Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them

Ken Gonzales-Day: Profiled

Tufts University Art Gallery presents two powerful, concurrent exhibitions that foreground the subject of race from different perspectives: one, Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them, from the contemporary, lived experience in Australia, first occupied by whites in the late 18th century as a penal colony; the other, Ken Gonzales-Day: Profiled, from an academic framework examining the representation of race and ideals of beauty in ancient and Modern (18th through early 20th century) portrait busts and sculptures in major western museum collections.

Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them

Richard Bell, Scratch an Aussie #4, 2008, digital print on aluminum, 38 ½ x 25 ½ inches, courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane, photo courtesy American Federation of Arts

Born in 1953 in Charleville, Queensland, Australia, and now based in Brisbane, Richard Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Garang Garang communities. Bell has had numerous solo exhibitions since 1990. For 20 years prior to that, he was a full-time activist for Aboriginal rights. He is represented in major collections in Australia and New Zealand and internationally recognized through numerous exhibitions.

Profiled, a conceptually-driven photographic project by Los Angeles artist Ken Gonzales-Day, looks to the depiction of race and construction of whiteness as points of departure from which to consider the impact of Enlightenment ideas on the depiction of the human form, and the portrait bust in particular. By juxtaposing carefully selected and posed sculptures and portrait busts from collections of several major museums across the world, Profiled considers the changing meaning of the human form and its representation.

Ken Gonzales-Day has photographed works at The J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Villa, The Field Museum in Chicago, The Museum of Man in San Diego, L’École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Berlin’s Bode Museum, and Park Sanssouci in Potsdam. He received an MFA from UC Irvine, and an MA in Art History from Hunter College (C.U.N.Y). His interdisciplinary and conceptually grounded projects consider the history of photography, the construction of
researched the birth of Modern, 18th century Enlightenment ideas about race, and 19th century pseudo-scientific practices such as phrenology, character analysis, and physiognomy that pitted a racialized “Other” against an Anglo ideal. He couches his larger study in terms of the contemporary discourse in the U.S. on racial profiling, to question whether those biologically-based discourses about racial difference are really a thing of the past.

Profiled began as an exploration of the influence of 18th century “scientific” thought on 21st century institutions from the prison to the museum, with an emphasis on the historical and artistic construction of difference. This exhibition addresses the absent dialogue around racial representation and racism in sculpture and portrait busts. It is as much about the body as its inanimate double. Cast, carved, burned, and broken, these lingering shadows of people that once lived in this world, or in the imaginations of their makers, have become illegible for many contemporary viewers. The project seeks to breathe life back into some of these motionless forms, representing everything from memorials to Emperors and kings, to Orientalist follies, as a way of tracking changing ideas about race. The Tufts presentation of Profiled is curated by Amy Ingrid Schlegel, director of galleries and collections, Tufts University.

On Profiled

Ken Gonzales-Day (excerpted from the eponymous book)

“To draw any head accurately in profile, takes me much time. I have dissected the scalps of people lately dead, that it might be able to define the lines of countenance… I began with the monkey, proceeded to the Negro and the European, till I ascended to the countenances of antiquity, and examined a Medusa, an Apollo, or a Venus de Medici. This concerns only the profile.”

Petrus Camper, quoted in Johann Kaspar Lavater, Physiognomy; or The Corresponding Analogy between the Conformation of the Features and the Rating Passions of the Mind, 1775-78

A professor who happens to be black is arrested for breaking into his own home in Cambridge, MA. A Pakistani-American man is shot by police in Los Angeles–he is autistic. A Latin-American is late for work after he is pulled over and questioned on suspicion that he may be undocumented. The ACLU investigates accounts that U.S. citizens perceived to be Muslim are unduly questioned about their religious beliefs by border patrol agents. Each represents a contemporary example of racial profiling–the backdrop against which this project evolved. Racial profiling, discriminatory treatment of persons of color, remains at the center of political debates about criminal justice, terrorism, national security, and immigration reform despite the fact that scholars and scientists increasingly argue that race has more to do with culture than biology.

This project surveys depictions of the human form found in some of the world’s most prestigious collections, spanning mainly from the 18th century to today. Profiled is a conceptual clustering of cultural artifacts, arranged to foreground the emergence, idealization, and even folly of race, including whiteness. My aim is to provide a new context for considering these ambiguous and sometimes troubling objects, some of which might otherwise be withheld from public view. Like the protagonist in a troubling object, some of which might otherwise be withheld from public view. Like the protagonist in a

The Fall 2011 Circle Calendar

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

6:30 to 8:00 pm: Public Opening Reception for our Fall exhibitions
6:00 pm: Welcome from the Wampumag Homelands
6:15 pm: Conversation with artist Richard Bell
8:00 pm: Contemporary Art Circle dinner (RSVP required)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, New York, NY

6:30 pm: Artist’s talk with Ken Gonzales-Day
Reception to follow

Contemporary Art Circle reception and presentation by Ken Gonzales-Day in the Chelsea gallery district of New York, Friday, October 14, 6:30 to 8 p.m. Electronic invitations will be sent in early September; RSVP required; space is limited.

Gonzales-Day will also speak on the Tufts campus on Wednesday, October 12 at 4:30pm, with a reception to follow. No RSVP required.

This semi-annual publication is produced by the Tufts University Art Gallery staff, designed by Jeanne V. Koles. Comments and suggestions may be directed to: Hannah.Swartz@tufts.edu or 617-627-3094.
largest sculptural depictions of Chinese musicians in Europe. Since there was no Chinese community in Prussia, the sculptor used local residents as models, adding Orientalist details once the work was completed. Intended as chinoiserie, it combined a mixture of ornamental Rococo elements as a kind of Orientalist folly, and as such, it reveals something different in 18th century Europe.

**AS:** Did you rearrange objects in storage to create certain juxtapositions, or were those contrasts created digitally?

**KG-D:** I was not allowed to touch or move any of the sculptures or objects because of the delicate nature of the works. As a result, certain juxtapositions had to be created digitally.

**AS:** What motivated you to develop Profiled? How has being a long-time resident of Los Angeles influenced the creation of this project?

**KG-D:** In a way, the project began from one sculpture in the J. Paul Getty Museum called Bust of a Man, sculpted in black stone by Francis Harwood in 1758. According to the Getty, the identity of the man is unknown but they suggest that the scar on the man's face supports claims that it was derived from a specific individual, and as such, it may be one of the earliest sculptural portraits of a black individual by a European. I began to wonder how it came to be in Los Angeles and as I watched museum visitors stroll past it at full speed, I wondered if anyone ever really saw it. Did they consider the complex historical conditions that must have contributed to its making? How had the social, cultural, political, scientific, and aesthetic resonance of blackness changed over the centuries? And what of the model, would he be at home in Los Angeles today? Would we at least know his name today? The sculpture contains a number of convincingly realistic qualities that clearly enhance its physical presence, but is it a realistic portrait, an avatar for the artist, or just an assemblage of visual tropes? These were just some of the questions that ran through my mind as I considered the polished stone surface of his face, and just a few of the questions that lie beneath the surface of Profiled.

**AS:** Tell us about the one photograph of a contemporary person in the Tufts exhibition, Untitled (Nora Scully, Cast of Alison, Oakland), depicting a wax cast carved marble, pendant portrait of a young African-American woman in profile, and how this image takes us as viewers into the present moment and the discourse around racial profiling.

**KG-D:** In the book Profiled (LACMA 2011), the wax cast of Alison's face is paired with a photographic image of her taken in profile. The wax cast was made by Nora Scully, an artist, educator, and community organizer who lives in Oakland, CA. Working with Nora, we created similar pairings of a number of different individuals, of different races and genders, presenting each portrait with a cast of their face. The cast has an indexical relationship to the face. The photograph has an indexical relationship to the cast, but culture transforms this simple gesture into something more, or at least something different. The pairings were originally presented as part of a fund-raiser for DeafHope, a nonprofit organization, established for and by deaf women to end domestic and sexual violence against deaf women and children.

Alison is not deaf, a simple fact that evades the camera’s lens and points to the limitations of photography as a representational system. A portrait stands in for the real person but it also transforms the individual into an object. It may be aesthetic, but the form of the profile, once so popular, has been transformed by the instrumentalizations of the mug shot. I hope that the image will provide a broader context to the depiction of race found in the photographs, locate the exhibition within the many discussions of race that surround us, and remind the viewer that race is literally a cultural construction. Stone and wax have no race, yet we still see race—or fail to see it, in the case of whiteness, all around us. Unlike the many historical sculptural depictions found in the Tufts exhibition, this image, taken from life, speaks to the complexity of even the simplest of gestures and the difficulties of trying to unsee race—or at least to see it though new eyes. Perhaps it will invite those viewers who only see only difference, to look again.

**AS:** Your project Profiled is a different take on the artist-in-the-museum; rather than curating an exhibition “mined” from storage vaults, you have photographed in various museum storage facilities to produce a photography exhibition that makes a visual argument and a book that expands that argument to the current social discourse around racial profiling, particularly in the U.S. since 9/11.

**KG-D:** The project actually has the potential to make more than one “visual argument” as it includes thousands of photographs, taken of hundreds of sculptures, on three continents, and it is ongoing. I photographed in museums in Paris and in Medellin, Colombia during the summer of 2011. I believe that the project should be configured differently for each venue; whether that venue takes the form of a publication or an exhibition. To date, the project has been guided by my own research and exploration into the relationships between a specific category of material culture (e.g. the sculptural depiction of the human form) and aesthetics. More simply, it is a contemporary response to historical articulations of beauty and difference in the arts, humanities, and sciences. As a result, the project is closely bound to both historical and contemporary debates around the question of display.

**JC:** Since most of your work was done in collections storage vaults, can you describe your process of selecting...
the museums and the specific collections and then of obtaining permissions to photograph in them?

KG-D: The project began when I was a visiting scholar/artist-in-residence at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. I worked closely with GRI staff and museum curator Antonia Broström, to gain access to the collection on view in the museum. The rest of the time was spent researching various collections and objects at the Getty’s research library.

Karol Wight, the curator at the Getty Villa, allowed me to access the works on view at The Getty Villa in Malibu, and immediately the project began to take shape. It was a remarkable opportunity to compare, contrast, and consider these objects in new ways. The research at the Getty led me to the Field Museum in Chicago, which holds the Malvina Hoffman Collection. Malvina Hoffman was an American sculptor who studied with Auguste Rodin in Paris. In 1930, she was commissioned by The Field Museum to create sculptures of 104 different racial types. Malvina Hoffman’s collection is the Malvina Hoffman Collection. Malvina Hoffman’s collection includes works that were exhibited in the museum as well as those held in storage. The Hoffman commission can be seen as the Field Museum’s response to the California-Panama Exposition in 1915-16 which included a number of racist, cultural, and evolutionary displays. I discovered that those works still existed, and I went to photograph them at the San Diego Museum of Man, where they are held in the museum’s on-site storage facility.

Each museum collection has allowed me to expand or further develop an issue or element of the project. I selected the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris because it played an essential role in instructing many artists on how to first to emulate and then to expand academic canons of beauty. In time, these canons helped to shape the image of whiteness throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Logically, it often takes months of correspondence to secure access to specific works or collections. Visiting these collections creates additional work for staff and security, and sometimes they are just not able to allow me more than a few hours, or even a few minutes, for a particular work. Works held in storage often need repairs, have specific lighting or temperature restrictions, may be in transition between exhibition venues. Staffing for non-secured areas, liability insurance, moving and/or lighting each work, equipment, travel, and even language can all impact my ability to photograph specific works.

JK: What was the most surprising thing you encountered in collection storage?

KG-D: I guess my biggest surprise was finding the death mask of Frederick II (Frederick The Great) in a small box on a shelf in a storage facility in Germany. Cast in wax, it had not been displayed or photographed for many years, if ever. I was specifically instructed that its precise location must not be disclosed as it is a valuable part of German history, and I would never wish to place the object at risk. In spite of its great historical value, the museum curator was kind enough to take it out of the box and allowed me to photograph it. Frederick the Great was a patron of the arts and had helped to support artists and writers in his day. He also commissioned one of the earliest and most important works of art in Europe, the Mona Lisa.

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For the past eleven years, John Foster has worked as an International Representative for Christie’s Fine Art Auctioneers, the world’s leading art business. Working in both the Boston and Palm Beach offices, John develops, cultivates and strengthens Christie’s relationships with existing and prospective clients, from private individuals to Museum curators as well as identifying and securing fine art for auction. Previous to Christie’s John was the Director of Marketing Services for Charles River Laboratories, a global provider of essential research products and services that advance drug discovery and development.

John serves on the Foundation Board of Directors for the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, where he has been a member of the Auction and Galleries Committees. John is also on the Board of Overseers for the Institute of Contemporary Art, where he has been a part of the Exhibitions and Marketing Committees. Most recently, John has joined the Board of Overseers for both the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine and the Boston Conservatory.

Why Visit?, continued

regular off-campus audience of “cultural omnivores.” We anticipate that, given former Provost Barucha’s incentives for cross-disciplinary faculty research and collaboration, our expanding audience will likely be very interested in intra-disciplinary learning, that is, how ideas or concepts manifest across an array of disciplines.

In the coming years, our benchmark of success will be a reputation of excellence that precedes us. One way in which our excellence will manifest itself, we hope, is in exhibitions and programs designed for diverse audiences that will want to come based primarily on “word-of-mouth” (or a Facebook invitation, as it were), because they know it will be time well spent, whether relaxing, as a study break, or as the enjoyable fulfillment of a class assignment, or as an enriching, corollary to life-long learning for inquisitive minds. This audience research plan provides a “roadmap” for us to connect with new audiences more effectively, and to thereby develop appropriate, mission-driven exhibitions and programs to meet our goals. Care about the sustainability of Tufts University Art Gallery? Help us out by filling out our pretesting survey at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/X86JNQK
Why Visit?: Working with consultants at People, Places & Design Research

Hannah Swartz, Art Gallery staff

Sustainability is on the tip of everyone's tongues these days, whether it's smart growth, cultivating new partnerships, or "going green." At the Tufts University Art Gallery, we are also thinking about sustainability in terms of our "renewable resource," our audience: in a bustling, activity-filled campus, how can we ensure that our exhibitions are relevant and enriching and that they continue to draw students? Sustainability is a particular challenge for university museums when one-fourth of the on-campus audience graduates each May and a new, younger, more technology-savvy class enters each fall. The needs and interests of this "Gen X" audience are certainly not the same as those of the baby-boomer generation, which comprises the majority of our sizeable off-campus audience at Tufts (and characterizes the typical museum-goer in the U.S.—upper middle class, educated, and over 50). The key to sustainability: know your "core audience" so you can design for them!

Back in 2007, Director of Galleries and Collections Amy Schlegel embarked on an institutional self-assessment process to understand the Tufts University Art Gallery’s audiences better via a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) Public Dimension grant, a program offered by the American Association of Museums. This structured self-study period enables museums to benchmark against other similar institutions by comparing standards and best practices. What Schlegel discovered was that while the Gallery’s efforts to achieve excellence, produce and secure noteworthy exhibitions, and garner favorable reviews by key art critics were successful, more visitors were not necessarily visiting in person, though our reputation was improving exponentially. Under Schlegel’s direction, the Gallery’s exhibitions and educational outreach programs have been designed to foster inter-disciplinary learning, visual literacy, critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, or what she likes to think of as "the humanities skill set." But these designs assume active participants and follow-through with repeat visitors to evaluate their true impact; and this assumption presumes one knows who is participating and how.

Armed with these new insights and a written evaluation performed by a MAP program surveyor, Schlegel hired consultant Jeff Hayward of People, Places & Design (PP&D) Research based in Northampton, MA to help us design a comprehensive audience research and evaluation plan. PP&D Research coaches institutions to devise a rubric of researchable questions about audience motivations, expectations, and experiences based on the goals set by the institution’s strategic plan. Since Hayward believes that museums do not have a "typical" visitor, audience segments are defined uniquely to each institution, both demographically and psycho-graphically. When pressed by Hayward, for instance, to consider why we were collecting detailed attendance statistics, we realized that understanding the quality of our visitors’ experience was more important than simply having more visitors.

PP&D Research outlined how to achieve a systematic conception of assessing visitors’ experiences through a five-stage, multi-year research plan. The plan focuses on key issues that reflect the Gallery’s need for information about its current and potential audiences. PP&D recommends that we capitalize on the resources we have here on campus and collaborate with social scientists and graduate students with analytical skills to help us interpret our findings.

Learning more about the composition of our audience and the kinds of experiences our current visitors are having has become an objective in our new strategic plan. Once we understand what motivates people to visit, what they find so compelling about the art exhibitions at Tufts, and what they expect to learn when they visit, then we can make more informed decisions about exhibition programming and interpretation, and build on long-standing relationships, particularly with our core on-campus community and a national audience graduates each May and a new, younger, more technologically savvy class enters each fall. The needs and interests of this “Gen X” audience are certainly not the same as those of the baby-boomer generation, which comprises the majority of our sizeable off-campus audience at Tufts (and characterizes the typical museum-goer in the U.S.—upper middle class, educated, and over 50). The key to sustainability: know your “core audience” so you can design for them!

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We Were Here First: An Interview with Richard Bell

M R: Since this history of colonization and your early biography has so enormously affected your politics, can you tell me about your childhood?

RB: I come from the Kooma, Kamilaroi, Jiman, Goreng Goreng peoples. I was born in 1953 in Charleville in southwestern Queensland, in the base hospital there. I lived my first two years in a tent on the yumba, waiting for the white people to throw away enough corrugated iron sheets for our family—me, my brother, and my mum—to build a tin shack and move up in life.

MR: And your father?

RB: He was out droving or cane-cutting. The men all did some sort of seasonal work because that was basically the only work available for Aboriginal people then. We survived by living off the land because our people weren’t allowed into the shops in town.

In 1959, my brother Marshall and I moved with our mother to the Retta Dixon Home in Darwin, where she got a job. There was a dormitory with all these Aboriginal boys and young men, sleeping in row upon row of beds, coil mattresses, and pillows. It was horrific. Me and my brother—I was six at the time and he was three—had to sleep away from our mother for the first time. That was pretty traumatic.

MR: What about your mum—what was her job at the Dixon Home?

RB: My mother was a House Parent at the new home. She’d earn extra money by selling paintings or making and decorating wedding cakes.

MR: Isn’t that how you first learned to paint—by helping your mother decorate cakes?

RB: Yeah, I guess so. I used to help her with the decorating. She was being commissioned to make wedding cakes, baskets, crocheted and knitted items from as long as I can remember. I often speculate as to what she could have done with her life given the opportunities that I’ve been given.

After my mother died in 1970, my brother and I were sent to live with a family we knew in Dalit. That was the first time we saw white people.

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time in my life that I remember being treated like a human being by the majority of the white people living in that town. After I finished high school, I spent the next decade getting laid and drinking beer. Those were the years I became politicized and involved in the Aboriginal rights movement. I was just another foot soldier playing a supportive role.

In the early 1980s, I worked for the New South Wales Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney. This period marked the steepest learning curve of my life. I met Blackfellas from all over Australia, from all walks of life, in a myriad of different circumstances—but always discussing the same issues and searching for solutions.

RB: When did you first start thinking about commerce and the commodification of Aboriginal art, and how did you get involved in that?

MR: Well, I was a young activist and an organizer. I was interested in making art about the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Aboriginal people. There were a lot of Aboriginal people talking about issues, but they were being subtle about it. I wanted to do something really direct. So when I started making art, it got collected straight away because it filled a gap.

RB: Yeah, it was, but to be honest, I thought art was bullshit, a con job. However, I did get to meet lots of great people over the next five or six years. I was fortunate enough to witness the “magic” of art. This led me to have such a high appreciation for art and all its participants that I’ve been reluctant to call myself an artist ever since. I see myself primarily as an activist rather than an artist.

MR: And your weapon of choice as an activist is . . . ?

RB: Humor.

MR: At what point did you decide to merge this activism into art production?

RB: I didn’t actually get into art until I was thirty-four, in 1987. I needed a change, and joining my brother in making and marketing Aboriginal souvenirs seemed like an attractive option. We had a business that supplied tourist items to the Queensland Aboriginal Creations, a government-owned enterprise. It was a small retail outlet in south Brisbane called Wiiumulli Gallery, where I learned about commerce and the commodification of Aboriginal culture.

One day, this guy came in and said, “Why don’t you get into fine art?” I said, “What are you talking about, motherfucker? I wanted to do something really direct. So when I started making art, it got collected straight away because it filled a gap.”

RB: How do you think your activism has influenced your art career?

MR: In the beginning, I saw myself primarily as an activist rather than an artist. I've been reluctant to call myself an artist ever since. I see myself primarily as an activist rather than an artist.

RB: Yeah, it was, but to be honest, I thought art was bullshit, a con job. However, I did get to meet lots of great people over the next five or six years. I was fortunate enough to witness the “magic” of art. This led me to have such a high appreciation for art and all its participants that I’ve been reluctant to call myself an artist ever since. I see myself primarily as an activist rather than an artist.

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distinguishes it from the predominant easel-sized canvas painting associated with Western art. The mural format allows Yuan to create art that is unique and personal, that can engage with established artistic traditions while permitting the freedom to depart from prescribed artistic conventions.

The first panel of Ancient Chinese Tales depicts the mythological water god/buffalo demon Kung Kung destroying the pillar separating heaven and earth that results in catastrophic destruction. The artist has stated, “Chairman Mao used Kung Kung as a symbol of revolution. I use [it] as a destructive force.” The next scene shows the large, sweeping figure of Nu Wa. This female deity mends the sky with a magical, multi-colored tether and recreates humankind, repairing the damage caused by Kung Kung. To the right of Nu Wa, a “golden boy” flies toward utopia, pulled by a kite. The final scene of the mural cycle depicts utopia as a lively celebration of hybrid creatures in which, according Yuan, “a horse doesn’t know whether he’s a horse or a human being [and a] human being doesn’t know whether he’s a horse or a human being.”

The mural cycle now hangs in the main stairwell of the Tisch Library. Due to its monumental size and space constraints, the cycle has been installed from the bottom level to the top of the stairwell. The first four panels of the cycle appear on the first floor of the library at the base of the main stairwell; the first two panels, showing the state of destruction triggered by Kung Kung, appear together on the east wall and the third and fourth panels, showing the rebuilding of the world through Nu Wa and the golden boy, appear on the west wall. The fifth, smaller panel, originally conceived to hang above a doorway in the Wessell Library, features a fragment of sky and the rope of the kite, which leads the golden boy to Utopia. This panel will continue to be displayed in its current location in the hallway leading to the Tower Café, just before the main stairwell. The final, utopian scene remains in its current location on a wall in the stairwell, positioned at the pinnacle of the four large panels and reflecting the aspirations of Yuan and the ultimate message of optimism presented in the mural.

R ichard Bell writes: “We were here first. This is our land.”

Like the Aboriginal Australians, Native people here know that they have been in this, their homeland for at least 40,000 years. And also like Aboriginal Australians, Native people have experienced several hundreds years of colonization as Europeans came into those homelands.

Many people do not yet recognize what colonization is and what its impacts on indigenous people are. Colonization is a multi-faceted method of overtaking another people, their land, lives, and cultures and the imposition of an ideology that functioning indigenous cultures need “defining and civilized.” It is striking and deeply disturbing that so many of the issues raised by Bell in his work – invasion, displacement, violence, genocide, broken treaties, systematized racism, stereotyping, language loss, and governmental imposition of definitions of identity – all parallel the lives of Native Americans.

The processes of colonizing indigenous peoples began with the Doctrine of Discovery, which was introduced in papal documents of the 15th century. These documents stated that Christians could go into the lands of non-Christians, take the land and resources, and do whatever they needed to do to “subdue the Saracens.” This precipitated the “Age of Discovery,” where Europeans not only “discovered” but also conquered and colonized. In Australia, this led to the development of the assumption of terra nullius, while in America the Pilgrims perceived this as a land needing to be “tamed.”

Manifest Destiny in the 19th century created the formal vision of a vast empty land, which was promoted as reason and justification for taking it. However, it is a construct of historical erasure, as it completely ignores the reality of hundreds of Native nations living there.

And just as the land was there for the taking, so did indigenous peoples “need” to be Christianized and civilized. From the mid-19th to mid-20th century, mixed race children in Australia were forcibly removed from their families and placed in group homes to be “saved, educated, and Christianized.” Today they are referred to as the Stolen Generations. In a like manner in the United States, Native children as young as three were taken and placed in boarding schools to “kill the Indian and save the man.” Survivors from these schools are called the Lost Birds, as their “education” often left them in a dark place where they fit into neither white nor Native societies. As Bell so aptly points out, such injustices are rarely included in textbooks. These omissions create not only an incomplete but skewed perception of indigenous histories.

So many of these issues spawned by the Doctrine of Discovery became completely ingrained into attitudes held by European colonizers. They believed they had not only the right, but a duty, to change indigenous people into something other than what they already were. They thought indigenous peoples and their traditional cultures would die out, or become completely assimilated into the non-indigenous world. However, indigenous peoples have tenaciously remained who they are. Cultural sensibilities would die out, or become completely assimilated into the non-indigenous world. However, indigenous peoples have tenaciously remained who they are. Cultural sensibilities have been strengthened by internal and external acts of resistance. Today, that resistance continues and seeks empowerment, restitution, and self-determination on both continents.

Richard Bell’s defiant voice exemplifies that empowerment, restitution, and self-determination on both continents. Richard Bell’s defiant voice exemplifies that spirit. Although his art specifically protests “Austracism,” his work speaks for indigenous peoples throughout the world who have and still are dealing with the lasting effects of colonization.
The Restoration of Yuan Yun-sheng’s mural cycle

Ancient Chinese Tales – Blue + Red + Yellow = White?

Amy Ingrid Schlegel, Ph.D., director of galleries and collections and Laura Conover, gallery graduate assistant and M.A. candidate in Art History, 2012

In 1983 Chinese artist, Yuan Yun-sheng, created the six-panel mural cycle Ancient Chinese Tales – Blue + Red + Yellow = White? for the Wessell Library at Tufts. The mural was created for the library’s Reserve Room, spanning one wall with five large panels and one smaller panel over a doorway. When library renovations began in 1984, Yuan’s mural was put into storage. The Tisch Library opened 1996 and, due to space constraints, only two sections of the mural were hung, the final panel of the cycle and the small panel that originally hung above the doorway. After over fifteen years in storage, Tufts University is pleased to announce that Yuan Yun-sheng’s entire mural now hangs again in the main University Library. The 2011 restoration and reinstallations of Two Ancient Chinese Tales has been made possible by the Aidekman Family Fund, thanks to the generosity of Shirley Aidekman-Kaye and her son Kenneth A. Aidekman (A76), who are keenly interested in helping to make objects in the Tufts Permanent Art Collection more accessible to the University community.

An outspoken and unconventional artist, Yuan’s career was greatly affected by the volatile political climate in Maoist China, both before and during the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution. Born in 1937 in Nantong, China, Yuan began to study painting in 1955 at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Yuan was sent to a remote town of Changchun and, due to space constraints, only two sections of the mural were hung, the final panel of the cycle and the small panel that originally hung above the doorway. After over fifteen years in storage, Tufts University is pleased to announce that Yuan Yun-sheng’s entire mural now hangs again in the main University Library. The 2011 restoration and reinstallations of Two Ancient Chinese Tales has been made possible by the Aidekman Family Fund, thanks to the generosity of Shirley Aidekman-Kaye and her son Kenneth A. Aidekman (A76), who are keenly interested in helping to make objects in the Tufts Permanent Art Collection more accessible to the University community.

An outspoken and unconventional artist, Yuan’s career was greatly affected by the volatile political climate in Maoist China, both before and during the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution. Born in 1937 in Nantong, China, Yuan began to study painting in 1955 at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. At this time artistic freedom was limited and a Social Realist style of painting was promoted in favor of an individualized approach to art. Yuan eschewed the methodology that was taught at the Academy, drawing instead on the Post-Impressionist painting style of European artists. During a brief period of time in 1956-7, known as the “Hundred Flowers period,” political and cultural freedom was granted in China; artists and intellectuals were encouraged to voice new ideas and openly criticize Chinese policy and culture. This era came to an abrupt end in 1957 with the Anti-Rightist Campaign and those who were outspoken during the Hundred Flowers period were branded as Rightists. Many artists who had expressed dissent, including Yuan, were sent to labor camps. Yuan, however, was able to return to the Academy after two years, and graduated in 1963.

Yuan’s unique approach to painting fused eastern and western artistic influences with a style that featured elongated, expressive, nude figures. His art remained controversial as his unorthodox style departed from the Social Realism that was supported by the government. His graduation from the Academy was followed by sixteen years of artistic exile in northeast China. Yuan was sent to a remote town of Changchun and given a position at the workers’ cultural palace, where his duties included teaching recreational art classes.

After political conditions in China changed, largely as the result of Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, Yuan was appointed Associate Professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. One of his most famous works is a large mural for the Beijing Airport, Water Festival – Song of Life (1979), which was subsequently censored by the government, ostensibly for its depiction of nude figures. By the early 1980s he traveled to America, where he was able to study Abstract Expressionist paintings first-hand. According to Joan Lebold Cohen, Yuan’s artistic style matured at this point as he successfully fused the expressionistic and linear elements of his early work. In America, Yuan visited many universities, including Tufts. Dean Elizabeth Ann Toupin invited Yuan to create this mural cycle on site in the Wessell Library and sponsored the artist’s residency on campus during the 1982-1983 academic year.

Ancient Chinese Tales – Blue + Red + Yellow = White? presents an epic cycle using a bold, calligraphic style, bright colors, and rhythmic compositions. It is, at once, a personal story, a reinterpretation of Chinese fables, and a history of his country. The creation of a mural, a format that Yuan was familiar with through his commission for the Beijing Airport, allowed Yuan to connect the work to the Chinese past while retaining a sense of individualism. The mural format references the historical tradition of wall painting in China, yet offers greater opportunity for experimentation with new, individualized forms of artistic expression than other traditional Chinese arts. Yuan’s work also engages in a dialogue with well-known Mexican murals by artists such as David Alfaro Siqueiros. At the same time, the scale became a collaborative effort between the Gallery’s registrar, library staff, art conservator, and the photographers who were able to document this process, among many others. For me, the installation of Ancient Chinese Tales – Blue + Red + Yellow = White? in the library was rewarding on several levels; not only is this historically important mural now available, in its entirety, to the Tufts community, but also, personally, the project has proved to be an invaluable learning experience.

– Laura Conover, gallery graduate assistant and M.A. candidate in Art History, 2012