

# Chronology

**1770**

Captain James Cook and *The Endeavour* sail into Botany Bay.

**1788**

Governor Arthur Phillip, marines and convicts land at Botany Bay.

**1823**

Government policy aims to convert Aboriginal peoples to Christianity, teaching them the habits of clothes, prayer, work and industry, thus making them Christian, 'civilised' and useful at the same time.

**1825**

The first mission is established at Wellington Valley, and gives all missions a bad name by kidnapping Aboriginal children.

**1849**

The village of Dubbo, on the western plains of New South Wales, is proclaimed. Surveyor John Oxley had noted the presence of Indigenous people in the area in 1818. Robert Delhunty established a pastoral station called 'Dubbo' between 1829 and 1833.

**1850**

All Aboriginal missions in New South Wales are closed by this date.

**1862**

Moree is gazetted. The town is named after a local pastoral run and a Kamilaroi term meaning either 'long waterhole', or 'rising sun'.

**1883**

The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board is established. The board's policy is that all Aboriginals should live on reserves. In 1883 there were 25 Aboriginal reserves totalling 1414 hectares. By 1900 there were 133 reserves. Most of the reserves would have been considered insufficient to support one white family, but they were expected to support whole Aboriginal communities.

**1883–1969**

Thousands of Aboriginal children, known as the Stolen Generations are taken from their parents and placed in white training institutions.

**1884**

**Alexander Riley (Alec 'Tracker' Riley), Michael Riley's paternal grandfather, is born at Nymagee. His parents were John (Jack) Riley and Mary Caligan.**

**1898**

**Talbragar Aboriginal Reserve is established on the outskirts of Dubbo.**

**1901**

The Commonwealth of Australia is inaugurated on 1 January 1901. In March, elections are held for the new Federal Parliament.

**1904**

**Maude Dunn, Michael Riley's maternal grandmother, is born.**

**1905**

The Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM) is established by Retta Dixon in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales.

**1908**

**Reuben (Bengalla) Wright, Michael's maternal grandfather, is born at Bengalla Station.**

**1911–1950**

**Tracker Riley works for the New South Wales Police Force, achieving the rank of Sergeant.**

**1915–1939**

Station managers and policemen are authorised to remove Aboriginal children from their parents to protect their moral or spiritual welfare.

**1920s–1930s**

Aboriginal people begin to organise themselves politically, demanding political rights and equality, and successfully seeking inquiries into the operations of the Aborigines Protection Board.

**1924**

**Alexander 'Tracker' Riley marries Ethel Taylor on 24 June at Wellington. Ethel Taylor was born in Dubbo to Robert Taylor (named after George Taylor, then Protector of Aborigines) and an unknown mother. Alexander and Ethel have eight children, including Michael's father, Allen.**

**1929**

The New York stock market crashes and the Great Depression begins. In Australia, Aboriginal people are most affected.

**Reuben (Bengalla) Wright and Maude Dunn marry at Boomi. They have 10 children, including Michael Riley's mother, Dorothy.**

*Delores* from the series *Portraits by a window* 1990 gelatin silver photograph  
Pat Corrigan

**1938**

26 January, Australia Day, is declared the inaugural Day of Mourning for Aboriginal People. In March, the Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights is formed in Sydney.

**1939**

**Michael Riley's maternal grandparents, Reuben (Bengalla) and Maude Wright, move from Boggabilla to Moree Aboriginal Reserve to manage a pre-natal hostel.**

The Aborigines Protection Board is abolished and the Aborigines Welfare Board is established in its place.

**1952**

**Bengalla and Maude Wright move to Dubbo where Bengalla works as a Police Tracker. Dorothy Wright meets Michael's father, Allen (Rocko) Riley.**

**1952–1972**

*Dawn* magazine is published by the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board. *Dawn* and *New Dawn* are published until 1972.

**1960s**

The modern land rights movement begins.

**1960**

**Michael Riley is born in Dubbo and spends the first years of his life on Talbragar Aboriginal Reserve.**

**1964**

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is established in Canberra.

**1965**

The Aboriginal Freedom Ride takes place throughout northern New South Wales. The participants achieve their objective of publicising discrimination by successfully picketing the Moree Baths to allow Aboriginal people into the facility.

**1967**

In a national referendum held in May, voters accept proposals that Aboriginal people be counted in the census and that a discriminatory clause in the Commonwealth Constitution, preventing the Federal Government from legislating for Aboriginal people, be deleted.

**1968**

On 1 December, the Arbitration Commission decision, made almost three years before – that Aboriginal people must be paid award wages if they work in industries covered by awards – takes effect. As a result, Aboriginal employees lose their jobs and families are forced to move onto settlements.

**1969**

The Aborigines Welfare Board is abolished.

**1970**

**Tracker Riley dies and the last family group at Talbragar moves into Dubbo.**

*Identity* magazine is published. It provides a public voice for Aboriginal writers. The National Black Theatre is formed – out of this grows the Aboriginal Islander Dance Company.

**1970s**

In Redfern, Sydney, the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service are established.

**1971**

The Commonwealth Government establishes a Ministry for Environment, Aborigines and the Arts.

**1972**

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is erected on the lawns of the Provisional Parliament House, Canberra, on 26 January.

The Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) is established, replacing the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. The Department plays an important role in the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry and eventually it inherits the company, Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd.

**1973**

Government funding supports the formation of more than 1000 Aboriginal-managed enterprises and services in social welfare, education and business.

The Aboriginal Arts Board is established by the Whitlam Government.

**1975**

On 20 February, the Senate unanimously passes a motion introduced by Senator Neville Bonner, Australia's first Aboriginal Member of Parliament:  
*that the Senate accepts the fact that the indigenous people of Australia, now known as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, were in possession of this entire nation prior to the 1788 First Fleet landing at Botany Bay, urges the Australian Government to admit prior ownership by the indigenous people, and introduce legislation to compensate the people now known as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for the dispossession of their land.*

**1976**

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* establishes the basis upon which Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory can claim rights to land based on traditional occupation.

**Michael Riley moves to Sydney to begin a carpentry apprenticeship.**

The Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) is formed.

1982

The Mabo Case – *Eddie Mabo and Others v. The State of Queensland* – begins. Eddie Mabo and four others take legal action to gain legal title to their family lands.

The Pascoe Report, *Improving focus and efficiency in the marketing of Aboriginal artefacts*, recommends that Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd concentrate only on commercial objectives and withdraw from its unprofitable social and cultural activities.

1983

In March, a new Labor Government takes office, with a policy of national land rights legislation and justice for Aboriginal Australians.

**Michael Riley undertakes a Koori photography course at the Tin Sheds, University of Sydney. He then works at the Sydney College of Fine Arts as a technician in the Photography Department.**

**Contemporary Aboriginal art, Bondi Pavilion, Sydney, includes Michael's work, alongside that of his cousin Yurry Craigie.**

1984

**Michael is one of the artists included in the Sydney exhibition, Koorie art '84.**

The Eora Arts Centre is established in Redfern, Sydney. The centre trains Aboriginal people in the visual and performing arts, music, dance, acting, mime, painting and photography.

Aboriginal Arts Australia Ltd (AAAL) is established by the Aboriginal Development Commission to develop national and international Aboriginal art markets.

*The Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage (Interim Protection) Act 1984* comes into force, protecting significant Aboriginal sites and objects.

1985

*Perspecta 1985 – A survey exhibition of contemporary Australian art* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales does not include any Aboriginal artists. Aboriginal people in Sydney begin producing their own feature films. *Fringedwellers*, produced by Bruce Beresford, and *Short changed*, with an original screenplay by the Aboriginal playwright Robert Merritt, are screened at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival.

At a special ceremony at Uluru (Ayers Rock), Northern Territory, the title deeds to Uluru are handed over to the traditional Anangu owners.

1986

**Michael Riley's work is included in NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander photographers – the first Indigenous photography show – at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney, and in Urban Koories, held at the Willoughby Art Workshop, Sydney.**

1987

First National Black Playwrights' Conference is held in Canberra at the Australian National University.

**Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative is formed by Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda L. Croft, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quail, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels. Boomalli au-go-go launches the co-operative in Chippendale, Sydney.**

At a meeting of the Aboriginal Arts Australia Ltd board, the Minister suggests the company take over the funding of community-based art centres. Art centres view this suggestion as a threat to their independence and 16 communities break away to form the Association of Northern and Central Australian Aboriginal Artists (ANCAAA).

1988

The Bicentenary of the European settlement of Australia, as well as the official 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of Aboriginal people in the Commonwealth of Australia (Aboriginal people were included in the census for the first time in 1967), are celebrated.

The Aboriginal National Theatre Trust (ANTT) is established in Sydney as a direct result of the First National Black Playwrights' Conference.

**Michael Riley's work is represented in *Art and Aboriginality*, exhibited at the Sydney Opera House before travelling to Portsmouth (England).**

**Michael directs *Dreamings: The art of Aboriginal Australia* which accompanies the exhibition to the Asia Societies, New York, USA and Boomalli: Five Koorie artists for Film Australia.**

1989

The New South Wales Taskforce on Aboriginal Heritage and Culture recommends that responsibility for Aboriginal heritage be removed from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and that a separate Aboriginal Heritage Commission be established.

A resolution on prior ownership and dispossession is passed at the opening of the new Parliament House in Canberra.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Committee (NATSIAC) replaces the Aboriginal Arts Board.

**The second National Black Playwrights' Conference is held at Macquarie University, Sydney. Michael Riley, employed at the Aboriginal Programs Unit at ABC Television, is hired to document the two-week workshop.**

1990

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is formed.

Michael's first solo exhibition, *Portraits by a window* is held at the Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, and his work is included in the exhibition *After 200 years: Photographs of Aboriginal and Islander Australia today*, held at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

1991

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is established under the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*.

Michael's solo exhibition, *A common place: Portraits of Moree Murries*, is held at Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London, and Hogarth Galleries, Sydney.

Michael Riley directs *Malangi: A day in the life of the eminent bark painter*, and *Poison*.

1992

The Mabo Case is settled in the High Court, declaring 'the land in the Murray Islands is not Crown land' and that 'the Meriam people are entitled as against the whole world to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the Murray Islands'. Eddie Mabo dies before the court gives judgement.

Michael's solo exhibition, *Sacrifice*, is held at the Hogarth Galleries, Sydney.

1993

The United Nations Year of Indigenous Peoples is celebrated.

The Federal Government passes the *Native Title Act 1993*.

With colleague Rachel Perkins, Michael forms Blackfella Films. His work is included in the major survey exhibition *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians*, exhibited at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark and Hayward Gallery, London.

Michael directs *Welcome to my Koori world*, and *Quest for country*, which is included in *Spirit to spirit*, an international Indigenous film festival.

1994

Michael's solo exhibition, *Fence sitting*, is held at the Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, and his work is included in *Urban focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art*, National Gallery of Australia.

1995

Michael's solo exhibition, *They call me niigarr*, is held at the Hogarth Galleries, Sydney. He is commissioned by the Museum of Sydney to write and direct *Eora*.

1996

The exhibitions *Guwany: Stories of Redfern Aboriginal community* (Museum of Sydney, with Gadigal Information Services, Sydney) and *Spirit + place* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney) include Michael's work. Michael directs *Blacktracker* for ABC Television.

1997

The report of the Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Parents, *Bringing them home*, is tabled in Federal Parliament.

The Australia Council for the Arts announces its first national Indigenous arts policy. An increase of \$500 000 is made in funding.

Michael directs *Tent boxers*, a documentary for ABC Television. He is commissioned to write and direct *Empire* for the SOCOG Festival of the Dreaming, Sydney.

1998

Michael's solo exhibitions, *flyblown* and *Empire*, are shown at Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne. Michael is included in the National Gallery of Australia's touring exhibition, *Re-take: Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander photography*.

1999

*Yarns from the Talbragar Reserve* is exhibited at Dubbo Regional Art Gallery, Dubbo, and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

*Oltre il mito (Beyond myth)*, including work by Michael Riley, is shown by Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in Venice as part of the *al latere* section of the 48th Venice Biennale. The film *I don't wanna be a bludger* is commissioned by the Art Gallery of New South Wales for *Living here now: Art and politics – Australian perspecta*.

2000

As part of the fifth annual National Reconciliation Week, *Corroboree 2000*, vast crowds walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. In the following months similar walks occur throughout the country.

*Beyond the pale: Contemporary Indigenous art, Adelaide biennial of Australian art* (Art Gallery of South Australia) includes *flyblown* and *Empire*. Michael participates in the *Biennale of contemporary art*, Festival of Pacific Arts, Noumea, New Caledonia. Michael's solo exhibition *cloud*, accompanied by *Empire*, is shown at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

2002

*Photographica Australis, Sala de Exposiciones del Canal de Isabel II*, Madrid, Spain, organised by the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, includes Michael's work. *cloud* and *Empire* is shown at Campbelltown City Bicentennial Gallery, Campbelltown, New South Wales. *cloud* is shown at Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne.

2002–3

As part of the Festival of Sydney, banners of *cloud* are hung over Circular Quay, Sydney.

2003

*cloud* and *Empire* are selected for inclusion in *Poetic justice: 8th international Istanbul biennial*, Turkey.

2004

A selection of Michael's work, including portraits of Sydney Aboriginal people, *A common place: Portraits of Moree Murries* and *cloud*, is exhibited at the Australian Museum.

Michael Riley dies, age 44, on 31 August.

2005

*cloud* is exhibited at the Museum of Sydney, Sydney. *cloud* and *Sacrifice* are exhibited at Stills Gallery, Paddington, Sydney.

(below) *Michael and Jacko French* from the series *A common place: Portraits of Moree Murries* 1991 gelatin silver photograph National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



2006

In June a selection of images from *cloud*, along with work by Paddy Bedford, John Mawurndjul, Ningura Napurrula, Lena Nyadbi, Judy Watson, Tommy Watson and Gulumbu Yunupingu, is permanently installed as part of the Australian Indigenous Art Commission at the new Musée du quai Branly, Paris.

*Michael Riley: sights unseen* opens at the National Gallery of Australia on 14 July.

#### Notes

Information for this chronology has been drawn from the following sources. In some instances, short passages of text have been directly quoted.

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