

7 July 2016

Special Media Release

INDIGENOUS ARTISTS RESPOND TO CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

Five Indigenous artists have created new works specifically in response to the current debate around the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’s *Constitution*. The artists—Amala Groom, Blak Douglas, Chico Monks, Nicole Monks and Jason Wing—were commissioned by the *Indigenous Law Bulletin* to create the works, which are featured in the Bulletin’s latest [special edition on constitutional recognition](#), out now.

The proposal to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the *Constitution*, by holding a referendum in 2017, has bipartisan political support, and a recent [Vote Compass poll](#) by the ABC reported that over 70 per cent of Australians back the initiative.¹ However, the artworks—which range from mixed media and video to paint on canvas and spray painted art—not only portray the passionate emotions the artists have around the issue, but they also capture and reflect the growing resistance to the recognition movement by Indigenous people themselves.

Wiradjuri artist Amala Groom, who was the artistic co-editor of the edition the works feature in, says that her piece, [Don’t Drink the Kool-Aid](#), represents the commodification of Aboriginal affairs, through the ‘repurposing and repackaging our political capital into a palatable, disposable drink’. On the back label of the ‘drink’, she has attempted to quantify the cost thus far of the recognition campaign.

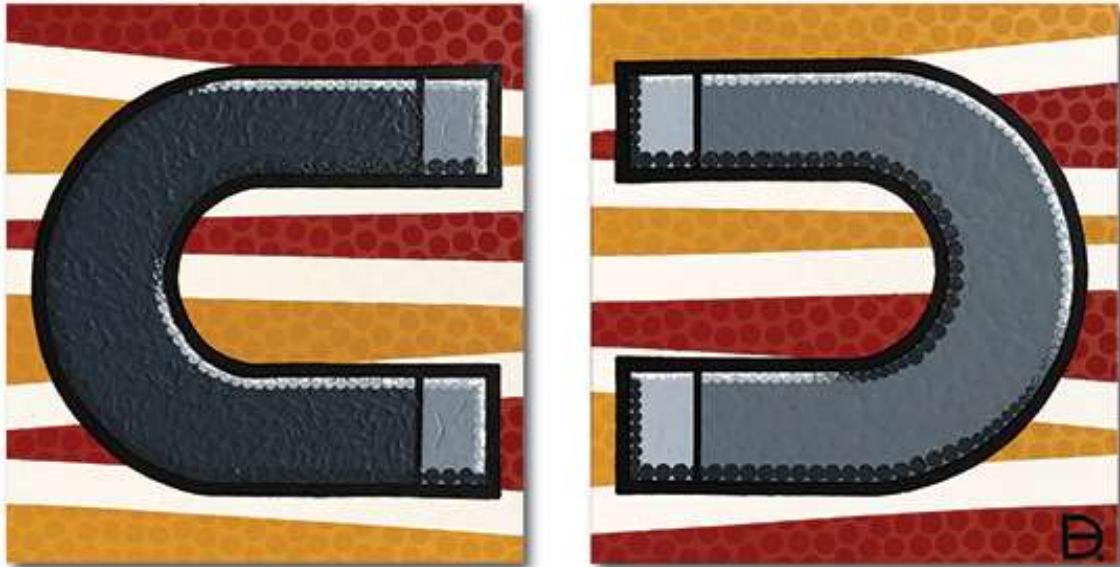


Recognition Facts

Serving Size: 1 punch	
Cost Per Serving (so far)	
AUD \$213,182,871	Benefit from Cost 0%
Recognise	\$30.84 Mil
	\$25.73Mil < 2016
	\$5 Mil > 2016
NAB	\$79K
KPMG	\$35K
Donations	\$?*
You Me Unity	\$?*
Expert Panel	\$11.2 Mil
Joint Select Committee	\$1.281 Mil
Referendum Council	\$9.6 Mil
Con Rec Taskforce	7.2 FTE**
Act of Recognition Review	\$257,871
PEFO 2016	\$160 Mil***

* This information is considered commercial and confidential.
 ** FTE: Full Time Employees. Expenditure cannot be quantified.
 *** PEFO: Pre-election Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2016.

In his artist statement, Dhungatti artist Blak Douglas observes that ‘the quest for rightful acknowledgement, whether it be through a treaty, through reconciliation or now a constitutional amendment, is like attempting to push two magnets together’; his paint on canvas piece, [Field of Dreams](#), depicts that analogy.



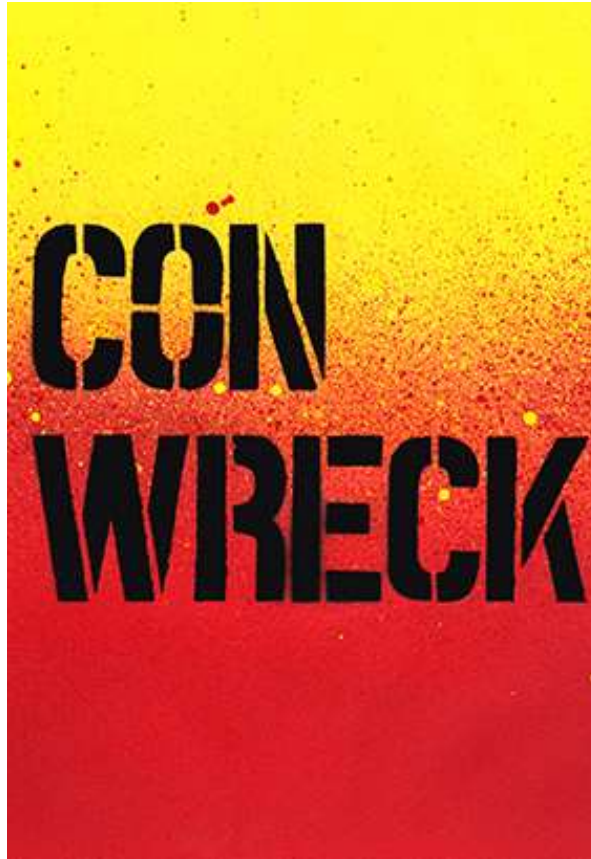
Chico Monks' (mob unknown) mixed media piece [Custody](#) focuses on the incarceration of Aboriginal people, both physically and mentally, under the *Constitution*. ‘On a daily basis, Aboriginal people are forced to live under a foreign system of governance,’ explains Chico Monks. ‘Christianity and the monarchy are forever present when dissecting the hierarchy of systems that govern us; their symbols are placed within the work to highlight their impact on Aboriginal culture and lore.’



Yamatji Wajarri artist Nicole Monks' video art, [Talking to a Brick Wall](#), is a confronting and emotional plea, in which Nicole transitions 'through all of the emotions I have personally experienced when noting my reaction to the invisibility of Aboriginal people in the *Constitution*: from questioning, animosity, stupidity and ignorance to anger, worthlessness, sadness and diminished'. Stills from the video piece are featured in the Bulletin, and the complete video can be accessed on the ILC website.



Biripi artist Jason Wing's cover art [Con Wreck](#), shown on the next page, captures how the process is perceived by many. In his own words: 'Constitutional recognition seems symbolic and does not translate into actual constitutional reform. While I am forced to navigate and negotiate under this current legal system, I do not support the Queen or the forced colonial legal system that currently controls every aspect of Aboriginal people's lives both directly and indirectly.'



All five works will be exhibited as a part of *Political Capital: Invisible Currency* showing at [107 Projects](#), Redfern. The exhibition will be curated by Amala Groom. Opening night is Wednesday 18 January 2017, and it runs until Sunday 29 January 2017.

Click [here](#) to access the artwork on the ILC website.

Media contact: For interviews with Amala Groom please contact the ILB Editor on 02 9385 2256 or at ilb@unsw.edu.au.

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¹ Mazoe Ford and Clare Blumer, 'Vote Compass: Most Australians back constitutional recognition for Indigenous Australians', *ABC News* (online), 20 May 2016, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-20/vote-compass-indigenous-recognition/7428030>>.