

# FRAMEWORK

#10 | PROVOCATION





## EDITORIAL

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Firstly, a warning for the content of this issue.

Some pieces in this issue deal with themes of violence, rape, suicide, assault, racism and Islamophobia. Please be aware that if you find these issues confronting use discretion.

This is Frameworks provocative second issue for this year.

Arts writing is powerful and poses questions that should be asked to make artists and audiences alike critically engage with their contexts.

This issue aims to do just that. Our contributors have looked around and pose some provocative questions. From critiquing the curious curatorial decisions of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, to the fight for sanity and survival seen in the art behind the bars of Australia's detention centres. Talking to Abdul Abdullah and Kahled Sabsabi and questioning the correlation between The Famous Onion Eating Man and posters that popped up in Sydney; this issue investigates how art provokes, but also who is being provoked, and why.

This issue is sure to make you position yourself in relation to these affairs.

I would like to thank the team at Arc UNSW Art & Design. Ramesh, Ella, Kieran your support is invaluable. Thank you to Abdul Abdullah, The Refugee Art Project and Kahled Sabsabi for being involved.

Lastly, thank you to the contributors. You make this the pleasure that it is.

Our next issue of Framework is Perception and if you would like to be involved, contact me: [l.davison@arc.unsw.edu.au](mailto:l.davison@arc.unsw.edu.au).

So, read on, we promise these pages will provoke!

Enjoy,

Lucinda Davison

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PROVOC-  
ATION

# ARTIST PROFILE

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Eleanor Holden



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Front cover image:

Abdul Abdullah "Self portrait as an ultra-nationalist", 2013. C-type print. 155cm x 110cm. Image courtesy of the artist.





# ABDUL ABDULLAH

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by Eleanor Holden

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Abdul Abdullah is a Sydney-based, Western-Australia born artist. As the son of a sixth-generation Australian and Malaysian Muslim, he had the unique experience growing up of trying to reconcile being both a proud Muslim and Australian. This experience informs his art as he seeks to explore the identity of marginalised groups, and to “effect positive change by introducing or emphasizing elements to the discourse that are often overlooked.”

His practice is primarily based in painting and photography, recently however he has delved into other multimedia platforms, saying of his work: “I build images.” His recognition, both nationally and internationally, is steadily growing, receiving accolades such as the Blake Prize, being a three time Archibald Prize finalist, and will soon be featured in the London based art fair Art15.

He credits his brother Abdul-Rahman Abdullah as a big influence and sounding board from the beginning of his practice. However, the two artists have had different experiences growing up, with Abdul Abdullah being more politically minded.

The Muslim experience changed after 9/11, and not being politically engaged following it was difficult. Abdullah originally studied journalism at university, looking to pursue this political interest, before using art to explore these themes. In light of this, it isn't hard to see why groups such as proppaNOW, who share similar experiences of marginalisation and explore political themes, have influenced him.

Abdullah's works are strong and striking, with a bold use of colour and shadow. He often features himself, both through painting and photography, further highlighting the personalised struggle of marginalisation. Abdullah cites ‘It doesn't matter how I feel’ and ‘I wanted to paint him as a mountain’ as some of his favourite works. These

two vastly different pieces emphasize his range and differing practices. ‘I wanted to paint him as a mountain’, highlights the depth and textural qualities of his painting, while also carrying across symbolism from Planet of the Apes, in the form of the ANSA logo, utilised in his Siege series to convey the other. In contrast to this work, ‘It doesn't matter how I feel’ is visually much calmer, yet still challenges the viewer's perceptions of the other and displacement.

Abdullah is not intentionally provocative, but he certainly doesn't shy away from any provocation caused. His work is responsive to the context around it and acts to hold a mirror up to society. This becomes inherently politicized, especially in light of an increasing Islamophobia within conservative Australia, with people not liking their reflections. In terms of the recent bout of anti-Islamic episodes, including the responses to the Sydney Siege and the Reclaim Australia Movement, Abdullah states they have not changed his views or practice, instead viewing them as being “symptomatic of attitudes that have become entrenched in Australian society,” something that he grew up experiencing. Muslims have time and time again been portrayed in the media as ‘the bad guy’ or ‘dangerous’, and the sense of being unwelcome and implied otherness informs his practice, without limiting it to a strictly Muslim experience.

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# AUSTRALIA AND THE PHOTOGRAPH: AMBIGUITY AS APATHY

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by Georgia Windrum



01. Charles Bayliss Group of local Aboriginal people, Chowilla Station, Lower Murray River, South Australia. 1886. Image courtesy of The Art Gallery of New South Wales

SYDNEY







'AUSTRALIA AND THE PHOTOGRAPH' IS PROVOCATIVE NOT FOR ITS INABILITY TO ENGAGE A RELEVANT DEBATE, BUT ITS INABILITY TO ENGAGE ANY DEBATE AT ALL.

I admit that I had high expectations of this exhibition. The Art Gallery of New South Wales claims the exhibition 'proposes a new way of thinking about the connections between photography, place, and identity.' I expected an engagement with the diverse and conflicting narratives of history and identity that shape Australia. Perhaps my expectations were too progressive for a state institution. However, the visitor expecting an affirmation of mainstream conservative values will be disappointed as well. 'Australia and the Photograph' does not live up to its frustrating title that anticipates a broad, all-encompassing consideration of the medium. Disappointingly, there is no clear message to be seen here, and this is the ultimate provocation.

Hypothetically, the exhibition could have presented a unified narrative of a conservative, masculine, white Australia. This would have at least incited debate about how this particular (and I would argue, dominant) conception of our nation is problematic. Conversely, the exhibition does not present a nuanced and diverse photographic history of Australia either. Each visitor, regardless of their social and political views, will be left grasping for something meaningful to engage with. The only thing to debate is what is not there: the prolific artists that are not included, the relevant questions that are not posed, the critical discourses that are not sufficiently engaged with.

I concede that ambiguity has the potential to be powerful. However, the vagueness and lack of concise curatorial direction does not translate to an exhibition that is meaningful in its openness or assumption of neutrality. In 'Australia and the Photograph' ambiguity manifests as apathy.

Recent current affairs have brought our sense of identity and nationalism to the forefront of public consciousness. Abbott's 'Stop the Boats' policy and reactionary art campaigns such as Peter Drew's 'Real Australian Say Welcome' point to the divide that has emerged: you either support or refuse the acceptance of refugees to this country. All of this is reflective of the broader stigma of what is labeled as "Un-Australian". At the same time, there is increasing awareness concerning the rhetoric of Australia Day as Invasion Day. The Martin Place siege and reports of other planned terrorist attacks have incited cases of religious vilification. Some cried out that we had lost our innocence: global terrorism had reached our 'unblemished' shores. Others united in cultural acceptance under #illridewithyou. The Anzac Centenary has encouraged debate concerning the dominant narrative of Australian history. The dismissal of journalist Scott McIntyre from SBS following his critique of the 'cultification' of Australian's involvement in various wars is just one instance that reveals the media intolerance of alternative views of history.

If there ever was a stable definition of Australian national identity, all of these events have challenged it. It is these circumstances that exacerbate the massive disappointment that is 'Australia and the Photograph'. This exhibition had the opportunity to engage with and present the hugely varied experiences of Australians. There are more than four hundred images included in this exhibition. I can count on my hands the number of them that contribute to a meaningful dialogue. Curator Judy Annear claims that Australian photography has been largely neglected since Gael Newton's groundbreaking 1988 exhibition 'Shades of Light' at the National Gallery in Canberra. Why then, does Annear include so few photographs from the last two decades?

An exhibition of such scale, informed by years of research, will automatically be positioned as a major event for Australian visual culture. Yet the exhibition primarily focuses on 'little-known' images of the nineteenth century. Clearly, these

ordinary portraits and images of everyday life are 'little-known' for a reason. Offering equally little discussion, they neither contribute to the existing dominant visual narrative, nor do they subvert it.

The treatment of the iconic photographs included in the exhibition is similarly problematic. While Annear acknowledges in an interview that there is nothing inherently Australian about certain images such as Max Dupain's *Sunbaker* and David Moore's *Migrants Arriving in Sydney* this dialogue is not raised by the exhibition itself. These photographs remain stagnant, reaffirming the myths that exalt them. Certainly, a general audience will want to see famous images. But a general audience is also capable of critical engagement. How and why have these photographs been mythologized as iconically Australian? What have they contributed to our national consciousness?

There seems to be a tokenistic approach to image selection in this exhibition. One corner in the room titled 'Critique' is particularly alarming. These two walls contain, amongst others, Moore's *Migrants Arriving in Sydney*, Mervyn Bishop's symbolic *Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hands of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari*, Michael Riley's *Maria*, and Carol Jerrems' *Vale Street*. It seems the gallery has set itself a spatial challenge: how many ethnic and gender diversity boxes can we tick in just one corner of a major exhibition?

The result is a contrived attempt at conveying diversity. While John McDonald asserts that Aboriginal themes are over-emphasized in the exhibition, I argue that the quantity of images does not equate to a meaningful presence. The large number of ethnographic photographs does not adequately present the complex discourses informing the art practices of Aboriginal photographers and representations of their communities. The problematic practice of ethnographic photography in affirming the colonial gaze and denying the subject an individual identity is ignored. These images retain a glaring sense of oppression and conformity. JW Lindt's studio photograph of an Aboriginal man on the ground, with his head rested in a pathetic, stylised posed on

the knee of a white stockman has been disturbingly interpreted by Rosemary Neill as suggestive of intimacy and companionship. Annear's statement that she "could have done a show about conflict (between Aborigines and settlers), but chose to do a show about active, useful lives" is even more shocking.

My frustration with the historical treatment of Aboriginal Australians extends to the treatment of contemporary works. Ricky Maynard and Tracey Moffat's photographs are installed so high on the dimly lit wall of the 'People and Place' room that the visitor is simply unable to view them properly. I am unsure if this is a contrived reference to an Indigenous presence hanging above the colonial photographs displayed in vitrines below. Regardless, it just does not make sense.

The endless presentation of similar historical photographs and portraits is another concern. Annear explains that her intention was to curate an exhibition dealing with the medium of photography, and how this medium came to invent Australia. Of course, the history of the photographic medium is fascinating. The opportunity to view original daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, stereographs and tintypes is rare and important for viewers so accustomed to the rapid processing and reception of digital photographs. However, there are two issues with this particular focus on the history of the photographic medium.

The notion of the physical photograph as a sacred or sentimental object is lost by the sheer multitude of the images included. Nothing stands out as particularly important, yet here is a rare opportunity to appreciate what physical photographs can mean to us. The examples of the elaborate cases traditionally used to protect such images beautifully reflect this sentiment.

Further, there is a confusing lack of attention given to the relationship between medium and content. Are we supposed to be appreciating the technological development that produced this type of photograph, or are we searching for a social content that reveals something of a particularly

Australian consciousness? How do x-rays, solar eclipses, photographs of the moon and Antarctica shape and define Australia? Perhaps this is ticking the fashionable intersection-of-art-and-science box. What about the entire wall of Sue Ford's indulgent self-portraits? Here, ambiguity leads to confusion, and confusion in this case produces disinterest.

The generation of disinterest by such an ambitious exhibition is dangerous. In Australia we already suffer from the inferiority complex of the 'cultural cringe'. Yet there are such varied experiences of this country, shaped by local and global events, which deserve attention and are capable of evoking powerful responses. In considering our national identity, there are many possible trajectories to be explored: the vastness of the landscape and its visual colonization, the global export of the masculine, athletic Australian beach body, the challenges and inspirations of race relations, the isolation of a western nation within an Asian region. While the exhibition superficially ticks the box for many themes, the depth and intriguing complexity of these narratives is unsatisfactorily fleshed out.

The missed opportunity to engage with our history, whether as a source of conflict or pride, to question our individual identities, and to connect to broader narratives of multiculturalism and Australia's place in the globalised world is frustratingly provocative. 'Australia and the Photograph' affirms a sense of apathy when an enthusiasm for engaging with history in order to shape a progressive future matters most.







# TAKING REFUGE IN ART

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by Annaliese Alexakis







UNITED BY A CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRANT DETAINEES, THE REFUGEE ART PROJECT IS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT GRASSROOTS INITIATIVE THAT ALLOWS ASYLUM SEEKERS TO FIND REFUGE IN ART.

THEY CONDUCT REGULAR WORKSHOPS AT SYDNEY'S VILLAWOOD IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTRE FOR A FEW HOURS A WEEK, THEIR SELF-EXPRESSION ALLOWS REFUGEES TO EXIST AS PEOPLE, NOT VICTIMS OF WAR LIVING IN CONSTANT FEAR OF BEING RETURNED TO THE COUNTRIES FROM WHICH THEY HAVE FLED. THROUGH ART, THESE DETAINEES ARE ABLE TO CONVEY THINGS THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE FIND DIFFICULT TO PUT INTO WORDS.

THE RESULT IS DEEPLY PERSONAL AND HIGHLY PROVOCATIVE.

Perilous sea journeys, family left behind in war torn countries, mental illness, uncertainty, frustration, fear, hope, death and endurance have all marked the lives of these people and is reflected in their artworks. There are significant therapeutic benefits of art in this instance, with their self-expression allowing for reconciliation of past traumas. One refugee saying: "When my drawings are clean, I feel that my heart is clean." However, branded as "mental illness factories" by several advocates, refugees in detention centres live under conditions of extreme mental duress. Many of them suffer from anxiety and depression, which often translates into self-harm and suicide. Furthermore, the witnessing of these acts is traumatising for other detainees within the centre.

Whilst these art classes are greatly appreciated by detainees, they cannot improve an individual's wellbeing within this context. Director of The Refugee Art Project, Safdar Ahmed, said "One of the main difficulties is that refugees are allowed very few materials in detention. This is because the mental health of people kept inside our detention centres is so poor that it's automatically assumed they will try to harm themselves." Their experiences of trauma and exile are rendered using materials such as instant coffee powder diluted in water and brushes fashioned out of cat fur and plastic cutlery. One refugee created a replica of the Sydney Harbour Bridge using glue and straight spaghetti.

These artworks embody the power of these individuals

to transcend their environment and make the ordinary, extraordinary. Such art creates beauty in a place where there is none.

Outside the walls of Villawood, The Project hold public exhibitions and have a number of zine publications, which enables these men, women and children alike to enter the public discourse on their own terms, beyond the barbed wire that incarcerates them.

Ahmed says exhibiting the works aims to combat stereotypes surrounding asylum seekers. "Hopefully it will present a deeper picture or understanding of refugees themselves – not as suffering victims who deserve our pity, but as complex individuals who demand as we all must to be treated with justice and fairness." Refugees in detention have been stripped of the basic agency that ironically they believed they would reclaim once they reached our shores. The Refugee Art Project relies on autonomous and creative expression to counter this tendency for refugees to be made anonymous and disempowered. Indeed, these powerful works tell a very different story from the dry, dehumanising statistics about refugees that dominate mainstream media.

To these people, art is more than just a therapeutic outlet. The very nature of the journey an immigrant must take to reach this country reveals a profound independence; they are not victims, they are fighters. The Refugee Art Project allows asylum seekers to keep fighting, even behind bars.







Q&A WITH

# KHALED

by Jenny Anan







SPENDING A FEW MINUTES WITH KHALED SABSABI'S NAQSHBANDI GREENACRE ENGAGEMENT, THE ANCIENT HYMNS OF THE SUFI'S EMITTING FROM THE THREE CHANNEL VIDEO INDUCE A POWERFUL ENTRANCEMENT. VIEWING THE WORK FOR THE FULL RUNNING TIME OF 90 MINUTES, THE DIVERSE AND BUSTLING CROWDS OF THE MCA (WHERE THE WORK IS EXHIBITED) PRESENTS A MIXTURE OF REACTIONS TOWARDS THE WORK.

COFA GRADUATE AND BLAKE PRIZE WINNING ARTIST KHALED SABSABI REFLECTS UPON THE EVERYDAY NATURE OF THESE COMMUNITIES AND THE PROCESS OF DOCUMENTATION. PRODUCING WORKS THAT HAVE OFTEN BEEN LABELLED AS EXTREMIST, KHALED DRAWS HIS PASSION FOR ACTIVISM INTO HIS WORK, EXPRESSING CONCERNS OF MISREPRESENTATION OF CULTURE AND IDENTITY.

I SAT DOWN WITH KHALED TO DISCUSS HIS ROOTS IN ACTIVISM, ARTIST LABELS, AND WHAT IS MEANS TO BUILD ON AN ART PRACTICE BASED ON THESE WESTERN SYDNEY COMMUNITIES.

**JA:** YOU WERE ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN HIP HOP SCENE DURING THE 1980'S, WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO IT NOW? IS IT STILL A DRIVING FORCE IN YOUR WORK?

**KS:** There were certainly many pioneers of the Australian hip hop scene, I don't want to be regarded as the only one. It was a movement that explored an alternative to the way things are and it's something that we could connect to as young people. Like anything, you will always have a connection to something that you value in life and as your awareness grows in life your connection will remain, and materialise itself in different forms. It is still evident in my work, as hip hop - in particular its early stages - is about activism and finding being that alternative voice, a voice for the people. That will always be in my mind as I continue to work.

**JA:** WHAT MADE YOU BUILD ON AN ART PRACTICE BASED ON YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES SUCH AS THE NAQSHBANDI SUFI ORDER?

**KS:** An art practice gages itself with where you sit in society. Years ago I made a choice that as an individual, I felt that I had a responsibility to be able to speak, and [I'm] privileged to do that through art. Having this platform is important but understanding this privilege you have is even more so. As an artist, to be able to take on these responsibilities and get involved with communities can definitely be more challenging than working in isolation, which can be seen as more 'comfortable'. But working with such communities as the Naqshbandi Sufi Order, you experience a sense of collaboration, acknowledgement and respect for that subject matter.

**JA:** IN MANY OF YOUR WORKS YOU PRESENT INSIGHT OF CEREMONIES MANY OF US WOULD NOT HAVE WITNESSED FIRST HAND. THROUGH THIS DOCUMENTATION, DO YOU FEEL PRESSURED TO ACCURATELY REPRESENT THESE COMMUNITIES AS WELL AS KEEP RESPECTFUL?

**KS:** I agree that many of us haven't witnessed these ceremonies but the question is, why? It is because we choose not to, or is it because we don't have access to them? The ceremonies I show are quite accessible and the people are open - whether I'm working with Greek Orthodox ceremonies or Sufi ceremonies. Being respectful is important to me because I feel strongly about history and what it has to offer to the present and to the future. I think history is always misrepresented and miswritten because it is always written by the person in power at the time, but if we see these things being practiced, as a society we can truly benefit from it. Part of the documentation is to also inviting us to appreciate the value of that is being practiced, and the knowledge that can be gained from it. In terms of respect, it comes back to the artist as an individual and I'm only speaking from my experience. It always depends how much respect these communities have for their work, and this respect should be just as important as the respect of the work.

**JA:** YOU ONCE MENTIONED THAT YOUR WORKS, IN PARTICULAR NAQSHBANDI GREENACRE ENGAGEMENT IS NOT ABOUT BEING TOLERATED, BUT ABOUT UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE. WORKING ON THE GALLERY FLOOR AT THE MCA FOR MANY YEARS WHERE THIS WORK IS EXHIBITED, I'VE NOTICED IT'S EITHER A CASE OF POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT OR

OFTEN, THE OPPOSITE. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON GALLERY INTERVENTION IN ASSISTING VISITORS UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORK?

KS: I have a problem with the word tolerate – it's a quite a heavy and loaded word. It often means you don't agree with it but you're willing to put up with it. It's much better for people to say they understand something or are willing to listen than be willing to 'tolerate' something. If we are not in a position of understanding, we cannot absorb anything that is related to wisdom and knowledge, especially when it comes to the ancient ways depicted in the work.

Though we accept art as being subjective, we must keep in mind that we are subjective beings. For me, beyond this subjectivity - where we simply pick and choose what we like - is compassion and acceptance. These are layers that we as individuals gradually understand as we get older. You see people coming into the work, some interacting positively, some being challenged by it - fantastic. The important thing is the work is there, and that the community is being represented. My satisfaction as an artist is seeing that community being happy with what is being put out there about themselves and feeling comfortable with it. In this work particularly, beyond the ceremony and the construct, beyond the modern image of hate that is being portrayed in society - it's really all about the children coming in and out of the frame, making it an everyday occurrence.

JA: YOU'VE WORKED CLOSELY WITH MANY COMMUNITIES IN WESTERN SYDNEY, DO YOU FEEL LIKE THAT'S A DEFINING FACTOR IN BEING LABELLED A 'WESTERN SYDNEY ARTIST'? DO YOU EVEN AGREE WITH SUCH A LABEL?

KS: We are lucky at the moment because we have a whole generation of young artists coming from Western Sydney and choosing

to live, work and continue to engage with the area. But I think we need to go back and ask why has this happened. Western Sydney is one of Australia's most culturally diverse regions, it has the third biggest regional economy in Australia and many other determining factors such as isolation, economic and economic disadvantaged communities, newly arrived communities add to a rich history of cultural activism.

So if people choose to label you as a Western Sydney artist, personally I don't mind because I have a connection with Western Sydney. This is where I live, where I make work and this is content that informs my work. In terms of the global context of things, if I were to exhibit a work like Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement in Shanghai, Western Sydney becomes totally out of the equation. But I think sometimes you just can't believe the hype, let things be as they are. If you fall into sensationalism and 'topic of the day' labels, you will become a victim to that. Though there is a lot of concern for individuals and artists to take on labels as an identity, it is important to just continue with your practice and have a genuine connection to whatever surrounds you.







# ABBOTTSOLUTLY HOPELESS: POLITICAL PUBLIC PROVOCATION

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by Emma-Kate Wilson





I WOULD LOVE TO SAY MICHAEL AGZARIAN, THE DESIGNER BEHIND THE 'HOPELESS' ABBOTT POSTERS, AND I SAT DOWN FOR A COFFEE AND HAD A GOOD LONG CHAT ABOUT HIS PROTEST ART BUT WE DIDN'T. WE NOW LIVE IN AN ERA WHERE YOU HAVE TO GET STUFF DONE QUICKLY, IN BETWEEN EVERYTHING ELSE YOU NEED TO GET DONE. IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A POINT, HURRY WITH IT BECAUSE TOMORROW THERE WILL BE FIVE NEW BLOG POSTS ABOUT IT. BUT THIS IS PRECISELY WHY AGZARIAN'S CAMPAIGN HAS DONE SO WELL.

WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA HIS BILLBOARD MAY HAVE JUST BEEN A BIT OF CHIPPENDALE GOSSIP... MAYBE SYDNEY NEWSPAPERS MAY HAVE PICKED UP ON IT, IT IS AFTER ALL A CLEVER CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, THROUGH FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITTER AND THE BLOGOSPHERE HIS WORK IS KNOWN ACROSS THE NATION. POSTERS ARE POPPING UP IN VIRTUALLY EVERY STATE THE BILLBOARD HAS MOVED TO MELBOURNE WITH PLANS TO CONTINUE ROUND THE COUNTRY.

THE 'HASHTAG' HAS SPOKEN.

No one was more surprised by this national reaction more than the artist himself, by provoking a national dialogue, Agzarian's campaign gained momentum specifically due to it's engagement with the public, it's political content and it's ability to achieve a 'viral' status online.

By placing art outside of the gallery walls where the public is guaranteed to engage with the work, featuring a controversial figure such as Abbott, you prod the public to engage with provocative ideas. In this case creating a reaction bigger than the art itself.

Like many Australians, Agzarian had been increasingly frustrated with Tony Abbott's "ideologically driven policies" Agzarian aimed to create a piece of art to provoke the public. Already involved with political protest design, Agzarian's Masters degree centres around this reaction that protest art creates. One of his first examples of protest design started during John Howard's prime ministership. In rural conservative Australia Agzarian parodied the 'Make Poverty History' wrist-bands rebranding them: 'Make Howard History'. The positive reaction from this first campaign gave Agzarian confidence to pursue a new idea.

Agzarian appropriates Shepard Fairey's 'Hope' campaign for U.S president Barack Obama in which Fairey used classic American colours to instil the idea of hope to unite a nation which is now an iconic piece of political art, Agzarian has ironically subverted Fairey's idea of hope uniting a nation to Australia's 'hopeless' political.

Agzarian spent months working on an image of Abbott's face that reflected his feelings of hopeless and provoked frustration for the viewer. He achieved this by depicting a completely apathetic Abbott, with a blank vagrant gaze. Agzarian didn't want people to pity Abbott, it needed to be an image that got to the point and conveyed this message.

Other notorious images of Abbott such as the 'eating onion' photo or the 'kissing baby' photo have also achieved this 'viral' status however, this image Agzarian created aptly connects to a moment of Australian political history that encapsulates the broad public dissatisfaction that is evident in the reaction.

The location of the billboard itself, rather than being carefully analysed like the face of Abbott, was a happy accident. Originally it was intended to be positioned above the urban landscape of Ashfield but the space was too big and the image would have had to be resized to fit the billboard. Instead, a spot opened up next to a petrol station in Chippendale opposite The Lord Gladstone Hotel which had close affiliations to the art world and now hosts a gallery: Good Space. I believe this close association Chippendale has with the arts helped promote the campaign- and of course the increasing use of social media. The billboard was not only on a main road where people could see it but also at a place where people stop and look for something interesting to look at whilst filling up their car. Once the hashtag hit the World Wide Web it grew and grew, people wanted to donate money to



see this image spreading its message across the nation. The fact that Agzarian used his own money to create the billboard instead of funding through a company or political party makes this even more of people's project. Individuals then raised money to get more posters up and to bring the billboard to Melbourne. The Lord Gladstone actually hosted the auction for the first billboard and temporarily changed its name to The Lord Turnbull for the day; they continue to sell the posters there.

I asked Agzarian whether his grand plan was to provoke a national reaction but as he wonderfully put it: "We all have a choice to make [our] voices heard to the masses. I just wanted to put my message out there not just as a political protester but as a designer. You always want to create something that will provoke a reaction; something to be remembered." Agzarian told me the National Library has archived the poster into their political art database, and requests have been coming in to do talks at art school about creating successful political protest design. I think Agzarian may be on his way to this status of mass recognition most artists covet.

This really has become a people's piece of art, with images all over social media and people reworking

the poster to add their own personal frustration with Abbott.

The reaction to Agzarian's work is morphing in its online existence as 'memes' are changing the meaning and can be seen all across the internet. Take the example of Abbott tucking into a raw onion, this image went viral with people reworking the image and the video adding their own songs and creating their own stories about the bizarre incident. This is where we can quantify the impact of political art; when it offers a means for the public to critically evaluate politics, opening discourse of dissatisfaction.

He has successfully created an outlet for the general public to express political frustration; despite the viral 'meme' nature of the work it is important to recognize that this is art; and for art to be taken seriously it needs to have a message that is communicable to all walks of people.

Agzarian campaign is a success across Australia, however as many times as it is shared, liked, retweeted online you will not see the billboard in Canberra because of its political affiliations and he's still waiting on a response from Mr Abbott. Aren't we all...



# FRAMEWORK