

STURGEON

# The Word. The Book. The Church. The Mission. Archie Moore

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Events in the present — the urgency of the Royal Commission into child abuse in religious institutions, the seven-year and going strong, bi-partisan government intervention in the Northern Territory and the hard-line resumption of mandatory offshore detention for asylum seekers arriving in Australian waters by boat — are whittling away the face of our constructed national identity.

*Black Dog* 2013  
Taxidermy dog, shoe polish, raven oil, leather,  
metal, 70 x 73 x 32 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 2014  
Courtesy of the artist and  
The Commercial, Sydney





*Today We Celebrate Boat People* 2014  
Synthetic polymer paint on flag, 86 x 182 cm  
Private collection, Canberra  
Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney



The 'fair go, mate!' picture of rolled-up shirtsleeves, Gold Rush era, white masculinity typified by the Heidelberg school of artists (and bludgeoned into most artists of my generation at high school); images of tough Aussie blokes mining, toiling the land, droving sheep and cattle, pioneer families doing it rough in the bush and ANZAC 'mates' bravely sacrificing themselves to bullets, are diminishing against the underlying visage of Australia as colonial jail. Deeply attached as we seem to be to punitive institutions in the modelling of our contemporary society, our artists are becoming legion and emboldened in their examinations of the repercussions of Australia's convict and colonial histories in the present.

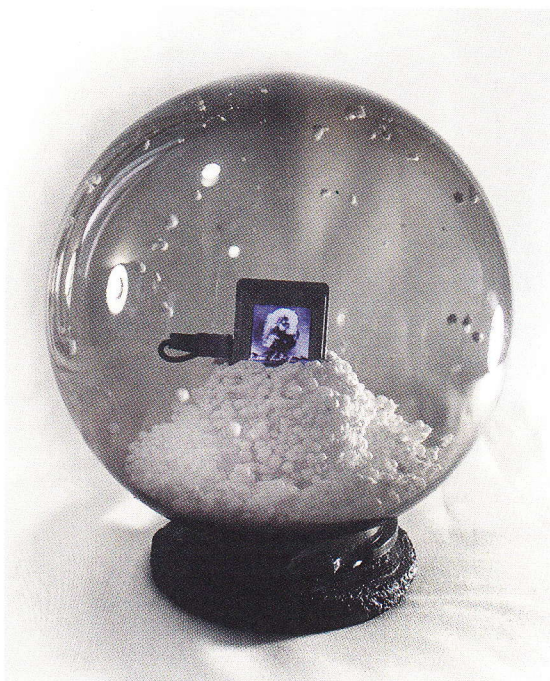
When I look at the works of Archie Moore, they speak collectively of the frail substance upon which the edifices of our modern culture are built. *Dieu et Mon Droit*, which is inscribed on the scroll beneath the British coat of arms quite neatly sums up the flavour: God and entitlement. Divine Right. The intertwined nature of Church and State in Australian culture and its impacts on Aboriginal culture is an ongoing concern of his work. *On a Sydney Mission from God* (2013) is a miniature Bible that has nestled between its leaves a tiny paper church crafted from the book's pages. Repurposing the often-quoted line from the John Landis film *The Blues Brothers* (1980) in its title, Moore instantly evokes the diminutive stature of an orphaned child in the space around the Bible, and the tiny church as both home and institution.

*Black Dog* (2013) — submitted into the National Artists' Self-Portrait Prize at the University of Queensland Art Museum — takes the form of a seated, taxidermy mongrel with its ears pricked up. Again, the work's racially pejorative title and the self-representational context for which it was made creates a charged atmosphere around an otherwise sad

looking object upon which we gaze down. It is an emotionally raw work that conjures the 'Black Dog' of depression simply and evocatively. Moore takes materials that we might consider benign and gives them weight and power with personal, religious, racial and nationalistic meaning.

For *Today We Celebrate Boat People* (2014), which was exhibited at the time of the Australia Day celebrations, Moore inverted and over-painted an existing national flag, daubing the work's title across in the Australian sporting colours of green and yellow. His reference to the First Fleet as 'Boat People' is a common theme among objectors to the celebration of Australia Day, who perceive 26 January as a moment that marks the beginning of the attempted genocide of the First Australians. The term 'Boat People' directly challenges the continuing entitlement to the country by those with illegitimate claims to it.

Moore's sculpture *Snowdome* (2013), which takes the form of an enlarged souvenir, contains a small LCD screen showing a series of slides of nuclear weapons tests at Maralinga, Emu Fields and the Montebello Islands between 1952 and 1957. With this insertion, the 'snow' of the dome becomes radioactive fallout, and the walls of the dome enclose homelands that are still off limits to their original owners. Moore's snowdome becomes a jail without; a place with invisible walls that cannot be broken into. Institutionalisation, dispossession, destruction and depression. The image of contemporary Australian culture that is constructed by Moore in his paintings and sculptures is necessarily bleak as he gives space to the discriminatory histories and daily realities of Aboriginal Australians that have been whitewashed for too long. His works powerfully command our attention.



*Snowdome* 2013  
LCD screen, polystyrene, plastic, 30 x 25cm  
The Owen and Wagner Collection, North Carolina  
Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney



*On A Sydney City Mission From God 2013*  
Miniature bible, 3.2 x 10.2 x 4.2cm  
Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

FOLLOWING  
'Flag' 2012  
Installation at The Commercial, Sydney  
Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney



