

# BOOMALLI

## FIVE

## KOORIE ARTISTS

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### STUDY GUIDE



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# TEACHERS NOTES

THESE ARE TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DVD.

## **BOOMALLI - Five Koorie Artists**

Producer: Paul Humfress  
Director: Michael Riley  
Camera: Ross King ACS  
Editing: Phillippa Harvey  
Music: John Patterson  
Chris Townsend  
DVD: 28 minutes, Colour, 1988

Developed in conjunction with:

Aboriginal Education Unit  
New South Wales Department of Education

and

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group  
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# INTRODUCTION

**Boomali** is a film about an artists' co-operative; a group of photographers, painters, sculptors, designers and film makers who are urban Aboriginal or Koorie artists

In the DVD we see the work of clothing designer Bronwyn Bancroft, the sand sculptures of Fiona Foley and Tracey Moffat discusses her film about Aboriginal girls.

The painters Raymond Meeks and Jeffrey Samuels discuss the thematic approach to their work and how they incorporate aspects of traditional Aboriginal painting.

**Boomali** Teachers notes were developed and written by the Aboriginal Education Unit, New South Wales Department of Education and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. They are designed specifically for use with Aboriginal Studies and Visual Arts Courses in secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The teachers notes are set out in two units: Aboriginal Studies and Visual Arts. Both the units share related questions and issues. It is suggested that teachers view the DVD before presenting material to the class.

Why study Aboriginal culture? Until recently, Australian history was presented from an ethnocentric 'European' world view. Through education an understanding and appreciation of the intrinsic worth and individuality of all cultures is being gained. This DVD provides students with an insight into many issues concerning Aboriginal people. After viewing this DVD, students will be able to question commonly held stereotypes of Aboriginal people and begin to appreciate the dynamics of Aboriginal Australia.

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**MICHAEL RILEY** photographer, film maker and member of the Boomalli co-operative, has found in directing *Boomalli - Five Koorie Artists*, an opportunity to combine technical skills and experience with a strong sense of being an Aboriginal and an artist. In making a film on five Boomalli artists, Michael's aim was to create a work which operates on three levels: Aboriginal culture, art and identity. The result is a positive view of the Koorie artist in contemporary urban society.

**RAYMOND MEEKS** studied Visual Arts majoring in painting and drawing. His work has been exhibited in Germany as well as Australia and is represented in collections at the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Australian National Art Gallery in Canberra.

**BRONWYN BANCROFT** studied Visual Arts and has worked as a photographic tutor and designer. She is the recipient of a number of grants and commissions involving hand-painted garments, uniforms and posters. Bronwyn's work has been exhibited widely since 1979. In 1987, her work was represented at the Fashion Parade, Printemps, Paris.

**JEFFREY SAMUELS** studied Visual Arts and has participated widely in private and group exhibitions within Australia and in Europe. In 1983, Jeffrey received a fellowship from the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council to study traditional Aboriginal culture on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

**TRACEY MOFFATT** studied Visual Communications and Film and DVD Production. She is a photographer and film maker. Her earlier productions include *Nice Coloured Girls*, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* and *Watch Out*. Tracey has worked closely with the Central Lands Council and other Aboriginal groups organizing photographic documentation projects and exhibitions.

**FIONA FOLEY** studied Visual Arts and has worked as assistant to the print maker Max Miller. She has also spent time studying traditional Aboriginal art in the Northern Territory. Her work has been exhibited widely and is represented in many private collections both within Australia and in London.

# VISUAL ARTS

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

After viewing the DVD through once, it is suggested it should be replayed, stopping the DVD after each artist. The class may be divided into three groups, assigned a key question each and then asked to present their findings.

## KEY QUESTIONS

How has each artist individually responded to:

- a) Their local environment as a source of ideas?
  - b) Their cultural heritage (Aboriginality)?
  - c) Their 20th century urban culture?
- 

### RAYMOND MEEKS

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE TO:

**a) Local Environment:**

Flora, fauna and stone patterning

**b) Aboriginality**

Inventing personal designs ie symbols—not using other people's, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal

**c) Urban Culture**

Seeking 'lost' pieces of himself, interpreting what he feels and sees. Affirming Aboriginal existence today—not once-upon-a-time people.

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### BRONWYN BANCROFT

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE TO:

**a) Local Environment**

Memory of idyllic love of nature/drawing

**b) Aboriginality**

Denies using traditional designs consciously (but clearly uses them intuitively)

**c) Urban Culture**

Becomes very involved in small business, clothing, jewellery, design, shop, Paris fashion parade.

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## JEFFREY SAMUELS

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE TO:

**a) Local Environment**

Based on nature—based on the land—political situation past and present—that is his identity

**b) Aboriginality**

Learnt traditional techniques and styles on Mornington Island—by using this his Aboriginal identity is enhanced

**c) Urban Culture**

By using Western 'modern' abstraction to express political ideas—'Western Art not greater than Aboriginal Art'.

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## TRACEY MOFFATT

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE TO:

**a) Local Environment**

People in contemporary Aboriginal society in either traditional or urban society. Film 'Nice Coloured Girls' about sexual exploitation

**b) Aboriginality**

Finding her Aboriginality as the only black kid in the white urban society—no traditional imagery used

**c) Urban Culture**

Film 'Nice Coloured Girls' is a symbolic drama. Wants to mix art and politics eg Flag/Tall Ships episode.

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## FIONA FOLEY

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE TO:

**a) Local Environment**

By using materials from her immediate environment eg sand, shells, wood—discovered that all her ancestors (Fraser Island) were annihilated or moved

**b) Aboriginality**

Symbolism of initiation ceremonies, women's fertility, massacres, universalized for all Australian Aborigines

**c) Urban Culture**

Aboriginal first, Woman second, Artist third.

## RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

- Find some other artists who use their immediate environment as a source of ideas
- Select two and say:
  - a) What aspects of the environment do these artists focus on?
  - b) Illustrate some of the personal symbols which they have invented.
  - c) Do these artists only *record* their environment or do they convey other meanings or purposes in their art?

## ABORIGINAL STUDIES

We suggest that students initially view the entire program focusing on the key discussion points and quotes (below). Then the DVD can be replayed and stopped after each artist. The questions and activities relating to each artist can then be discussed.

### KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Where do these artists live and work?
2. Why do you think it was necessary for these artists to form the Boomalli Cooperative?
3. From where do these artists get their inspiration?
4. What are these artists attempting to communicate through their work?
5. What aspects of upbringing are seen reflected in their own work and philosophy?
6. In what ways do these artists reflect their heritage?
7. How do these artists express their relationship with the land?
8. Why do you think it is important for these artists to maintain their Aboriginal identity?
9. Make a list of the issues concerning Aboriginal people in this DVD.
10. a) What are the usual stereotypes of Aborigines and artists presented by the media?  
b) In what ways do these people challenge these stereotypes?

# QUOTES

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## RAYMOND MEEKS

'I am born Aboriginal. I do not have to question who I am.'

'Through my painting I am hunting for lost pieces of myself and through my culture I have many answers.'

## BRONWYN BANCROFT

'We have a lot of people here from all over the place asking us "Is the work done by Aboriginals?...Where are the real Aboriginals?...Is it secondhand?" After a while you realize just how much education people need.'

'When I went to Art School, they said I couldn't do Aboriginal work, which I was painting, because I wasn't a proper Aboriginal, so I had to work very hard at technical process to compete on their level.'

## JEFFREY SAMUELS

'When I was at Art School I had to justify my art work because a lot of students didn't understand it because their subconscious couldn't understand it because they were taught that you couldn't get anything from Aboriginal culture.'

'I do not paint in traditional form but paint about issues that concern Aboriginal culture.'

## TRACEY MOFFAT

'I grew up in the suburbs of Brisbane in a fairly white environment so I had this thing about always being different, always being the only black kid in the school photograph.'

'I wanted to make a film which didn't show Aboriginal women as victims.'

## FIONA FOLEY

'I made a sculpture that was entitled *Annihilation of the Blacks* and it started off just looking at my own history...how the massacres also occurred throughout Australia and realizing that that particular history isn't unique [to only Fiona's people].'

'Being Aboriginal is part and parcel of everyday life.'

# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

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## **FIONA FOLEY**

### Questions

In what ways has the history of Fiona's people influenced her work?

What does she mean? 'I see myself as an Aborigine first, then a woman second and then an artist.'

What does she mean? "'Aboriginal' has different levels of meaning.'

Fiona talks about 'inner and outer' meaning.

### Activities

Research the history of the Aboriginal people from Fraser Island.

Compare the history of Fraser Island to your own local area/region.

Investigate other Aboriginal art styles in terms of level of meaning eg Western Desert sand paintings which have evolved into modern Papunya art.

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## **TRACEY MOFFAT**

### Questions

In what ways does she challenge stereotypes through her work?

Why do you think she decided to question the flying of the Aboriginal flag? Discuss.

Examine the statement 'She defended the right to mix art and politics.'

Are they separate issues?

### Activities

How did the Australian media portray Tracey's actions? Why?

Discuss the meaning of 'Ethnographic.' Critically examine the representation of Aboriginal people in films.

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## **BRONWYN BANCROFT**

### Questions

Why do you think Bronwyn was told she was 'not a proper Aborigine'?

How does her experience internationally at the Paris art show compare with the acceptance of her work in Australia?

Why?

### Activities

Research other Aboriginal small businesses and co-operatives.

Collect pictures of models from magazines; classify them. How many Aboriginal models do you find?

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## **JEFFREY SAMUELS**

### Questions

What does he mean when he says that both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art are political?

What is the relevance of European art for him?

Suggest reasons why his fellow students at Art School were unable to appreciate his work.

### Activities

'All Aboriginal art is political.' Discuss. Consult with your local Aboriginal community before discussing the concepts 'sacred', 'secret' and 'dreaming'.

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## **RAYMOND MEEKS**

### Questions

In what ways is the environment reflected in his work?

How does the work explore contemporary Aboriginal issues?

How did he develop his own style of symbolism?

### Activities

Go to the playground, beach, bush; collect about six natural objects.

Examine some new ways of creating your own symbols.

Why do you think Aboriginal people are the most oppressed group in Australian society?

# RESOURCES

## INTERNET

### **Aboriginal Education Consultative Group**

<http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/>

### **Aboriginal Education Contexts**

<http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>

### **Dare to Lead**

Dare to Lead is a Commonwealth funded national project with a focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

<http://www.pai.edu.au/content/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education>

### **Indigenous Centres at Australian Universities**

<http://www.indigenousteaching.com/indigenous-centres-australian-universities>

### **Media Portrayals of Indigenous Australians**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media\\_portrayals\\_of\\_Indigenous\\_Australians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_portrayals_of_Indigenous_Australians)

### **NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council (AJAC)**

The AJAC is comprised of Aboriginal community members whose role is to provide advice to the New South Wales Government on law and justice issues effecting Aboriginal people in this state.

<http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/>

### **Racism in Aboriginal Australia**

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/racism.html>

## BOOKS

'More than Black & White'; 'Racism in Everyday Life', A. Dewdney and D. Michels, Inner City Education Centre, Stanmore, NSW 1988.

# CONTACT US

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