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supported by



image: Real Blak Tingz (Gabi Briggs & Arika Waulu) *Resistance* (detail), 2017, mixed media installation, dimensions variable



## **Foreward**

The Koorie Heritage Trust is proud to present *The Blak Matriarchy*, by the Real Blak Tingz (Gabi Briggs x Arika Waulu), an exhibition that has been commissioned to reflect on a date of national significance in 2017; the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum. On May 27 1967, in a landslide victory, Australians voted to amend the constitution to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and to allow the Commonwealth to create laws on their behalf. Contrary to our national memory, the referendum did not give Aboriginal people the right to vote or citizenship. These rights had already been introduced years earlier in both state and federal law, and yet this important date is often celebrated as the first time our communities felt recognized by Australian society as being entitled to the same rights and benefits as the rest of the population.

50 years later, and over a century since Federation, we are still interrogating what it means to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander both politically and socially within the Commonwealth of Australia. Through this exhibition, the Real Blak Tingz use art as resistance, drawing our attention

to the matriarchal lines of power that have long governed our families and communities, stretching back generations before this country existed and many tens of thousands of years before our invasion and colonisation. By acknowledging our Matriarchs, we acknowledge the long and continuing journey towards Reconciliation, and particularly the contribution of our Matriarchs on this journey.

I gratefully acknowledge our key supporters, the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria's Organisations Investment Program, the Australian Government through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program, and the City of Melbourne.

I especially wish to acknowledge and thank the Matriarchs represented in this exhibition and the artists; Gabi Briggs and Arika Waulu for all their work on this project. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Trust's curatorial staff, in particular our Senior Collections and Exhibitions Manager, Charlotte Christie, our Public Programs Officer, Zenzi Clark, and our Collections Coordinator Jane Walton.

**Tom Mosby**

CEO The Koorie Heritage Trust



## **Curatorial Statement**

*Real Blak Tingz (Gabi Briggs x Arika Waulu)*

Through the curation of *The Blak Matriarchy: Leenyarr & Kokæ*, it became clear that the referendum's political and social memory is laced with grandiose imaginings of a reconciled, conscious Australia. However, fifty years on, selected/collected statistics on us actively defy the notion of a reconciled Australia, and bring light to the complex realities of our plight.

*More of our kids are being stolen.*

*More of our men and women being locked up.*

*More of our young warriors taken too soon.*

***Less country to go home to.***

### **Real Blak Tingz**

We are a collective that imagines a decolonial, powerful Sovereign Blak Matriarchy as an act of resistance against a colonial patriarchy that is imposed upon us, our Blak bodies and kin. We do so by intervening within public spaces and in the gallery through the act of curating and working projection, video, photography, and performance.

## Gallery 1

*Wuurn*

Reconstruction/Deconstruction of  
traditional Gunditjmara rock home  
volcanic rock

*Ngathook Kalpeerno Partoopang –  
I am hungry*

plaster sculpture with projection

*Peem Thanampool*

archival imagery framed, mantelpiece

*VOTE LEENYARR & KOKAE*

mural

*MEERREENG – country*

mural

### **For Grandmothers Above**

Where kokae, where Leenyarr,  
Crying under the old birthing tree,  
hold the earth in her two hands wet flow of tears,  
singing song for grandmothers above,  
sending them message of heartache and pain,  
Waa perched low concerned for the cry,  
together sing song for grandmothers above, cradle her body,  
cradle her body, cradle all children yet to come,  
may they always feel love as they walk barefoot on the sand  
and rubbing the clay through their hands,  
toxic smell invade, invade our kooyong, yam, seal and whale,  
once strong rock home big families, sleeping warm,  
rock fences erected now, sleeping cold,  
Kokae and Leenyarr  
Come wrap your sweet soft arms around me, call me home call  
me home, young birthing trees awaiting their first bub, rivers now  
reconnecting old songlines, murrang in season once again.

*Arika Waulu*

## Gallery 2

*GWEN BROOKE*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*EUNICE WRIGHT*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*SANDRA ONUS*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*CAROL POTTER*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*ALMA THORPE*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*JOAN VICKERY*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*BUNTA PATTEN*

Giclee print (framed)  
841 x 1189 mm

*Murrnong Sticks*

digging sticks mounted on stands, dirt  
dimensions variable

The referendum is remembered for hailing the greatest 'Yes' vote in Commonwealth history with an overwhelming 90.77% of Australians voting in support. However, despite such a large number of supporters voting yes and engaging in the process, a false memory of the referendum question is evident fifty years on. Many people would believe the referendum gave us voting rights even though in most states we had voting rights indiscriminately bar Western Australia and Queensland. What actually was proposed was to include Aboriginal people in the census and to allow the Commonwealth government to make laws for Aboriginal people.

The false memory that is retained about the referendum giving voting rights and citizenship is dangerously different to what it enacted; it fundamentally allowed more immediate control of the Blak population by the Commonwealth Government. Fifty years on, the removal of power from states to Commonwealth changed little in our plight and quality of life.

Looking at the referendum retrospectively, we were intrigued by how it is manifested in the Australian memory and how it intersects with the ever-present Blak Matriarchy. Despite the imposition of the Commonwealth, the roles and functions of Matriarchs have been ever-present. The Matriarch has played mother, nurturer and the fighter alongside our men prior to and after invasion, a partnership that is the linchpin to our survival. Our journey of survival has been because of those who came before us, and those before them.

Real Blak Tingz is informed by our realities of traditionally coming from matrilineal societies, where our Matriarchs hold and maintain power within our clans. *The Blak Matriarchy: Leenyarr & Kokæ* has been shaped by the need to celebrate and honour our Matriarchs and their realities, to highlight the existence of our lores within this land-mass Australia, and we do so by manipulating western tropes of power; the portrait, and flipping dirtied ideas of us through the reclamation and reconstruction of our homes, feeds and yarns.