

MICHAEL COOK

Born: 1968

Brisbane-based artist of Bidjara heritage **Michael Cook** credits a particular body of work with garnering his ever-increasing global audience. Having found success at home, including in the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial and 19th Biennale of Sydney, he didn't feel his work had impacted in the way he hoped overseas. "It had interest," he says of the major exhibition *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* at the British Museum, "but from expats, not from the English, which was sort of surprising to me." People did not know much about Australia's colonial history, even in the UK. Immediately, Cook's politically charged imagery about the legacy of colonialism for Aboriginal Australians was stripped of some of the power for which it had gained acclaim in Australia.

Then the artist presented *Mother* at Art Basel Hong Kong in 2016 with *This Is No Fantasy* + *Dianne Tanzer Gallery*, Melbourne. The series is made up of photographic vignettes depicting a lone woman, variously seen with empty prams, abandoned play equipment, unused tricycles. With this series, Cook seemed to have found the right blend of specific cultural and historical content – in this case that the Stolen Generations – and universal resonance, that of adoption, of being apart from family. It was a particularly personal work for Cook, who was adopted and raised by a white family. "It was the first time I'd shown work overseas where people hadn't asked me about Australian history," Cook says. "It resonated with a lot of people no matter what country they're from. I realised that

all these people were relating to it, people saw from their own perspective. That was my first clue was getting through to an international audience.

Since finding this acclaim abroad, Cook has gone from strength to strength. He hopes his next body of work, an ambitious film project that riffs on 60s sci-fi aesthetics, alien invasion and UFOs to speak to the experience of first contact for Aboriginal Australians, will find an international audience. With shows in Paris and Art Basel Hong Kong in 2018, things are looking promising, but Cook nonetheless remains focused on his roots. "It's nice to think your work will be seen overseas, but as long as you have local support you can keep going," he says.

Kate Britton

// Michael Cook, *Majority Rule Turned*, 2014. Inkjet print on cotton rag, 140 x 200cm.

// Michael Cook, *Object - Vase*, 015, Inkjet print on cotton rag 80 x 200cm.

SUPPORTED BY THE ARTIST AND THIS IS NO FANTASY + DIANNE TANZER GALLERY MELBOURNE.

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