

Vault

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KIMBERLEY MOULTON

GAME CHANGER

VAULT sat down with First Nations curator and self-proclaimed “conduit for community” Kimberley Moulton to discuss the significant moments that have shaped her stellar career. A Yorta Yorta woman, Moulton has over 15 years of experience curating and writing across historical collections and contemporary artistic practice. She has been appointed Adjunct Curator specialising in First Nations and Indigenous Art at the Tate in London.

INTERVIEW by GRACE SANDLES

How did you come to be working in art? What sparked your passion in the beginning?

I guess I was always really fascinated with culture and history and art and leant into it as a child. I grew up in Shepparton, in country Victoria. My dad was really into history, so we grew up going to our Country, going up the river to Burma, to Cummeragunja, and going to old colonial homesteads. I was reflecting the other day on the first work that changed how I think about Indigenous art when I was studying art at university. It was Destiny Deacon's *Melancholy* (2000). It's the one with the watermelon and the baby's head. I just had this lightbulb moment, where I was like, “Oh, wow, this is Aboriginal art.” And it's a female Aboriginal artist. From there, my interest and passion continued.

So, what do you see as your role? Your work is so much more than curation and outreach.

I think I've always spoken to my curatorial practice as a conduit, a person who sits between community and artists and history and communicates between institutions, civic space and collections. I love the storytelling that comes with curating, getting to know people's stories as well as creating my own ideas around how to interpret history and decide what's really important to us as



Above
Kimberley Moulton
Photo: Eugene Hyland, 2023

Opposite
TARRYN LOVE
koantapool wayapawanh –
Meeting the Whale (detail), 2020
New Zealand possum skin,
pyrography, linen, thread
130 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist

Indigenous people right now. I take it with a lot of responsibility.

Can you tell me about a recent project you've worked on that you're proud of?

I started working with RISING Festival about four years ago. I'm really proud of my two most recent projects, the first of which was *Shadow Spirit*, an exhibition that I curated last year, in 2023, from an idea I pitched many, many years ago. We had 14 new commissions from artists across Australia, from Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land down to Tasmania with Julie Gough and everywhere in between.

The exhibition allowed the artists to work at a pace where they were able to develop their concept really deeply. We partnered them with other Australian creatives – whether animators or fabricators, sound technicians or experts – to create work and build the skills of these artists. And that's what I'm most proud of in that project – it created a space for artists to develop their work in a way they wished.

And then I've just done *Blak Infinite* this year, 2024, which was a co-curated exhibition at Federation Square with Kate ten Buuren, a Taungurung curator. It started with me saying to Kate, “I'm kind of into aliens. I've been thinking about them a lot lately, and there's a lot of mob that are into aliens. But in the post-referendum world





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that we're in now, that seems to have just been shoved under the carpet very, very fast. I wanted to have these conversations around what it means to be alienated in your own Country. Also, the type of infinite possibilities of culture and our politics linking into Sky Country as well.

And so, we came up with *Blak Infinite*, a series of works across Federation Square. We had Richard Bell's tent embassy work, *Embassy* (2013-) anchoring the program, a hugely significant work that has been going for the last decade and a bit. And that enabled us to look at our political constellations and demonstrate how important it is for us to have these discussions. Around that, we had work from Kait James, Michael Cook, Josh Muir, Tony Albert, Ellen van Neerven and Tarryn Love, who we partnered with Studio Gile.

You've travelled around the world and seen Australian First Nations artefacts in cultural collections all over. What's a significant moment you recall from those travels, where you really kind of sat back and went, "Wow."

I did a program called Accelerate a few years ago, in 2013 – a leadership program

with the British Council. I was there to look at specific collections in the United Kingdom from Victoria and southeast Australia – to connect to them, but also to understand what institutions have been doing in terms of working with contemporary artists, not just Indigenous artists. There are a lot of spears, a lot of shields – many shields were either from the lower Murray River, or they could have been from New South Wales or Victoria. Provenance wasn't clear.

And there was this label, which set me on a trajectory of thinking for the last decade, including really influencing my PhD. It said something along the lines of, "This shield is a good specimen, but somewhat impaired." This means the value was somewhat impaired because of the use of white man's material – the maker had used steel or something else to carve the lines instead of stone, in a customary way. Then the collector got the shield, put it into the collection and said, "It's a native specimen, but it's not worth that much because the Black fella used a white man's material."

But what that collector failed to recognise was that the designs on that

shield represent thousands and thousands of years of generational knowledge. And so, regardless of the material used to make the shield, the story, the artwork and the cultural knowledge embedded in that object is time immemorial. That just really changed my thinking. **V**

Above
MICHAEL COOK
Invasion (giant birds), 2017
inkjet print
81 x 120 cm
Courtesy and © the artist

Opposite, top to bottom
DESTINY DEACON
Melancholy from the series
Sad & Bored, 2000
lightjet print from Polaroid
104 x 124 x 4.5 cm (framed)
© Destiny Deacon/
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BRIAN ROBINSON
*Zugubal: The Winds and
Tides set the Pace*, 2023
lightjet print from Polaroid
104 x 124 x 4.5 cm (framed)
Installation view in *Shadow
Spirit* during *RISEING
Festival*, 2023
Photo: Eugene Hyland

