

# Jasmine Togo-Brisby: It Is Not a Place

EDUCATION KIT

20 APRIL-16 JUNE 2024



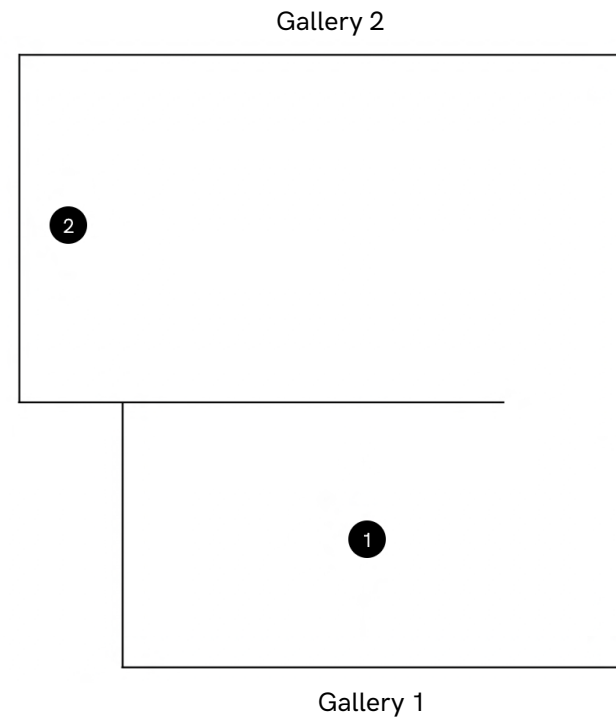
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## HOW TO USE THIS EDUCATION KIT

This kit has been developed for use alongside viewing the exhibition *Jasmine Togo-Brisby: It Is Not a Place* at the Institute of Modern Art. It focuses on the two newly commissioned artworks in the show. Teachers can adapt the curriculum-linked questions and activities for learning experiences in the gallery or classroom. Links to further resources are provided at the end of the kit.

## CONTENTS

- 2 About the exhibition
- 3 About the artist
- 4 Artworks
  1. *Until We Runneth Over*
  2. *It Is Not a Place*
- 6 Key terms
- 7 Curriculum links
- 8 Further resources



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Jasmine Togo-Brisby is an Australian South Sea Islander artist based in Meanjin/Brisbane. As children, her great-great-grandparents were taken from Vanuatu to work as domestic servants for the Wunderlich family in Sydney and later worked on a plantation. Togo-Brisby's work examines the Pacific slave trade and its impact on those who trace their roots to Australia through its practices.

Togo-Brisby conjures with an iconography of tall ships, decorative ceilings, and crow feathers. Her ships remind us of the dangerous vessels that transported tens of thousands of South Sea Islanders to Australia; her decorative ceilings recall the refined pressed-tin ceilings made by the Wunderlich family in Sydney; and her crow feathers refer to 'blackbirding', a euphemism for the Pacific slave trade.

The exhibition features major new works—a sculpture and a video. In the sculpture, crow feathers cascade from a decorative ceiling rosette, reminding us that Australian civil society was built on violence. In the video—a haunting computer animation—a ship, made of crow wings, sails on a churning ocean crafted from crow feathers. The ship has two crow heads, which open their beaks to suck up the sea. Togo-Brisby describes it as 'both alive and dead, moving yet not moving'.

Togo-Brisby's title *It Is Not a Place* complicates matters. It makes us wonder to what extent her work speaks to an actual place—a demarcated location in time and space—or to something else.

**Australian South Sea Islander** a descendant of the blackbirding trade that saw some 62,500 people trafficked from the Pacific Islands, including Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, to establish sugar, maritime, pastoral, cotton, and railways industries. In 1994 the Commonwealth recognised Australian South Sea Islanders as 'a distinct cultural group'.

**Iconography** the imagery or symbolism of a work of art.

**Euphemism** a word or phrase used instead of one that is offensive or unpleasant.



Jasmine Togo-Brisby, *Until We Runneth Over* (detail), 2024. Photo: Carl Warner.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jasmine Togo-Brisby was born in Murwillumbah, New South Wales, in 1982, and raised in Townsville from the age of eight. She studied at the Queensland College of Art, Brisbane and Massey University, Auckland (BFA 2018, MFA 2022). Togo-Brisby's research-driven practice examines the historical practice of 'blackbirding', the Pacific slave trade.

She delves into her own personal history, which saw her great-great-grandparents taken from Vanuatu and transported to Australia in 1899 under slave-labour policies employed by the Australian government. As a fourth-generation Australian South Sea Islander, her works address the complexities of contemporary South Sea Islander culture and identity.

She investigates complex relationships of power, cultural identity, and political systems. She continues to build upon her complex body of artworks employing, installation, painting, lens-based media, and sculpture.



Jasmine Togo-Brisby with her work *As Above, So Below* (2022) at the 18th Adelaide Biennale at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide/Tarntanya.



## ARTWORKS

### 1. *Until We Runneth Over*

"I hold an imagined image in my mind of my granny, at eight years old, after her journey to Australia in the hold of a ship looking up from below deck. Then, on her first day at the Wunderlich's house, she lies down at night, looking up at the decorative ceiling above."

—Jasmine Togo-Brisby, 2023

#### DISCUSSION

- For most of us, the experience of Jasmine Togo-Brisby's ancestor—being forced to leave family behind and finding herself in a new country governed by slave labour—is difficult to imagine. Consider the imagery of travelling on a long journey. Have you undertaken any extended or solo journeys as a child? What do you remember about that experience?

#### ACTIVITY

- Create a plaster sculpture that uses signs and symbols that have meaning to you. Start by building a mould using clay or plasticine. Add decorative markings using picture frames, baking utensils, vintage buttons, or other objects. Consider repetition and symmetry when arranging your design. Mix plaster according to the instructions then pour and let sit in your mould. Carefully remove when dry and paint if desired.
- Research the Wunderlich family. How can their history be traced through heritage architecture in Australia? Write a paragraph that considers the colonial legacy of these physical manifestations in light of Togo-Brisby's cultural heritage.



Jasmine Togo-Brisby, *Until We Runneth Over*, 2024. Photo: Carl Warner.



## 2. *It Is Not a Place*

*It Is Not a Place* is a computer-animated video of an ocean of crow feathers. A vessel made of crow feathers and wings journeys across the churning ocean. The body of the vessel features the heads of two live crows, which gaze at their surroundings and occasionally open their mouths to suck up the sea.

### DISCUSSION

- Jasmine Togo-Brisby uses recurring metaphors and motifs in her practice. How does the artist draw upon this visual language to support her investigation of the Pacific slave trade and its impact on South Sea Islanders in Australia?
- How does Jasmine Togo-Brisby's work challenge audiences to value and better understand South Sea Islanders' perspectives on the impacts of colonisation?

### ACTIVITY

- Create a short animation using stop motion that explores your own cultural identity or a journey taken by boat. Build a set using available materials such as cardboard and tape to convey your story.
- Research the history of blackbirding in Queensland. What was this practice? When did it begin and what effects did it have on South Sea Islanders?



Jasmine Togo-Brisby, *It Is Not a Place*, 2024, video, sound. Produced with assistance from Max Athans.



## CURRICULUM LINKS

### Australian Curriculum / Visual Art / General Senior Syllabus Curriculum Links

#### Concept

- **Art as code** use of metaphor and symbolism to invite audience interrogation
- **Art as lens** Australian South Sea Islander lens
- **Art as knowledge** response to historical events of indentured labour and colonisation

#### Contexts

Analyse and compare artworks through:

- **cultural context** to interpret how Australia's history of blackbirding and indentured labour from the Pacific contributes to the meaning of Togo-Brisby's work
- **contemporary context** to interpret how Togo-Brisby communicates ideas about current issues and concerns and challenges traditional thinking on Australian South Sea Islanders' culture and identity
- **formal context** to interpret how symbols and other visual language are used to transmit information and ideas

### Australian Curriculum / Visual Arts / Years P-10

- Use materials, techniques, and processes to explore visual conventions when making art works (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM111) (ACAVAM115)
- Explore ideas and art works from different cultures and times, including artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (ACAVAM106) (ACAVAM110) (ACAVAM114)
- Respond to visual art works and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (ACAVAR109) (ACAVAR113) (ACAVAR117)
- Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies, and processes (ACAVAM119) (ACAVAM121)
- Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art making (ACAVAM126) (ACAVAM128)

### Australian Curriculum / Cross-Curriculum Priority / Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

#### People

- Australian South Sea Islanders have only recently been recognised as a distinct cultural group by the Australian government. Despite distinct cultural beliefs and practices, they share a history of colonial displacement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For Togo-Brisby, as a South Sea Islander living in Australia, family history is inextricably linked with that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through intermarriage and kinship.
- Investigate the contributions South Sea Islanders have made and continue to make in Queensland and nationwide.

#### Culture

- Investigate the presence/absence of cultural artefacts from South Sea Islander cultures in Australian museums and cultural institutions. Compare this with artefacts from the Wunderlich family and their contributions to heritage architecture. What can the presence or absence of these artefacts reveal about Australia's 'hidden histories'?
- Develop an awareness and appreciation of the resilience of Australian South Sea Islanders by studying the historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.

#### Place

- Explore the connections to place that Togo-Brisby's work reveals. Consider how the imagery of the sea links these places of significance in her artwork.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

[The Wunderlich Patent Ceiling and Roofing Company, Limited](#) newspaper article

[Australian South Sea Islanders, Port Jackson](#) website

[Sugar Slaves: Australian South Sea Islanders Are Descendants of the Pacific Islands Blackbird Trade](#) video

[Page 1987 Galleries: Jasmine Togo-Brisby](#) artist profile

[Jasmine Togo-Brisby on Creating from Personal and Familial History](#) interview

[Possession, Separation, Homecoming: Resistance in the Work of Jasmine Togo-Brisby](#) article

Further exhibition resources are available via the [IMA Resources](#) webpage.

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## TERMS OF USE

This education resource has been produced to provide information and classroom support material for education visits to *Jasmine Togo-Brisby: It Is Not a Place*. The reproduction and communication of this resource is permitted for educational purposes only.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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