

THE COMMERCIAL

MICHAEL RILEY



PORTRAITS 1984 - 1990

Koori Art '84 | NADOC '86 | Portraits by a Window

FRIDAY 28 JUNE, 6-8pm

to be opened by
Brenda L. Croft

Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra peoples
Senior Research Fellow, National Institute for Experimental Arts, College of Fine Arts, UNSW
curator of Michael Riley Sights Unseen, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2006

exhibition: 28/06/13 - 20/07/13

open Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm

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Image: Michael Riley, Delores, 1990/2013, pigment UltraChrome ink on Platine Fibre Rag, 70 x 59.5cm (image size)

It is with honour that The Commercial Gallery announces that it is representing the Estate of renowned artist and filmmaker Michael Riley (1960 – 2004), in association with the [Michael Riley Foundation](#). An exhibition of estate prints of Riley's important early black and white portraits is being presented. These photographs are significant not only in the context of Riley's career but also in terms of Australian history.

Michael Riley was a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man whose conceptual and documentary photographs and films mark an important shift in contemporary Aboriginal art and socio-political cultural developments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Riley created images which have become icons of Australian contemporary art.

Riley was a prominent member of an extraordinary generation, a generation of talented, often tertiary-educated artists/activists whose pursuit of their chosen profession (art, literature, dance, acting, law, politics, cultural administration and academia) changed history through the advent of strong, positive voices speaking for themselves on their own terms in response to the prejudice of non-Indigenous Australia. These individuals, Riley's family, friends and peers, are the subjects of his portraits.

The exhibition brings together a selection of works from three important historical exhibitions: *Koori Art '84*, a seminal exhibition of Aboriginal art held at Artspace, Sydney (1984); *NADOC '86: Aboriginal and Islander Photographers*, the first ever exhibition by Indigenous photographers (curated collaboratively by Ace Bourke and Tracey Moffatt) at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney (1986); and *Portraits by a Window*, Riley's first solo exhibition, held at Hogarth Galleries, Sydney (1990).

Subjects of the photographs in the exhibition include: **Linda Burney** (first Aboriginal person to be elected to the NSW Parliament and current Deputy Leader of the NSW Labour Party); **Joe Croft** (first Aboriginal person to study at an Australian university, Queensland University in 1944), father of **Brenda L. Croft** (artist, curator, now Senior Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales, and a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative); **Telphia Joseph** (former model, now prominent in national Indigenous Health Advocacy programs); **Tracey Moffatt** (internationally acclaimed artist, filmmaker and a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative); **Djon Mundine** OAM (writer, activist and curator who has held prominent positions in many national and international institutions); **Charles Perkins** (one of Aboriginal Australia's most significant activists and administrators who led the 1965 Freedom Ride protesting against discrimination against Aboriginal people in rural NSW and the first Aboriginal person to graduate from the University of Sydney in 1966); his daughter **Hetti Perkins** (senior cultural advisor on numerous national and international projects, former Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales); **Avril Quail** (artist, curator, Artistic Director of the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative); and **Darrell Sibosado** (former dancer, active in arts management, production and

Indigenous arts and cultural policy development). Riley's portraits are a pantheon of Aboriginal Australia at a moment when history was being changed.

In 1983, Michael Riley completed a Koori photography course at the Tin Sheds, a gallery and workshop at the University of Sydney, that compressed three years into a single year program. Following these studies he worked as a technician in the Photography Department at Sydney College of the Arts. Subsequent to his training in still photography, Riley undertook a two-year traineeship at the Australian Broadcasting Commission in producing and directing documentaries. In 1987 he was a co-founder of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-op in Sydney, alongside Croft, Moffatt, Quail, Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks and Jeffrey Samuels.

Riley's photographs and films have been included in major museum exhibitions and biennales in Australia and internationally, including *Crossing Cultures: The Owen and Wagner Collection of Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Art* at the Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, and Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, curated by Stephen Gilchrist (2012); *Half light: Portraits from Black Australia* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, curated by Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones (2009); *Prism: Contemporary Australian art* at the Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo (2006); *Images: Contemporary photographs by Aboriginal artists*, AAMU Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Utrecht (2004); *Poetic Justice* - the 8th Istanbul Biennale, curated by Dan Cameron (2003); *Photographica Australis*, Sala de Exposiciones del Canal de Isabel II, Madrid and the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (2002); the *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (2002); *Beyond the pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art*, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Galley of South Australia, Adelaide, curated by Brenda L. Croft (2000); *Biennale of contemporary art*, Festival of Pacific Arts, Noumea (2000); *Living here and now: Art and politics*, Perspecta '99 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, curated by Wayne Tunnicliffe and Hetti Perkins (1999).

In 2006, the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra hosted a posthumous retrospective of Riley's work, *Michael Riley: sights unseen*, curated by Brenda L. Croft during her tenure as Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, which toured to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, venues in Queensland and Victoria, as well as to Riley's home towns of Dubbo and Moree in regional New South Wales. A full-colour hard-cover 176 page catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition. ABC Television produced a two-part series of the same name for 'Message Stick' in 2008.

Riley's work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Western Australia as well as a number of regional and University galleries in Australia. International private collections include the Owen and Wagner Collection, the Alison and Peter W. Klein Collection and the Sir Elton John Collection. In Australia, a significant

collection of Riley's vintage prints are in the collection of Pat Corrigan AM.

In 2004, Riley won one of three grand prizes at the 11th Asian Art Biennial for his now iconic photographic series, *Cloud* (2000). The Musée du quai Branly, Paris, commissioned a large-scale permanent installation of *Cloud* in 2006, for the Australian Indigenous Art Commission curated by Croft and Perkins for the Australian Government.

Proceeds from sales of Michael Riley estate prints will enable philanthropic activities by the [Michael Riley Foundation](#) in the artist's memory as an extension of its role as custodian of his artistic legacy. The **Trustees** of the Michael Riley Foundation are **Hetti Perkins, Anthony 'Ace' Bourke** and the **Hon. Linda Burney MP**.

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