Raymond Zada

"My art practice gives me a voice. It's a chance to say something and to deliver a message in a way that people are likely to approach with an open mind.

I don't need to ask permission to talk about what I want, my message won't be undermined by ignorant reactionaries, and I get to reflect what is happening in our society."

About the artist

Raymond Zada was born in Adelaide in 1971 and grew up in Port Augusta and Marree of South Australia. He is a descendant of the Barkindji/Pakkintji people, located in far west regions of New South Wales. Through a range of creative practices in photography, video and digital installation, Zada informs ideas of cultural identity and colonial histories in which he focuses on the erased and hidden narratives of Aboriginal culture and history in his hometown of Adelaide.

Zada has been nationally recognised for much of his work that looks into the lens of Australian colonial discourses and deconstructing social and political approaches of modern Aboriginal culture and people. In 2012, he won the Works on Paper category of the 29th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Prize for his work titled racebook (2012) and the following year he won the New Media category of the 30th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award for his work Sorry (2013).

Zada was working as a computer programmer, software designing when he won the Telstra Works on Paper category in 2012.

Being Aboriginal and same-sex attracted, I've never felt I'm part of the mainstream; with non-Aboriginals and heterosexuals in authority—and in society in general—constantly trying to define, influence, or oppress those aspects of me that they could never hope to understand.

Racism and homophobia are entrenched in Australian culture. Even today, the Recognise referendum and the marriage equality plebiscite will see members of the dominant cultures debating and deciding what they think is right and acceptable for me and my peers.

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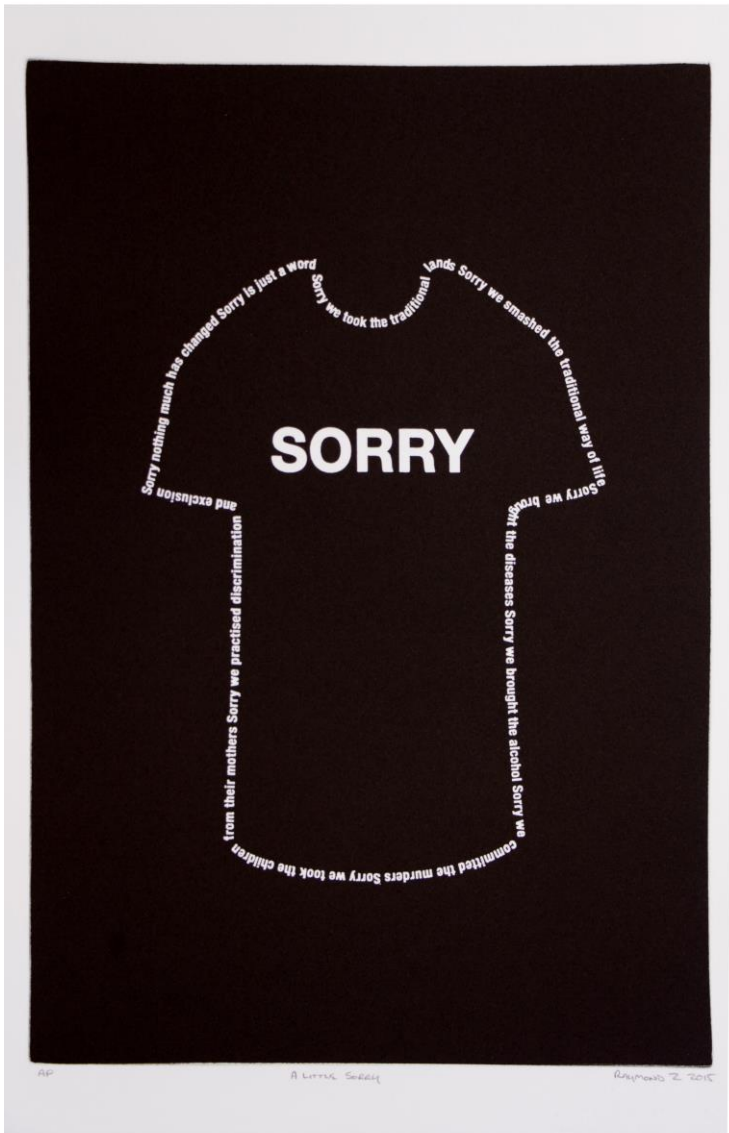
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On a personal level, it's a chance for me to be creative in different media and forums. As a software developer, all my creations have been virtual. As a visual artist, I also get to create things that are tangible.

Being self-taught, I feel the freedom to experiment in my practice. Perhaps one day I'll find 'my thing' but, for now, I'm excited by the opportunities to explore, play and learn. Many of my works address negative issues but I'm not an 'angry black' or 'bitter queen'. My creations are imbued with spirit, hope, and power. Just as trauma can carry across generations, so too can strength and resilience.
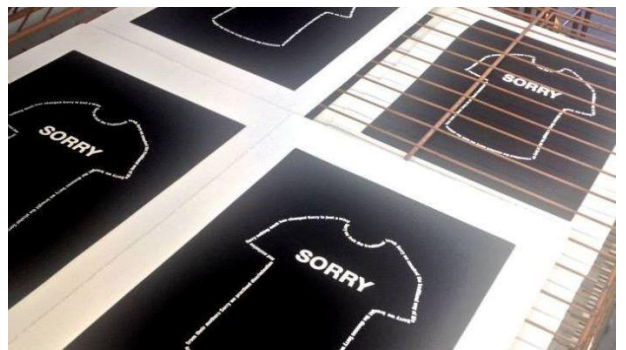
About the artwork: critical statement

Sorry, 2015

Zada won the New Media category of the 30th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award for his work Sorry (2013). As part of the 2015 Annual Indigenous Print Workshop hosted by Cicada Press at UNSW Art & Design, Zada produced another edition of his work titled *Sorry* through the process of printmaking. Zada was invited by Cicada Press to participate in a two week residency with other award winning artists, including Tony Albert and Dale Harding. The workshop allowed the artists to adapt and produce their works through the new medium of printmaking in collaboration with master printer Michael Kempson.

Sorry (2015) was the result. It is a reworked image that examines the complexities of Australian history and disconnect between language and reality. The word 'sorry' in Aboriginal communities is reflected upon. The work quotes from Prime Minister Keating's Redfern Speech from 1 993 and the 2008 national apology that was given by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in which he apologizes to all Australian Indigenous peoples for their mistreatments and suffering caused by colonial settlers and Australian government systems.

Straight from the press:
Raymond Zada's Sorry print (courtesy Cicada Press, UNSW)

Through the lens of Zada's work, Zada uses text in the form of outlining a t-shirt that speaks of many oppressed histories of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture. When reading the text outlining a shirt, the audience is conflicted with the word 'sorry' that also questions if it may or may not have any meaning to what has happened in Aboriginal history.

REFERENCES
Watch Keating deliver his 1993 Redfern Park Speech
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKhmTLN3Ddo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G0gizfu5Ms
Watch Kevin Rudd deliver The Apology 2013
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDvome0bCXs

Artist Practice

Material Practice: Zada utilises his background as a software designer to explore themes related to his identity. His work in Na Ngara is an adaptation of his digital based works into an edition of prints.

Go to this link and listen to the discussion between Zada and Master Printer Michael Kempson [Director of Cicada Press at UNSW] as they consider the adaptation of the new media work *Sorry* [2014] into a print based form.
http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/erasing-the-rowley-line/6552106

Conceptual practice: Identity is a persistent theme in Zada's work and he explores the ugly side of Australian culture to comment on racism and the disjunction between government policy and reality. Follow this link to hear Zada speak about his art making practice.
https://nga.gov.au/defyingempire/artists.cfm?artistirn=42906

Other relevant works

Racebook

Face value

https://www.youtube.com/watv=bRSsIdc9jyI links to a video installation and Zada speaking about *Facevalue.*

Acknowledged (2014)

Zada's work speaks to the erasure of Kaurna history and culture in his hometown of Adelaide. While documenting the monuments and statues that adorn the streetscapes of Colonel Light's city, as Adelaide is often referred to, he began to take notice of the more prosaic markers of the city - its street signs. In this installation these signs have been stripped of their physical reference and hypnotically float towards the viewer above the red earth of the Adelaide plains. Whilst Adelaide City Council adopted in 2002 an Indigenous acknowledgement to be used at all official functions only its central square bears a Kaurna name in its dually named Tarntanyangga/Victoria Square. This is the square Zada's signs float over and he has placed the words of the City Council's acknowledgement surrounding the centrally located statue of Queen Victoria.