

Dale Harding

“Rather than continuing to accept historical myths about Queensland’s colonialist history .. I am responding to residues of raw emotions that result from lived experiences and inherited memories.”

Dale Harding, 2013¹

About the artist

Dale Harding was born in 1982 in Moranbah, Queensland and is a descendant of the Bidjara, Garingbal and Ghungalu peoples of Central Queensland. His creative practice focuses on hidden narratives of Australian Aboriginal history also discusses ideas of culture, spirituality and sexuality through his frame of work.

Short Biography

Born, 1982, Moranbah, Queensland.
Descended from Bidjara, Garingbal and Ghungalu peoples of Central Queensland. Lives and works in Brisbane, Queensland

Harding had been recognized with his art at a young age and participated in many art workshops during afterschool programs. He began working with local Elders and artists who inspired him to continue his art practice which led him to showcase and sell his works through high school and through private commissions.

On finishing high school, Harding moved to the Sunshine Coast in 2001 and worked in art industries including a Bristol paint company which strengthened his understanding of colour and paint. Working in these industries allowed him to develop enough knowledge and experience to further his education.

In 2008, Harding enrolled into the Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art course at Griffith University’s Queensland College of Art in Brisbane where he was introduced to a number of prominent artists. He began working as an assistant to Tony Albert in 2009 and in 2012 Tony Albert curated Harding’s first solo exhibition *Colour By Number* at Brisbane’s Metro Arts Theatre. The title of the exhibition is a reference to the colonial discourse of Australian Government orders and systems that attached Aboriginal children with a number according to the tone of their skin.

Harding is primarily a textile artist having learnt lacemaking, embroidery and cross-stitching techniques watching his mother and grandmother, who had learnt while working as domestic servants. Harding’s practice primarily centres on the untold stories of the maternal side of his family. During his studies, he was encouraged to explore his family background and ancestry. These unwritten histories became a significant influence for Harding, particularly in *Bright Eyed Dormitory Girls*. In 1897, the Queensland Government passed the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, which led to the establishment of the Woorabinda Mission in 1927. Harding’s Elders and their families lived at the Mission under government control. Harding believes the intent of this legislation was more to do with finalising the process of dispossession and securing an Aboriginal labour supply than with protecting anyone.

In 2008, after his grandfather’s passing, Harding became responsible for recording his Mother’s family histories. It was through this that Harding became aware of the punishment, torture and dehumanisation experienced by his matrilineal Grandmother, Nanna Lawton, and other girls at Woorabinda Mission.

The retelling stories of deep sorrow, loss, death and deprivation is not easy. Harding's recounting personal histories from an Aboriginal perspective is a cathartic act and gives voice to victims of the past.

In 2014 Harding participated in the Cicada Press UNSW Art & Design Annual Indigenous Print Workshop and produced two etchings titled *Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls* (2014) and *I Am The New Blak* (2014).

About the artwork: critical statement



Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls, 2014 is one of a print edition reworking Harding's sculptural *Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls*, 2013. The latter original work is a series of hessian sacks, branded and embroidered to resemble official stamps of the Crown and each with a beautifully embroidered collar.

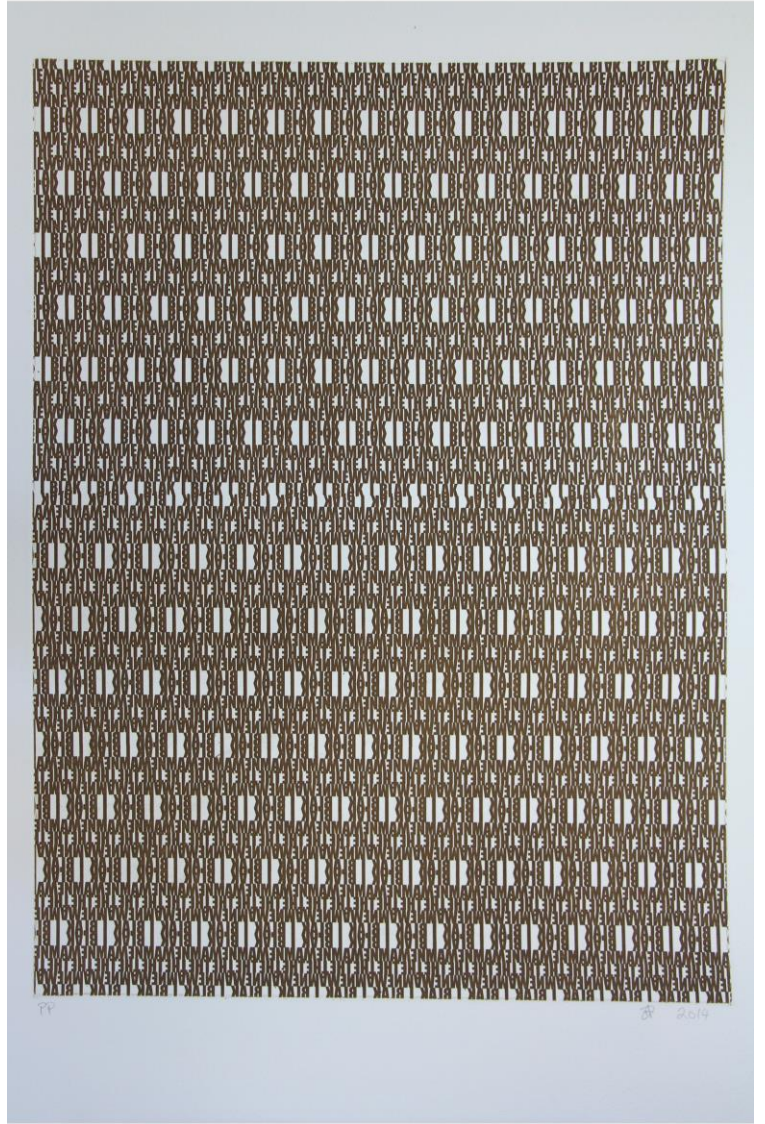
For the print series, Harding has experimented with techniques such as scribing, etching, blocking and inking onto the zinc plate to form a new presentation of the work. The work explores Harding's emotional response to his family's 'lived experiences and inherited memories'. He details stories of his grandmother who was forcibly removed from her home and family to live and work as a domestic servant. The etching depicts a hessian sack she was forced to wear as punishment, after she dared to defend herself from the unwanted advances of her employer. On the hessian there are embroidered and branded marks of the crown and government agencies. Harding addresses how government systems and orders are enforced as a sense of power and control over Aboriginal people. The clothing reflects the materiality of clothing worn

by Aboriginal children in missions. The omission of armholes alludes to confinement and restriction. The beautifully embroidered neckline out of soft mohair represents the desire to return to the past and soften the brutality of the punishment. Hessian sacks are generally used for containing produce, foods and other objects. He recalls the experience of his grandmother who was mistreated in ways that degraded her. Therefore, this work illustrates real life stories and truths of Aboriginal people and cultures that in many ways were hidden and not officially recorded in an Australian historical context.

Harding's *I Am The New Blak* is a text-based artwork that uses a repeated gesture of the words I AM THE NEW BLAK which is also reversed. The use of these texts and the play of reversing them suggests that Harding is forming ideas based around and representation and perceptions of contemporary Aboriginal cultural and identity. This artwork raises discussions around the descriptions of race and in particular with Aboriginal people in modern society.

Art Critique –

Harding's works serve as a constant reminder of the severe experiences many young gambis endured throughout their lives. They are a magnificent tribute to hi family and community and give him the opportunity to tell their stories, their way. P70 Defying Empire Catalogue



Other relevant works

Dale Harding, *Black Days in the Dawson River Country- Remembrance Gowns*, 2016.



Glossary

Gambi:

7 - 10 Activities

VISUAL ARTS

Employing what he defines as “poetic sensibilities” Harding’s artworks become symbols for the lived experiences of his family and the broader Aboriginal community. In *Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls*, Harding uses a hessian sack to symbolize his grandmother’s experiences on Woorabinda Mission. Inspired by Harding’s practice, create a symbol that reflects the stories, personality or memory of a family member.

HSIE

Woorabinda Mission was established as a result of The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897. Research the policies that have significantly impacted Aboriginal culture since European settlement. You may choose to focus on the “White Australia Policy” and the “Stolen Generation”. Research the definition of these policies, the reasons for their introduction and their effects on Aboriginal people.

11-12

VISUAL ARTS

‘He creates an open dialogue with the public and challenges them to acknowledge and understand the impact of our nations un-written histories. Furthermore, Harding’s practice becomes an advocate for the positive change in the socio-cultural climate necessary to “lessen the burden of knowing that remains with his family and community.”

With reference to this statement by writer Wesley Shaw, discuss why an artist may choose to explore distressing subject matter using a visually pleasing form. In your answer, consider the conceptual framework.