

# NATION BUILDING

Develop a greater understanding of the events, people and structures that have shaped Australia as a nation.

VIEW ONLINE

QAGOMA  
LEARNING

# AUSCHAR CHAUNCY

## *PORTRAIT OF RICHARD EDWARDS 1874*



Auschar Chauncy / England/Australia c.1836–77 / *Portrait of Richard Edwards 1874* / Oil on canvas / 76 x 63.5cm (sight) / Purchased 2001 Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

The subject of this portrait is Richard Edwards (c.1840s–1915) who served as Member for Oxley in the House of Representatives between 1901–13. Edwards was a major shareholder in the *Telegraph Newspaper* and served as its director for a number of years, which speaks to his power and influence in both the financial and media systems of the time. He owned a drapery store in Brisbane with James Chapman trading under the name Edwards and Chapman (the firm eventually changed its name to Edwards and Lamb and traded into the 1960s) and he was also involved in the sugar industry. Above all, Edwards was a politician, which brought him to the very table that crafted policy for Australia. To know that Edwards, with such a vast sphere of influence, supported the White Australia Policy is an opportunity to think critically about how Australia was built, who built it, what their values were and what legacy have they left behind for all Australians.

## EXPLORE

Visit the National Museum of Australia website and learn about the White Australia policy.



Unknown / Swiss Studios, Melbourne / *Portrait of R. Edwards* early 1900s / Photograph, sepia toned / 31 x 23.5 cm (including mount) / Collection: National Library of Australia

## THINK

1. The *Immigration Restriction Act* (the White Australia policy) became law in 1901. What position did Richard Edwards hold in that year?
2. The National Museum of Australia's website features a video of journalist and author George Megalogenis in which he states that the White Australia policy is one of three defining moments in Australia's history. How long does he say that it took Australia to realise the mistakes of this policy?

## CREATE

Research the history of Brisbane's *Telegraph*. Find images and articles that were published by the Australian news media in the early years of the White Australia Policy. Draw the outline of Richard Edwards as portrayed in Chauncy's painting. Fill the space surrounding your outline with large block text taken from your research of the *Telegraph*. Inside the shape of Edwards illustrate references to his life: Oxley, Montgomeryshire, drapery, sugar cane, the Edwards and Lamb building.

# CONRAD MARTENS

## FOREST, CUNNINGHAM'S GAP 1857



Conrad Martens / England/Australia 1801–78 / *Forest, Cunningham's Gap* 1856 / Watercolour on paper / 30.5 x 42cm / Purchased 1998 with funds raised through The Conrad Martens Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Appeal and with the assistance of the Queensland Government's special Centenary Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Cunningham's Gap is the famous route over the Great Dividing Range between Moreton Bay and the Darling Downs. It is named for botanist Allan Cunningham, who traversed it in 1828. The Gap and its surrounds, the lush rainforest of the Great Dividing Range, is a site of cultural significance to Indigenous Australians, and includes the World Heritage-listed Main Range National Park west of Beaudesert, Queensland.

Conrad Martens, one of Australia's most proficient and prolific landscape artists, travelled through the Darling Downs during the 1850s, a time of early European settlement in the region.

In *Forest, Cunningham's Gap* Martens presents a colonial perspective. The painting accounts for the terrors of exploring an unknown land and the relative insignificance of the individual, dwarfed here by the natural world. The image of this solitary horseman facing a mighty forest could be read as symbolic of youthful hope, courage and hardiness, and the beginning of a new life in what would soon become Queensland.

## EXPLORE

Explore the Gallery's 'Northern Journey' interactive from 2001 to learn about the sketching journey that Conrad Martens embarked upon in 1851. (Note: you can access the interactive without Adobe Flash, but if prompted you may choose to download the software for optimal use of the interactive).

## THINK

1. 'The first Europeans to settle the Darling Downs arrived in the early 1840s. By 1851, when Conrad Martens crossed Cunningham's Gap, nearly all the land had been taken up by a small, close-knit group of young men, the squatters of the Darling Downs.' On what grounds would have the squatters claimed ownership of the land?

2. It is estimated that between 1500 and 2000 Aboriginal Australians from various language groups lived in the Darling Downs. The ancient practice of fire stick farming in the region is part of a complex process that Aboriginal peoples have passed down and maintained to cultivate their country. How is the ancient care of country in the region at odds with the claims of the squatters of the Darling Downs? Is there evidence that the Gap was cultivated by Indigenous Australians, not discovered by Cunningham?

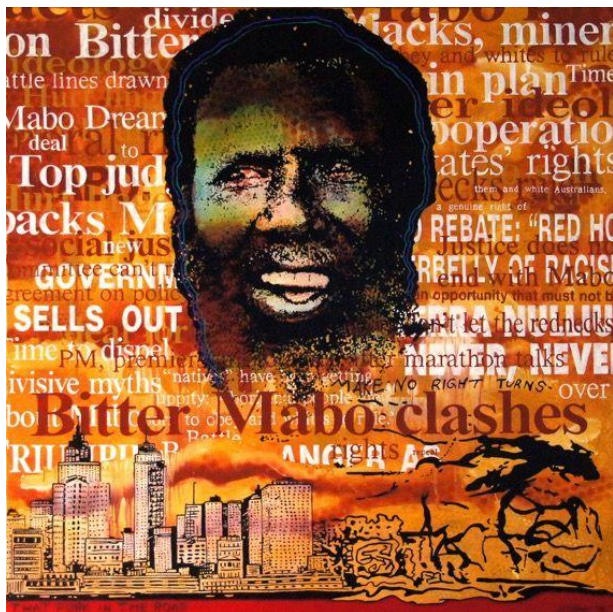
## CREATE

Use the information on the Department of Environment and Science website for the Main Range National Park to create a timeline of major events that occurred between 1828 and 1856.

Map your timeline by using the links to guides on the National Park website. Refer to Noel McKenna's Queenslander 2004 for inspiration.

# JOHN CITIZEN

EDDIE MABO (AFTER  
MIKE KELLEY'S  
'BOOTH'S PUDDLE' 1985,  
FROM PLATO'S CAVE,  
ROTHKO'S CHAPEL,  
LINCOLN'S  
PROFILE) 1996



John Citizen / Australia 1955–2014 / *Eddie Mabo (after Mike Kelley's 'Booth's Puddle' 1985, from Plato's Cave, Rothko's Chapel, Lincoln's profile)* 1996 / Synthetic polymer paint on canvas / 100 x 100cm / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Gift of James C. Sourris AM through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2019. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program/ Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Estate of Gordon Bennett

John Citizen is the pseudonym of the artist Gordon Bennett. A name chosen to suggest the everyman, John Citizen allowed Bennett to throw off being labelled as an Indigenous artist. Bennett stated that: 'John Citizen lets me take my Australian citizenship and cultural upbringing back from the netherworld of the imagined "other".' This work features the portrait of Eddie Koiki Mabo (1936–92), one of Australia's most important historical figures whose actions overturned the accepted view that Australia had been *terra nullius* (uninhabited land) before white settlement, leading to the Native Title Act of 1993.

There are numerous cues in this work that, if examined closely, open up knowledge about art, the media, Australia as a nation and the creative genius of the artist. Consider the title, the fragments of text, the cityscape, the two thin wavy lines are painted within the outer edges of Eddie Mabo's portrait and the blue and green colouration of the subject's face. The latter two observations are subtle pointers to Mer Island in the Torres Strait — Mabo's ancestral home.

## EXPLORE

Watch this introduction of the allegory of Plato's Cave. Look up Mer Island on Google maps and set your view to satellite. Compare the outline of Eddie Mabo's portrait in the painting with the shape of Mer Island. Watch the video again and pay particular attention to the references to outlines, shadow and light.

## THINK

1. What parallel is John Citizen drawing between Eddie Mabo and Plato's Cave?
2. Why did Bennett use John Citizen to explore the figure of Eddie Mabo and the Mabo decision?

## CREATE

1. Research a range of perspectives on the impact of native title since the Mabo case. Begin by researching native title claims in your region.
2. Stand with a light behind you facing a sheet of paper taped to a wall. Draw the outline of the silhouette cast by the shadow of your head. Within the silhouette draw a portrait of someone who has taught you a complicated lesson. Fill the negative space surrounding your outline with words and phrases about that person. Connect with the person you drew or someone else that they may have taught and ask them about their knowledge of native title.



# GUAN WEI

## ECHO 2005



Guan Wei / China/Australia b.1957 / *Echo* 2005 / Synthetic polymer paint on canvas / 42 panels: 273 x 722cm (overall) / Purchased 2006. The Queensland Government's Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Guan Wei

Guan Wei's *Echo* is a collision of cultures. Across the vast composition there are layers of national honour and resilience. Aboriginal warriors defending their country, British colonisers expanding their empire, the accomplishments of Chinese and European painting, the evolution of weaponry are all captured within one uniform grid of fragments. With all of the various elements that Guan brings together, it's the contemporary issues that he addresses that are not as visually evident. The contemporary artist is painting historical images through historical traditions to comment on the current treatment of immigrants and refugees in a nation that is defined by its multiculturalism.

### LOOK

Look for evidence to support the description that *Echo* is a 'contemporary historical painting'. Research historical painting from Australia and China to justify your visual analysis. Search the composition for visual codes that are indicative of a contemporary artist's practice.

### THINK

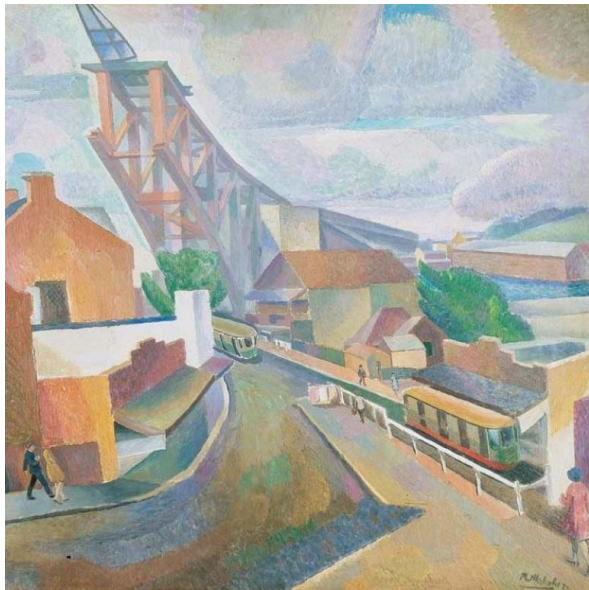
1. Can an artwork be historical and contemporary at the same time? How does history help us with the present?
2. What role does a contemporary artist play in communicating ideas about history? What can be gained by exploring history through contemporary art?

### CREATE

Think of *Echo* as a collage; a collage of traditions, styles, images and symbols. Select a nation to research and find an image of a landscape from that nation's tourism website that you can use as a background for a collage. Search for images and symbols about that nation by investigating the country's history (art, military, leaders, international relations), as well as other facets of their national story that could fill your composition (i.e. language, sport, farming, shipping). Use a grid to enlarge your image onto one large sheet of paper or card. Render your grid with your preferred medium (pencil, pastel, paint). Cut your work using your grid lines and display on a wall.

# ROLAND WAKELIN

## THE BRIDGE UNDER CONSTRUCTION 1928



Roland Wakelin / New Zealand/Australia 1887–1971 / *The bridge under construction* 1928 / Oil on composition board / 96.5 x 118cm / Purchased 1994. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant. Celebrating the Queensland Art Gallery's Centenary 1895–1995 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Roland Wakelin Estate

The international influences of Modernism on Australian art, architecture, design and literature has left an indelible mark on Australia's identity. The story of the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge is itself an example of the search for Modernism. English engineering (Dorman Long and Co Ltd.) and American inspiration (Hell's Gate Bridge, New York City) combined with Australian industry and ingenuity to create an iconic structure that set records and made a grand statement.

Wakelin was influenced by the British art critic Clive Bell's idea of the 'significant form', the art of French post-impressionist Paul Cézanne (as was Clive Bell) and the Synchronism movement. His membership in the Contemporary Group positioned him at the forefront of Australian art. Credited for working to bring modernism to Australia, Wakelin's support of the ideas of Bell and admiration for Cézanne can reveal insights into a pivotal period in the story of Australian art.

## EXPLORE

Explore the works of other modernist Australian painters in the QAGOMA Collection:

- [Grace Cossington Smith](#)
- [Roy de Maistre](#)
- [Eric Wilson](#)
- [Rah Fizelle](#)

## THINK

1. Clive Bell's theory of 'significant form' is 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, [that] stir our aesthetic emotions'. The description lacks detail or specific examples to illustrate the idea that was part of Bell's ambition to explain the entire history of art. What is the significant form in Wakelin's painting? Is the painting itself a significant form?

2. Are your emotions stirred by *The bridge under construction*? What is the difference between a standard emotion and an aesthetic emotion?

## CREATE

Lightly apply an angular grid to a sheet of paper. Make either a still life working with distinctly Australian products and objects in your house (i.e. a cup of tea and a biscuit, or a jar of Vegemite next to a plate of toast) or a landscape that echoes the spirit of Wakelin's painting of Sydney Harbour Bridge. Still drawing lightly, begin to illustrate your composition by following the lines of the grid. Instinctively take liberties to free your design from the grid with the aim of bringing the proportions, angles and orientation of each element in your image into a shared perspective. Render each element by applying a selection of blue-violet and yellow-orange watercolours with varying degrees of pressure to create tonal variations of colour. Use a paint brush and water to activate the colour. Be careful not to allow your colours to bleed into neighbouring shapes.

# TONY ALBERT

## SORRY 2008



Tony Albert / Girramay/Yidinyji/Kuku Yalanji peoples / Australia b.1981 / *Sorry 2008* / Found kitsch objects applied to vinyl letters / The James C. Sourris AM Collection. Purchased 2008 with funds from James C. Sourris through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Tony Albert

The forced removal of Indigenous Australian children from their families and ancestral country was a devastating systemic atrocity that has been the root cause of lasting, widespread and profound consequences. Known as the Stolen Generation, those who were removed suffered greatly from the destruction of family networks and loss of cultural knowledge. Many also encountered trauma and worked in servitude following their displacement. For the policies, prejudices and actions of the Australian Government, the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd officially apologised to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a speech delivered at the opening of the Australian Parliament on 13 February 2008. Tony Albert's *Sorry* commemorates this moment.

The Apology highlights the complexity of nation building in a country that is yet to reconcile its history. National progress is associated with looking forward into the future and the decision of Kevin Rudd's government to apologise raised political debate about whether or not it would make positive and tangible change — questions which continue to be asked.

## WATCH

Watch Tony Albert's introduction to *Sorry 2008*. He asks the question 'Has life for Aboriginal people changed because of the apology?' and explains the various ways that the display of the artwork can be altered which is integral to the critical nature of his practice.

In 2017 Tony Albert travelled to a remote Aboriginal community in Western Australia called Warakurna. During his visit, he collaborated with the children and artists in the community on a number of art projects. One of these projects is a series of illuminated paintings featuring the Mamu, fearful spirits that are found in Warakurna. Watch the video of Tony Albert's journey [here](#).

## THINK

1. Albert states that 'sorry is just a word.' What are the limitations of words?
2. Language is a powerful tool that can be used for a vast number of purposes (i.e. to entertain, to persuade, to instruct). How does language shape relationships and influence a nation?
3. The act of apologising is a fundamental skill that stems from a person's conscience. Does a national apology come require a collective conscience? How do you know if an apology has been meaningful or effective?

## CREATE

Tony Albert refers to the objects he assembles into his wall-based text works as 'Aboriginalia'. He began collecting these objects as a child when visiting Op shops with his family and continues to collect objects online. Find a collection of objects or images to create your own text work. Think about the relationship between the objects that you collect and the word/s you create.

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This resource has been developed by QAGOMA Learning.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.

