object. Why do you think he has chosen such an enlarged design?
3. Do you think Namatjira's *Boomerang* 1950 artwork would only be significant to Aboriginal people? What relevance might it have to people from other cultures?
4. Compare the landscape depicted in Namatjira's *Boomerang* 1950 with Danie Mellor's *Hearts of ranges 1* 2006 included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition. How is the **topography** and landscape similar or different in these works of art?
5. Try watercolour techniques to record your own favourite place. Practise using washes of colour to create light and shade.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**3D:** a work of art with depth, as well as height and width, such as sculpture and installation.

**anthropology:** is the study of human culture, society, and difference. The discipline emerged in the twentieth century as a critical response to explanations of human difference in terms of 'race'.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**iconic:** a person or thing that is an object of great respect and admiration.

**iconography:** the use and interpretation of images, signs and symbols to convey meaning.

**identity:** a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).

**installation:** mixed-media constructions or assemblages usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time.

**narrative:** a story or report of connected events, actual or imaginary. Presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images.

**homage:** to pay tribute to.

**motif:** ornament, distinctive feature.

**object:** things that you can see or touch, that are not usually a living thing.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**symbolism:** the use of symbols to represent ideas.

**topography:** the shape of the earth's surface across an area or region. The topography of an area includes the size and location of hills and dips in the land.

# BLACK WHITE & RESTIVE

**MARGARET PRESTON**

*Native flowers 1941*

Learning resource



**Margaret PRESTON**

born 1875 Adelaide SA, died 1963 Mosman NSW

*Native flowers 1941*

oil on hardboard

51.1 x 48.0cm

Gift of an anonymous donor 1968

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

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**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## MARGARET PRESTON

Born in Adelaide, Margaret Preston began her studies with landscape painter W. Lister Lister in Sydney from 1888. She studied at the National Gallery of Victoria School in Melbourne and at the Adelaide School of Design. She travelled to Europe in 1904, studying for three years in Munich and Paris, and made a longer second trip in 1912, where she was exposed to modern art and **Primitivist** ideas such as those contained in works by Pablo Picasso. She didn't return to Australia until 1918.<sup>1</sup>

Preston travelled widely throughout the Pacific, Asia, India and Africa, where she developed an interest in non-European art and culture. She was a key figure in the development of modern art in Sydney from the 1920s to the 1950s. Best known for her paintings and woodcuts, she stylised domestic **objects**, local landscapes and native Australian flowers into dynamic, formally precise **compositions**. Through the incorporation of diverse styles and **motifs** into her work, she sought to create and develop a distinctly Australian style, one that engaged with Australia's place in the international art world and would use Aboriginal art as the foundation for an Australian **identity**.

Inspired by Indigenous art, she used Aboriginal motifs in her work from the 1920s throughout the rest of her career. While art history has

recently re-cast her as a passionate and outspoken champion of Australian nationalistic identity through Indigenous art, Preston was a white artist who took images from a culture, without any spiritual understanding of the meaning of these images, nor of the people from whom she was borrowing.<sup>2</sup> In a 1925 publication of *Art in Australia* she is quoted, "In wishing to rid myself of the mannerisms of a country other than my own I have gone to the art of a people who had never seen or known anything different from themselves... These are the Australian Aboriginals and it is only from the art of such people in any land that a national art can spring."<sup>3</sup>

While Preston recognised the significance of the dynamic **design elements** of Indigenous art, she ignored the intricate links between Indigenous artmaking and the culture and ritual that provided its source. In 1930 she wrote, "Mythology and religious symbolism do not matter to the artist, only to the **anthropologist**."<sup>4</sup> However, Preston never asked what mythology and religion meant to Indigenous makers/artists.

As a modernist preoccupied with abstract values, Preston attempted to remove the aesthetic object (art) from its cultural context. Preston was also interested in Australia's

national art **identity** (ironically white identity) based on Aboriginal art. Indeed, Western artists have had a long tradition of borrowing/taking aka stealing/appropriating imagery from other cultures. However, it is important to question the difference between **appropriation** and influence, particularly when, as Aboriginal art curator Djon Mundine writes, "Using them [Indigenous motifs] in that way shows a total disrespect for any knowledge of what those images actually mean. It's showing an interest but an ignorance."<sup>5</sup> The questions raised by Preston's "Aboriginalised" work are not just about incoherency and ownership, but about cultural sensitivity.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/preston-margaret/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/shadow-cast-over-a-painters-legacy/2005/07/24/1122143723289.html>

<sup>3</sup> 'The Indigenous Art of Australia', *Art in Australia* March 1925

<sup>4</sup> Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p86

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/shadow-cast-over-a-painters-legacy/2005/07/24/1122143723289.html>

### FURTHER READING

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/preston-margaret/>  
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/shadow-cast-over-a-painters-legacy/2005/07/24/1122143723289.html>  
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lister-william-lister-604>  
<http://nga.gov.au/preston/essay.cfm>  
<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/margaret-preston/>

## ACTIVITIES

1. People enjoy bringing the beauty of nature into their family homes. Often this is achieved by decorating our home with flowers in vases, or cushions, furniture and crockery with printed pictures of plants. Do you have things in your home that are decorated with flowers or patterns of different plants? What kind of flowers or plants are they?
2. See how many different flowers you can identify in the Preston's *Native flowers* 1941. Make a list of all the flowers you can see. Can you tell them apart?
2. Choose a favourite flower or plant for yourself as a personal decorative motif. Research what country it originated from or if it is an Australian native flower. Create a symbol of this flower or plant that you could use as your logo and try to incorporate your initials into the design.
3. Consider various ways that flowers, or food could be represented so that it reflects different cultural **identities**. Produce an artwork based on one of these methods and evaluate its success as a work of art.
4. Preston's painting has a variety of **design elements**, representing the different colours and shapes of the Australian native flowers. Research other artists using the **still life** genre as their subject matter. Present your research to the class and compare your findings.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**anthropologist:** is someone that studies human culture, society, and difference. The discipline emerged in the twentieth century as a critical response to explanations of human difference in terms of 'race'.

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**collaborate:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**colonialism:** refers to the period of time and government after the British invasion of Australia.

**composition:** the placement or arrangement of elements or parts in a work of art.

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**identity:** a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).

**motif:** ornament, distinctive feature.

**objects:** things that you can see or touch, that are not usually a living thing.

**postcolonial:** refers to the need for groups which have experienced colonisation to achieve an identity empowered and autonomous; a critique of colonial ideas and power structures by Eurocentric concepts or images.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**Primitivist:** refers to the fascination of early modern European artists with what was then called primitive art – including tribal art from Africa, the South Pacific and Indonesia, as well as prehistoric and very early European art, and European folk art.

**representation:** (in art) form that shows an image, often with life-like qualities, i.e a horse. In this way, it is opposite to abstraction. It can also be a symbol, i.e a lightbulb represents an idea, or a cloud represents rain.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**still life:** is one of the main subject matter genres in Western art – a still life painting or sculpture is anything that does not move or is dead.

# BLACK WHITE & RESTIVE

**IMANTS TILLERS**  
*White Aborigines (No.2) 1983*

Learning resource



**Imants TILLERS**

born 1950 Sydney NSW

*White Aborigines (No. 2) 1983*

acrylic on 100 canvas boards

255.0 x 380.0cm

Purchased 1983

Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Courtesy the artist

**NEWCASTLE  
ART GALLERY**

## IMANTS TILLERS

Imants Tillers was born in Sydney in 1950, a child of Latvian **refugees** who had fled their homeland to escape war and political turmoil. This post-war European **diaspora**, the experience of being displaced in a new land, isolated from cultural and personal histories, became a key component of Tillers' work. Tillers explores the **fragmented** nature and **second-handedness** of Australian culture by creating **disjointed** images of familiar Australian landscapes. He explores the emotional and cultural impact war and politics has on refugees. Tillers also uses a gridded system of multiple canvases to create this 'fragmented' effect. There are hundreds of sequentially numbered small canvas boards which Tillers combines into large-scale gridded paintings – all of which are part of an ongoing series entitled *The Book of Power*.

*White Aborigines* 1983 is concerned with the politics of cultural and artistic **identity**. The large black figures and the text are taken from a 19th century German cartoon by Wilhelm Busch, whilst the smaller figures derive from

an illustrated children's book from Latvia<sup>1</sup>. It depicts two ironically non-Aboriginal figures combusting in a landscape: one man with horns has part of his head blowing off, while his companion is simultaneously exploding from his centre.<sup>2</sup> The work refers to Latvian history and the brutality of World War II while the **composition** echoes the work of mid-20th century artist Ian Fairweather and contains elements of Australian Aboriginal art, perhaps aligning the horrors of war with the violence suffered by the Aboriginal population at the hands of British invaders.

Throughout the 1980s both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous artists had to re-think ways of working. The 1980s was a time of growing political and social awareness and acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture. Tillers' longstanding **practice** remains based within this idea of **appropriation**, manipulating large scale reproductions of works made by others, **recontextualised** with layers of text.

In 2013 Tillers won the Wynne Prize with a **homage** and appropriation of Albert

Namatjira's painting style. The painting is simply titled *Namatjira*, and layers the words of Austrian poet Thomas Bernhard against a landscape that is reminiscent of Haasts Bluff. Tillers describes the work as, "...an homage to Albert Namatjira (1902 – 1959), one of the pivotal and tragic figures in Australian art. Through his watercolours of Central Australia, Namatjira found a way to repair some of the psychic and spiritual damage... long endured by Aboriginal Australia."<sup>3</sup>

More recently, in 2014 Namatjira's long-time teacher and painting companion Rex Battarbee's *Ghost Gums* 1948 appeared in Tillers' *Ghost Gums* 2013, which is included in the *Black White & Restive* exhibition next to Richard Dunn's painting *Quarta-tooma (Ormiston Gorge)* 1939, a homage to Namatjira. Tillers' and Dunn's works are both tributes to Battarbee and Namatjira, men who shared a long standing cross-cultural creative exchange.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mca.com.au/collection/work/1995248/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4>

<sup>3</sup> <http://theconversation.com/times-change-but-the-art-establishment-rolls-on-13058>

### FUTHER READING

<http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=5>  
<http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=6>  
<http://www.mca.com.au/collection/work/1995248/>  
[http://www.lwgallery.uwa.edu.au/exhibitions/past/imants\\_tillers](http://www.lwgallery.uwa.edu.au/exhibitions/past/imants_tillers)  
<http://www.mca.com.au/collection/artist/tillers-imants/>  
[http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4#\\_edn30](http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4#_edn30)  
<http://www.collectiveidentities.com.au/gordonbennett.html>

## ACTIVITIES

1. Drawing grids can be used to explore the relationship between **scale** and **proportion**. A grid can be used to increase or decrease the size of an image while keeping it in proportion. Select and photocopy two or three images of the Australian landscape. Combine these into a single image by cutting and pasting, manipulating and altering the relationship of the **design elements**. Use a blank drawing grid to redraw this image and enlarge each section to about A4 size. Number each piece like Tillers so the artwork can be easily put back together in the correct order. Combine all the individual enlarged fragments to re-form the image. How does the alteration process impact on the original images? How could you continue to make the image more complex?
2. Look for other artists in *Black White & Restive* exhibition who have included text, together with the use of visual **appropriation** in their work. What ideas and processes do they have in common with Tillers? Discuss the similarities and differences in approach
3. Think about a graphic novel or a children's story you have read. Write down your thoughts on the main ideas of the **narrative**. How would you recontextualise this idea into a new work of art or a written text piece? Creating your own found poetry using a phrase or a couple of words from the narrative. Reassemble your text to make new meaning or contrast it from the original idea.
4. Research other artists who have **collaborated** with Tillers. You might like to start by looking at *Fatherland* 2008 by Warlpiri artist Michael Jagamara Nelson included in *Black White & Restive* exhibition. In collaborations Tillers undertook with Jagamara Nelson, often there is a distinctive E shape added, a symbol of his possum dreaming. Discuss how these artists have collaborated on the individual boards?
5. What positive connections might come from collaboratively working with another peer on a large-scale work? What practical, physical and group issues might you need to work through for a successful outcome?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

You will find these terms highlighted in the text of this resource

**appropriation:** to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.

**collaboration:** to work jointly with at least one other, especially on an intellectual endeavour.

**composition:** the placement or arrangement of elements or parts in a work of art.  
**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**contemporary:** of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.

**Country:** *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways* (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority).

**design elements:** include line, colour, shape, texture, space and form found in a work of art.

**diaspora:** a scattered population whose origin lies within a smaller geographic area. Diaspora can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland.

**disjointed:** not connected or lacking a sequence or sense of order.

**Dreaming:** the term that encompasses the eternal nature of Aboriginal cosmology and belief systems. It incorporates the ancestral beings, the creation of the universe and the laws of social and religious behaviour. The Dreaming is known by various local terms such as Tjukurrpa or Jukurrpa in the desert, and Ngarrangkarni in the Kimberley.

**fragmented:** broken into small parts.

**homage:** to pay tribute to.

**iconography:** the use and interpretation of images, signs and symbols to convey meaning.

**identity:** all of the things by which a person or thing is known or is considered as being.

**narrative:** a story, description, or account of events.

**painting:** the process of applying paint to a surface to make a picture or design.

**proportion:** the size relationship of one thing to another.

**refugees:** people living outside their country of nationality due to fear of persecution due to religion, race, nationality, political or social membership.

**second-handedness:** the state of something being second-hand or used.

**practice:** an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.

**recontextualisation:** is a process that removes text, signs or meaning from its original context (decontextualisation) in order to introduce it into another context. Since the meaning of texts and signs depend on their context, recontextualisation implies a change of meaning.

**restive:** to be uneasy, unsettled or agitated, often associated with a crowd. A pause or hesitation before taking action. A restive horse steps side-to-side, not forwards.

**scale:** how big or small something is. The size of the work of art.