



ABORIGINAL  
EXHIBITIONS GALLERY

at RUTHERGLEN ESTATES

# Dhungala

Trevor 'Turbo' Brown & Craig Charles

October 26, 2017 – January 25, 2018

Curated by Jamie Ivan Durrant

**Aboriginal Exhibitions Gallery at Rutherglen Estates opens October 26 with a landmark exhibition featuring Latje Latje and Yorta Yorta artists Trevor 'Turbo' Brown and Craig Charles titled Dhungala.**

*Dhungala – Trevor 'Turbo' Brown and Craig Charles* celebrates both artists' close personal connection to the Murray River as well as the friendship they shared. Their spiritual connection to Country and its animals is evident; enabling a very personal engagement with the paintings to the viewer. As both artists have passed on, the exhibition also marks a fitting tribute in memory of Turbo and Craig.

**Trevor 'Turbo' Brown's** intimate relationship with his animals and birds is shared as he lets us in to his enthralling and playful animal kingdom. Estranged from his family as a young boy due to his intellectual disability he lived on the banks of the Murray near Mildura for some time. During this period he formed a lifelong love for the animals living along the river and in his own words the animals were his only friends. The exuberant style of painting employed by Turbo captures this affection in a unique purity. The artistry lies in the total lack of pretentiousness. It is all about the joy and celebration of his subjects.

**Craig Charles** also engages with his Country through his depiction of animals but more often his paintings depict the Murray, historic themes such as *Possum Skin Football, 2008* and sacred sites. The sacred sites are often marked as areas of gold, silver and copper leaf applied to the work. Whole paintings are then covered with a layer of clear acrylic or shellac. The use of dark shellac imbues Craig's work with a sense of solemnity and respect, as seen in works such as *Sacred Tree of Knowledge, 2008*. A lighter golden shellac is used where subjects which are not as secretive or sacred in nature. The layering of mediums and the thematic complexity of the pieces could not be more different than techniques employed by Turbo, yet both artists share a connection and respect to Country which unifies this exhibition's collection.

*Dhungala – Trevor 'Turbo' Brown and Craig Charles* will feature 40+ paintings selected from 50 Trevor 'Turbo' Brown and Craig Charles works taken from the Hans Sip collection. It is a notable exhibition for both artists as it represents one of the the largest Aboriginal group exhibitions ever to be exhibited in regional Victoria; and showcases some of the finest examples of story-telling works produced by both painters. It is an exhibition not to be missed.

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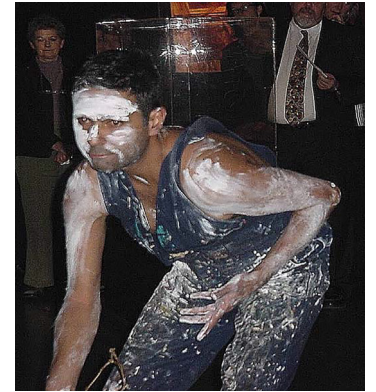
## Artist Biography: Craig Charles 1975-2015

Craig Charles was a Melbourne-based painter with Yorta Yorta heritage on his father's side, and Mhutti Mhutti heritage on his mother's side. Born in 1975 in Mildura, in Latje Latje country, Charles was raised by his great grandparents, Betty Charles, a descendant of the Djara people, and Ron Murray, a descendant of the Wamba Wamba/Lake Boga people. Creativity was part of his life from an early age: the artist remembers listening to stories and drawing with Betty and his siblings at the kitchen table from the age of four. His formal training in art began in 1996, first at the Sunraysia TAFE in Mildura, and then at the Mildura Campus of La Trobe University, where Charles completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1998. As Charles writes in his masters thesis exegesis, a turning point came when an art lecturer 'told me about my ability to raise awareness of the "Koori" plight, through art' (Charles, 2006:12). Since that time Charles' art practice was concerned with celebrating Aboriginal people's resilience, paying tribute to family, ancestors and country, and sharing experiences and stories with wider society. Having lost a number of family members and friends from the Victorian Koori community over the years, creativity of all forms has become a means to draw strength and to heal: the artist described it as 'an amazing form of medicine' (Charles, 2006:8).

In 2006 Charles completed a Masters of Fine Arts at RMIT University in Melbourne, during which he pursued these themes and developed technical approaches to articulating them in his work. He began incorporating a range of artist and natural materials in his paintings for symbolic purposes. For example, gold leaf was frequently employed in his works, as it signified his respect for his elders and traditional owners. Gold leaf also allowed Charles to glorify the country he depicted, such as the Murray River that runs through Latje Latje country, with which he identified very strongly. The artist also rubbed his canvases in the earth 'to appreciate the physical connection between the image and the land' (Charles, 2006:17), and he used shellac and oil to bind the dust and grains to the work.

Other natural materials such as ochres and charcoal also add texture to his paintings. Charles' works are recognisable for their dramatic figurative and animal forms and their layered, scraped and glossy surfaces. They are often characterised by a well-defined figure/ground relationship, in which negative space forms a bold, semi-abstract component.

Craig Charles began exhibiting in significant group exhibitions from the mid-1990s, including the National Gallery of Victoria's Big Shots exhibition: *We-Iri-We-Homeborn* (1996), the *Art of Place National Indigenous Heritage Awards* exhibitions at Canberra's Old Parliament House in 1996, in 1998 where he was highly commended in the Emerging Artist section and 2000; and the touring exhibition *Native Title Business: Contemporary Aboriginal Art* (2002).



In 2000 he held his first solo exhibition *Nana Bett and Me* at Melbourne's Alcaston Gallery, and that same year Charles also established his own dance group, The Black Crow Dancers, which toured Singapore, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. As a young child he was a member of the Latje-Latje Dance Group in Mildura, and alongside painting, dance remains a crucial creative outlet for the artist. Since 2000, Charles had held several solo exhibitions, including *City style, Country Youth* at the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at the Melbourne Museum in Carlton (2005), *Mungo Stories* at Australia Dreaming Art, Melbourne (2006), and *Elders Place*, at the Prahran Town Hall in Melbourne in 2007. The *Elders Place* series pays homage to his great-grandparents, Betty and Ron. The works exemplify the artist's treatment of painting as an expression of, and extension of, family togetherness and sharing, honouring the spirit of his formative experiences drawing at the kitchen table. The work *Nan and Pop's Campfire Kitchen – Pumpkin Stew* from this series is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, having won the NGV Acquisitive Prize at the Victorian Indigenous Art Awards, 2007. In 2008 Charles was a finalist for the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. Charles' work is also in the collection of the La Trobe University (as a result of having won the 1997 Colin Barrie Acquisition Scholarship), the Koorie Heritage Trust, and Museum Victoria.

**Writer:** Laura Fisher, 2008. Updated 2017 by Jamie Durrant



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## Artist Biography: Trevor 'Turbo' Brown 1967 - 2017

Trevor 'Turbo' Brown was born a Latje Latje man in 1967 and grew up in Mildura, a regional city in North Western Victoria. Born with a mild intellectual disability and abandoned by his family at a young age, he spent much of his youth homeless.

By 1982, Turbo was slipping into alcohol abuse and crime when a local policeman introduced him to Uncle Herb Batten and his wife, Aunty Bunta. They adopted Turbo and moved to Melbourne where he took up boxing and became a keen rapper and breakdancer. His nickname 'Turbo' began at this time and is the name of a lead character in the breakdancing film *Breakin'*, (1984).

In 2001, Uncle Herb and Aunty Bunta enrolled in a diploma of visual arts at the Bundoora RMIT campus and took Turbo along. It was clear from early on that Turbo had an exceptional talent for being able to express on canvas the stories and images in his mind. In just a few years, Aunty Bunta could see that art had transformed Turbo's life and Uncle Herb also commented that art kept Turbo away from drinking and drugs.

Turbo painted animals because, as he told Uncle Herb, when he was a teenager living on the Mildura streets and the Murray River bank, the animals were his only friends. Turbo's work may seem naive in the simplicity of form, but there is an incredible energy in the dynamic composition, colour and line. Using bright colours and bold outlines, he often worked on a large scale and painted quickly using unmixed acrylic paint. His engaging pictorial style and distinctive creatures from the dreamtime make his works pulsate with an irresistible and syncopated beat.

By 2005 Turbo already had his first commercial solo exhibition in Melbourne (it was a sell-out), completed a Diploma of Visual Arts at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and was a finalist in Australia's biggest Indigenous art prize: the *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Award*. After this award he continued to achieve substantial recognition for his bold and innovative style and



carved out a significant exhibition history. He was a finalist in the *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Award* three times and also received the *Deadly Award*, Victoria's highest honour for an Indigenous artist, at the 2012 Victorian Indigenous Art Awards.

In 2006, Turbo was included in *Landmarks* – an exhibition curated by Judith Ryan and Stephen Gilchrist – at the National Gallery of Victoria. Judith Ryan, senior curator of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Victoria, said at the time that he 'produces work of energy and integrity that is strongly expressive of his cultural identity'. In 2007, Turbo was part of *Culture Warriors* the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial curated by Brenda Croft. He also exhibited at the prestigious Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London and was included in *Dreamtime – Lo Spirito Dell'Arte Aborigena*, 2011; an exhibition of approximately 90 Indigenous Australian artists in Nuoro, Sardinia, Italy.

Prior to his passing in 2017 Turbo was considered a rising star in the Aboriginal art scene with a bright future.

**Writer:** Laura Fisher, 2008. Updated 2017 by Jamie Durrant



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## About Aboriginal Exhibitions Gallery at Rutherglen Estates

**A** boriginal Exhibitions Gallery at Rutherglen Estates is a unique joint venture between Rutherglen Estates winery and fine Aboriginal art gallery Aboriginal Exhibitions Pty Ltd, operated by Director and art collector Hans Sip.

Through the joint venture Rutherglen Estates gains access to the entire Hans Sip collection of Aboriginal art and artefacts comprising over six hundred pieces. Collected works include paintings and artefacts from: Victoria; Cape York and Arnhem Land, NT; Northern Queensland; Kimberley and Fitzroy River, WA;

Central and Western Deserts; Tiwi Islands and South Australia.

Representing a broad and mostly contemporary view of Australian Aboriginal art, the collection offers a visually powerful experience. Significant cultural works convey ancestral stories and depict large scale maps of Country together with sacred sites. As the pieces have been sourced from many parts of Australia they clearly demonstrate the richness and diversity of Aboriginal art and culture.

## About Gallery Curator Jamie Durrant

Aboriginal Exhibitions Gallery at Rutherglen Estates aims to present sensitively curated exhibitions that celebrate and respectfully acknowledge Australian aboriginal people, their lands, sacred sights, tribal and family groups and collective nations and cultures. Each exhibition will include appropriate written information explaining the artist's works in cases where the information is deemed 'non private' and approved for publishing. This will allow the gallery to offer a strong educational message and a constructive cultural learning experience, directly relating to artists' homelands, sacred sights, tribal laws and cultural activities. Quarterly exhibitions will be curated by Jamie Durrant; locally well known for his photographic arts and culture-based Australian publishing business Essentials Magazine.

Jamie Durrant is the son of prolific photorealist Australian painter Ivan Durrant. Since birth he has been surrounded by art, artists, exhibitions and industry professionals. In recent years he has curated aboriginal exhibitions for The Benalla Art Gallery; also aiding the gallery in marketing services.

In 2010 he photographed and help to collate more than 350 aboriginal art works for the international touring exhibition and published book: *Dreamtime - Lo Spirito Dell'Arte Aborigena*. This joint Australian and Sardinian project culminated in the largest non commercial exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art works and

cultural items to be shown in a foreign museum. It was shown at MAN Museum, Nuoro Sardinia, Italy during 2011 in two parts over a six months period. Over three hundred items were donated to the show by Hans Sip and many of the exhibits are now available for sale from Aboriginal Exhibitions at Rutherglen Estates.

Over the past 11 years, Durrant has edited more than 180 articles on Australian and international art, published within Essentials Magazine. He is an Aboriginal art collector in his own right and has a personal and very passionate connection to the paintings and the messages that they represent. He has a respectful view towards both the learning of, and sharing of Australian Aboriginal culture and tribal customs.

In 2016 Durrant initiated the concept of Aboriginal Exhibitions Gallery at Rutherglen Estates, connecting the Directors of Rutherglen Estates winery with art collector Hans Sip (owner of Aboriginal Exhibitions Pty Ltd). Durrant acted as a representative bridge between the two parties. Over a series of creative meetings a joint venture agreement was reached and entered into enabling the partners to begin design and construction. The end result is destined to become a must-visit gallery for both domestic and international visitors, bringing greater numbers overall to the tourist regions of The Murray and High Country Victoria.

## About the Hans Sip Collection

Hans has been an art collector for most of his life, his journey starting with the collecting of early Chinese ceramics and wood carvings from his mid teens. While always holding an interest in Australian Aboriginal art and culture, serious collecting in that area did not commence until he met artist Clifford Possum in 1996. The first work purchased was by Clifford who is Australia's best known and highly priced artist with his *Warlugulong* work purchased by the National Gallery of Australia at for \$2,400,000. The Sip collection now holds nine Clifford paintings. Clifford's daughter Gabriella soon followed with a growing number of works purchased by Hans building his collection and in turn leading to an enduring friendship. In 1999 a series of limited edition serigraphs on canvas were produced based on three paintings commissioned by Hans and painted by Gabriella. The large scale works are the same size as the originals and represent a 'tour de force' of silk screen printing.

From 2000 onward Hans has represented Northern Queensland artists Luke Cummins, his brother John, Billy Doolan and Russell Butler through his company Aboriginal Exhibitions Pty Ltd. Fitzroy Crossing, WA artist Jack Macale and Ngukurr, NT artist

Wendy Espie are also represented by Hans. Sustained financial support given to Victorian artists Trevor 'Turbo' Brown and Craig Charles led to substantial holdings of their works by Aboriginal Exhibitions Pty Ltd.

Institutions such as the Queensland Art Gallery have long drawn from Aboriginal Exhibitions's rich cultural resource. In 2003 works were loaned to QAG for their landmark exhibition *Story Place - Indigenous Art of Cape York and the Rainforest*. In 2011 over 300 items were loaned to MAN Museum, Nuoro, Sardinia, Italy for the *Dreamtime - Lo Spirito Dell'Arte Aborigena* exhibition and this was followed in 2013 by Turbo Brown's *All Animals Running Free* exhibition at the Benalla Art Gallery, curated by Jamie Durrant. The Bright Art Gallery of which Hans is a life member has had multiple exhibitions with pieces drawn from the private collection of Hans; the most recent exhibition being: *Turbo* featuring the works of Turbo Brown, in 2014. Three of Turbo Brown's paintings have recently been donated by Hans to the NGV from his private collection. Hans Sip is a Foundation Member of the National Gallery of Victoria.

