



For Immediate Release

RICHARD BELL: UZ VS. THEM

FOUR-VENUE NATIONAL TOUR

Begins September 8, 2011, at Tufts University Art Gallery



Richard Bell, *Wewereherefirst*, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 2 parts, 96 x 144 in. Private collection, Brisbane



Richard Bell, *The Peckin' Order*, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 in. Private collection, Brisbane

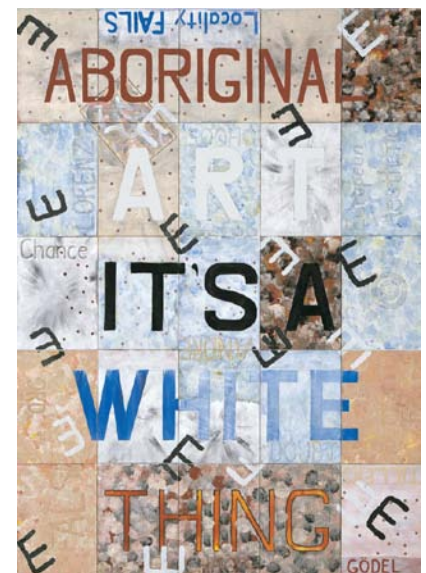
New York, NY (April 26, 2011)—The American Federation of Arts (AFA) is pleased to announce the four-venue North American tour of *Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them*, commencing on September 8, 2011, at the Tufts University Art Gallery in Medford, Massachusetts, after which it will travel to the University of Kentucky Art Museum and two other university galleries. This will be the first traveling exhibition in the United States dedicated to the multi-layered work of Aboriginal artist and activist Richard Bell. Known for his sardonic wit and provocative voice, Bell is one of Australia's leading and most controversial artists and an impassioned and charismatic figure of increasing international stature. Pauline Willis, AFA's Chief Operating Officer, remarked, "The work of Richard Bell signals the emergence of a powerful voice in contemporary art, and the AFA is delighted to present his broad-ranging talents to an audience in the United States with this exhibition of his work."

***Richard Bell: Uz vs. Them* will follow the following schedule:**

Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, MA
University of Kentucky Art Museum, Lexington
OPEN SLOT: JUNE 7–AUGUST 19, 2012
Victoria H. Myhren Gallery, University of Denver
Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington

September 8–November 20, 2011
February 12–May 6, 2012
September 13–December 9, 2012
March 1–May 5, 2013

Exhibition Details: A self-taught artist, Richard Bell works in a wide range of media, including painting, performance, and video, and freely borrows styles and motifs from other artists, periods, and cultures. Visual references invoking the dot matrixes and expressionist drips of Aboriginal desert painting, the Pop art styles of Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein, and the paint drips of Jackson Pollock are juxtaposed with text to create powerful political and social commentary. Politicized at an early age, the artist merged his activism into artmaking in the late '80s, first making "tourist" art and then art about, as he describes it, "the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Aboriginal people." Bell still sees himself as "more an activist than an artist."



Richard Bell, *Bell's Theorem*, 2002. Acrylic on 25 canvas boards, 70 × 50 in. Courtesy the artist

Among the critical early works in the exhibition is *Pigeon Holed* (1992), a multi-media piece in which Bell presents a series of images of himself to challenge the negative stereotypes associated with Aboriginal men. More recent examples reflect his interest in Pop appropriation, which began around 2001, and include works from his "Made Men" series: *The Peckin' Order* (2007), in which a woman cries out, "Thank Christ I'm Not Aboriginal"; *The Cleaner* (2004), which depicts a bedroom decorated with three of his own paintings; and *Psalm Singing Suite* (2007–09), which includes thirty small-scale Lichtenstein-inspired paintings that address issues relating to Aboriginal politics. Bell's interest in appropriation sums up many of the problems of Australian identities, asking viewers to consider ideas of ownership in images and national politics.

Key to Bell's work is his belief that Aboriginal art has become a commodity controlled and exploited by non-indigenous people. This is highlighted in his "Theorems," an ongoing series of paintings that combine powerful contentious slogans with references to the Jasper Johns's target paintings—the central targets in the "Theorems" symbolizing the intensely critical focus on Aboriginal Australians by government policies. Bell's first "Theorem" featured the slogan "Aboriginal Art—It's a White Thing." Texts in subsequent "Theorems" include slogans like "We Were Here First," "Pay Me to Be an Abo," and "I Am Not a Noble Savage."



Richard Bell, *Blackfella's Guide to New York*, 2010. DVD projection with sound, duration not yet determined. Courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Bell began making films in 2006. His first film, *Uz vs. Them* (2006), sets the debate about identity in Australian art in a boxing ring. In the provocative video *Scratch an Aussie* (2008), he overturns political and social norms by performing as a black Sigmund Freud psychoanalyzing racist white Australians. In the video *Broken English* (2009), the artist plays chess with indigenous politics, asking white and black Australians why Aborigines do not seem to have a vision for their own future. In his most recent work, the film *Blackfella's Guide to New York*, made during a 2010 artist residency in New York, New Yorkers are viewed as anthropological specimens, from an Aboriginal perspective.

In her foreword to the exhibition catalogue, critic Eleanor Heartney observes that Bell "wields his art like a scalpel, using it to get under the skin of contemporary Australian culture in order to scrape away the accumulated contagions of history. In the process, he provides a remarkably effective model for thinking about larger issues as well. He reminds us that none of us can escape the paradoxes of identity and authenticity in a post-colonial world."



Richard Bell, *Guilty*, 2003. Acrylic on canvas, 35 x 47 in. Courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo Ray Enders

About the Artist: Born in 1953 in Charleville, Queensland, Richard Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, and Goreng Goreng communities. His work is included in major public and private collections, and he has been represented in numerous exhibitions. His recent solo exhibitions include *Richard Bell: Provocateur* (University of Queensland Art Museum, 2009) and *Richard Bell: Positivity* (Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2006). Bell first came to the attention of the wider community when his massive painting *Scientia E Metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)*—emblazoned with the text “Aboriginal Art— It’s a White Thing”—won the 2003 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award. He lives and works in Brisbane.

Exhibition Credit Line: The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and supported by the Queensland Government, Australia, through Trade and Investment Queensland’s Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency (QIAMEA). Additional support has come from the Australian government through the Australia Council for the Arts and the Embassy of Australia, Washington, D.C.



Guest Curator: Maura Reilly is Professor of Art Theory at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, and formerly Senior Curator of Exhibitions at the AFA.

Publication: A fully illustrated catalogue is published in softcover (\$29.00 list price) and hardcover (\$35.00 list price) by the AFA in association with D Giles Limited, London. In addition to entries on most of the works in the exhibition, the book includes a foreword by critic and scholar Eleanor Heartney, an interview with the artist by Guest Curator Maura Reilly, a piece by Bell titled “Scratching an Aussie,” and an essay by Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine titled “For Whom the Bell Tolls—It Tolls For Thee.” The softcover is available from the AFA to the museum venues and AFA members only. The hardcover is available from National Book Network (NBN) at 800.462.6420 or custserv@nbnbooks.com

American Federation of Arts: The AFA is a nonprofit institution that organizes art exhibitions for presentation in museums around the world, publishes exhibition catalogues, and develops education programs.

#

Press Images and Media Contact: For more information, please contact: Michaelyn Mitchell, Director of Publications and Communications, at 212.988.7700 ext. 228 or mmitchell@afaweb.org or Lauren Palmor, Publications/Communications Assistant, 212.988.7700 ext.249 or lpalmor@afaweb.org.

High-resolution publicity images are available at www.afaweb.org. To obtain a user name and password, please contact Lauren Palmor, Publications/Communications Assistant, 212.988.7700 ext.249 or lpalmor@afaweb.org.