



Hot Chocolate

24 October - 29 November 2012

SASA GALLERY

MONASH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

CA REQ

It started with a KISS

By working together for this exhibition, the artists in *Hot Chocolate* have delivered an eclectic assortment of ideas across a range of academic fields of enquiry:

- the politics of identity
- the politics of desire
- fetishisation of racial and othered bodies
- origin and place
- the politics of skin
- events, moments, and ephemerality

We too, talked, laughed, cried and worked through these issues in relation to the artworks submitted, including Pamela's work, and to the theory and literature we have read and utilised in our words with each other and communities. We begin this piece by reflecting on the writings of bell hooks, whose words kissed us awake and stirred us at the start of our respective formal research journeys. We align her words with some of our activism, advocacy, academic and community work. We will weave the magical lyrics from the 1970s iconic band Hot Chocolate throughout this essay.

bell hooks in writing of white women and feminism stated that '[b]lack women are treated as though we are a box of chocolates presented to individual white women for their eating pleasure, so they can decide for themselves and others which pieces are most tasty'.¹ hooks was referring to which women get picked, selected out and for what purpose. In Australia, Bronwyn Fredericks has used hooks' work to discuss how some Aboriginal women and men are deemed to be the most tasty in terms of 'what they are saying, writing or doing or not saying, writing or doing'² in the work context and indeed within broader Australian society. We know that some Aboriginal people are picked over and above others. At times the ones that are picked are the complimentary sweetness, like the 'after dinner mint', to what the government wants to do or what key non-Indigenous decision-makers want to do. They might be the ones offered key jobs and positions on government boards, decision-making committees or advisory groups and/or given priority of access to the media. The government can say 'Aboriginal people agree with us' or 'this Aboriginal person agrees with us'.

The flip side of this is that Aboriginal people who are deemed to be the hard centres, or the unpalatable kind maybe like the rocky road, peanut brittle types that stick on your teeth and make you question whether you should have selected that chocolate or not, are not offered the same access to power despite the qualifications and/or experience they hold or their level of on-the-ground communal support. These Aboriginal people may be seen as stirrers, radicals, trouble makers and some are positioned in this way just because they have a differing view not because they are radical in approach or trouble makers. We are seeing this now with the issues of Aboriginality (who is, who isn't), the Northern Territory Intervention, Native Title and more.

We know some people don't think about which chocolate they pick when they are picking from an assortment. They just dig in and perhaps get surprised, possibly disappointed or possibly have their perceptions reinforced by their choice. We know too that some Aboriginal people also use this terminology of chocolate with regards to themselves. For example in an email to Troy-Anthony Baylis titled *Bodies of Desire*, Frances Wyld writes of a woman who questioning her, '[t]hrough her choice to question me she chose the wrong chocolate, a hard center – perhaps not soft'.³ She positions herself as a hard center and identifies that the woman made the wrong choice. She wasn't going to get a soft center response. We have also heard other Aboriginal women refer to Aboriginal men as 'hot chocolate' in reference to attractive, appealing Aboriginal men. This is without reference to the center. It is merely a reference to the exterior appearance.

Hot Chocolate is also the name of a British pop band that was popular during the 1970s and early 1980s that had consecutive hits. The band was 'interracial' and comprised British-born citizens and immigrants from Jamaica, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Grenada. The title and ethnic diversity of the group, as well as select song lyrics, connect with a variety of themes for curatorial exploration:

'I believe in miracles. Where you from, you sexy thing? ... Where did you come from baby? ... Touch me. Kiss me darling ...' – *You Sexy Thing* (1975).

'It started with a kiss. I didn't know it would come to this ...' – *It Started With A Kiss* (1983).

'When you can't take anymore, when you feel your life is over, put down your tablets and pick up your pen and I'll put you together again ...' – *I'll Put You Together Again* (1978).

The politics of living in mixed-race skin and the politics of desire and difference is emphasised in many of the artworks in this collection. There are family photographs, other printed artefacts that embody the personal, text and graphics. Moreover, found objects including road-kill and parts of birds and animals found trapped in nets and fencing are included. These objects are about relatedness to Country, which also allow the beings to be memorialised through preservation as art. They add to the depths of 'where did you come from ...' and offer a sense of 'touch me'.

Elements of the songs of Hot Chocolate appear in all of the works. For example, the *Emotional Landscape* (1997-2010) series of paintings by Troy-Anthony Baylis are constructed with multiple 'x' signifiers that are reductive and glamorous and represent both 'a Kiss' and a marker for creating imaginings of Country. The works blow air kisses in the face of modernity at histories of colonial Australian landscape art that wielded power and control over Aboriginal subjects.

The artists in this collection are concerned with the categorisations and constructions of Aboriginality and the ways in which as both Aboriginal peoples and artists they are "boxed" in for the selection by others. Some would never have thought when they started their art careers that they would be positioned as 'hot chocolate' – highly desirable; or that they would need 'a miracle' to move from their boxed position; or that their artistic talent would be boxed within a category or classification difficult to move from. In respect to this, it is also categories and classifications that have been applied by non-Indigenous people, not Aboriginal people.

The artists wanted to use Hot Chocolate lyrics to chart their journeys and create artworks. The representations are desirable, tasty and a celebration – they declare the self as hot chocolate.

The audience is invited to view the work with all their senses in order to understand the stories and messages the artists share. This exhibition seeks to speak to the human experience of art. These artists are memorable, tasty and chosen. Their research includes themes of identity and desirability starting with the lyrics from *It Started With A Kiss* (1983). The artists desire to be the stars of their own love stories and favourite chocolates. This is juxtaposed with the possibility of not being chosen, not being selected from the collection, not being memorable.

In the overall collection, the song *I'll Put You Together Again* (1978) has been used to refer to the solidarity between creative people, often described as 'other', and their capacity to find joy in life and 'do some tastin.' *You Sexy Thing* (1975) is an anthem for those who have found this tastiness and believe in miracles. In this song Hot Chocolate ask the question 'Where you from?'; a question asked by many Aboriginal people as a protocol to ask who are your mob? Who do you belong to? This question allows for a place of belonging and identity, as desired by many people. It is answered in all of the artworks and through the collection as a whole. The last section ends with the very positive *Everyone's A Winner* (1978) describing a place that satisfies. This exhibition is a winner, it will satisfy all, and if it doesn't then it's your taste buds that are the issue, not ours, you sexy thing, you.

Dr Pamela CroftWarcon, Director, Sandhills Arts Keppel Sands, Queensland; and,
Dr Bronwyn Fredericks, Professor & Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement), BMA Chair, Indigenous Engagement & President of Academic Board, CQU University.

1. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom*, London: Routledge, 1994, 80.

2. Bronwyn Fredericks, "Getting a Job": Aboriginal Women's Issues and Experiences in the Health Sector, *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*. 2 (1): 2009, 24-35.

3. Frances Wyld, 'Bodies of Desire', email to Troy-Anthony Baylis, September 2010.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the support of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, architects, writers and curators associated with the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia, in a national and international context. The Director, SASA Gallery, would like to acknowledge the contribution to the development of the 2012 exhibition program by the SASA Gallery Programming Committee; Professor Kay Lawrence; Professor Mads Gaardboe, Head, AAD; and Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Pro-Vice Chancellor, DIVEASS, UniSA.

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Images:

Front: Nat Paton, 2008, *Forty-two, thirty-nine, fifty-six, Rosie*.

Digital photo, 93x100cm

Middle: Bianca Beetson, 2010, *Run, run, run, run, catch me if you can, you can't catch me you can't catch me cos' I am the nigger bread-man*. Photographs, triptych, each 100x100cm

Back: Andrew Putter, 2012, *Given Mkhondo as 'A Young Man Dressed for the Dance'*. Photograph 35x49cm



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Art, Architecture
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