

TONY ALBERT

Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia
Born 1981 in Townsville, Australia



View Tony Albert's artist page on the website [here](#)

Tony Albert is one of Australia's foremost contemporary artists with a longstanding interest in the cultural misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. He is a cultural leader, both as an artist and a curator. His work is held in all state and most regional museums across Australia, and many important private collections.

Drawing on both personal and collective histories, his multidisciplinary practice considers the ways in which optimism might be utilised to overcome adversity. His work poses crucial questions such as how do we remember, give justice to, and rewrite complex and traumatic histories?

Albert is acknowledged industry wide as a valued ambassador for Indigenous community and culture. He was recently announced as the Artistic Director for the 5th National Indigenous Art Triennial: *After The Rain* for the National Gallery of Australia. He is the first First Nations Curatorial Fellow for the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, the first Indigenous Trustee for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, a member of the Art Gallery of New South Wales Indigenous advisory, a board member for the City of Sydney's Public Art Panel and member of the Art & Place Board at the Queensland Children's Hospital. In January 2023 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Griffith University for his significant contribution to the arts.

Albert was recently awarded several prestigious public commissions both within Australia and internationally, including an installation for Public Art Fund's *Global Positioning*, which debuted in January 2022 on bus shelters throughout New York City, Chicago, and Boston. He represented Australia with his commission for *Constellations: Global Reflections*, a first of its kind exhibition curated by world-renowned US based art curator Lance Fung which took place during the 2022 G20 Summit in Bali. Also, in 2022 he was included in *Prime: Arts Next Generation* (Phaidon) featuring the top 100 most distinctive and innovative young artists from around the world. Most recently, renowned Indigenous collective proppaNOW, of which Tony is a founding member, were awarded the prestigious 2022-24 *Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice* (USA).

Upcoming commissions within Australia include *Inhabitant*, a monumental 15-metre-long floating botanical sculpture which will welcome visitors at the entrance of the transformed Queen's Wharf in Brisbane, and *The Big Hose*, an iconic outdoor play sculpture for QAGOMA which is being made in collaboration with artist Nell. His collaboration with Angela Tiatia, *Murmurations*, was launched at Museum of History NSW, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney in 2023 and *Two Worlds Colliding*, a culturally informed design and artwork for Allianz Sydney Football Stadium was unveiled in 2022. Other significant national commissions include *Healing Land*, *Remembering Country*, NIRIN: the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020). *House of Discards*, The National: New Australian Art, Carriageworks, Sydney (2019); *I am Visible*, The National Gallery of Australia (2019) and *Yininmadyemi Thou didst Let Fall*, Sydney Hyde Park War Memorial, City of Sydney (2015).

Albert is strongly represented in major national and international collections including Fondation Opal, Switzerland; National Gallery of Australia; National Gallery of Victoria; Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Parliament House New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia; Art Gallery of South Australia; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art.

**ARTWORKS PRESENTED AT
THE ARMORY SHOW**



Sullivan+Strumpf is honoured to present Tony Albert's solo exhibition, *Unpacking History*, at New York's prestigious Armory Show in September this year. Featuring 7 new works on canvas and a large text installation, this dynamic body of work expands upon his acclaimed *Conversations with Margaret Preston* series to interrogate the problematic use of First Nations iconography in domestic design and explores the boundary between ownership and appropriation.

Incorporating treasured souvenirs from Albert's personal archive, these powerful works serve as painful reiterations of a violent and oppressive history that act as an important societal record. Through them, the artist seeks to confront themes of colonialism and generational trauma.

'Albert with Preston and his reclamation of Aboriginalia enacts the principles of Indigenous self-determination, which includes how to deal with and reconcile pernicious legacy and presence of Aboriginalia in contemporary Australia. Turning nineteenth century European landscape and still life genre on its head, Albert's still lives are similarly bound with ideas of conquest, ownership, and possession but this time of taking back and making one's own and make proper Aboriginal art, design, and life (including its misappropriation) by and for Aboriginal people.' - Exhibition essay excerpt by Eriola Pira of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics.



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Dismantle), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



AUSTRALIA

OF AUSTRALIA

ABOUT AUSTRALIA

DESIGNED IN AUSTRALIA

DESIGNED IN AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIA BY BUCK

PURE AUSTRALIA

BARK PAINTING OF R

Australia





Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Disconnect), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
183 x 152.5 cm / 6' x 5'

USD\$ 39,000



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Discard), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Disappear), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Disarm), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Defoliate), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000





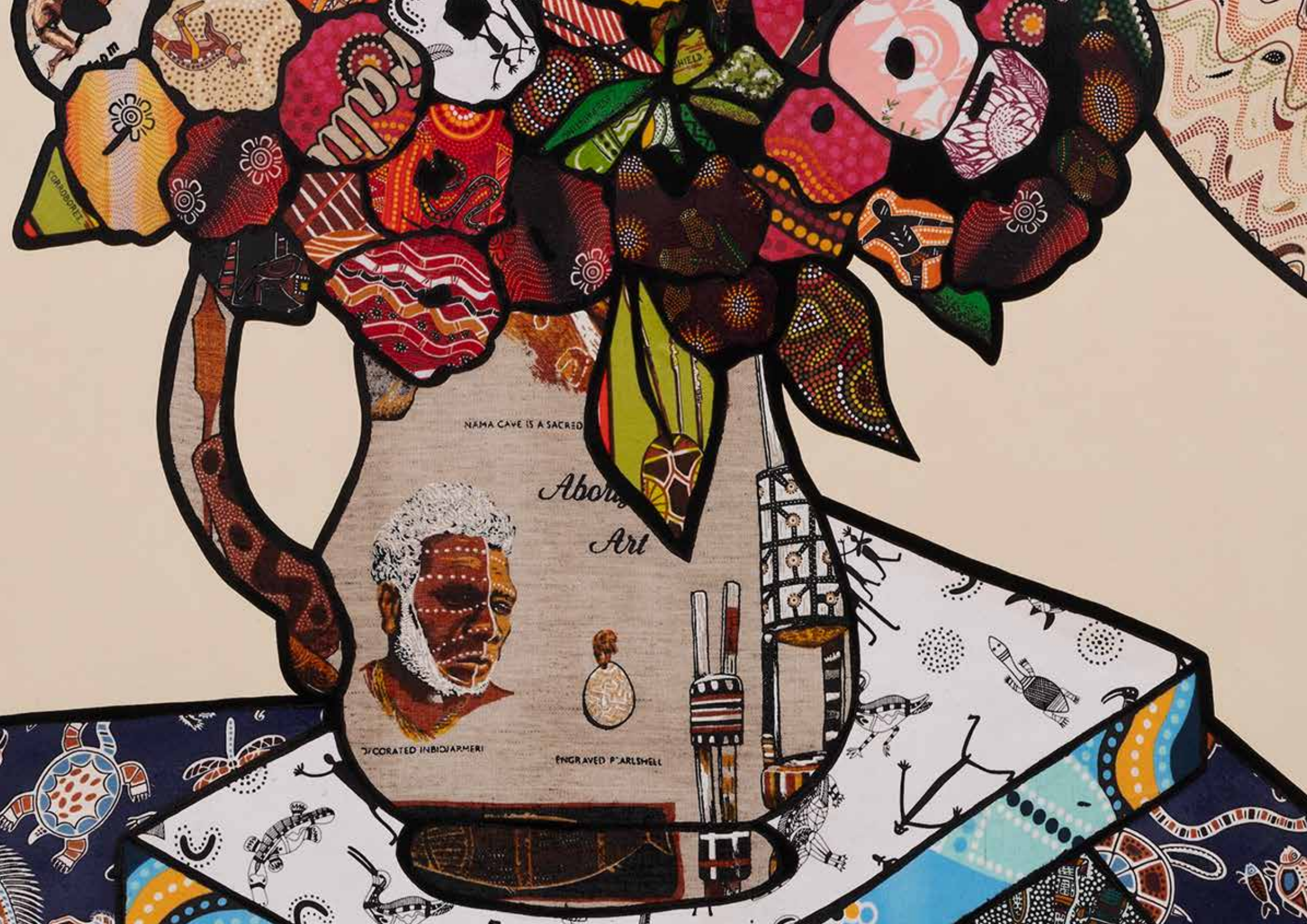
Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Disburden), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



Tony Albert
Unpacking History (Dispel), 2024
acrylic and vintage appropriated
fabric on canvas
101.5 x 101.5cm / 3'3.7" x 3'3.7"

USD\$ 24,000



NAMA CAVE IS A SACRED

About
Art

DECORATED INDIAN MERI

ENGRAVED PEARLSHELL

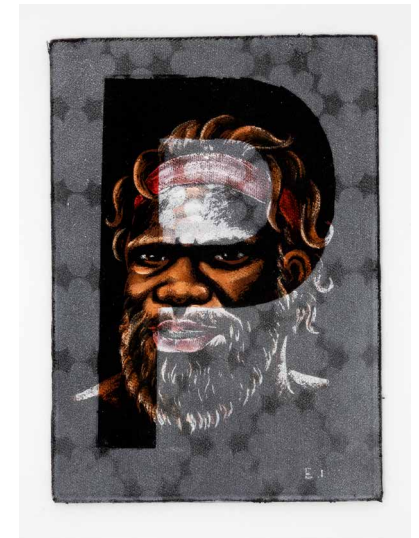
WE CANNOT LIVE
IN THE PAST
BUT THE PAST
LIVES IN US



WE CANNOT LIVE
IN THE PAST
BUT THE PAST
LIVES IN US

Tony Albert
*We Cannot Live in the Past but the
Past Lives in Us*, 2023
appropriated found vintage objects,
timber and acrylic
180 x 200 cm (approx) / 5'11" x 6'7"

Sold



Tony Albert
*We Cannot Live in the Past but the
Past Lives in Us*, 2023
artwork details

View all letters [here](#).

Tony Albert's Appropriate Aboriginalia

By Eriola Pira

Eriola Pira is a New York-based curator and writer. She is a curator at The Vera List Center for Art and Politics.

Renowned Australian painter and printmaker Margaret Preston's (1875-1963) was one of the first non-Indigenous Australian artists to incorporate and center Aboriginal life and culture and position it into a national visual language. Working in the early 20th century, her still lifes were bound with the ideas and aesthetics of Modernism, which included, as it did for her contemporaries in Europe (she studied in Munich, Paris, and London), appreciation and appropriation of non-European art. Working a century apart from Preston, acclaimed Aboriginal artist Tony Albert, appropriates her still lifes of native flowers to enter into a dialogue not only with Preston's artistic legacy and that of Modernism, as do many of his contemporaries, but also reckons with the tradition and inheritance of Aboriginalia, which Preston's work inadvertently quickened, and challenges our understanding of appropriation, contemporary Australian and Aboriginal visual culture, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Like many a modernist artist in search of primitivism and other art forms from colonized or exotic places and cultures, Preston had also traveled throughout Asia, where she was heavily influenced by Japanese woodblock prints and Chinese landscapes. A student of Aboriginal art and design (she had traveled extensively throughout Australia), at the time she held progressive beliefs about the depth and intricacy of Aboriginal art and what it meant for national Australian identity and expression and world art. Preston's views reflected developments in European art influenced by colonial expansion and extraction, while they were also paralleled by the Australian government's assimilation policies in place at the time. Unlike her European counterparts -living and working in the context of a settler colonial state (founded on the premise that Aboriginal people were primitive and intellectually inferior people either be eliminated or assimilated) hers seems to have been as much a nation-building project as about Australian art's unique contribution to Modernism, namely Aboriginal art's flat design, solid colors, and symbols.

Aboriginal art was not only a subject matter and style to be adopted and freely appropriated by white Australians like herself, but also applied widely to all aspects of Australian life, from the decorative arts to home décor. Aboriginal flora and fauna and Indigenous motifs, designs, and earthy colors became the defining element of Preston's hand colored woodcut still lifes of native flowers, distinguished by striking geometric forms and defined by prominent black outlines. A lowly regarded genre in the hierarchy of high art, still lifes allowed Preston to explore different styles, colors and compositions and bridging the gap between art and craft, but also, on account of her gender, her prints were dismissed by critics as decorative. Still, she saw potential in the decorative arts and crafts for their mass appeal and reach beyond the traditional art world.

Establishing Australia's national aesthetic on craft, she believed, would put women at its forefront and safeguard that Indigenous art and design remained vibrant and relevant in a modern, cosmopolitan Australia. Preston's success as an artist and encouragement inadvertently also paved the way for the cultural pillaging and extractive economy that followed as Aboriginal designs and motifs were plastered on

everything from tea towels to ashtrays, fabric design, biscuit tins, figurines, ornaments and prints, all of which have become Albert's primary materials.

Albert's practice has long centered around his vast collection of Aboriginalia, Aboriginal cultural designs and figures in souvenirs, bric-a-brac, and home decor, which he's amassed since childhood. Trafficking in racist stereotypes, these objects and designs were easily recognized, commodified, and imitated. They became widely available and accessible, perhaps achieving the totalizing effect if not the spirit of Preston's project. At least since 2021, Albert, in his signature use of Aboriginalia, has been in dialogue with Preston and the legacy of her work taking up her call and vision for an Aboriginal national visual identity. For his Sullivan+Strumpf booth at this year's Armory Show, Albert presents his third series in this body of work, "Unpacking History", which began with "Conversations with Margaret Preston" and later with "Remarks." As in these earlier series, in some seven new paintings, Albert appropriates Preston's work and signature style to engage with Preston and her ideas and through her with a contemporary public about art, identity, and their interrelation. Retaining Preston's stark and geometric shapes but filling them in with scraps of fabric from his collection, Albert uses the very same imagery of exploitative tropes that Preston's work spawned to disturb and complicate their reading and reception today. Colorful vintage fabrics full of text, figures, designs that literally and figuratively read "Aboriginal art" is meticulously composed to evoke or mimic Preston, while offering a dialectical juxtaposition of high art and mass-reproduced culture that is a hallmark of post-War contemporary art.

Less interested in decrying her appropriation and inappropriate use of sacred images without acknowledgment or respect, which goes without saying and has been rehearsed by many other artists who have also taken Preston to task, Albert's intentions are to reconcile her aims of promoting Aboriginal art within Modernism and the unintended outcome of reducing it to kitsch caricatures and commodity objects. The double appropriation, Preston's modernist iconography and pop culture's Aboriginalia, stages the tension between the two in Albert's work, while reclaiming and returning both to their origin, an Aboriginal maker and rightful inheritor and custodian of the legacies of Aboriginal art, in Modernism and in Aboriginalia. Albert's approach, that is an earnest conversation with Preston and her legacy, both engages with the premise of her argument and work of positioning Aboriginal art within Modernism and extends it into the present and within contemporary art, where for better or for worse it exists alongside Aboriginalia.

For Albert, much like for Preston for whom still lifes were 'really laboratory

tables on which aesthetic problems can be isolated,' the quiet radicalism of still lifes, the prosaic nature of the subject matter, allows for experimentation with form and meaning and way to explore broader question about genre, gender, self (determination), and cultural appropriation. Nesting Aboriginalia's troubling presence within Preston's flowers and domain of domestic respectability, can also be understood as a queer gesture of sorts and part of Albert's ongoing investigation of visibility and invisibility. But Albert doesn't hide or conceal Aboriginalia so much as contextualizes, interprets and recasts it from an Aboriginal perspective, underscoring its role in the erasure and subjugation of Aboriginal people.

Removing these harmful images and objects, remnants of a violent and oppressive history, as he does, from circulation and their intended use in white

Albert's practice has long centered around his vast collection of Aboriginalia, Aboriginal cultural designs and figures in souvenirs, bric-a-brac, and home decor, which he's amassed since childhood. Trafficking in racist stereotypes, these objects and designs were easily recognized, commodified, and imitated.

homes, cutting up, remixing and resetting them in Preston's outlines of Native flora, Albert enters them into renewed conversations about Australian Aboriginal identity and contemporary art.

Albert's with Preston and his reclamation of Aboriginalia enacts the principles Indigenous self-determination, which includes how to deal with and reconcile pernicious legacy and presence of Aboriginalia in contemporary Australia. Turning nineteenth century European landscape and still life genre on its head, Albert's still lifes are similarly bound with ideas of conquest, ownership, and possession but this time of taking back and making one's own and make proper Aboriginal art, design, and life (including its misappropriation) by and for Aboriginal people. Owning and using Aboriginalia, as Albert and other Aboriginal artists have, restores these objects and images to whence they came from and to those most impacted by their reproduction as racist tropes. That Albert, and other First Nations artists, now critically appropriate, quote, and parody Aboriginalia in their art, where these images and objects now circulate for sale in the contemporary art market as Aboriginal art on its own terms, is a means of reconciliation by way of restitution and reparations. Albert doesn't stop there: his repurposing and reclamation of Aboriginalia finds its way back into tea towels, coasters, or wearables, making Aboriginal art and design accessible and available outside of the traditional art world, much like Preston had envisioned and perhaps closer to the national visual identity she'd imagined.

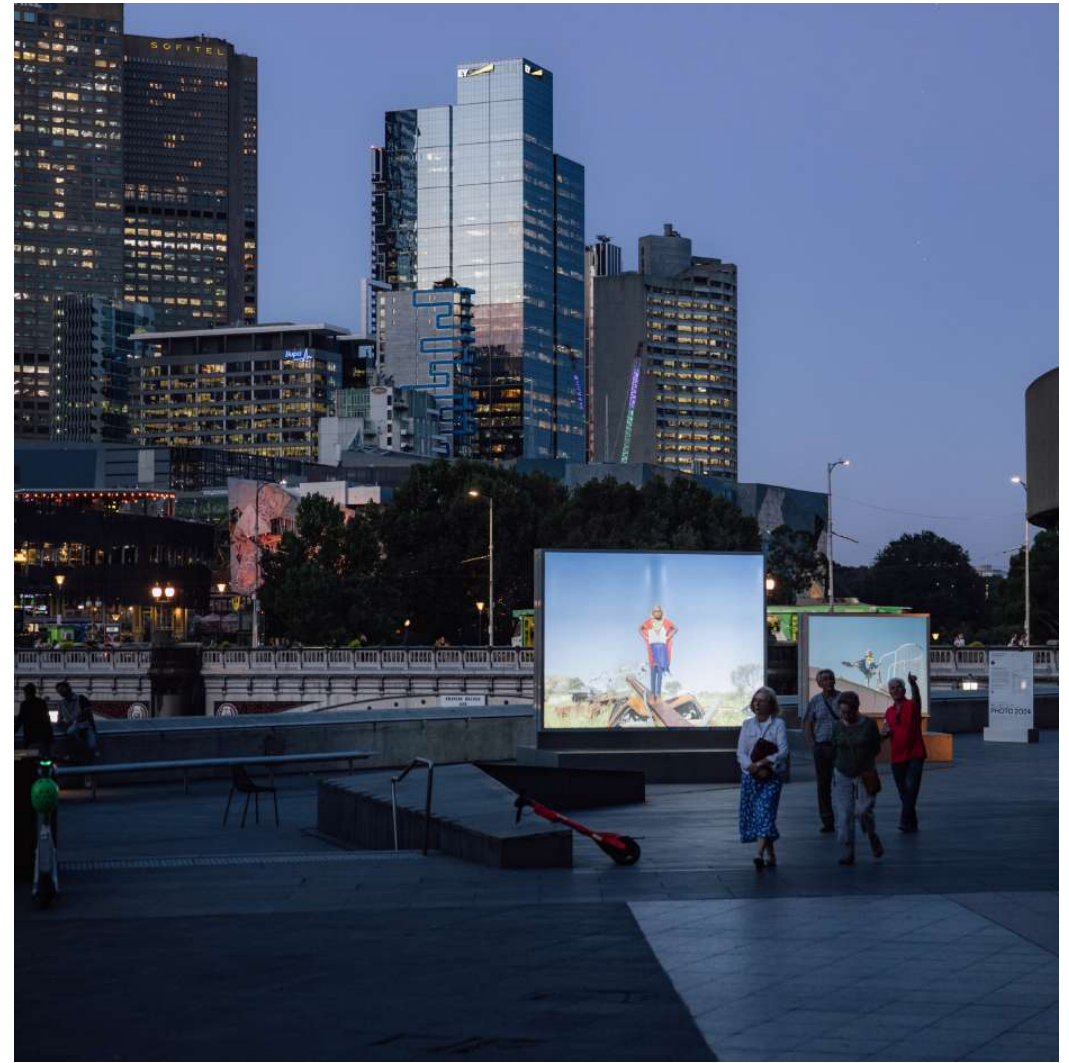
**SELECTED PROJECTS
BY TONY ALBERT**



Tony Albert, *The Garden + Forbidden Fruit*, 2024, installation view, Sullivan+Strumpf Sydney



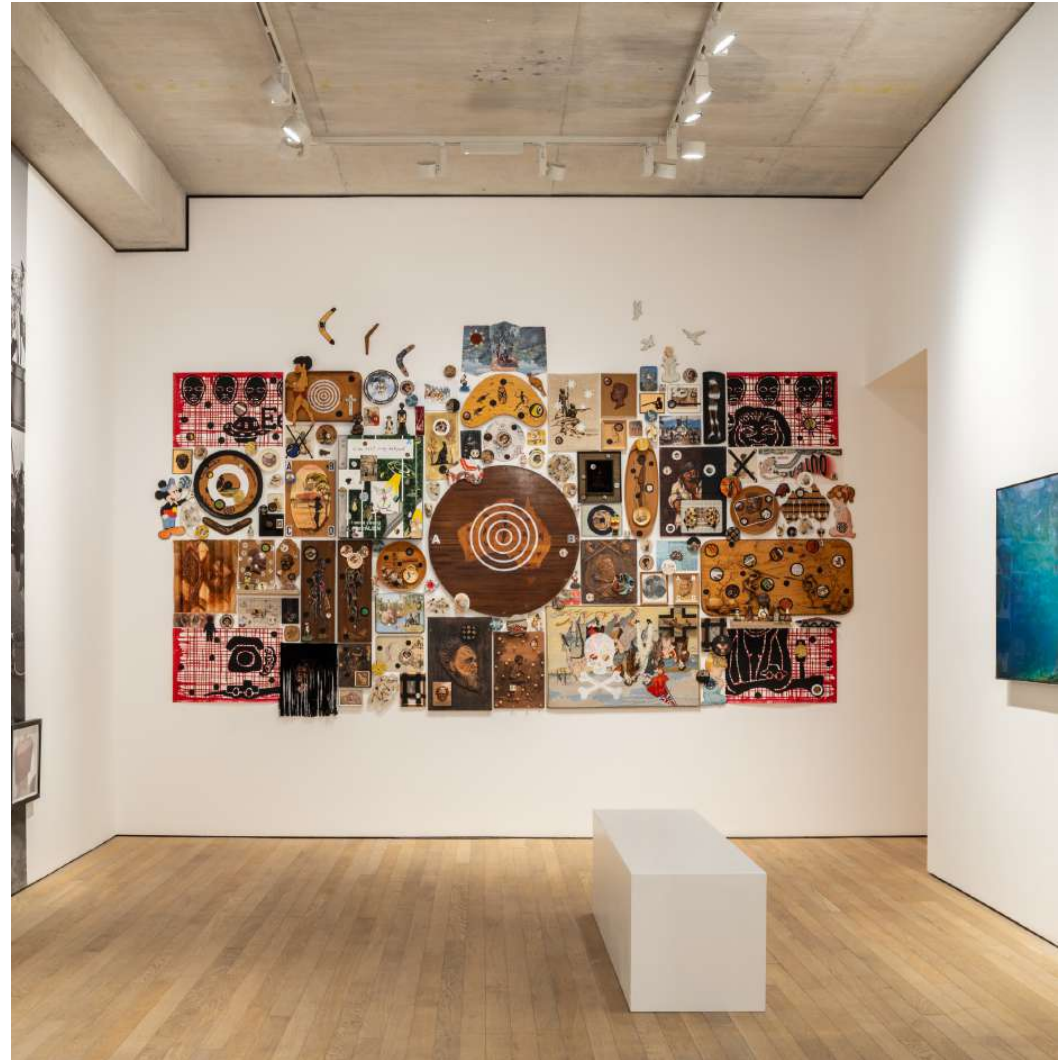
Tony Albert, *Unpacking History: A Native Australian Bouquet for New York*, commissioned for Global Positioning, Jan 26, 2022 - Jun 5, 2022, JCDecaux bus shelters: New York City, Chicago, and Boston



PHOT02024, International Festival of Photography, Melbourne Australia



Story, Place, 2023
curated by Tony Albert and Jenn Ellis
exhibited at No.9 Cork Street, London



Story, Place, 2023
appropriated found vintage objects
200 x 400 cm



VISIBLE, 2018, installation view, survey exhibition at Queensland Art Gallery |
Gallery of Modern Art, Australia

ABOUT SULLIVAN+STRUMPF

Sullivan+Strumpf is a leading contemporary art gallery with spaces in Sydney, Melbourne and Singapore. Founded in 2005 by co-directors Ursula Sullivan and Joanna Strumpf, the gallery is committed to presenting a dynamic exhibition program, representing over 40 engaging and culturally significant artists and estates from across the Asia-Pacific. The gallery presents itinerant international programming, most notably in Singapore and London.

With unwavering dedication to a progressive and compelling schedule of over 30 exhibitions annually, Sullivan+Strumpf has helped foster the careers of some of the most prominent contemporary artists working in Australia, Southeast Asia and beyond. As a complement to the diverse and innovative exhibition program, the gallery publishes a bi-monthly magazine; hosts public talks and participatory workshops; and partakes in key national and international art fairs. Regularly consulting to major public and private museums, Sullivan+Strumpf acts in an advisory capacity to public and private collections internationally.

With our commitment to developing artistic careers and enriching cultural practice in the region, in 2024 Sullivan+Strumpf launched a third location, Singapore Studio. The Studio acts as a base for our expanding diverse international program and a home to intimate events and presentations. This unique and dynamic space promotes the gallery's established presence in Asia and cultivate important global dialogues and cultural voices.

SYDNEY / MELBOURNE / SINGAPORE

sullivan+strumpf

Ursula Sullivan, Director
ursula@sullivanstrumpf.com

Mariia Zhuchenko, Associate Director Singapore
mariia@sullivanstrumpf.com

SYDNEY
799 Elizabeth St
Zetland NSW 2017
Australia
+61 29698 4696

MELBOURNE
107 – 109 Rupert Street
Collingwood VIC 3066
Australia
+61 37046 6489

SINGAPORE
114 Lavender St
CT Hub 2, #07 – 56
Singapore
+65 8310 7529

sullivanstrumpf.com / @sullivanstrumpf / art@sullivanstrumpf.com