

**persbericht**  
press release

**VAN  
ABBE  
MUSEUM**



## Richard Bell's first European solo exhibition opens at the Van Abbemuseum

*Leading Australian artist questions decolonial discourse in the art world*

Leading artist Richard Bell (1953) lives and works in Brisbane, Australia, and uses his art as a political vehicle. He challenges the Western and white construct of the art world in a provocative way. Growing out of a generation of Aboriginal activists, he uses his work to advocate for the emancipation and self-determination of all First Nations communities.

The exhibition *Relinking: Richard Bell*, on view at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven from 25 June to 4 September 2022, is Bell's first solo exhibition in Europe. Central to it are his four statement paintings and his two essays on the position of Aboriginal Art and artists in the art world. From 18 June onwards, Bell's work will also be shown at the extensive contemporary art biennial Documenta in Kassel, Germany.

### **Essay: Bell's Theorem**

In 2002, Bell published the critical essay *Bell's Theorem*, which addresses the colonial structures of the art world and argues for the right of self-determination of Aboriginal artists within it. This theoretical framework shapes the basis for a series of paintings, including works with the texts 'Aboriginal Art, It's a White Thing' and 'Western Art Does Not Exist'. Bell's paintings offer a sobering reflection on the realities of the inner-workings of the art world: white experts determine the criteria for what counts as 'Aboriginal Art'. Due to dominant Eurocentric views, Western Art is considered the norm for all global art and cultural production. Bell suggests that the label 'Western Art' has thus become superfluous, as all art is considered 'Western' by default.



### **Statement paintings**

Now, twenty years after his provocative essay, Bell has made two new paintings with the statements 'Contemporary Art, It's a White Thing' and 'White Lies Matter'. The first can be read as a broader critique of the Western dominance over all contemporary art production worldwide, including work by Indigenous artists. 'White Lies Matter' is an indictment against the expropriation of land from Aboriginal communities by the British. In order to legally justify and protect their actions, they erected legal constructions that Bell sees as a big lie. The colonial ideas about hierarchy and race on which their actions were based have bled through into the contemporary art world.

The exhibition *Relinking: Richard Bell* brings these four statement paintings together for the very first time. Additionally, the Van Abbemuseum is publishing a new essay by the artist, entitled *Bell's Theorem (Reductio ad Infinitum)*. It explores the development of his artistic vision and practice since the publication of *Bell's Theorem*.

### **Study area**

Bell's work prompts the viewer to think, discuss, and reflect, which the Van Abbemuseum wishes to facilitate with a purpose-built space in the exhibition. In the middle of Bell's paintings, a reading table has been set up. Here, an infographic visualizes the connections between colonialism and the art world, which the artist outlines in *Bell's Theorem*.

### **Delinking and Relinking**

Bell's solo exhibition is part of the series *Relinking*, which encourages visitors to revisit the current collection presentation *Delinking and Relinking* with a different, critical perspective. In the series *Relinking*, the museum presents (proposals for) new additions to the collection.

*This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.*



### **NOTE TO THE EDITOR**

For images and questions please contact:  
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### **Opening 25 June**

The opening of *Relinking: Richard Bell* takes place on Saturday, 25 June, 2022, between 2 - 5.30 p.m. The press is cordially invited to attend. As part of the afternoon programme, director Charles Esche and head of collections Steven ten Thije will go in conversation with Richard Bell. The artist will be present at the Van Abbemuseum from 24 to 26 June. Before that, he will be in Kassel from 1 June for Documenta, where the press may have the opportunity to speak with him by appointment. Interview requests can be sent to [pressoffice@vanabbemuseum.nl](mailto:pressoffice@vanabbemuseum.nl).

### **Images**

*Prelude to a Trial* - Richard Bell (2011)  
*Reductio Ad Infinitum* - Richard Bell (2022)

**Visiting address**  
Stratumseindijk 2, Eindhoven  
The Netherlands

**Opening hours**  
Tuesday to Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
The museum is closed on King's Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.



### **Entrance fees**

€13 Adults  
€6 Students, CJP holders  
Free Children up to 12 years old, Museum card, BGL VIP card & every Tuesday afternoon after 3 pm

**Book in advance online at [vanabbemuseum.nl/en/visit/online-tickets](http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/visit/online-tickets)**

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