

Richard Bell

(This page)
RICHARD BELL, *Scratch an Aussie*, 2008, installation view at "Imagining Victory," Artspace, Sydney, 2013. Photo by silversalt photography. Courtesy Artspace.

(Opposite page)
LEE MINGWEI, *Luminous Depths*, 2013, mixed-media interactive installation, dimensions variable, installation view at the Peranakan Museum, Singapore. Courtesy the artist and Peranakan Museum.



"Aboriginal Art—It's a White Thing." The phrase launched Richard Bell's career when he stenciled it across his 2003 canvas *Scientia E Metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)* adorned with Jackson Pollock-like drips and modernist patterns. More than a decade ago, "Bell's Theorem" laid out the endemic problems with the assimilation of cultural objects from Australia's many Indigenous peoples into European models of art history. The painting won Bell the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2003.

Since then, Bell, who hails from the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities, and calls himself "an activist masquerading as an artist," has continued to provoke the public on the contentious subject of Australian race relations. Australia's persistent racist and colonialist attitudes are exposed in the paintings and installations—including a re-creation of the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra—shown in Bell's first survey in Melbourne, "Lessons on Etiquette and Manners" (2/5–4/13) at the Monash University Museum of Art. Not mincing words, Bell showed off new paintings at his hometown's Milani Gallery (8/22–9/7),

including a scathing Pop-style canvas that delicately crops the famous 1971 photograph of activist Gary Foley holding a banner that reads "Pardon Me for Being Born into a Nation of Racists."

Bell's exhibition "Imagining Victory" (6/26–8/11), at Artspace, Sydney, traced his recent embrace of video. There he also debuted his newest piece, *The Dinner Party* (2013), which is set in an imaginary future at a lavish home on Brisbane's waterfront, where prominent Australians give their perspectives on interrelationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

For these challenges to Australian identity, Bell was awarded one of the AUD 100,000 Creative Australia Fellowships from the Australia Council for the Arts in May. A survey of work touring the United States since 2011 stopped at the Indiana University Art Museum (3/2–5/5) in Bloomington. Bell's works were also featured in the fifth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (9/19–10/20), and in the landmark survey "My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia" (6/1–10/7) at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. *HGM*