

Dylan Mooney, *As We Stand: Blak, Queer & Here*

## ***Heroes***

By Zali Matthews

The myth of the superhero features heavily in contemporary media. Crowds flock to cinemas and huddle over comic books to watch muscular, latex-clad figures save the vulnerable (and often oblivious) masses from world destruction. Powerful and paternalistic, these protagonists are overwhelmingly Caucasian and heterosexual.

This lack of diversity reflects the issues Indigenous and queer communities face in achieving fair representation within the media, having historically been omitted from narratives or included as stereotyped caricatures, yet rarely depicted as heroes. If the heroes chosen by a society reflect its values and aspirations, what do our heroes say about us, and what can we do to change the conversation?

Dylan Mooney asks these questions in his exhibition *As We Stand: Blak, Queer & Here*, shown at Outer Space ARI as part of the six-part exhibition series *As We Stand*. Mooney is a proud Yuwi, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander man from Mackay in Northern Queensland who works across painting, printmaking, digital illustrations and drawing. Positively representing people from Indigenous and queer communities forms a core element of his practice.

On show are two illustrations titled *Growing Together* and *Pride + Culture*, which form part of his digital portrait series 'Queer, Blak & Here' (2020-21). Drawn with sweeping lines and intense swaths of colour, Mooney's heroes are born, live, and fall in love. Captured mid-embrace, they gaze towards the viewer with a sense of defiance, poise and pride. Behind them, enormous yellow suns cast loose haloes around their heads, as if seeking to further deify these already venerable figures. These suns flood the compositions with warmth, manifesting clearly in the glowing lines which streak across the sky, and in locks of hair dyed in brilliant hues of red and gold.

These youthful heroes are dressed in casual clothes, with their collars, hems and chests often adorned with the signature rainbow design of the LGBTQI+ pride flag. On their limbs, outlines of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are scrawled amongst positive affirmations. These proclamations of self-love explore themes of self-exploration and desire, while championing the capacity for strength and healing in the face of hardship and discrimination.

In a world where queer and Indigenous people struggle to see themselves represented fairly in the media and in positions of power, Mooney's works place them under the spotlight. These works are important not only for their tender depictions of queer love among people of colour, but also for their centring and celebration of these historically marginalised perspectives.

Mooney rejects conventional understandings of the indestructible and paternalistic hero, instead creating heroes that are beautiful in their vulnerability and proud self-expression. A hero, he declares, has the courage to be themselves – something we all could aspire to.