



The artist at work in his Carriageworks studio, Sydney, 2018 | Photograph: Mark Pokorny

# TONY ALBERT VISIBLE

## TEACHER NOTES

### **About the resource**

The student resource and teaching notes link specifically to the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the *Australian Curriculum* and Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the Senior Syllabus.

Teachers can adapt questions and activities to deliver an ongoing unit of work or select relevant stand-alone learning experiences.

Activities can be undertaken before, during and after an exhibition visit.

### **About the artist's practice**

Tony Albert's work includes painting, photography and sculpture, as well as installations that use his vast collection of 'Aboriginalia' — these installations are synonymous with his practice. His collection stems from a childhood affection for images of Aboriginal people and their culture that is found in these mass-produced items of twentieth-century kitsch.

Growing up in the 1980s, very few Aboriginal faces were visible in the mainstream media, aside from a few sporting icons. Yet, in his local St Vincent de Paul second-hand store, Albert found and collected countless images of people who looked almost like him, people who were – in some distorted way – representations of him and his family. Through his

teenage years, Albert began to understand the darker racial undertones embedded within the objects and their histories. Today, his works echo the complexities and nuances of his evolving relationship with these objects.

Albert often reworks objects and artworks with imagery, symbols and quotes that give voice to silent subjects. More recently, Albert has presented his items of 'Aboriginalia' with little intervention, drawing attention to the sheer quantity and popularity of objects produced during the twentieth century. In doing so, he invites audiences to interrogate their meaning and existence.

*With this approach, Albert brings audiences closer to the objects themselves, and in this exhibition, he takes the idea even further, presenting the collection of images entirely unmediated. Without any active repurposing or apparent critical frame, Albert invites viewers to consider Aboriginalia on its own terms.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Advisory warning**

Teachers are advised that an artwork in this exhibition contains explicit language.

## Key ideas

Albert is a fresh voice in the **contemporary** conversation. Having created an original and highly moving body of work early in his career, building on a foundation of **knowledge** and study, Albert's work is a thorn in the side of easy art consumption. While deeply indebted to a **personal** and **cultural** history, Albert is obviously a child of the world and his work gives us a voice in the **twenty-first century** that was unheard of in the twentieth.<sup>2</sup>

- Contemporary Aboriginal artists respond to their lived and learnt experiences and issues that are important to their culture and society today.
- Contemporary artists may use their artwork to question how Indigenous Australians are portrayed — and stereotyped — in media and texts.

## Before

### Research — experiment, analyse and interpret

Investigate events, issues and ideas explored in Tony Albert's work and the work of other urban contemporary Indigenous artists.

## During

### Reflect — evaluate and justify

Respond to the questions and challenges raised by the artist's work and connect new ideas with prior knowledge.

## After

### Develop — implement and create

Explore the artist's practice and inspiration through art-making activities that engage students as collectors, commentators and collaborators.

Objects from the Tony Albert collection of Aboriginalia | Photograph: Natasha Harth, QAGOMA



## Australian Curriculum links

### Cross-curriculum priority key concepts and organising ideas

#### Country/Place

**OI.1** Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups: Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and within those groups there is significant diversity.

**OI.2** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place.

#### Culture

**OI.5** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.

**OI.6** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in Australia as First Peoples of Country or Place and demonstrate resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.

#### People

**OI.9** The significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the present and past are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally.

### Link activities to key concepts

|                      | Before   | During   | After                  |
|----------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| <b>Country/Place</b> | Commentary on the National Apology   | Optimism<br>Comparing and connecting   | Artist as collaborator |
| <b>Culture</b>       | Historic production of Aboriginalia<br><br>Contemporary urban Indigenous art | Use of humour, fun and familiar objects<br><br>Challenging meaning<br>Comparing and connecting | Artist as collector    |
| <b>People</b>        | Commentary on the National Apology   | Optimism<br>Comparing and connecting   | Artist as commentator  |

### Years 7 and 8 Visual Arts Content Descriptions

- Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)
- Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes (ACAVAM119)
- Develop planning skills for artmaking by exploring techniques and processes used by different artists (ACAVAM120)
- Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their artmaking (ACAVAM121)
- Present artwork demonstrating consideration of how the artwork is displayed to enhance the artist's intention to an audience (ACAVAM122)

- Analyse how artists use visual conventions in artworks (ACAVAR123)
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their artmaking, starting with Australian artworks including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR124)

### Years 9 and 10 Visual Arts Content Descriptions

- Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal style, reflecting on the styles of artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (ACAVAM125)
- Manipulate materials, techniques, technologies and processes to develop and represent their own artistic intentions (ACAVAM126)
- Develop and refine techniques and processes to represent ideas and subject matter (ACAVAM127)
- Plan and design artworks that represent artistic intention (ACAVAM128)
- Present ideas for displaying artworks and evaluate displays of artworks (ACAVAM129)
- Evaluate how representations communicate artistic intentions in artworks they make and view to inform their future art making (ACAVAR130)
- Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131)

### Year 10 History Content Descriptions: Rights and freedoms (1945 – the present)

- Students investigate struggles for human rights in depth. This will include how rights and freedoms have been ignored, demanded or achieved in Australia and in the broader world context. Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACDSEH104)
- The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; *Bringing Them Home Report* (the Stolen Generations), the Apology (ACDSEH106)
- Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the role of ONE individual or group in the struggle (ACDSEH134)
- The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (ACDSEH143)

## Visual Art 2019 General Senior Syllabus

### Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

- Teaching and learning in Queensland schools should provide opportunities for students to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Positive outcomes for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students are supported by successfully embedding Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across planning, teaching and assessing student achievement.

#### Concepts

- Art as lens — Indigenous lens exploring Aboriginal identity in contemporary life
- Art as code — symbolism and text to invite audience interrogation
- Art as knowledge — response to events and issues
- Art as alternate — diversity of practice stemming from early interest in collecting

#### Contexts

Analyse and compare artworks through the:

- contemporary context to interpret twenty-first century art, ideas and issues that challenge twentieth-century stereotypical misrepresentation and question processes of reconciliation
- personal context to interpret reaction and response to events and issues as an Aboriginal artist and collector of objects

- cultural context to interpret representations of time, place and politics in visual language and communication, and how these invite change and provoke conversation about historical practices of colonisation and continued mistreatment and representation of Aboriginal people in media and society
- formal context to interpret communication and meaning through symbols, familiar forms and diverse art processes.

#### Link activities to contexts

|                             | Before   | During   | After                  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| <b>Contemporary context</b> | Historic production of Aboriginalia<br>Contemporary urban Indigenous art | Optimism<br>Challenging meaning  | Artist as collaborator |
| <b>Personal context</b>     | Historic production of Aboriginalia<br>Contemporary urban Indigenous art | Use of humour, fun and familiar objects<br>Challenging meaning<br>Comparing and connecting | Artist as collector    |
| <b>Cultural context</b>     | Commentary on the National Apology                                       | Optimism<br>Use of humour, fun and familiar objects  | Artist as commentator  |
| <b>Formal context</b>       | Contemporary urban Indigenous art  | Inviting conversation with artworks<br>Symbolism   | Artist as collaborator |



## Visual Art 2019 General Senior Syllabus (continued)

### Unit 1 Art as lens

- Reflect on the impact of different lenses that filter and distort representations in artworks as they consider ideas and information, media, techniques and processes.
- Evaluate how artists assign and represent symbolic value on various people, places objects through traditional and non-traditional approaches in artworks.
- Participate in an authentic experience as artist or audience to reflect on diverse art practices, traditions, cultures and theories.

### Unit 2 Art as code

- Evaluate the various ways artists communicate ideas through visual language and expression, such as:
  - innovative and expressive, non-linguistic communication in diverse practices, traditions and cultures by examining past and present influences on contemporary artists, including the work of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and contemporary artists from Asia
  - artworks that communicate literal and conceptual meaning using familiar and unfamiliar text or other symbolic systems.

### Unit 3 Art as knowledge

- Analyse and compare past and present artworks through selected contexts to interpret multiple perspectives and evaluate how these offer layers of meaning and dialogue between artist and audience.
- Evaluate:
  - a range of primary sources and secondary sources, art practices and art approaches from diverse traditions, cultures and theories to guide investigation and inform student focus and art-making
  - how artists can challenge, reinforce or manipulate ideas, beliefs and meaning through making and displaying artworks.
- Participate in an authentic experience as artist or audience.

### Unit 4 Art as alternate

- Implement:
  - creative thinking skills to challenge art practices and develop possibilities by combining, changing or reapplying existing ideas
  - alternate ideas to extend their focus through exploration of divergent approaches and key contemporary artists, including artwork by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, artwork by artists from the Pacific Islands and/or artwork by artists from Asia.

## Links to resources

Australian Curriculum:

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)

Queensland Visual Art 2019 General Senior Syllabus:

[www.qcaa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au)

#### Endnotes

- 1 Sally Brand, 'Aboriginalia: Conversations and connections', in *Tony Albert: Visible* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2018, p.39.
- 2 Franklin Sirmans, 'Hear and now', in *Tony Albert: Visible* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2018, p.33.



Objects from the Tony Albert collection of Aboriginalia | Photograph: Natasha Harth, QAGOMA

**Page 4** Tony Albert and Stephen Page | *Moving Targets* 2015 | Video projection inside car chassis: video: 6:35 minutes, colour, sound, looped | Composer: David Page; Dancer: Beau Dean Riley Smith; Project Manager: Liz Nowell; Chief Engineer: Angus Adameitis; Production Manager/Chief Editor: Andrew Haining; Film Director: James Marshall; Film Editor: Tiffany Parker; Stills Photographer: Alex Wisser | Commissioned by Carriageworks for 24 Frames Per Second | Collection: The artist

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Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art  
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PO Box 3686, South Brisbane  
Queensland 4101 Australia  
W: [qagoma.qld.gov.au](http://qagoma.qld.gov.au)

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The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara (Jagera) peoples who are the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.

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