

# Michael Cook

**BORN**

1968, Bidjara heritage

**PRICE RANGE**

\$3,300 - \$5,000 for photographic works.

**CONTACT**

Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne and Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

**Michael Cook** is an artist whose work fits into the genre of post-colonialism, as he challenges the colonial perception of what it means to be civilised and highlights the inadequacies of such an attitude. Cook has been in major recent exhibitions such as the National Gallery of Australia's National Indigenous Triennial and the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial and he will take up a Greene Street studio residency in New York in 2014. His work was also part of the recent Indigenous group exhibition, *Debil Debil*, curated by Professor **Marcia Langton** at Anna Schwartz Gallery in Sydney.

Cook, who has a commercial background and is a relative newcomer to visual art, is a master of manipulating photography. He gathers props, masks and costumes and poses youthful Indigenous models in compositions that question the tradition of historical photography and the documentation of Aborigines by Spanish, Dutch, French and English settlers in the 18th and 19th century. His work questions what makes a person civilised and how that perception could be subverted or reversed. The *Civilised* series features characters positioned by the water's edge of a beach, with a romantically ethereal and misty scene extending beyond. The overlaid text in *Civilised 1*, an extract from **Captain James Cook's** journal, reveals a colonial view that Indigenous people were uncivilised and simple. However, it is also clear Captain Cook held a belief that Aboriginal Australians had a stronger connection with their land and a better grasp of happiness than the "polished European".

These photographic theatres, rich with irony, disrupt our habitual ways of thinking about historical artefacts. Michael Cook's images are like 19th century tableau vivant. He uses horse head theatre props and elaborate period gowns to recall a time of first contact, where cultures first collided. Cook's work is inherently political, a clever play with ideas of colonial curiosity and the collection of the exotic. These images are speculations on how historical stereotypes and discrimination might easily have worked in reverse, that the true meaning of being civilised might be to be happy, in tune with the natural world and free from intolerance.

Cook's work is represented in 26 national,

state and other major public institutions. He has won, and been a finalist in, major national awards including winning the 17th annual Deadly Awards. He has packed nine solo exhibitions into three years, since his first in 2010.

Photography is doing well in the current art market, which is why Dianne Tanzer Gallery has decided to take Cook to the Auckland Art Fair, where there is a thriving demand for photography.

*Prue Gibson*

Michael Cook's works will be on show at the Dianne Tanzer Gallery stand at Auckland Art Fair from 7 to 11 August 2013.

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14. Michael Cook, *Civilised #4*, 2012. Inkjet print on archival Hahnemühle cotton paper, 100 x 85cm. Price: \$3,750.

15. Michael Cook, *Civilised #1*, 2012. Inkjet print on archival Hahnemühle cotton paper, 100 x 85cm. Price: \$3,750.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND DIANNE TANZER GALLERY + PROJECTS, MELBOURNE

*"They are human creatures,*

*the work of the same omnipotent author,  
equally under his care with the most polished European;  
perhaps being less offensive, more entitled to his favour."*

*"These people may truly be said to be in the pure state of nature,  
and may appear to some to be the most wretched upon the earth;  
but in reality they are far happier than ... we Europeans."*

