

## **Turtleboy and Puppet's Cabinet of Curiosity**

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Turtle boy and Puppet are small souvenirs from a racially prejudiced past. They are repositioned in fine art today in order to draw attention to the fact that racism may be officially abhorrent, yet in a public and private sense continues being taught and maintained within mainstream Australian society.

The project for consideration relies on a sort of melancholic humour to prompt uncomfortable questions, in order to elicit a reflective or critical response in the viewer. This is primarily for the benefit of a Western viewer. These are not the voice of Indigenous Australia, they will no longer stand for the 'other' but become metaphors for what remains in the Western gaze, a sentimental and nostalgic attachment to the simplification and degradation of 'others'.

The deconstructive visual journey of Turtleboy and Puppet is intended to highlight the need to delineate political racism active in the present, the need to identify and realise the problem in order to deal with it (Gilroy 2005).

Inevitably with a project that engages with the issues mentioned above, this project is situated within a postcolonial discourse. The objects illustrate the way in which 'others' were brutally simplified, where 'creative licence' was used to generate degrading stereotypes in order to ascribe gross human deficiencies of target peoples (Driessen 1997). Art derived from Turtleboy and Puppet will dispute the narratives of progress and civilising effect of Western culture in relation to Indigenous Australian lives. Hopefully, through the work, there will be encouraged an incredulity towards these meta-narratives resident in the national identity as well as the private world. What will be touched on here are the residual power relations between colonisers and the colonised that are still in play today. The power relations that become evident revolve about who defines whom and what is defined, what is remembered and what is regarded as history.

I'd hope that by exploring these objects visually a number of binary oppositions could be drawn out into an artistic experience. A push-pull of revulsion versus interest, memory versus reality that could result in a critique of the legitimising factors of racism at work in the constructs of Western culture, society and politics.

In justification, Dr Charlie Teo mentions in his Australia day address of 2012 the, "blatant and open racism in Australian society today" (Teo 2012, p. 1). Unfortunately the malevolent shadow of bias and racial hatred still haunts Australian governmental policy and law, and walks the streets of the everyday openly. Sadly the objects, their sentimental and nostalgic aesthetic resists cultural entropy in the Western viewer just as racism survives in Anglo Australian society. Personally I relate to both the colonizer and the colonized, and from this perspective I feel the project can contribute towards a dialogue about the revelation of institutionalised and political racism in today's Australian society, and pose questions as to the legitimacy of its continuance.

As Turtleboy and Puppet are explored visually, they will be brought into the present, from a biased past, to display the faults of the present.

### Reference List

Driessen, H. 1997, in *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, (eds) Bremmer, J. & Roodenburg, H. Polity Press, Cambridge, pp.255-256.

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Teo, C. 2012, 'Australia Day 2012 Address: Full Speech', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, viewed August 2012,

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