

Robert Fielding (b.1969)

Milkali Kutju 2015

screen print

42 x 59.5 cm

Language Western Arrernte/

Yankunytjatjara/Pitjantjatjara

Region Mimili, Central Australia



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

“My work is about forgiveness peace love joy and happiness. My story is not a political one; my story is about how we as individuals are one. We only look at what’s on the surface, what’s below the surface is one blood. We all feel and breathe the same.”

“My paintings are symbolic, they are everything that I see around me when walking or traveling in a car or flying over country in a plane” he said. “Whenever I paint I depict all my family in my paintings [as] rock-holes or creek beds or sand dunes.”

Robert Fielding, 2015

CRITICAL STATEMENT

In this work, Fielding has been exploring the concept of Milkali Kutju – which means ‘One Blood’ in Pitjantjatjara. Fielding experienced a high level of racism growing up in Port Augusta.

The statement in this work – ‘You See Black, I See Red’ is deliberately provocative at first glance, however just as Robert has over time learnt to forgive, so too does the viewer, as they realise the sentiment behind this work is forgiveness not anger. When Robert says – ‘I See Red’ he does not mean the anger and fire he would have exploded with as a young man when faced with racism. He now means ‘I See Red’ as ‘One blood’, forget the colour of our skin, it is all the same colour underneath.

Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory, The 2015 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award

The text reads “You see Black, I see red” and relates to seeing a person’s colour first and not the blood which moves through all our veins making us human and all part of the human race.

Whilst the work talks directly about racism and the politics of blood, Fielding is adamant that this work is not intended to be political at all, as referenced in his

statement above. The audience can interpret/process the politics and the personal sentiment together.

This work has incorporated various processes, including the painted background, photographic self-portrait and use of graphics, to produce a strong statement about cultural identity. The work directly talks about racism and the politics of 'blood'

Judges Comments (from 2015 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award)

Fielding uses various processes including a painted background, graphics and a photographic self-portrait to produce a strong statement about cultural identity.

In Anangu culture the word Milkali blood is a very sensitive word and can be used offensively but in this work Milkali kutju means one blood, it is about Indigenous and non Indigenous working long side one another and learning and sharing two different cultures ngapartji - ngapartji 50-50. It doesn't matter what colour or race we are, its about what's below the surface Milkali blood. We can learn from one another, and by moving forward by closing the gaps and not blaming one another for our for fathers actions whether they were good or bad choices.

Fielding has been painting at Mimili Maku Arts since 2005. His diverse background and his experience growing up across two very different cultures - Western and traditional Aboriginal law - influence his work. His paintings are a way for him to connect to his heritage and family.

Prizes and Awards

2015 Winner, NATSIAA 2015 Telstra Work on Paper Award

2015 Winner, Desert Art Worker Photography Prize

Collections

National Gallery of Australia

National Gallery of Victoria

Art Gallery of South Australia

Art Bank Collection

The McGeoch Collection

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Robert Fielding's mother is Garieva Fielding, a descendant of Afghan/Western Arrernte (SA). His father Bruce Fielding (dec.) was Yankunytjatjara from Finke (Aputula) he was born at Lilla Creek but as a child he was taken from his mother and raised in Colebrook Home, at Quorn, SA. Robert Fielding is the youngest of 12 children. Continuing the tradition of large families he and his wife Kaye Lowah have 9 children of their own. Kaye Lowah is of Torres Strait/Kanaka heritage.

Robert Fileding grew up in Port Augusta and has been working and living in the community of Mimil for the last 20 years or so. Mimili is in the far north west of South Australia, at the base of the Everard Ranges, in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara

Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. It is 645km south of Alice Springs which is the nearest large town.

As a young father, Robert made the decision to travel with his young family back to his family's country in the APY Lands. He has learnt traditional language and lore and culture. He is respected within his community.

Mimili is home to 350 Anangu people who speak a mix of Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra and Luritja. The community was established in the early 1970's after the land was returned to the traditional owners. The land the community occupies was previously part of Everard Park Station. Many of the older members of the community were employed on the station undertaking mustering, droving and breaking in horses for station work and racing.

A significant story from this area is the Maku Tjukurpa (witchetty grub songline). The art centre takes its name from the maku (witchetty grub) found in the roots of the Acacia Kempeana. Mimili Maku Arts is an Aboriginal-owned and governed arts business. The art centre involves men and women, young people and old people from the community and four surrounding homelands of Perentie Bore, Wanmara, Blue Hills and Sandy Bore.

REFERENCES:

Mimili Maku Art Centre

Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory,

The 2015 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award