

r e a

born 1962, Coonabarabran, New South Wales
lives and works on Darug and Gundungurra Country/Blue
Mountains, New South Wales

Look Who's Calling The Kettle Black series 1992
dye sublimation Chromaluxe ultra high gloss prints
on aluminium
19.0 × 25.0 cm each (10 images in series)
Edition of 15 + 1AP
Courtesy the artist

Look Who's Calling The Kettle Black 1992 is one of r e a's
most acclaimed series, combining archival photographs with
graphic illustrations of kitchen appliances. This juxtaposition
challenges societal perceptions and highlights the hidden
histories of Aboriginal lives, acting as a metaphor for the many
unacknowledged Aboriginal people who lived in domestic
servitude due to various policies of removal.

The title references the saying 'the pot calling the kettle black,'
critiquing the hypocrisy of one person criticising another
while ignoring their own faults. In this work, r e a addresses
issues of identity, history, and the ongoing consequences
of colonialism. The series invites viewers to reflect on
the complexities of Aboriginal experiences and the narratives
surrounding domestic enslavement.

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POP (my blak(h)art) 1998

dye sublimation Chromaluxe ultra high gloss prints
on aluminium

84.0 × 59.0 cm each (triptych)

Edition of 4 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

POP (my blak(h)art) 1998 employs high-key colour and digital montage to create a triptych of pop art-inspired vignettes, featuring the artist's eyes, back of the head, and profile superimposed onto shooting practice targets. The central panel depicts an out-of-focus hand holding a gun, aimed directly at the viewer, creating tension by directing the threat of violence at the observer.

The target functions as a recurring symbol in r e a's work, with concentric circles reminiscent of Indigenous symbols from Central and Western desert regions that are used to signify place. r e a transforms these iconographies into a disturbing metaphor for the control exercised over Aboriginal lives by authority. The work also highlights the disproportionate rates of Indigenous deaths by suicide, murder and, most recently, in police custody.

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100% Koori 1998

dye sublimation Chromaluxe ultra high gloss prints
on aluminium

60.0 × 120.0 cm each (triptych)

Edition of 4 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

Through their work, 100% Koori 1998, r e a explores themes of reclamation and the reframing of language, delving into the complexities of identity and cultural representation. The panels include:

- Black Panel: BLAKCOURME / COLOURMEBLACK /
MEBLAKCOLOUR
(Images of Vegemite & Mickey Mouse)
- Yellow Panel: BLAKBOY / BLAKBOY / BOYBLAK /
BOYBLAK (Image of Jesus)
- Red Panel: BLAKGIRL / BLAKGIRL / GIRLBLAK /
GIRLBLAK (Image of Mary)

Their work highlights how language and imagery can evoke diverse meanings, serving as a metaphor for the realities of discrimination and the systematic dispossession of Aboriginal peoples. r e a describes:

These three panels symbolise the colours of the Aboriginal flag: the icons on the blak panel draw attention to early popular cultural imagery, like Vegemite & Mickey Mouse, who I know clearly as blak; the yellow & red panels read as Christian symbolism, Jesus & Mary, who I read as blak bodies not white! The work also reflects on how the English language translates ‘whiteness’ as rigidity. The boomerangs are a metaphor of my body in flight, smashing all these allusions to pieces.

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Definitions of Difference I-VI 1994

dye sublimation Chromaluxe ultra high gloss prints
on aluminium

100.0 x 80.0 cm each (six works in series)

Edition of 4 + 1 AP

Courtesy the artist

Definitions of Difference 1994 is a powerful critique of gender norms and cultural stereotypes, advocating for greater recognition of Indigenous and queer identities. First exhibited at ACCA in 1994, this series challenges narrow perceptions of Aboriginal identity and art, particularly the misconception that authenticity is solely linked to traditional forms.

Using digital media, the work explores complex themes of identity, femininity, and historical oppression, especially as they relate to Aboriginal women. The series features fragmented imagery of a female figure who is both adorned and ensnared, symbolising the lasting effects of colonial narratives.

By overlaying definitions of knots and binds onto these visuals, r e a deepens the commentary on entrapment and societal expectations, prompting a reconsideration of the constraints on identity and representation.

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Head On 2009

installation; 3D printed heads (reproduced from the
original 1950s cast with black glaze), found objects, vinyl text
in Gamilaraay language

15.0 × 12.0 × 2.0 cm each (26 male and female heads
per installation, dimensions variable)

Edition of 4 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

The installation Head On 2009 features a new configuration of the artist's series, which originally included one hundred 3D-printed 'Aboriginal heads'. These replicas are based on two original 'adolescence heads'—one male and one female—created in the 1950s from plaster casts and finished with high black gloss, sourced from a second-hand store.

The repetition of these striking male and female faces, positioned to 'face off,' prompts a visual dialogue that challenges the gender binary. Accompanied by Gamilaraay words with English translations—bilaarr meaning spear, yugal meaning song, and baran meaning boomerang—this installation reclaims the racially charged original casts that exploited Aboriginal likenesses for commercial gain.

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NATIVE 2013

neon

Edition of 3 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

NATIVE 2013 is derived from r e a's site-responsive installation, The Native Institute 371.979915, which featured sound, neon, and an LED sign. This installation was originally created as part of The Native Institute, Indigenous Artists' Residency at Blacktown Art Centre in 2013. The white neon spells the word 'native,' continuing the artist's exploration of reclamation and the reframing of language.

The glowing text underscores the legacies of its history, illustrating how a single word can evoke multiple meanings. The term 'native' speaks to various truths, including the use of language as a tool for discrimination and the systematic displacement of many First Peoples. This disruption has significantly impacted the ongoing practice of culture and language, prompting reflection on the values and priorities we let shape our present.

In this third iteration of the now-iconic work, r e a employs the language of the readymade to amplify voices, particularly those of young Aboriginal children, who are reclaiming their history and identity.

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Native 2013, 2024, 2025

LED signage

Unique Edition

Courtesy the artist

r e a's expanded practice encompasses photography, installation, digital media, and video, featuring a deliberate juxtaposition of English with their Gamilaraay language. In this work, r e a repurposes a road sign, using text to signify colonial presence and creating a space for resistance through their message.

The words cycle through sixteen frames of text in English, illuminated on the LED screen. Phrases such as 'native', 'black black black black', and 'the black native institute, estab'd Parramatta 1814' highlight historical contexts, while statements like 'Assimilation 1930 – 1960' and 'Self-determination 1972 – 2013' reflect ongoing struggles. The urgent plea, 'Stop killing me!' resonates deeply, emphasising the call for recognition and justice in the wake of the colonisation.

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GARI (language) SILENCE = DEATH // LAND = RIGHTS

2025

screenprint

100.0 × 75.0 cm each (diptych)

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

This diptych features two screen prints: the left panel in black with magenta text reading ‘SILENCE = DEATH,’ and the right panel with yellow and magenta text reading ‘LAND = RIGHTS’. Inspired by a 1987 poster from the Silence=Death Collective, which used a pink triangle to highlight LGBTIQ+ oppression, the work reflects themes of reclamation recurrent to r e a’s practice.

The first display of this installation took place outside the Gunnery at Artspace, Sydney, featuring banners with the word for ‘sun’ in Gamilaraay language (yaraay), Wailwan language (dhuni), and Biripi language (toonau). Inside, wallpaper displayed the phrases ‘SILENCE = DEATH’ and ‘LAND = RIGHTS’. However, the reference to death was removed from the public-facing banners due to concerns about youth suicide rates, which some viewed as ironic given the work’s intention to highlight this critical issue.

GARI (language) is a recent work by r e a, comprising a series of political posters. Its first iteration was a site-specific commission of banners and posters at Artspace, Sydney, for the 24th Biennale of Sydney in 2024.

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PolesApart series 2009

C-type prints on aluminium

3 triptychs: 100.0 × 92.0 cm, 100.0 × 110.0 cm, 100.0 × 92.0 cm

HD single-channel video, 6:55 mins

Edition of 4 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

PolesApart 2009 series critically engages with accepted histories and heroes. The series responds to Frederick McCubbin's painting The Pioneer 1904, that uses a triptych format traditionally reserved for religious art to elevate the status of the pioneer in Australian history. In a similar three-panel format, r e a presents self-portraits in Victorian-era attire, fleeing through a burnt landscape. Accompanying this series is a single-channel video that creates a dream-like atmosphere, blurring memory and reality. The figure alternates between running toward and away from the viewer, spraying paint across their body and the camera, implicating the audience as both spectators and pursuers. Though unnamed, the character reflects the story of r e a's great aunt, Sophie, reenacting her escape in a burnt landscape from the hunter. This narrative symbolises resilience and survival, highlighting the trauma of being taken and the strength to rise from historical adversity.

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tRAKa-tRAKn (burra bee dee) 2025

three-channel video and 5.1 sound installation, 15:00 mins

Edition of 4 + 1AP

Courtesy the artist

Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary
Art (ACCA), Melbourne, 2025

tRAKa-tRAKn (burra bee dee) 2025 was realised in

collaboration with Coonabarabran Elders and Community.

Performers: Joey Samuel Carriage & Jet Thomas. Voice: Brenda
Nicholas, Lesley Morris, Suellyn Tighe, Joey Samuel Carriage &
Nardi Simpson. Creative Team/Collaborating Artists include,
Editor, Drone & Colourist: Darrin Baker, Co-Producer:
Abi K, Sound Composition & Design: Lea Collins & Kimmo
Vennonnen, with Didgeridoo instrumental by Jason Lee Scott,
Bat Animation Production: Studio Gilay, Animation Director:
Jake Duczynski (Gomeri / Mandandanji), Animation Producer:
Melissa Azizi, 3D Rigging & Animation: Jalamara Toney
(Wiradjuri), Texture Artist: Zoë Velonas, Illustrator: Jonathon
Saunders (Woppaburra).

tRAKa-tRAKn has been in production since 2018. The first

iteration was launched in 2024 in Coonabarabran, r e a's

Community in the central west of New South Wales. Funded by
Create New South Wales and Creative Australia.

r e a : c l a i m e d 2025 marks is the first public premiere of r e a's immersive three-channel video installation, tRAKa-tRAKn (burra bee dee). The work addresses the tragic reality of youth suicide in Indigenous communities, evoking a sense fear and violence through ominous visuals and visceral 5.1 surround sound. The recurrent symbol of a target and the hunting rifle's scope that follows the central figure alludes to being stalked by a predator, rendered all the more sinister by the fact it is unseen. Created with support from Gamilaraay Elders, the narrative loosely reflects the cultural history of Burra Bee Dee, an Aboriginal mission founded in 1908 near Coonabarabran. The name translates to 'Flying Mice,' referencing totemic animals significant to the Gamilaraay people. r e a's collaboration with Elders powerfully transforms cultural stories from Burra Bee Dee into an abstract interpretation that invites reflection upon how the past influences the present, specifically when it comes to the critical issue of youth suicide. The power of art to turn attention to urgent issues and prompt change is, for r e a, reflected in the words of James Baldwin;

All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique.
All artists, if they are to survive, are forced, at last, to
tell the whole story; to vomit the anguish up.