

# Archie Moore

## Mial

06.08.22 — 27.08.22



installation view: Archie Moore — *Mial*, at The Commercial, Sydney, 2022

It is with pleasure that The Commercial presents Archie Moore — *Mial*, a fractured self-portrait in the form of a series of 34 monochrome paintings relating to colours of the artist's body parts.

Skin colour as a key signifier of identity and trigger for racism has been an ongoing theme in Moore's work over two decades. His 100-part photographic self-portrait, *Blood Fraction* (2015), that recently featured in *The Colour Line: Archie Moore & W.E.B. Du Bois*, curated by José Da Silva at UNSW Galleries (2021), and earlier in *Defying Empire: National Indigenous Art Triennial*, curated by Tina Baum at National Gallery of Australia (2017) now in the NGA collection, is a key precedent. The title of the current exhibition, *Mial*, is the Bigambul word for 'Aboriginal man' an abstract signifier for the Kamilaroi/Bigambul artist himself.

In *Archie Moore — Mial*, Moore takes the serious tradition of monochrome painting and draws a direct connection to racist jokes of the late 19th Century. The exhibition is accompanied by a text written by Moore.

Forthcoming, Moore has a major new work, *Inert State*, in *Embodied Knowledge: Queensland Contemporary Art* at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 13.08.2022 — 22.01.2023 and a solo exhibition, *Archie Moore — Dwelling (Victorian Issue)*, at Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 27.08.2022 — 23.10.2022.

*Archie Moore — Mial* is Moore's seventh solo exhibition with The Commercial.

# Archie Moore – Mial<sup>1</sup>

The first documented monochrome was a racist joke.

Paul Bilhaud's entirely black painting, *Combat de Nègres dans la Nuit (Negroes Fighting At Night)*, featured in the 1882 Paris exhibition, *Salon des Incohérents*, curated by Jules Lévy. The poet's humourist friend, Alphonse Allais (1854–1905), a few years later claimed this joke work as his own - with his version entitled *Combat de Nègres dans une cave, pendant la nuit (Negroes Fighting in a Cellar, at Night)* - and later expanded upon Bilhaud's idea with red, grey, green, blue and white monochromes in his *Album primo-avrilesque (April Fools' Album -1897)*<sup>2</sup> preceding Klein, Rauschenberg and Malevich by decades. Also included in this album is blank sheet music for a deaf man, *Marche funèbre composée pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd (Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf Man)*, beating John Cage's 4'33" (1952) by fifty-five years.

Entirely black postcards of famous places 'at night' were produced from the early 1900s and black pages appeared in books such as *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Histoire de Mr. Lajaunisse* (Paris, 1839) Charles Amédée de Noé (aka Cham) — another racist — and Robert Fludd's *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica* in 1617 (*The history of the physical and metaphysical cosmos*) — a black page with 'Et sic in infinitum' ('And so on to infinity') inscribed across each of its four sides.

Last year, Paul Bilhaud's thought-to-be-lost painting was found in an attic trunk along with other works from the *Incohérents* exhibition. It appears to have remained a black square whereas Kiev-born Malevich's blackness of paint in his 1915 version of *Чёрный квадрат (Black Square)* has faded and cracked since. In 2015, researchers at Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery using x-ray imaging found two Cubist images underneath, peering through the layers of cracked paint. Another discovery in the white border was an inscription, some say in Malevich's handwriting, which says 'Negroes Battling In A Cave'. This reference to Allais or Bilhaud's earlier work casts the seriousness of Malevich's Suprematist composition in a new light and poses a question of plagiarism. Or is it a very common and obvious joke made by European people about Africans which goes back centuries? Even though the range of human skin colours is a vast spectrum from dark to light, skin itself does not quite reach the stubborn binary opposites of 'black' and 'white'. The colours that were used to categorise race - black, white, red, yellow and brown - are easily debunked through impartial examination at fifty paces.

At Bunnings, a colour sample of any material can be scanned, allocated RGB+LV colour values and matched with corresponding paint amounts to replicate that sample into a tin of paint. I have used the same technology to scan various areas of my own body and left it up to the small hand-held scanner and its software to suggest to me what colour I am. The results - mediated by the scanner lens, software, my phone screen, converting RGB+LV values into Pantone ones and then the paint colour itself will further shift as it ages - hang on the wall for the viewer to observe and assess.

p.s. Unknown to me at the time, recently my autonomy and privacy was breached as I was identified by biometric facial recognition on entry to the Bunnings store. News articles of the past few weeks on the use of this technology in liberal democracies and the ethical boundaries it breaches reminded me of an earlier story about the New York Police Department employing facial recognition software to search by skin colour. The police could search a large database for 'ethnicity' tags, such as 'Asian,' 'Black,' and 'White.'<sup>3</sup>

Archie Moore, 2022

1. The title is taken from [an early Bigambul dictionary](#) and means "Aboriginal Man".
2. Allais' work *Première communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par un temps de neige* (First Communion of Anaemic Young Girls in the Snow - 1883) was completely white. Seeing this took me back to similar joke paintings I did during my course at Gateway TAFE in 1992 entitled *Polar Bears In The Snow Series*. Jules Lévy's curatorial rationale that 'All works are allowed, serious works and obscene excepted' and exhibiting drawings by people who couldn't draw also relates to my early days of art making.
3. Last month consumer group CHOICE published findings of an investigation which prompted the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) to launch a formal investigation into the technology's use at retail stores. A ruling on whether these stores have breached the Privacy Act will be a landmark one.