BIG EYE: ABORIGINAL ANIMATIONS

BIG EYE presents work from Aboriginal Australian and Canadian New Media artists who utilise animation techniques. The artists in this exhibition use video and animation to translate traditional Aboriginal culture into a contemporary context.

The animations in BIG EYE are part of a wider ongoing cultural maintenance for both Aboriginal Canadians and Australians. The artists in BIG EYE adapt ancient storytelling traditions from Aboriginal culture through New Media art forms. Animation adds a strong visual element to the stories, which traditionally would have been told verbally. On screen, traditions can be communicated to broader audiences, and bring important messages to audiences attune to screen-based technologies.

BIG EYE examines the intersecting of traditional cultural ideals with contemporary artistic practice and the ramifications this has for Canadian and Australian Aboriginal identity. The animators and artists involved explore how 'old' meets 'new' in contemporary Aboriginal culture, and raise many questions; how is Aboriginal identity affected by embracing new technologies? What is lost in the process of adapting traditional stories to the screen? What is gained?

By bringing Aboriginal Australian and Aboriginal Canadian art together in one space, BIG EYE foregrounds both the cultural and historical similarities between these two Nations' First Peoples, and explores how traditional storytelling is being re-told through the visual art form of animation.

Orphan Boy (2004), *The Echidna and the Turtle* (2003)
Courtesy Gozer Media & Gunbalanya Community

Raiders of the Lost Art (Wapos Bay Series) (2009)
Courtesy of Wapos Bay Productions

THEMES
New Ways and Old Ways

Many animations in BIG EYE tell the old stories, building upon traditional ideals and knowledge whilst others raise new issues important to Aboriginal culture and wellbeing. Healthy Aboriginal Network's *Darkness Calls* (2007) and Dennis and Melanie Jackson's *Wapos Bay* (2009) both focus on contemporary issues and knowledge within modern scenarios, whereas *How Bama Got Biri* (1994) and *Ballawinne* (1996) focus on bringing traditional stories into the modern realm.

Animation to raise new issues

Darkness Calls raises issues of low self-esteem and depression in young Canadian Aboriginals. The animation is spoken in Gitxsan, a Canadian Aboriginal dialect, and affirms that a connection to old ways and stories can help self-belief and self-determination. The animation is part of a suicide prevention outreach program for First Nations youth in Canada.

Wapos Bay addresses how traditional Canadian Aboriginal culture intersects contemporary culture. The animation highlights how old and new practices are fused in the characters' lives; the children in Wapos Bay learn to hunt with their elders, but also love to play video-games. *Wapos Bay* exemplifies the change of culture for Aboriginal people, and how tradition can successfully live alongside contemporary culture.

Animation to keep the past alive

Works from *The Dreaming* series *How Bama Got Biri* and *Ballawinne* are animations of traditional Dreaming stories. *How Bama Got Biri* tells the story of how Aboriginal people got fire, and Ballawinne of the red ochre wars.

These animations bring traditional Aboriginal stories to younger audiences. SBS Television broadcasted the *The Dreaming* series in the 1990s with a second screening currently running. The animations re-form the old stories via new media methodologies to create accessible stories to an optic-centric contemporary society.

Aboriginal people of both Canada and Australia use animation to modernise traditional storytelling techniques, and to keep culture and tradition alive for generations to come. As Rennae Hopkins writes in the BIG EYE Floor Brochure (2009), '… this series is vital as a contemporary sharing of Indigenous cultural heritage and ongoing cultural maintenance.'

A shared history

Canadian and Australian Aboriginal people share many historical and spiritual similarities as well as being the only two First Nation Peoples to refer to themselves as Aboriginal. In the BIG EYE Floor Brochure (2009), Rennae Hopkins discusses these spiritual similarities, 'I do know that the mythology of First Nation Peoples of both Canada and Australia are very similar … both hold a common belief that human consciousness developed from a form of totemic connection.'

The animations in Big Eye bring forward cultural similarities between Canadian and Australian Aboriginals. *Baby Blues* (*Raven Tales* Series) and *Tuggan-Tuggan* highlight Dreaming traditions inherent in both cultures. In *Wapos Bay* and *Otherwize* (2006) colonisation is the central theme. *Wapos Bay* looks at how colonial culture has melded with traditional Aboriginal culture. *Otherwize* explores the direct effects of colonisation, such as cultural displacement.

ANIMATION IN BIG EYE

The works in BIG EYE showcase a range of animation techniques, which utilise different levels of technology.

Claymation: Gozer Media and Gunbalanya Community produced *Orphan Boy* (2004) using Claymation techniques. The Gunbalanya Community built sets, and created characters and objects from plasticine to create a story. Each movement was photographed and the stages compiled into an animation.

2D animation: Frank McLeod's *Ballawinne* is a 2D animation. This visual form is developed in a process similar to Claymation, using stop-motion to capture each moment. However, instead of creating the scenes from plasticine or other three-dimensional objects, drawings and/or painting methods are used. In the case of *Ballawinne* each cell was hand drawn using ink and paint. Most of the Aboriginal Australian works in this exhibition use 2D animation, such as *Tuggan-Tuggan* (1996), Moon and *His Two Wives* (1997), and *Two Willy Willies* (1994).

Computer Generated Imagery: Colin Curwen's *Baby Blues* (*Raven Tales* Series) (2007) utilises Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) animation. Digital forms of animation have become more popular since the turn of the 21st Century due to increased accessibility, knowledge and equipment. Curwen's animations are created through computer 3D modelling technologies and special digital programs that model, move and capture the characters of the story.

Second Life and the Virtual realm: Skawennati Tricia Fragnito's *Timetraveller™* (2008) and Aroha Groves' *What is a Blakfulla doing in a virtual realm?* (2007) both use digital animation tools from the online program Second Life. Instead of creating the animations themselves, they utilise the built in animation programs within Second Life, and tailor them to their own purposes. Both artists use cyberspace as a neutral realm where ideas can be tested in an experimental and open atmosphere.

Skawennati Tricia Fragnito uses the virtual realm in the development, experimentation and production of her works, as well as a tool by which to document and communicate her artistic process [via blog-site Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace]. Through this portal Skawennati contributes to the fast growing online community through the sharing of technical and conceptual knowledge.

Like Fragnito, Australian Aboriginal artist Aroha Groves uses Second Life in her work *What is a Blakfulla doing in a virtual realm?* Groves explores Aboriginal identity in Cyberspace, and views Second Life as a promising space for Aboriginal people to experiment with identity and escape from Aboriginal social politics.
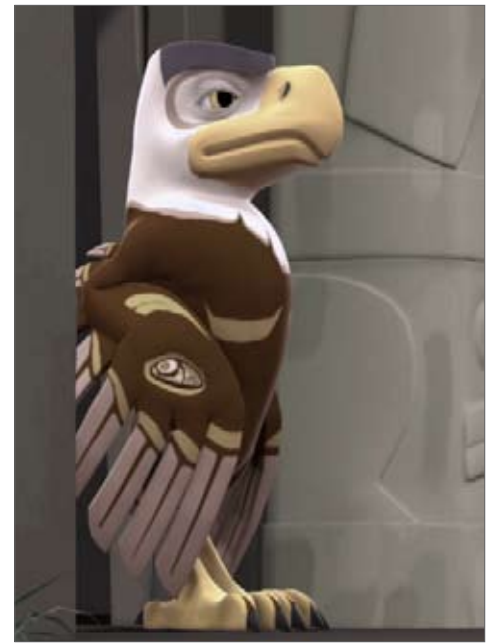
Baby Blues (*Raven Tales* Series) (2007)
Courtesy the artist and New Machine Studios

INFORMATION

Admission
Free, all welcome

Open
29 April to 15 May
From 2pm
Tuesday-Saturday

The Block
QUT Creative Industries Precinct
Cnr Kelvin Grove Road and Musk Avenue,
Kelvin Grove, Queensland, Australia, 4059

Phone: 07 3138 5495
Email: ciprecinct@qut.com
Visit: www.ciprecinct.qut.com

Public Programs

Try your hand at animation in our interactive animation workshops. There are a range of images available for you to create a moving sequence. Instruction booklets are provided, and you can take your animation home with you.

Acknowledgements

Curators
Jenny Fraser
Lubi Thomas

Assistant Curators
Maggie McDade
Rennae Hopkins

Education Kit produced by
Maggie McDade

Presented by
QUT Creative Industries Precinct
cyberTribe

What is a Blakfulla doing in a virtual realm? (2007)
Courtesy the artist and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative