

Tony Albert



Introduction

Born 1981 in Townsville, Australia

Artwork Title: *Healing Land, Remembering Country*, 2020

Artwork Location: Convict Precinct, Cockatoo Island

Tony Albert's practice explores contemporary legacies of colonialism in ways which prompt audiences to contemplate elements of the human condition. Using imagery and source material from across the globe, Albert draws on both personal and collective histories to explore the ways in which optimism might be utilised to overcome adversity. His practice is concerned with identity and the ascribing of social labels; unpacking what it means to judge and be judged in the absence of recognition or understanding.

For the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, Albert has created an outdoor greenhouse at Cockatoo Island, a work that occupies a special place at the heart of NIRIN, creating a space for gathering, sharing, learning together, healing, reflection, and play. Albert's work connects sites of historical incarceration and trauma including The Blacktown Native Institution, Cockatoo Island (the site of a former convict prison dating from the 1840s) and the National Art School (formerly Darlinghurst Goal).

The greenhouse is filled with hanging baskets, displaying the weaving and basket making practices of Indigenous artists and communities from around Australia that act as the holding places for people's memories written on seeded papers. Many communities' baskets are based on the shape of other carrying vessels (collectively termed 'coolamon') objects with multiple purposes and meanings: as cradles, to hold food, and used for ceremonies. These are artworks that intimately care for what is placed in them. Visitors, including families and children, are invited to use the greenhouse as a space of reflection, conversation, and writing, creating messages on handmade paper imbedded with seeds to place in the baskets. Albert's installation acts as a powerful and poetic gesture of collective and active memorialisation.

Image: Tony Albert. *Healing Land, Remembering Country*, 2020 greenhouse nursery, hand woven baskets, native plants dimensions variable. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts and Create NSW, and generous assistance from The Medich Foundation Courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney
Hand woven baskets by: Bula'Bula Arts – Evonne Munuyngu; Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts – Dolly Dhimburra Bidingal, Joyce Milpuna Bidingal, Mary Dhupalany, Mavis Marrkula Djuliping, Linda Gagati, Caroline Gulmindilly, Kathy Guyula, Helen Djaypila Guyula, Meredith Marika; Numbulwar Numburindi Arts – Nicola Wilfred; Tjanpi Desert Weavers – Munatji Brumby, Maureen Cullinan, Niningka Lewis, Puna Yanima. Photograph: Zan Wimberley.

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Inquiry questions

- Look at the images of Albert's artwork what do you see?
- What type of atmosphere do you think Albert wanted to create? How do you think you would feel in this space?
- The greenhouse is filled with hanging baskets, displaying the weaving and basket making practices of Indigenous artists and communities from around Australia. Why do you think the baskets are of different shapes and sizes?
- Albert uses a selection of plants from Australia in his greenhouse. What time of native plants do you have at home?
- To fully experience this artwork visitor participation is required. What other artworks have you actively interacted with?

Creative Learning activity

Tony Albert's artwork is a space for contemplation and reflection. If you could create your own space for contemplation and reflection, what would it look like. Think about the objects in the space and what the structure would look like.

Use any creative technique you would like such as drawing, painting, writing, or even digital programs to convey or illustrate your thoughts and ideas.

Reflection

- If you could participate in this artwork, what message would you place in the basket and why?
- How did you feel after reflecting on the message you would place in the basket?
- How is Tony Albert's work linked to memory and history?