

GORDON HOOKEY: A MURRIALITY

Plimsoll Gallery

5 June – 16 August 2025

Curators: **José Da Silva** and **Liz Nowell**

Gordon Hookey: A MURRIALITY is the first survey of renowned Waanyi artist **Gordon Hookey**, charting three decades of practice where artmaking and activism fuse. Drawn from public collections as well as the artist's own studio archive, this exhibition features over nine key works, presented alongside a major new commission of eight protest-style banners.

Charting his practice from the early 1990s until the present day, *A MURRIALITY* reveals an artist reckoning with the legacies of capital and empire. With biting wit and candour, Gordon's work addresses issues including land rights, environmental destruction, institutional violence, human rights abuses, systemic racism, police corruption and international conflict.

Across large-scale painting, sculpture, video, print making and even a children's book, Gordon reconstructs world histories and current affairs through the lens of his lived experience. In his trademark visual language, anthropomorphic kangaroos play out fantastical allegories, claiming victory over introduced species such as cane toads, camels, and, of course, pigs.

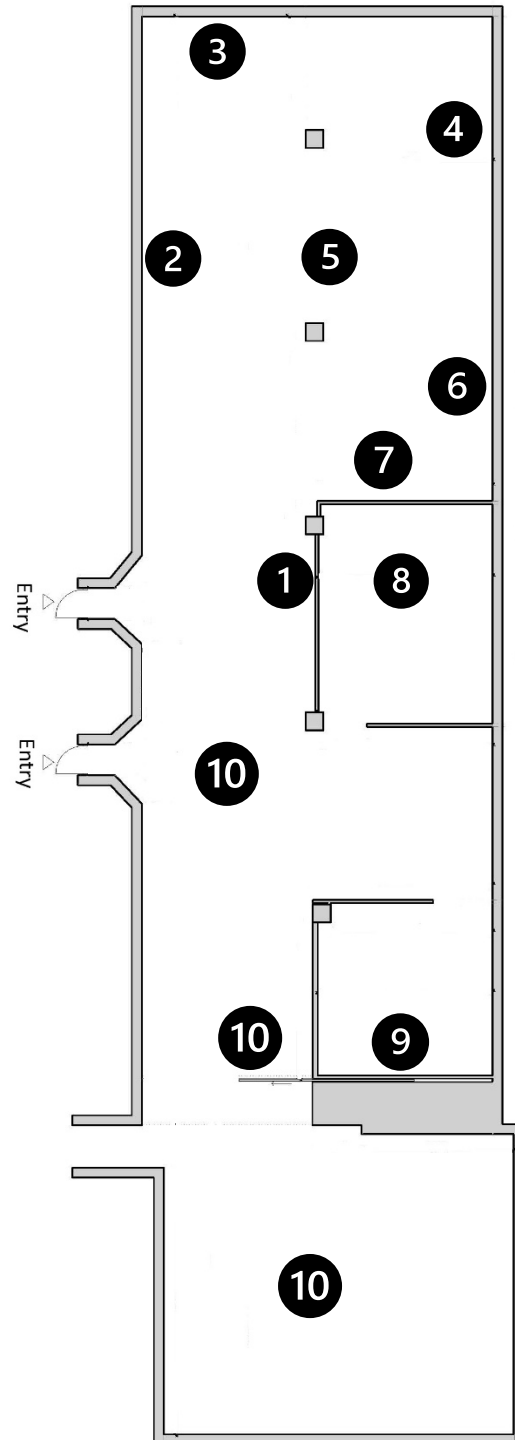
Superimposed over these frenetic tableaux is slang, text and political jargon that the artist has deliberately misspelt, disassembled and bastardised. For Gordon, whose mother tongue was taken from him in the process of colonisation, exploiting English vernacular is an act of Indigenisation and resistance.

In addition to previous works, *A MURRIALITY* features a significant commission that draws inspiration from Gordon's vast collection of political posters and continues his acclaimed series of protest banners. Made for use in the public realm at Invasion Day marches and rallies recognising Aboriginal resistance fighter Dundalli, Hookey's banners provide timely socio-political commentary while also imagining a truly empowered Indigenous future.

Please note: This exhibition contains adult content including strong language and graphic imagery.

Map

PLIMSOLL GALLERY



1

Untitled, 1994

Oil on canvas

Collection: The Australian National University Art Collection. Acquired by the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre, 1995

These early painting set in Sydney introduces Gordon Hookey's use of anthropomorphism and ideas of corruption, brutality, and injustice around Indigenous land rights. The characterisation of police officers as pigs follows the work of leading African American artist and activist Emory Douglas, who used pig illustrations to satirise the US police force.

In a 2018 interview, Hookey described his interest in depicting humans as animals: "I was always moved by George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. He looked at a farm of animals as a microcosm of humanity. I started symbolising Aboriginal people as native animals, from crocodiles to goannas, kangaroos, and wombats. But then, when I was representing introduced people, they had to be introduced species. So, I started using sheep, cane toads, pigs, camels, and other invasive animals."

2

ETHICS 2021

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

3

hoogah boogah, c.2005

Card and paint stencil

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

For Hookey, "Just being a blackfella in this country is political. All I do is look at the world as a blackfella and translate that world visually, be it on a canvas or in a sculpture, installation, or poem; I metaphorically clarify or describe our realities."

In *hoogah boogah*, Hookey speaks to the commodification of Indigenous creative expression for non-Indigenous audiences and the need to recognise the social and political realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The phrase appears in several works, including a 2011 drawing which adds further: "THEY WANT OUR SPIRITUALITY BUT NOT OUR POLITICAL REALITY / THE PEDDLERS OF HOOGAH BHOOGAH / THE PERPETRATORS AND PERPETUATORS OF CULTURAL COLONIALISM."

4

ethics, c.2005

Card and paint stencil

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Hookey's belief in ethics is a central tenet that runs through all of his work. In his 2021 triptych *Ethics*, Hookey spells out his hope for society through E (empathy), T (truth), H (honesty), I (integrity), C (compassion), and S (sincerity). Similarly in *ethics*, c. 2005, honesty, humility, credibility, integrity, and dignity are upheld by the artist as universal values.

For Hookey, art can encourage communities to act on civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. While visiting for the installation of *A MURRIALITY* in Eora (Sydney), he remarked: "I've been trying to put right, in a small kind of way, the damage done across the world." The artist here is offering us all a skeleton key for change, showing us possibilities for civic resistance, and ways to feel mobilised and ready to effect change.

5

You can go now/Stop sign, 2021

Stop sign, traffic cone, oil paint, wood, wheels

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

6

Denecolonialism, 2010*Painted boxing gloves**Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane*

Gordon Hookey's acknowledgment of Aboriginal sovereignty features a kangaroo proxy who sees the world through Aboriginal eyes. This use of sharp political observation and humour also appears in a traffic sign referencing Richard Bell's 2017 painting Immigration Policy, where the expression "You can go now!" fills a map of Australia. Hookey's refashioned sign announces the need for non-Indigenous viewers to slow down and pay attention and an invitation to leave on departure.

7

Dog Eat Dog, 2012

Print on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

8

Terraist 2012

Single-channel digital video, colour, stereo

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

9

Reiteration in Perpetuity 2010

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

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10

Tassietigahscene/A pixel no.13, 2022***Trum's legacy/Yella fella, 2022******Blood on the green/Houses are homes, 2022******The red yella & black/A dot painting no.184, 2022******Good on'ya!/Love, 2022******Youcrane/Love, 2022******Poohtin/A dot painting no.185, 2022******Trumspeek/A dot painting no.186, 2022***

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas; wood dowels, traffic cones, castors

Commissioned by UNSW Galleries, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Since 2020 Gordon Hookey has made placards and banners which explore the visual histories of protest and his feelings about activism in the present.

For this new body of work, Hookey revisited his forty-year-old poster archive, which he plastered to a wall in his studio. The eight banners on display take inspiration from this personal collection which cover subjects including land rights, refugee advocacy, revolutionary leaders, deaths in custody, health campaigns, and Indigenous excellence in sports, music, art, and theatre.

Conceived with a primary side/scene and a reverse that features an Aboriginal flag/heart or one of his ongoing 'dot' and 'pixel' paintings, the banners comprise "a punchline first, and then something that happens afterwards."

Artist Biography

Gordon Hookey was born in Cloncurry, Queensland in 1961. He currently lives and works in Meanjin/Brisbane. Hookey belongs to the Waanyi people and locates his art at the interface where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures converge.

He explicitly attacks the establishment and implicates our current political representatives. His style and approach is distinctive in its vibrancy and best known for its biting satire of Australia's political landscape, its leaders and representatives. Hookey's work combines figurative characters, iconic symbols, bold comic-like text, and a spectrum of vibrant colours. Through this idiosyncratic visual language, he has developed a unique and immediately recognisable style. Hookey's perspective comes from a divergent, activist positioning – his work challenges hierarchies, skewering the status and integrity of the 'elite', while working to bolster the position of the marginalised and oppressed. Hookey is a core member of Brisbane-based Indigenous collective proppaNOW alongside fellow artists including Richard Bell, Vernon Ah Kee and Jennifer Herd. His work is held in major collections within Australia including the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art and University of Queensland Art Museum in Brisbane, Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth, National Gallery of Australia and Australian National University in Canberra, National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, University of Technology in Sydney and a number of significant private collections.

Gordon Hookey is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Acknowledgements

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