

**Transforming Tindale is a thought-provoking journey into the Tindale collection, what it means to Aboriginal people and its place in Queensland's history.**



transforming  
tindale



## Transforming Tindale

In 1938, the anthropologist Norman Tindale embarked on a two-year scientific expedition documenting Aborigines from around Australia. Most of the original material collected during this expedition is held by the South Australian Museum. Around 20 years ago, some of this collection relating to the genealogies and photographs of over 1100 people from five Queensland and two northern New South Wales Aboriginal communities was copied and supplied to the State Library of Queensland. Since then, there has been a constant demand from members of the Aboriginal community looking for photographs and information about their families.

One of the many Aboriginal people who has accessed the Tindale collection is Vernon Ah Kee. An important part of the **Transforming Tindale** exhibition is his use of the images of his family members to produce stunning artworks that are featured alongside enlargements of several of the portraits taken by Tindale in 1938. Many other Aboriginal families also have strong connections to the photographs taken by Tindale and this exhibition is an opportunity to tell some of these personal stories.

This exhibition features text and images that will highlight controversial issues relating to anthropologists studying Aboriginal people and treating them as scientific objects, while also looking at the importance of Aborigines now gaining access to photographs and documents that relate to their family histories held by archives, museum and libraries.

**Michael Aird, Curator**

## Vernon Ah Kee

Vernon Ah Kee is a conceptual artist and also a member of the Brisbane-based proppaNOW artists' collective. He completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Hons) at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane, majoring in drawing and screenprinting. Vernon's work critiques Australian society, particularly the segregation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

Vernon has represented Australia at the 2009 *Venice Biennale*. He's featured in group exhibitions such as *Revolutions – Forms That Turn: 2008 Biennale of Sydney* and *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial* at the National Gallery of Australia. Vernon features in the National Gallery of Canada, the Hood Museum of Art in New Hampshire, USA, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. He was a 2012 Archibald Portrait Prize finalist for his portrait of Indigenous activist Lex Wotton.

Solo exhibitions include *ill-like* at the Kluge-Ruhe Gallery in Charlottesville, USA (2012), *tall man* at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne (2011), *Vernon Ah Kee* at City Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand (2010), *Blow Your House In* at Mackenzie Gallery, Regina, Canada (2009), *Belief Suspension* at ArtSpace, Sydney (2008) and *Can't Chant* at Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2007), where they published *borninthisskin* (2009), the first major publication about his practice.

**Above left to right**

Annie Sibley, Palm Island, 7 November 1938, Tindale Genealogical Collection

Vernon Ah Kee  
*Annie Ah Sam (A)*, 2008  
James C. Sourris Collection

George Sibley, Palm Island, 25 October 1938, Tindale Genealogical Collection

Vernon Ah Kee  
*neither pride nor courage*, 2006  
The James C Sourris, AM, Collection. Gift of James C Sourris through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2007. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

**“I'm expanding the idea of what it means to be Aboriginal and what it means to be human. A lot of the problem this country has with Aboriginal people is that it struggles to see Aboriginal people as fully human.”**

**– Vernon Ah Kee**

## Tindale collection

Tindale's original research is held at the **South Australian Museum**. State Library of Queensland has copies of genealogical information and some photographs from the Tindale collection for the Queensland Aboriginal communities of Mona Mona, Yarrabah, Palm Island, Woorabinda and Cherbourg as well as two northern New South Wales communities at Boggabilla and Woodenbong.

SLQ has also created an **online index** of names recorded in the genealogies. There are restrictions on who can access the full family tree information and photographs.

**Access** to these records can be arranged by contacting the John Oxley Library. Visit [slq.qld.gov.au](http://slq.qld.gov.au) to find out more.

The Tindale collection is a great resource for researching Aboriginal family history; however, it does contain some inaccuracies. Information from this collection should not be your only source for family history research.

## Learning notes

Designed to complement SLQ's *Transforming Tindale* exhibition, the learning notes align with the Australian Curriculum in History, English, and Visual Arts, with a focus on the cross-curricular priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This resource can be used to enhance students' learning experiences pre-visit, whilst visiting *Transforming Tindale*, and post-visit. The activities can also be adapted for adult learners.

The resource is divided into three parts, available as downloadable PDFs from the SLQ website at [slq.qld.gov.au](http://slq.qld.gov.au)

- These background notes
- Middle phase (Grades 7 – 10)
- Senior phase (Grades 11 – 12)

## Using the learning notes offsite

SLQ recommends visiting the exhibition. If you are unable to visit, some of the activities can be used independently. Students can also access information and images from the exhibition webpage at [slq.qld.gov.au/showcase](http://slq.qld.gov.au/showcase).

To locate primary resources for further research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, use SLQ's **OneSearch catalogue**.

### Arranging your visit to Transforming Tindale

To book a group visit to *Transforming Tindale*, contact the Learning & Participation team at [learning@slq.qld.gov.au](mailto:learning@slq.qld.gov.au) or call 07 3842 9293.

Please indicate the following when enquiring:

- Name of school
- Name and contact details of organiser
- Proposed date and time
- Number of students attending
- Number of adults attending
- Year level
- Subject

### Acknowledgements

State Library thanks Jonathan Nalder, Principal Project Officer, Indigenous Education and Training Futures Division, Department of Education, Training and Employment, whose input ensures these activities bring out the best in our exhibition and the learner experience. Jonathan assisted SLQ as part of the Learning Associates Program. To assist State Library with future learning notes, send an expression of interest to Learning & Participation at [learning@slq.qld.gov.au](mailto:learning@slq.qld.gov.au) or 07 3842 9293.