



Education kit

MENAGERIE

22 December 2012 to 2 March 2014

Teacher's note

Menagerie features outstanding contemporary and traditional works of art by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia. The exhibition offers students and teachers an opportunity to engage with art forms depicting a wide variety of animals.

This education kit focuses on the sculptural works by contemporary artists, which form the majority of the exhibition. These works were made using a broad range of materials and techniques, informed by traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic practices. The sourcing and preparation of materials is an important aspect of the sculptures in *Menagerie*.

Teachers will have an opportunity to extend their investigations and engagement into curriculum areas such as Creative Arts, Science and Technology and Human Society and its Environment (HSIE).

This education kit includes:

- Images of some of the artists and their objects
- Background information on a number of the artists
- Contextual information on a variety of themes including animals, artistic processes and techniques, cultural practices and quotes directly from the artists
- Workbook focusing on looking, discovering and making

In this education kit, the artist's quotes and background information are sourced from an exhibition catalogue created for a previous exhibition featuring these sculptural works, courtesy of the artists and their agents or art centre representatives.

Front Cover: Danie Mellor, *Red, White and Blue*, 2008 © Australian Museum



Artists featured in this education kit

Penny Milingu Wanapuyngu
Garth Lena
Lena Yarinkura
Ken Thaiday Senior
Rahel Kngwarria Ungwanaka
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

Treahna Hamm
Yvonne Koolmatrie
Jean Burke
Niningka Lewis
Badger Bates
Laurie Nilsen

Johnny Young
Danie Mellor
Dennis Nona
Frewa Bardaluna
Vicki West

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Education kit developed by Object's Learning Coordinator, Annette Mauer and Australian Museum staff

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Photographers Australian Museum (Stuart Humphrey and Carl Bento); other images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons where not listed



Djirringama (Echidna), 2008

Penny Milingu Wanapuyngu

Pandanus fibre, paperbark, wood and acrylic paint
23 x 25 x 55cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the Artist

Penny Milingu Wanapuyngu is an artist who has made a name for herself by creating original fibre based works, which incorporate the practice of weaving techniques passed down through her family. She emphasises the importance of using bush colours and dyes in her work. The echidna represents an animal that lives in Wanapuyngu's country.

Family and social gatherings are an important part of the process of making fibre objects in Arnhem Land. Through these gatherings, knowledge about harvesting, preparation of specific plant materials and craft skills continue to be passed on and adapted from one generation to the next.

Penny says...

My sister Lucy teach me how to dye the colour the back (from) the green leaf... I make yellow dyeing and we put the ash white to make the red... start (to) make crocodile, I start the head and the two arms and then the tail. My mother and grandmother used to learn us, from outstation they come to Gupuwiyak (Lake Evella).



Bark from a paperbark tree

Penny's Process

Penny uses a variety of processes and techniques to make her sculptures. She requires knowledge of plant preparation and skills in weaving. Penny twines fibre around paperbark to form the animal then paints it with ochres or sometimes acrylic paint. She makes some of her animal sculptures with wooden legs or beaks.



Echidna, 2006

Garth Lena

Mango, wood and porcelain

38 x 47 x 50cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Garth Lena's ancestry is Aboriginal and South Sea Islander. He is a member of the Bundjalung people and lives in Fingal Head, northern NSW. Garth uses mango wood and porcelain to explore the fragility of animals within urban and rural environments.

Garth draws on his immediate surroundings to find shapes and materials for his work.

Garth says...

▶ *Fingal Head is called Pooningbah in my language and means 'place of many echidnas'. The rocks on Pooningbah Headland are shaped like an echidna and the echidna is the totem of this land. This work is about the land and the formations of the land which make our stories and how we know where we are by looking at those formations.* ▶



Short-beaked Echidna

The Short-beaked Echidna is easily recognised by its sharp spines, short legs and long snout. Using its pointed snout and sharp claws, the Short-beaked Echidna breaks into ant and termite nests and catches its prey by flicking its long sticky tongue in and out. The Short-beaked Echidna is an egg-laying mammal or monotreme and lays one egg at a time. Once the young are born they live in the mother's pouch and suckle for 2 or 3 months.

Porcelain

Porcelain is a type of ceramic or clay material which after firing is generally white, extremely hard and translucent. The word porcelain comes from the Italian word *porcellena* or cowrie shell because of the shell's hard and shiny surface.



Top: Short-beaked Echidna in the wild
Echidna, detail, 2006
Photo © Australian Museum

Camp Dogs, group of five, 2008

Lena Yarinkura

Pandanus fibre, wood and ochre

Dimensions variable, largest 104cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: Courtesy of Lena Yarinkura and Maningrida Arts and Craft

Lena Yarinkura is an innovative artist challenging ideas about weaving and using these techniques to create life-sized objects that represent ancestral stories and to also make large woven animal sculptures.

Lena makes the bodies from pandanus and grass twined in the same technique used by basket weavers. She stuffs the twined pandanus with paperbark and paints the outside with ochre. Bush turkey and black cockatoo feathers sometimes provide the fur. Lena has adapted a traditional technique to explore new ways of creating sculpture that depicts animals and stories. The camp dogs depict the dogs that live with her and her family. Each dog has been crafted to have a personality – including a sick, an angry and even a cheeky dog!

Lena says...

...The men used to go hunting with a spear and the women with a dog. If the men didn't catch a kangaroo, the women would catch a goanna. If neither caught anything, then they would go fishing.

Camp Dogs, detail and lone dog, 2008
Photos © Australian Museum



Ochre pit in Central Australia

Ochres

Ochres are natural earth pigments containing iron oxides. Ochres are made by grinding rock to a fine powder and mixing it with a fluid to bind it together. The ochre pit above shows some of the range of colours available.



Hammerhead Shark Headdress, 2009

Ken Thaiday Snr

Mixed media

100 x 85 x 64cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: © Creative Cowboy

Ken Thaiday Snr was born in the Torres Strait Islands. As a child he would sit and watch his parents and the elders teaching and performing dances, songs and ceremonies of his people, the Meriam Mer. Ken has led many dance groups in Cairns with family and friends and regularly performs with his own headdresses.

The creation of the 'dance machine' is based on traditional headdresses, masks and other tools used for specific ceremonial purposes. When these headdresses are removed from their original role as tools of performance, they exist as amazing sculptures.

The *Hammerhead Shark* that features in the *Menagerie* exhibition is constructed from plywood, string, plastic, paint and feathers. The headdress although displayed as a motionless object, is incredibly mobile. By pulling the strings attached to the dance machine, the performer is able to animate the headdress and it becomes an extension of the dancer. Today many of his works reach up to 3 metres in height and length!

The shark is an important animal to Ken, as it is also a figure of justice.

Ken says...

I use mainly the hammerhead shark in my work because it has a more decorative body and unusual shape ... The shark is one of my family totems and this originated from ancestors in New Caledonia ... I usually refer to the shark icon as a symbol of law and order, boss of the saltwater.

Hammerhead Shark

Hammerhead sharks are predators that use their oddly-shaped heads to improve their ability to find prey. Their wide-set eyes give them a better visual range than most other sharks and can therefore easily scan the ocean for food.





Sgraffito Owl, 2008

Rahel Kngwarria Ungwanaka

Terracotta, white engobe, with incised decoration

33 x 16 x 20cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: Photo by Grant Beed, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

Rahel Kngwarria Ungwanaka's interest in making sculpture was influenced by her childhood experiences in and around Ntaria (Hermannsburg) drawing local animals, flowers and people to make colourful designs and to model in plasticine.

Rahel made this hand-coiled terracotta pot and decorated it with a white slip or watered down clay. Pattern and texture are created using the sgraffito technique of incising or scratching through the white slip with a sharp tool to reveal the red-brown clay underneath.

The colours featured in *Sgraffito Owl* are very similar to the red earth that can be seen in many of the watercolour works from Ntaria's most famous artist Albert Namatjira.

Rahel says...

▀ *We call them Kurrkurrka, night owl. They fly around at night looking for food. They sit high up in the trees and look around for small animals they can grab. They children are scared when they hear the sound of the night owl. Their mother and father tell them to stay close to the camp.* ▸



Sgraffito Owl, detail 2008
Photo © Australian Museum

Australia's night hunter

The boobook owl is a nocturnal hunter. Its diet comprises small mammals, birds and invertebrates. Like all owls, it is superbly adapted for night-time hunting. The boobook is also known as the mopoke, due to its distinctive call which sounds like 'mo-poke'.

Southern Boobook Owl





Jurrukukuni (Owl), group of three, 2008

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

Ironwood and ochre

Left to right: 55 x 13 x 13cm, 55 x 15 x 15cm and 63 x 16 x 16cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri is a Tiwi man born on Melville Island. Puruntatameri is a master carver who is descended from a long line of traditional carvers of *pukumani* (Tuitini) poles. Birds feature regularly throughout Patrick's work, because he believes that they maintain the ability to carry messages from the spiritual world.

Ironwood is perfect for display and difficult for termites to munch through. However, as it is very hard, it can be quite difficult to carve in a detailed way. Many ironwood objects are intricately painted instead, often using a *pwata* (a comb-like painting tool used to paint even lines of dots). Patrick carves the basic form with a chainsaw and finalises his work with hand held tools before painting begins.

Patrick Freddy says...

When you see an owl at night ... they don't normally look straight, they've got to look away (sideways). That's why I like doing owls like that, looking away ... (The Owl is) my totem and that's my dance, like traditional way we dance ... different people here, they've got their different totems, like some have got buffalo, some have got crocodile. (The Owl) that's from my father ... When (the people here at Jilamara) hear the chainsaw going, they know I'm making an owl straight away. They can just tell ... "Oh he's going to make another owl, and tomorrow he's going to make another owl." And people ask me, "Why do you like making owls?" and I say, "Well, that's my totem".

Totem

Aboriginal communities are divided in complex ways into social groups that include animals and plants that guide people in all aspects of their life. The animal or plant gives each group or tribe an identity and is referred to as a totem. The group has a responsibility to care for the well being and continued survival of their totem.



Top: Barn Owl
Jurrukukuni (Owl), group of three, detail 2008
Photo © Australian Museum



Pondi (Murray River Cod), 2009

Yvonne Koolmatrie

Sedge grass and river rushes

18 x 69 x 121cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Yvonne Koolmatrie is a Ngarrindjeri artist from the Murray River centred around the Coorong.

Koolmatrie now passes on her knowledge to the next generation of weavers through workshops to ensure the knowledge of Ngarrindjeri basketry continues.

In her work, Yvonne celebrates country. She harvests and prepares the sedge grass and to this day she closely protects the location of her rare materials. She even places little seeds in her works to preserve the plant. Yvonne has produced more traditional items such as yabby and eel traps, as well as ground-breaking contemporary works such as a hot air balloon.

Yvonne says...

▣ *The Murray Cod it is a beautiful big fish. It is one of the creators of the creeks and the rivers. My belief is that they pull too many Murray Cod out of the river. That is why (the river) is drying up. They are taking the life out of the river.* ▣

The Murray Cod

The Murray Cod is a special fish to the people of the Murray River groups, they often refer to it as the 'Old Man' because it can live as long as a human and weigh up to 120 kilograms. The fish is a symbol of the Murray River. However, over-fishing, feral species and polluted waterways have taken a toll on the 'Old Man' and it is now on the endangered species list.

Pondi, detail, 2009.
Photo © Australian Museum

The great Ngarrindjeri: ancestral hero

... the great Ngarrindjeri ancestral hero Ngurunderi, chased Pondi, the Murray Cod, in an epic encounter. As Pondi fled the spears of Ngurunderi, the action of his mighty tail gouged great winds and bends in a stream forming the Murray River. Ngurunderi, finally spearing Pondi in Lake Alexandra, divided up the fish to create new species, naming them as he threw the flesh into the water, calling 'you be boney bream, you be cat fish, you be perch'.

[Jonathan Jones]



Looking Forward, Looking Back, 2009

Treahna Hamm

Mixed media

34 x 13 x 84cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: Courtesy of Terry Melvin

Treahna Hamm attended a workshop taught by fellow weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie and learnt many important weaving techniques, including the coiled bundled technique. Hamm's fish has a stomach filled with various bits of rubbish, collected along the riverways. You might notice a few golf balls, lying in the fish's belly. This is a reference to an actual fish that once swallowed some golf balls, mistaking them for bird's eggs. Hamm has used recycled nylon rather than natural fibres like sedge.



The Murray River

The Murray River was the major pathway that linked the Aboriginal people across the southeast of the continent and provided the resources for their survival; including the Murray Cod, freshwater crayfish and eels that were once captured with traps made from the local sedges. Today the Murray River, Dhungala, continues to be important in the everyday lives and imaginations of the Indigenous people.

(Margie West)



Top: The banks of the Murray River
Looking Forward, Looking Back, detail 2009
Photo © Australian Museum

Looking Forward, Looking Back

Murray Cod
Old Man of the River
Living in the Deep Shadows
Of 400 year old Gums

In the 70s
To see the River in Flood
Was to truly appreciate
The life, beauty and strength
That water brings
To the life of Dhungala
(The Murray River)

Now seems to be a
long time ago
Between Floods
When the Old Man was secure
To swim and hide in peace

Wire, rope, plastic bags
Tin cans, broken glass
Always found in his water
mia mia

The River constantly changes
It is part of life to many
Someday it might not be here
BUT
Optimism still prevails
That the River will regain
its health.

(Treahna Hamm)



Ngirntaka Ngunytju Palunyalu and Tjitji (mother and baby goannas), 2008

Jean Burke

Minarri grass, raffia

Mother 38 x 56 x 144cm, Baby 17 x 28 x 84cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Jean Burke, who died in 2012, closely observed the animals, their movements and gestures while living and hunting across the desert regions. Her first sculptures were carved from wood, however after joining the Tjanpi Weaving Project she became an accomplished weaver and fibre sculptor. She then constructed her sculptures out of *minarri* (greybeard grass), yarn and raffia. Over the years her work became more innovative, depicting desert animals that are full of life and personality.

Goannas are highly prized for their delicious fatty meat. Hunting for goannas is very difficult and time consuming, a lot of people are needed to help track and dig them from their burrows. Jean Burke was known in the community as good person to have in your hunting party. The posture and physique of Burke's goannas are very telling. The protective mother nurtures her young, whilst the dominant strong male goanna asserts his territory.

Jean says...

I used to listen and think, 'how do I make these animals?' Then I thought, 'Gee, I better make something different for a change,' so I did. Now I want to make small animals, because I can see there are enough baskets. I love doing animals.

Bush Tucker

In the Central Desert of Australia, Aboriginal people have the seasonal knowledge of where to locate food essential for survival. This knowledge is passed on from one generation to another. In these images juicy *maku* (witchetty grubs) are collected for cooking and *tjala* (honey ants) are gathered for their nutritious honey.





Tinka (Sand Goanna), 2007

Niningka Lewis

River red gum

47 x 5 x 5, 57 x 7.5 x 7.5 and 35.5 x 5 x 5cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: © Tjanpi Desert Weavers

Niningka Lewis is well known as an innovative sculptor and weaver. A major component of her creative process is observation. If you look closely at her works, you can see that Lewis is very familiar with the goanna's behaviour.

The sand goannas live in the sandhills and plains country, and how they stand, behave and move are all things that inform Niningka of the next step in creating her work. Her work displayed in *Menagerie* features prominent and intricate line work, created by heating wire on a fire and burning it into the wooden surface to create bold black patterns along the goanna's back.

Sand goanna and Tjukurrpa

When Niningka Lewis talks about making sand goannas she is referring to Tjukurrpa where animals are an important part of daily life.

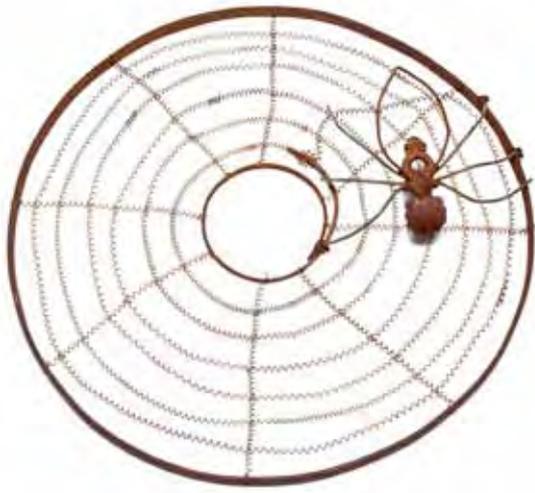
Tjukurrpa is the time of creation as well as the present time. It provides the rules for behaviour for living together. It is the Law for caring for one another and for the land that supports people's existence. Tjukurrpa is the relationship between people, plants, animals and the physical features of the land. Knowledge of how these relationships came to be, what they mean and how they must be maintained is explained in the Tjukurrpa.

(Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts)

Niningka says...

After watching the goannas, Perentie lizards, birds and other animals I decide how to make them. Sometimes I'm thinking of Tjukurrpa and burn a design or paint something of the Tjukurrpa, connected with ceremony. And people realise 'Of course, there is Aboriginal Law', in the dunes and in the creek beds.





Golden Orb Spider on Web, 2004

Badger Bates

Metal (rusted cast-iron bed ornamentation and springs)

24 x 118 x 113cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: Courtesy Finton Mahony

Badger Bates is a retired heritage officer who worked with the National Parks and Wildlife Services for 23 years. One time, a woman in a sight-seeing group approached him and asked him how long it took him to become a ranger. He said, 'I'm not a ranger, I'm a bush-ranger'. She asked him what was the difference. He joked 'The rangers protect the animals, I eat 'em'.

Bates' work is an example of how an artist can use discarded materials found in the local environment.

Badger says...

▀ *The spider's web is made from an old sulky rim and the springs of an old lounge chair or something that was burnt in the Wilcannia rubbish tip. The spider's body is made from two parts of old cast-iron bedhead, and the legs are just bent steel. The bit that holds the spider onto the web, that's the clamp for the muffler, you know, when they put the mufflers and the exhaust pipes on a car. My backyard, it looks like a junkyard ... to me it's just things, I just bring it home and collect it, put it up, and then sometimes I just sit and look at it, and the shape will be there, and you just make something out of it.* ▸



Top: Underside of a golden orb weaving spider

Golden Orb Spider on Web, detail 2004
Photo © Australian Museum

I'm a Widow by Choice, 2008

Laurie Nilsen

Barbed wire, steel and enamel paint

140 x 160 x 50cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: courtesy Brian Parkes

Laurie Nilsen is a Mandandanji artist living in Brisbane. Growing up, Nilsen and his family moved around a lot following the work where it took them. For the most part it was living out of a tent with none of the modern comforts we know now.

'We thought we were fairly lucky to have seven kilometres of playground along the creek, all different spots along there for fishing and swimming and all sorts of things.'

I'm a Widow by Choice is a large barbed wire and steel Redback Spider, a venomous Australian spider and relative of the Black Widow. The large scale of the spider creates an uncomfortable presence, almost as if it is preying on you. It represents an image of strength, power and justice. Although this work may be constructed from modern materials, the message within it maintains a strong sense of history that ultimately, women should be in charge of women's business.

Laurie says...

The scale of these works usually inspires a giggle, which is intended; however there is as well a more serious underlying message about women having more say in decisions affecting women.

Redback rendezvous

The Redback Spider is famous for the male's suicidal tendencies. After mating, he spins around so that his abdomen is against the female's fangs, effectively sacrificing himself to her. She mauls him, usually fatally, and eats him. If he escapes, he does so severely injured and returns to mate again - although this time to certain death.



I'm a Widow by Choice, detail 2008

Photo © Australian Museum

Far left: Redback Spider

Aherre (Kangaroos), pair, 2008

Johnny Young

Copper wire and steel

30 x 47 x 96cm and 47 x 23 x 86cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Johnny Young has made a name for himself by producing his intricate sculptures and bush toys. As a young man he was employed as a stockman breaking in horses and camels, and began creating these sculptures from scrap metal found on the community. Johnny's artwork celebrates the memories of station life. Although they may look rugged, these works have been carefully created and shaped with time and patience.

With his pair of *Aherre (Kangaroos)*, Johnny has captured the way kangaroos lie under the shade of a tree during the heat of the day. He has an incredible ability to represent the personality of his animal or human forms with only a twist or bend of a few wires.

Teaching and making

Johnny Young's wire sculptures and bush toys represent the significant role Aboriginal people have played in Central Australian station life. The men and boys who make these toys want to replicate the objects associated with station life such as horses, livestock, tools and dress. In the early 1940s and 1950s when station work was a way of life toys were made from materials in the natural environment. More recently these delicate and animated objects are made from materials found in community tips and other discarded articles from around the home.

Aherre (Kangaroos), pair, details 2008
Photo © Australian Museum



Red, White and Blue, 2008

Danie Mellor

Mixed media

Dimensions variable, tallest 105cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the Artist

Photo: © Jacqueline Mitelman, 2012

Danie Mellor was born in Mackay, Queensland. He currently lives in Canberra and lectures in Theories of Art Practice at Sydney College of the Arts. Mellor wants us to understand his ideas through imagery and the type of materials he uses.

On first glance *Red, White and Blue* seems fantastic and charming yet it is full of symbolism about how Australia represents itself using native animals. Mellor's life-size kangaroo sculptures are made from ceramics, real ears and back scratchers. The soft grey fur of the kangaroos is replaced by a mosaic of shattered original Spode china.

The installation is similar to the dioramas you can see in museums which consist of stuffed animals placed in an artificial environment. *Red, White and Blue* also references the proverb of the three wise men, *hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil*.



Spode china

The use of Spode china is important because it was produced in the 18th century, around the time of European settlement of Australia. The decorative patterns transferred to fine china by Spode brought images of the newly discovered worlds to 'mother' England. Spode ware was decorated in a mixture of European castles, images from Etruscan vases, Turkish landscapes, Indian hunting scenes and Chinese gardens. The china was like a fantasy postcard from the grand tour to fabulous imagined lands.

Red, White and Blue, detail, 2008, showing Spode china mosaic and taxidermied ears and paws
Photo © Australian Museum



Gubuka (Stingrays), 2008

Dennis Nona

Bronze and aluminium with pearl shell inlay

106 x 88 x 82cm

Photo © Australian Museum



Meet the artist

Photo: Australian Art Print Network

Dennis Nona was born on Badu Island, one of the Torres Strait Islands. His totems are *Tabu* (snake) and *Tupmul* (stingray).

When he was a young boy he learnt the traditional craft of woodcarving. He translated this skill into lino cut printing, creating decorative flowing designs based on the stories of the Torres Strait Islander people. He has recently transformed his ideas into three dimensional bronze and aluminium sculptures.

These sculptures depict the two dominant species of Stingray in the Torres Strait, the darkish brown *Guwerr* (the bronze stingray) and the pale, almost white *Tupmul* (the aluminium stingray).

At certain times, if you are out fishing or diving, you might see them leaping out of the water. This is an indicator of an impending change in weather conditions.

Tupmul is Dennis's totem and is one of the main totems on Badu Island. In creating this sculpture he has incorporated patterns based on traditional designs.



Stingrays

Stingrays are commonly found in the shallow coastal waters of temperate seas. Stingrays spend most of their time partially buried in the sand and lying still. Some stingrays can grow to two metres and weigh 350 kilograms.

Where are the Torres Strait Islands?

The Torres Strait Islands lie between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea in the body of water known as the Torres Strait. They are the only part of Australia sharing a border with another country. The approximately 274 islands are part of the Australian state of Queensland.

Gubuka, detail, 2008
Photo © Australian Museum



Stingrays, group of seven, 2008

Frewa Bardaluna

Pandanus fibre and wood

Dimensions variable, longest 145cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Frewa Bardaluna is well known for her string bags and twined and coiled baskets. She produces these with her trademark weaving techniques and striking colour combinations of bright pinks and purples achieved with natural dyes.

Frewa collects and prepares all her materials (such as pandanus), makes the structural shape and weaves the work.

Considered a delicacy, Kuninjku people must wait for the stingrays to travel upstream on king tides to the inland stone country of western Arnhem Land in order to spear them. In representing the stingray in this work, Frewa illustrates how the stingray is equally important to Kuninjku people as a source of food and simply because of its existence in the environment.

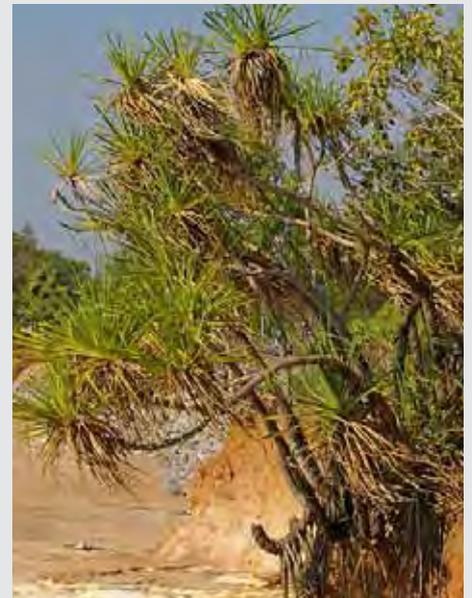
Pandanus

Most Arnhem Land fibre artists use pandanus. The *Pandanus spirallis* tree has prickly leaves arranged in a spiral with large orange fruiting heads. It grows up to around 10 metres and it is found in swamps, billabongs, floodplains, along river beds, open forests and woodland areas along the edges of coastal sand dunes.

Pandanus is available all year round. The top leaves are collected and placed in large bags or bundles wrapped in sheets of paper bark to be taken back home to be prepared.

The spiky thorns or teeth on the leaves are removed and the clean strips of leaves are then folded and divided again. Once the desired lengths are reached they are tied together in small bundles ready for dyeing and weaving.

(John Waight)



Top to bottom: Pandanus tree and close-up of fruit



Hella, 2009

Vicki West

Mixed media

55 x 34 x 78cm

Photo © Australian Museum

Meet the artist

Vicki West's country is on the north-east coast of Tasmania.

As a young girl she learnt basketry, knitting, sewing, macramé, rag matting, millinery, crochet and lace-making from her relatives. She continues to use these skills as well as others learnt at courses she took in textile dyeing, printing, surface design, drawing, painting, ceramics, photography, sculpture and jewellery making at the University of Tasmania.

Vicki collects kelp (seaweed) from a special place on the east coast of Tasmania. She describes her visits and the collection process 'as a gift from her ancestors'.



Vicki says...

▀ *I like using kelp, a plant fibre from the ocean, so the old people used to use it to create the water carriers. I use it as that metaphor of survival. When you collect (it) you've got to work it within two to three days otherwise it just goes off, it ends up a tacky, sticky mess. I'll carve or cut into it. ▸*

▀ *Hella is my voice for a wider understanding of survival and knowledge of respect and responsibility of our 'home' ... Today we are faced with the possible extinction of the Tasmanian Devil, currently threatened by facial tumour disease. It is my belief that since European invasion, disrespect for the land and the natural environment play a major role in the near-extinction of yet another significant Tasmanian mammal. ▸*

The Tasmanian Devil

The Tasmanian Devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) was given its common name by Europeans, who were haunted at night by the sound of its spine-chilling screeches and demonic growls.

Tasmanian Devils eat any meat that is available including insects, birds and beached fish. But their favourites are small mammals, such as possums, wallabies and wombats. Their massive jaw muscles and strong teeth allow them to eat almost every part of the carcass, including the hide and the skull.

Tasmanian Devils with large facial tumours were photographed in north east Tasmania during 1996. A decade later, we know these characteristics are Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD) – a fatal condition characterised by cancers around the mouth and head.

Save the Tasmanian Devil website:
<http://www.tassiedevil.com.au/index.html>

Australian Museum

6 College Street, Sydney NSW 2010

Open daily 9.30 am – 5.00 pm

☎ 02 9320 6000 www.australianmuseum.net.au



Image: *Red, White and Blue*, 2008 by Danie Mellor. Photo by Stuart Humphreys.

