



Vernon Ah Kee

Born Innisfail, Queensland, Australia, 1967;
Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu
Yimithirr peoples.
Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.
Whitefella normal, blackfella me 2004
Digital video with sound
00:30 seconds
Courtesy of the artist and
Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Bindi Cole

Born Melbourne, Australia, 1975;
Wathaurung people.
Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.
Seventy Times Seven 2011
Digital video with sound
10:21 minutes
Edition of 5
Courtesy of the artist and
Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne

Destiny Deacon/Virginia Fraser

Born Maryborough, Queensland, Australia,
1957; KuKu and Erub/Mer peoples.
Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.
Born Melbourne, Australia;
lives and works in Melbourne, Australia.
Forced into images 2001
Super 8 film finished on video, DVD format
9:00 minutes
Edition of 20
Courtesy of the artists and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Destiny Deacon

Forced into images 2001

Fiona Foley

Born Maryborough, Queensland, Australia,
1964; Badtjala people.
Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.
Bliss 2006
Digital video with sound
11:00 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and
Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Ivan Sen

Born Namber, Queensland, Australia,
1972; Gamilaroi people.
Lives and works in Sydney.
Dust 1999
Digital video with sound
25:00 minutes
Courtesy of the National Film
& Sound Archive, ACT

Christian Thompson

Born Gawler, South Australia,
1978; Bidjara people.
Lives and works in Oxford,
The United Kingdom.
Gamu Mambu (Blood Song) 2010
Digital video with sound
2:30 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne

Shadowlife: moving image

Curated by Djon Mundine OAM
and Natalie King

Artists: Vernon Ah Kee,
Bindi Cole, Destiny Deacon/
Virginia Fraser, Fiona Foley,
Ivan Sen and Christian Thompson.

10–12 February 2012
Melbourne Indigenous Arts Festival
Federation Square, ACMI and
Birrarung Marr and surrounds
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(Clockwise from below)
Christian Thompson
Gamu Mambu (Blood Song) 2010 (still)
Vernon Ah Kee
Whitefella normal, blackfella me 2004 (still)
Bindi Cole
Seventy Times Seven 2011 (still)



(Cover)
Fiona Foley
Bliss 2006 (still)

Conversations with a shadow

The history of Aboriginal people is that of figures; of numbers; and of shadows. Dreaming tells us that the shadow is your soul. A person can never desert its shadow and a shadow cannot leave its human cast. Prominent Aboriginal figures that dot the historical Australian landscape carry a shadowy-halo edge of Aboriginality only seen and recognized by most people at certain fleeting moments of intense emotional, social and spiritual exposure. **Shadowlife** addresses these moments of intensity through the photo and filmic practices of six Aboriginal artists.

Wungguli, an Arnhem Land Djambarruyngu word, means spirit and shadow and came to describe photographic image. In 1960, Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little had a hit song with *The Shadow of the Boomerang*, from the film of the same name. Shadows are our souls which we can never leave; nor can our shadow exist independent of us. Each artist is a storyteller. Since the mid-1980s, Indigenous photographers have become empowered through the use of photography for role-playing, self-representation and affirmation.

Vernon Ah Kee's explores rap as a linguistic tool for free form poetry that is direct and political. *Whitefella normal, blackfella me* (2004), deploys language and chanting in a short rap song featuring himself. Biting and black, Ah Kee aerates concerns and emotions from the streets. These issues are expressed aurally with phrases that are profoundly beautiful, pithy and poetic.

Bindi Cole's new film *Seventy Times Seven* (2011) explores how the personal and societal converge. In a contentious work, Cole filmed Aboriginal participants willing to say 'I forgive you' on camera to white Australian society. For Cole, a personal forgiveness allowed her to move on. Can this be applied to society's wider historical crimes in the Aboriginal context?

Destiny Deacon/Virginia Fraser enacts urban domestic stories with dolls and everyday objects configured into hilarious yet grim soap operas deftly uncovering stories of racism and persecution. The title, *Forced into images* (2001), is derived from a quote by African American author Alice Walker who talks of, and crucially how people live up to or reject these typecasts. A silent video, *Forced into images* (2001) captures Deacon's niece and nephew role-playing and acting out with masks. The improvised play by these young relatives reminds us to be cognizant of the simple yet profound exchanges between children.

Fiona Foley reinterprets the history of enforced opium addiction within the Queensland Aboriginal community in the 1850s in a poetic video of swaying poppies. Foley traces the ongoing significance of Australia's colonial histories with uncompromising directness. The notion of bliss or euphoria questions how Australians can live in a dreamlike state ignoring the reality of history. Luscious and hypnotic, the video *Bliss* (2006) of colourful flowers belies the insidious history that Foley has uncovered.

Ivan Sen
Dust 1999



Ivan Sen's *Dust* (1999) navigates the contested physical, social and historical landscape in western New South Wales: a landscape colonized in the fullest sense, in economic and agricultural terms through cotton farming and the social displacement of the original inhabitants. But the land is full of shadows and ghosts that lie just below the surface of everyday life.

Christian Thompson's video *Gamu Mambu (Blood Song)* 2010 shows a group of Dutch baroque singers singing in Bidjara, the language of his heritage. Through dress, song, photographic and video images, Thompson harnesses iconographies from completely different times and cultures, blending them into magical hybrids. By integrating stories of many differing, small ethnic groups, Thompson values their individual expression.

Shadowlife embraces moving image with all its directness, theatricality and immediacy by confronting stereotypes and acting out scenarios. Shadows, like photographic and moving images, follow us and infiltrate our daily lives but are now the expression we control and project. They comfortably hover around us and return us to our past and point to our future. Are they a protective guardian or a curse of history?

Djon Mundine OAM and Natalie King, Curators