

Reiteration in Perpetuity 2010

Oil on canvas

You can go now! 2021

Stop sign, traffic cone, oil paint, wood, wheels

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Gordon Hookey's acknowledgment of Aboriginal sovereignty features a kangaroo proxy who sees the world through Aboriginal eyes. This use of sharp political observation and humour also appears in a traffic sign referencing Richard Bell's 2017 painting *Immigration Policy*, where the expression "You can go now!" fills a map of Australia. At the entrance to the exhibition, Hookey's sign announces the need for non-Indigenous viewers to slow down and pay attention and an invitation to leave on departure.

Solidarity/You Are Here 2020

Canvas synthetic polymer paint, metal eyelets, on wood dowels, traffic cones, castors

Collection: The University of Queensland, Brisbane. Purchased 2021

Gordon Hookey makes two statements in this protest banner made for the 2021 Invasion Day march in Meanjin (Brisbane). *Solidarity* expresses visions of unity and resistance, with a clenched fist holding a skeleton key for humanity. Watering cans pour gold and silver over the roots in a bid to mobilise the wider community. *You Are Here* responds to the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfire season and inaction over the growing climate emergency by then Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who went on holiday during the crisis. In 2017, he lobbied for the coal industry by presenting a lump of coal to Parliament and telling the chamber, “Don’t be afraid, don’t be scared, it won’t hurt you. It’s coal.”

hoogah boogah c.2005

Card and paint stencil

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

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*, Hookey 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.”

ethics c.2005

Card and paint stencil

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

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.”

Murriland! #1 2015–17

Oil on canvas

Commissioned by Frontier Imaginaries for documenta14

Collection: HOTA Gallery. Gifted by the citizens of the Gold Coast to future generations, 2019

Murriland! #1 is the first in a series of history paintings that Gordon Hookey is developing. The works aim to educate audiences from a Murri perspective on significant historical events omitted from mainstream education. Inspired by Congolese artist Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu (1947–81), who depicted his country's brutal colonial past and the fight for independence, *Murriland! #1* is a powerful account of the colonisation of Australia in Queensland, where many Aboriginal people self-identify as Murri. It shows ancestors emerging from the Dreamtime, the coming of Europeans and their eventual domination of the land. Hookey has described his approach: "History in Australia is horrific and ugly. I grieve every time I look at something so horrific. I find it hard to represent those realities, and I have dealt with the situation by subverting them."

Tassietigahscene / A Pixel No.13 2022

Blood on the Green / Houses are Homes 2022

The Red Yella & Black / A Dot Painting
No.184 2022

Good On'Ya! / Love 2022

Youcrane / Love 2022

Poohtin / A Dot Painting No.185 2022

Trumspeek / A Dot Painting No.186 2022

Trum's Legacy / Yella Fella 2022

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas; wood dowels, traffic cones, castors

Commissioned by the UNSW Galleries Commissioners Circle, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Untitled 1994

Oil on canvas

Collection: The Australian National University Art Collection.

Acquired by the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre, 1995

Untitled 1994

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

These early paintings set in Sydney introduce Gordon Hookey's use of anthropomorphism and ideas of corruption, brutality, and injustice around Indigenous land rights. The characterisation of police officers as pigs, follows the work of leading African American artist and activist Emory Douglas, who used pig illustrations to satirise the US police force. Sydney's iconic TNT towers also point to a history of the NSW police force monitoring residents in Redfern.

In a 2018 interview, Hookey described his interest in depicting humans as animals: "I was always moved by George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. He looked at a farm of animals as a microcosm of humanity. I started symbolising Aboriginal people as native animals, from crocodiles to goannas, kangaroos, and wombats. But then, when I was representing introduced people, they had to be introduced species. So, I started using sheep, cane toads, pigs, camels, and other invasive animals."

All Natives laughed as the cruel joke was played on poor li'l Pinky 1997

Oil on canvas

Collection: National Museum Australia. Gordon and Elaine Syron Collection

In a 2021 interview, Gordon Hookey explains: “I’m trying to show this ugly, horrible, terrible reality in maybe a beautiful or a funny way. Humour for me has been a device to seduce people into the harsh political realities of my people.” In *All the Natives Laughed*, Hookey reverses the story of an old blackfella who goes into a pub and has his chair pulled out from under him. He flips the scene with Aboriginal people presented as native animals enjoying payback for Pinky’s misfortune.

Wreckonin 2007

Oil on canvas

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.
Gift of Timothy North and Denise Cuthbert through the Queensland Art
Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2020. Donated through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

Wreckonin is one of several works Gordon Hookey has made in response to the fight for justice following the 2004 Palm Island death in custody. Mulrunji was then the 147th Indigenous death in police custody since 1990, and his death sparked enormous civic unrest, including the burning down of the local police station and courthouse. Hookey's painting imagines a decisive guilty verdict for Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley, who was acquitted of manslaughter in 2007.

Austika/Autralya 2020

Canvas synthetic polymer paint, metal eyelets, on wood dowels, traffic cones, castors

Collection: The University of Queensland, Brisbane. Purchased 2021

In this protest banner made for the 2021 Invasion Day march in Meanjin (Brisbane), Gordon Hookey draws attention to the use of the Australian flag and the Southern Cross constellation as illustrations of ultranationalism. The term 'Austika' is borrowed from artist Richard Bell who used it to characterise racial violence in Sydney during the 2005 Cronulla riots. The word takes literal form in the shape of a tattoo, a merger of the stars, and a swastika whose association with anti-Semitism incites ideas of xenophobia and white supremacy.

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Thud! 1996

Lithograph on paper, edition 1/10

Scary, very scary 1996

Lithograph on paper, edition 1/10

Collection: Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Purchased 1997

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Sacred nation, scared nation, indoctrination 2003

Oil on canvas

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Presented through the NGV Foundation by Juliette, Danielle and Georgina Jerums, Member, 2003

Sacred nation, scared nation, indoctrination speaks to the destruction of natural environments by the government of the United States of America in its search for oil and of the Australian government's complicity in such behaviour. It also expresses more broadly a frustration and anger at the greed for natural resources that exacerbates environmental degradation and climate change. When it was exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2004, it was subject to intense criticism in the media, with then Victorian Liberal Opposition Arts Spokesman Andrew Olexander calling for its removal. In a 2009 interview, Gordon Hookey stated: "The worst type of censorship is not from the police, the government bureaucrats, the Censorship Board, the church or the community; it comes from within. We won't censor ourselves."

Ten Point Scam 1998

Oil on canvas

Collection: The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Group, The Art Gallery of Western Australia Foundation, 2001

Brick shithouse 1998

Acrylic on canvas

Collection: Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Purchased 1999

Ten Point Scam is a response to the 1998 Native Title Amendment Bill, commonly referred to as the “10 Point Plan”. A ruling made by the High Court of Australia in the 1996 *Wik Peoples v Queensland Native Title Case* allowed for the coexistence of both Native Title and pastoral lease on Australian land. However, the amended Bill created by the John Howard-led Liberal Government made such coexistence impossible, effectively disabling Native Title claims on pastoral leases and a wide range of other land tenures. Gordon Hookey responds to the denial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty with works rebuking the systems of control and structures under which Indigenous people are governed. They include *Brick shithouse* and *King Hit (for Queen and Country)*, exhibited alongside *Ten Point Scam* in the 2000 Adelaide Biennale ‘Beyond the Pale’. Hookey has said of the former painting, “Often to symbolise the way non-Aboriginal people are disconnected from the land, I use bricks in my work. Bricks are land, but it’s land that has been burnt, everything living inside it destroyed, and then that is “what’s used to build.”

Xanthorrhoea takes over the suburban backyard 1995

Oil on canvas

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Gift of Joseph and Patricia Pugliese 2014. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

Xanthorrhoea is Gordon Hookey's response to the hysteria surrounding the issue of Native Title and the political and media campaigns that ignited widespread paranoia that private landholders were at risk of losing their property to Aboriginal people. The painting depicts the once average quarter-acre plot of land in Sydney surrounded by a white picket fence that *Xanthorrhoea* shrubs have infiltrated. A native plant to Australia and formally known as black boys or spear grass, it takes the form of literal spears within the surrounding chaos.

WAM/Ethics 2020

Canvas synthetic polymer paint, metal eyelets, on wood dowels, traffic cones, castors

Collection: The University of Queensland, Brisbane. Purchased 2021

In this protest banner Gordon Hookey employs the ubiquitous office staple of Wite-Out to describe the concept of whitewashing: a practice of deliberately concealing unpleasant or incriminating facts through censorship. The text refers to a 2019 viral video featuring a Mildura woman named Karen attacking her Aboriginal neighbours. As Karen attempts to remove an Aboriginal flag on their property, one of the residents says: “My flag is too strong for you, Karen”. Since this event, ‘Karen’ has entered the common vernacular globally to describe someone (usually a white, middle-aged woman) who complains unnecessarily and from the position of entitlement and privilege. On the reverse side, a wordplay on ‘ethics’ questions moral principles.

Aboriginality victorious 2008

Oil paint, plastic and metal on canvas, paper, metal and metallic and oil paint on boxing gloves

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, NGV Supporters of Indigenous Art, 2008

Aboriginality victorious features the character of Fruit Flee, a diminutive figure of resistance inspired by martial artist-actor Bruce Lee. In a 2017 interview, Gordon Hookey stated: “My work is not only about resistance and protest, but also about empowerment. If I am dealing with a situation where Aboriginal people are subjugated, dehumanised, or treated unjustly, I subvert the scenario, turn it around to make blackfellas strong, powerful, and victorious.”

King hit (for Queen and Country) 1999

Synthetic polymer paint and oil on leather punching bag and gloves with steel swivel and rope noose

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.
Purchased 2000. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant

King hit (for Queen and Country) features a punching bag depicting former Prime Minister John Howard, One Nation leader Pauline Hanson and former politician and One Nation co-founder David Oldfield. Each raises their gloves, ready for a fight. For Gordon Hookey, a set of boxing gloves painted with the Aboriginal flag represents “Aboriginality fighting against these things that we see as subjugating or oppressing us as a people”. Written around the bag is the 1946 prose by Lutheran Pastor Martin Niemöller about the atrocities of Nazi Germany and the personal responsibility of standing against persecution, violence, and injustice.

In a 2012 interview, Hookey stated: “*King hit* is of a time and place that is still impacting us today and will probably continue to make an impact for generations. It was made around the time that John Howard was Prime Minister of Australia, while Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party was at its peak. Hanson was saying all these racist things against Aboriginal people, against migrants and even attacking workers and single mothers. It was a verbal attack on human rights – I believe that Aboriginal rights are human rights. Howard just stood back and did not react. In retrospect, he used Hanson to gauge how far his right-wing views could be manifested.”

Wall-a-roo 2017

Oil paint on particleboard flooring

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Wall-a-roo speaks to the normalisation of racism in mainstream Australian media, with Pauline Hanson leading journalists in hood and robes. At the same time, armed kangaroos (a proxy for Aboriginal Australia) are witnesses to the fears and anxieties of racist Australia. A cautious warning from Malcolm X (here attributed by his later Islamic name) speaks of the media's mischaracterisation of his political activism. "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."