

## ***Fiona Foley***

**Language: Badtjala**

Fiona Foley was born in Maryborough, Queensland, but the spiritual homeland of her Badtjala people is Thoorgine (Fraser Island). After studying print-making in London, Foley moved to live and study in the Aboriginal creative atmosphere of 1980s Sydney. While she was still studying, one of her prints was shown in the important Koori Art '84 exhibition at Artspace in Sydney. It was this show that introduced the contested 'Urban Aboriginal art' label (as against 'traditional' rural-based art). Now trained in sculpture, she was told on graduation that her interest in Aboriginal art was just a passing phase and, not to worry, she would grow out of it.

Mixing and exhibiting with a similarly aged and practising "urban" artists group, she collaborated with nine others to form Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in 1987 to overcome difficulties in being taken seriously by commercial galleries and public institutions. Following this time she moved back to Hervey Bay on the mainland opposite Fraser Island to prepare for a Native Title claim and to ground herself in her own country and cultural history.

Originally Foley worked in prints on paper, pastels on paper, then sculptural installations, and in the mid-1990s she began to insert photography into her installations as well as pose herself as a Badtjala identity. A photographic series created in Florida with Seminole Native Americans was exhibited in *The American Effect* at the Whitney Museum in New York (2003). Another series called HHH (Hedonistic Honkey Haters) was created at the High International Studio Curatorial Program (2004), a part of which appeared in the *Global Feminism* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum (2007). Foley now works consistently and intentionally as a public art practitioner, her most recent work being *Bible and Bullets* in Redfern Park, Sydney (2008).

This series concerns the personal: the single woman's eternal pursuit for affection and commitment. In the photographs seemingly conservative nerd-like white males pose in their homes with a trophy-like image of Fiona's fetish-shoed feet in the background. This fetish image is scaled up to similar size and mounted next to the male image. In one image she could be the trophy; in the other she is definitely the predator to the "bait-like" waiting males.

Foley now lives in and works out of Brisbane on an ongoing series of public artworks throughout the state, interstate and overseas.

(Author: Djon Mundine, OAM)