

Media Release

Friday July 25, 2014

**EMBARGO - not for publication until 3pm**

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BASIL  
SELLERS \_\_\_\_\_  
ART \_\_\_\_\_  
PRIZE \_\_\_\_\_

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Exhibition runs 22 July to 26 October 2014, Free Admission

## Art Prize Winner Announced

**The prestigious \$100,000 Basil Sellers Art Prize has been awarded to Indigenous artist Tony Albert for the work titled *Once upon a time ... 2013-14***



**Tony Albert *Once upon a time ... 2013-14***

The work consists of a painted target over which are hung 23 small framed works comprising watercolours on paper, photographs and collage, and small vignettes made of found objects – toys, blocks and figurines. The work is introduced by a typed letter by Albert to fellow Indigenous artist Gordon Bennett that pays tribute to Bennett's important contribution and influence on Albert's work, and acknowledges the elder artist's sustained championing of Indigenous rights.

Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne, Ms Kelly Gellatly, commended all finalists for the depth of their engagement with the theme of sport and the quality of their art.

“The judges were impressed by the breadth of artists’ themes, which encompass the emotions and spectacle of sport, as well as challenging historical and moral issues. The ambitious new works by the finalists present a rich engagement with the idea and experience of sport.

“The overall impact of the work as an exhibition is particularly impressive, reflective of the different ways in which the Australian spirit can be articulated; whether in the desire for equality, the behaviour of the fan, or the role of sport in everyday life.

“The winning work, *Once upon a time* deals with the ongoing issue of racism in sport, and by implication, Australian society more broadly, and has at its heart the recent controversy surrounding the crowd abuse directed towards AFL player Adam Goodes (Goodes plays for the Sydney Swans, is a dual Brownlow medallist, and is the 2014 Australian of the Year). Within the suite of intimately scaled works comprising the overall installation is a delicate watercolour of the now iconic moment in 1993 when former Kilda footballer Nicky Winmar lifted his guernsey and pointed proudly at this black skin after enduring racial abuse during a match against Collingwood. The separation of these two incidents by over 20 years, along with the collective imagery of Albert’s playful, yet deceptively powerful work, highlights the fact that as a society, we have a long way to go in both confronting and dealing with these issues.

“Judges commended *Once upon a time* for its bravery and poetry, and for the fact that it tackles such a difficult and emotive issue in sport and Australian culture without being didactic or heavy-handed. The work is neither a lesson nor a sermon, and provides no answers, but instead creates a contemplative space that encourages the audience to think about these issues in a way that engenders a sense of hope, and of the possibility of change. It also highlights the way in which sport can be a positive forum in which to both air and tackle difficult subjects. Issues such as racism will no doubt continue to arise and to confront, but the very public nature of sport ensures that it provides a platform on which to air, discuss and debate these issues rather than pretend that they don’t exist.”

The Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Kelly Gellatly, says “The responses of the 16 finalists in the Basil Sellers Art Prize keep pushing the boundaries of how sport and art relate. “

The Basil Sellers Art Prize provides a range of awards for artists. In addition to the \$100,000 prize, the finalists are in the running for the 2014 National Sports Museum Basil Sellers Creative Arts Fellowship (valued at \$50,000) to be announced during the Exhibition, and the \$5,000 Yarra Trams People’s Choice Award, voted on by visitors to the Exhibition at the conclusion of the exhibition.

The other 2014 finalists are: Narelle Autio, Zoe Croggon, Gabrielle de Vietri, Ivan Durrant, Shaun Gladwell, Richard Lewer, William Mackinnon, Rob McHaffie, Noel McKenna, Rob McLeish, Fiona McMonagle, Raquel Ormella, Khaled Sabsabi, Jenny Watson, and Gerry Wedd.

This year’s judging panel included Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Kelly Gellatly, Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art; Robert Cook, curator of modern and contemporary photography and design at the Art Gallery of Western Australia; Michael Hawker AM, distinguished businessman and a veteran of 25 Australian rugby test matches and now Chairman of Australian Rugby Union; Dr Chris McAuliffe, consultant for the Basil Sellers Group; and Basil Sellers AM.

**ENDS**

**Basil Sellers Art Prize 4 Catalogue** <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/assets/files/Exh2014/BasilSellersArtPrize2014MediumRes.pdf>

**Basil Sellers Art Prize 4 exhibition: open until 26 October 2014** <http://www.sellersartprize.com.au/>

## BACKGROUND

### Catalogue Essay: Tony Albert

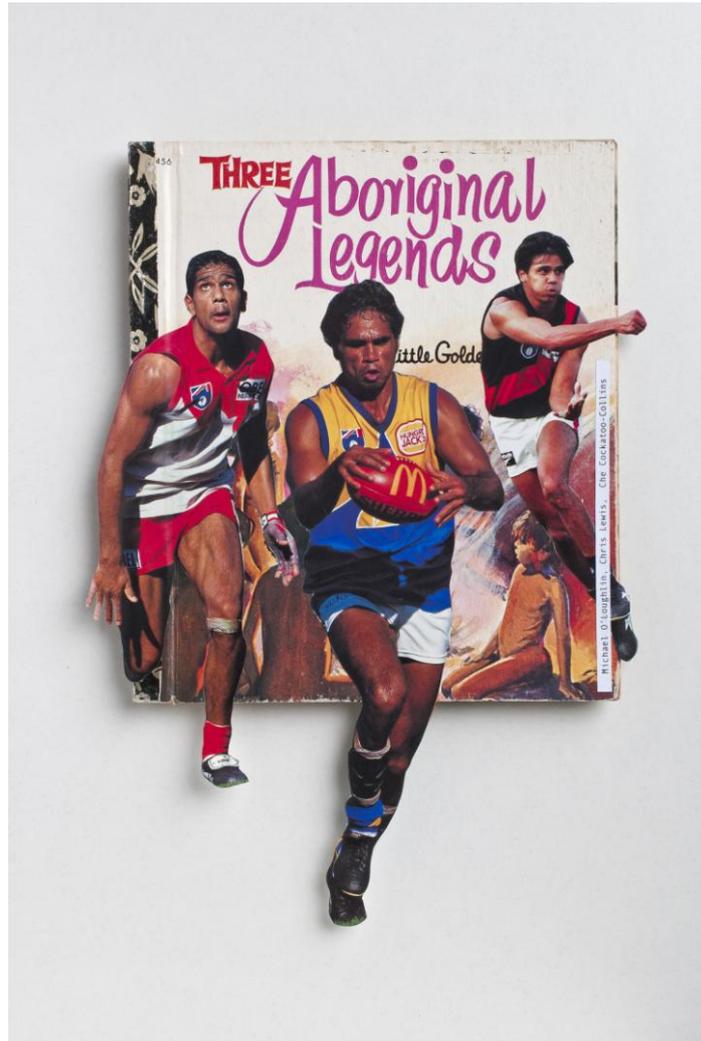
In 1993 two Indigenous Australian Rules footballers, Nicky Winmar and Gilbert McAdam, endured a day of racial abuse at the hands of Collingwood supporters at the notoriously inhospitable Victoria Park football ground. At the conclusion of the game Winmar lifted his guernsey and pointed to his black skin in a moment of defiance and pride. Captured by photographer Wayne Lubbey, the image graced the front pages of the next day's newspapers under the headline 'Winmar: I'm black and I'm proud'. This historic moment is now rightly recognised as the catalyst for the movement against racism in Australian football both on and off the field. Twenty years later, during the week that the same sport celebrated the contribution of Indigenous players, a thirteen-year-old girl called Sydney Swans footballer Adam Goodes an ape: evidence that the fight against racism has a long way to go.

Tony Albert's two works *Daddy's little girl (After Gordon Bennet)* (2010) and *Once upon a time* (2013 – 14) investigate the ongoing racism in Australian sport and its continued presence in society more broadly. These two works have as their genesis individual moments of racism in national sports (AFL and NRL). *Daddy's little girl (after Gordon Bennett)* responds to the story of an NRL coach excusing his reference to an Indigenous player as a 'black c...' as merely a casual remark and clubroom banter with no malice, while the more recent *Once upon a time* was made following the crowd abuse directed towards AFL footballer Adam Goodes mentioned above. While the making of these two works is separated by only four years, this short period is an analogy of the ongoing racism present in society. Moreover, it is also a comment on the fact that racism is a learnt behaviour, passed down through generations. This is clearly evident in *Daddy's little girl (after Gordon Bennet)* where a young girl sits on the lounge room floor arranging her alphabet blocks into the words 'black c...' as she looks approvingly at her father who watches a game of rugby league on the television.

Both works are anchored by letters Albert sent to the late Gordon Bennett, one of Australia's leading contemporary artists and a champion of Indigenous rights. In the first letter, which forms part of *Daddy's little girl (After Gordon Bennett)*, Albert writes of his admiration for and the influence of Bennett on his work and commitment to his practice. In the latter work, the letter, which sits to the right of a collage of images, Albert asks why after the endless achievements of Indigenous sports people racism remains prevalent and continues to exist. However despite this, the letter concludes with hope and a strong sense of pride. Albert writes 'despite the challenges I face as a Blak man, I will never give up on the fight against racism. There are so many heroes who stand up for our people, and it is those heroes—people like you, Adam Goodes and Nicky Winmar—who inspire me to carry on.'

Tony Albert's work is a complex interrogation of the human condition, of memory and of representation. An avid collector and investigator of both high and pop culture, Albert's works are political and confronting and continue to ask questions of both the viewer and the broader public. He asks us to consider how Aboriginal people have been treated throughout history and challenges the racial stereotyping, cultural misrepresentation and the long-standing power imbalance between the colonisers and the colonised.

By Vincent Alessi



Tony Albert, *Once upon a time...* (detail) 2014 mixed media on paper, installation (variable): 200 x 300 cm © Courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney

## Biography: Tony Albert

Tony Albert was born in Townsville, Queensland, in 1981.

He lives and works in Sydney. Recent solo exhibitions include *Projecting our future*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney; *Brothers*, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney (2013); *Family*, Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney (2012); *Be deadly*, with Griffith University for Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Cairns (2011); and *Pay attention*, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (2010). Group exhibitions include *Dark heart*, 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Adelaide; *Paradise again*, Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria (2014); *My country, I still call Australia home: Contemporary art from black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; *String theory*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; *The weight of history*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2013); *unDisclosed*, 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; *Like*, Casula Powerhouse, Sydney; *Variable truth*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney; *Making change*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2012); and *Roundabout*, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Israel, and City Gallery, Wellington (2011).

Tony Albert is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

## **Background on the Prize**

**“My hope is that this prize will take lovers of sport and art into what may be uncharted, but ultimately rewarding, territory, leading to an engagement that will enhance their enjoyment of each other’s loves.” Basil Sellers AM**

The Basil Sellers Art Prize is a contemporary art prize and exhibition which focuses on the theme of ‘art and sport’ and is staged at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne every second year since the inaugural in 2008.

Not the Archibald in a footy jumper, the prize is a fresh take on the theme, encouraging artists to boldly ask the questions, rattle our preconceptions and explore sporting culture—perhaps luring art and sports supporters from their strongly held positions on opposite sides of the ring.

From a national field of over 300 entrants, the work of 16 shortlisted finalists comprise the 2014 exhibition with a prize of \$100,000 awarded to the winner, making the Basil Sellers Art Prize one of the richest in Australia.

The prize has met with national media attention, critical acclaim and strong endorsement from artists. In a crowded field, the Basil Sellers Art Prize has established a strong reputation for professionalism, attention to artists’ needs and interests, and quality of presentation.

The prize has been initiated and generously supported by Basil Sellers AM, a businessman and philanthropist. A recognised art collector, Basil divides his time between Europe and Australia (or wherever the Sydney Swans are playing that weekend).

The Basil Sellers Art Prize is a long-term project, involving 5 biennial awards from 2008 to 2016 staged at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, aimed at changing Australians’ perception and enjoyment of art and sport. The prize is acquisitive.

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(between Elgin and Faraday streets), Parkville, 3010. **T:** 03 8344 5148

**W:** [www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/exhibitions/future-exhibitions/exhib-date/2014-07-22/exhib/basil-sellers-art-prize-4](http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/exhibitions/future-exhibitions/exhib-date/2014-07-22/exhib/basil-sellers-art-prize-4)

Hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am - 5pm: Saturday and Sunday 12 - 5pm