

Weekend **Bulletin**

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# townsvilleeye

PAY TV:  
WHAT YOU PAY,  
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ART: 'DISCOVERING'  
AUSTRALIA



FEATURES, FASHION, FOOD AND LIFESTYLE

# HAVE A CAPTAIN COOK AT THIS

EAST COAST ENCOUNTER REIMAGINES JAMES COOK'S VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY SO THAT WE MIGHT LOOK AT IT FROM THE ENDEAVOUR, AND THE SHORELINE. WORDS: **SHARI TAGLIABUE**



ARTIST MICHAEL COOK, *UNDISCOVERED 4*, 2010.  
MAIN PICTURE: MICHAEL COOK, COURTESY OF ANDREW  
BAKER ART DEALER & DIANNE TANZER GALLERY + PROJECTS



ARONE MEEKS, *FIRST VOYAGE TO POSSESSION ISLAND*, 2012.

PICTURE: COURTESY OF AUSTRALIAN ART PRINT NETWORK, COOEE GALLERY

Ask the average Aussie about British explorer James Cook, and with the exception of history buffs, most seem to recall only a few facts: the year 1770, the tall ship *HMB Endeavour*, New South Wales' Botany Bay, and a tentative query, "Cooktown?"

North Queenslanders are more aware of Cook's voyage north as his compass went awry as they sailed past Yunbenun, which prompted him to rename it Magnetic Island.

Many would know of the *Endeavour* running aground and having to stop at Cooktown for 48 days while they repaired the ship, replenished provisions and tended to their sick, and some might have heard of an altercation, then reconciliation, with the local Guugu Yimithirr people over Cook's turtles.

Few, however, would know of a small island in the Torres Strait called Bedanug by its original inhabitants, the Kaurareg people.

While up north, Cook claimed the entire east coast of Australia for the Crown and commemorated the "discovery" by renaming the island Possession Island.

Most of us weren't taught to consider both sides of the story at school but the travelling multi-arts exhibition, *East Coast Encounter*, might.

*East Coast Encounter* is an exhibition of paintings, photographs, videos and three-dimensional works that reimagines Cook's journey, and captures images and moments of contact between the inhabitants and the explorers.

By merely viewing the fascinating collection of contemporary works, Cook's penchant for claiming and renaming land appears insensitive at best, the Crown-backed sense of entitlement completely ignoring those who inhabited this land.

And while the exhibition doesn't force any kind of



EUAN MACLEOD, *SUITCASES*, 2013.

viewpoint, the viewer can't help but re-evaluate events.

The exhibition is curated by John Waldron and Dr Lisa Chandler, and with the University of the Sunshine Coast as project manager and the Australian National Maritime Museum, who now own the collection, on board, the eclectic mix of works by Australian indigenous and non-indigenous artists, writers and songwriters has been travelling on a 12-venue tour up the east coast of Australia to Cooktown, and is now on its way back down to Sydney, providing not only a visual feast but a thought-provoking switch from our known history to a more balanced viewpoint. "Even today, the full history is not well taught, and it's not one that's taught in a balanced way," said Waldron.

"The exhibition attempts to present the two world views, the two cultural viewpoints, and to



GAIL MABO, *CONSTELLATION*, 2014.

PICTURE: COURTESY OF MONSOON PRESS FOR UMBRELLA STUDIO



NEIL HEALEY, *FIRST LIGHT*, 2014.

present them in a balanced way, and have indigenous and non-indigenous people explore that."

The seed for the exhibition was planted in 2010, when Sunshine Coast artist Peter Hudson approached Waldron with a concept, to explore Cook's journals. Waldron thought they would need to get as many of the artists as possible to experience the locations.

"Some of the artists got to travel to Possession Island, spend time there, and spend time with the community at Cooktown, at Hervey Bay, Fraser Island, and Botany," he said.

But if you're thinking of seeing Possession Island for yourself, Waldron says it isn't really an option.

"The artists were taken across by traditional men. It's only a short boat ride from the top but it's not easy to get there. It's not accessible." There are many artists

involved, including indigenous artist Gail Mabo, Goanna frontman Shane Howard contributed a painting and excerpt from the hit *Solid Rock*, musician Reg Mombassa features two portraits done in his signature Mambo style, while Former *60 Minutes* journalist Jeff McMullen filmed a haunting video of Possession Island, which, along with the painted landscapes, shares a familiarity with that of Magnetic Island.

Waldron says as a curator, to have the collection kept together at the National Maritime Museum is unique, and that part of the role was to bring artists together to shape the exhibition.

Caloundra-based photographer Michael Cook was one of the artists whose existing works were a serendipitous addition to the collection. Formerly a commercial photographer, Cook says he had always wanted to move into

contemporary art, and after showing his first collection to a gallery, was able to throw in his day job.

"Coming from fashion, I work in storylines from beginning to end. I come up with the idea or concept first then create the imagery. A painter would use paint to create layers on the canvas, I just use a camera to create the image that is in my mind, using layers, which is completely opposite to photojournalism, which is going out and finding what you want."

Cook's distinctive style is highly collectable. He says his style was inspired by the Renaissance paintings in London's National Gallery, and his works now feature in numerous public and private collections here and overseas: "Looking around the world there's not heaps of people that do it this way, so I'm always looking for other artists working the same way I do."

Cook's ethereal photos were a perfect fit for the exhibition.

"I'm exploring my own indigenous identity. I didn't know much about it because I'm adopted," he said.

"My adoptive mother fought for indigenous rights my whole life. She gave me an understanding of that part of my background.

"I met my birth mother when I was 30, so we've known each other for about 17 or 18 years now. She's not indigenous either, that's from my father's side.

"My work comes from stories I learned from my adoptive white family, not traditionally from my indigenous family.

"My work has a certain look compared to a lot of other indigenous artists, because of my upbringing. It's not so in your face but it's telling the same story."

*EAST COAST ENCOUNTER* IS ON EXHIBITION AT PINNACLES GALLERY, RIVERWAY ARTS CENTRE DAILY UNTIL OCTOBER 30.