



Treena Clark

How First Nations artists are reclaiming colonial objects and celebrating culture through garments

Published: February 8, 2024 6.17am AEDT

Treena Clark

Chancellor's Postdoctoral Indigenous Research Fellow, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, University of Technology Sydney

A few years back, I started collecting vintage Australian tourist scarves that portray First Nations people as primitive caricatures and noble savages. Now, I own more than ten scarves with images ranging from Western depictions of First Nations art and objects, to Indigenous people in tokenistic scenes.

Collecting these tourist wares isn't new. Kitsch items are often gathered and reclaimed by First Nations peoples, artists, designers and academics.

My fascination with kitsch scarves involves wearing them as outfits, which I recently did at the Darwin Country to Couture runway show.



I wore one of my kitsch scarves to a runway show as a creative response to my academic work. Treena Clark

I did so as a creative response to my academic work on First Nations fashion, art and style and to engage with the practice of First Nations garmenting – the use of clothing and adornment as art.

Aboriginalia and Koori Kitsch

Artists such as Destiny Deacon and Tony Albert use several names to describe items with Western depictions of First Nations people, art and objects, including Koori Kitsch and Aboriginalia.

You can find these depictions in souvenirs and bric-a-brac in the form of tea towels, tablecloths, postcards, ashtrays, dolls, scarves, badges and patches.

Destiny Deacon (KuKu/Erub/Mer) has used Koori Kitsch objects for decades. In one work titled *Border Patrol* (2006), Deacon photographs a white doll atop a tea towel featuring Australian landmarks, plants, animals and Aboriginal people hunting.



Destiny Deacon, *Border patrol* (2006), from the series *Totemistical*. Light jet print from Polaroid original. 80cmx100cm. Edition of 8 + 2 APs. Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

Tony Albert's (Girramay/Yidinji/Kuku-Yalanji) art often features vintage souvenir ashtrays and textiles. Albert has been credited with creating the term "Aboriginalia" to describe the portrayal of Western stereotypes of First Nations peoples and cultures in kitsch items.



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Self Portrait (Ash On Me)

X

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Kait James (Wadawurrung) has decolonised vintage souvenir towels through embroidered embellishments to highlight their problematic designs and reclaim them as First Nations art. James recently also disrupted the Barbie doll by creating a custom Aboriginal flag dress and banner saying “Faboriginal Barbie”.



kait_james
The Hotel Windsor, Melbourne

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...

Kait James's *Faboriginal Barbie*, 2023 features in her takeover of the bathroom in our Spring1882 Suite 407 until Saturday 12th of August 2023

Spring1883 Suite 407 until Saturday 12th of August 2023.

Email info@neonparc.com.au or DM us for a catalogue.

—

Kait James, a proud Wadawurrung woman explores her identity as an Australian woman with Indigenous and Anglo heritage. Her work questions Australia's self-perception, and the collection lack of knowledge of Indigenous culture. Combining fabric collage, embroidery, and rug tufting techniques, James incorporates kitsch 'Aboriginalia' that generalises and stereotypes her culture and subverts it with familiar pop-cultural and political references to reflect her contemporary perspective. Known for maintaining an idiosyncratic tone throughout her practice, while navigating injustices with optimism and humour, James's work ultimately speaks of hope.

—

Kait James

Faboriginal Barbie, 2023

Acrylic yarn, black barbie, printed paper, wooden dowel, toilet roll
30.5 x 24 x 16 cm

Neon Parc, Suite 407
Spring1883
The Hotel Windsor
111 Spring St, Melbourne

Opening hours:

Thu 10 Aug, 11am–7pm

Fri 11 Aug, 11am–7pm

Sat 12 Aug, 11am–7pm

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In Kayla Dickens' (Wiradjuri) 2022 exhibition, *Return to Sender*, collage backdrops featured enlarged vintage postcards with superimposed images, symbols and text interrogating colonisation and colonial sexual exploitation.



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As both artist and collector, [@karla_dickens](#) searches op shops and rubbish tips for souvenirs from history. These objects and materials work their way into her art, repurposed in order to connect the past to the present-day.

In addition to this found detritus, 'Return to Sender' reworks a collection of postcards picturing First Nations people from the turn of last century and confronts these racist depictions with messages of strength and survival.

Free exhibition | Wed-Sun, 10am-5pm.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that the exhibition contains images of deceased persons, and includes images and themes that may be distressing.

More info via the link in our bio.

📸 : [@zanwimberley](#)

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First Nations garmenting

First Nations peoples are also using Aboriginalia within fashion. Paul McCann (Marrithiyel) has embellished couture outfits with vintage textiles depicting First Nations peoples, animals and plants.

One of McCann's designs at the 2022 Australian Fashion Week, Blinged Out Warrior, disrupted a kitsch item of an Aboriginal man by placing it front and centre on a bedazzled top. This form of work, termed "garmenting", emphasises contemporary artists' use of clothes in their pieces.



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Blinged out Warrior @jarwynirvincollins @first.nations.fashion.design ❤️👑❤️

Proud to say the least...

@lucasdawsonphotography

#paulmccannart #Aboriginal #firstnations #Couture #warrior #regalafuck #blackpride

#Sovereignty

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While Aboriginalia and Koori Kitsch are popular terms, First Nations garmenting is a recent definition yet to reach mainstream use. It's an emerging trend adopted by many First Nations artists whose work is interested in confronting or reshaping history, highlighting the current world, or imagining a new future.

This could look like creating modern versions of traditional pieces, or critiquing and talking back to colonial clothing forced upon First Nations peoples. Several artists also create works that reflect contemporary protest wear, or futuristic pieces that depict fantasies or predict trends.

Peter Waples-Crowe's (Ngarigo) *Ngarigo Queen – Cloak of queer visibility* (2018) features a reworked possum skin cloak with rainbow colours and a train to reference his two identities of Aboriginal and queer.



Peter Waples-Crowe, *Ngarigo Queen – Cloak of queer visibility* (2018). Treena Clark

Kelly Koumalatsos (Wergaia/Wemba Wemba) uses possum fur as a stamp to create cultural fabrics. Significant works use these fabrics to form colonial and Western outfits that speak back to colonisation.

When displaying her garments in galleries, Koumalatsos also includes old family portraits within the works to further contextualise the forced colonial clothes.



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We adore seeing our visitors exploring and sharing our newest exhibition, Gung: Create, Make, Do, Love, by Wergaia/Wemba Wemba artist Kelly Koumalatsos in Bunjilaka at [@MelbourneMuseum](#). 💕

The exhibition showcases a stunning selection of works on paper as well as three-dimensional Victorian-era garments delicately constructed from fur-printed tissue paper. You'll notice portraits of Kelly's family and ancestors, symbolising cultural identity and protection, throughout. ✨ Learn more via our link in bio!

Open daily and included in your general entry to Melbourne Museum.

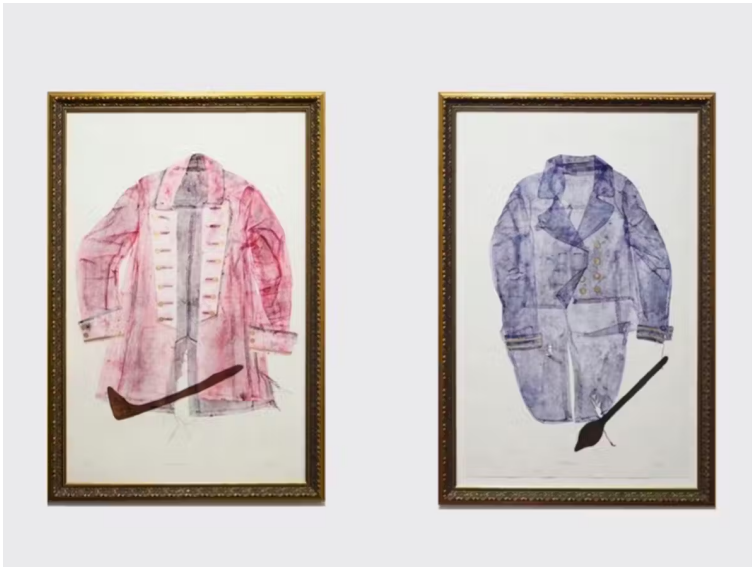
📷 [@kylowie](#), [@jillkellett](#) and [@dingograms](#)

#MuseumsVictoria #Bunjilaka #MelbourneMuseum #OpenforEveryone
#CreateMakeDoLove #KellyKoumalatsos #FirstPeoples #FirstNations #Victoria #Australia
#Melbourne #MelbourneToDo #Art #Fashion #Regram #Museums #Museum #Gallery
#Exhibition

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Kyra Mancktelow (Quandamooka) specialises in creating garments in sculptural or print form to interrogate colonial histories of forced Western clothing and the removal of cultural wear. The items she recreates range from forced military jackets, to outfits worn in missions, to contemporary forms referencing the history of activism.



Kyra Mancktelow, *Gubba Up*, 2021-22. Two ink impressions with gold leaf on Hahnemühle paper, 140cmx92cm each. Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney.

Carly Tarkari Dodd's (Kurna/Narungga/Ngarrindjeri) exhibition, *Royal Jewels* (2022), showcased Indigenised versions of jewellery pieces owned by the English royal family. Using cultural weaving techniques to replicate the English monarch's jewellery collection, Dodd confronts colonisation by turning the tables and inspiring truth-telling about this country's history.



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♥ Sapphire and Pearl necklace
Sapphire and Diamond earring
Sapphire engagement ring ♥

New works for an upcoming show at [@marsgallery](#)

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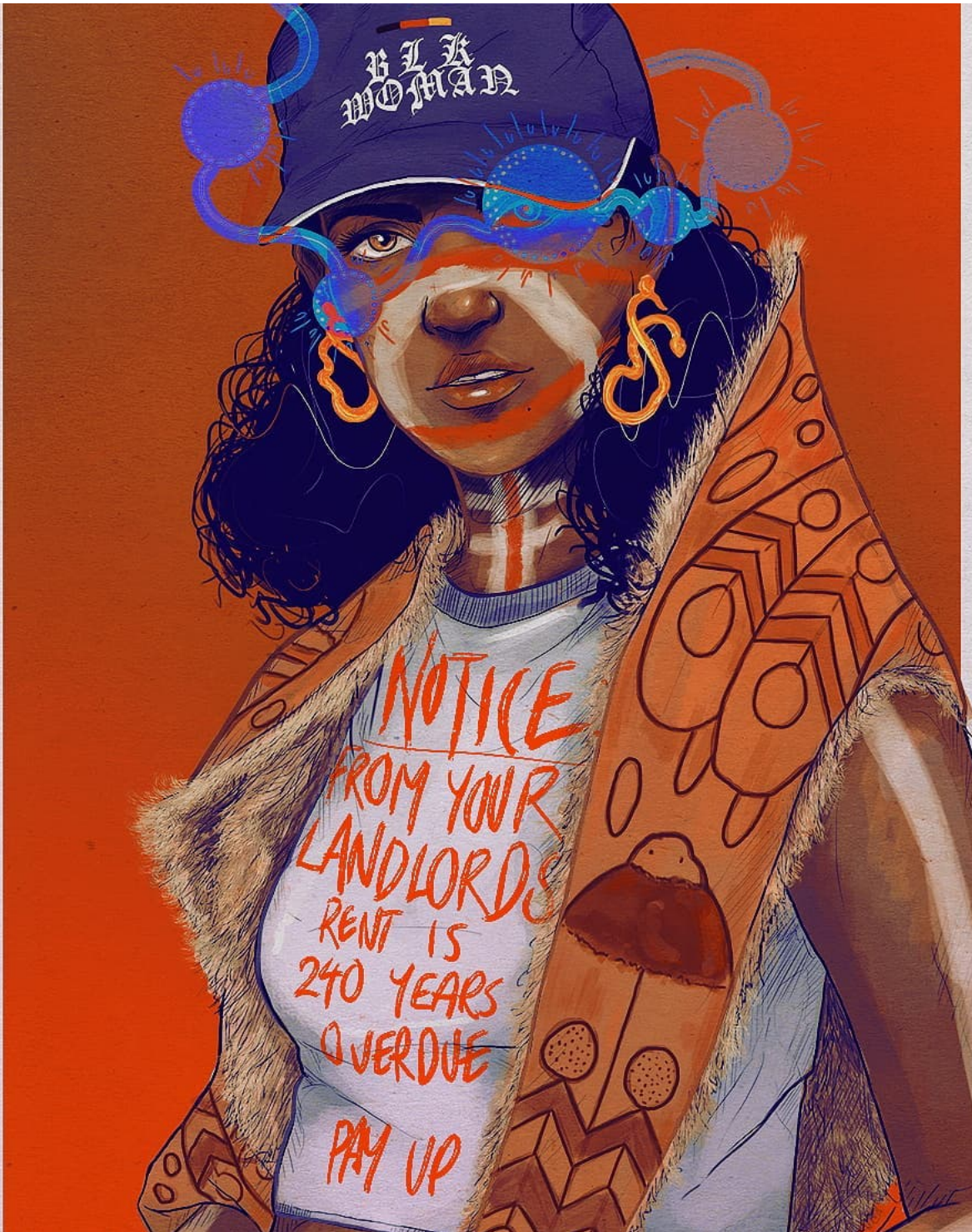
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The artist Coffinbirth (Charlotte Allingham, Wiradjuri/Ngiyampaa) illustrates designs featuring First Nations people in unique outfits across time. Coffinbirth notably reimages or recreates First Nations culture or issues through pop-culture graphics and comic-style art.



coffinbirth
74.7K followers

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coffinbirth

Found some work that I haven't posted/forgot existed. So I'm going to post them. A redo of notice.

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Dennis Golding (Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay) creates hand-painted superhero capes to celebrate the power of First Nations identity. He often works with young First Nations people to develop their own versions.



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@dennisingolding's exhibition 'POWER – The Future is Here' is on tour now!

Developed in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Alexandria Park Community School as part of our @solidgroundau program, the work is a

Alexandra Park Community School as part of our @SolidGroundau program, the work is a series of vibrant painted superhero capes adorned with iconography informed by the students' lived experience and cultural identity.

You may remember this work from when it premiered at Blacktown Arts and Carriageworks in 2021. We are so excited for it to be shared with regional communities across NSW.

Read more about the work and where you can experience it in ArtsHub via the link in our bio.

Image credit: Dennis Golding, The Future is Here, 2021, Carriageworks. Photograph Zan Wimberley

[#SolidGround](#) [#IndigenousYouth](#) [#CulturalIdentity](#) [#carriageworks](#)

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Disrupting, reclaiming and Indigenising

Many First Nations people have an inherent need to expel harmful histories and channel cultural practices creatively.

This can be through artists exhibiting their works, fashion designers telling their stories, or everyday First Nations people who like to practise culture through outfits. When First Nations artists use colonial souvenirs and garments, they can disrupt colonisation and celebrate their culture.

Wearing my kitsch scarves means I join a distinguished group of First Nations artists who use these objects and clothing within their works and creative expressions.

Read more: A brief look at the long history of First Nations fashion design in Australia
