A Domain of Proliferated Doubt
Astrid Lorange
Fr(e/a)ud Complex
Holly Childs
Odwalla dumpster locket like a diary
myle Russell-Cook
The Imposter
Abdul Abdullah
Yoshua Okón
Megan Cope
Hany Armanious
Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Beth Dillon
Tully Arnot
Bindi Cole Chocka
Técha Noble
Sara Morawetz
Tyza Stewart
Acknowledgements
A Domain of Proliferated Doubt

By Peter H. Johnson & Denise Thwaites

Otherwise known as ‘imposter syndrome’, the fraud complex is a neurosis which plagues the individual with a deep sense of inauthenticity and inadequacy. Suffered by many, but by marginalised people disproportionately, this syndrome is symptomatic of an authoritarian dichotomy between authenticity and fraudulence permeating contemporary life. Operating within public discourses that at once promote the assuming of our ‘authentic selves’, while recognising the multifaceted instability and fluidity of personal identity, the conceptual opposition of authentic/fake inflicts and infects our thinking about perceptual, cultural, social and political fields of experience.

Echoing its namesake, The Fraud Complex is a dissonant assemblage of works that seeks to suspend established categories of selfhood and knowledge. An expanded exhibition that brings eleven contemporary artists into dialogue with writers, performers and thinkers, The Fraud Complex seeks to destabilise the binary of authentic/fake. It asks questions such as ‘what does it mean to be authentic?’, and ‘are we all just faking it in different ways?’

This exhibition opens at a time when political, theoretical and cultural approaches to authenticity and fraudulence intersect in complicated and sometimes discordant ways. This emerges from a complex history in which political movements founded in feminism, black power and gay pride, have over the past century fought for the rights of such groups to publicly assume their heritage or desires without fear of persecution or oppression. However, the latter half of the twentieth century has seen notions of essential, authentic self critiqued through poststructuralist and postmodern thought. Seminal texts such as Jacques Derrida’s Of Grammatology (1967), Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble (1990) and Homi Bhabha’s Location of Culture (1991) introduced critical frameworks through which to examine assumed gender and racial binaries, which are otherwise sustained through the power dynamics of linguistic, gendered and colonial hierarchies.

In the present day, neoliberal mantras resound, increasingly valorising the individual at the expense of collective identity. This is a world where self-help, mindfulness and feminist empowerment can all be bought at Lululemon for the right price, where Caitlyn Jenner’s admirable coming out as a trans woman sits uneasily with her strongly expressed conservative politics; where Rachel Dolezal makes a case for the existence of transracial identity. This sits in contrast to enduring bureaucratic processes of authentication in Australia, where access to specific rights or programs demand documentation of, for example, certified Aboriginal ethnicity or a legally recognised relationship. The criteria for these assessments are not only derived from the presumption of an authentic/fraudulent status, but seek to establish the definitive line where one becomes the other.

Given the pervasiveness of the authentic/fake binary that shapes our perceptions of ethnic, social, and gendered self, how might contemporary art’s field of impersonations, fakes and simulations perturb its assumed authority? As far back as Plato’s Republic (370 BCE), we see the arts described as third order reproductions of reality — as mimesis far detached from the realm of abstract truth. In contrast, more recent art theory and critique has focused on the importance of perceived authenticity when discussing or valuing works of art. Walter Benjamin’s seminal 1936 essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ dissociated modern art forms from the the innate, authentic ‘aura’ of earlier art objects, gesturing towards the critical role that institutions would play in determining the value of the work of art. Since then, modern and contemporary artists have interrogated, inverted and undermined the dichotomies of illusion/reality and direct/mediated experience in a multitude of ways.

While these ideas have informed The Fraud Complex, reflected by a number of artists making works from a position of marginalised identity — be that one of gendered, ethnic or cultural difference— the exhibition does not attempt to answer the breadth of questions provoked by engagement with identity politics. Rather, it proceeds from the premise that individual and collective identities are not closed systems, instead how they intersect, influence and internalise orthodoxies, assumptions and pedagogies across the social fabric. This expanded exhibition does not present a unified argument or narrative. It plunges the visitor into a domain of proliferated doubt. Through the suspension of certitudes, The Fraud Complex reminds us of the instability at the core of everyday judgments of authenticity and fraudulence.

According to a recent report on US teens, only 48 per cent identify as exclusively heterosexual, and 56 per cent know someone who uses gender neutral pronouns such as ‘they’ or ‘ze’. There has been a semiotic explosion in the ways in which people define their sexual and gender identities; Tumblr overflowing with users identifying beyond the LGBT, as asexual, genderfluid, demisexual, pansexual, demiromantic, pomosexual and so on. In June 2014 the cover of Time Magazine, featuring transgender actor and activist Laverne Cox, declared ‘The Transgender Tipping Point’. Long gone are the days when ‘men were men and women were women’. The expression of these new and varied identities is often understood in terms of the individual’s right to be their ‘true selves’, or to live ‘authentically’. Without diminishing the profound importance of people being able to live and love in the ways that make them most happy, these increasingly complex taxonomies of identity are often shaped by the same discourses of authenticity and fraudulence that inflect traditional notions of gender.

Artsheaven.com painting-9752 (Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue) 2016 oil painting reproduction on canvas, 92 x 92 cm
SHE ISN’T A PHONY BECAUSE SHE’S A REAL PHONY. SHE BELIEVES ALL THIS CRAP SHE BELIEVES. YOU CAN’T TALK HER OUT OF IT.

SHE’S A REAL PHONY. YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE SHE HONESTLY BELIEVES ALL THIS PHONY JUNK THAT SHE BELIEVES.
Two artworks in *The Fraud Complex* by Tyza Stewart and Têcha Noble (in collaboration with Casey Legler and Jordan Graham) complicate both the traditional binaries and increasingly specific divisions between gender and sexual identities. Stewart’s life-size self-portrait depicts the artist’s body as they pull their hair back into pigtails. Markers of sexed identity — chest and genitals — are erased, fading into the white voidspace of the background, suggesting both ambivalence and ambiguity. Noble’s video collaboration with Casey Legler, former French swimming champion, artist, and first woman to be contracted as a male Ford Model, depicts its subject shifting between various attitudes and poses derived from modelling. In this study of specific body language designed for commercial purpose, Legler seems to morph between feminine and masculine, the heightened performance foregrounding the artifice of gendered expression.

There is perhaps no more pernicious instance of the idea that ‘authentic’ identity is rooted in biology than in the historical treatment of Aboriginal people. The history of Aboriginality in postcolonial Australia is fraught with disagreements over what constitutes ‘authentic’ Aboriginal identity. From the 1930s until the late 1980s, blood quantum were the measure of whether or not someone was Aboriginal, the work raises uncomfortable questions about the co-option of identity and Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal people. Discover your Aboriginality (2018), is a provocative extension of these concerns. Inviting people to take a test and be eligible for a membership package bestowing Aboriginal identity, the work raises uncomfortable questions about the co-option of identity and Aboriginal culture by non-Aboriginal people. Discover your Aboriginality also challenges audiences to ‘put their money where their mouth is’ and to reflect critically on a moral economy when supporting activism and Aboriginal people.

Continuing this enquiry into authenticity as it relates to Aboriginal cultures, *The Fraud Complex* presents one in a series of Next Wave Indigenous Language Workshops led by Paul Paton, Executive Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. In this presentation, Paton addresses the issue of authenticity in the contemporary revitalisation of Indigenous languages. While introducing central principles and methodologies of language revival, Paton considers the use of historical records in this process, asking questions such as: ‘Is our (indigenous) language authentic if we use what white people have written down?’

Issues regarding cultural authenticity and fraudulence are not limited to the sphere of Australia’s relations with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ethnic stereotypes and expectations mediate our experience of cultures across the world. Problems surrounding the exoticism and fetishism of other cultures are addressed through Yoshua Okon’s work *The Indian Project: Rebuilding History* (2015). This single-channel video navigates the threshold between documentary and performance, as Okon records the presentations of a committee seeking to restore an 80-foot monument to the original Indigenous population of their town, Skowhegan, Maine, a site where a genocide of the Indigenous inhabitants took place. This uncomfortable work presents the impossibilities of adequately resurrecting or atoning for cultures lost, and the problematic dynamics of cultural appropriation that can arise as a consequence.

Issues of cultural stereotyping are further addressed through Abdul Abdullah’s work *WHY CAN’T I BE ANGRY* (2016) and his accompanying series of works in ceramic. A black velvet curtain, embroidered and tasseled with gold thread asks the viewer ‘Why can’t I be angry?’, while a collection of glazed ceramic trophies are adorned with the phrases ‘Most Kind’, ‘Most Strong’, ‘Most Fair’ and ‘Most Great’. The palette and form of the textile work recalls the monumental Kaaba of Mecca, while the trophies bear English translations of some of the 99 names of Allah, drawing associations with the spiritual identity shared by Muslim worshipers across the globe. This is contrasted by text that alludes to the expectation of self-censorship or social cohesion thrust upon young Australian Muslims. In this, the work highlights how the means and conditions which enable people to be their ‘authentic selves’ are enjoyed by a privileged few.

Through his work, Abdul-Rahman Abdullah initiates a dialogue with his brother Abdul Abdullah both as art-makers and members of a marginalised culture. *Monster Maker* (2016) is a life-sized bust of Abdul wearing a mask from sci-fi film series *Planet of the Apes*. The work directly references Abdul’s series *Siege* (2014), which explored the monstrous representations of Muslims in Western media. It also recalls Abdul’s later series *Monsters* (2014) around a similar theme, while making reference to ‘Rick Baker the Monster Maker’, a legendary figure in practical makeup and effects in Hollywood films, who crafted the mask worn by Abdul in his photographic series. Through this process of mimicry and doubling, Abdul-Rahman engages with fictitious cultural stereotypes, while also presenting the multifaceted quality of artistic influence implicit in the creation of the art object.

The intertextuality of *Monster Maker* exemplifies the widely applied technique of artistic appropriation which, having once suffered criticism as an indication of unoriginal creative thought, is now embraced by theorists and critics alike as a vital strategy in modern and contemporary art. However, to what extent can the disassociation of ideas of artistic value, originality and authorship be pushed? *The Fraud Complex* integrates a number of
Twentieth century critical theory is known for its interrogations into how, in addition to our socialised experience as persons categorised into gendered, ethnic and cultural or professional categories, our phenomenal experience of the world may be shaped by conceptual binaries. While it is easy to take for granted the ‘authenticity’ of our pre-reflective experience, we may question how we come to know ourselves as individuated subjects, our position within the greater world, and our apprehension of the ‘real’. To what extent might these apprehensions be informed by an authoritarian binary between authentic/fake?

Despite its seductive mirrored surface, Hany Armanious’ artwork Body Swap (2014) is a violent rejoinder to the assumptions we hold about our bodies in space. Shaped like an enormous guillotine blade, the work severs the viewer at the head and knees. If aligned properly, it appears that two viewers have swapped bodies with one another, collapsing the binary between self and the other.

Further to this, in an internet-aged everything age, the line between that which is ‘real’ and authentic, and that which is simulation, is increasingly indistinct. Tully Arnot’s work Waterfall (2016), presents a slippage between these two realms. A stock photo of a waterfall is printed on fabric and presented in an infinite mechanised loop; a gif made real; a glitched version of Romantic awe, instigating feelings of phenomenal doubt.

The fragile dynamics of self-perception and its relationship to our creative output are also explored in Astrid Lorange’s text, Feel Like a Fraud? (2018). Drawing on the Freudian interest in parapraxis, or the act of misreading or misspeaking, Lorange considers the legacy of imposter syndrome may be intimately tied to our socialised experience as persons and its relationship to our creative output, as well as phenomenal and artistic experience, may arise from a common and pervasive conceptual root.

The Fraud Complex contributes to the critical discourse surrounding notions of authenticity and fraudulence, by presenting a diverse group of creative practices that explore the manifold ways in which these concepts play out in relation to different spheres of existence. The works exhibited, along with curatorial interventions, commissioned writing, and discursive events, act as a pivot to question how senses of fraudulence relating to gender, ethnic and cultural identity, as well as phenomenal and artistic experience, may arise from a common and pervasive conceptual root.

I am always misreading. Freud for Fraud, for one. And what a misreading, too; for not only is the proper name Freud hysterically entangled with the term ‘complex’, but it is the thinker Freud who invested so much in the meaningfulness of misreading (or misspeaking, forgetting, substituting one word or gesture for another by accident). He calls this ‘parapraxis’, a word wide enough to include almost any occasion in which the unconscious reveals itself through error: calling the wrong name; getting out housekeys when in front of a doorbell; speaking unusually to express something very simple. Parapraxis, whatever form its assumes, is the unconscious made evident by errors in habit, memory or structure. So when I read Freud for Fraud, as in the case of this exhibition, I am reminded (and what an embarrassing thing to both think and remember, let alone reveal!) that my own unconscious is never free from the labour of grappling with Freud and his capacity to be at once present and absent (that is, thoroughly repressed), in my thought.

To take Freud’s enthusiasm for misreadings seriously — to take his own seriousness enthusiastically — I read my misreading as part of what’s interesting about fraudulence and its tendency to be felt as a complex. If for psychoanalysis a complex refers to an intimate, dynamic cluster of affects and tendencies that articulates itself as a kind of constant psychic state, then the fraud complex can be understood as that general but persistent feeling that one’s efforts and achievements — if not one’s entire existence — are a sham. This feeling is intensified when one has internalised a sense that one’s very capacity to achieve is limited or absent; it’s also intensified when the work that one does [make art, for example] appears to exist almost entirely apart from intention or desire, yet remains no less connected to one’s name.

Art has a habit of making everyone feel like a fraud: artists for the simple fact that the work they produce is always in excess of what they have intended or what they can claim; and anyone else who, in the humiliating context of interpretation, finds themselves in a paranoid state (’the meaning is hidden from me, and from me alone!’). For us today, the profundity or not of art presents itself as a secular version of Pascal’s wager: it is better to assume that art has a higher meaning than not, for to be revealed as fraudulent in the event of meaningfulness is worse than overdetermining the meaningless. But fear of fraudulence, in the context of art, relies on a wholly inadequate logic of meaning — in which it is assumed that meaningfulness is like a rare earth mineral: hidden, elemental, precious.

Listening to Freud, momentarily, as he appears in thought in the moment of parapraxis, fraudulence takes a new shape; not as a precondition for participation in the humiliatingly inscrutable world of art, but as an instructive dimension to the kind of thought that makes participation in the inscrutable not only possible, but constructive, desirable, perhaps even important.
Pretty patchy
Holly Hobbie
Gingham
Toys
Lacy doilies
¥XL; is that pronounced with a hard G or soft
Lamb's ear
Secateurs
Leather glove catching on a rose thorn, poison ivy
Dis– anything really
Distaste,
Dystopia,
Hell, Dinunicornucopia
Render a uni-horn, black and grey thread
Blend in some silver? metal rust corrode ruins fade
Dig a hole in the yard, keep em down there for a while
Fluffy foamy
Soil with the burial plot, worms
Juice & bone
Grow through this
Dead compost with butterfly wings
Make your own logo crest tutorial
Symbol, sigil
5 easy steps
Store it in a hope chest
Not yr heart
Oh the stories we'll try tentatively &some 2 believe
Larvae, set up with a punky penpal she knows I'm real
'String cheesy A-bomb ring to all cops are bastards,
Break a nail break it all' I proffer
Source image via Flickr: oogle snapped his leg lost
his dog off a grainer I attach
Didn't remove those crusty patchy pants for the surgery
10 weeks in crusty punk pants h-eaven/-ell
Someone yells 'ear jam 4 stretching up'
Compound fracture
She tags me in 'let's hop trains to Alaska'
You'll stop bleeding but the sunset never ends
The Imposter

By Myles Russell-Cook

It is polite to introduce yourself properly to your audience, your host, and others. In Aboriginal culture introductions and identification are essential—people want to know who they are meeting, where they come from and how they are, or might be related. With this in mind, I introduce myself as someone who identifies within a discourse of cultural hybridity; that is, I openly embrace all my heritages. My identity includes, indeed privileges my Aboriginality.

While this multiplicity of identity is in many ways a strength, it can also be a cause of distress. For many years, I have lived with a type of cultural imposter syndrome. As I have fair skin and am declarative about my Aboriginality, I’ve often felt the need to justify my cultural positionality. I clarify that I’ve grown up within contemporary urban Aboriginal communities and I have endeavoured to, wherever possible and practical, learn Aboriginal languages and customs. I both self-recognise my Aboriginality and am recognised by many Elders, including those who are the owners and custodians of the land on which I live: the Boonernong and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

My ancestors were born on Wotjobaluk land. We don’t know much about them other than their names as written in Government records: ‘Frances [native], and James [native].’ Although official documentation is scant and fragmented, I have been lucky enough to be raised in a wellspring of cultural knowledge passed down to me through my parents, my grandparents and my great-grandparents. While there have been many attempts in my family’s history to dissociate our name from our Aboriginality, I continue to be educated within my culture because I have some proud, intelligent and generous ancestors. However, I can not deny that in addition to being Aboriginal, I am also, at least in the view of the general and unknowing public—WHITE.

I am ever cognisant that like most contemporary people with Indigenous heritage, I must consciously construct my identity against the historical and traditional perception that Indigenous culture and Aboriginal people remain ancient and untouched, and that to be authentic we must appear a certain way. In a country built on the institutionalised dispossession and removal of Aboriginal people with the sole purpose of ‘breeding out the colour’, fair-skinned Aboriginal people are extremely common. So why is it that fair-skinned Aboriginal people are still so often confronted with internal struggles around their authenticity?

Since the early Frontier Wars, there has been an economic advantage for settler Australians to reduce the Aboriginal population because to put it bluntly: fewer blackfellas meant more land for the whitefellas. The late historian Patrick Wolfe called this, settlement based on ‘the logic of elimination’. In Australia, having non-Aboriginal ancestry made someone less of a threat to land acquisition. There can be no doubt that generations of settler Australians also descend from Aboriginal ancestors, unacknowledged and unremembered: half-castes gave way to quadroons to octoroons and then for many they were just ‘Australian’. Although Australia has officially rejected the notion of blood quantum and genetic arithmetic, fair-skinned Aboriginal people are frequently asked the intrusive question ‘what part Aboriginal are you?’

So one’s proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, or ‘blood’, remains the defining factor of Indigenous authenticity for the non-indigenous population.

This is a very different logic to that which has, for instance, shaped African-American colonial history, which was rooted in slavery. The system of slavery intended that the population of slaves must increase as this enhanced the colonial system’s economic capital, whereas in Australia any increase in the population of Aboriginal people was seen as economically counterproductive. So Aboriginal people, including myself, are still sorted into classifications whereby dark-skinned Aboriginal people are accepted as authentic, and fair-skinned Aboriginal people are seen as fraudulent. This only serves to further the rationale of diminishing the Aboriginal presence from mainstream view, and thus decreases the threat to the white man’s wealth.

A few members of the Aboriginal community internalise this logic and direct scorn and dismissal towards fair-skinned Aboriginal people, which is a type of destructive lateral violence: that is, the misdirection of violence toward one’s peers rather than one’s true adversaries. I have experienced this personally with community members who don’t know me or my family asking how recently I have identified. These types of questions are damaging and hurtful, and not unlike when Andrew Bolt (in one of his ill-famed articles) specifically named my family as having chosen to identify without a genuine claim. I do not identify as Aboriginal, I am Aboriginal. I have as much control over my Aboriginality as I do my skin colour.

Lateral violence from within Community is a symptom of suppression and, for the most part, it is common. This violence compounds the sense of being an imposter and ironically is allied with Bolt and other conservative denialists. While this may represent the widespread mainstream understanding that authentic Aboriginality is rooted in blood quantums and skin colour, our lived reality is very different.

After decades of struggling I choose now, consciously and out of respect, to reject this internalised feeling of being an imposter. My identity does not need to be authenticated beyond the community that recognises me, the family that claims me and sense of self that I maintain. In honour of my ancestors, who keep me rooted as a being in and of place, from now on when people ask me why I am white I will answer: Because some Aboriginal people are.
Abdul Abdullah

Most kind 2016
ceramic
17 x 12 x 7 cm

Most fair 2016
ceramic
17 x 12 x 7 cm

Most great 2016
ceramic
17 x 12 x 7 cm

Most strong 2016
ceramic
17 x 12 x 7 cm
Megan Cope

Discover your Aboriginality

2016
mixed media

Yoshua Okón

The Indian Project (still) 2015
single-channel video, colour, sound
duration: 15:26 minutes
Hany Armanious
Body Swap 2015
mirror, steel
150 × 200 × 55 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Photograph: Peter Morgan

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Monster Maker 2016
51 x 48 x 27 cm
painted wood
Image courtesy of the artist and This Is No Fantasy + Dianne Tanzer Gallery

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Beth Dillon
The Tallest Artist in Next Wave
(Preliminary Sketch) 2016
pen on paper
29.7 x 21 cm

Tully Arnot
Waterfall 2016
digital print on fabric, shutterstock image, metal, plastic, motor, electronics
350 x 129 x 15 cm
↑ Técha Noble, Casey Legler and Jordan Graham
That Self (still). 2015
single-channel video
duration: 5:56 mins

→ Bindi Cole Chocka
Not Really Aboriginal (series). 2008
digital prints on rag paper
Sara Morawetz

You Are Here. (From I:1)
(After Umberto) 2016
mirrored perspex,
mixed media installation
perspex: 50.8 x 50.8 cm

Tyza Stewart

Self Portrait 2015
oil on board
185 x 70 cm
Image courtesy of the artists and Heiser Gallery, Brisbane.
Photograph: Jon Linkins
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