

CAIRNS  
ART  
GALLERY

---

9 NOV 2024 –  
5 JAN 2025

**MICHAEL COOK**  
*COLLECTION IN FOCUS*

ARTWORK LABELS

## ***Livin' the dream series***

From 1900 the Queensland Government began to remove Aboriginal people from their own country to forcibly live in Christian missions. In these segregated missions, displaced people were forced to live alongside other peoples with whom they were not connected; most were unable to practice language or traditions. In the present, generations later, dislocation and trauma remain.

Through his *Livin' the dream* images, Michael Cook projects a powerful sense of dislocation by picturing an 'aspirational' Aboriginal family in the remote outback, headed by 'Joey Jones'. Bemused, his family members are removed from the familiar despite bringing western accoutrements with them. Among the trappings Cook ironically includes a desirable 1963 EH Holden car, swimming pool, boat, lawnmower, and smart clothes.

Cook says

*Joe is the least materialistic person I know, which makes him ideal for this series. After being adopted and meeting my biological mother and mob in my early thirties, I understood certain habits, traits, thought systems in myself. I see in Joey the characteristics that ran through Indigenous peoples before European influence, a giving and sharing, and lack of interest in materialistic items... Keeping up with 'The Joneses', coveting what others own, may mean they miss what is right in front of them. Community, love for self and others and giving back, is there for anyone anytime...*

### **Michael COOK**

b.1968

Bidjara

***Livin' the dream (Sold)***

***Livin' the dream (Welcome home)***

***Livin' the dream (Birthday)***

***Livin' the dream (BBQ)***

***Livin' the dream (For sale)***

from the *Livin' the dream* series 2020

inkjet print

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Cook, 2021

## ***Enculturation Series***

Michael Cook's *Enculturation* photographs show Indigenous women elders painted for ceremony. The women sit with babies of various nationalities or walk in scrubby grassland with a kind of magnetic pull for children, crawling babies and companion dogs.

Cook in this series refers to Australia's Stolen Generations (1910-1970s) but pictures the situation in reverse: non-Indigenous children are removed to a traditional Aboriginal setting. Exploring difficult territory, Cook makes the point that contemporary child removal practices continue to see a disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children raised outside their families.

First Nations' harmony with the natural world is evoked in these images, suggesting young minds will absorb the wisdom and knowledge of Aboriginal Culture via observation, influence, and enculturation.

The concept for this series stayed in Cook's psyche for some years, driven by his own desire to learn from the vast Indigenous knowledge systems that are disappearing as elders pass away. Michael Cook opens such conundrums of our age to his audience.

### **Michael COOK**

b.1968

Bidjara

***Enculturation #1***

***Enculturation #2***

***Enculturation #3***

***Enculturation #4***

***Enculturation #5***

***Enculturation #6***

2022

Hahnemühle Photo Rag with Archival Ink

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Cook, 2023