

# *A MURRIALITY* Gordon Hookey

22 October – 23 December 2022

**Education Kit**

## How to Use This Resource

This education kit has been developed for use alongside viewing the exhibition *A MURRIALITY* at the Institute of Modern Art (IMA).

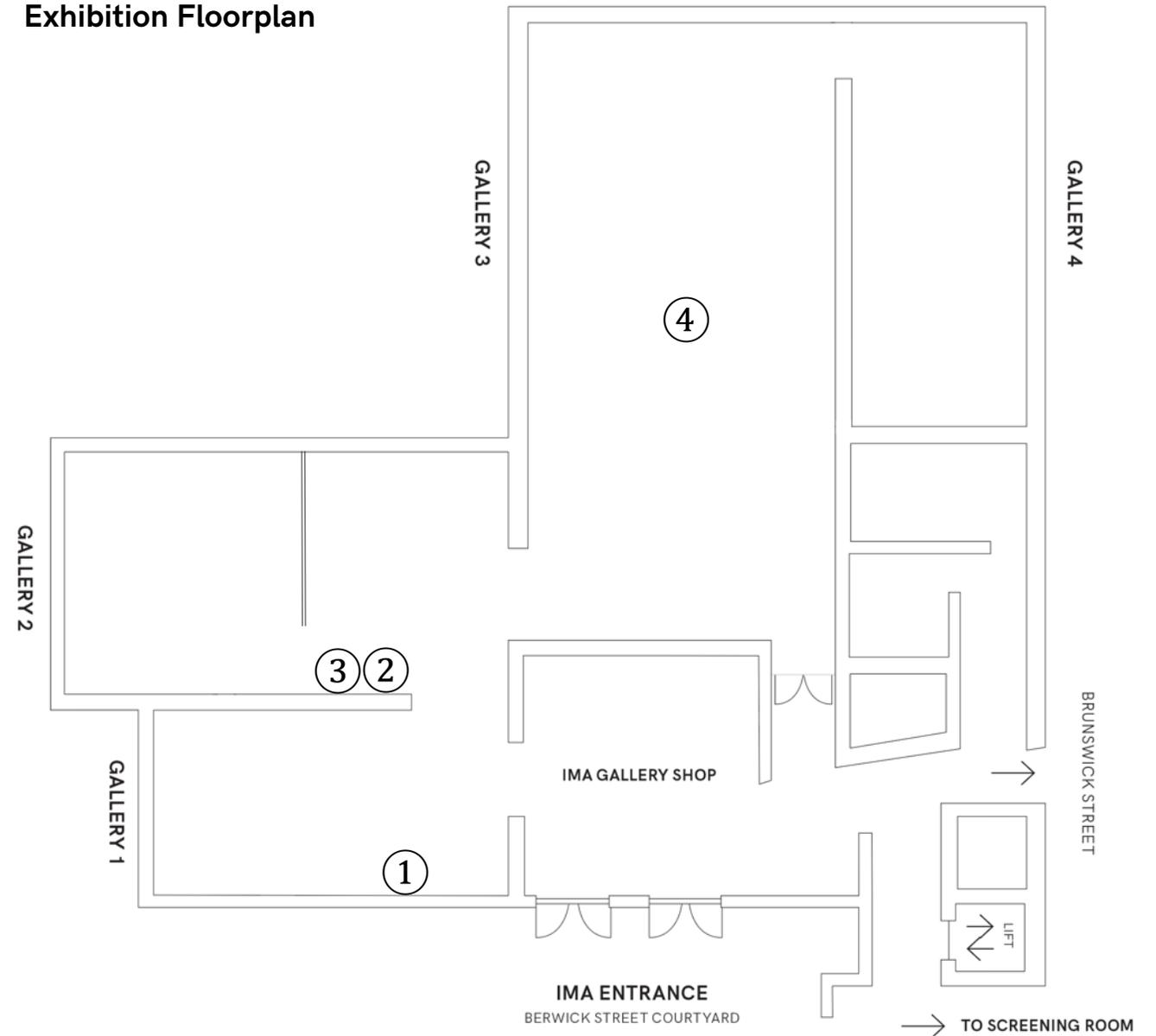
Teachers can select and adapt the curriculum-linked questions and activities provided within the resource for learning experiences in the gallery or classroom.

Please be advised the exhibition contains some adult content including very strong language.

## Contents

- About *A MURRIALITY* .....3
- About Gordon Hookey .....4
- ① Artwork - *Reiteration in Perpetuity* .....5
- ② Artwork - *hoogah boogah* .....6
- ③ Artwork - *ethics* .....7
- ④ Artworks - *Youcrane / Love, The Red Yella & Black / A Dot* .....8  
*Painting No.184, Blood on the Green / Houses are Homes*
- Hands-on Workshop Activity .....12
- Curriculum Links .....13
- Further Resources and Notes .....14

## Exhibition Floorplan





## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION:

### ***A MURRIALITY***

Curated by José Da Silva and Liz Nowell

*A MURRIALITY* is the first survey of renowned Waanyi artist Gordon Hookey, charting three decades of practice where artmaking and activism fuse.

Gordon Hookey's work is best known for its biting satire of Australian culture and politics, its witty critique of racism, and an exploration of oral and image-based history-making traditions. Across sculpture, printmaking, video, and large-scale painting, *A MURRIALITY* presents perspectives on historical and contemporary issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through the lens of Gordon's lived experience as a Murri person, this includes legal injustices, international conflict, cultural representations, and language.

Image: Gordon Hookey, *New Commissions*, 2022. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST: Gordon Hookey

**"In my work, I try and represent Murri people, Aboriginal people, in the strongest possible light. They have to be powerful. They have to be strong, they have to have resilience and the spirit of resistance in their demeanour".**

— Gordon Hookey<sup>1</sup>

Gordon Hookey (born Allan Gordon Eattes) was born in Cloncurry, North West Queensland, Australia, in 1961. 'Gordy', as he's fondly known, remembers picking up a paintbrush in his early primary school years and getting lost in his ability to tell his stories creatively. Influenced by the storytellers of his community who would imprint drawings in the dirt for him and his cousins, Gordy was always happy to paint and play as a young child, as this brought him joy and made him feel free.

Gordon is a proud Aboriginal Murri, who descends from the Waanyi people. Although Gordon does not see himself as an historian, he has transcribed so-called Australia's history and treatment of Aboriginal peoples, in real time, through his art.

Over the last thirty-odd years, Gordon has solidified his position as one of the first contemporary political artists in Australia, whose work is informed by domestic and international events and policies that affect Indigenous communities globally. More specifically, Gordy's lived experience as a Murri and Aboriginal person is at the forefront of his work; this includes legal injustices, international conflict, cultural representations, and language.

Image: Gordon Hookey in the studio, 2022. Photograph by Rhett Hammerton.



## ARTWORK: *Reiteration in Perpetuity*

Gordon Hookey's acknowledgment of Aboriginal sovereignty features a kangaroo who sees the world through Aboriginal eyes. Gordon frequently uses animals as symbols in his work, which stems from reading books such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

In *Reiteration in Perpetuity*, the image of a kangaroo is used to symbolise a Murri, an Aboriginal person in Queensland. The glasses painted with the Aboriginal flag highlight Gordon's provocation to see the world the Aboriginal way.

The Uluru Statement From the Heart describes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes as **"the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands"**, with their own laws and customs. This sovereignty is a spiritual idea: the ancestral tie between the land and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there and have continuous links with the land. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded (given up)<sup>2</sup>.

Image: Gordon Hookey, *Reiteration in Perpetuity*, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.

### Gallery Discussion

- What do you think the title *Reiteration in Perpetuity* means? How does this connect with the message the artist is seeking to convey in their work?
- Personal context: Look at the image of the kangaroo and the way in which it has been portrayed. What does this image represent in the context of Gordon's work?

### Classroom Activities

- Research political posters and campaigns. What are three elements of art they all have in common? Can you find these elements in Gordon's work? Write a short paragraph to reflect on why you think Gordon uses similar visual language.
- Read the Uluru Statement from the Heart. What is its significance for Australian society? How is the spiritual sovereignty spoken of different from mainstream interpretations of sovereignty? Discuss as a class.



## ARTWORK: *hoogah boogah*

For Gordon Hookey, "Just being a blackfella in this country is political. All I do is look at the world as a blackfella and translate that world visually, be it on a canvas or in a sculpture, installation, or poem; I metaphorically clarify or describe our realities."

In *hoogah boogah*, Gordon speaks to the commodification of Indigenous creative expression for non-Indigenous audiences and the need to recognise the social and political realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The phrase appears in several works, including a 2011 drawing which adds further:

**"THEY WANT OUR SPIRITUALITY BUT NOT OUR POLITICAL REALITY / THE PEDDLERS OF HOOGAH BHOOGAH / THE PERPETRATORS AND PERPETUATORS OF CULTURAL COLONIALISM."**

Meaning of commodification: to be treated as a product that can be bought or sold, within a capitalist economic system.

Image: Gordon Hookey, *hoogah boogah*, 2008. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.

### Gallery Discussion

- What do the words 'hoogah boogah' make you think of? (clue: derogatory as though to mimic caveman speech). How is Gordon shifting power dynamics through his work?
- Cultural context: Looking at the text presented in the artwork, what message do you think the artist is trying to convey? Do you think Gordon is effective at conveying this message? Explain by discussing the artist's use of materials, techniques and processes
- Formal context: Why do you think the artist has chosen to display the work in this way?

### Classroom Activities

- As a class, generate a word cloud on "What is Aboriginal art?" Allow students to come to the realisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are diverse, and their art is too.
- Reach out to First Nations elders in your community. Build a long-term relationship and seek their support for school initiatives to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the fabric of the school community.
- Create a short and sharp message using stencil artwork. Use a limited palette and display your artwork at school. What reaction do people have to your work?



## ARTWORK: *ethics*

In a 2017 interview, Gordon Hookey explains:

"I will never deny anyone their own meaning or perception of the work that I do because people come to a painting or a work of art with the whole life that they have lived. They will look through your work of art according to their perception of life. They'll read your work of art according to their own experiences. That's why I also say that art is a mirror to society; they look at it and learn something about themselves. People's readings of art often say more about them than the work of art, the artist, or what the artist is trying to say. In many cases, when it comes to Aboriginal history, they don't like what they see."

Image: Gordon Hookey, *ethics*, 2009. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.

### Gallery Discussion

- Given ethics are a set of moral principles that govern people's behavior, why do you think Gordon has chosen to present these words in this way? What is the artist saying about our colonial history?
- Contemporary context: How does Gordon challenge dominant power structures in his work?

### Classroom Activities

- Repurpose an old or secondhand frame to create a 2D artwork. How does the previous life of this frame add history or change the meaning of the work?
- Research protest and activism in Australia over the last 10 years. Are there any symbols, images or text that you see occurring frequently? Share your findings as a class and create a visual timeline of these events.



**ARTWORKS: *Youcrane / Love*  
*The Red Yella & Black / A Dot Painting No. 184*  
*Blood on the Green / Houses are Homes***

A *MURRIALITY* features a new commission that draws inspiration from Gordon's collection of political posters collected over the past 40 years and continues his series of protest banners. Made for use in the public realm at Invasion Day marches and rallies recognising Aboriginal resistance fighter Dundalli, Gordon's banners provide socio-political commentary while also imagining a truly empowered Indigenous future.

The use of wordplay and humour is evident throughout, as is Gordon's visual language of using images, text and metaphors or symbols. This is evident in *The Red Yella & Black / A Dot Painting No. 184* where Gordon uses the Brush Turkey as a metaphor for Aboriginal survival through colonisation.

While Gordon's banners focus mainly on Australian subjects, they also address human rights elsewhere as a reminder of our obligation to others. In *Youcrane/Love*, Gordon acknowledges the widespread media attention given to Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. Still, he asks us not to forget **"the atrocities, violations, injustices in Syria, Africa, Tibet, Palestine, West Papua etc."** that are no longer trending on social media or receiving media coverage.

In *Blood on the Green/Houses Are Homes*, the ace of hearts reveals blood spilt through fighting and difference of opinion, while the back of the banner addresses the housing crisis in Australia as a result of greed and government policy<sup>3</sup>.

The use of hearts as the yellow element within the Aboriginal flag is often used by Gordon to represent love. **"The yellow heart is symbolic of mob, land, and people. It is also open to translation by the viewer."**<sup>4</sup>



Image: Gordon Hookey, *Youcrane / Love*, 2022. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.



Image: Gordon Hookey, *TheRedYella&Black / ADotPainting No. 184*, 2022. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.



Image: Gordon Hookey, *Blood on the Green/ Houses are Homes*, 2022. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.

## Hands-On Workshop Activity

Students will take inspiration from Gordon Hookey's newly commissioned works in *A MURRIALITY* to create their own protest banner on an issue they care about. This could be social, political, or environmental, addressing issues that are local, national or international.

### Workshop materials

Writing equipment

Heavy duty cardboard or fabric such as calico

Markers, acrylic paint, paintbrushes

Wooden dowel (optional)

### PART A (in gallery or classroom)

- Observe Gordon's banner works. What do you see? What do you think about that? What does it make you wonder?
- Where have you seen slogans and short visual messages and even symbols in everyday life? Discuss with the person next to you about where you have seen these recently. Think about popular culture and media.
- Gordon often uses animals and other symbols in his work. How effective is the artist in conveying his message through the use of symbols? Discuss as a class.
- Listen and watch the interview with Gordon Hookey talking about his work.

### PART B (in art room)

- Think about a social, political or environmental issue. This could be something that affects you, your family, your friends or your community.
- What slogans or short messages could be used to communicate about your chosen issue? Brainstorm as many as you can.
- Start by creating a series of smaller works on cardboard. Choose one of the slogans to focus on. How can you use humour, wordplay, colour and other visual elements to maximise the impact of these words?
- What images and symbols can you use to complement the text? Is there an animal you could use to represent something about your chosen issue?
- Then, either collaboratively in groups or individually, choose the strongest image and text or combination of images and text to reproduce largescale on a fabric banner.
- Optional: sew panels either side of your banner to slide the wooden dowel through.
- Hold up your banners together as a class to gauge the visual impact of your work.

### Reflection

- Looking at the banners made together in class, what are the issues of relevance for people in your community? Are there any shared issues or threads of commonality?
- How does the use of humour impact on your interpretation of an artwork? Can serious issues be addressed through humour?
- Have you ever taken part in a protest march, rally or resistance before? What was the atmosphere like? Were there any banners or chants you remember?
- Do you think art can be an effective form of activism? What other examples of art activism can you think of?



Image: Gordon Hookey, *New commissions*, 2022. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.



## Curriculum Links

### Australian Curriculum / Visual Art / Years 11-12 Syllabus Objectives

1. implement ideas and representations
2. apply literacy skills
3. analyse and interpret visual language, expression and meaning in artworks and practices
4. evaluate art practices, traditions, cultures and theories
6. experiment in response to stimulus
7. create meaning through the knowledge and understanding of materials, techniques, technologies and art processes
8. realise responses to communicate meaning

Image: Gordon Hookey, *You can go now stop sign*, 2021. Installation view, 'A MURRIALITY', UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2022. Photograph by Jacqui Manning. Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © Gordon Allan Hookey / Copyright Agency, 2022.

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

Use materials, techniques and processes to explore visual conventions when making artworks (ACAVAM107) (ACAVAM111) (ACAVAM115)

Explore ideas and artworks 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 artworks 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)

## Further Resources

*A MURRIALITY*: Gordon Hookey, ed. Liz Nowell and José Da Silva (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art and Sydney: UNSW Galleries, 2022). Exhibition catalogue.

"Gordon Hookey", Milani Gallery, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://milanigallery.com.au/artists/gordon-hookey>

Gordon Hookey, [The Sacred Hill](#) Children's Book (Brisbane: The Queensland Art Gallery I Gallery of Modern Art. A Children's Art Centre publication, 2013).

"Gordon Hookey", University of New South Wales, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/alumni-profiles/gordon-hookey>

Additional *A MURRIALITY* resources are available via the [IMA Resources webpage](#)

## References

1. Tracey Clement, "Gordon Hookey's Kangaroos with Attitude Are Symbols of Indigenous Resistance", *Art Guide Australia*, 15 December 2021, accessed May 18 2022, <https://artguide.com.au/gordon-hookeys-kangaroos-with-attitude-are-symbols-of-indigenous-resistance>.
2. "The Uluru Statement", Uluru Statement From the Heart, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://ulurustatement.org>
3. José Da Silva, "Sign O the Times", *A MURRIALITY: Gordon Hookey*, ed. Liz Nowell and Jose Da Silva (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art and Sydney: UNSW Galleries, 2022). Exhibition catalogue.
4. Shannon Brett, "Aboriginal Way", *A MURRIALITY: Gordon Hookey*, ed. Liz Nowell and Jose Da Silva (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art and Sydney: UNSW Galleries, 2022). Exhibition catalogue.

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