

ABOUT THE EDUCATION RESOURCE

The Artspace education resource has been developed specifically for senior secondary school students and their teachers to accompany the exhibition Richard Bell: Imagining Victory. Please note some of the works presented within the exhibition contain mature themes.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Imagining Victory is a significant touring exhibition of Richard Bell's highly acclaimed video works including *Scratch an Aussie* (2008), *Broken English* (2009), and the trilogy-culminating work *The Dinner Party* (2013). Bell has been a leading force within the field of contemporary Australian art since the 1990s, making provocative gestures and works that expose Australia's contentious history of racial relations. He often refers to himself as 'an activist masquerading as an artist', frequently integrating expressions of political, cultural and economic disenchantment resulting from the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and colonial migrants to Australia.

Scratch an Aussie takes form as a Freudian therapy session in which Bell opens up to a therapist (played by fellow activist and sometime collaborator Gary Foley) about his perceptions of Australian race relations. This session is interspersed with Bell assuming the role of therapist for a group of blonde-haired twenty-somethings as he urges them to frankly discuss their concerns and attitudes regarding Aboriginal people. In *Broken English* Bell centres his attention on what form Aboriginal political empowerment might take, posing the question against the backdrops of a game of chess, a gallery opening and an Australia Day re-enactment of Captain Cook's landing.

Bell's trilogy of films concludes with the *The Dinner Party*, a major new video work that premiered at Artspace in 2013, that depicts an intimate portrayal of a dinner party in a luxurious mansion. Over the course of the evening a number of the guests speak, privately and unguardedly, of their views of the interrelationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. These conversations occur within a context of conspicuous privilege and far-removed from the most obvious sites of Aboriginal disaffection, and political, social and economic inequities. The evening takes on dramatic resonance when it is announced on live television that there is to be a decisive political shift, as an Aboriginal leader assumes control of the nation and outlines the new political manifesto to take effect immediately.

Bell's films are widely regarded as some of the most confronting and challenging works within his broader practice, extending from his long-time engagement with the medium of painting, and issues around the co-option of traditional Aboriginal methods of story-telling within the modernist canon of Western art history. *Imagining Victory* assembles these films together to firmly bring into focus the complex issues at play in the accumulative narratives within the filmic trilogy.

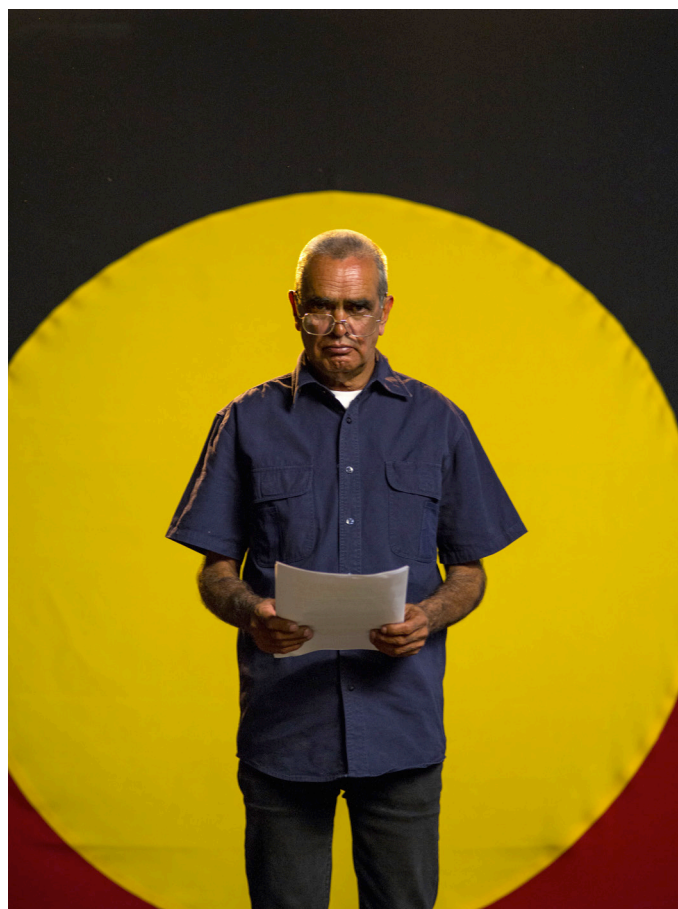
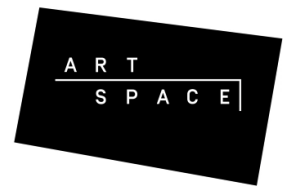


Image above: Richard Bell, *The Dinner Party*, 2013, still from HD video, courtesy of the artist; Artspace, Sydney and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Richard Bell: Imagining Victory is developed by Artspace and toured by Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

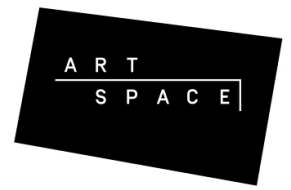


Questions: *Imagining Victory*

Generally, victory is used to define the winner of something [a war or a sporting competition, for example]. What is the victory that the artist imagines in this exhibition?

In this series of works, how does the artist challenge stereotypical ideas of Aboriginal culture and people?

The artist has described himself as 'an activist masquerading as an artist.' What do you think this means?

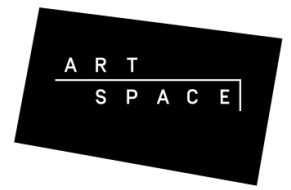


Questions: *Imagining Victory*

The artist has featured the quote 'Aboriginal art, it's a white thing' in one of his paintings. What do you think this means?

The artist is best known for his paintings. Why do you think he used video as a medium for the works in this exhibition?

Explain the differences between viewing a video in a gallery or museum, rather than on a television or in a cinema?



Questions: *Imagining Victory*

The subject matter of this exhibition covers very serious topics. Why does the artist use humour within his work? Are we laughing at the artist, with the artist, or at ourselves?

The films in *Imagining Victory* are described as a trilogy (like *The Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*). Discuss how the videos relate to one another and the significance of their individual titles.

How does the artist's work compare with or differ from other Aboriginal art you have seen previously?

Questions: *Scratch an Aussie*



Why does the artist use a therapy session as a setting to discuss Australian identity?

Image above: Richard Bell, *Scratch an Aussie*, 2008, still from HD video, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Questions: *Scratch an Aussie*

What is the significance of choosing young blonde twenty-somethings as characters in the film? They are all similar looking and of the same generation; why would the artist not have chosen more of a range of characters, or is this decision deliberate?

Why does the artist ask one of the characters about possessions that had been taken from her? How does this relate to the issues raised within the film?

Could a non-Aboriginal person ask the same questions that the artist asks in this film? What do you think the response would be to those questions?

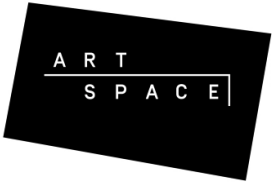
Questions: *Broken English*



This work features an Australia Day re-enactment of the arrival of English settlers onto Australian soil in 1788. What is the significance of this day? Does it mean the same to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?

In the re-enactment, an Aboriginal elder greets the settlers with a friendly handshake. Do you think the encounter in 1788 would have been so welcoming?

Image above: Richard Bell, *Broken English*, 2009, still from HD video, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Questions: *Broken English*

Do you think Australia was peacefully settled?

Do you think that Aboriginal people get a 'fair go' in this country?

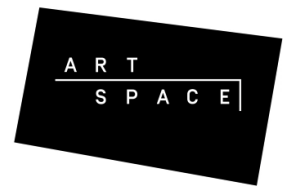
Australia considers itself to be an egalitarian society. Do you think that everyone in this country has the same access to opportunities?

Questions: *The Dinner Party*



Why does the artist use a dinner party to explore race relations as a topic? Can you think of other examples in cinema in which a dinner party is the principal setting?

Image above: Richard Bell, *The Dinner Party*, 2013, still from HD video, courtesy of the artist; Artspace, Sydney and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Questions: *The Dinner Party*

In *The Dinner Party* the artist appears both in real life and as a puppet. What is the role of caricature in the artist's works? Is the artist portraying himself, or is he acting as a persona or stereotype?

This work discusses shifts in political power that occur when an Aboriginal elder becomes the Prime Minister. If you were to become Prime Minister, what changes would your political manifesto seek?

Discuss the visibility of Aboriginal people in the Australian Government.
