

Let's talk...

Art, Culture and the Archibald Prize

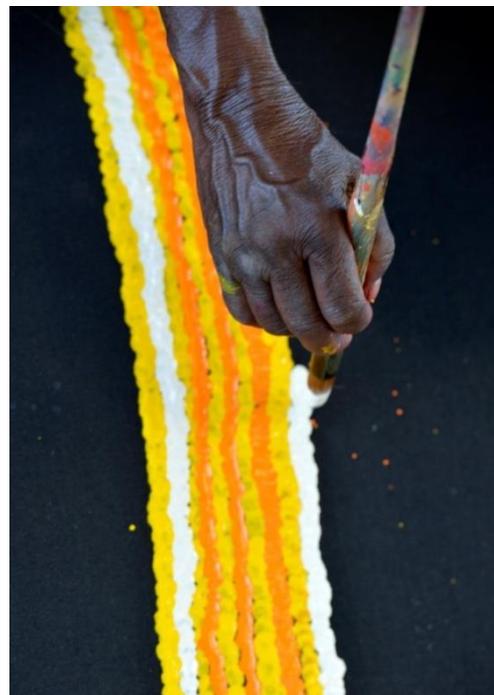


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this factsheet may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

Art connects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to culture, heritage and land, and to the past, present and future. The art world in Australia is made richer by the important historical and ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, and the Archibald Prize provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on these contributions and celebrate these artists' success and the beauty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

Did you know...?

- Emily Kame Kngwarreye's art and life were inseparable, her cultural connections to community and Country present in all of her work. Without formal training, Emily became one of Australia's most celebrated artists.¹
- Australia boasts the oldest ever depiction of a human face, with over 70 faces found across the Murujuga Peninsula from between 25,000 and 35,000 years ago. This is also the site of the world's largest gallery with approximately 1,000,000 engravings over 300 sq kilometres.²
- The emergence of 'dot' paintings by Aboriginal men from the western deserts of Central Australia has been called the 'greatest art movement of the twentieth century'.³
- In 2012 Tony Albert became the first Indigenous Australian to be appointed as official war artist and was deployed to one of the Army's special Regional Surveillance Units North West Mobile Force. His artworks honour the dedication and contribution of Indigenous Australians to the defence of Australia.⁴



¹ http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia_the_genius_of_emily_kame_kngwarreye/emily_kame_kngwarreye

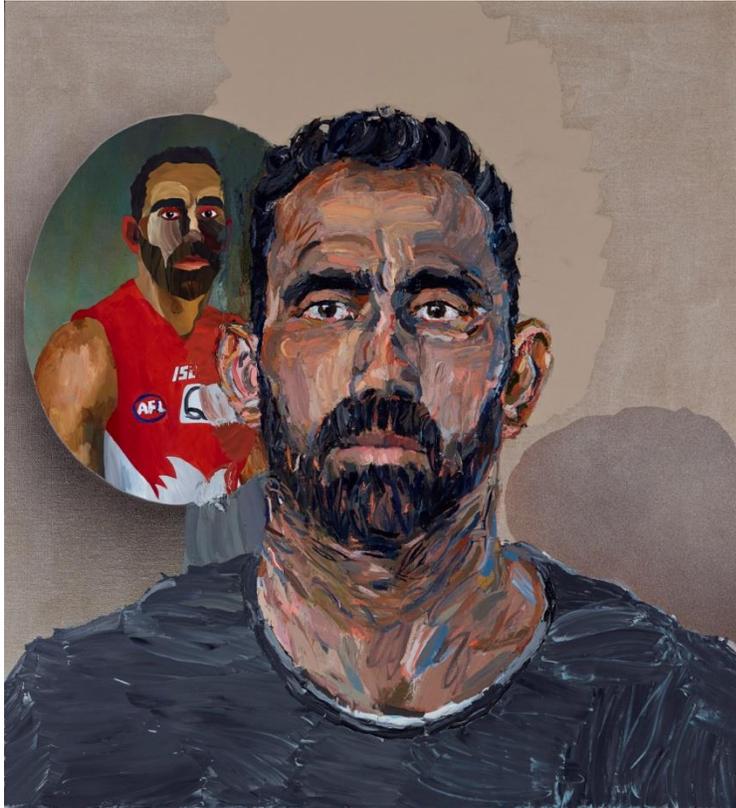
² http://www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/uploads/41632/ufiles/First_Footprints_Press_Kit_-_S.pdf p31

³ <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage>

⁴ <https://www.awm.gov.au/events/naidoc-week-public-programs-2014/>

The Archibald Prize and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia...

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are frequently represented in the Archibald Prize, as both artists and subjects. This year is no exception, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to show modern Australia their strength, pride and heritage. Portraits showcased in 2014 include:



- A portrait of Archie Roach, *Proud*, by Yorta Yorta artist Jandmarra Cadd, which blends Aboriginal art techniques with contemporary application, to show 'the significance of connection between Aboriginal people and the land - the core of our culture'.⁵
- Alan Jones' portrait of Andyamathanha/Narungga man Adam Goodes, *Adam*, (pictured) depicting him as a proud Indigenous man and an active campaigner for constitutional recognition.⁶
- Aboriginal political activist and artist, and founding member of Queensland's leading Aboriginal art collective, proppaNOW, Kamilaroi man Richard Bell is celebrated in Abdul Abdullah's *I wanted to paint him as a mountain*.⁷

- Carla Fletcher's portrait of musician Dan Sultan, *Dan Sultan*, who is Arrernte and Gurindji on his mother's side, and Irish on his father's, shows the leading Aboriginal musician, supporter of Recognise and inaugural ambassador for the GOFoundation as 'equal parts...in love with the land but battling the demons of the system'.⁸

Some quick statistics...

- Art exhibitions attract larger crowds than the AFL. With around **11 million visitors** a year, galleries are more highly attended than Australia's most popular spectator sport which had 10 million attendances in 2009-10.⁹
- **31%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria participated in some form of artistic activity.¹⁰

⁵ <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/29479/>

⁶ <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/29493/>

⁷ <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/29470/>

⁸ <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/29487/>

⁹ <http://artfacts.australiacouncil.gov.au/visual-arts-participation#post-1712>

- The highest priced Aboriginal artwork was painted by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri for the work 'Warlugulong' selling in 2007 to the National Gallery of Australia for **\$2.4 million**.¹¹
- The Archibald prize has been awarded **three** times for portraits of Aboriginal sitters: portraits of Albert Namatjira in 1956, David Gulpilil in 2004 and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu in 2009.
- **90%** of Australians believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are important to Australian culture.¹²

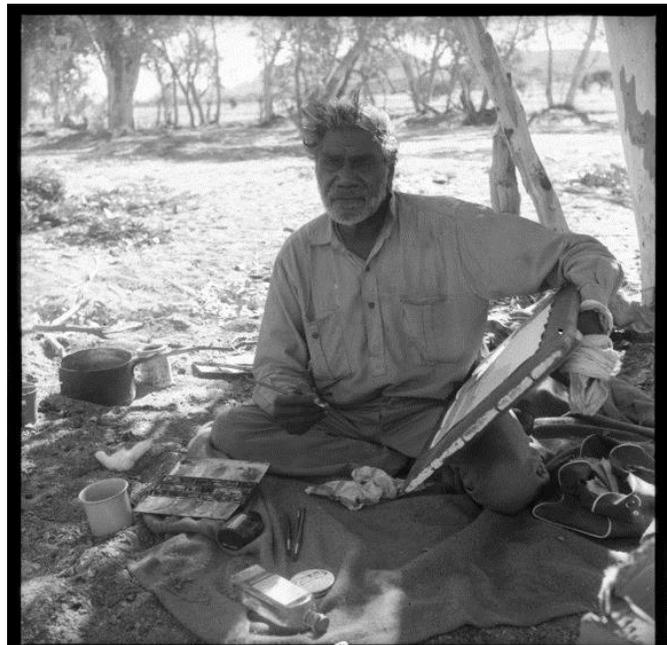
Meet Albert Namatjira...

Albert Namatjira (1902–59) is one of Australia's most celebrated Aboriginal artists. He achieved fame for his western-style landscape paintings and was the first Aboriginal artist to be recognised within the wider Western art tradition. His watercolours have become synonymous with central Australia.¹³ Through his art practice, Namatjira shared his connection to his land and culture with a broader Australian audience and received many honours and acknowledgements of his incredible art throughout his life.

Namatjira grew up at Ntaria, or the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. First named Elea, he was christened as Albert when his parents adopted Christianity,

although he still took part in a traditional initiation ceremony when he was 13, and married Ilkalita, a Kukatja woman, at age 18. With encouragement from the mission authorities, he began to produce mulga-wood plaques with poker-worked designs, before he was introduced to western style painting through an exhibition by two painters visiting the mission in 1934. After receiving tutelage from artist Rex Battarbee, in 1936 Namatjira accompanied him on a two month long excursion around the Macdonnell Ranges. Battarbee also helped Namatjira arrange his first solo exhibition in Melbourne in 1936 which was a great success. Many other exhibitions followed, particularly during the 1950s, and Namatjira quickly became a celebrity.¹⁴

Namatjira was widely recognized and celebrated in non-Indigenous Australia as a representative of assimilation. He was the first Aboriginal Australian to achieve national and



National Library of Australia

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¹⁰ NCCRS (National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2012. Arts and culture in Victoria: a statistical overview 2012: summary. Prepared for Arts Victoria. Melbourne: Arts Victoria.

¹¹ <http://www.kateowengallery.com/page/5-Aboriginal-Art-Facts.aspx>

¹² 'Indigenous arts - a growing enterprise', Koori Mail 472 p.18

¹³ <http://nga.gov.au/COLLECTIONS/ATSI/GALLERY.cfm?DisplayGal=21b>

¹⁴ <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs145.aspx>

international recognition for his art: he was included in the 1944 'Who's Who in Australia', awarded Queen Elizabeth II's coronation medal in 1953, and presented to the Queen in Canberra the following year. In 1955, he was elected an honorary member of the Royal Art Society of New South Wales.

However, Albert Namatjira's success went well beyond gaining acceptance into the non-Indigenous art world. According to Charles Perkins, Albert Namatjira 'was definitely the beginning of a recognition of Aboriginal people by white Australia.'¹⁵ Namatjira helped many Aboriginal Australians gain basic human rights, and, in 1957, Namatjira was one of the first Aboriginal people to be granted full citizenship rights. This entitled him to the same rights as non-Indigenous Australians, including the right to vote, to live where he wished and to purchase alcohol—unlike most other Aboriginal people in Australia.

While this was a great step forward in recognition by non-Indigenous Australia, Namatjira faced difficulties in moving between the two worlds. In 1958 he was charged with supplying alcohol to Henoch Raberaba who was also an artist and part of the same tribal group. Namatjira was sentenced to six months imprisonment with labour, which was reduced to three months following public outcry and two appeals. After serving two months of 'open' detention in 1959, he died of hypertensive heart failure on 8 August 1959.¹⁶ Through his struggles, Albert Namatjira helped pave the road for the many successful and inspirational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who were to come after him, by breaking down stereotypes and raising recognition of Aboriginal Australia throughout the country.

Take action...

- Check out the [Archibald Prize exhibition](#), on show until 28 September 2014 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and vote in the People's Choice Award. You can also visit the exhibition as it [travels to regional centres](#).
- Visit the Australian War Memorial to peruse [Tony Albert's](#) works on display.
- If you're in the Northern Territory, visit the [National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award](#) on show until 26 October... Or, if you're not in the NT, you [can check it out online!](#)
- Explore the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the [National Gallery of Australia](#), and learn how it simultaneously connects to the past and engages with the present.
- If you're in [Melbourne](#) or [Sydney](#), take the chance to be immersed in the incredible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exhibitions on show at the State galleries.
- Show support for Aboriginal art collectives and movements, such as the [Western Desert Mob](#), [Tjanpi desert weavers](#), or [Boomalli Aboriginal Art](#).

Reconciliation Australia would like to thank the Art Gallery of NSW, the National Library of Australia, Craig Ruddy and Alan Jones for their help in the production of this factsheet.

Photo credits:

Banner photo: Craig Ruddy, David Gulpilil-two worlds 2004, mixed media on wallpaper on board, 204 x 240cm,

Photo: AGNSW, © the artist

¹⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2002/s597983.htm>

¹⁶ Sylvia Keinert, 'Namatjira. Albert (Elea) (1902-1959), Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/namatjira-albeter-elea-11217>

1. Wayne Quilliam
2. Alan Jones, Adam 2014, oil and acrylic on linen, 171 x 156 cm, Photo:AGNSW, © the artist.
3. Frank Henry Johnston, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 1028479