

KAIT JAMES: RED FLAGS

EDUCATION RESOURCE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which I live and work, and where this exhibition will travel.

I pay my deepest respects to Elders past and present, to our leaders and to the future generations who will continue to shape and strengthen our communities.

I also recognise the guidance of our ancestors, whose wisdom and strength continue to inform and inspire us today. Their enduring presence reminds us of our deep connections to Country and culture, and I carry their spirit throughout this exhibition.

As this journey unfolds, I hold hope that the 'red flags' raised in this work will, in time, no longer need to be waved. May the conversations sparked by the exhibition lead to change, healing and a future where these issues are no longer relevant.

Kait James

Warrnambool Art Gallery and NETS Victoria respectfully acknowledge and celebrate the continuing culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

Presenting this touring exhibition on unceded lands would not be possible without the continuing custodianship of Australia's First Nations people. It is our privilege to work on Country, and we pay our deepest respects to the land and those who have looked after it.

Cover image:
Kait James
Whose Country are you on? (Pink), 2024
water-based opaque pigment
screen printed on wool felt
230 x 145 cm irreg.

CONTENTS

About this education resource	4
Curriculum links	5
Introduction to the exhibition	6
In her own words: Perspectives on the exhibition from the artist	7
Introduction to the artworks	13
Starting points for discussion and learning activities	17
Kait James: Biography	20
Glossary	21

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource has been developed to support young people to engage with the exhibition *Kait James: Red Flags*. Educators are invited to use the materials provided within the resource and adjust them to meet the learning needs of their students.

The resource can be used before, during and after visiting the exhibition *Kait James: Red Flags*, and in conjunction with the digital catalogue available at www.netsvictoria.org.au/education.

The resource includes:

- ▼ Getting ready for your excursion
- ▼ Links to the Australian Curriculum
- ▼ Introduction to the exhibition
- ▼ Interview with the artist:
Kait James in her own words
- ▼ Introduction to the artworks
- ▼ Starting points for discussion
and learning activities
- ▼ Glossary

Content warning

Educators are advised that the exhibition contains strong language and themes in relation to the ongoing legacies and impacts of settler colonial histories and Australia's First Nations People.

Getting ready for your excursion

Contact the gallery hosting *Kait James: Red Flags* to make a booking for your class and to find out more about:

- ▼ Gallery opening times
- ▼ Transport and parking options
- ▼ Cloakroom facilities
- ▼ Any admission fees
- ▼ Options for guided education programs
hosted at the venue

Before a visit to *Kait James: Red Flags*, you might like to introduce your students to the artist's practice and some of the key themes within the exhibition, using this education resource as a guide.

Preparations for your excursion may also include familiarising students with expectations for respectful behaviour in the gallery.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Kait James: Red Flags is relevant to students at all stages along their learning journeys. This education resource is broadly aimed at students from years 4 through to 10, however the material could be modified for students at other levels. The discussion prompts and learning activities within this resource provide opportunities for students to engage as both viewer and artist.

The exhibition directly links to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum:

Cross Curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Contemporary artist Kait James is a proud Wadawurrung woman, and this exhibition provides opportunities for students to engage with the cross-curriculum priority of respecting and recognising First Nations Peoples' knowledges, experiences, values and perspectives.

Visual Arts Learning Area

The exhibition *Kait James: Red Flags* connects with the Visual Arts Curriculum at all levels. Areas of learning may encompass:

- ▼ Exploring how Kait James challenges and subverts stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal identity, using humour and popular cultural references to reclaim the narrative of Aboriginal identity representation within her art.
- ▼ Developing an understanding of Kait James' art practice, and the ways that she selects and combines new and found materials to create artworks and express ideas.
- ▼ Developing knowledge about the kinds of skills and processes Kait James uses to create her artworks, such as embroidery, collage and casting.
- ▼ Reflecting on the ways that Kait James' artworks are installed and displayed within the exhibition galleries and the way these spaces are designed to enable audiences to encounter the artworks.
- ▼ Responding to, speculating about and interpreting the meaning of images and texts that are presented within artworks in the exhibition.
- ▼ Reflecting on Kait James' artistic intentions and how they are communicated through the exhibition.

Language Learning Area: Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

During the process of creating a new largescale installation of flags for the exhibition, Kait James consulted with Traditional Owners from each place this exhibition will visit along its touring journey to seek permission to include words that mean 'Country' in various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The exhibition offers opportunities for students to consider how identity is shaped by language(s), culture(s) and Country, and how these in turn affect communication.

General capabilities

Engagement with *Kait James: Red Flags* provides students with opportunities to develop the following general capabilities:

- ▼ Critical and creative thinking
- ▼ Ethical understanding
- ▼ Intercultural understanding
- ▼ Personal and social capabilities

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION *KAIT JAMES: RED FLAGS*

Kait James: Red Flags is a solo exhibition bringing together new and recent works created by Wadawurrung contemporary artist Kait James. Curated by Aaron Bradbrook, the exhibition was developed by, and launched at, Warrnambool Art Gallery in 2024. *Red Flags* will tour various venues across regional and urban Australia throughout 2025–27.

Kait James: Red Flags offers student audiences an immersive opportunity to develop insights into art and culture through the perspective of one of Australia's leading First Nations artists. Kait James' practice astutely and beautifully combines aspects of craft, design, culture, colonisation, politics, identity and history. Central to her work is the use of humour as a tool to call out outmoded stereotypes and broaden limited perceptions of what First Nations art can be in ways that are memorable and full of hope for future generations.

As young people experience Kait James' signature comedic style and enjoy the vibrancy of her pop culture references, they are simultaneously invited to engage with layered, nuanced depictions of Aboriginal identity. Within the exhibition, student audiences will encounter a range of art forms – from textiles to sculpture and installations – that recontextualise 'Aboriginalia'. These souvenir tea towels, pennant flags and a life-size toilet roll doll emblazoned with satirical slogans encourage further learning about First Nations cultures. Typographic design and the reclamation of language also play a significant role within the exhibition via the inclusion of Aboriginal language words shared by the Traditional Owners from each of the places the exhibition will visit over the course of its touring journey across Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania.

Kait James is an artist whose bold work simultaneously celebrates the identity of First Nations Australians while directly addressing uncomfortable histories and speaking to contemporary political and social issues faced by First Nations Australians and the broader Australian community. The use of the term *Red Flags* in the title of the exhibition evokes a sense of urgency. It is intended to open up conversations that move us all towards an expansive future where the 'red flags' faced by First Nations Australians today cease to be relevant.

Next page:
Kait James
Faboriginal, 2024
acrylic yarn, cotton,
digital printed cotton, mirror tiles, felt
150 x 140 x 10 cm



IN HER OWN WORDS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXHIBITION FROM THE ARTIST

This interview between artist Kait James and educator Melissa Bedford took place in November 2024.

M.B. Could you share with the students a little about your life journey so far and what led you to become a professional artist?

K.J. I am proud Wadawurrung woman and contemporary artist based on Wurundjeri Country in Melbourne. I have been a full-time artist for the past four years. My work focuses on 'Aboriginalia', which stereotypes Indigenous culture, critiquing how such objects contribute to the whitewashing of Australia's shared history and perpetuate colonial narratives that erase or distort the truth of our past.

I studied visual arts straight after high school before completing a Bachelor of Media Arts (Photography) at RMIT University. After finishing my degree, I didn't take another photo; photography just wasn't my medium. Instead, I worked, saved money and lived in the UK for three years. When I returned, I found myself in jobs that were just about making a living. I had always been interested in art though and remained culturally involved with my mob, it just took me a while to realise that textiles are my medium.

About six years ago, I attended a weaving workshop hosted by my cousin, where I learned how to weave traditional baskets. I started with traditional grasses then moved onto raffia and eventually to fabric and colourful yarn. This led me to an interest in embroidery and punch needling, and I eventually bought a punch needle while on holiday in Queensland. Without any material to try it on, I used a vintage tea towel I had purchased that day – a Scotland tourist tea towel. Instinctively, I changed all the pictures to Indigenous imagery and changed the word 'Scotland' to 'Stolenland'. This reminded me of the Aboriginal tea towels from my childhood, prompting me to hunt them down.

The first works I created were just for friends, but I had always wanted to enter the Koorie Art Show at the Koorie Heritage Trust. I worked towards that and then applied for their emerging artist exhibition program, which led to my first show in 2019 – *Dry Your Dishes on My Culture*.

Six months later, I was made redundant from my full-time job and I took this as an opportunity to fund a year of art making. Fortunately, I've been a full-time artist ever since.

Since then, my practice has evolved to include more mediums and techniques including rug tufting, screen printing and ceramics, all of which are included in this exhibition. I also enjoy creating public artworks as they reach a broad audience, including those who may not typically visit galleries or museums.

M.B. Within your artwork there is often an interplay between different layers of information. While some things are revealed others are obscured. How do the layers contribute to the meaning of your work?

K.J. The interplay between layers reflects the complexity of our shared histories and identities, highlighting how colonial narratives have often overshadowed or erased Indigenous voices. By juxtaposing old materials like vintage tea towels with bold imagery and stitching, I aim to reclaim and recontextualise these objects, giving them a renewed voice and purpose.

I use bright colours and pop culture references to draw people in, creating a sense of familiarity and safety that encourages them to look deeper. As they engage further, they uncover other layers of meaning, including more challenging or confronting references. Since the [2023 Australian Indigenous Voice] referendum, I've found my work has become less subtle and the messages more blatant – perhaps out of frustration or a growing desire to be unapologetic in expressing these truths. I hope this directness makes the work more powerful and impossible to ignore.

M.B. Each of your textile artworks is handmade and requires a great amount of time, skill and labour. Can you share any insights about the process of learning textile techniques and how long these artworks take to make?

K.J. In my textile practice, all the techniques I use are self-taught, so there's lots of trial and error.

I often turn to the internet, particularly YouTube, when I want to learn something new. Each piece I create is incredibly time consuming, usually starting with a concept or idea. I begin by mocking up the design on my iPad, experimenting with fonts and layouts, and creating templates, especially for my larger works.

I believe it's important to find your own way of making. You don't have to use tools or materials exactly as they were intended – sometimes the best approach is to make them work for you or to experiment with unconventional materials. For example, punch needling traditionally requires a fabric called monk's cloth, but I've developed a special technique that allows me to work with cotton fabric instead. Similarly, tufting isn't generally used with collage, but after much trial and error I've created methods to incorporate collaged imagery into my large, tufted pieces. I love finding new techniques and playing around with different mediums; this can be the most enjoyable part of making art.

The tea towel works and tufted pieces can each take up to a month to complete, depending on the level of detail.

M.B. Within the exhibition your viewers will encounter – possibly for the first time – examples of collected materials and items including tea towels, a toilet roll doll and a suite of small relief sculptures. These kitsch, found objects, largely produced during the mid-late 20th century, feature negatively stereotyped images of Aboriginal people.

Why were these items produced in the first place and who are some of the other contemporary Aboriginal artists who've worked with forms of 'Aboriginalia'? What inspired you to work with these kinds of materials and why is it important that you make interventions to alter their meaning and reclaim the narrative?

K.J. These items, often called 'Aboriginalia', were made in the 20th century as souvenirs for non-Indigenous people. They showed Aboriginal people in very stereotyped, generalised and disrespectful ways, treating culture like it was something from the past and ignoring that Indigenous communities are strong, vibrant and still here today. These objects were not created to celebrate or represent Aboriginal culture in a meaningful way – they were made to echo what non-Indigenous people thought of Aboriginal people, which was often wrong and harmful.

Many other Indigenous artists use these types of objects in their work to challenge the negative ideas they spread. Tony Albert, who I believed coined the term 'Aboriginalia', collects kitschy Indigenous souvenirs and turns them into artworks that makes people think about how Aboriginal people have been represented. The

late, great Destiny Deacon also used 'Aboriginalia' in her work, as well as black dolls, in unexpected or disturbing ways. Her works ask the viewer to reconsider their assumptions about Indigenous culture and identity, and question how these objects have been distorted by colonialism and commodification.

I started working with these materials because they are part of our shared history. Even though they're hurtful, they exist, and it's important to talk about them. By reusing these objects and changing them – through things like embroidery, punch needling and ceramics – I'm taking back the story. I transform them into something that challenges the stereotypes and shows pride in Indigenous culture. It's important that people see how these items were wrong so they can learn the truth about Australia's history. My work gives these objects a new meaning, helping people understand the strength and resilience of Aboriginal communities today.

An example of this is the wall figurines I recreated for this exhibition. These are based on figurines made by a non-Indigenous artist named Brownie Downing. From the 1950s to the 1970s she also created plates and other souvenir items that featured images of Indigenous babies and children, often showing them happily skipping through fields or chasing butterflies. But these images were far from the truth. During that time, many Indigenous babies and children were being taken from their families as part of the Stolen Generations, and Indigenous people were being denied the right to practice and share their culture.

By recreating these figurines, I challenge the false and romanticised stories they told and shine a light on the reality of what was happening to Indigenous people. It's a way to reclaim the narrative and show the truth behind these seemingly innocent objects.

M.B. The idea of collective memories is also present in your work, particularly in the pop culture references included via vintage typefaces and lyrics drawn from songs performed by Yothu Yindi, Kylie Minogue and David Bowie. Can you share why you choose to use text within the work?

K.J. I use text in my work because it helps link personal stories with shared memories, especially from the '80s and '90s pop culture that shaped my life. These decades hold special meaning for me, and songs by artists like Yothu Yindi, Kylie Minogue and David Bowie take me back to certain moments in my life. The lyrics tell stories that many of us can relate to, evoking feelings of connection and nostalgia.

Text also adds another layer of meaning to my work. I love fonts because they bring a sense of nostalgia, and the lyrics themselves allow me to tell a deeper story, one that might be different from the original intention of the songwriter. It's a way for me to express how I feel about my own culture and how I relate to the wider world. For instance, Yothu Yindi's songs speak about the Indigenous experience in Australia and the ongoing fight for recognition. David Bowie's 'Let's Dance' video was the first time I saw urban Indigenous people represented on TV in a non-stereotypical way. And Kylie Minogue's 'I Should Be So Lucky' holds personal meaning that goes beyond what the song was originally about. By bringing these texts into conversations with the visuals in my work, I want people to think about how history, culture and personal experiences blend together.

Using text also invites viewers to engage with my work in different ways. It encourages them to reflect on how pop culture shapes our memories, our identities and the way we see the world. Through these references, I'm showing that text, songs and symbols still have power today, and I want people to question their deeper meanings.

M.B. A good laugh can be such a great balm, and your work conveys a sense of the comedic. I found myself giggling and being taken aback all at once. Can you talk about how about how humour has found its way into your practice and any thoughts about how it contributes to truth-telling and healing in the work?

Humour has always been a powerful tool for me, both as a way to cope with tough truths and as a way to get people thinking about things that might otherwise feel too heavy or uncomfortable. I often use humour to disarm the viewer, break down barriers and invite them into the deeper themes I'm exploring – like colonialism, cultural appropriation and identity. Laughter can make tough subjects feel more approachable while also highlighting the absurdity of certain situations or historical events. It's a moment of release and reflection.

By weaving humour into my practice, I want to encourage viewers to see the serious side of things that might otherwise be overlooked or brushed aside. For example, turning something as ordinary as a tea towel into a powerful political statement creates a contrast between the everyday and the profound, and humour helps make that shift more relatable. It draws attention to the contradictions and tensions in our histories and cultures, prompting people to think

differently about what they've been taught – or what they haven't been taught.

Humour also plays a big role in truth-telling, especially in Indigenous cultures where laughter has long been a way to process trauma, celebrate survival and communicate resilience. It's a form of defiance against the weight of history, a way to take back power in a world that often tries to silence or dismiss our voices. In that way, humour becomes a tool for healing – not just for those who've lived through the pain, but also for anyone who engages with the work. It creates space for reflection but also for joy, connection and shared understanding.

At the end of the day, humour can be like a mirror, reflecting the complexities of our own lives and the world around us while offering a little bit of lightness and hope along the way.

M.B. An intensely powerful element in your visual language is colour. Can you share a little bit about why you love working with bold colour?

K.J. Colour plays a big role in my work because it's a powerful way to connect with people and evoke emotions. I've always been drawn to bold, vibrant colours, and not just to make things visually striking. Colour also allows me to express the life and depth behind the stories I'm telling.

I love how colours can work together to create something dynamic. For me, colour plays a similar role to humour in my work – it draws people in, makes them feel comfortable and helps them engage with the deeper content. Just as humour can make tough topics more approachable, colour can ease the viewer into the work, setting the right tone for reflection and connection.

M.B. There is a new largescale flag installation that you have created especially for this touring exhibition. Could you share your inspiration for this body of work?

K.J. For this series, I've created a set of nostalgic triangular pennant flags inspired by those from the 1960s, '70s and '80s. They are similar to the souvenir pennants you might have found in tourist shops, surf clubs or community centres, which people would buy and collect as reminders of a place or time. But, unlike most souvenir flags, my pennants don't just celebrate the place they represent; they also force us to think about the hidden or overlooked history. When you buy a pennant, it might say the name of a town or place but it usually ignores the complex history of the land and the people who've lived there for thousands of years, the Traditional Owners.

So I'm taking these kitschy, mass-produced items that historically stereotyped Indigenous identity and transforming them into something much more powerful. They now carry a strong political message, wrapped in pop culture references.

The flags in this exhibition are bright and bold, designed to grab your attention. Each flag mixes political messages with retro fonts and powerful imagery. For example, the flag titled *Still Here* (2024) uses a cool '70s -style font and the image of a raised fist, symbolising resistance. Another flag, *Unsettled* (2024), has an image of Captain Cook's statue in St Kilda after its body had been cut down, leaving only the feet. Spray painted over it are the words 'The colony will fall', which brings in the theme of resistance against colonialism.

Another flag, *Invasion* (2024), features the old Australian Telecom logo from the '70s and '80s. The two black shapes in the circle look like alien heads, which ties into ideas of invasion, both in terms of the land being taken and the unsettling feeling of colonisation that still affects us today. The old telecom poles, which were put up as part of Australia's colonial infrastructure, remain in the landscape, and this flag plays with the idea of colonisation as an invisible, deeply embedded force that has never really left.

M.B. Aboriginal language from each place the exhibition will travel to is included in the exhibition. Together, these words offer visiting students an insight into the diversity of Aboriginal language groups in Australia and the opportunity to learn Aboriginal language from the Country where they are seeing the work. The process you went through in asking Traditional Owners for permission is an example of respecting the protocols that are important when engaging with Aboriginal culture. Can you share why acknowledging Country and respecting protocols is important when visiting a new place?

K.J. Acknowledging Country and respecting protocols when visiting a new place is essential because it shows respect for the land, the people and their culture. Country is not just a physical location; it is deeply tied to identity, spirituality and history. Every place has its Traditional Owners, whose knowledge, language, stories and relationship with the land go back tens of thousands of years. Recognising this connection is crucial for understanding and respecting the significance of the land.

Country and language are deeply important to me, and I feel a great sense of pride when the Wadawurrung language is used or acknowledged. When I found out this exhibition would be touring to many different places, it was important for me to learn about each location – the Traditional

Owners and their totems, creation stories and language. It's fascinating to see both the differences and similarities with Wadawurrung. Traditionally, we would ask permission to enter each other's Country and I believe it's still important to learn about the places we visit. I've really enjoyed learning about different mobs during this process.

There are many protocols that should be respected, and I see them as a basic form of respect we should show everyone. We should never appropriate someone else's culture as our own. When visiting another mob's Country, the respectful thing to do is to leave only your footprints behind. If a visitor, Indigenous or not, were living, working or visiting Wadawurrung Country, I would expect the same respect for my culture.

I hope the work serves as a tribute to each of the Traditional Owners while also encouraging non-Indigenous people to reflect on our connection to the land. I'd like it to prompt people to consider whose Country they are on when they visit new places, to learn about its history and to approach it with the respect it deserves.

M.B. What do you hope for the generation of students who see the exhibition?

K.J. I hope that the students who see the exhibition will leave with a deeper understanding of Aboriginal art, culture and history – one that celebrates the richness and resilience of Indigenous peoples while also prompting them to reflect on the uncomfortable legacies of colonialism and its ongoing impact on First Nations communities. I also want them to recognise that Indigenous art is contemporary and relevant today.

My work intends to spark conversations about the complexities of our shared history. I hope the exhibition encourages students to question what they've been taught, to think critically about the world around them and to consider how we see ourselves in Australia. It's important to reflect on how Indigenous peoples have been portrayed in the past and to engage with different perspectives. By showing art that tells powerful stories and reveals deeper truths, I want students to feel empowered to ask questions, engage thoughtfully and carry that awareness into their everyday lives.

I hope the exhibition inspires empathy, respect and a sense of responsibility, encouraging students not just to learn about the past but also to think about how they can contribute to a more just and fair future.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTWORKS



Kait James
Bring your own culture, 2024
porcelain clay slip, pigmented underglaze,
clear gloss ceramic glaze, felt, wooden dowel
35 x 26 cm, flag 32 x 4 cm



Red Flags 2024

Kait James
Red Flags, 2024
porcelain clay slip, pigmented underglaze,
clear gloss, ceramic glaze, felt, wooden dowel
35 x 26 cm, flag 32 x 4 cm (ceramic dolls)

For this body of work, Kait James hand cast a suite of small ceramic relief sculptures, each a figure in motion holding a flag adorned with a proclamation drawn from popular internet slang. One of the characters holds a FOMO flag, which is typically understood to be an abbreviation of 'Fear of Missing Out'. In this case, the artist has changed the meaning to become 'Fight Oppression, Make Opportunity'. Each alternative meaning also proposes an alternative perspective, prompting reconsideration of what we take for granted. Other examples include:

LOL (Liberate Our Land)
RSVP (Respect Sovereignty, Value Pride)
TBA (To Be Acknowledged)

The sculptural form of each of the figures is based on the 'Aboriginal characters' rendered by the non-Indigenous Australian artist Brownie Downing, who was well known for producing kitsch stereotypical representations of First Nations culture in the mid-20th century. These domestic decorations, known as 'Aboriginalia', were historically very popular, and have here been repurposed by the artist. By changing the posture, facial expressions and scale of Downing's earlier depictions, and giving each figure an individualised flag to wave, Kait James reclaims the narrative. These works prompt us to rethink the agency of First Nations people who, at the time Downing's versions were produced, were denied the ability to practice their culture.



Miss Red Flag 2024

Kait James

Miss Red Flag, 2024

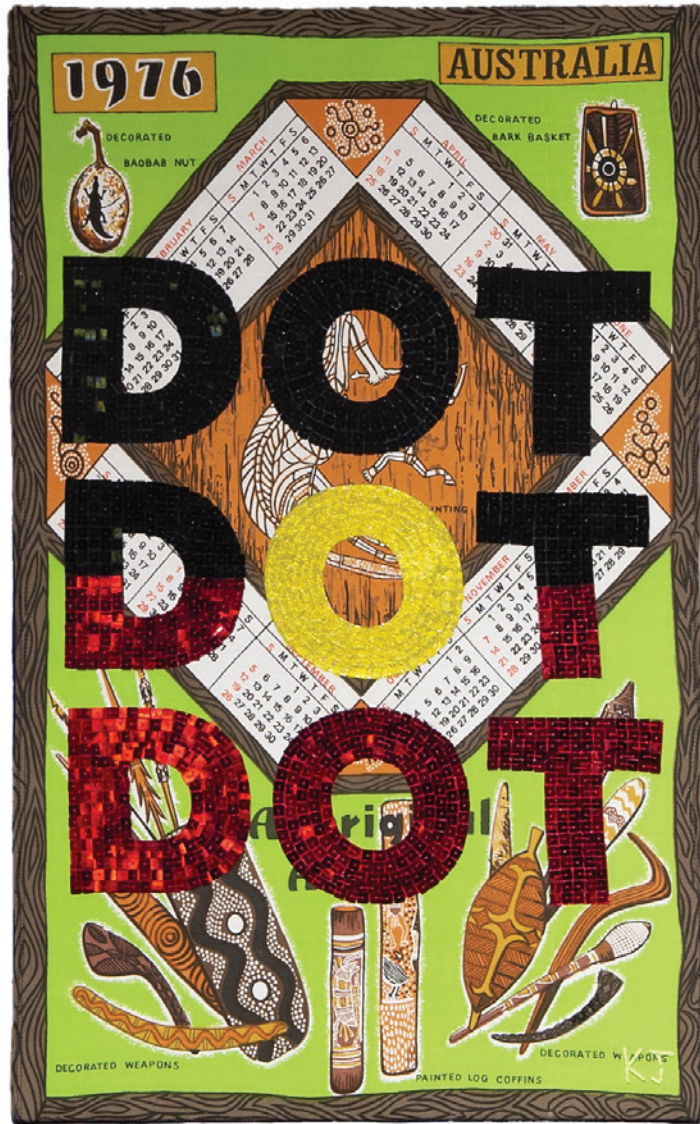
vintage mannequin, 3900m of tulle, paper, plywood, toilet paper, synthetic hair

168 x 90 cm irreg.

Crocheted by Gemma Jones, toilet paper courtesy of Who Gives a Crap

As a child, Kait James used to travel to visit her grandmother in Warnambool, on the land of the Peek Whurrong people of the Gunditjimara, Eastern Maar, Maar Nation. During one of these visits, she recalls seeing a handmade toilet roll doll in the bathroom for the first time. The artist remembers being fascinated by this craft trend, these elaborate crocheted gowns that were used to conceal a single toilet roll. Over time, the artist grew acutely aware that the dolls in these DIY creations only represented white women.

For *Red Flags*, Kait James has paid tribute to her grandmother through the powerful embodiment and representation of a Black woman. The artist has super-sized the original to present a life-size toilet roll doll holding an Aboriginal flag. The doll is presented in the galleries alongside her smaller, domestic counterpart.



Dot Dot Dot (Sequin) 2024

Kait James
Dot Dot Dot (Sequin), 2024
 cotton, sequins on printed cotton
 76.5 x 47.5 x 7 cm

This artwork is one of a number of textile works that Kait James has been layering onto vintage tea towels since 2018. These souvenir tea towels were mass-produced in the 1970s and 1980s, featuring culturally insensitive, stereotypical depictions of First Nations culture. The artist sources the tea towels online, in op shops and at markets, and has collected hundreds of them over the years. She typically commences working on these intricate and time-consuming works with a particular idea in mind that she would like to express, mocking up her idea digitally to explore various details such as texts, font styles, colours and compositions before undertaking the embroidery by hand.

Kait James' artistic intention for *Dot Do Dot (Sequin)* is to draw the audience's attention to the popular, but false idea that 'authentic' First Nations art is only dot painting. While dot painting rose to prominence in the central and western desert areas of Australia in the 1970s, it has a specific localised history and does not represent the diversity of practices that contemporary First Nations artists from diverse language groups and communities embrace.



Pennant Flags 2024

Kait James
Pennant Flags, 2024
 Installation view, Warrnambool Art Gallery

Next page: Kait James
Milaythina (Blue), 2024
 wool felt, water-based opaque pigment, water-based glue,
 metallic foil, screen printed on synthetic felt
 120 x 80 cm irreg.

Milaythina means 'Country' in Palawa Kani,
 the language of the Traditional Owners of Nipaluna/Hobart,
 and the flag features a map of Lutruwita

In this installation, Kait James has reappropriated the visual language of pennant flags, which tourists from the 1950s to the 1980s used to collect during road trips. The flags, adorned with the name of the country town where they were purchased, were displayed back at home as a memento of the journey. Kait James noticed that the original souvenir flags only included settler-colonial place names and did not acknowledge the First Nations place names; this artwork reclaims those names.

This installation was made specially for the exhibition, knowing that the artworks would be presented in seven regional venues across four years. Significantly, the installation includes seven translations of the word for Country spoken by the Traditional Owners of each of the lands where the exhibition is touring. Kait James asked permission from Traditional Owners to create and present these flags.

Ngurambang means 'home' or 'Country' in Wiradjuri language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Orange region.

Woka means 'Country' and 'ground' in Bangerang language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Wangaratta region.

Tjaa means 'Country' and 'ground' in Djab Wurrung language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Ararat region.

Milaythina means 'Country' in Palawa Kani, the language of the Traditional Owners of Nipaluna/ Hobart, and the flag features a map of Lutruwita.

Meerreeng means 'Country' and 'ground' in Peek Whurrong language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Warrnambool region.

Dhawun means 'ground' and 'Country' in Gamilaraay/Kamilaroi language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Tamworth region.

Yartangka means 'Country' in Kurna language, spoken by the Traditional Owners of the Tarndanya/Adelaide region.



STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Learning about Language and Country

Do you know what Country you live and go to school on?
Who are your local Traditional Owners?

- ▼ Look carefully at the triangular flags that Kait James has adorned with the First Nations language words of the seven places that the exhibition will tour to.
- ▼ Find out which flag/s in the exhibition relate to the area where you live.
- ▼ Learn how to pronounce and say your local First Nations language word for Country.

Looking at artworks together

As a class, select an artwork within *Kait James: Red Flags* to respond to together, guided by the following prompts:

- ▼ What is it about the artwork that stands out to you most?
- ▼ Brainstorm a list of adjectives to describe the artwork and what you see.
- ▼ What is the mood of the artwork? How does it make you feel?
- ▼ How would you describe the colours in the artwork?
- ▼ What kind of materials, techniques and processes have been used to make the artwork?
- ▼ Has Kait James included any references to 'Aboriginalia' in this artwork? If so, what are they?
- ▼ Are there any references to pop culture within the artwork? If so, what are they?
- ▼ Is there anything funny, ironic or satirical within the artwork? Discuss how these elements make you feel or think.
- ▼ Are there any texts or words in this artwork? What do they say? Consider if the words could have several meanings at once.
- ▼ What ideas do you think Kait James is intending to express through the artwork?
- ▼ What do you think the main meaning of this artwork is?

What's so funny?

In the spirit of political satire, Kait James often uses humour to engage with audiences and address uncomfortable truths around the ongoing legacies of settler colonial histories affecting First Nations people and the whole Australian community.

- ▼ Can your class find any examples of artworks within the exhibition where something that might at first glance appear to be a joke contains a much deeper meaning?
- ▼ Do some further research to learn about some other contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who use humour as a strategy in their art practice.
- ▼ Extend your research about humour in art to non-Indigenous artists who have explored absurdity in their art practice to address social and political issues, now and historically.
- ▼ Choose three examples of satirical artworks that resonate with you to share with your fellow students
- ▼ As a class, draw your research together to reflect on the different ways each of the artists you have learned about used humour to comment on important issues.
- ▼ How can humour be a powerful strategy for artists to speak out and speak up on issues that are important to them? Reflect and discuss.

Recontextualising words from pop culture

Kait James is renowned for her vivid, humorous, text-based artworks that address the way white western culture has dominated Australia's history and perpetuates ongoing issues in society for Australia's First Nations People. She also holds a great fondness for popular culture, which often finds its way into her art practice. One example is through the inclusion of lyrics drawn from famous songs that express her ideas.

a. Lyrics and music

In *Reg Flags*, Kait James has recontextualised a well-known song lyric by musical artist Kylie Minogue.

- ▼ Can your class find the artwork in the exhibition that references the song by this famous performer? Do you know which song this phrase is drawn from?
- ▼ Do some research to find a recording of the original song and listen to it together.
- ▼ Speculate together about the lyric Kait James has chosen to place in her artwork. What might its meaning be in this context, in relation to Kait James' identity as a contemporary First Nations artist? Discuss.

b. Make your own pop culture inspired artwork

- ▼ Choose a social or environmental cause that you are passionate about and that is important to you. For example, climate crisis, endangered species or gender equality.
- ▼ Work with a partner to brainstorm some songs you both enjoy listening, keeping your chosen idea in mind.
- ▼ Can you find any lyrics in these songs that might make a powerful slogan if they were recontextualised in an artwork to address the topic that you have chosen to explore?
- ▼ Choose the music and lyrics that best express your topic/cause/idea.
- ▼ Work together to experiment with vintage lettering, typography and colour schemes, using digital imaging software to create a composition for a text-based artwork that includes the lyrics you have selected.
- ▼ Work with materials such as paint, collage, thread or digital imaging to turn your composition into a final artwork using techniques and processes that interest you and your partner.
- ▼ Present your artworks as a collaborative installation in the art room at your school.

Experimenting with textiles to create a family flag

Kait James often visits second hand stores and op shops to find materials relating to ideas about her First Nations identity and culture that she can recontextualise in her artworks.

- ▼ Inspired by your own cultural background/the cultural background of your family, create your own triangular flag design.
- ▼ Research your family tree and find out a bit about where you and your family originated from.
- ▼ In your flag design you might like include words or a cultural symbol to represent your family.
- ▼ Experiment with geometry and typography to develop a unique message for your flag design.
- ▼ Collect old or second hand printed fabrics and textile items to use as a background for your flag. You might like to consider bringing in old fabric or clothes from home that you have permission to turn into an artwork, or source fabrics that relate to an aspect of your personal cultural identity.
- ▼ Create a triangular template/pattern for your flag. Consider the scale of flag you would like to make.
- ▼ Choose a fabric for the triangular background of your flag design and pin it to the template/pattern; cut around the edges of the template/pattern.
- ▼ You might need to attach some backing fabric or hem the edges of your flag so that they don't fray.
- ▼ Embellish your flag with materials such as coloured felt and thread to add word/symbols to the background fabric. You might like to explore various textile techniques such as embroidery or appliqué to sew your design onto the background piece
- ▼ When you have completed your flag, display your artwork in an installation at school alongside the flags of your peers.

KAIT JAMES: BIOGRAPHY

Kait James is a proud Wadawurrung artist whose work boldly challenges stereotypical representations of Indigenous culture, drawing from both her Indigenous and Anglo heritages. Through her art, she critiques and subverts the often narrow and homogenised depictions of First Nations identity in Australia, offering a deeper, more nuanced exploration of history, culture and self-determination.

Since beginning her professional practice in 2018, Kait James has mounted several solo exhibitions at prominent venues such as Warrnambool Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Geelong Gallery, Neon Parc and the Koorie Heritage Trust. In addition to her gallery shows, she has contributed to public art projects of various scales across Victoria, reinforcing her commitment to making art that engages the public in critical conversations.

Kait James' work has garnered significant recognition, including winning Craft Victoria's Emerging Artist Award and the Koorie Art Show Reconciliation Award in 2019. Her work has been collected by leading institutions, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of Ballarat, Geelong Gallery and the Koorie Heritage Trust, as well as the Epworth Art Collection, Monash University Museum of Art, Murdoch University, Artbank and numerous private collections.

Predominantly working with textiles, Kait James' practice is a vibrant fusion of techniques and themes. She incorporates fabric collage, embroidery and rug tufting as well as repurposing 'Aboriginalia' to critique the generalised and often commodified representations of First Nations culture. By recontextualising kitsch souvenirs that historically diminish and stereotype First Nations identity, she transforms them into powerful statements laden with pop cultural and political references. These works challenge colonial conceptions of culture, questioning broader social understanding and pushing back against efforts to erase First Nations knowledge in contemporary Australia.

While creating works that are provocative, critical and politically charged, Kait James endeavours to navigate the ongoing effects of colonialism with optimism and humour, ultimately speaking of hope and resilience. By navigating injustices with a blend of wit and warmth, her works speak to the enduring strength of First Nations communities and the importance of reclaiming cultural narratives.

Ultimately, Kait James' art is not only an assertion of identity but also an invitation to dialogue. Through her creative practice, she continues to push boundaries, encouraging audiences to confront uncomfortable histories while also recognising the beauty and resilience that persists in the face of adversity.

GLOSSARY

Aboriginalia

The word 'Aboriginalia' was coined by contemporary First Nations artist Tony Albert. It is a collective term for the vintage fabrics, kitsch objects and images featuring stereotypical and racist portrayals of First Nations people.

Appropriation

To sample and recontextualise pre-existing objects, images, texts, traditions or ideas with little or no transformation of them. Appropriation has played a significant role in the history of art.

Country

An area of land, sea and sky connected to a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, clan or nation. Country is also much more than a physical place, with languages and culture connected to Country. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a deep connection to Country.

Casting

Sculptural process in which a liquid material is poured into a hollow mould that contains a cavity of the desired shape, and then allowed to solidify.

Colonisation

The process of establishing occupation of and control over a foreign land or peoples for the purpose of settlement. Colonisation has taken place in many countries across the world and has always had devastating consequences for the First Nations people who live in the places being colonised.

Kitsch

Objects considered to be in 'poor taste' but sometimes appreciated in an ironic way

Settler colonists

People from a colonising nation who migrate to an area and establish a settler colony that functions to extend and maintain power and control over that area.

Traditional Owners

The original First Nations people who inhabited an area, and their descendants. They have a continuing connection with the land, which can be spiritual, cultural, political, or physical.

Cultural protocols

Respectful ways of interacting with First Nations people. Protocols are more than manners or rules and are a continuous representation of a culture's deeply held ethics.

Contemporary art

The art of now, produced by living artists. Contemporary art provides an opportunity to reflect on contemporary society and the issues of the world today.

Text-based art

Art that uses language and text as a medium, where the visual representation of words plays a role in conveying meaning in the artwork. This form of art emphasises the relationship between textual and visual elements.

Popular culture

Also known as mass culture or pop culture, popular culture refers to the well-known traditions and material culture of any particular society.

Kait James: Red Flags

A Warrnambool Art Gallery exhibition, curated by Aaron Bradbrook and touring nationally with NETS Victoria.

Editor: Sarah Gory

Design: Lavinia Puccetti

© 2024 the authors, artists, NETS Victoria and Warrnambool Art Gallery

All photography by Christian Capurro

All images courtesy the artist and Neon Parc

Co-published 2024 by:

National Exhibitions Touring Support Victoria
c/- The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia
Federation Square
PO Box 7259
Melbourne VIC 8004
www.netsvictoria.org.au

and

Warrnambool Art Gallery
26 Liebig Street
Warrnambool VIC 3280
www.thewag.com.au

The views and opinions expressed here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the publisher. No material, whether written or photographic, may be reproduced without the permission of the artists, authors, NETS Victoria and Warrnambool Art Gallery. Every effort has been made to ensure that any text and images in this publication have been reproduced with the permission of the artists or the appropriate authorities, wherever possible.



Exhibition Supporters:



This project has been supported by the Australian Government through Creative Australia and the Visions of Australia program as well as receiving development assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund, supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, and by the Australian Government through the Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and through the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian state and territory governments. NETS Victoria also receives significant in-kind support from the National Gallery of Victoria.

