TONY ALBERT

BROTHERS

15 AUGUST - 7 SEPTEMBER 2013
In 2011, while working on a project in Beijing, local artists bestowed Tony Albert with a new name: Wai Xing Ren, meaning “outer-stars person.” Since then, Wai Xing Ren (pronounced why shing ren) has appeared in Albert’s work as an alternative signature alongside images of aliens, space ships, and otherworldly beings. Wai Xing Ren has found particular resonance within Albert’s practice as the name speaks directly to the artist’s desire to create works that defy categorization. He says, “On this planet, there exist so many institutional definitions, labels, and categories that try to pigeonhole who I am and what I do. I am a human being, an Aboriginal man, and a contemporary artist. I am me! I don’t wish for any other fixed definition…” In other words, within his practice, Albert could be said to shape-shift. From ancient stories to comic books, the shape-shifter has existed as a symbol of the pluralistic nature of reality and the world’s interconnectedness. Significantly, unlike those who metamorphose or undergo other transformations, shape-shifters do not alter their essential being—think Clark Kent/Superman. In each of these portraits, the red target is a core truth, a cross for each of these young men to bear. Most significant, however, the target does not determine who they are; for Albert and his Indigenous brothers, the target is a reality but it does not tether them to any one particular identity.

For the Brothers series, Albert also selected a trilogy of images entitled Brothers (Our Past, Our Present, Our Future) to edition at life-size without any painted intervention. Edited down, these three brothers become signifiers for all brothers, a holy trinity, ever present in our past, our present, and our future. This idea of interconnectedness across time and space is also an important one for Albert. Throughout history, many artists have found impetus for their work in destabilizing stereotypes, exposing codified language, and correcting historical mistruths. Albert’s practice certainly connects with this mode of art-making. What sets Albert’s work apart, and I believe the Brothers series exemplifies this, is his bold optimism. In Albert’s hands, red targets become emblems—ripples in a pond or music booming from a speaker—such that in the face of historical misrecognition and present injustice, this “outer-stars person” takes us into the future with hope for our fellow man.

1) Quoted from an interview with Stephen Gilchrist in Tony Albert—It Always Seems Impossible Until It’s Done (Hong Kong: Conceptio Unlimited, 2011), 37.


Tony Albert would like to thank:
Annette and Martin Peachy and all the boys from Kirinari Hostel;
Alex Wisser for his photographic technical assistance;
Inga Ting for her research into the incarceration of Indigenous Australians;
Ursula Sullivan and Joanna Strumpf and the team at Sullivan+Strumpf;
David Teplitzky & Peggy Scott for their ongoing support;
Sally Brand at Conceptio ART;
Liz Nowell and Joel Spring at Australien Studio;
proppaNOW;
and always, my friends and family.

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Brothers 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
210 x 280 cm
Brother (Our Past) 2013
pigment print on paper
150 x 100 cm
dition of 3 + 2APs

Brother (Our Present) 2013
pigment print on paper
150 x 100 cm
dition of 3 + 2APs

Brother (Our Future) 2013
pigment print on paper
150 x 100 cm
dition of 3 + 2APs
We Can Be Heroes 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
42 x 30 cm (4)
Champions of the world 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
29 x 21 cm (2)
Here comes the story 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium with infinite wall drawing in pencil
28 cm diameter, wall drawing variable
Here comes the story 2013 (detail)
Just like the time before and the time before that
2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print
mounted to aluminium with infinite wall drawing
in pencil
29 x 21 cm, wall drawing variable
Just like the time before and the time before that 2013 (detail)
One love, one heart 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
30 x 30 cm
One love, one heart 2013
Above us only sky 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
30 x 30 cm
Come on come on, I see no changes. Wake up in the morning and look at myself. "Is life working? Should I blast myself?" I’m tired of being poor and even wear my black. My stomach hurts, so I’m looking to snatch. Can’t give a damn about a nigglor. Pull the trigger. Kidnigga, he’s a hero. Give the crack to the kids who’s hell cares. Give less human mouth on the welfare. First, them dope and let ‘em deal. I know, my brothers. Give them free back and warn’ em kill each other, now go fight back”, that’s how Huey said. 2 Guns, do the dark how Huey dead. I got love for my brother, but we can’t go nowhere unless we share with each other. We gotta start making changes. Learn to see as a brother instead of 2 distant strangers. And that’s how we’re supposed to be. How can the Devil take a brother if he’s close to me? I’d love to go back to when we played as kids but things changed, and that’s the way it is...

Things will never be the same 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
30 x 30 cm
Things will never be the same 2013
A genocide begins with the killing of one man – not for what he has done, but for who he is.
A genocide begins with the killing of one man – not for what he has done, but for who he is.
Where justice is a game 2013  
aracylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium  
29 x 21 cm
This land is me 2013
acrylic and gloss medium on pigment print mounted to aluminium
29 x 21 cm
EDUCATION

2004 Bachelor of Visual Arts, Contemporary
Indigenous Australian Art, Queensland College of Art Griffith
University, Brisbane

COLLECTIONS

Australian War Memorial, Canberra
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
National Museum of Australia, Canberra
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Caloundra Regional Art Gallery, Sunshine Coast
Horsham Regional Art Gallery, Horsham
Monash Gallery of Art, Melbourne
Griffith Artworks, Brisbane
Murdoch University, Perth
University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane

SOLD EXHIBITIONS

2013 Brothers, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney
Projecting Our Future, Level 2 Project Space, AGNSW, Sydney
Be Deadly, mural, Redfern Jumarg College, Redfern Street, Sydney

2012 Family, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney
Be deadly, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns

2010 Pay Attention, City Gallery, Wellington, NZ

2008 Must have been love, Canberra
Contemporary Art Space, Canberra

2004 Go away, The Farm, Brisbane

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013 My Country, I Still Call Australia
Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
String Theory, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney,
Curated by Glenn Barkley
The Collectors Show: Weight of History, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
Speak to Me, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney
The Future’s Not What It Used To Be, Chapter Gallery, Cardiff, Wales

2012 undisclosed 2nd National
Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Making Change, National Museum of China, Beijing, China
Variable Truth, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney
Like, Casula Powerhouse, Sydney
National Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

2011 roundabout!, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel
The black sea, KickArts, Cairns
Ten Years of Contemporary Art: The James C South AM Collection, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Saying No, Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art, Brooklyn, USA

2010 21st century art in the first
decade, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
roundabout!, City Gallery, Wellington, NZ

2009 The trickster, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Suol, Korea
10th Havana Biennial, Integration
and resistance in the global era, Havana, Cuba
Octopus 9 / I forget to forget,
Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, and Canberra
Contemporary Art Space, Canberra

2008 Temperature 2, new Queensland
art, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane
me take, Perth Centre for Photography, Perth
Contemporary Australia: optimism,
Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Half light: portraits from black
Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Under the influence: art and
music, QUT Art Museum, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
Living black, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
The visitors, Penrith Regional
Gallery & The Lewin Bequest, Sydney
Ravage of genes, Les Brasseurs, Liege, Belgium, and Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
Thresholds of tolerance, Australian National University School of Art
Gallery, Canberra
Celebrating Aboriginal rights?, Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney
The Bodies That Were Not Ours,
Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Art, St Kilda, Victoria
From The Edge, The University of New South Wales, Sydney
Thick and Fast, Brisbane
Powerhouse, Brisbane

2004 Nice Coloured Dolls, 24HrArt, Darwin