

Tony Albert's 'confronting' tribute to Indigenous Diggers unveiled in Sydney's Hyde Park

March 31, 2015

☆ Read later



A dramatic sculpture paying tribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women has been unveiled in Hyde Park. *Photo: Peter Rae*

"What are they for?" an office worker could be heard asking as he power-walked through Hyde Park on Tuesday morning.

It is the question that the seven-metre-tall, 1.5-tonne bullets and shell casings permanently installed in the country's oldest park are bound to keep raising.

And that is a wonderful thing, says artist Tony Albert, because the stories that inspired the creation of *Yininmadyemi – Thou didst let fall* have been untold for too long.

The dramatic new sculpture, opposite the Anzac Memorial, is a tribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women.

In particular, it recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island diggers who risked their lives on the battlefield although they were not classed as citizens, were denied the vote and could not access the same benefits as returning white soldiers.

"These are stories that are not written into history; they aren't represented in our institutions," Albert, a Sydney-based Indigenous artist, said.

"It's long overdue. It's confronting. It might ruffle a few feathers but they are feathers that need to be ruffled."

Behind the striking public artwork is a very personal story.

Albert's grandfather, Eddie Albert, fought for Australia in World War II and narrowly escaped execution when he and six fellow soldiers were captured by Italian troops.

The four marble and steel bullets represent Eddie and the three soldiers who survived the encounter; the shells represent the three who were shot dead.

Albert said he hoped the sculpture would become a place where the family of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island veterans could contemplate and honour their contributions.

"It's great to see it up and completed. It's at the stage now where it's beyond me, it's serving its purpose now."

Commissioned by the City of Sydney, the artwork took two years to make and cost \$500,000.

It was unveiled at a moving public ceremony on Tuesday, ahead of Anzac centenary commemorations in April.

One of those who attended the ceremony was Auntie Jenny Beale, whose father fought in World War II and whose uncle was killed after he was taken as a prisoner of war.

"It's taken such time to get here. My dad would have been 104 this year and here I am finally standing at a monument, finally to recognise what he contributed to this country," Ms Beale said.

NSW Governor David Hurley, the former chief of the defence force, said in the past four years, significant steps had been made to acknowledge and include "our Indigenous brothers and sisters" in all military ceremonies.

"This public artwork restores Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heroes to their rightful place in the canon of Australian war history from which they have vanished," he said.



Artist Tony Albert expects that the Hyde Park artwork may "ruffle some feathers". *Photo: Peter Rae*



Tony Albert's artwork was inspired by his grandfather, Private Eddie Albert, who served in World War II.