

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Can the Prime Minister say he's sorry?



Sandra Saunders, *Can the Prime Minister say he's sorry?*, 2001, synthetic polymer paint with artist's postcards, wood and composition board. Gift of Emeritus Professor JVS Megaw. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 3469.

This is an audio description of an artwork by Sandra Saunders, titled "*Can the Prime Minister say he's sorry?*".

Sandra Saunders is a Ngarrindjeri and Boandik artist, born in 1947.

Made in 2001, "*Can the Prime Minister say he's sorry?*" is a mixed-media work measuring 65 centimetres high by 43 centimetres wide. It combines paint, collage and raised relief elements on a rectangular composition board.

The artwork is vertically oriented. It is dominated by strong blocks of black and bright red, colours that immediately evoke the Aboriginal flag. Across its surface, small dots of blue, red, yellow and green paint create a textured background. Repeated throughout

this composition, the word “sorry” is also applied in small white dots. Some are clearly visible, while others fade into the background.

Mounted onto its surface are three narrow wooden panels, fixed at the top, middle and bottom of the work. Each panel contains the same collaged postcard image of former Australian Prime Minister John Howard. He is depicted as a paper-mache caricature, and recognisable by his dark-framed glasses and heavy eyebrows.

In each image, Howard appears behind two vertical bars, suggesting imprisonment or entrapment. His expression is subdued and vacant. Beneath each portrait appears the printed statement: “HOW DO I GET OUT OF THIS MESS.”.

Although the same image is repeated three times, each panel is treated differently. The upper portrait sits within a black circular opening, like a porthole or spotlight. The middle portrait is surrounded by thick orange paint applied in heavy ridges, while the lower portrait is encircled by similarly textured red paint. These raised surfaces draw attention to the repeated image and create a tactile quality.

Created during John Howard’s successful re-election campaign in 2001, the work responds to debates surrounding Indigenous rights, reconciliation and the Australian Government’s refusal to issue a formal apology to the Stolen Generations.

Through repetition, satire and symbolic colour, Saunders presents a pointed commentary on political responsibility and the ongoing deferral of justice. The repeated word “sorry” becomes both a demand and an absence. It highlights the significance of an apology that had not yet been made.