

**CAIRNS
ART
GALLERY**

Dylan Mooney
A Story of My People
25 Jun–21 Aug 2022

Artwork labels

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Dylan MOONEY

Yuwi, Withathi, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander
Born Yuwibara/Mackay, Queensland, 1995

Untitled

2022

charcoal and pencil on paper

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

In the charcoal and pencil drawing *Untitled* 2022, Mooney interprets the grief, confusion and profound sense of loss that is evident in the faces of the archival portrait photographs that were taken during the early days of white colonialisation. However, while history has never known or has quietly erased their names and identities, these peoples are not 'faceless', and nor are their stories of separation, segregation and subjugation forgotten, for, through his drawing, Mooney has given back to them their identity and their place in history.

Still Here & Thriving

2022

digital print

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

Still Here & Thriving comprises five backlit digital images which are overlaid with sharply articulated and brightly coloured words. The words are specific and seek to engage the viewer in a dialogue about 'how we are viewed' while also asking the disturbingly blunt question - 'are we more than our history'.

For Mooney, cultural identity extends beyond immediate ancestry, and is central to his sense of being here and now, and beyond into the future.

Mooney explains that digital drawing, as a new medium, allows him to contemporise historical images and stories, and reflect on the future of Indigenous communities. In so doing he asks, 'what are we doing today that carries on the legacy of our ancestors [and] how will we be remembered?'

Together these works burn with intensity as the artist questions 'the resilience, innovation and empowerment required of our people to not only survive but to thrive in so-called Australia'.

The field
The builder
The wisest
The fastest

from the *Sugar Town* series 2021

sugar and Modge Podge adhesive on board

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

On his father's side, Mooney's grandfather's grandparents were forcibly taken from their island homes of Santo and Ambae and brought to Queensland to work on the sugar cane plantations. Like so many other South Sea Islanders who were kidnapped ('black birded') in the 1860, they were never able to return to their island homes. Mooney describes this group of works which is based on the lives of his father's ancestors.

The works depicts the history of South Sea Islander peoples of Mackay, Queensland. Sugar is integrated as the main medium that reflects on the history of our ancestors who were slaves on sugar plantations. Adversity was and still is challenged through the survival of the South Sea Islander community by creating a platform for our voices to be heard and accomplishments recognised.

The images used in the works reflect my connection to my community, family, and places and with the deterioration of this work the artist leaves behind a white outline of the works which points at what legacy our past generations have left behind for us and what we the future generation will leave behind for our South Sea Islander community. The new works hope to start a dialogue of how we are viewed – are we more than our history? what is South Sea Islander identity? With these questions raised the work hopes to inspire thought, reflection, and action. These works as a whole show my personal connection to this so-called sugar town 'Mackay' they are my past as they are my future.

Dylan Mooney, 2022

Dylan MOONEY

Yuwi, Withathi, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander
Born Yuwibara/Mackay, Queensland, 1995

Janice May BINSIAR

Torres Strait Islander and Wuthathi people
Born Cairns, Queensland, 1956

Untitled

n.d.

linocut printing on cotton

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

In her supporting essay for the exhibition publication, Dr Chelsea Watego writes that the artist 'forces us to consider the real and full array of Black identity, as Yuwi (Aboriginal), Torres Strait Islander, and South Sea Islander'. Mooney also notes that rarely has he had the opportunity to be all these things at once, and that typically he is called on to represent these parts of himself independent of each other. For this exhibition, Mooney has created new works that honour and interpret the different ancestral histories that are integral to his identity and being.

This series of linocut prints and the accompanying printed dress, pays homage to Mooney's Torres Strait Islander ancestry.

The print series represents a story about my great grandmother and grandmother and how they went back to the Torres Strait Islands. Ailan is the creole word for Island. I tried to depict the hardships of their life, which they went through and being brought to the mainland and not being able to return. In particular, I collaborated with my grandmother, Janice Binsiar to create a dress that reflects those pasts but the resilience and the work she is doing within her community and what it was like for her to go back to her island home for the first time.

Dylan Mooney, 2022