

OC CURRENT AFFAIR



OC CURRENT AFFAIR

An exhibition from The University of Queensland Art Museum touring with 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. This project is assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.

UQ
ART MUSEUM

**Museums
& Galleries
of NSW**





Vernon Ah Kee, *proppaNOW*, 2021. *proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey

ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE

Queensland's leading Indigenous arts collective, proppaNOW, was set up in Brisbane in 2003 to give urban-based Aboriginal artists a voice. They present a unique and controversial perspective of black Australia which is sometimes confronting and always thought provoking.

The name proppaNOW best encapsulates the philosophy of what the collective is all about. They approach everything in a considered manner whilst providing a supportive environment for members to explore current social and cultural issues through art. The collective creates art that raises awareness of Aboriginal urban expression that depicts a contemporary story. They reinforce that Aboriginal Australia is a living culture that has evolved over time.



Above: Tony Albert, *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*, 2021, participatory work in progress. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Travis De Vries

Front page: proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey

THE ARTISTS

Vernon Ah Kee

Vernon Ah Kee was born in 1967 in Innisfail, North Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. He belongs to the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr people. Ah Kee has risen in prominence as one of Australia's most dynamic artists. Ah Kee investigates the mistreatment of our country's First Nations Peoples since colonisation, focussing on lived experiences and those of his ancestors.

Megan Cope

Megan Cope was born in 1982 in Brisbane. She lives and works between Miinjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and Bundjalung Country, NSW. Cope is a Quandamooka woman. Her site-specific sculptural installations, video work and paintings investigate issues relating to identity, the environment and cartography practices. She often uses maps to challenge concepts of ownership and place, and history and time.



proppaNOW artists Gordon Hookey, Jennifer Herd, Tony Albert, Megan Cope, Richard Bell, Vernon Ah Kee (left to right). Image courtesy of Rhett Hammerton.

THE ARTISTS

Tony Albert

Tony Albert was born in 1981 in Townsville, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Albert is a descendant of the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. He works across a range of media, often recycling kitsch, mass-produced objects that feature stereotypical depictions of Indigenous people.

Richard Bell

Bell was born in 1953, Charleville, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. Bell is an artist, activist and provocateur. He harnesses his work to provoke debate about identity, place and politics, posing complex and humorous challenges to preconceived ideas about Aboriginal art.

Jennifer Herd

Jennifer Herd is from Eumundi, Queensland. She lives and works in Brisbane. Herd is a Mbarbarrum woman whose family roots lie in far North Queensland. Herd draws on her past experiences and knowledge in costume design, often incorporating stitching and pin holes in her installations, painting, drawing and sculptural works. She creates shield designs as a way of connecting to her heritage and culture. Herd's shield designs are presented as a reminder of speaking truth to power, frontier resistance and the aftermath of cultural identity stripped bare.



Tony Albert with his *Brothers* series, 2013. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Nicole Anderson, National Art School

THE ARTISTS

Gordon Hookey

Gordon Hookey was born in 1961, Cloncurry, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Hookey belongs to the Waanyi/Waanjiminjin peoples. Gordon Hookey is well-known for his use of humour, irony and wit to provoke and challenge the status quo. While studying at the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, he became a member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, which was founded in 1987 in Redfern by artists like Tracey Moffat, Fiona Foley, Michael Riley and Avril Quail.

Laurie Nilsen

Born 1954, Roma, Queensland. Laurie Nilsen lived and worked in Brisbane until his passing in 2020. Nilsen was a Manadandanji artist. His practice was charged with ideas surrounding Indigenous and gender issues, emus (the artist's totem) and introduced species, religious doctrines, and the presentation of language. His work spans sculpture, drawing, painting, and printmaking, and often incorporates barbed wires that have been used in rural Queensland to threaten native species like emus. In the early 1990s, Nilsen was a founding member of the Campfire Group that preceded proppaNOW.



Gordon Hookey. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view, NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Nicole Anderson, National Art School

THE ARTISTS

Shannon Brett

Shannon Brett is a Wakka Wakka/Butchulla/Gooreng Gooreng artist and experienced researcher/writer/educator who is skilled in various areas of research, arts management, curatorial (museums and galleries), arts writing, fashion design, graphic design, public speaking, photography and arts mentorship. They are currently a PhD Candidate at the Queensland University of Technology—interrogating the construction of racial whiteness in Australia and responding to systemic racism and patriarchy from decolonial and black feminist perspectives. Brett is also Adjunct Curator at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, and holds a Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art; Photography and Fine Art via the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. Brett has exhibited internationally while working in numerous arts institutions throughout Australia, maintaining their position as a curator and educator.



Warraba Weatherall

Warraba Weatherall is a Kamilaroi visual artist, Lecturer at Griffith University and PhD candidate, who is currently based in Brisbane. Weatherall's artistic practice has a specific interest in archival repositories and structures, and the life of cultural materials and knowledges within these environments. He is also a lecturer for the Contemporary Australian Indigenous Arts (CAIA) degree at Griffith University's, Queensland College of Art. Weatherall is passionate about shifting cultural norms within the Australian visual arts sector and contributes to the sector through artistic practice, education and curation.

proppaNOW artists Richard Bell, Tony Albert, Warraba Weatherall, Megan Cope, Lily Eather, Shannon Brett, Gordon Hookey, Vernon Ah Kee. Image courtesy of Shannon Brett and Cairns Courthouse Gallery.

THE ARTISTS

Lily Eather

Lily Eather was born in 1996 in Brisbane. She is a Mandandanji woman who lives and works in Brisbane, and the daughter of the late Laurie Nilsen, an early member of proppaNOW and renowned multidisciplinary artist in his own right. Eather has a deep commitment to the upkeep of her father's legacy, which she had demonstrated through the completion of a Graduate Diploma majoring in Art History at The University of Queensland. She is passionate about Indigenous and Australian art and recognises the need for Indigenous curatorship locally and globally. Eather also enjoys a career as a Theatre Nurse at the Mater Private Hospital.



Lily Eather and Warraba Weatherall with Laurie Nilsen's *Dollar Dilemma Flag*, 2020. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy Nicole Anderson, National Art School

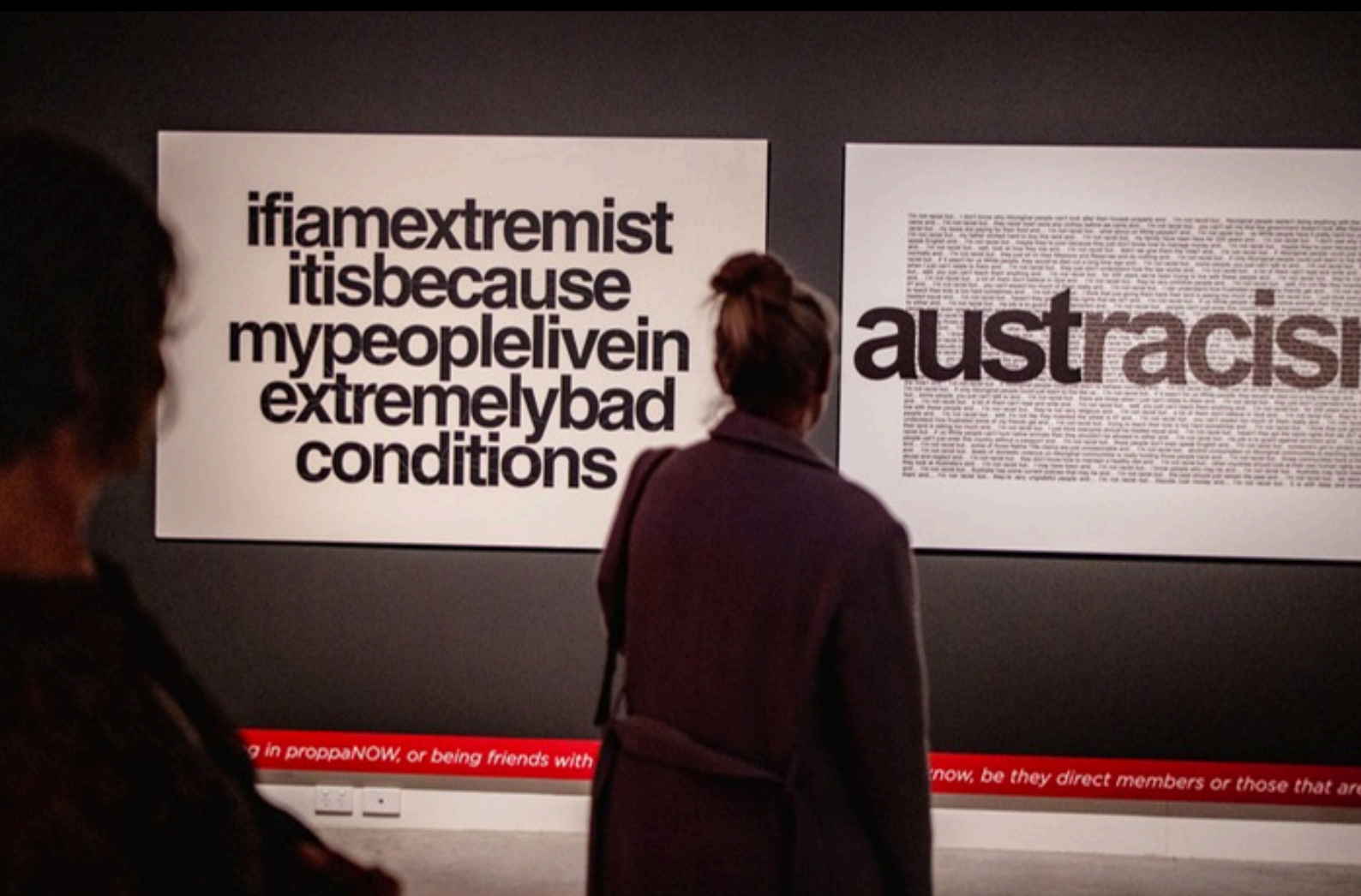
THE EXHIBITION

OCCURRENT AFFAIR was a major exhibition featuring new and recent works by proppaNOW. Conceived as a collaborative activist gesture, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* addressed current socio-political, economic and environmental issues, while celebrating the strength, resilience and continuity of Aboriginal culture.

Engaging wordplay through its title, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* referenced the sensational journalistic style of some television current affair programs. *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* embraced the slippage between language and its associated readings to probe and present new narratives. The exhibition reflected on the ongoing state of affairs affecting Aboriginal communities – issues that are relevant to all Australians.

NATIONAL TOUR

OCCURRENT AFFAIR was first presented at The University of Queensland Art Museum in early 2021 and was toured by Museums & Galleries of NSW from 2023 to 2025. The exhibition travelled over 11,580 km to 7 venues across Australia and engaged 44,893 visitors nationwide.



Works by Vernon Ah Kee in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey



ITINERARY & VISITATION

Venue	State	Exhibition Dates	Visitors
John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University	WA	10 February - 16 April 2023	6,033
NAS Galleries, National Art School	NSW	24 June - 5 August 2023	2,336
Ngununggula Southern Highlands Regional Gallery	NSW	26 August - 5 November 2023	11,600
Gosford Regional Gallery	NSW	18 November 2023 - 11 February 2024	11,210
USC Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast	QLD	23 February - 5 May 2024	3,077
Artspace Mackay	QLD	2 August - 6 October 2024	2,690
Lismore Regional Gallery	NSW	1 March - 27 April 2025	7,947

Tony Albert, *Brothers* (series), 2013. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA, 2023. Image courtesy of Brad Coleman, John Curtin Gallery

Vernon Ah Kee, *austracism*, 2003. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA, 2023. Image courtesy of Brad Coleman, John Curtin Gallery



KEY STATISTICS

Number of exhibition venues	7
Total number of visitors	44,893
Average number of visitors per venue	6,414
Number of workshops/activities offered	105
Education kit distribution to schools	237
Total number of students to the exhibition	4,452
Total number of guests to opening events	1,231
Total distance travelled	11,580 km



The Blak Laundry Takeover in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024. Image courtesy Sasha Parlett, Red Handed Productions



Works by Laurie Nilsen and Tony Albert in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning



Tony Albert, *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*, 2021, participatory work in progress. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA, 2023

OCCURRENT AFFAIR

EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

In June 2023 at the National Art School, M&G NSW and NAS Gallery hosted education, programming, and curatorial staff, as well as First Nations gallery collaborators and local Elders connected to John Curtin Gallery WA, Gosford Regional Gallery NSW, Artspace Mackay QLD, and USC Gallery QLD for an Education Symposium. The symposium included yarning circles, education content from FLENK Collective, a 'Scrub Club' cleaning oyster shells for a Megan Cope work, and the painting of a Tony Albert mural as a part of *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*.





Works by Megan Cope, Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* Education Symposium, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning



proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* Education Symposium at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning



'Scrub Club' for a work by Megan Cope in Richard Bell, Embassy, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR
Education Symposium at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Samu Carvajal, National Art School

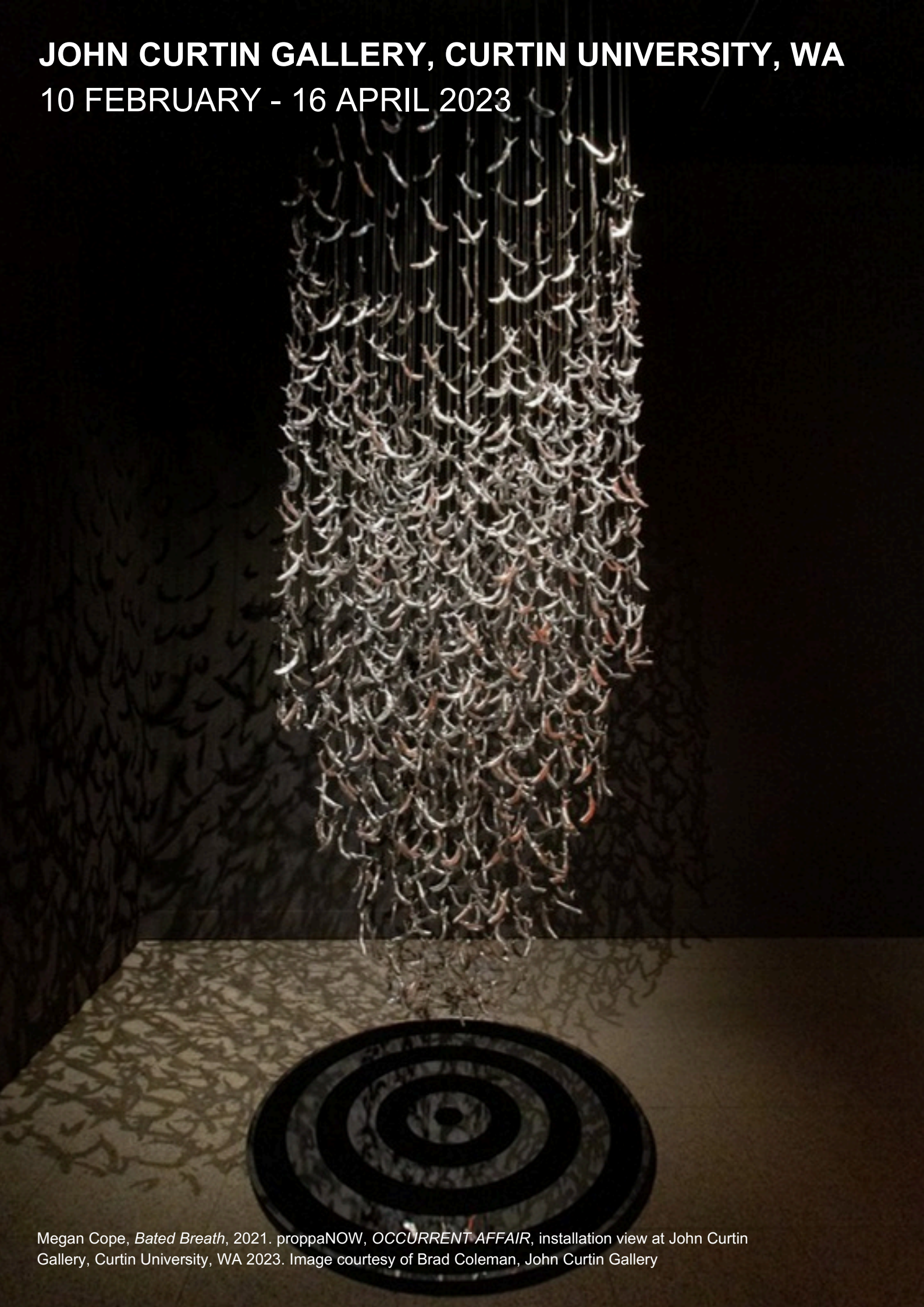
OCCURRENT AFFAIR

TOUR VENUES



Works by Gordon Hookey and Vernon Ah Kee in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Document Photography

JOHN CURTIN GALLERY, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, WA
10 FEBRUARY - 16 APRIL 2023



Megan Cope, *Bated Breath*, 2021. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA 2023. Image courtesy of Brad Coleman, John Curtin Gallery



Works by Tony Albert in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA 2023. Image courtesy of Brad Coleman, John Curtin Gallery

JOHN CURTIN GALLERY, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, WA PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

Perth Festival

In-Conversation with proppaNOW

Director's Talk

Orientation Week Tours

Open Day Tours

Crossing the Wire

Botanical Euphoria in the Great Southern Land

Student Writers Response

Design your own Shield

Richard Bell *Embassy* - Visa Exercise

Richard Bell *Embassy* - Weaving





Above: weaving workshop in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA 2023. Image courtesy of John Curtin Gallery

Previous: proppaNOW artists with UQ and John Curtin Gallery staff as part of opening event celebrations. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA 2023. Image courtesy of John Curtin Gallery

NAS GALLERIES, NATIONAL ART SCHOOL, NSW
24 JUNE - 5 AUGUST 2023





Jennifer Herd, *Mother's Country*, 2008. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR Education Symposium, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning

NAS GALLERIES, NATIONAL ART SCHOOL, NSW PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

Q and A - proppaNOW

DJ DJANABA and BARKAA

M&G NSW Education Symposium

Tony Albert *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)* - painting workshop

Megan Cope Kinyingarra (Oyster) Cleaning Workshop

Gordon Hookey Printmaking Residency

Panel Talk - proppaNOW Collective

Kids Workshop - Drawing the Future

Art Forum - *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*

NAS NEO (Rocked Sculptures) x *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*



NAS NEO workshop in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Nicole Anderson, National Art School



Ron Bradfield Jnr with proppaNOW members Tony Albert and Megan Cope. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Samu Carvajal, National Art School

NGUNUNGULA |
SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW
26 AUGUST - 5 NOVEMBER 2023



Works by Laurie Nilsen, Vernon Ah Kee and Jennifer Herd in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Document Photography



Megan Cope, *Arsenal*, 2021. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Document Photography

NGUNUNGULA | SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

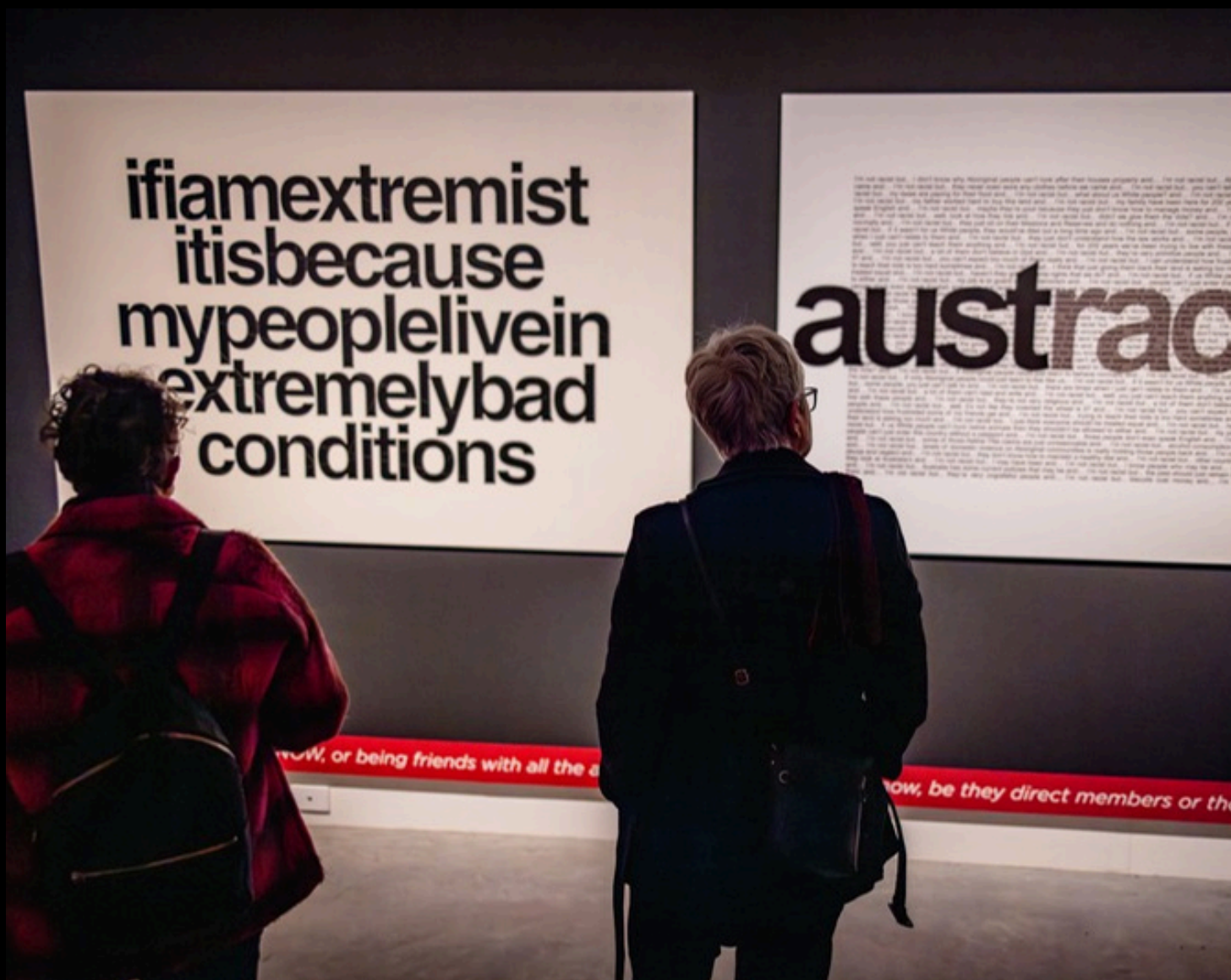
Tony Albert *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)* - mural workshop

Weaving workshops x 6

After school artmaking workshops with Aboriginal young people x 6

Community weekend artmaking workshops x 2

Art and Dementia tours x 2



Works by Vernon Ah Kee in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey



Works by Gordon Hookey and Laurie Nilsen in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Document Photography

GOSFORD REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW

18 NOVEMBER 2023 - 11 FEBRUARY 2024



Works by Tony Albert and Megan Cope in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Docqment



Tony Albert, *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*, 2021, participatory work in progress. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR, installation view at Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW, 2023

GOSFORD REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW

PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

Culture training and awareness program led by Awesome Black Creatives (Brook Scobie)

Painting with Tony Albert, *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*

Awesome Black Creatives weaving workshop

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Awesome Black in-conversation with filmmaker Auntie Maddy McGrady and performance by 2023 Australian Poetry Slam champion Uncle Rob Waters

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - MINGALETTA Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corp

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - NAISDA Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corp

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Pearl Beach Arboretum education activity by Awesome Black Creatives



Workshop in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW, 2023

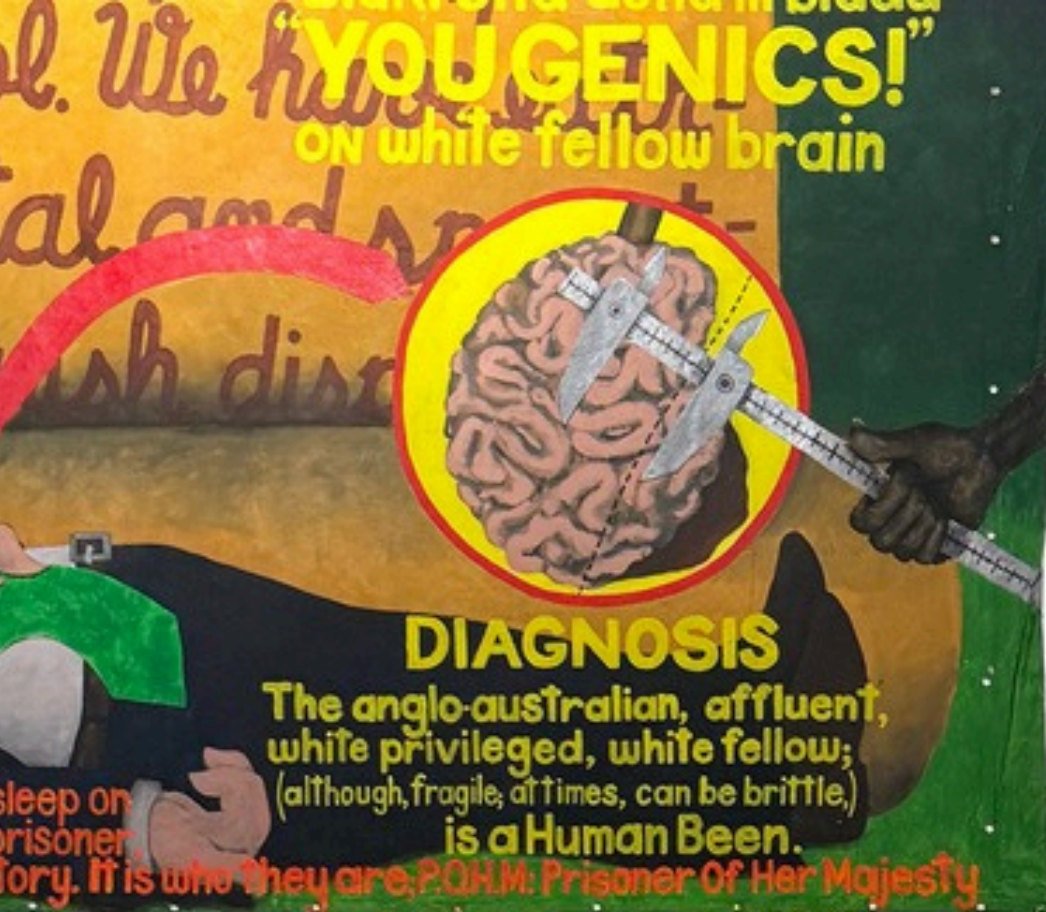


Works by Gordon Hookey in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Docqment

**USC GALLERY,
UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST, QLD
23 FEBRUARY - 5 MAY 2024**



proppaNOW members Richard Bell, Gordon Hookey and Vernon Ah Kee with Jennifer Herd, *In defence*, 2008.
proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024



Protest and Resistance Panel Discussion with Rob Weatherall, Les Malezar and Aunty Helena Gulash. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024

USC GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST, QLD PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

Richard Bell, Gordon Hookey and Vernon Ah Kee in-conversation with Aunty Helena Gulash

Guided tours x 20

Tony Albert's *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)* and Richard Bell's *Embassy* during UniSC Connect Week

UniSC CIDSEL Events and Seminars x 4

Protest and Resistance panel discussion: Rob Weatherall, Les Malezar and Aunty Helena Gulash

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - The Blak Laundry Takeover



The Blak Laundry Takeover in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024. Image courtesy of Sasha Parlett, Red Handed Productions

Richard Bell, *Little fish are sweet*, 2021. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024. Image courtesy of Tai Bobongie, Red Handed Productions



ARTSPACE MACKAY, QLD
2 AUGUST - 6 OCTOBER 2024



Works by Gordon Hookey in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Artspace Mackay, QLD, 2024.
Image courtesy of Jim Cullen, Artspace Mackay



proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Artspace Mackay, QLD, 2024.
Image courtesy of Jim Cullen, Artspace Mackay

ARTSPACE MACKAY, QLD

PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

UQ Art Museum Cultural Mediation Training

Artist talk with Richard Bell

Conversations with Art, Megan Cope's *Bated Breath*

Occupation Support Group SCOPE tour x 2

School tours x 2

Conversations with Art program

Art and Memory program

Tony Albert's *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)* - North Mackay High School with artist Leon Namai

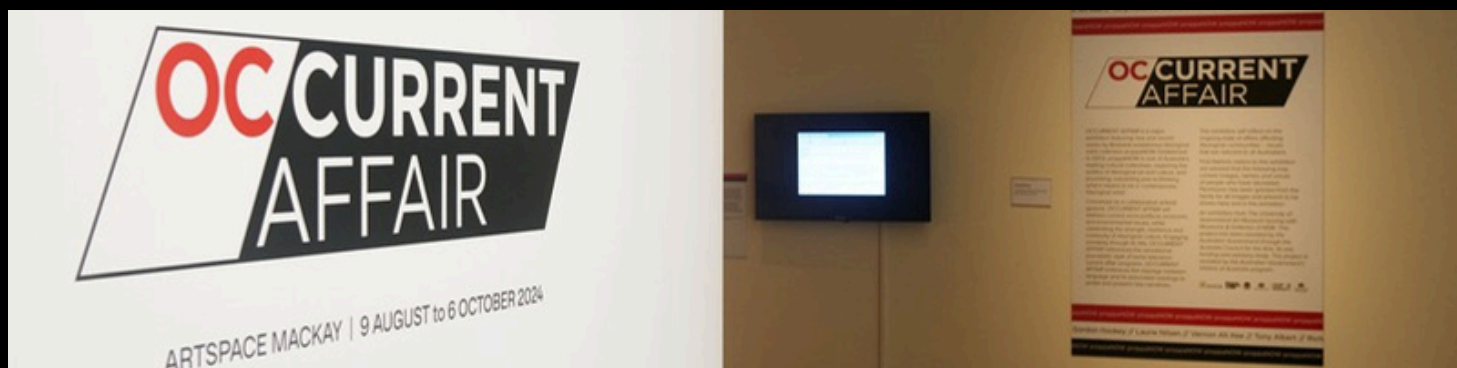
Tony Albert's *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)* - Kutta Mulla Gorinna Special Assistant School with artist Leon Namai

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Blak Coffee networking group

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - daily School Holidays art activities

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Lunchbox weaving workshops with Aunty Lee George

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - displayed at Gallery 31 exhibition space in partnership with CQ University





Vernon Ah Kee, *Scratch the surface*, 2019/21. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Artspace Mackay, QLD, 2024. Image courtesy of Jim Cullen

LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW

1 MARCH - 27 APRIL 2025



Tony Albert, *Terra Nullius (with Scrooge)*, 2021. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR, installation view at Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW, 2025



Works by Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW, 2025

LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY, NSW

PROGRAMMING SUMMARY

NOISY HOUR with Black Moon Society

You can go now by Richard Bell, film screening

Panel conversation with proppaNOW and Rhonda Roberts AO

OCCURRENT AFFAIR soft opening

Gathering Space with Kylie Caldwell

Words As Activism with Penny Evans

Auslan tour with Singrid Macdonald

Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Lismore People's Assembly x 2

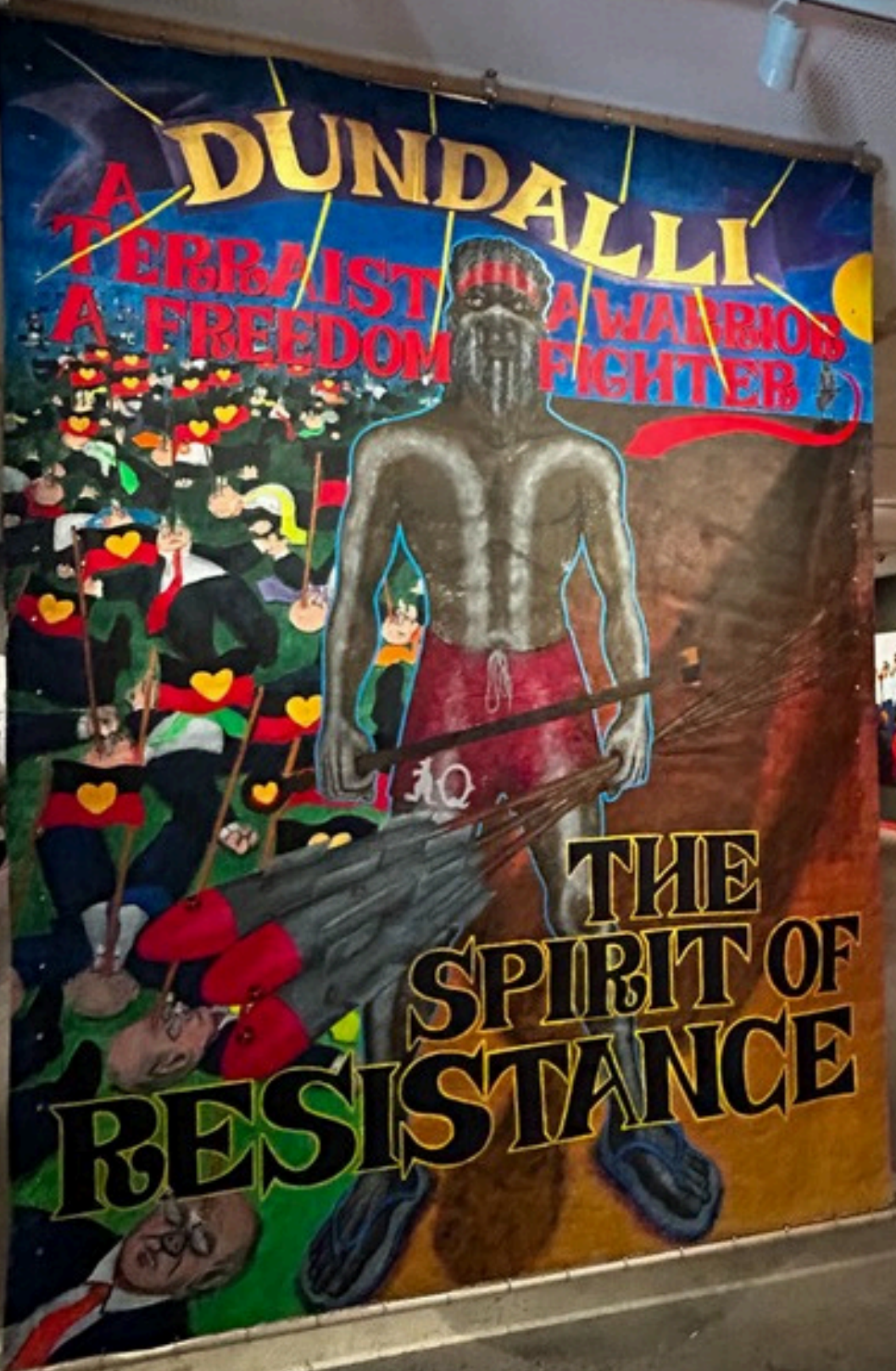
Richard Bell's *Embassy* - Weaving for Mullet x 2

Volunteer led tours

OCCURRENT AFFAIR closing celebration



Richard Bell at opening event celebrations. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW, 2025



VENUE & VISITOR FEEDBACK

Astonishing!! So powerful!!

Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW

The public program opportunities were great value. They allowed us to activate the space with the local Aboriginal community and make new connections for the future.

Ngununggula, NSW

The Austracism artwork stood out to me the most because they are all phrases that people commonly say (common racism) and stereotypes that people continue to believe. I think the artwork addresses this concept beautifully.

UniSC Art Gallery, QLD

Poignant story telling, discourse and narratively relevant to Australia and Indigenous Australia today.

Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW

The [Mediation Handbook] built a stable foundation for understanding the exhibition, the nuances, and unique qualities. It also helped to prepare staff to deliver tours, navigating social, cultural, and political topics appropriately. It was clear that a lot of effort had gone into the preparation and the staff would thrive if one was provided for each exhibition. Well done to the producers.

John Curtin Gallery, WA

We should look and listen.

Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW

Proppanow Exhibition - thought provoking, realisation and understanding of colonial discrimination since invasion.

Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW

Love everything about the exhibition- great themes, ideas, use of space and delivery.

UniSC, QLD

A reminder of the ongoing struggle for First Nation People for rightful respect & recognition.

UniSC Art Gallery, QLD

VENUE & VISITOR FEEDBACK

The Gosford Regional Gallery was able to re-engage with NAISDA Dance College after working with them during the Richard Bell EMBASSY installation and community engagement. This led to a curated dance performance by 3 of their Female Advanced Diploma Students at the opening of Karla Dickens exhibition, Embracing Shadows Saturday 22 June 2024.

Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW

The Mediation Handbook was extremely helpful for our volunteers. Many of them had never invigilated an exhibition with contemporary Aboriginal artists before.

Ngununggula, NSW

A truly mesmerising and engrossing exhibition. It brought conversations of “truth” to the forefront of our work at the gallery. The beauty and talent in the conception of the works enabled a soft landing for difficult discussions to happen.

John Curtin Gallery, WA



The Blak Laundry Takeover in Richard Bell, *Embassy*, 2013-ongoing. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at UniSC Art Gallery, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD, 2024. Image courtesy Sasha Parlett, Red Handed Productions

VENUE & VISITOR FEEDBACK

Most powerful exhibition at Ngununggula to date.

Ngununggula, NSW

So glad to hear the exhibition is touring the country.

UniSC Art Gallery, QLD

Very confronting exploring impact of colonisation on First Nations people.

Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW

Never before have I thought so deeply about the injustice in Australia.

Artspace Mackay, QLD

We greatly appreciated the support and attentiveness of the MGNSW staff throughout the exhibition. They were consistently responsive to the needs of all stakeholders, readily available to assist with problem-solving, and demonstrated a commendable level of flexibility when it was most needed.

Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW

Trap - I grew up in country qld & could relate to the powerful message of this piece.

UniSC Art Gallery, QLD

The public program opportunities were great value. They allowed us to activate the space with the local Aboriginal community and make new connections for the future.

Ngununggula, NSW

Great to see the wonderful ProppaNow collective here in Lismore.

Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW

The staff found it valuable to participate in the cultural mediation training as it gave us a better understanding of the five principals of mediation and the three As - ASSIST staff and volunteers to engage with more confidence, practice ACTIVE LISTENING and give AGENCY to the viewer. It offered tools and a process to engage visitors about the art in a conversation style that prompted respectful enquiry that will be helpful moving forward.

Artspace Mackay, QLD



proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey



Megan Cope, *Bated Breath*, 2021. proppaNOW, OCCURRENT AFFAIR, installation view at Ngununggula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey



Works by Gordon Hookey in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at Ngungungula, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Brian Rapsey

ADDITIONAL LINKS & RESOURCES



Comprehensive education and mediation resources supported venues to present the complex themes within the exhibition and were used extensively by venues and programming staff throughout the tour.



proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023.
Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning

[Museums & Galleries of NSW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* national tour webpage](#)

[*Exhibition Review: OCCURRENT AFFAIR: proppaNOW*](#), UQ Art Museum (QLD), by Gina Fairley, ArtsHub, 2021

[*Indigenous Arts Collective Wins International Prize for Art and Social Justice*](#), by Catherine Li, Arts Asia Pacific, 2022

[Western Australian Radio Highlights](#), Bec Bowman interview with Megan Cope and Lily Eather, *PERTH FESTIVAL 2023*, RTR FM

[*Celebrating 20 years of proppaNOW art collective*](#), Tony Albert, Megan Cope, Gordon Hookey, along with new members Lily Eather and Warraba Weatherall in conversation with Dr Stephen Gilchris at the National Art School, produced by Rudi Bremer, *AWAYE!*, ABC Radio, 2023

[*Trio of exhibitions exposes dark and violent truths*](#), by Jaimi Wright, *See Saw*, 2023

Occurrent Affair: Award-winning art collective proppaNOW is bringing an exhibition on Indigenous affairs to Sydney, by Caitlyn Todoroski, *TimeOut*, 2023

Aussie artists who won a \$US25,000 art prize take provocative work to Sydney, by Arlie Alizzi, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2023

ProppaNOW First Peoples collective wows Sydney, by Rhiannon Clarke, *National Indigenous Times*, 2023

First Nations artist collective proppaNOW welcomes three new members, by Rhiannon Clarke, *National Indigenous Times*, 2023

OCCURRENT AFFAIR opens at the National Art School, *Australian Arts Review*, 2023

Sovereignty was never ceded: Protest, resistance and resilience with proppaNOW, interview with proppaNOW, *Art Guide Australia*, 2024





Works by Megan Cope and Laurie Nilsen in proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning



proppaNOW's acclaimed touring exhibition, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, concluded its four-year-expedition in April 2025. A collaborative undertaking with the University of Queensland Art Museum and Museums and Galleries New South Wales; the exhibition marked a significant return for proppaNOW as Australia's leading Indigenous art collective. *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* was nothing short of a knock-out, both visually arresting and intellectually provocative. Behind new and existing works from all proppaNOW members, in many ways it represented a final statement (through new works specifically for this exhibition) by one of its early figures, Laurie Nilsen.

OCCURRENT AFFAIR has become an entity that has grown into a defining chapter in proppaNOW's ongoing legacy.

In 2023, proppaNOW welcomed three new members: Shannon Brett, Warraba Weatherall, and myself, Lily Eather. All three of us have longstanding ties to the collective, ensuring a natural and reassured integration. Shannon and Warraba, both highly accomplished artists, curators, and academics, were mentored by proppaNOW members early in their careers. For me, as the daughter of Laurie Nilsen, proppaNOW is somewhat of a pseudo family. Joining the collective felt like a natural way to uphold and honour my dad's work and legacy.

Fortuitously, as the final tour dates of *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* were released, a new and exciting opportunity to show an extended iteration of the exhibition at the Cairns Courthouse Gallery emerged. Peggy Lane, (then the First Nations Curator with the Cairns Regional Council), requested the collective present a new focus to the exhibition; to interrogate and challenge the historical weight of the building itself. Formerly the Cairns Court House, the building is a site fraught with painful colonial history to the local Bama and Indigenous communities more broadly. Despite its current function as a gallery, today it continues to deliver small stabs through the colonial architecture and oppressive historical associations. Bearing the Royal Coat of Arms as an ode to the Monarchy and containing spaces named 'Court Room', 'Barristers and Bailiffs', and 'Clerks,' the building in fact serves as an ongoing reminder of injustice.

Shannon, as proppaNOW's resident curator for the exhibition, worked tirelessly and painstakingly to dismantle these barriers. Under their curatorial leadership, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR: JUSTICE NOW* becomes an act of reclamation, transforming the space into a platform for critical conversations about Indigenous art and activism. As leaders in the field, proppaNOW continues to interrogate the meaning of Aboriginal art, with new major commissions by Shannon and Warraba further extending the scope of the collective's mission.

Shannon's new work *Black Joy, After O'Grady, 2025* is a poem and installation composed of six paintings in three parts. The artwork comprises suspended forms attached to the ceiling of the gallery space, as hung ideas poetically juxtaposing the knowing of blackness with the ongoing pressure of whiteness. This work intersects the artists feelings of love, power and respect experienced through joy and survival of culture and place in the colony of Australia.

This work is dedicated to Lorraine O'Grady, - champion of the diptych and all in between - who Brett researched as part of their study for PhD.



Shannon Brett
Black Joy, After O'Grady, 2025
 acrylic on canvas



Warraba Weatherall
Equations (1), 2025
 acrylic on canvas

Warraba's work *Equations (1)*, 2025 is part of a painting series that examines how violence has been normalised throughout history. The work presents visual equations—constructed from both imposed and omitted histories—to explore the roots of present-day social dynamics that continue to deny human and cultural rights. By engaging with social memory and the systems that uphold inequality, *Equations (1)* invites viewers to question structures of power and consider new ways of imagining justice, access, and redistribution.

While *OCCURRENT AFFAIR: JUSTICE NOW*, poses as a new entity and fresh iteration, the core of the exhibition remains deeply rooted in its original conception. Referencing the Australian TV program 'A Current Affair', it critically engages with current socio-political issues, examining the sensationalism of mainstream media and its role in targeting and marginalising minorities. At its heart, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* is a powerful commentary by proppaNOW on enduring struggles through their love for people and their communities.

OCCURRENT AFFAIR: JUSTICE NOW will not only mark a powerful statement in the collective's enduring legacy, but it has also reaffirmed proppaNOW's deep commitment to art as activism. The collective's expansion means that *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* is not just a reflection of the past - it is a moving, living part of the collective. Through its boldness, it is a celebration of who we are and our unwavering call for justice.

Lily Eather



Jennifer Herd, *Resist, Rebel, Reclaim*, 2021. proppaNOW, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, installation view at NAS Gallery, National Art School, NSW, 2023. Image courtesy of Jacquie Manning

OC CURRENT AFFAIR

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