

my island

TEXTILE DESIGNS BY
ODGEROO NOONUCCAL

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland
Sunday 15 December 2013 –
Sunday 2 February 2014



My Island: Textile designs by Oodgeroo Noonuccal showcases a major new donation to the Redland Art Gallery Collection through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support and contribution of the donors Ivana and Robert Perkins, curator Ross Searle, North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum and members of the Walker family.

The gift of works by one of Redlands' most significant and versatile artists, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), provides a lasting legacy for future generations.

ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Grandma left me her life works, passing responsibility on to me... I want to continue making a difference through her works. I remember the words she spoke when she charged the next generation.

In my lifetime it is my desire to see my dream becomes a reality, that my people will return to their various tribal places and set in motion a Council of Elders who will decide the future of their people, also a council of their educated young people who will respect obey and advise their elders in all aspects of aboriginality – in short to return to the basics of what used to be before we, the Aborigines, were invaded over 200 years ago.

May my dream become a reality, if not in my time, I charge you young Aboriginal people that it become a reality in your lifetimes. Let us unite with the best of all races so we can create a better living for all.

I remember when I was younger visiting Grandma at Moongalba. She lived in the gunya back in the time when we had no running water. The adults had to carry two buckets and us little ones had to carry half a bucket up a hill. Grandma used to tell all of us children that we could not go down to the well by ourselves as a big, bad bunyip lived there. I remember going down there one time, challenging grandma. I reached the bottom of the hill and then ran straight back up. So we did still use our ways in a sense and it worked as I was very fearful as I reached the bottom of the hill.

Through this exhibition we hope to bring alive Oodgeroo's work and legacy to her people. Her spirit lives through her works.

Petrina Walker

OODGEROO NOONUCCAL

Oodgeroo Noonuccal was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska on 3 November 1920, on North Stradbroke Island. She attended Dunwich Primary; left school and became a domestic in Brisbane at the age of 13. As an Aboriginal person, she said, "there wasn't the slightest possibility of getting "a better job" [even] if you stayed on at school".¹

Oodgeroo served in the Australian Women's Army Service (1942-1944). She published her first book of poetry, *We Are Going*, in 1964. Oodgeroo went on to become a trailblazer in publishing Aboriginal writing in Australia.² Oodgeroo was Queensland State Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) for ten years in the 1960s and from 1972 was managing director of the Noonuccal-Nughie Education Cultural Centre on Stradbroke Island. Throughout her life, she was a renowned and admired campaigner for Aboriginal rights, promoter of Aboriginal cultural survival, educator and environmentalist.³ She stood for election in the electorate of Greenslopes in the 1969 State election. Although voting rights had only been in place for four years, Oodgeroo decided it was time to make a stand.

Oodgeroo's literary work has been recognised by numerous awards, including the Mary Gilmore Medal (1970), the Jessie Litchfield Award (1975), the International Acting Award and the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Award. She also held an honorary doctorate of letters (Macquarie University) and was awarded the degree of Doctor of the University from Griffith University. In 1970, Oodgeroo (under the name Kathleen Walker) was appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) for services to the community. She returned it in 1987 in protest against the forthcoming Australian Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. It was around this time that she reclaimed her traditional name, Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal Tribe.⁴

In considering Oodgeroo's areas of involvement in the arts, there is an obvious emphasis on her

poetry and writing for which she received national and international recognition. But she also loved to draw and paint; and became active as an artist during her retirement on North Stradbroke Island in the late 1970s.

In the early 1980s Kimpton Fabrics, a Melbourne-based furnishing textile company produced a bold new line of bedding fabrics including doona covers and pillow cases. While the print production of this new line took place overseas, the finished designs were created through a unique partnership of Melbourne designers, Robert and Ivana Perkins and Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

The Perkins were introduced to Oodgeroo through a mutual friend, Cheryl Arthur who lived in Queensland. In 1978 the Perkins and Oodgeroo began initial design discussions. Oodgeroo was keen to produce designs that related to the natural environment on North Stradbroke Island. The design emphasis was to create bold images that had a universal appeal. She made a conscious decision not to focus on Indigenous-based designs, as was in keeping with the commercial nature of the project. The Perkins worked with Oodgeroo on North Stradbroke Island and in Melbourne.

The collaboration with Robert and Ivana Perkins proved to be highly successful. Born Ivana Ferreri in Cairo, Egypt, to an Italian father and a French mother, Ivana arrived in Melbourne as a small child. After spending most of her early working years in advertising, film and television productions, Ivana began to develop her passion for sculpture by working with sculptors and attending evening classes in ceramics. Initially, her work was making clay sculptures; eventually she graduated to lost wax castings. Alongside her practice in sculpture and jewellery is her work as a textile designer.

Robert Perkins is an award winning production designer, artist and sculptor who has designed numerous feature films and television series that involves all facets of architectural and interior design. His most recent project is Production Designer for the successful ABC TV series *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*. Robert Perkins drew a sketch of Oodgeroo Noonuccal that was used in the Kimpton packaging.

The initial designs were printed on the only available 18 metre table by Melbourne screenprinter David Hodson using fine cotton fabric supplied by John Kaldor. With assistance from the Aboriginal Arts Board, the trio formed a company to market the designs. Six of Oodgeroo's design concepts went forward for development by the Perkins. These designs include: *Oyster beds*, *Oysters*, *River stones*, *Leaves*, *Swish* and *Wheels*.

Of these six design concepts that went into development, three relate to the sea and water, and the other three respond to the land and the domestic environment. The titles say much about her interests and engagement with the natural environment and her life on North Stradbroke Island. One depicts a series of interlocking wheels which represented the world revolving; a leaf motif depicts the four seasons and an oyster design, the beginning of life and her own islands roots.⁵ A design titled *Swish* is a stylised image of a broom made from a palm leaf.

While the final design work was developed by the Perkins, Oodgeroo Noonuccal had input into the selection of the designs, colour combinations and titles. The designs were screenprinted and launched in August 1980 before Kimpton took over the commercial production and distribution. Oodgeroo recognised that her collaborators, Robert and Ivana Perkins, were faithful to the original designs. 'I could see immediately that they felt for the paintings, loved them and understood them like I do'.⁶

It has been noted that the designs have a wonderful modernist edge to them, harking back to funky 1950s interior design. The clean, clear placement of the designs floating on cool coloured cotton makes for highly original and distinct images.⁷ There was a clear emphasis to develop textiles that had a broad commercial appeal. These little known textiles demonstrate Oodgeroo Noonuccal's extraordinary artistic versatility and talent.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal died in 1993.

Ross Searle
Guest Curator

Endnotes

- 1 Roberta Sykes, *Murawina: Australian women of high achievement*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993).
- 2 www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/IMP0082b.htm [accessed 1 November 2013].
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 Peter Weiniger, 'Kath Walker and the new Dreamtime', *The Age*, 18 August, 1980. p.11.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/Tactility/Default.cfm?MnuID=6&Essay=1 [accessed 1 November 2013].



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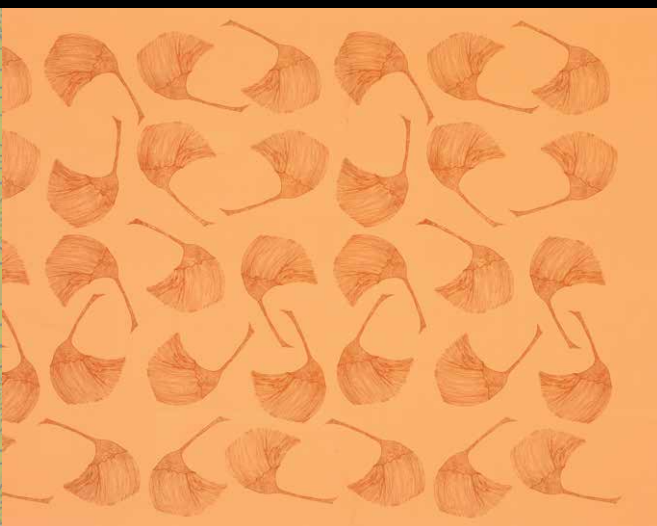


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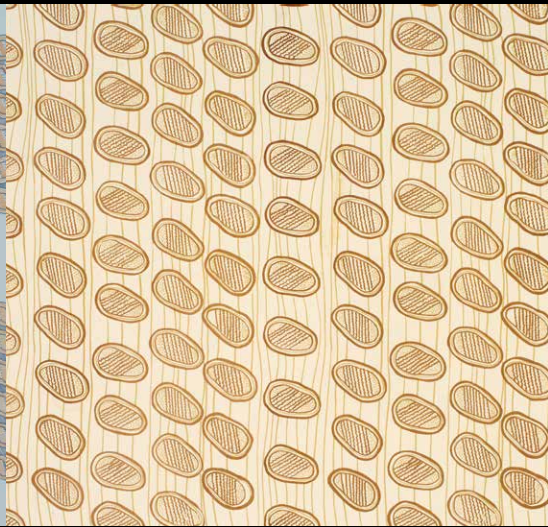
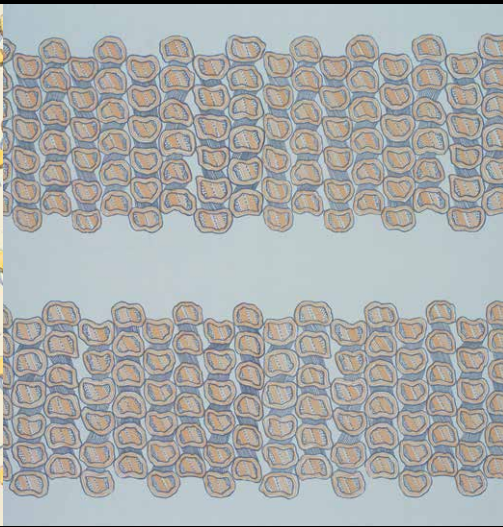
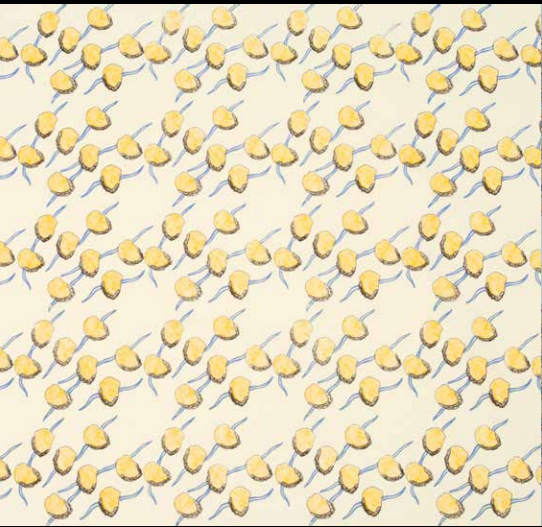
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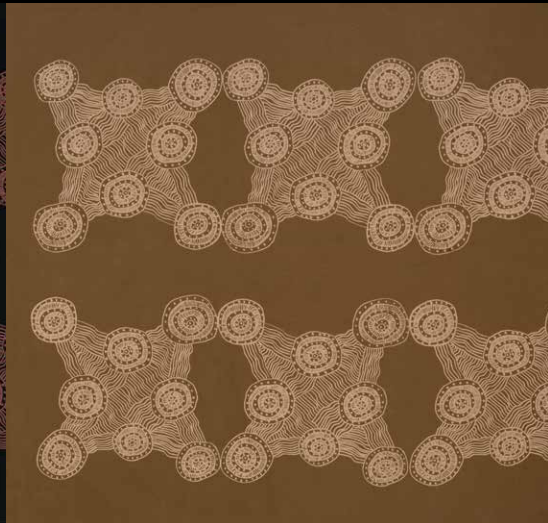
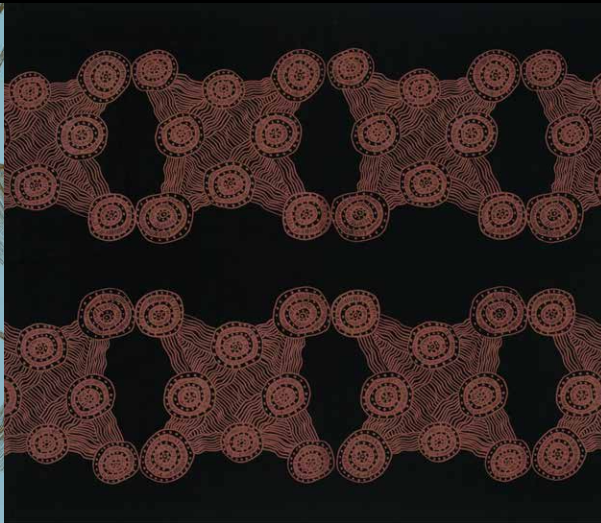


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LIST OF WORKS

(Unless otherwise stated, all works from the Redland Art Gallery Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Ivana and Robert Perkins, 2012. © Images courtesy of the artists. Photography by Carl Warner)

Featured colourways

- Cover. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Oyster beds (blue/black/red)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 127 x 122cm. 2012.21b.1
1. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Leaves (brown/black/yellow/red)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 122 x 70cm. 2012.17b.3
 2. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Leaves (cream/green)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 240 x 118cm. 2012.17a.3
 3. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Oyster beds (cream/yellow/blue)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 377 x 121.5cm. 2012.21a.5
 4. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Oysters (light blue/dark blue/orange)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 135 x 122cm. 2012.22.8
 5. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *River stones (cream/brown)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 145 x 120cm. 2012.20a.5
 6. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *River stones (green/blue)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 122 x 65cm. 2012.20b.2

7. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Swish (apricot/dark orange)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 139.5 x 122cm. 2012.19a.4
8. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Swish (blue/brown)* (detail) 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 90 x 60cm. 2012.19b.1
9. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Wheels (black/red)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 141.5 x 122cm. 2012.18b.8
10. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Wheels (olive green/cream)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 230 x 139cm. 2012.18a.1

Other collection works

11. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Gecko* 1981, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 64 x 49cm. Redland Art Gallery Collection. Acquired in 2004 with Redland Art Gallery Acquisition Funds. 2004.19
12. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *(Untitled)* 1981, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 54 x 44cm. Redland Art Gallery Collection. Acquired in 2004 with Redland Art Gallery Acquisition Funds. 2004.01

13. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Untitled (Pig face)* 1981, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 79 x 41cm.
Redland Art Gallery Collection. Acquired in 2004 with Redland Art Gallery Acquisition Funds.
2004.02
14. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Leaves (brown/black/yellow/red)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 34 x 31cm.
2012.17b.1
15. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Oyster beds (cream/yellow/blue)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 59 x 47cm.
2012.21a.3
16. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Oysters (light blue/dark blue/orange)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 46 x 30cm.
2012.22.2
17. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *River stones (cream/brown)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 44 x 39.5cm.
2012.20a.2
18. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *River stones (green/blue)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 59 x 43cm.
2012.20b.1
19. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Ivana Perkins and Robert Perkins, *Wheels (salmon pink/cream)* 1980, screenprint on cotton fabric, 63.5 x 42cm.
2012.18c.2
20. Robert Perkins, *Kath Walker – Poet* 1980, pencil on watercolour board
37 x 30cm
2012.29

Loan works

21. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Father Sky Mother Earth 4* n.d., pencil and ink on paper (sketchbook), 24.7 x 27cm (closed).
On loan from the Walker Family.
22. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Rainbow Serpent banner* 1988, synthetic polymer paint on fabric, 126 x 104cm.
On loan from the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum.
23. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Textile sketch book* n.d., pencil and ink on paper (sketchbook), 24.7 x 27cm (closed).
On loan from the Walker Family.
24. Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), *Light blue/dark blue colourway* c.1980s, screenprint on cotton fabric, 190 x 110cm.
On loan from the Walker Family.

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Cnr Middle and Bloomfield Streets
Cleveland Q 4163

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

Sunday 9am – 2pm

Admission free

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galler@redland.qld.gov.au

www.more2redlands.com.au/ArtGallery



*Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council,
dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana*

