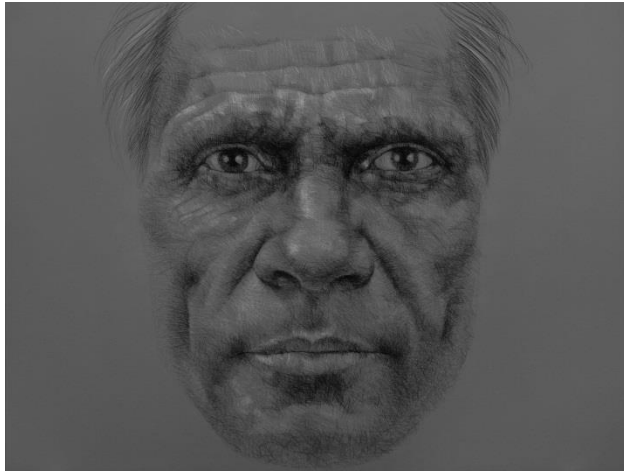


Vernon Ah Kee: not an animal or a plant

NAS Gallery, National Art School Sydney



Vernon Ah Kee, *George Sibley* (2008) acrylic, charcoal and crayon on canvas 180 x 240 cm

Sydney, Australia: Vernon Ah Kee: not an animal or a plant solo-exhibition opens at NAS Gallery, National Art School in Sydney's Darlinghurst on Saturday 7 January and is on display free of charge to the public until Saturday 11 March 2017.

Forming part of the Sydney Festival 2017 program, this exhibition is a provocative investigation of race, ideology and politics, marking the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum which recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and included them in the census. 2017 also marks Ah Kee's 50th birthday. When Vernon was born in far north Queensland he was not counted as a citizen.

Michael Lynch, National Art School Interim Director, said "Vernon Ah Kee is an internationally recognised Australian artist and we are honoured to present his first solo exhibition in Sydney since 2008 at NAS Gallery as part of Sydney Festival."

"Importantly, Ah Kee's work presents a thought-provoking portrait of black/white political issues, attitudes and ideologies. Through masterful drawings of his forebears to text-based installations and paintings, Ah Kee weaves the history and language of colonisation with aspects of today's affairs to expose degrees of underlying racism in contemporary Australian society."

This exhibition is both visually and conceptually arresting and presents important works from Vernon Ah Kee's career including his major work *fantasies of the good* (2004). This series of 13 sensitively-drawn charcoal portraits was prompted by historical documentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people assembled by anthropologist Norman Tindale in the 1930s, when it was widely believed that Aboriginal people would become extinct. Ah Kee has drawn upon images of his own relatives, and while Tindale's photographs provided a valuable record of Aboriginal subjects from all over Australia, each person is only referred to by number rather than name, an example of the disrespect and underlying racism present in Australian society at the time.

The exhibition includes an opportunity to revisit *Born in this Skin*, Ah Kee's confrontational work from the 2008 Biennale of Sydney. The work involves a disused dockworkers' toilet block on Cockatoo Island, heavily graffitied and squalid, that Ah Kee claimed and included as part of his work in the international Biennale exhibition. With this act of claiming and naming, the artist focuses not only on

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historical processes of invasion and colonisation, but he also provides a chilling portrait of the extremes of deeply held, brutal attitudes in everyday society that are not only racist, but also homophobic and misogynist.

NAS Gallery Curator, Judith Blackall said, “NAS Gallery is excited to be working with Vernon to present key works from the artist’s powerful and diverse oeuvre. The exhibition includes new works alongside text-based installation, drawing, painting and photography. It is an opportunity for the public to reflect and engage with important issues in Australian popular culture, particularly the dichotomy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies and cultures.”

Vernon Ah Kee was born in 1967 in Innisfail, in the far north of Queensland. He is a member of the Yidindji, Kuku Yalandji, Kolo Berrin and Gugu Yimithirr peoples and today lives and works in Brisbane. He is a conceptual artist and founding member of the *proppaNOW* artists’ collective.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Vernon Ah Kee holds a bachelor and Doctorate of Visual Arts from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith, Brisbane and in recent years has earned a considerable international reputation. In 2015 Ah Kee represented Australia in the 14th Istanbul Biennale *Saltwater: A Theory of Thought Forms* and in 2009 the 53rd Venice Biennale in the group exhibition *Once Removed*. In February 2016, his work was presented in the exhibition *Everywhere: The external present in Indigenous Art from Australia* at Harvard Art Museums, MA. His work is held in numerous national and international public and private collections including the Sprengel Museum, Hanover in Germany; National Gallery of Canada; National Gallery of Australia; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart as well as most State Collections.

Where National Art School Gallery (NAS Gallery), located at Forbes Street, Sydney NSW.

When Saturday 7 January to Saturday 11 March 2017
Mondays through to Saturdays, 11.00am to 5.00pm

Tickets Free



For interviews and further information contact:

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