



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 6 EPISODE 5 (Late April 2024)

VENICE BIENNALE LAUNCH

Archie Moore Ellie Buttrose

TIM STACKPOOL:

A sunny day for the launch of Archie Moore's work at this year's Venice Biennale which depicts thought-provoking portrayals of self and national histories. His work is rooted in experiences around identity and heritage, and speaks to wider themes of the universality of the human family and the enduring impact of colonisation.

Titled kith and kin, Archie has created an amazing work, an expansive, genealogical chart spanning more than 65,000 years. Drawing on his Kamilaroi, Bigambul, British and Scottish heritage, the installation does embody his enduring exploration of history and identity, they are central themes in his artistic practice spanning over 30 years. His work brings international awareness to the vitality of First Nations kinship, in spite of facing systemic injustices since British settlement in Australia. Here's Archie himself talking about the inspiration for the title of his work.

ARCHIE MOORE:

Kith and kin title of the exhibition means in today's sense, friends and family. But in an old English definition of the word kith means. Countrymen, or of one's own land. So I was drawn to the old English definition of the word because it seemed more of an indigenous understanding of what a family could be. Which indigenous people in a traditional sense would consider the land and the living things on that land as part of their kinship system? The land could be a mentor or teacher, or a parent to a child. It wasn't separate from the Aboriginal people themselves.

TIM STACKPOOL:

If you're not heading to Venice, you can experience the work at www.kithandkin.me, there's also a link to that at our website www.insidethegalley.com.au,

But, what Archie has created, hand-drawn in white chalk, is his genealogical chart across the Pavilion's five-metre-high black walls that run probably around 60 metres in length, illustrating his lineage stretching back more than 2,400 generations. He's researched this for years and the intricate map of relations reflects the unique family structures of First Nations Australians that includes all living things and affirms their status as some of the longest-continuous living cultures in the world. And extending across the Pavilion's black ceiling, the inscribed names resemble a type of celestial map; kind of representing his ancestors resting place. Because Remember that In the First Nations Australian understanding of time; the past, present and future all exist together. So by placing tens of thousands of years of kin on a single continuum, Archie makes this notion visible to us as the audience.

The launch of Archie Moore's work at this year's Venice Biennale was attended by a very supportive crowd, including Alison Burrow's the Charge d'affaire from Australia's Embassy in Rome. Here's some of what she had to say at the opening:

ALISON BURROWS:

At the time of the voice referendum last year, the Prime Minister asked us all to build a bridge on issues like reconciliation, like closing the gap, like creating opportunities for our First Nations people in a way that's worthy of the great privilege we have of living on our great continent, with the oldest continuous culture on Earth. So I think what better place to build the bridge than here at Venice? And what better place to build a bridge of art than here at the Biennale? Thank you. All very much.

TIM STACKPOOL:

The work in the pavilion is pretty much also a stark representation of the decline in First Nations Australian languages and dialects under colonisation. Over 254 years the number of languages have plummeted from as many as 700 to around 160 today, due to past prohibitions on First language use, land dispossession and the killing of kin in colonial warfare. So to counter this, Archie has undertaken language maintenance through his use of Gamilaraay (that's the Kamilaroi nation's language) and Bigambul kinship terms. In this way, the work presents the shift from Indigenous to European languages, the translation of oral languages to written text, and of course, the introduction of racial categories and slurs. There are obvious missing pieces too amongst the names we see in the work, to represent the atrocities inflicted upon First Nations communities, like massacres, the introduction of diseases and destruction of knowledge that have all produced intergenerational trauma. Worth noting too is Archie's choice of educational materials — erasable chalk on blackboard paint — to represent insufficient dissemination of First Nations histories.

Of course, there is a significant level of collaboration when it comes to a project like this, and Archie did thank a load of people at the opening, one of which of course was the curator of the work: Ellie Buttrose. It would be difficult to overestimate the level of support that Ellie has brought, leading to this year's Biennale. Here are her words about the opportunity to work on this:

ELLIE BUTTROSE:

This has been a really extraordinary and humbling experience to work directly with Archie on this project. I've always admired his conceptually rigorous work that is politically incisive but also emotionally engaging. And while his work is well known around Australia. This will be one of the biggest international opportunities he's had to date. Archie's work is often about his personal experience and also in this case, his family research. And it's been a real privilege for me to hear the stories that he shared over the process of making this work with this sense of trust also comes a large sense of responsibility. So I'm ensuring that audiences have everything they need to understand the social and political background of the work so they can understand the depth of Archie's practice. It's a really exciting opportunity to be able to realise Archie's vision at such scale, but also with a keen eye for detail so that audiences are completely immersed within his world.

TIM STACKPOOL:

Curator Ellie Buttrose there.

Now Beyond the artwork on the walls of the pavilion, the interior also presents a reflective pool that creates an atmosphere of a memorial and pays tribute to the injustices still faced by First Nations people today. And Suspended above the pool are more than 500 document stacked in bundles, containing mainly coronial inquests on the deaths of Indigenous Australians in police custody dated from our recent history. For those who don't know Despite First Nations Australians being just under 4% of Australia's population, they account for 33% of our prison population, making them among the most incarcerated people globally. Standing and admiring this work its easy to be reminded that the paperwork represents more than nameless statistics; but rather actually includes children, siblings, cousins, parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and great-grandparents.

I did catch-up with Franchesca Cubillo who was the MC at the launch, Franchesca is Creative Australia's Executive Director of First Nations Arts and Culture and I asked her about the impact of this work, and the message it evokes, not just in Venice but in world terms.

FRANCESCA CUBILLO:

I think this is a remarkable moment in our history. To have First Nation's storytelling, but also the complex history of Australia being shared through an artist's eye. At a global platform, right? Aesthetically you have an artist who has been informed by their childhood, by the history of his ancestry, his inheritance, his heritage, and he has been putting really courageous work out into the public arena and it is it is really wonderful to see that recognition and the exposure of these narratives. When you think about Australia's history, we are only now understanding and unpacking the truth telling and to have an artist who is courageous, who is aesthetically astounding in terms of conceptually pulling together works and. And being brave and having his artwork talk about this history is just I think it is huge. It's significant on a global platform and I think people will be surprised they'll be challenged and that is, you know, something that we all must do. I think be surprised and challenged because these things have been a part of nationhood and creating this nation and to see a First Nation artist being supported in their courageous practice to share this globally is so wonderful. So it makes a strong statement.

TIM STACKPOOL:

Creative Australia's Francesca Cubillo there. Of course This is not the first time that First Nations art has been presented at the Venice Biennale, but each time it is significant and I asked distinguished curator and writer Djon Mundine OAM about that significance.

DJON MUNDINE OAM:

I think the interesting thing of course, is that the Venice Biennale was set up about the time of the modern Olympic Games and in a way it's sort of like the Olympics of art and culture. So everyone, everyone comes here as a representative of their country, of their nation. So it's very important that fact Aboriginal people happen to be into that, and give the complete rounded view of the history of the nation a more complete story. And the thing that's in the how it's changed since 1990, when the first Aboriginal artist were chosen to be in that. In the pavilion representing us. That now people have burst beyond that and people who have chosen not, not necessarily as being the national representative, Daniel Boyd, Vernon Archer, et cetera. They were chosen to be in the general curated Venice Biennale not just in as national representatives, yeah.

TIM STACKPOOL:

Bias aside, do you think that Australia should be represented solely exclusively by First Nations artists at such an event?

DJON MUNDINE OAM:

I think it's good that they're appearing more into this as the image of Australia. Internationally, we are appearing more commonly now, more often as a representative of the of the nation and about the society here, so that happens anyway. There was a push..there has been a push on, off and on, to have an indigenous pavilion for Indigenous people worldwide, so the problem with that you could be marginalised into "ohh well they they're Aboriginal or they're Native American or whatever. So we'll put them into that. That pavilion, and not the other." Whereas this places the questions we ask, the history that we represent, it forces the nation then to look at those histories.

TIM STACKPOOL:

Djon Mundine there with his thoughts about Australian First Nations artists and their history at the Venice Biennale.

Now, there's no doubt that Archie Moore's work bridges the personal and the political as we heard Ellie share earlier. And amongst the contemporary coroners' reports featured within the Biennale work, there are historic documents with specific references to the Archies' family. These include things like a court conviction from when his great uncle accidentally killed his father during a fight over their wages; and reports by the Protector of Aboriginals denying his grandparents access to rights that non-Indigenous citizens enjoyed — such as freedom of movement. And while many of the stories in kith and kin are specific to Archie's family, do they mirror narratives throughout the world. Through this he highlights all of our shared ancestry and humanity: through the interconnectedness of people, and place and time.

Anyway, The Venice Biennale runs through until November, it's peak crowd season right now of course, so a trip later in the year might be a bit more relaxed, although Venice is always kinda busy. For an armchair view, a link specifically to Archie's kith and kin is available at our website, www.insidethegallery.com.au, as well as links to Creative Australia's dedicated Venice Biennale page, and a link to the transcript of this edition is there too. and in other great news, following the exhibition in the Australia Pavilion, the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) plans to present kith and kin as part of its 2025-26 program, so it will be heading home.

That is the podcast for now, Thanks for your interest this quick express edition, congratulations to all involved with this year's Venice Biennale, it's really great and touching work, thanks to Frank Luston in Sydney for production assistance with this episode, and until our next edition, I'm Tim Stackpool. Bye Bye for now .