

Richard Bell T-shirt collection

Accession number 32788

Date [between 2003 and 2020?]

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953- artist.

Scope and content The collection contains eight T-shirts featuring artworks by Queensland artist and political activist Richard Bell and one T-shirt featuring the proppaNOW slogan.

System of arrangement Arranged into 1 series.

Description 9 T-shirts

Administrative / Biographical history Richard Bell was born in Charleville, Queensland in 1953. He is an Aboriginal Australian a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. As an artist and activist, Bell explores identity, place and politics, working across video, painting, installation and text. He is one of the founders of proppaNOW, a Brisbane-based Aboriginal art collective.

Access restrictions Unrestricted access.

Copyright status In copyright.

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Preferred citation

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Series 1: T-shirts (2003-2020?)

Series number 1

Series title T-shirts

Date 2003-2020?

Scope and content

A collection of T-shirts predominately designed by renowned artist and activist Richard Bell, intended to provoke thought and discussion. Richard Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities.

Description

Description 9 T-shirts

Locate OMOSBOX Box 23516 O/S

Access

Access restrictions Unrestricted access

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Items in this series:

"proppaNOW" T-shirt (2003-2020?)

Unit ID 32788/1

Date 2003-2020?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is black with grey text on the front. The text reads "proppaNOW" and is the logo of proppaNOW, the Indigenous arts collective established in Brisbane in 2003 to give urban-based Aboriginal artists a voice.

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

M, chest width 53 cm., back length 71 cm.

Other

Biographical history

Richard Bell was one of the founding members of proppaNOW and involved in the establishment of the group. Other members have included Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, Laurie Nilsen and Megan Cope.

"Me Me Dreaming" T-shirt (2000-2014?)

Unit ID 32788/2

Date 2000-2014?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is black with a print of an artwork in the "Me me dreaming" theme on the front. The print is brightly coloured containing the words "Me me me" overlapping, many times.

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 59 cm.; back length 75 cm.

Other

Biographical history

Richard Bell first painted artworks of this theme in the early 2000s.

In an interview in ca. 2012 Richard Bell explains that a number of factors led to the creation of paintings of this theme including: the selfish attitudes of art dealers following the death of Indigenous artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye; the art work being his eg. his art, contemporary art, although it was a tribute to Emily Kame Kngwarreye's painting style; and the "Me me" spirit (NETS VICTORIA website, viewed 12 October 2021).

In 2012 Richard Bell's installation work "Me, me, me, dreaming (with a little help from my friends)" was part of the exhibition "Jus Drawn" by Indigenous art collective 'proppaNOW' held at the Gippsland Art Gallery. Richard Bell kicked off the work by writing the word 'me' on a blackboard surface painted on the gallery wall, and then asked others to join in and make their own mark. (Information taken from: ABC website, viewed 12 October 2021).

Richard Bell continued this theme with a series of paintings and prints titled "Me me dreaming" in 2014. Like the other works "Me me dreaming" contains many layers of the words "Me, me me", like a chant of self-affirmation. Richard Bell "has altered the perspective of the paintings so that from some angles the words read 'We, we, we' as a reminder that individuals need communities and vice versa. The artwork depicts the cathartic experience of artistic self-expression and art's positive function in the developing child, from childhood to adolescence and beyond." The original artwork is part of the collection at the Queensland Children's Hospital. (Information taken from: Children's Health Queensland website, viewed 12 October, 2021)

"Foley vs the Springboks (lone protestor)" T-shirt (2012?)

Unit ID 32788/3

Date 2012?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is white with a print of the artwork "Foley vs the Springboks (lone protestor)" (2012) on the front. The print shows Aboriginal activist Gary Foley holding a placard with the words "Pardon me for being born into a nation of racists". The word "racists" is only partly visible.

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Douglas, Emory, 1943-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 59 cm., back length 74 cm.

Locate OMBOX

Other

Biographical history

The original "Foley vs the Springboks (lone protestor)" painting was a collaboration with Emory Douglas (graphic designer, artist, and Minister for Culture for the Black Panthers from 1967-1981) (Information taken from Elephant Art website and Asian Art Biennial : 2013 Everyday life website, both viewed 12 October 2021). It depicts Gary Foley "one of Australia's most important Aboriginal activists. In 1971 when the Springboks (South Africa's rugby union team) toured Australia, there were mass protests by mostly white Australians expressing solidarity

with the anti-apartheid movement. During the mass hysteria of the protests, Foley set up camp one morning outside the Springboks hotel where the media was gathering prior to another day of protests. It showed the hypocrisy of the anti-apartheid movement in Australia, but also got international attention for Aboriginal rights. It led to the anti-apartheid movement supporting Aborigines in their struggle for equal rights." (Information taken from Asian Art Biennial : 2013 Everyday life website, viewed 12 October 2021)

"A white hero for black Australia" T-shirt (2011?)

Unit ID 32788/4

Date 2011?

Scope and content

This T-shirt is black with a print of the artwork "A white hero for black Australia" (2011) (also known as "We Can Be Heroes") on the front. The print contains Australian sprinter, Peter Norman standing in solidarity with African American sportsmen Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Tommy Smith and John Carlos have their fists raised in a 'black power' salute. All three wear badges for the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) (Information taken from: Museum of Contemporary art website, viewed 13 October 2021).

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Douglas, Emory, 1943-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 60 cm., back length 75 cm.

Other

Biographical history

The original artwork, "A white hero for black Australia", was a collaboration with artist and political activist Emory Douglas. It "celebrates and remembers the bravery of three athletes: two African-Americans, Tommy Smith and John Carlos, and a white Australian, Peter Norman. In the famous photo, the three medalists stand together on the podium at the 1968 Olympic Games award ceremony. Smith and Carlos have their fists raised in a Black Power salute, while Norman stands with them in support. All three men wear badges for the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). This protest drew attention to racial inequality and the fight for civil

rights in the USA and Australia, and all men were treated poorly on their return to their home countries." (Information taken from: Museum of Contemporary art website, viewed 13 October 2021)

"The Peckin' Order" T-shirt (2007?)

Unit ID 32788/5

Date 2007?

Scope and content

This T-shirt is black with a print of the artwork "The Peckin' Order" (2007) on the front. The print contains a woman's face and a speech bubble that reads "'Thank Christ I'm not Aboriginal!!!'"

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 59 cm., back length 74 cm.

Other

Biographical history

Richard Bell appropriates Roy Lichtenstein's melodramatic comic strip in his painting "The Peckin Order" which is part of a series of paintings called "Made Men". The original painting by Lichtenstein, titled "Shipboard Girl", depicts a blonde woman, eyes closed and red lips slightly parted, throwing her head back against the left side of the canvas". In "The Peckin' order" Bell reverses the image of the blonde, changes her skin tone to black and adds a thought bubble, "Thank Christ I'm not Aboriginal!!!", "and in doing so is reversing expectations". (Information taken from TuftsNow website, viewed 13 October 2021) He also replaces the background with light blue colouring.

"Admit it Chris you killed him!" T-shirt (2007?)

Unit ID 32788/6

Date 2007?

Scope and content

This T-shirt is black with a print of an untitled artwork on the front. The print contains a white strip across the top containing the text "Meanwhile...", the face and hands of a woman on the phone and a speech bubble that reads "Admit it Chris you killed him!".

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 60 cm., back length 76 cm.

Other

Biographical history

The original artwork was from Richard Bell's Psalm Singing Suite (2007-2009) and may refer to the death of Cameron Doomadgee in 2004 while in police custody on Palm Island. In this work Richard Bell appropriates Roy Lichtenstein's melodramatic comic strip. The original painting by Lichtenstein depicts the face and shoulders of a blond woman on the phone with a speech bubble "Oh, Jeff...I love you, too...but...". In "Admit it Chris you killed him!" Richard Bell adds a top line that reads "Meanwhile...", reverses the image and changes the speech bubble to read "Admit it Chris you killed him!". He also makes a number of colour changes.

"It happens to white folks too" T-shirt (2008?)

Unit ID 32788/7

Date 2008?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is black with a print of the artwork "It happens to white folk too". The print contains the faces and shoulders of a man (front) and a woman with a black eye (back) with a speech bubble from the man that reads "'I'm afraid to fight another man 'coz he might beat me up".

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 56 cm., back length 75 cm.

Other

Biographical history

In "It happens to white folk too" Richard Bell responds to media hyperbole around Aboriginal family and domestic violence (Information taken from: Artlink website, viewed 13 October 2021). In this work Richard Bell appropriates Roy Lichtenstein's melodramatic comic strip. The original painting by Lichtenstein, titled "Forget it! Forget me!", depicts the face and shoulders of a black-haired man (foreground) and blonde woman (background) with a speech bubble "Forget it! Forget me! I'm fed up with your kind!". In "It happens to white folk too", Bell gives the woman a black eye and changes the speech bubble to read "I'm afraid to fight another man 'coz he might beat me up." He also makes a number of other colour changes.

"Now my Black People.. Kill" T-shirt (2007?)

Unit ID 32788/8

Date 2007?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is black with a print of the artwork "Now my Black People.. Kill" (2007) on the front. The print contains a woman wearing a beret and shooting a rifle, accompanied by the text "Now, my black people...KILL!".

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 59 cm., back length 74 cm.

Other

Biographical history

In "Now my black people...Kill!" Richard Bell appropriates Roy Lichtenstein's melodramatic comic strip. The original painting by Lichtenstein, titled "Crak!", depicts a woman wearing a beret firing a rifle with a speech bubble "Now, mes petits...pour la France!". In "Now my black people...Kill!" Richard Bell alters the skin colour of the woman to brown and changes the

speech bubble to read "Now my black people...KILL!". He also makes a number of other colour changes.

"This is Aboriginal" T-shirt (2019?)

Unit ID 32788/9

Date 2019?

Scope and content

The T-shirt is black and contains a print of the artwork "This is Aboriginal" (2019). The print contains a black map of Australia on a yellow background. Orange vertical stripes and the words "This is Aboriginal" in white party cover the map and background. Beneath it are the words "Embassy: 2019, Venice Italy" are written in white.

Author / Creator

Bell, Richard, 1953-, artist

Description

Description 1 T-shirt (cotton)

XL, chest width 59 cm., back length 75 cm.

Other

Biographical history

Richard Bell travelled to Venice in 2019 at the same time as the 2019 Venice Biennale to promote his "Embassy" project. He did this by loading his work "Embassy 2019: Venice", a 4-5 m. square by 3 m. high model of the Venice Biennale Australian Pavilion wrapped in chains, onto a barge, which he sailed on the Venetian Lagoon, 8-11 May 2019. (Information taken from: Artist Profile website and the art guide Australia website, both viewed 13 October 2019).

"Embassy" has travelled the world since it was first appeared in Melbourne in 2013. The installation consists of a large military-style canvas tent surrounded by painted protest signs and a sign marking the tent as 'Aboriginal Embassy'. (Information taken from: Museum of Contemporary Art website, 13 October 2021).

Richard Bell's original artwork of "This is Aboriginal" was auctioned, and T-shirts and tote bags sold to help fund his trip.

In the original artwork the yellow background and map of Australia contained traditional Aboriginal art patterns. The map of Australia was also brown.