

## Other side art: Trevor Nickolls, a survey of paintings and drawings 1972–2007

This survey exhibition of the work of senior artist Trevor Nickolls follows key moments and highlights of his career over more than three decades. It also recognises his pioneering role in the struggle by a generation of Aboriginal artists to forge a new position within the mainstream of Australian art and culture at a particularly vital juncture in the continent's history.

Trevor Nickolls was born in Adelaide in 1949 and completed a Diploma of Fine Art at the South Australian School of Art in 1970. Subsequently, he taught art in various South Australian schools and in country New South Wales. In 1975 he moved to Canberra, and in 1980 he completed a Postgraduate Diploma of Fine Art in painting at the Victorian College of the Arts. Between 1982 and 1984 Nickolls held various positions in the Northern Territory Department of Education in Darwin before establishing short-term studios in Sydney and Melbourne and commencing a full-time painting career. In 1990, Nickolls, along with Kimberley artist Rover Thomas, was selected to officially represent Australia at the Venice Biennale.

While living in Canberra between 1975 and 1978, Trevor Nickolls met various people associated with the Aboriginal Tent Embassy movement and it was during this time that the artist conceived the framework for the Dreamtime—Machinetime theme that has informed the majority of his work. As an allegorical overlay, this has formed a conceptual base from which his work has expanded in many directions in an articulation of the profound historical, political and emotional impact on Aboriginal Australia of the European invasion in 1788.

Stylistically, Trevor Nickolls has incorporated ideas, forms and painterly strategies from a wide range of sources in an idiosyncratic bricolage of symbols and motifs. Influences from comic book magazine graphics, Renaissance and pre-Renaissance symbolism and the visual tricks of the Cubists and Surrealists are mingled with references to various traditions in Aboriginal symbolism and mark-making.

*Other side art* is largely based on a chronological sequence of paintings with the addition of selected works on paper. Groups of works are arranged to explore different facets of the artist's interests: the interplay between human psychology and the polemical and political, the cityscape and unmodified landscape, and the harmony/disharmony between the spiritual and the material.

Michael O'Ferrall, guest curator