



BUNGAREE: the First Australian

Mosman Art Gallery

1 September – 25 November 2012

A multi-arts response by contemporary Aboriginal artists to the historical figure of Bungaree

Launching in Sydney in September 2012, **Bungaree: the First Australian**, is a major touring project developed by Mosman Art Gallery. This exhibition offers for the first time, an Indigenous perspective on the impact of early colonial society through the qualities and personality of Bungaree, known as the 'King of the Blacks' and 'Chief of the Broken Bay Aborigines' and a central and sometimes controversial figure in early Sydney.

While Bungaree has been the subject of written publications, his story has not previously been critically examined in the context of contemporary Australian visual arts or from an Indigenous perspective.

Led by renowned Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine OAM, fifteen Indigenous artists were invited to create new works to acknowledge and interpret Bungaree's life and story, addressing the continuing dilemma of living between conflicting world views.

The exhibition features artworks by **Frances Belle Parker, Mervyn Bishop, Daniel Boyd, Karla Dickens, Fiona Foley, Adam Hill, Warwick Keen, Gary Lee, Peter McKenzie, Danie Mellor, Caroline Oakley, Gordon Syron, Leanne Tobin and Jason Wing.**

The artists have interpreted key issues faced by Aboriginal society in the face of the forces of colonial settlement. After the experiences of Aboriginal society in dealing with the arrival of Europeans by Bennelong (through diplomatic means) and Pemulwuy (through active warfare), the story of Bungaree represents a third approach in coming to terms with the monumental shifts in power, control and identity faced by Aboriginal people then (and now).

Bungaree (c.1775-1830), originally from Broken Bay north of Sydney, was the first person described in print as being an 'Australian' and commonly known as a mediator between English colonists and Aboriginal people. He sailed in that capacity with Matthew Flinders, becoming the first Indigenous person to circumnavigate Australia, and was central to life in colonial Sydney including leadership of his community. Bungaree established himself in Sydney as an important identity on his own terms and was acknowledged for his intelligence, character, sense of humour and flamboyance and regularly dressed in a succession of military and naval uniforms that had been given to him. He made it his business to greet anyone important who was new in the colony. Bungaree's prominence as a subject in early Australian art and portraiture (greater in number than any early governor), includes being the subject of the first lithograph produced in Australia. Bungaree's resilience reflected in his ability to live both a traditional life and a life enmeshed 'between worlds'.

Central to the development of the Bungaree exhibition project has been a series of intensive group residency workshops and a program of individual residencies of participating artists on-site on the land granted to Bungaree at Middle and Georges Heads. The land, gifted by Governor Macquarie in 1815, is inextricably intertwined with that of the suburb of Mosman, and in particular Georges Head at Georges Heights where Bungaree's farm was located.

John Cheeseman, Director, Mosman Art Gallery, comments: *This is a local story for the Mosman community, but one that has broad national and international significance. The Gallery is proud of the leading role it has taken in the development of this project.*

Bungaree: the First Australian is the biggest exhibition project staged by Mosman Art Gallery to date. This is a nationally touring exhibition (2012-2015) that will be supplemented with artistic responses at each touring venue by local Aboriginal artists, ensuring greater appeal and relevance to local audiences and communities.

A full colour catalogue accompanies the exhibition with essays by curator Djon Mundine OAM, Dr. Keith Vincent Smith, Prof. John Maynard, Dr. John Sturmer and participating artist, Fiona Foley.

A Community Open Day launches the exhibition for public viewing on Saturday 1 September. Events include curator and artists' talks, performances, kids activities.

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Where: Mosman Art Gallery - cnr Art Gallery Way & Myahgah Road, Mosman, NSW
On view: Saturday 1 September – Sunday 25 November 2012
Open: 7 days, 10am – 5pm
Admission: Free
PH: 02 9978 4178
Information: www.mosmanartgallery.org.au

> Media enquiries: Leah Haynes – M: 0408 419 463 – leahmhaynes@gmail.com

> Exhibition information: Katrina Cashman, Assistant Gallery Director / Senior Curator -
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image: Mervyn Bishop, *Bungaree, The Showman*, digital photography.
giclee on archival pigment, 100x200 cm

images (top): (R) interpretation of the Aboriginal flag designed by Harold Thomas, c.1971
(L) Warrick Keen, *The first Australian*, oil stick on canvas, 100x100cm