

Case study

Courting Blakness

Details

What:

In a groundbreaking exhibition, curator and University of Queensland (UQ) Adjunct Professor, Fiona Foley, brought works together by eight Indigenous artists, Ryan Presley, Archie Moore, Rea, Natalie Harkin, Karla Dickens, Christian Thompson, Megan Cope and Michael Cook. The artists' works promoted dialogue and cultural exchange about the place of Indigenous knowledge and art in the university.

The accompanying national symposium brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, curators and academics. Arts Queensland funding has fostered new collaboration and significantly consolidated the strength of art related knowledge and networking across the university. Digital technologies provided an ongoing experience and permanent record of the works.

When:

5-28 September 2014

Where:

The Great Court, and various locations across UQ.



Ryan Presley's work 'Debt' in the Great Court Photography: Carl Warner

Key stats:

- 25,000 attendees
- Radio audience of 93,313 people for the symposium
- 24,202 people engaged with the digital platform

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$59,967 – Projects and Programs Fund

Contact for further information:

Email: f.nicoll@uq.edu.au

Phone: 0421344207

Website: www.courtingblakness.com

www.facebook.com/courtingblakness

Outcomes

- The project provided invaluable exposure for emerging and established Indigenous artists enabling them to collaborate with academic staff in a university context.
- The research generated is of national and international significance. A book will be published by UQP as a result of the national symposium and launched in NAIDOC week.
- Adjunct Professor Foley's work on this project has led directly to an invitation to curate a larger project at the University of Technology Sydney with 10 artists in 2018 to commemorate the 1938 Aboriginal Day of Mourning.
- The project highlighted the built heritage of the Great Court and raised the profile of pioneering female Brisbane sculptor and Great Court carver, Rhyl Hinwood.
- The project promoted cultural diversity on the UQ campus in a uniquely powerful way.



Archie Moore, *Kamilaroi Nation*, 2014 Photography: Brenton McGeachi

Learnings and reflections

In the planning stages there were some concerns that this type of project could be seen as a risky venture with challenging works placed in a traditional environment. The student volunteer program was an outstanding success in this respect. The majority of volunteers were non-Indigenous students from Australia and other parts of the world and their support for the project communicated to their peers that *Courting Blakness* was an enrichment of the Great Court space. Having volunteers onsite throughout the exhibition assisted students and other members of the UQ and wider public to recognise *Courting Blakness* as a genuine and challenging invitation to engage with questions of identity and sovereignty that lie at the heart of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

The symposium enabled two-way development of service innovation, with academics and students learning how to support creation of quality art in their organisation and the curator and artists learning how their practice could contribute to the work of a large university.

The majority of respondents to a participant survey commented on their experiences of the symposium. Every statement was a positive reflection on the experience, described as “informative”, “fantastic”, “well-attended”, “incredibly moving”, “engaging” and “insightful”.

The curated, inter-disciplinary format of the symposium, with invited speakers from different academic and industry specialities, was considered to have worked well. Participants reflected on the personal impact of attending the symposium and on their positive impressions of UQ as a result, with one describing *Courting Blakness* as “*one of the most important of the cultural events UQ has ever hosted.*”