



A new exhibition features works including Welcome Sign by artist Michael Cook, below.

Cook's tour

Groundbreaking artist Michael Cook's latest works feature a journey to Central Australia

Story PHIL BROWN

It's a while since Michael Cook has shot a wedding. A long while and the Sunshine Coast-based photographer and artist intends to keep it that way. Weddings and later fashion were his bread and butter for years until he moved into art photography in 2009.

Since then he has established himself nationally and internationally as one of the most interesting artists working today.

His unique perspective on Australia, informed by his search for his Aboriginal identity (he was adopted as a child) has resulted in some of the most amazing series of art photos including his groundbreaking series of photographic portraits of Australian prime ministers with their visages tweaked and overlaid with Indigenous features. He has given us downtown Brisbane with roles reversed – the population mainly Indigenous – he has even staged a photographic alien invasion of London with Aboriginal fembots and giant marauding Australian fauna.

Cook exhibited for many years with Andrew Baker Art Dealer in Bowen Hills but recently, after Baker's retirement, he moved to the prestigious Jan Murphy Gallery in Fortitude Valley. Cook's latest exhibition, *Fake*, opens there on Tuesday and will also be on at The Calile Hotel nearby from Thursday.

Cook, 54, has come a long way since his commercial photography days. Doing that gave him the skills to shoot his arty photos and he acknowledges that. "I did a lot of wedding photography but I'm glad those days are over," Cook says. "I had one last wedding booked but I never got to do it."

He blew off the nuptials, in the US, of comedian and movie star Martin Lawrence to concentrate on his burgeoning art career, which was announced to the world when he won the 2012 Deadly Award for Visual Artist of the Year. Just over a decade later his reputation is growing and he has major exhibitions in Europe later this year.

His latest series, *Fake*, explores the travels to Central Australia of an

Indigenous couple who have a white child. The couple dress in luxury clothing and there's a priceless shot of them standing, clad in their designer finery, in front of a sign saying Welcome to Fabulous Alice Springs with the arid landscape behind them. That's an even more loaded image now. "During Covid we couldn't have the whole team on location," Cook explains. "So I went out several times to shoot all the backgrounds. We shot the people in a studio in Sydney at different times."

This latest series has a strong narrative thread, following the adventures of the Louis Vuitton luggage-bearing trio, who end up shedding their clobber and dancing to clapsticks in the Red Centre. Sounds a bit wacky? Wacky doesn't even begin to describe how unique Michael Cook's vision is. What would be the best word? Go along, see for yourself and you tell me.

Michael Cook - Fake, March 28 to April 22, Jan Murphy Gallery; March 30 to April 10, level 1, The Calile Hotel
janmurphygallery.com.au

