



# RICHARD BELL

## LESSONS ON ETIQUETTE AND MANNERS

Curators: Max Delany and Francis E. Parker

### EXHIBITION DATES

5 February – 3 April 2013

Opening function Saturday 9 February 3 – 5pm

### MEDIA

For all media enquiries please contact Rosemary Forde [rosemary.forde@monash.edu](mailto:rosemary.forde@monash.edu)



## INTRODUCTION

Provocative and controversial, Richard Bell is the subject of a survey opening MUMA's exhibition program for 2013. *Richard Bell: Lessons on Etiquette and Manners* presents the work of this major Australian artist who confronts the assumptions surrounding race politics in Australia.

Bell penned 'Bell's Theorem: Aboriginal Art – It's a White Thing' in 2002, an influential essay making a compelling case for the autonomy of Aboriginal art and artists. His reputation was sealed the following year when he won the 20th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award for the painting *Scientia e metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)* 2003 and accepted the prize at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory wearing one of his extensive collections of T-shirts bearing incendiary slogans.

Never afraid to court controversy, Bell judged the Sulman art prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2011 with the toss of a coin. An agent provocateur and regular presence on panel discussions and at major art events nationally and internationally, he maintains a constant challenge to the status quo. This was acknowledged recently by the influential blog *The Art Life* that described Bell as 'probably the most powerful artist in the Australian art world right now', placing him at number 24 on the inaugural list of the 50 most powerful people.

*Richard Bell: Lessons on Etiquette and Manners* was initiated by MUMA's former Director Max Delany and will be Bell's first major presentation in Melbourne. Highlights of the exhibition include the artist's collaboration with Emory Douglas, former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party in the United States, *Peace heals, war kills (Big ass mutha fuckin mural)* 2011-12, and a significant new installation *A prelude to imagining victory* 2012-13, which recreates the first Aboriginal Tent Embassy erected in 1972 on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra. The installation will be the site of a series of talks by radical political leaders.

Bell's public persona will be represented in the exhibition by three videos, a

selection of T-shirts and what the artist refers to as his 'fur bling', in which he makes his public appearances. Painting remains at the core of his practice, however, and key works over two decades from the early 1990s to the present will figure prominently.

Bell's work embraces the practice of appropriation in a fierce bear hug, seizing the visual languages of celebrated Western artists to draw attention to the appropriation of Indigenous culture. Against this background, Bell has devised memorable and incisive aphorisms that cut to the heart of race relations and the perpetuation of false histories.

– Geraldine Barlow, Acting Director, MUMA

## CATALOGUE

The exhibition will be supported by a full-colour publication featuring insightful new essays by Aboriginal journalist Daniel Browning and art historians Rex Butler and Ian McLean, which consider the role of politics in Bell's work and Australian society. MUMA is also proud to bring together a collection of Bell's writings from the influential 'Bell's Theorem: Aboriginal Art – It's a White Thing' to its unpublished sequel, 'Psalm Singing (Australian Art, it's an Aboriginal Thing)'.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

A series of artist's talks, forums and a program of addresses by Indigenous leaders to animate Bell's installation, *A prelude to imagining victory* 2012-13, will be held to coincide with *Richard Bell: Lessons on Etiquette and Manners*.

For further details and additional public programs see [www.monash.edu.au/muma/events](http://www.monash.edu.au/muma/events)



## ARTISTS BIOGRAPHY

Richard Bell was born in 1953 in Charleville, Queensland, and is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, and Gurang Gurang communities. Based in Brisbane, he was a founding member of art collectives the Campfire Group in 1990 and proppaNOW in 2003.

Working with humour and agit-prop activism, Bell's works confront and unsettle common ideas about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians' relationships to each other, to their country's history and to art itself. His paintings play with the practice of appropriation, often miming the pop art styles of Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns and the paint drips of Jackson Pollock, while using texts that complicate the way we think about racism and race politics in Australia. More recently, his work has taken on a new international focus, critiquing Western art and civilisation, and the way it represents marginal cultures.

Bell's work has been the subject of numerous significant exhibitions since 1990. In 2006 the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, presented the survey exhibition *Richard Bell: Positivity*; and in 2009 *I am not sorry*, was held at Location One, New York, where he was the recipient of a Location One International Fellowship. More recently, *Uz vs. Them*, a major touring exhibition of Bell's work, organised by the American Federation of the Arts, premiered at Tufts University, Boston, in 2011 and concludes at Indiana University Art Museum in 2013.

Bell has participated in numerous significant group exhibitions within Australia and overseas, which have included: *Unfamiliar Territory: Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art 1992*, Art Gallery of South Australia; *The Boundary Rider: 9th Biennale of Sydney, 1992/93*; *Arajara: Art of the First Australians*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, 1993; *Australian Perspecta 1993*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; *the National Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin, 2003, of which he was the winner; *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2007; *16th Biennale of Sydney: Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, 2008; *Half-Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008; *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2010; *The 4th Auckland Triennial: Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o T māki, 2010; *Parallel Collisions: 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2012; and later in 2013, Bell will exhibit in the *Fifth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*.

Bell's work is represented in the collections of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; and also the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Richard Bell is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane.