



# CHRISTIAN THOMPSON

## Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NORTH TERRACE, ADELAIDE Open daily 10am–5pm [artgallery.sa.gov.au](http://artgallery.sa.gov.au)





## CHRISTIAN THOMPSON (BIDJARA PEOPLE)

Christian Thompson is an Australian born, London-based contemporary artist who works in photography, video, sculpture, performance and sound. In 2010 he made history when he became the first Aboriginal Australian to be admitted into the University of Oxford in its 900-year history.

Thompson's practice explores notions of identity, history, gender, race and memory. In his live performances and portraits Thompson adopts a range of personas achieved through his handcrafted costumes, poses and backdrops.

image: Christian Thompson, Bidjara people, Queensland, born 1978, Gawler, South Australia, *Twin Divination*, 2017, c-type print on Fuji metallic pearl paper, 120.0 x 120.0 cm; Courtesy the artist, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney and Berlin



## RESOURCES

ABC – Songlines: The Indigenous memory code  
<http://ab.co/29FC7MO>

Christian Thompson  
<http://bit.ly/2FnFYsu>

QAGOMA – Christian Thompson  
<http://bit.ly/1ninZdA>

MCA – Christian Bumbarra Thompson *Gamu Mambu*  
(Blood Song)  
<http://bit.ly/2rjMlpn>

Monash University – Ritual Intimacy  
<http://bit.ly/2nXPI8i>

UTS ART – Christian Thompson Heat  
<http://bit.ly/2nk8aFf>

## VIDEOS

Christian Thompson at the Pitt Museum  
<http://bit.ly/2Goaeo9>

Christian Thompson – Berceuse  
<http://bit.ly/2GoeC6l>

Christian Thompson – Refuge  
<http://bit.ly/2DJCK5Y>

Christian Thompson – We Bury Our Own  
<http://bit.ly/2DSnMtL>

HIJACKED III interview with Christian Thompson  
<http://bit.ly/2DGWHX7>

The Gallery's Learning programs are supported by the Department for Education and Child Development.

image (cover): Christian Thompson, Bidjara people, Queensland, born 1978, Gawler, South Australia, *Purified by fire*, 2017, c-type print on Fuji metallic pearl paper, 120.0 x 120.0 cm; Courtesy the artist, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney and Berlin

## EARLY YEARS

### RESPONDING

Visit Thompson's sound piece in the Palm House at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. Describe the conditions in this space. How does this work of art make you feel?

**TIP** This sound work can also be heard at the Gallery.

Identify the plants and flowers in Thompson's photographic images.

*Berceuse* is a French word meaning lullaby or cradle song. Recall and recite a familiar lullaby. Describe what is happening in your selected lullaby.

In *Berceuse*, Thompson performs a song in his traditional language Bidjara, a language now categorised as endangered. Why is it important to preserve Aboriginal languages? What can be done to prevent languages becoming extinct? (See *Berceuse* in resource list)

### MAKING

Draw your favourite Australian plant or flower. Caption your drawing with information about the role this species plays in our ecosystem.

## PRIMARY

### RESPONDING

Compare photographic works by Tamara Dean and Christian Thompson. What similarities do these works share? What is different about them?

Thompson often uses disguises in his portraits or wears elaborate costumes or props. Suggest some reasons why he uses these devices to create his images. What is the symbolic nature to these items?

Songlines are an important way Aboriginal people preserve their history and pass down knowledge to younger generations. Combined with dance and objects, Songlines become a significant memory technique to recall information. What are some techniques you use to remember important information? Devise your own strategy for remembering something important to you – perhaps a series of special dates or the journey to an unfamiliar destination. Use a combination of song, rhymes, objects or movement to build your strategy.

### MAKING

Thompson sometimes adorns himself in costumes for his portraits. Using the Australian landscape as inspiration, create a wearable work of art.

Flowers and plants often have symbolic meaning. Select a plant or flower that best represents who you are. Photograph or draw your selection to create your own flora-portrait.

Thompson's work references his cultural identity. Create a self-portrait that captures your family heritage or culture.

## HASS – KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Thompson's artistic practice responds to the impact that colonisation has had on Aboriginal people, including the loss of some traditional languages. Investigate other impacts colonisation has had on Aboriginal people and the environment.

**TIP** Use Thompson's images and a visit to the Botanic Garden to unpack the following HASS inquiry questions:

- What was the nature and consequence of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and early traders, explorers and settlers? (Year 4)
- How did colonisation change the environment? (Year 5)

## SECONDARY

### RESPONDING

Investigate other Aboriginal photographers such as Daniel Boyd, Bindi Cole, Destiny Deacon and Michael Riley. Identify techniques these artists have used to communicate their ideas.

The gaze is a term used in art to describe how we look at visual imagery. Unpack this term further by looking at the different types of gaze that are often referred to when looking at paintings and photographs.

In Thompson's early work he references the notion of the 'imperial gaze'. Research the representation of Indigenous Australians from colonisation to today. How has the gaze changed?

Thompson encourages us to consider our past and the impact colonisation has had on Aboriginal cultures. What has he brought to your attention that you were not aware of before?

Discuss the significance of Thompson concealing himself with Australian flora.

Selfies are common practice in today's digital age. What defines a selfie? Discuss with your class whether Thompson's images are self-portraits or selfies. Define the difference between these two terms.

### MAKING

During his time at Oxford University, Thompson accessed historical images of Aboriginal people and artefacts as inspiration for his work as a means of spiritual repatriation. The historical images were collected from the 1840s onwards, which means many details such as people's identities and locations have been lost. Thompson reimagined the subjects through language, writing descriptive texts rather than presenting the images of Aboriginal people. Select a photograph of a family member. Compose a portrait in words that details your family member's gestures, appearance and character.

Thompson has formal training in sculpture and textiles, and stated that he composes a photograph in the same way he would create a sculpture. Collect fabric and props to construct your own self portrait that captures who you are. Consider sculptural elements and formal principles such as balance, direction, form, symmetry and texture.



image: Christian Thompson, Bidjara people, Queensland, born 1978, Gawler, South Australia, *Portent Serac*, 2017, c-type print on Fuji metallic pearl paper, 120.0 x 120.0 cm; Courtesy the artist, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney and Berlin