

## MEDIA RELEASE

### 'WHY YOU PAINT LIKE THAT'

'Why You Paint Like That' participates in the conclusion of a long-running artistic hiatus for painter Marshall Bell. Having prioritised the struggle for Indigenous land rights over the past decade, Bell has now dedicated himself to his art practice in order to champion issues of a different nature.

Or perhaps not so different- 'Why You Paint Like That' is historical, controversial yet thoroughly researched art. It is art which represents Bell's place, his story and the symbols of this story as a unique tradition originating in South East Australia. These paintings reference the traditional art featured on animal skin cloaks, particularly on kangaroo and possum skin, which were originally made in the Aboriginal countries of this area and specifically in his mother's country of Kamilaroi. These cloaks were marked with complex symmetrical patterns spanning the entire surface of the cloak or otherwise in smaller, repeated patterns which varied from one woven pelt to the next. These cloaks could include up to seventy animal skins woven together in a grid like formation. They (traditionally) remained with one person and each person's cloak was marked to tell the story of their lives and their country. They were personal, intimate and essential items.

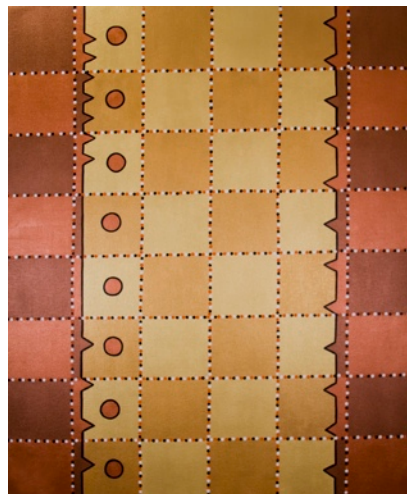
Yet Bell believes cloak art from this region has been significantly disregarded by both museums and art galleries, not just as an important historical artefact but as a distinct artistic style in its own right. Through conducting his own research into the topic, Bell has formed the argument that many of the painting styles which are claimed by Central and Northern Australian Aboriginals actually have history in South East Australia. Bell explains: "Predictive modelling used in Archaeology can be used to suggest Ancestral Aboriginal art should not be thought of as being restricted to a few regions but to have proliferated throughout South East Australia. The evidence for this is scattered over many and various places. There is at present no one central data base that documents and correlates accounts of Indigenous cultural traditions of all regions of South Eastern Australia. It is envisaged that this project would be instrumental in commencing such an initiative." He has reproduced these ways of working as he argues he has the license to use them. This is why Bell 'paint like that'.

'Why You Paint Like That' is a body of work full of focused and serious intention. Every colour, every symbol, every pattern is full of representation and meaning. However, these works are also undeniably beautiful. The use of luminous, metallic paint balanced in perfectly symmetrical designs are testament to Bell's dedication to find a modern interpretation of traditional art. His stylised designs flow through the paintings, referencing both art history and cultural history but still remain entirely Indigenous in their interpretation. Bell's art proves Aboriginal cultures are not unchanging or static but can and do adapt to time and circumstance. Bell adds: "This project seeks to overturn or bring into question many of the popularly held assumptions regarding artistic copyright of Indigenous imagery within the art world and particularly within the Australian Indigenous community." Through this challenge Bell both represents the history of his country and takes its representation into the future.

Woolloomgabby Art Gallery extends an invitation to the public to view 'Why You Paint Like That' in exhibition from the **26th of March to the 17th of April**. There will be opening drinks and the opportunity to meet the artist on **Thursday, 1st of April, starting at 6.30pm**. All are welcome.



Artist: Marshall Bell  
Title: *Animal Skin Moiety* 2010  
Medium: acrylic on canvas  
Size: 121.5 x 91.5cm



Artist: Marshall Bell  
Title: *Message Stick I* 2010  
Medium: acrylic on canvas  
Size: 121.5 x 101 cm