



The Velvet Skin
2015, 100 x 100cm
C Type Print on
Fuji Pearl Metallic Paper



Deaths Second Self
2015, 100 x 100cm
C Type Print on
Fuji Pearl Metallic Paper



The Race Game
2015, 100 x 100cm
C Type Print on
Fuji Pearl Metallic Paper



Gods and Kings
2015, 100 x 100cm
C Type Print on
Fuji Pearl Metallic Paper



Dead Tongue
2015, video, 3mins 32 seconds



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CREATIVE
VICTORIA



cover image courtesy of the artist



Christian Thompson
Dead Tongue

1 August – 13 September 2015

Dead Tongue is a new video work by internationally acclaimed Australian born, London based artist Christian Thompson. As an inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholar, he made history in 2010 as one of the first Aboriginal Australians to be admitted to the University of Oxford in its 900-year history. He recently completed his Doctorate of Philosophy Fine Art at Trinity College.

Dead Tongue was conceived during the Kaldor Public Art Project 'Marina Abramovic in residence' program during which Thompson was one of twelve Australian artists to be mentored by the renowned performance artist. This specially commissioned video work comprises two components; an original track recorded by Thompson in Oxford, England, where he sings in the endangered Bidjara language of his people, and a stunning visual work filmed in Sydney, Australia.

Channeling a counter culture British aesthetic, *Dead Tongue* coincides with the 'David Bowie is' exhibition at the Australian Centre of the Moving Image. The title *Dead Tongue* suggests a language no longer in motion, however, in this work, the viewer is confronted with a profound rebuttal as Thompson's full throated voice evokes ancient calls as he gazes into the distance - silenced by the union jack flags pursed between his lips. Perhaps a metaphor for the muting of Indigenous languages by the over reaching arm of colonial forces, Thompson's *Dead Tongue* finds a voice in the avant-garde.

Thompson creates new images and entry points for interrogating complex cultural subjects whilst simultaneously retaining the lyrical beauty of his heritage. The convergence and evolution of images and references from disparate

sources into new and uniquely personal vignettes is characteristic of Thompson's practice.

In *Dead Tongue*, Thompson stands at the helm, a figurehead bearing the ornamental flags as sculptural performance devices, waving in wind - perhaps heralding winds of change? The strategically orchestrated posture reveals Thompson's formal training in sculpture where his body is a form inherently political as one of an Aboriginal male, yet his expression is one of hope and longing. Here, Thompson stands at the masthead embodying his distinctly worldly view - that of an artist based in Europe for a third of his life.

The speaking of language in *Dead Tongue* is evocative, celebratory and transient. With sound comes images and the visual component is a window, a frame, and a space of reflection to allow language in, to lose one's self sonically. This is living language, lyrical in it's form where the meaning is not critical, rather the opportunity is offered to *feel* language, to bear witness to its survival and recognise it's intrinsic role in contemporary Australian culture.

In addition to *Dead Tongue*, Thompson presents his new series of photographs produced in London. *The Imperial Relic* series was originally created for the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival in Melbourne. In his first exhibition since completing his studies at the University of Oxford, Thompson brings together a range of materials including a collection of flags; the British flag, Australian Royal Australian Air force flag and the Navy Flag, reconfigured

into a hoodie. This references his itinerant childhood in Australia and expresses the additional multiple layers of Thompson's own adult internationality as an Aboriginal person educated and working in England. Here, delicate flowers again veil his face, a recurring and distinctive signature of his work.

In the work titled *Gods and Kings*, Thompson reconfigures maps of Australia, Queensland and a map of Aboriginal Australian language groups into an architectural landscape. He literally wears his own peripatetic history alongside the shared history of Australia and England. In employing cartographic materials, he asks who owns these representations of history and to what end? Thrown, and indeed sewn, together in Christian's poetic architectural cape we are all regardless a product of the conflicts of gods and kings.

Death's Second Self makes reference to Shakespeare's famous sonnet 73, where Thompson appears again in a formal crisp white shirt, his face digitally distorted. Shakespeare states:

*In me thou see'st the twilight of such day,
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by-and-by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.*

Thompson offers the viewer "a reflection on the passing of time, how one's experiences change and shape the person you are and the person you become, a rebirth, a transformation". The wispy blonde ringlets and his warped features echo the abstract paintings of Romare Bearden and the Harlem renaissance, or portraiture of the Victorian era.

In *Ancients Bloom* Thompson's face emerges out of a trumpet-like garment, similar to a phonograph speaker flue. In Thompson's sculpture, the flower shaped speaker becomes like an over exaggerated Victorian collar, seemingly smothering the artist's face. Like a rare and exotic bloom, the fabric flute is alluring but potentially toxic.

Christian Thompson seeks to transport his audience, to allow the viewer to leave the space outside the gallery and invite them into his unique and aesthetically charged world, he forges ahead, he is interested in what lies around the corner, how dynamically we can imagine our future and dream forward whilst reconciling our past. As Bertolt Brecht once said:

"Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it."

Hetti Perkins

Artist talk and public forum

Let's Dance: In Between the Message and the Medium Saturday 5 September 1pm

Presented in partnership with with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, this public event will commence in the Koorie Heritage Trust gallery at 1pm with a talk by artist Christian Thompson, followed by a public forum at ACMI's Studio 1 at 2pm. The public forum will bring together panelists in the fields of Indigenous art and culture, film, music and popular culture to explore the rapidly changing landscape of Australian indigenous representation in new media art and moving image.