

EDUCATION
RESOURCE

A SURVEY OF
PAINTINGS AND
DRAWINGS
1972–2007

OTHERSIDE ART: TREVOR NICKOLLS





This image shows a traditional landscape typical of the Kimberly region in Western Australia and particularly references the Bungle Bungle mountain ranges of Rover Thomas's Country. At the centre of the painting female genitalia with legs and torso is shown giving birth to a heart, surrounded by traditional symbols. Nickolls has also included what appear to be 'Bradshaw figures' and traditionally drawn reptiles on a Western Desert style dotted background.

Dreamtime landscape 1987
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
121.5 x 122 cm
Araluen Art Collection, Araluen Arts Centre,
Alice Springs

Front cover
Tightrope walking 1980
oil on canvas
198.5 x 91 cm
VCA Art Collection, the University of Melbourne
Gift of the artist 1980

TOUR

Venues and dates

Ian Potter Museum of Art,
The University of Melbourne (Vic)
13 May - 2 August 2009

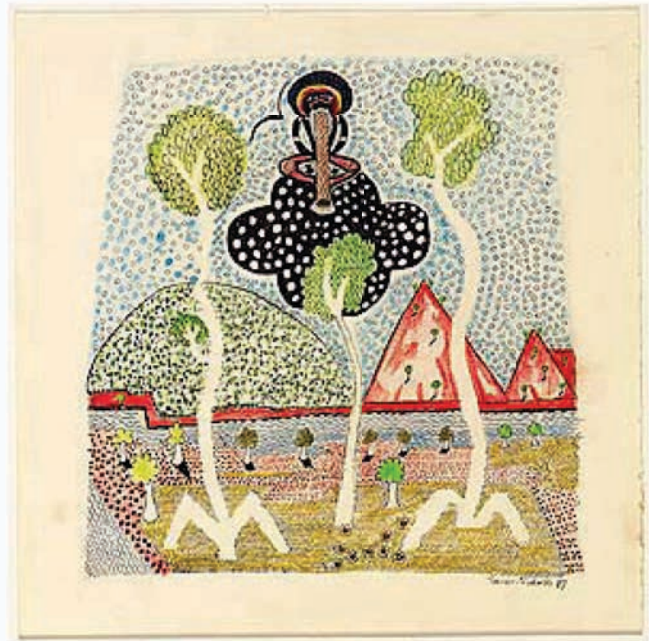
Araluen Centre for Arts and Entertainment (NT)
13 November 2009 - 30 January 2010

Benalla Art Gallery (Vic)
12 March 2010 - 2 April 2010

ANU Drill Hall Gallery (ACT)
8 April 2010 – 23 May 2010

Latrobe Regional Gallery (Vic)
24 July 2010 – 19 September 2010

Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art
University of South Australia (SA)
22 October 2010 – 17 December 2010



Choosing a drawing as the first image in this education resource was simple as drawing is where Nickolls started his journey with art. He has stated that his first flirtations with art actually started as soon as he left the womb. As far back as he can remember he always wanted to be an artist and nothing else appealed to him. As a child he recalls taking his mother's cookbooks and using them as sketch pads for cartooning, mark-making and sketching. The series of works 'The Bethesda series' came about after Trevor had an altercation with a machine travelling at great speed. The machine injured him; damaging one eye, his arms, legs and face. Despite this accident, he has retained a fantastic sense of humour and his spirit has not been dented by this chance encounter. Bethesda means 'place of healing' and in this series Trevor has found a way to create his own Dreamtime Country.

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Contemporary traditional 1978
oil on canvas
165 x 60 cm
Collection of Marianne Baillieu, Melbourne

The top half of this painting shows a traditional scene with male and female trees. Their gender is shown through genitalia added by Nickolls. The central figure is reflected in a contemporary cityscape. Nickolls is fond of the idea of his work being considered as 'contemporary – traditional'. *Machinetime to Dreamtime* and this work are prime examples of that idea.

This education resource is designed to be used as a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to *Other side art: Trevor Nickolls, a survey of paintings and drawings 1972–2007* and is intended to complement and be used in addition to information provided in the room brochure, gallery wall texts and on the NETS Victoria web site www.netsvictoria.org. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, together with suggested points for discussion and activities for junior and senior students.

CURRICULUM LINKS AND CONNECTIONS

As this exhibition is touring nationally, teachers are encouraged to adapt the curriculum links given in the list below to suit their school's state curriculum. Use this list to generate ideas, activities and points for discussion, and where suitable, contact education staff at your local gallery for further ideas and suggestions. **Teachers are strongly urged to take students to your local cultural centre.**

The exhibition can be used to explore:

- studies in Aboriginal art and culture
- the diversity of Indigenous styles and artistic practices
- symbolism and iconography
- figuration and abstraction
- techniques and production
- social and political issues
- cross cultural interactions
- spirituality
- social justice
- cultural heritage.

ABOUT THE EDUCATION RESOURCE WRITERS

Brian McKinnon; Professional Profile

Brian was born Brian Charles Dodd in Geraldton, Western Australia. His father was descended from the Wongai people of the Western Desert and mother was a descendant of the Yamatji people of the Midwest coast.

Brian McKinnon has been employed at the National Gallery for 4 ½ years as an Indigenous Project Officer.

Brian was previously employed by Splash Art as an Arts Worker, working with people with Dyslexia and Schizophrenia.

Before this he worked as a professional arts practitioner exhibiting and contracting to schools and councils.

Brian completed a Masters in Visual Art at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2008.

Rebecca Hicks; Professional Profile

Rebecca Hicks has been employed at the National Gallery of Victoria for the past 8 years.

In 2001 she was appointed as Outreach Education Officer within the department of NGV Schools.

Prior to joining the Education team at the NGV, Rebecca's teaching experience reached across P-12 in a variety of learning environments including the Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute.

In the role of Outreach Education Officer, Rebecca is engaged in visiting schools and working with student and teacher groups within the gallery to support the continuity of arts education with emphasis on cross-curricula and cross cultural teaching and learning.

In 2002, Rebecca completed a Master of Education at The University of Melbourne, with focus on Arts Education and Cross Cultural Communication to further her ambition to challenge and educate young people, by way of instilling a love and understanding of the Visual Arts.

Trevor Nickolls is a senior indigenous artist and seminal figure in Australian contemporary art. Born in 1949, Nickolls has exhibited nationally and internationally for over thirty years, and represented Australia with Rover Thomas at the Venice Biennale in 1990.

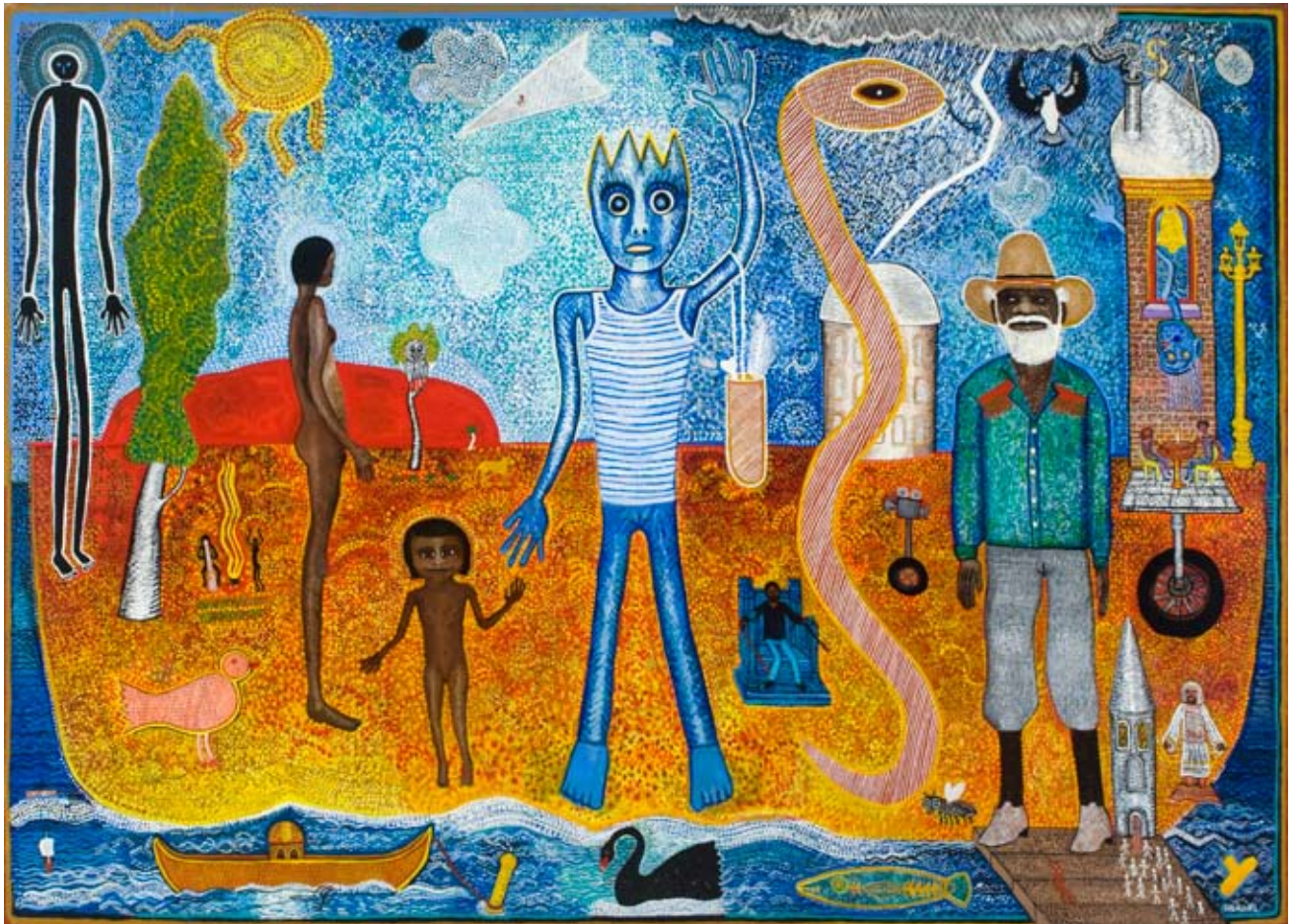
Nickolls's artworks are powerful figurative and symbolic explorations of alienation and the urban landscape, and have informed many of the critical intellectual and aesthetic positions vital to questions of identity and Aboriginality in Australia. His works are widely recognised for their 'dreamtime/machinetime' theme, which has become an enduring leitmotiv for the dichotomy of European and Aboriginal histories in our nation.

Other side art: Trevor Nickolls, a survey of paintings and drawings is the first major museum survey of this influential artist's practice. It will include pictorially complex works from the early 1980s to the present.

Curated by senior Perth based independent curator and writer, Michael O'Ferrall, the exhibition will bring paintings and works on paper together from a large number of private and public collections within Australia and in Europe. The works will be organised to follow a time sequence, tracing influences from different periods of the artist's life. The exhibition will explore themes of self portraiture, the urban landscape and the evolution of the artist's iconography.

Nickolls's drawings and paintings reflect his personal experience as a Nunga man and his relationship to the land, place and history. These relationships are of universal relevance, particularly at a time when the effects of shifting political paradigms, environmental instability, population increases in urban centres and rapid technological development are so keenly felt.

The pictorial motifs employed by Nickolls in his figurative works, such as the 'dreamtime/machinetime' leitmotiv that combines the sheer natural wonder of the Aboriginal land and Dreamtime stories with robust symbols of urban Australia, open up his story to every viewer. They make accessible ideas about the effects of nature and nurture, rich and poor, good and evil – dichotomies that shape our experience of contemporary life whether we are rural or city dwellers.



This painting shows many of the influences that have shaped Nickolls's life and his work. The Venice Biennale, birds, which he loves to feed in his back yard, Wandjina spirits, the artist Rover Thomas and clouds for which he uses a stencil. In the background, pictured seated in the blue chair, Nickolls has also included a small self portrait.

Trevor Nickolls studied in Melbourne, at the Victorian College of the Arts, in 1980. He spent most of the second half of the 1980s living and working in Melbourne prior to being selected as a joint official Australian representative for the 1990 Venice Biennale with Rover Thomas. This period in Melbourne coincided with the creation of a series of powerful images relating to the urban landscape and the inner mind. His work is held in many major state, national and international collections. He is represented by Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne.

Named 'the father of urban Aboriginal art' by Brenda L. Croft, the Curator of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Australia, Trevor Nickolls is one of the most significant social commentators working in the visual arts in Australia today. For the last thirty years he has worked and reworked themes that are at the same time intensely personal, Aboriginal and universal, in the process developing a unique repertoire of visual symbols to depict the impact of Western culture on Aboriginal traditional life.

He is currently living and working in Adelaide.

Roving in Thomas Town 1994
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153 x 213 cm
Private collection, Perth

INTERVIEW WITH TREVOR NICHOLLS: ART AS AN EXPRESSION OF LIFE

When did your love of creating art first begin?

I can remember drawing on my mother's cookbooks when I was a baby. It was my destiny to draw and create.

Can you tell us a little about your background?

When I was young I was diagnosed as having St Vitus Dance. The doctor encouraged my mother to enrol me in Saturday morning art classes.

Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? Yes, as an artist I believe in the Spirit world. You have to be able to tune in.

Do you consider yourself as a storyteller?

Above all, the narrative is important in art. The traditional link, that art was created to instruct, to tell stories, to educate where to find food. I've always believed that a picture should tell a story. I don't think I could paint an entirely abstract work.

What was the turning point in your career?

I knew that I wanted to be an artist. One big influence: as a youngster I had a job as a 'Tray Boy' selling lollies at a movie and live theatre. I got to see night after night the same shows. Big exposure to white man's culture, Broadway shows, Russian Ballet and African Dancers. I could stand there night after night watching them. A lot of my paintings, the borders are theatre scenes with curtains. The world is a stage.

What aspects to your artistic career have been difficult?

I don't mind admitting it, that I have a mental illness, which is what I've had to contend with. That has been difficult and then you go to hospital and are full of those terrible chemical drugs. It takes a long time to recover from that and get back on the creative thing. It kills that creative part of your brain that makes you want to create and for periods of a time for a while I'd sit there and I couldn't work. Slowly I start climbing back and creating. I've been well now for quite a long period of time. It has been a balancing act. Know body knows unless you actually experience it, demons, terror, voices. It all becomes a reality. It comes out in my work.

TECHNIQUE

You have described your style as 'traditional/contemporary'

I describe it as a mixture of both. Traditional techniques to make a contemporary painting. I trained myself in technique. Drawing mainly from copying comics. Then I started charcoal drawings that involved going to Saturday morning art classes, and then I started to do my first oil painting. Picasso opened my mind to another kind of art. And later on of course I found out his art was based on African art anyway. Then at art school I learned about western techniques, gum and glazing and all those old techniques. The theme at art school at the time was all hard edged using masking tape and all, I was considered grubby and crude, squatting on the floor, using dirty colours.

Where and when did your love of colour develop?

I love the colour of the earth. I like bright colours. Influence from reading comic books.

What themes do you explore in your work?

Themes of the dreamtime which is the Aboriginal influence of the philosophy, the beliefs, the art styles, the culture and also what happens when we go to sleep at night. I believe that the spirit leaves the body and partakes in the dreaming world. And when we wake up, I believe we wake up in what I call the machinetime, influences of machine and technology.

Can you explain your relationship to nature?

I can, I think, we should live with nature. Not to control or exploit it, but to tune into nature more. Listen to the birds and see those trees just as important as we are. In this society we haven't really done that. We have tried to exploit everything. It is out of control.

What social, political and cultural issues are expressed in your work?

- Deaths in Custody
- Aboriginal Diggers
- Stolen Generation
- Maralinga

Would you consider yourself a change agent?

Art should stir people up.

Do you deliberately challenge the viewer to think about issues that maybe they haven't considered before?

Yes I do. That's the power of the visual arts. You can rock and confront people.

INTERVIEW WITH TREVOR NICHOLLS: ART AS AN EXPRESSION OF LIFE – CONT.

INFLUENCE

Can you tell us about your relationship with Rover Thomas. You refer to him frequently in your work?

I met him in Venice. We connected. When I saw his country I really connected to his art. There is something timeless about that country – Kimberleys. It is so animated, lizards, figures, rocks, they way they pop out.

In what ways did your experience in Venice influence/ impact our work? I saw Van Gogh's work. I went to the Vatican and saw the Sistine Chapel, Da Vinci and Bosch.

Your work features a myriad of influences.

What artists have been major influences for you?

- Rover Thomas (Joolama)
- Dinny Nolan
- Nelson Tjakamarra
- Lin Onus
- Albert Tucker
- Ian Fairweather
- William Dobell
- Pablo Picasso
- Amedeo Modigliani
- Salvador Dali
- Albert Namatjira

What life experiences have had the biggest impact?

Going to Papunya for the first time and Melville Island and Turkey Creek.

Is your work autobiographical?

Definitely

You have created your own visual language. Can you describe the meaning behind some of your recurring symbols? Are the symbols still relevant today?

A lot of the language I use is visual and I like to use stencils to make things repetitive, this breeds familiarity with the observer, gives them confidence in viewing my work.

How has your work evolved over the years?

Discipline, Persistence and belief in what I'm doing. Trusting my instincts and my own consciousness. Life is a journey, constantly evolving.

THE EXHIBITION

Can you explain the importance of this recent exhibition?

From my personal point of view I'm very proud to see all four generations of work together in one walk about. There are not many artists that get to see that. So I'm very proud for myself personally to see that. On the world stage I'm proud that I have a lasting art that the wider public can be exposed too. My credibility as an artist.

What kind of experience/knowledge do you want people to have when they view your work?

I'd like them to have a spiritual experience. I also like to use humour in my work quite a lot. When you think of western art, humour is not a really big thing. There are not many artists who have employed humour into their work. I think to have a sense of humour is a life saving quality.

What does this exhibition reveal about you?

As I'm getting older I feel it has been a spiritual and artistic journey. They come together. As I become more aware of the spiritual and how close the spirit and creation is. For me, I want people to believe in the power and magic of creation. I think the white fella has lost.

What are you currently working on?

My next exhibition is going to be entitled, *The Lost Spirit's Meet*.

THE FUTURE AND BEYOND

How do you want the next generation of young people to understand/view your work?

I hope they see my work as a record of a time that I was born in and lived through and what influences throughout history have shaped my world as I express it.

What is the greatest message you wish the next generation of young people to understand from your work?

Love, Peace and Harmony. More spiritual and more cultural awareness rather than the emphasis on the technological. 'Keep the dream alive'.

Discuss the role of visual arts in maintaining culture and educating non Aboriginal people about culture.

I think it is very important. The visual arts was so important in traditional society. As a means of instruction and education, ceremony and sacred instruction. Pleasure and enjoyment in the making and looking at.



This exhibition will tour nationally.
What conservation issues do you think this may present?

Research the roles of key professionals involved in the preparing and presentation of this exhibition:

- NETS Victoria
- Exhibition design
- Graphic design
- Installation staff
- Conservation
- Marketing
- Transport

EXPLORING AND RESPONDING



Dreamtime calling from Gondolaland 1990
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 213.4 x 152.5 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Purchased from Admission Funds, 1991

Calling from Gondolaland

In this painting Trevor Nickolls references many of his favourite and not so favourite things. The scene shows Nickolls's apartment in Venice, through whose window we can see Vincent Van Gough's *Starry Starry Night*. However this familiar painting has been transposed using the Western Desert style of dot painting. There are cartoon-like characters which reference the comic-strip character of 'Mighty Mouse', a symbol used by Nickolls throughout his career. To the left is a woman holding a hat which represents Rover Thomas who is also symbolised to by the boot and his totem, the owl, shown perched on the window shutter. Rover Thomas, together with Trevor Nickolls was a joint Australian representative for the 1990 Venice Biennale.

Trevor recalls that while in the apartment the phone never stopped ringing and it was driving him mad - in the speech bubble it says 'Vincent rang, Rover rang, Art rang and boomerang'.

The Rainbow Serpent can be seen on the right-hand side of the painting, this has been referred to as Nickolls's muse. Here it is depicted as an 'irreverent Rainbow Serpent' shown smoking, wearing a beret and completed in the cross-hatching pattern of traditional bark paintings.

Near the tail of the serpent the sunflower can be seen as another reference to Van Gough. The cat in the middle foreground is reminiscent of a painting by Lin Onus who exhibited with Nickolls in 1987.

Whilst in Venice Nickolls came across Picasso's painting *Woman Pissing*, here the baby is a direct reference to that work. The table in the middle of the room represents the architecture and sculpture he encountered throughout Venice.

SYMBOLS

Nickolls has created his own visual language through the use of symbols.

What is a symbol?

Brainstorm a list of objects within this work that act as symbols.

INFLUENCES

Dreamtime calling from Gondolaland pays homage to traditional Aboriginal art and features a myriad of international and contemporary influences. Nickolls makes reference to the Impressionist artist, Vincent Van Gogh.

What evidence can you find to suggest this?

Nickolls's admiration and deep respect for the Kimberley artist, the late Rover Thomas is reflected in this work. Thomas and Nickolls were the first Aboriginal people chosen to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale in 1990. Nickolls and Thomas share a highly personal approach to their art making. People are familiar with traditional art but for many the paintings of Nickolls and Thomas represent a different and challenging contemporary Aboriginal art. Nickolls pays homage to his mentor and friend in *Dreamtime calling from Gondolaland* through the images and symbols of the:

- bushman's hat
- snakeskin boot
- speech bubble, 'Rover rang'
- and Thomas' totem the owl.

What is a totem?

Thomas features in many of Nickolls' paintings wearing a stockman's hat with his distinctive long white beard. Make a list of the works in the exhibition featuring images or references to Rover Thomas?

CREATION

Nickolls regularly incorporates the Rainbow Serpent as a symbol into his work. In *Calling from Gondolaland* the Rainbow Serpent is disguised wearing a beret and completed in the cross hatching patterns of traditional bark paintings. The Rainbow Serpent features in the Dreaming stories of many mainland Aboriginal nations. The Rainbow Serpent can make life, bring on the wet season, regenerate the natural worlds and can change into human and animal form. The Rainbow Serpent acted both to shape the landscape and establish human culture. The creation or Dreaming stories are integral to

Aboriginal spirituality. The importance of this powerful creator is constantly celebrated and transformed in ritual and song, story and art.

- Speak to your librarian to discover the creation and ancestral stories of the Rainbow Serpent.
- Visit the following websites to discover more about the Rainbow Serpent.

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM: STORIES OF THE DREAMING
[http://australianmuseum.net.au/Stories of the Dreaming](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Stories%20of%20the%20Dreaming)

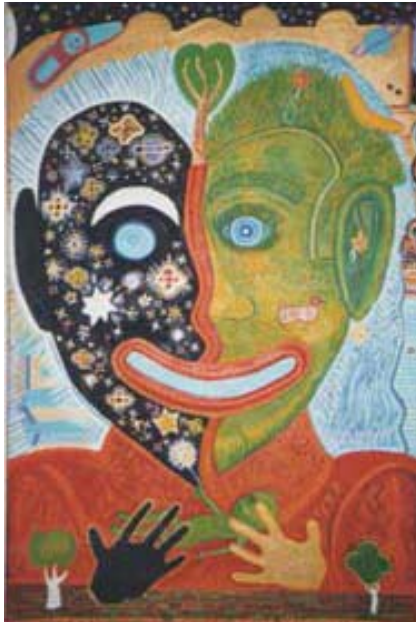
SCREEN AUSTRALIA DIGITAL LEARNING: THE RAINBOW SERPENT
<http://dl.screenaustralia.gov.au/module/1540/>

- Make contact with your local cultural centre to learn about local creation stories.

How do other cultures express their idea of creation?

- How do you believe the world began?
- Draw your interpretation of how the world began.

CULTURAL IDENTITY



Family portrait—birth of a new age 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
112 x 82 cm
Private collection, Melbourne



Where do we come from? Where do we end up? 2004
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
84 x 84 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Trevor Nickolls was born in 1949 to an Aboriginal mother and a father of Anglo-Celtic descent. His work can be read as a way of trying to reconcile his black and white heritage, being part black and part white he felt that he belonged nowhere. His art making has been a constant journey of self-discovery in search of his identity.

His work also speaks of a broader Aboriginal struggle for identity and self, in colonial and post colonial Australia.

What does the word identity mean?

Discuss what makes up a person's identity?

- Is it their physical appearance?
- Is it their personal history?
- Is it how they live?
- Is it what is important to them?

How do people express their identity?

Write about your own experience with meeting someone from a culture different to your own.

Design an image illustrating the merging of two or more cultures.

Story telling is an important element of Nickolls's work.

Create a timeline of your own story.

In search of reconnecting with his Aboriginality, Nickolls developed his own style of painting, drawing inspiration from a diversity of Aboriginal forms of expression. Nickolls attended the Victorian College of the Arts where he was exposed to many Western art influences. Nickolls first contact with traditional Aboriginal artists was not until the late 1970s when he met Dinny Nolan Tjampitjimba, a senior Warlpiri man from Papunya. This was a turning point in Nickolls's career. Meeting Nolan provided the opportunity for him to learn about the approach and technique of the desert artists. He was also very grateful to Nolan for his willingness to teach and share his deep knowledge of the land. Explore the work of Dinny Nolan. Nolan is recognised for his Central Desert dot paintings.

In what way has Nickolls's technique been influenced by his meeting with Nolan?

Research the diversity of Australian Indigenous cultures and forms of expression.

Create a class map of Australia identifying Aboriginal place names, tribal areas and language groups.

Discuss how regional differences affect style, technique and materials used by Aboriginal artists. For example Papunya, Melville Island, Arnhemland and Turkey Creek.



Find and draw the following symbols
How many times do these symbols appear in the exhibition?

Serpent

Dollar sign

Crucifix

Divided face

Hand

Bird

Wandjina

Hat

Owl

Television

Test tube

Aerial/antenna

Can you find any more symbols that are not listed?

LINE, SHAPE AND COLOUR

Explore the art elements line, shape and colour.

COLOUR

Nickolls has a love of colour and often experiments with the placement of colours side by side one another and overlapping.



Emu Dreaming 2004
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
60 x 90 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

The clouds in the background of this painting feature throughout Nickolls's work and he keeps a stencil for reproducing them pinned on a board in his workspace. The dotted section of the background is in the style of Emily Kngwarreye and the foreground evokes ploughed and sown paddocks.



NATURAL COLOURS



The Billabong actually takes the shape of a gorge looking out over flood plains reminiscent of the vast flood plains of the Kimberly. Nickolls uses vibrant colours but also incorporates natural earthy colours, such as black, brown, yellow and white reflecting the traditional colours of the land.

Billabong 1985
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
91 x 91.5 cm
Collection of Allens Arthur Robinson

SHAPE



Here Nickolls seems to be paying homage to birds which are his favourite animals. The three sets of concentric circles in the foreground are surrounded by bird footprints, the brown circles may represent nesting places for the birds. The three trees appear to be Boab trees from the Kimberly region in Western Australia and the mountain range in the background are the famous Bungle Bungles.

Landscape with rocks 1982
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
50.4 x 76.3 cm
Collection of Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide

Concentrate on the painting. Squint and look through your eyes. You will start to see shapes and fields of colour emerging. How would you describe the shapes in this work?

Try this new way of looking with other works created by Nickolls.

LINE

Make a list of words to describe the types of lines that have been used. Swirly, sweeping, zigzag etc



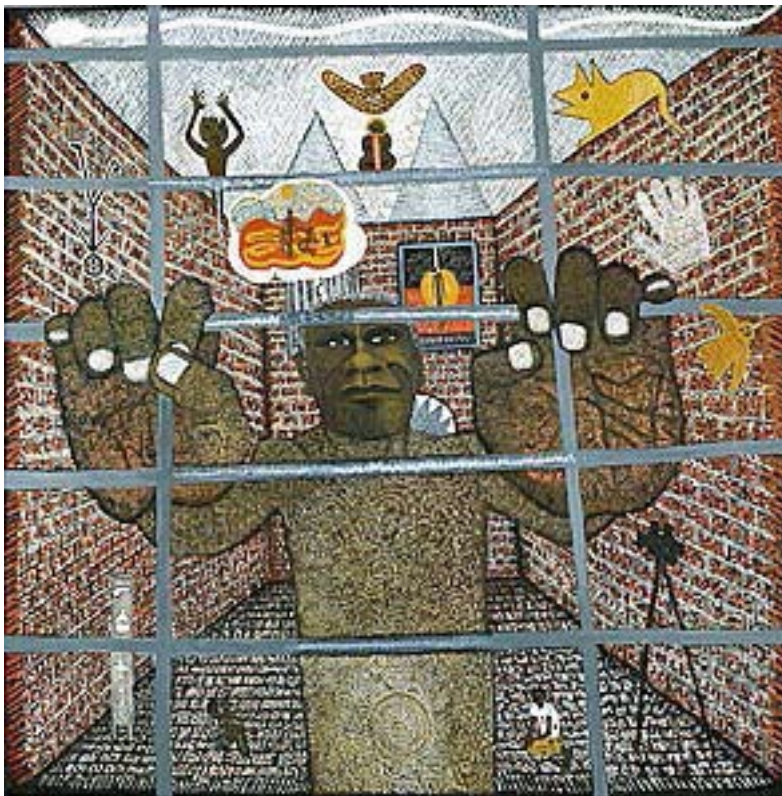
In this work Nickolls is showing man's reliance on nature and nature's connection to man. Nature can survive without man, but man cannot survive without nature.

Tree man c. 1988
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
122 x 45.8 cm
Collection of Dr Nigel Strauss, Melbourne

PATTERN/TEXTURE

Record your own patterns found from nature and compare to Nicholls's work.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND QUESTIONS



In this work we can see a lot of Nickolls's favourite symbols, but here they take on a sombre role, as they refer to the shocking results to the inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody.

On 10 August 1987 Prime Minister Hawke announced the formation of a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of deaths of Aboriginal people while held in State and Territory gaols.

Deaths in custody 1990
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 150.3 x 150.4 cm
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 Purchased 1991

POLITICS AND HISTORY

One of Nickolls's most challenging images, *Deaths in Custody*, reflects the struggles of Indigenous Australians.

Discuss as a group:

- The image of a hanged Aboriginal man set against the Aboriginal flag.
- The influence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy Movement.
- Palms of the hands and clutching fingers around the bars
- Claustrophobic cell and closing red brick walls
- Camera on tripod/television camera

Look at the facial expression of the main figure. Consider his body language. Imagine you are the man in the painting. Describe the scene before you/ how you feel/ what you are thinking. What might he say if he could speak?

Describe the mood or atmosphere? Write a list of words that would encapsulate the scene.

Write a personal interpretation/reflection about how the image makes you feel.

A Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in custody was established in 1987 to investigate the number of Australian Aboriginal deaths in prison, youth detention centres or police cells. Between 1980 and 1989, at least 99 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died in custody.

Read the report and recommendations made by the Royal Commission to improve the treatment of Indigenous Australians in the justice system.

Visit the following website:

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT:

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY

http://www.aic.gov.au/en/criminal_justice_system/indigenousjustice/cjs/dic.aspx

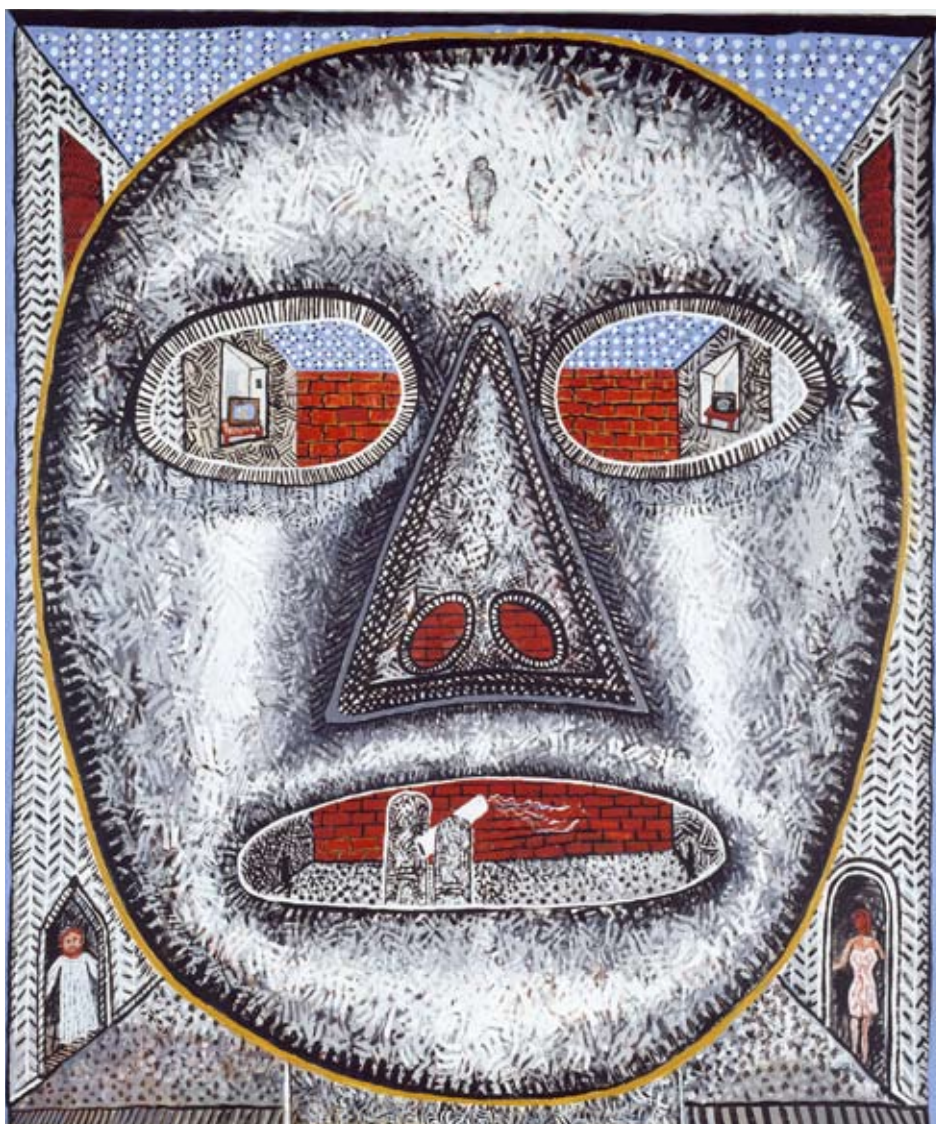
Discuss as a group:

- What is social justice?
- Is the role of art to reflect society and expose social injustice?

Deaths in custody is a confronting image based on a photograph, which appeared in a Brisbane newspaper of an Aboriginal person held in custody.

After discussing the content of this image, write a newspaper headline for this image.

Read your local newspaper and select a photograph or story to create your own visual response.



The image of a mask in front of a room that seems almost empty is Nickolls's way of talking about his unending, undefinable search for identity in what seems to be a very unforgiving world.

Inside looking out 2 1988
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 106 x 91.5 cm
 Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
 Purchased 1991

Discuss as a group Nicholls's work in relation to political commentary.

Notice the placement of the facial image/mask. What impact does this have?

What is the impact on you, the viewer, as you stand in front of this work?

What does the mask mean? Does the mask represent a death mask?



Trevor considers himself to be very spiritual man and we can see his spiritual connection through in the title of this work, *Warmun Mandala 2*. It is a reference to the artist's connection to Rover Thomas and the Gija people at Warmun, in Western Australia's Kimberley region, who are very active with their ceremonial practice and still in direct contact with their land, culture and spirituality. The colours used and the figures, depicted here holding hands, could be interpreted in as a reference to their strong spirituality and culture. The Mandala is a reference to symbol used in other spiritual practices, in particular Buddhism, and is shown here the painting's circular composition.

Warmun mandala 2002
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
122 x 122 cm
Private collection, Perth

Over four decades Nickolls's work has evolved dramatically in style and content. Select a work from each decade of his career.

Compare and contrast changes, which have occurred over time.

Discuss themes, subject matter, painting techniques and composition.

What understanding or insight do you gain about the artist from viewing his work over such a long period of time?

Nickolls has been influenced by a myriad of artists. Research two of the following artists and compare the works of Nickolls with your chosen artists.

Select from the following:

- Rover Thomas (Joolama)
- Dinny Nolan
- Nelson Tjakamarra
- Lin Onus
- Albert Tucker
- Ian Fairweather
- William Dobell
- Amedeo Modigliani
- Salvador Dali
- Albert Namatjira



Cultural terrorist 1987
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
126 x 125cm
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

As a young boy, Nickolls became familiar with the work of Pablo Picasso, particularly *Guernica*. *Guernica* was Picasso's personal response to the Spanish Civil War.

Find an image of Picasso's *Guernica* and compare the image of the *Weeping Woman* with her upturned face to the way Nickolls creates his figurative images.

In what other ways has Nickolls been influenced by Picasso?



The adventures of Wanda Wandjina 2001
oil on canvas
122 x 211 cm
Private collection, Western Australia

The Wandjina, cloud or rain spirits from Rover Thomas's Kimberley country, have proved fascinating for Nickolls and have inspired him to produce a series of works featuring the character 'Wanda Wandjina'. Trevor admits that Wanda represents the dreamtime figures of the Wandjina, but argues that true Wandjina do not have mouths and that 'Wanda' therefore only represents them as an idea.

The Statue of Liberty makes an appearance in this work, floating in from the ocean atop of a Coca-Cola bottle, a reference to the idea that Australians are trying to emulate Americans or that the Australian government cannot act without the USA. It could however, also be interpreted simply as a symbol that Nickolls seeks freedom from the classifications of mainstream Australia. Yet, by depicting an iconic Australian car - the FJ Holden - he puts forward solidarity with the Australian identity and, by showing such a diverse range of beings in the car, points to the diverse origins of the Australian people.

Trevor's work is complex with multiple references. Each symbol or icon within his work encapsulates a variety of meanings. Select five of the following symbols and give your personal interpretation of the meaning behind these symbols.

- Serpent
- Dollar sign
- Crucifix
- Divided face
- Hand
- Cartoons
- Birds
- Wandjina
- Bushman's Hat
- Owl
- Television
- Test tube Aerial/antenna

Do you consider the themes and symbols in Nickolls's work relevant in today's society? Select examples to support your opinion.

Do you need to understand the meaning and stories behind Nickolls's work to appreciate his work?

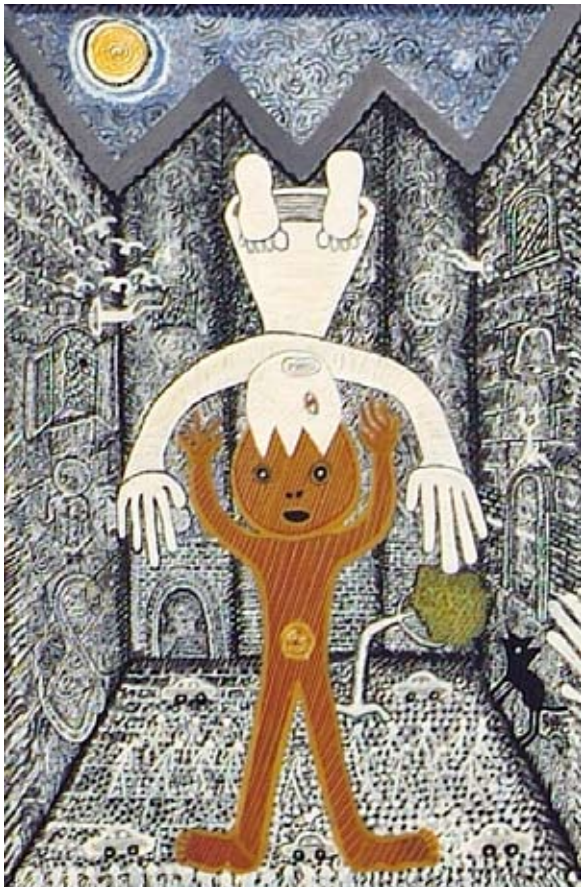
How has Nickolls used the elements and principles of design to convey meaning and messages?

Select an aspect of today's society that concerns you and create a visual response.

Write a review of the exhibition including:

- personal observations and responses
- what values and beliefs are reflected in his work
- stylistic characteristics
- influence of traditional and contemporary life and culture.

QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION



Wrestling with white spirit 1990
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
76 x 50.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through the NGV Foundation by Violet Sheno,
Member, 2005

Wrestling with white spirit shows the artist as an Aboriginal man who has conflicting backgrounds; one white and one black. He must continually wrestle with himself to recognise the importance of both cultures, because without either one there would be no Trevor Nickolls.

'My painting is a marriage of Aboriginal culture and Western culture to form a style called 'traditional contemporary – from Dreamtime to Machinetime.'

[Neale, M, *An Introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection*, The Art Gallery of NSW, Yiribana, 2000, pg 46]

'Me being part black, part white, it'd sort of like wrestling. I find myself in an attempt to keep my balance between the black and white.'

[Neale, M, *An Introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection*, The Art Gallery of NSW, Yiribana, 2000, pg 46]

'My work is a balancing act, like walking a tightrope between my dreams and my life when I'm awake – from Dreamtime to Machinetime.'

[Kleinert, S and Neale M, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Culture*, Oxford Uni Press, 2000, pg 663]

'I guess the black side is instinctive. When I work, it's like trying to get back to the Dreamtime.'

[Murdoch, A 'Aboriginal artist finds dreamtime as a victim of the machinetime', *The Age*, 1987]

'When it comes to painting, Trevor Nickolls is, he argues, an artist first and an Aborigine second. Like many other, he is sick of being branded an 'Aboriginal artist', being shown at 'Aboriginal exhibitions', of being hung in 'Aboriginal sections' of the country's art galleries.'

[Thompson, L, 'Dreamtime meets the machinetime', *The Australian*, 24 May 1990]

'Aborigines are Aborigines, he says, but they are also living in a modern society and talking about contemporary issues, and their comments must be seen as part of the Australian mainstream art scene.'

[Thompson, L, 'Dreamtime meets the machinetime', *The Australian*, 24 May 1990]

Nickolls believes it is important to create new symbols, to reflect a new time and modern society. 'You have to find your own symbols and how they relate today.'

[Thompson, L, 'Art of the dreamtime in machinetime' *The Advertiser*, May 1990]

My work is not purely Aboriginal art, it's a mixture. My work is cross cultural and, as far as I'm concerned, by classifying it and saying it is Aboriginal art, by putting it in a box – well, that, to me is racist. We have to break down that barrier. We have to evolve Aboriginal art as part of Australian art.'

[Thompson, L, *Aboriginal voices. Contemporary Aboriginal artists, writers and performers*, Simon & Schuster, Australia 1990 pg 107]

'Cultural revival means survival'

[Thompson, L, *Aboriginal voices. Contemporary Aboriginal artists, writers and performers*, Simon & Schuster, Australia 1990 pg 107]

ONLINE RESOURCES

ABC TELEVISION: MESSAGE STICK

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/>

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

<http://www.abs.gov.au/>

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT: AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY

http://www.aic.gov.au/en/criminal_justice_system/indigenousjustice/cjs/dic.aspx

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CULTURAL PORTAL

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/dream-time/>

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CULTURAL PORTAL

PAPUNYA TULA ART MOVEMENT OF THE WESTERN DESERT

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/papunya-tula/>

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/index.html>

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM: STORIES OF THE DREAMING

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Stories-of-the-Dreaming>

AUSTRALIA: VENICE BIENALLE

<http://www.australiavenicebiennale.com.au/venice-biennale>

FIRST AUSTRALIANS

<http://www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians/>

KOORI MAIL: THE VOICE OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

<http://www.koorimail.com.au/>

LANGUAGE AREA MAP

<http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/default.htm>

NAIDOC

<http://www.naidoc.org.au/>

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA:

TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvschools/traditionandtransformation>

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TIMES

<http://www.nit.com.au/>

RACISM NO WAY: ANTI RACISM EDUCATION FOR AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>

<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/library/keydates/index-1900s.html>

RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/>

SCREEN AUSTRALIA DIGITAL LEARNING: THE RAINBOW SERPENT

<http://dl.screenaustralia.gov.au/module/1540/>

VIVIEN ANDERSON GALLERY

http://www.vivienandersongallery.com/artists/trevor_nickolls/bio.html

Please note: These websites have been gathered from various sources and the listing of them does not mean an endorsement by NETS Victoria.

Teachers: Although we check each site before listing, please ensure you have thoroughly checked any site before distributing to your students.

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Government of South Australia
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