ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ricardo Idagi is a Meriam man who grew up on Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait, north of mainland Australia. He was encouraged to produce art by Eddie Koiki Mabo, who is famous internationally for winning native title rights to Mer Island in 1992. Idagi studied art at Cairns Technical and Further Education Institute. He has been included in a number of major exhibitions over the last five years, and has won two prestigious Australian art awards: the Western Australian Indigenous Art Award (2009) and the New Media category of the 28th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (2011). His work is held in the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Queensland Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia, among others. He lives and works in Melbourne, and is represented by Vivien Anderson Gallery.

Kluger-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia

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Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 4 pm; Sunday, 1 – 5 pm.
Free guided tour every Saturday, 10:30 am.
When Ricardo Idagi was growing up on the Torres Strait Island of Mer (Murray Island) in the 1960s, the favored primary school uniform was called a "cocoon." A cocoon is akin to a trash sack; it signifies that underneath someone’s Black skin is a preference for white people. This divided identity is just one of many devastating effects of colonization that influence King’s artwork. This divorce practice includes aliki, the Torres Strait headhunting, earthworm sculpture such as the Cocoon, and radio execution of a fractional self, seen in Ikiri ko, White Mask.

The Torres Strait Islands, part of the state of Queensland, comprise more than one hundred islands dotted between the northern most point of Australia and northern Papua New Guinea. Many cultural and linguistic differences exist between Torres Strait Islanders and mainland Australian Aborigines, and each retains their separate identity.

Namaste! Iku Va de Torres navigated the strait in 1606. The earliest European settlement was established in the region in 1609 and from this date onwards, the lives of Torres Strait Islanders were forever disrupted. Indigenous, disease, and the imposition of Christianity irreversibly altered cultural practices, language, diet, and spiritual beliefs. King’s (Kuruma) Tjorntjoe Jonjoe is an example of how Torres Strait Islanders who were forced to become fishermen with the contemporary reality for those who must "borrow money." King’s artistic practice of making art similarly reflects upon contemporary Aboriginal life by revitalizing the traditional headwear with a minimal modern aesthetic.

The pending infinity plane stands as a symbol of cultural awareness of the traumatic past, seeking a process of healing and decolonizing for himself and his family. Curari – Saltwater Drinker takes its name from the artwork that Idagi made in honor of his great grandfather, Mino ata. Mino ata was given the name Curari – Saltwater Drinker by the people at the Mer mission. The literal translation means "saltwater drinker." When Idagi was a child his mother told him the origin of this name.

Long before the arrival of Europeans, the region was home to various aboriginal peoples. The earliest known European settlement was established in the region in 1609. From this date onwards, the lives of Torres Strait Islanders were forever disrupted. Indigenous, disease, and the imposition of Christianity irreversibly altered cultural practices, language, diet, and spiritual beliefs. King’s (Kuruma) Tjorntjoe Jonjoe is an example of how Torres Strait Islanders who were forced to become fishermen with the contemporary reality for those who must "borrow money." King’s artistic practice of making art similarly reflects upon contemporary Aboriginal life by revitalizing the traditional headwear with a minimal modern aesthetic.

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Gurari – Saltwater Drinker

ESSAY BY KIRA RANDOLPH

When Ricardo Idagi was growing up on the Torres Strait Island of Mer (Murray Island) in the main, the favored primary school uniform was “cournal.” A cournat is akin to a tucker; it means that underneath someone’s black skin is a preference for white people. This divided identity is just one of many devastating effects of colonization that informs king’s artwork. His diverse practice includes art, the Torres Strait headwear, earthenware sculpture such as the Cournat, and invasive culture at a fractional level, seen in Illikok Skin, White Mask.

The Torres Strait Islands, part of the state of Queensland, comprise more than one hundred islands dotted between the northeasternmost point of Australia and southeastern Papua New Guinea. Many cultural and linguistic differences exist between Torres Strait Islanders and mainland Indigenous Australians, and each retains their separate identity. Namaoak who’s name means the strand in the sea. The oldest European settlement was established in the region in 1606 and from this date onward, the lives of Torres Strait Islanders were forever changed. Indigenous, disease, and the imposition of Christianity (specifically; alcohol, language, dress, and spiritual beliefs, king’s marriage) justified the dispossession of many Torres Strait people who were known as mer Islanders. This dispossession was for those who were known as “buccaneers,” king’s artistic practice of making of art is similar to the contemporaryMerians life by revitalizing the traditional headwear with a modern aesthetic.

The pending infants status claimed the Torres Strait in the main and was responsible for widespread regional growth, much like the Californian gold-rush, perpetuating further loss of land and loss. In the main people were relocated to build a missionary school. In king’s words, “What the missionaries delivered was the final apocalyptic zone.” The missionary rule, enforced by whip, was motivated by the belief that Islanders needed to become “civilized.”

It is against this history that king uses his artwork to cultivate awareness of the traumatic past, seeking a process of healing and decolonizing for himself and his family. Cournat – Saltwater Drinker takes its name from the artwork that king made in honor of his great-grandfather, during the time he was working as a judge of the main. The literal translation means “saltwater drinker.” When king was a child his mother told him the origin of this name.

It began when old Mino was strutting walking back to his birthplace of Merland, sitting on the rocks during low tide each night, drinking their water. Mino would never cry, “angry to himself, laughing and crying.” As king’s time passed, the COURNA was actually used, which through the Christian, rational, and then disgust, through the cycle of addiction, the same story. emblem with king’s family for four generations, and now.

Today at age three and a half feet tall and made of empty beer cans, king’s childhood home has become infamous as the first site where the terra nullius claim was effectively contested. Translated from Latin, this legal doctrine means “land belonging to no one” and was used to justify colonization. During a land rights conference in 1981, Mer Islander Eddie Mabo spoke about the complex nature of Indigenous land inheritance. This speech was a catalyst for the Merrie Mermaid, a case that played out in Australia’s High Court for over a decade. The final verdict resulted in a landmark decision in 1992 recognizing native title rights for Mer Islander, as well as Indigenous land claims in other parts of Australia.

The pearling industry gained momentum in the Torres Strait in the 1860s and was responsible for widespread regional growth, much like the Californian gold-rush, perpetuating further losses of land and loss. In the main people were relocated to build a missionary school. In king’s words, “What the missionaries delivered was the final apocalyptic zone.” The missionary rule, enforced by whip, was motivated by the belief that Islanders needed to become “civilized.”

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When Ricardo Idagi was growing up on the Torres Strait Island of Mer (Murray Island) in the 1960s, the favored primary schoolchild’s name was “coconut.” A coconut is skin to a tracker; it means that underneath someone’s black skin is a preference for white people. This divided identity is just one of many devastating effects of colonization that informs Idagi’s artwork. This diverse practice includes art, the Torres Strait headresses, earthenware sculptures such as “The Coconut,” and multimedia evocations of a fractured self, seen in “Black Skin, White Mask.”

Gurari – Saltwater Drinker

ESSAY BY KIRA RANDOLPH

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