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*Further understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present through undertaking and publishing research, and providing access to print and audiovisual collections*

## Nothing comical about new display

14 February 2011

**A fascinating collection of Indigenous themed comics, cartoons and posters are the feature of a new display at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra.**

The works are drawn from Institute's vast archive of material relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and include published comics and cartoons – some as early as the 1940s – that have been educational, promotional and also controversial.

The catalyst for the exhibition was the purchase of a 1985 Walpiri inspired version – in Walpiri – of a Phantom comic.

According to the Institute's Library Collections Officer, Ms Alana Garwood-Houng, the collection ranges from works produced in the 1940s to more recent works by Canberra Indigenous youth and artists in 2005.

“The content certainly emphasises the value of such material to highlight specific messages on Health, Education, Employment or just create awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.”

Among the featured items is a poster of a black super hero - *Kaptn Koori* – the work of famed Indigenous artist Lin Onus who created it in 1985 for his four year old son Tiriki who even then was into Superman and Batman.

“Lin Onus realised all those years ago the major role comics or comic book heroes played in creating awareness of Koori issues,” Ms Garwood-Houng said.

The Collection also includes the comics of well known but controversial Australian artist Eric Jolliffe. Jolliffe was author of the contentious 1940s comic series *Wichettys Tribe*. A full set of his *Wichettys Tribe* cartoons were donated to AIATSIS by retired lawyer John Austen Brown.

Apart from Jolliffe's work, other comics, cartoons and posters featured include;

- An ACT creation – “Young black and deadly” – the work of Canberra Indigenous youth and artists – from 2005;
- A poster of a black super hero, *Kaptn Koori* – by famed Indigenous artist Lin Onus

- A range of *Streetwize* comics from the 1990's;
- The cartoons of famed Australian artist Eric Jolliffe from the 1940's;
- An Australian versions of *The Phantom* ;
- Various overseas comics of black comic characters – such as “*The Batman Aborigine!*” by DC comics of New York and
- Contemporary Indigenous comics by Inception Strategies, which include *Condoman* which can now be seen by young people free of charge on the internet.

“It gave me immense personal satisfaction to research material for this exhibition,” said Ms Garwood-Houng added.

AIATSIS Principal Russell Taylor noted the stressed the Institute's proud role in staging such exhibitions as they highlighted the changing portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture over the last 50 years.

“The Institute holds over a million items in its archive - items that we keep on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

“Despite our limited exhibition space – we are keen to display more and more of our unique collection not only to our people but to all Australians,” he concluded.