

gathering
strands



gathering strands



REDLAND ART GALLERY, CLEVELAND
12 June – 24 July 2016

Curated by Freja Carmichael



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FOREWORD

Weaving takes time: time to collect, dry and prepare the materials; time to plan and design the form and time to gather the fibres and knot, thread and bind them so as to shape, decorate and adorn objects.

Redland Art Gallery's exhibition *Gathering Strands* has also taken time. As a curatorial project, it evolved from the seed of an idea first proposed by Gallery Support Officer Freja Carmichael in 2014 as a potential Australia Council Curatorial Fellowship project. Her ambition was to revive traditional Indigenous fibre-making practices in South East Queensland, while also challenging accepted ways of curating through an intensive community engagement and consultative approach to the exhibition development phase.

Over two years, funding was sourced, participating artists selected, community members gathered, and themes and content finessed and refined, as the strands of the exhibition were drawn together under Freja Carmichael's curatorial vision.

From the creation of content to the collecting of stories and sharing of memories, each woven vessel, basket or artwork in *Gathering Strands* embodies the community's and artists' thoughts, words, travels across Country, journeying from the present to the past and back again.

For emerging curator Freja Carmichael, the exhibition has also been a process of strengthening community and engaging with her Quandamooka heritage. Throughout the project, she has also generously shared her knowledge and learnings, providing invaluable cultural exchange and training for all Gallery staff.

Gathering Strands was developed with the assistance of an Australia Council Emerging Curatorial Fellowship. Redland Art Gallery acknowledges the support of the Australia Council in providing funds to support Freja Carmichael's salary and professional development in the research stages of the project. Without this initial seed funding, the project would not have been possible for the Gallery.

The exhibition has also received further financial assistance from the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland's Backing Indigenous Arts program and the Gordon Darling Foundation, and is supported by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation.

Stephanie Lindquist
Director (Strategic), Redland Art Gallery
Project Mentor Curator

WEFT AND WARP: A SENSE OF TOUCH

Freja Carmichael

Fibre art has a history as long and enduring as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The tradition of using elements from the natural world to create diverse material is a rich expression of culture, identity and place that links generations together. I am a descendant of the Ngugi people, one of three clans who are the traditional custodians of Quandamooka (known as Yoolooburrabee). We are the people of the sand and sea.¹

For our ancestors, weaving was a way of life. In keeping with the seasons, fibres were carefully harvested and women would sit and twist these reeds to string, and loop, knot, coil and plait them into unique flat bags, beautiful baskets and intricate mats. Food and other important items would be transported in these woven forms. Scents of country would be imbued and physical traces captured within them, symbolising strength in togetherness and the transmission of our rich culture. In the beautiful words of distinguished art curator Hetti Perkins, “One rush is strong, but bound together the rushes become stronger.”²

Gathering Strands highlights the continuing significance of fibre art in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and unearths the current practices of a diverse number of artists in South East Queensland. The title refers to the many filaments that have been united through these practices—people, traditions, narratives, places—and a continuous and circular relationship to the past. The exhibition presents the work of more than 18 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including a collective of Quandamooka weavers, practicing fibre artists, and established and emerging visual artists.

The journey of *Gathering Strands* began in 2014 with the welcome support of an emerging curatorial fellowship program from the Australia Council for the Arts. Through both research and an extensive call out, artists culturally or geographically connected to South East Queensland were selected based on their contributions to the field of contemporary Indigenous fibre art.

There was also a growing awareness of a much-needed regeneration of weaving—to support continuance of fibre art traditions. Thus, the exhibition development embodied a clear focus on strengthening practices locally through workshops, concentrating on expanding skills and knowledge of Quandamooka weavers, and creating new work for *Gathering Strands*.

Many exhibitions and publications over the past two decades have promoted the evolution and innovation seen in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fibre work across Australia. These advancements have asserted the influential place of Indigenous fibre art within contemporary Australian art practice. The diversity reflected in *Gathering Strands* and the broad range of mediums and themes represented add to this discourse.

The specific plant materials employed in traditional practices influence the weavers' techniques and the forms they create. In the same essence, the different threads interwoven in *Gathering Strands* have shaped this story to reveal the here and now of fibre art practices. The various themes within the exhibition comprise *Shared Connections*, *Remembering* and *Place and Belonging*. At the heart of this exhibition is the pulse of a strong, living and vital practice, ensuring a legacy for future generations.

¹“Quandamooka territory, known as ‘Country’, comprises the waters and lands of and around Moorgumpin (Moreton Island), Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), the Southern Moreton Bay islands and South Stradbroke Island. It includes the mainland from the mouth of the Brisbane River, Wynnum, Chandler, Lytton, Belmont, Tingalpa, south to Cleveland, to the Logan River. Quandamooka Country crosses the boundaries of four Queensland local governments.” Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, 2016, <http://www.qyac.net.au/who-we-are/>.

² Hetti Perkins, *Art + Soul: A Journey into the World of Aboriginal Art* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2010), 111.

SHARED CONNECTIONS

Unique looped and knotted flat bags bearing a recognisable diagonal pattern are recorded as evidence of pre-colonisation weaving practices distinct to the people of South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales.³ Numerous historical fibre works in museum collections that are physically linked to Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) provide visible records of the techniques and customary uses of Yunggaire⁴ (reeds, also known locally as Noongies and Ungaire) in this area.

Inherent to this work is an emphasis on sharing knowledge and communal approaches. Over time, the intimate skills surrounding fibre traditions have been imparted over countless generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To ensure the contemporary value of these forms, present-day fibre artists and weavers continue to pass on their artistic practices, adapting them from one generation to the next.

Over the past year, open workshop sessions were initiated for Quandamooka women and those belonging to the extended Quandamooka families to support the development of the Yunggaire weaving display. The first session welcomed visiting Aboriginal weavers, The Wake Up Time weaving group, who travelled from Northern New South Wales to share their weaving journey. Local events, including the inaugural Quandamooka Festival and Pacific Tides Festival, provided support and enabled sessions to continue to build momentum and strength.

The heightened enthusiasm resulted in regular sessions exploring traditional practices and a name emerged for this group of Elders and generations of women: **Yunggaire weavers**. On the open verandahs of Goompee's (Dunwich's) beautiful community learning centre, surrounded by the landscape of deep greenery, they celebrated the collective sharing of knowledge. Old ways were remembered through new approaches and further connections were formed by weaving together on spirited lands.



Gathering Strands weaving workshops, Minjerribah

Top: (left to right) Aunty Mary Burgess, Sonja Carmichael, Aunty Rene Clarey, Toni Cope and Aunty Evelyn Parkin with Yunggaire **Bottom left:** Aunty Avril Quail **Bottom right:** detail of weaving with Yunggaire. Photography by Freja Carmichael. Courtesy of Redland Art Gallery and participants.



Gathering Strands weaving workshops, Minjerribah

Top: Sonja Carmichael with Yunggaire **Bottom left:** Aunty Margaret Iselin and Aunty Evelyn Parkin **Bottom right:** Aunty Evelyn Parkin's hands weaving with Yunggaire. Photography by Freja Carmichael, top image by Amanda Hayman. Courtesy of Redland Art Gallery and participants.

Working together in alternating spots, **Aunty Mary Burgess**, **Toni Cope**, and Sonja Carmichael assisted in harvesting Yunggaire that continue to grow strong mostly in the rugged terrain of swampy areas of Minjerribah. Walking in the footsteps of ancestors, these artists collected and prepared the precious Yunggaire with sensitivity, taking care to only take the required fibres to ensure the reeds' ongoing growth. Yunggaire has a distinctive colour, with the strands gracefully shifting from variations of white and pink to shades of green. With age, the presence of these hues persists, embodying a metaphor of the liveliness and strength of Aboriginal culture.

The rich fragrances of the reeds wetlands resonate in the Yunggaire weavers' display, as the single filaments have become transformed into bundles of coils, plaits and other reiterated movements. Historical bags loaned from The University of Queensland Anthropology Museum have been included in the exhibition to contextualise these contemporary works by Yunggaire weavers and other featured Quandamooka artists.

Each basket, bag and mat evolved from the workshops is imbued with a personal story, capturing the lived experience of its making. Some weavings began with the harvesting of fibre, while **Aunty Rene Clarey's** basketry speaks of her material collections along Back Beach, intricate sea shells that have been integrated with Yunggaire and raffia.

Other interwoven narratives include the recollections of Elders, such as **Aunty Margaret Iselin** who grew up in the Myora mission. She remembers how as a young girl she helped the Grannies weave by collecting Yunggaire. She provided a detailed account of the specific plaiting technique involved in mat making, working closely with **Aunty Evelyn Parkin** to recreate. This skill was also shared with Elisa Jane Carmichael, whose individual weaving expresses a personal interpretation of plaiting, representing just one of the many rich exchanges that has taken place so far between these women.

³ Lissant Bolton, *Baskets and Belonging: Indigenous Australian Histories* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), 37.

⁴ Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elder-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Jandai Language Dictionary: A Dictionary Spoken on Stradbroke and Moreton Islands Based on Words Remembered by All Elders and Recorded by Interested Visitors to Our Shores* (Dunwich, Qld: Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2011), 67.





Yunggaire weavers

Opposite page top: (front) Joan Hendriks and Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Coolamon Basket with String* 2016, Yunggaire. Donna Page, *Coiled Basket* 2016, Yunggaire. Sonja Carmichael, *Quandamooka Gulayi (Women's Bag)* 2016, Yunggaire.

Opposite page bottom: (front) Mary Burgess, *Small Basket with Shells* 2016, Yunggaire and shells. Sonja Carmichael, *Quandamooka Gulayi (Dillybag)* 2016, Yunggaire and shells. Donna Page, *Twined Basket with Handle* 2016, Yunggaire.

Top: (front) Rene Clarey, *Colours of the Sea* 2016, Yunggaire, raffia and shells. Alisa Perry, *Raffia Basket* 2016, raffia. Rene Clarey, *Raffia Basket with Recycled Rope* 2016, raffia, recycled nylon rope and shells.

Bottom left: Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Sun* (detail) 2016, Yunggaire.

Bottom right: Evelyn Parkin, *Honouring 'Aunty Margaret, Mum and Grannies'* (detail) 2016, Yunggaire.

All photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.





REMEMBERING

Customarily, the techniques and materials used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fibre work related to the immediate landscape. Embedded in these diverse practices was a detailed understanding about fibre harvesting, material preparation, and the refined skills that were specific to the plant material used. Through colonisation, such processes have been affected in varying ways in different areas across Australia. For some, precious knowledge of fibre-based processes has been resting for periods of time, but recent awakenings have seen a number of customary methods revitalised, such as those reflected in the works of Yunggaire weavers here.

Across the spectrum of works in *Gathering Strands*, the artists depict remembering in both subtle and direct ways. Through historical material engagements, traditional techniques and forms are re-invigorated and expanded upon. Ironically, it is the collection material stored in museums amassed (forcefully) during colonial times that is assisting with journeys of reconnections. In featuring this work, the exhibition tries to make sense of the complexities surrounding loss of knowledge and cultural heritage in a postcolonial world—central themes in the current discourse of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.⁵

Amanda Hayman's visual layering with fibre, *Past Future Present* (2016), speaks of cultural survival despite the colonial erasure of heritage. Utilising moving images collected during workshop sessions, Hayman translates the living qualities of fibre practices. She overlays the footage with woven elements deliberately created from contrasting synthetic and natural fibres, which signifies the essence of contemporary adaptations. By including an interactive element where touch activates content, *Past Future Present* explores intangible elements surrounding connectivity and continuation. The work envisages weaving as a parable of contemporary Aboriginal culture, which Hayman articulates with these words:

Colonisation cut and damaged fibres, weavings unravelled and significant techniques and knowledge lost, yet Indigenous culture is perpetual and where the framework remains, there lies an opportunity to repair, revive traditions and re-stitch, merging the old ways with new.⁶

The print series *the holes in the land* (2015) by **Judy Watson** responds to Aboriginal cultural material held at the British Museum since the 19th and early 20th century to visually return them home. Despite breaks of inactivity, artefacts from the past provide so many layers to be read and uncovered, inciting and inviting stories and hidden histories that traverse time, space and place. Watson's layered etchings that reference several historical artefacts such as woven Pituri bags are a powerful reminder of the hole created by their removal in Aboriginal culture.

Watson portrays the woven Pituri bags and other artefacts as darkened silhouettes overlaid on backgrounds of British Museum floorplans. In Western Queensland, woven Pituri bags were uniquely shaped by using a looping and knotting approach to carry the nicotine-containing leaves of the Pituri plant, which was a valuable source of trade for Aboriginal people in the area.⁷ The particular bag referenced in *the holes in the land 3* was obtained in the 1860s by the Government Land Commissioner in Burketown and Normanton, William Finucane.⁸ It has been created after recycling twine and wool from government-issued blankets, disclosing strong connotations of colonialism.

Glennys Briggs's *Our Stories* (2014) also visually interprets artefacts to reveal historical accounts and inherent meanings. This print examines the importance of the dilly bag to daily life and the narratives embedded within the cultural item's lived experience. As a skilled printmaker, Briggs directs the variations of faint and intense details to express layered stories that speak of traditions, spirited lands, and the histories that will forever be remembered.

Carol McGregor's series of possum-skin bags were inspired by a historical photograph (c. 1870) that she came across during her time as Museum Victoria 1854 Student Scholar. She imagined that her great-grandmother may have held a similar possum-skin bag to the one seen in this image. Through her extensive and ongoing research into the material culture of possum skin, she has invented her own versions of it that are informed by her personal identity, merging her Aboriginal and Scottish heritage together with customary methods relative to both cultures.

Delvene Cockatoo-Collins also pays tribute to matrilineal connections through her installation *My Grandmother's Words* (2016). Using her signature mediums of ceramic and print, Cockatoo-Collins was inspired by the words of her grandmother, as relayed in the following statement:

Mum gave me some minutes to a community meeting that my grandmother, Bethel Delaney (née Martin) attended in 1974 and was responsible for taking these notes. The meeting related to community land and cultural activities. In those minutes my Nan states, "let's get back to weaving baskets and mats like our grannies did."⁹

In her work, Cockatoo-Collins honours these yearnings for a revival of weaving and celebrates the prized skills of mat and basket making. Replicating basketry forms, she creates a series of ceramics vessels that reinterpret traditional techniques. In her print, the plaiting method evident in the foundation of the mats is expressed through a pattern of rhythmic lines that echo its unique detail. The mixed mediums are united through the inclusion of her grandmother's vivid words, retold in textual form.

Through her work, **Elisa Jane Carmichael** references the emotional experience of viewing the baskets and bags that our ancestors weaved, and of seeing the colours of the fibre today. Her mesmerising painting *Fresh Water Swamp Reeds Above and Below* (2016) captures the growth of Yunggaire using a vivid colour palette. The intensity of movement and vibrating patterns symbolise a rich spirit that interconnects past, present and future. Digitally printed versions of the paintings onto cotton fabric have also resulted in the formation of an ethereal soft sculpture, *A Bed of Yunggaire* (2016). String is an important and necessary invention in Aboriginal cultures; along Northern Australian coastlines, the bark of native hibiscus was traditionally used to twist filaments together for fishing, hunting and other myriad purposes.¹⁰ Carmichael creates her own contemporary fibre to twist together over 400 individual strands.



Chantal Henley's range of basketry also elaborates the significance of twisted strands. Her series of bark vessels are densely bound together with string handles, demonstrating the strength of this technique and materiality that has supported our ancestors since time immemorial. The process of collecting, preparing and transforming the cotton tree bark (native hibiscus) into usable filaments makes this practice an essential element in Henley's work.

Henley's trio of beautifully woven dilly bags, *Together Again* (2015), incorporates string methods while capturing the alluring qualities of Yunggaire. Her skilful twining attests to the uniqueness of each individual strand, as she employs both open and tight weave to ignite an array of colours and textures. At the core of *Together Again* is a celebration of community and an acknowledgment of ancestors. Through unifying the vessels with hand-created reed threads, Henley expresses strong ties that are bound together and deeply connected to land.

⁵ Howard Murphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998), 382.

⁶ Amanda Hayman, artist statement, 2016.

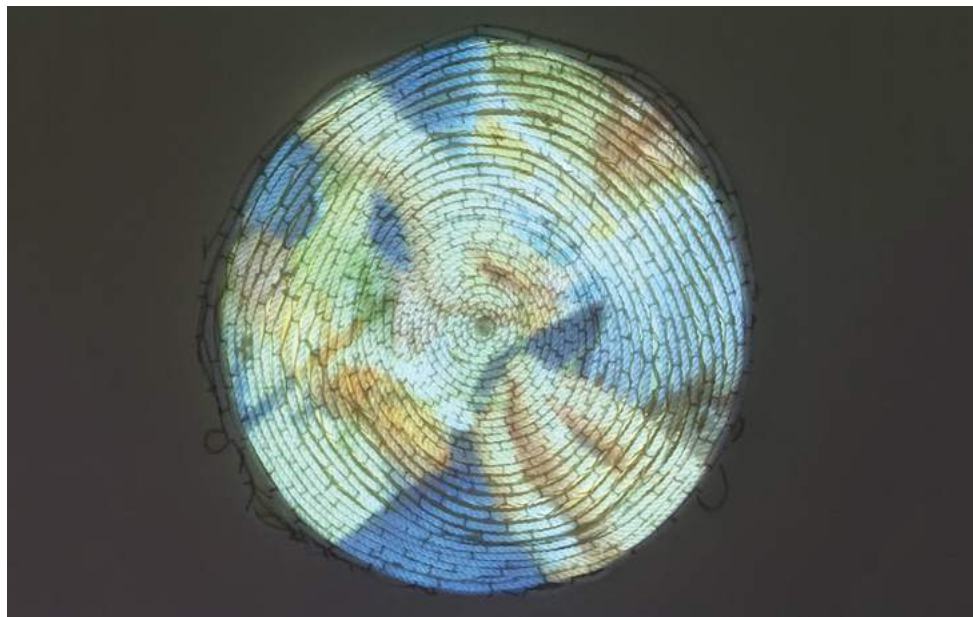
⁷ Bolton, *Baskets and Belonging*, 61.

⁸ "the holes in the land, 2015," *grahame galleries + editions*, 2016, <http://www.grahamegalleries.com.au/index.php/judy-watson-the-holes-in-the-land-2015>.

⁹ Delvene Cockatoo-Collins, artist statement, 2016.

¹⁰ Diane Moon, "Visible Songs: Captured Flight," in *Floating Life: Contemporary Aboriginal Fibre Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 2009), 12.





AMANDA HAYMAN

b. 1983, Brisbane, Queensland
Kalkadoon and Wakka Wakka people
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Born and raised in Logan, Amanda Hayman describes herself as 'modern day murri'. She is passionate about storytelling through technology and is notable for combining two-dimensional works with digital elements. She has produced video art, net art, installation, projections, live AV displays, and augmented reality, and articulates her practice and rationale of digital mediums as follows:

... [because I grew] up in [an] urban environment, with little cultural traditions passed on, my artwork explores notions of identity as a woman and culturally through an exploration of history, family and connection to Country. Projections are indicative of intangible elements of life such as spirituality and connectivity and technology as a medium also becomes representative of contemporary identity.

Amanda Hayman, *Past Future Present* (still) 2016, video, natural and synthetic fibre. Courtesy of the artist.

Hayman has a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Contemporary Art from Queensland College of Art (QCA), Griffith University (2003), and has extensive experience in facilitating digital art workshops with Indigenous communities across Queensland. She is currently Manager of kuril dhagun, State Library of Queensland (SLQ), and in recent years she has been involved in the *South Stradbroke Island Artist Camp*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (2014) and 2High festival, Brisbane (2015).



JUDY WATSON

b. 1959, Mundubbera, Queensland
Waanyi people
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Judy Watson works across print media, painting, drawing and sculptural forms to explore ancestral, political and environment aspects of her Aboriginal heritage. In 1990, she visited her traditional Country during the first of many journeys, and the spirited presence of these lands has been embodied in her work since.

Central to her practice is revealing the hidden histories of Aboriginal people, particularly those relating to colonisation experiences. Her quest to continuously uncover fragments of the past often involves working closely with museums, immersing herself in collected artefacts, often with close affinity to her family's Country. Through her art, cultural significance of historical material is maintained and becomes visually repatriated.

Judy Watson, *the holes in the land 3* 2015, 4 plate colour etching. Redland Art Gallery Collection. Courtesy of the artist and graham galleries + editions. Photography by Carl Warner.

Over the past 25 years, Watson has received major public art commissions and exhibited widely. Selected awards include a Moët & Chandon Fellowship (1995); NGV Clemenger Award (2006); and Works on Paper Award at the 23rd National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Awards (2006). She co-represented Australia at the 1997 Venice Biennale and was included in the 2012 Biennale of Sydney. Her work is held in several private art collections, all Australian state art galleries, and the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), as well as in many international collections, among them the Taipei Fine Arts Museum; The British Museum; the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University; The Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia. Watson is currently Adjunct Professor, QCA, Griffith University.















GLENNYS BRIGGS

b. 1948, Mooroopna, Victoria
Taungwurrung and Yorta Yorta people
Lives and works: Gold Coast/Brisbane,
Queensland

Having relocated from Victoria to the Gold Coast in 2008, Glennys Briggs maintains a strong relationship to her traditional lands through her visual art practice. Working across different mediums, including print media, painting, installation and sound, Briggs views herself as an educator of her culture:

The cultural influences in my work reflect the strong connection to people and land. Like a time-lapse photograph, my work is ever changing to reveal a long history. Each scene rests upon the other like the layers in a midden, each revealing more of the story.

Her recent work uncovers the meanings of cultural artefacts in relation to people, history and land, and their persistence in Aboriginal culture. Briggs translates stories surrounding fibre material, which often honour her female ancestors, through printmaking and painting. Briggs' recent possum-skin cloaks use

Glennys Briggs, *Our Stories* 2014, print on paper. Redland Art Gallery Collection. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Carl Warner.

contemporary approaches to activate cultural artefacts. Inspired by traditional practices, she has instigated the revival of possum-skin cloak-making in South East Queensland with fellow Aboriginal artist Carol McGregor.

In 2013, Briggs graduated from QCA with a Bachelor in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art (Interdisciplinary Print Media). The following year, she was prize winner of the Victorian Indigenous Art Awards (the Copyright Agency Limited Award) for her *Stories Within* series. Briggs has exhibited in numerous group exhibitions, including *Conform/Confront*, Hong Kong (2013); *Stradbroke Island Artist Camp*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (2014); *Victorian Indigenous Art Awards* Finalist exhibition, Art Gallery of Ballarat (2014); and *Printmakers*, University of Shandong (2014).



DELVENE COCKATOO-COLLINS

b. 1974, Brisbane, Queensland
 Nunukul, Ngugi and Goenpul people,
 Quandamooka
 Lives and works: Minjerribah, Queensland

Delvene Cockatoo-Collins lives and works on Minjerribah with her family. She acknowledges that this is “The place of my mother’s birth, and also for her mother and her mother’s mother. I am grateful for their continuity of connections to this place.”

Her current practice includes textiles, ceramics and jewellery making; through these mediums, she expresses the stories of her family’s lived experiences on Minjerribah, the natural environment, and her responses to representations of images and objects of Quandamooka. She has an inherently resourceful approach to her art making, whereby she spends time with her family on Back Beach collecting materials and found objects that become an important element in her work. Cockatoo-Collins also draws inspiration from the stories that have been handed down to her that relate to family, culture,

Delvene Cockatoo-Collins, *My Grandmother’s Words* (print detail) 2016, charcoal, gouache on paper. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

history and the land. She translates these narratives through her own contemporary interpretations to ensure their continuation.

Cockatoo-Collins is currently completing her PhD in Indigenous Perspectives in Creative Arts at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education; is working on various community projects, including Jarjums Life Museum; and is part of the Australian delegation to the 2016 Festival of Pacific Arts, Guam. She also runs a small business, selling her label *Made on Minjerribah*, and has exhibited in several group exhibitions, including *Connections to the Waters of Minjerribah*, Redland Art Gallery (2015), and *My Story: South Stradbroke Island Indigenous Artist Camp*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (2015).



ELISA JANE CARMICHAEL

b. 1987, Brisbane, Queensland
Ngugi people, Quandamooka
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Elisa Jane Carmichael's practice visually explores the beauty of nature and the surrounding environment, drawing inspiration from her cultural heritage. Since a young age, she has had a paintbrush in her hand, working in an array of bold colours and vibrant patterns, weaving her family's connection to Country through pigment and, more recently, fibres.

After being taught to weave by her mother, she developed a passionate interest to further expand her understandings of traditional fibre practices. Viewing historical material in museum collections, Carmichael imagined the wonderful possibilities that using fibre could provide in creating wearable forms and saw this as an opportunity to focus on the regeneration of weaving traditions through fashion.

Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Fresh Water Swamp Reeds Above and Below* (detail) 2015, synthetic polymer on canvas. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

Along with these recent explorations, she continues to work across familiar mediums with a strong influence being drawn from ancestral practices. Traditional fibres and techniques such as string weaving have become significant elements in Carmichael's art, where she simultaneously maintains their continuation and honours their importance to her heritage.

Carmichael holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from QCA (Print Media) and is currently completing a Master of Fine Art in Fashion by Research at the Queensland University of Technology. She has exhibited nationally in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Cairns and internationally throughout the UK, USA, India, Belgium and Singapore, and she has also delivered art workshops globally. Her work has been reviewed in national and international publications.



CHANTAL HENLEY

b. 1984, Elizabeth Vale, South Australia
Nughi and Munundjali people
Lives and works: Adelaide, South Australia

Chantal Henley retains strong links to her basket-weaving heritage through contemporary approaches. Her current work incorporates a variety of methods and materials to create diverse woven forms, adornment, and textile pieces.

Having grown up in a creative family, Henley was taught tapestry and pattern making at a young age by her mother and grandmother. Later, deciding to pursue her skill in textiles and design, she studied briefly at the Whitehouse Institute of Design before working in the museum and art gallery sector for over 10 years in South Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. During this time, she was provided with opportunities to expand her knowledge and immerse herself in various fibre techniques.

Chantal Henley, *Together Again* 2015,
Yunggaire. Image courtesy of the artist.

After her son Nehemiah was diagnosed with autism, Henley made the decision in early 2015 to concentrate on her professional artistic practice. During this period, she started to spend more time on her grandparents' Country, engaging with the fibre practices of her ancestors and expanding her skills.

Chantal Henley is active in sharing her knowledge through workshop programs across Brisbane and Adelaide, including *A Thousand Fibres*, kuril dhagun, SLQ (2015) and the World Science Festival, *Indigenous Weaving*, Queensland Museum (2016). She was selected to participate in the 2015 South Stradbroke Island Indigenous Artist Camp program, which included the group exhibition *My Story*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (2015), and designed the float for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, Tandanya (2016). She is currently working on her latest design collection, *Gather 2016*.

PLACE AND BELONGING

The deep relationship to the land inherent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is present across the collection of works on display in *Gathering Strands*. The conscious use of fibre and materials maps a clear association to the places in which the artists have historical, spiritual and physical connections too. A celebration of saltwater lineages and influence is embodied, while a strong appreciation of the environment and the importance of its preservation and care are also intimately expressed. The support that fibre practices bestow in strengthening connections to Country and in offering a sense of belonging is also revealed in this exhibition.

MATERIALS OF PLACE

Carol McGregor's and **Sarah Wapau's** specific use of materials provides an abiding tie to their cultural traditions. Utilising possum-skin fibre in McGregor's practice brings her closer to her Wathaurung family history, where the making and wearing of possum-skin cloaks were a part of her ancestors' life. Similarly, Wapau's continuous use of coconut and pandanas leaf maintains a deep connection to her island home. Her intimate understanding of the fibres is celebrated in the careful folding and handling of each strand. She knows when they are ready for weaving by its manipulating nature. With each harvest taken from the plant, she honours and gives gratitude for the sustenance it provides.

From a young age, Wapau was immersed in fibre practices, creating both functional and culturally significant items as part of her daily life. Interruptions to weaving techniques throughout the Torres Strait Islands appear to be minimal,¹¹ and in Wapau's large-scale fan installation, *Waving My Energy* (2016), she extends these ongoing traditions. Woven fans in Torres Strait Islander culture serve a variety of purposes from drying wood during monsoon season to keeping flies at bay. In *Waving My Energy*, the versatile movement of the fan symbolises Wapau actively spreading her knowledge and passing on her culture.

SALTWATER PLACE

Hannah Brontë and **Hannah Gutchen**'s collaborative garments reference their relationship to fibre practices, which is intrinsically bound to their experiences and imaginings surrounding the sand and sea. Their contemporary body adornment work celebrates both cross-cultural and artistic exchange, since the ideas and skills of both artists stem from family influence and their own cultural understandings.

Brontë and Gutchen's exquisitely created objects accentuate nature's strength and beauty by their transformation of plant fibres, such as coconut leaf from Gutchen's traditional lands, into alluring body wares. Combining customary techniques and forms relative to both artists' heritage, these traditions are carried into the present day through extending both materiality and inventive designs. Adornment of the body holds strong notions of creating beauty,¹² and these pieces symbolise a powerful femininity through envisioning a code of dress for future female regalia. The intrinsic qualities of the natural material serve as a metaphor of resilience, as these future warriors take the lead from the footsteps of their female ancestors.

Sonja Carmichael's *Pulan Pools, Baskets of Culture* (2016) tell of her profound affinity to Pulan Pulan (Amity Point) through a vibrant basketry installation that pays tribute to ancestral entities and the beauty within these peaceful waters. Creating an array of colours and designs, the shallow pools of water formed by the surrounding seas and sands are visually replicated to depict the spirited vitality.

In a similar way, **Sharon Phineasa**'s vibrant and whimsical sculptures, *Koey Kamu* (2015) and *Migina Kamu* (2015), are reflective of her lineage to the Island of Dauan in Torres Strait and rekindle memories of mangrove pod caps, as remembered in the following words:

We would spend countless hours playing with mangrove pod caps (referred to as Kamu in Kala Kawaw Ya, top western Torres Strait Islands dialect) as they closely resembled people. Our imaginations would take flight and we soon had made storylines and characters for each of the Kamu. Playing out family day to day scenarios was popular, not to mention, throwing in the odd Dogai (witch or scary monster) in these stories, based on Island myths and legends told to us by our grandparents.¹³

Using wool, she relays the warm emotions from these recollections, and references her Australian heritage that is intrinsically intertwined with her Torres Strait Islander identity. The additional representation of Torres Strait Islander grass skirt illustrates playful movement, as these items are often worn during performances.

RECLAIMED MATERIALS

Both Carmichael and Phineasa creatively incorporate found materials in their work. Carmichael's *Pulan Pools, Baskets of Culture* combines natural raffia and reclaimed materials collected from the shores of Quandamooka Country to weave the multiple, differently sized vessels. Her inclusion of reclaimed materials such as fishing nets parallels the Ghost Nets art movement that commenced over a decade ago in Indigenous communities across the top end of Australia. Begun as a response to the ongoing pollution devastating coastlines, this movement sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fibre artists transforming waste into woven and sculptural forms.¹⁴ Quandamooka Country faces the same environmental concerns, with shifting seas bringing in discarded and lost materials of all sorts. Similarly, Phineasa's sculptural forms (which draw upon teachings from her grandfather) incorporate sustainable approaches by covering reclaimed everyday objects with wool yarn. Through innovatively using excessive waste, these artists ensure the future of precious environments.

PLACE AS PROCESS

In her ethereal, woven forms, **Debbie Presley** intimately works with the natural world to reveal ways of seeing, understanding and caring for the land. These vessels reflecting nature's fragility may appear delicate—an impression formed by the technique and raw material used—but grounded in their careful construction is great strength and integrity. Inspired by the structural forms that dwell in the harmony of the environment, Presley's vessels represent phenomena such as the growth of a vine and a spider's web, created from fibres collected in her immediate ecosystems such as Yucca, Corn Husk, and Honey Suckle. Using the time-honoured methods of twining and string weaving, Presley allows the fibre to dictate the shapes' final forms and textures.

Finally, **Katina Davidson**'s multi-layered installation, which combines fibre and moving image, discloses an understanding of the tangibility of belonging, and intangible relationships to place. Gathering fabric, Davidson creates tension in the material through careful and attentive folds onto high-quality artist linen, so that it becomes metaphoric of her own complex understanding of identity. Her entrancing fibrous sculpture is layered with found patterns within her current environment that form moving images embedded in her contemporary representations of place. For Davidson, the meditative activity that goes into the creative process becomes ceremonious, which is emphasised in her bold and textured hand-made patterns. She appreciates the reiterated movements involved in the act of creating to strengthen her inherent relationship to Country and the current place that she is living on.

¹¹ Trish Barnard, "The North-East: Contemporary Basket Making in Queensland," in *Woven Forms: Contemporary Basket Making in Australia*, ed. Brian Parkes (Sydney: Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design, 2005), 32.

¹² Moon, "Visible Songs: Captured Flight," 12.

¹³ Sharon Phineasa, artist statement, 2016.

¹⁴ Sue Ryan, "The Ghost Nets Project," *The Long Tide: Contemporary Ghost Net Art Exhibition* (Brisbane: artisan, 2012).





CAROL MCGREGOR

b. 1961, Hastings, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand
Wathaurung people

Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Carol McGregor is a multidisciplinary artist working with ephemeral natural fibres and metal. Since 2015, she and Glennys Briggs have also been facilitating the revitalisation of traditional possum-skin cloak-making practices in South East Queensland. She describes her practice as:

... a desire to unearth and to visually activate histories and memories to strengthen and further inform Australian Aboriginal identity and sense of belonging. The major stimulus is a need to uncover and better understand my family's Wathaurung history, to contribute to its 'untelling' as suppressive outcomes of assimilation resulted in evidence of our culture, identity and history being undervalued, hidden, ignored, and silenced.

In particular, she connects to her great-grandmother by creating visual interpretations of personal stories, past histories and understandings of the

Carol McGregor, *Twining Time with Grandmothers 1* (detail) 2016, possum skin, cotton and ochre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

colonising ideologies that Indigenous Australians adapted to in order to survive. As she says, she "investigate[s] artefacts as vehicles of remembering, as objects that give physical form to shadows of the past and that un-silence history". She questions "how the making of new Australian Aboriginal artefacts informs, activates and disrupts existing narratives" and asserts that sharing stories is "an important form of resistance" and integral to her art practice.

McGregor is currently completing her PhD in Visual Arts at QCA. In 2012, she was awarded *The Espresso GARAGE Award* at *The GAS: Graduate Art Show*, QCA, for *journey cloak*. She has held several solo exhibitions and has been a finalist in *The Churchie National Emerging Art Prize* (2013, 2014), the *Sunshine Coast Art Prize*, 3D (2013), and the *Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize* (2014), and won *The Gather Award* (2014).



SARAH WAPAU

b. 1951, Thursday Island, Queensland
Kauralag Ipilgal and Meriam people
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Torres Strait Islander Elder Sarah Wapau was raised on the Torres Strait Islands, Thursday, Murray, Moa, and Horn, and in Indigenous communities of Cape York. From a young age, she was taught to weave by her grandmother. Now based in Brisbane, she continues to maintain her cultural practices, creating baskets and items remembered from her childhood, thereby ensuring her knowledge is carried on. She draws inspiration from the story of Ipatu, a basket lady who travelled from Papua New Guinea, island hopping her way over to Horn Island. Weaving, sharing and teaching her culture allows Wapau to continue Ipatu's legacy.

The use of natural materials is vital to her weaving practice, as it embodies a deep and abiding connection to her cultural lands. Wapau has childhood memories of travelling by sailing dinghy from the Islands to the mainland to harvest fibres. Pandanus leaves and coconut fibres would

Sarah Wapau, *Waving My Energy* (detail) 2016, coconut leaf. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

be collected to create functional baskets and other woven items, including fans, mats, fish traps and decorative and ornamental pieces for either immediate or temporary use. These materials are not as accessible in South East Queensland, but Wapau ensures their persistent use through sustainable methodologies.

Wapau is well known across Brisbane for her weaving workshops and for showcasing her baskets at community events and festivals. She has presented workshops at Queensland Museum, Clancestry, and throughout libraries, schools and tertiary institutions. She exhibited work in *Awakening: Stories from the Torres Strait*, Queensland Museum (2011).



Hannah Gutchen and Hannah Brontë, *I am Your Spine* 2016, coconut leaf, coconut spine, raffia. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artists.

HANNAH GUTCHEN

b. 1992, Mareeba, Queensland
Zagareb people
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Hannah Gutchen is a proud Torres Strait Islander and Jewish woman. Throughout her upbringing, her parents ensured the passing on of Torres Strait Island traditions, instilling the importance of culture. She recalls collecting shells, seeds, feathers and animal skins as a young girl to create diverse cultural objects. Gutchen describes her relationship to weaving as follows:

Weaving was always something I gravitated towards as I love using my hands to create, it's an adventure. My earliest memories of learning coconut leaf weaving was by my 'Uncle Friday' and 'Ama Rechel', sitting at dance practice listening to the aunties and uncles sing island songs, they would always say that the best type of weaving is when sitting on the beach under a coconut tree. The simplicity of making the coconut leaf ball became the first piece I mastered.

My passion for weaving deepened when my parents commenced their business making pure coconut oil. I have learnt that every part of the coconut tree is resourceful to our people, from the fronds to the husk and then the creamy milk to the pristine oil, it describes a unique story of its own, separating it from many other fruit trees.

Based in Brisbane, Gutchen is an exercise physiologist who works closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and communities. Her current weaving practice explores contemporary adornments and garments, which she intends to pursue further while ensuring the continuation of her traditions in fibre work.

HANNAH BRONTË

b. 1991, Brisbane, Queensland
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Hannah Brontë works across experimental video art, soft sculpture, sound, and textile design to examine themes surrounding female empowerment. Her work dissects negative representations of women and reassembles them into fierce, power female messages. She often re-purposes language and aesthetics from popular culture, particularly commercial hip-hop to introduce radical and feminist ideas to new audiences.

Natural fibres and textile mediums have become an integral and supportive feature in her work as she honours traditional methods within contemporary contexts. Drawing influence from Brontë's Aboriginal heritage and otherworldly body decoration, the characters within her video pieces are often adorned with textile and woven pieces. The history of women as warriors is also explored through the inclusion of shell and woven pieces created using raw materials.

In 2013, Brontë completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at QCA (Sculpture), and was recently a participating artist in Next Wave Festival, with her video piece, *Still I Rise* (2016). Her previous works include *alterSHEGO* (2012–13), an exploration of a hyper female versions of a range of her female peers and *Ain't Nuthin But a She Thang* (2012–13), a night presenting local female emcees.



SONJA CARMICHAEL

b. 1958, Brisbane, Queensland
 Ngugi people, Quandamooka
 Lives and works: Brisbane/Minjerribah,
 Queensland

Working expansively in the medium of fibre, Sonja Carmichael's basketry and woven sculptures reflect her family's cultural connections with the land and seas of Minjerribah. She draws inspirations from the many stories connected to Quandamooka traditional woven bags and explores materials and techniques to continue the making of them today.

Carmichael also uses the diverse lost and discarded items that are washed up on Minjerribah's shoreline, which she unravels to create new forms. Weaving is central to understanding Carmichael's deep-rooted connectedness to Country. As she asserts:

Despite a painful history of colonisation, we still know the web of family histories since contact and have close ties, connecting to our place of belonging and cultural re-inheritance. My work reflects the changing patterns of life: *Before the Burn* – the pre

Sonja Carmichael, *Pulan Pools, Baskets of Culture* (detail) 2016, natural raffia, nylon fishing net, synthetic fibre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbah. Courtesy of the artist.

contact era, *The Burn* – colonisation[']s impact on weaving practices and *After the Burn* – weaving in the regenerative spirit.

Carmichael is currently completing a Master of Philosophy at The University of Queensland, which is exploring the regeneration of Quandamooka weaving practices. She works actively across community, sharing her weaving skills and passing on her acquired knowledge of Country. Recently, she has been involved as workshop presenter for the Boomerang Festival (2016); Clancestry (2015); Homeground Festival, Sydney Opera House (2015); and Australian Museum (2015). She has exhibited in group exhibitions, including *Woven*, BCM Crucible Gallery, artisan (2014); *Connections to the Waters of Minjerribah*, Redland Art Gallery (2015); and *Marketplace*, artisan (2015).



SHARON PHINEASA

b. 1976, Brisbane, Queensland
Ait-Koedal and Dhoeybaw people
Lives and works: Townsville, Queensland

Sharon Phineasa was born and raised in Brisbane, but spent much of her upbringing on Dauan Island in the top western Torres Straits. Growing up in both worlds has influenced her artistic practice and encouraged her to explore contemporary art through working across several mediums, including carving, sculpture, painting and collage to reflect a deep respect for her cultural heritage and ensure the preservation of stories, knowledge and traditions.

Phineasa identifies her main source of inspiration as:

... the Kulba Adithil (old stories) of myths and legends passed on to me by Island Elders, especially by my grandfather who carved traditional artefacts. Childhood experiences on the islands have also provided me with stories to draw upon. I feel a great responsibility to pass on the knowledge and stories that have been passed on to me, through artistic expression and on many

Sharon Phineasa, *Koey Kamu (Big Mangrove Pod Cap)* 2015, recycled umbrella, polyester wadding, cotton, wool, raffia, shells. Image courtesy of the artist.

occasions I have felt a strong connection to my ancestors, as I have told their stories through these means.

Currently living and working in Townsville with her husband and children, Phineasa sees the continuance of her artistic practice as a means of maintaining her culture in all aspects of her life.

In 2012, Phineasa was selected in the Australian Delegation for the Festival of Pacific Arts, Honiara, Solomon Islands (2012) and she had a solo exhibition *Kapa Kukuwam* at UMI Arts, Cairns. She has also exhibited in group and touring exhibitions, including *Freshwater Saltwater* (UMI Arts 2014, 2015, 2016); *Indigenous Fashion Week: Akin Collection*, Sydney (2014); and Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (2013, 2014). Her work is held in several collections, including those of the NGA, SLQ, and Gab Titui Cultural Centre.



DEBBIE PRESLEY

b. 1955, Brisbane, Queensland
Bidjira and Jiman people
Lives and works: Redcliffe, Queensland

Debbie Presley's conceptual approach to her art practice is informed by her early childhood experiences growing up in remote areas of far Western Queensland; her Indigenous cultural knowledge; and her understanding of Australian colonial history.

Having worked across different artistic mediums since 1993, Presley has recently started to explore the use of natural fibres and found objects sourced from her immediate environments to affirm the ongoing relationship Aboriginal people living in the cities have to Country. This journey into fibre-based practices has allowed her a deepening connection with the land and environment. Though not deliberate, she has created a belonging space in her suburban garden, a process she describes as "forging my own sense of Country, which comes from both a learned and inherent connection (racial memory) with the past, present and future that is passed on through my bloodlines".

Debbie Presley, *Entwined Traditions* (detail)
2016, Yucca fibre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

In her home garden, Presley re-enacts the art practices of her ancestors, which include weaving. She finds weaving a meditative act, with the repetitive actions offering time to think deeply and reflectively about her ancestors. She hopes to further explore traditional fibre practices and customary techniques belonging to her cultural heritage.

Presley has a Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art (Sculpture) from QCA, and was selected to participate in the inaugural South Stradbroke Island Indigenous Artist Camp in 2014, exhibiting in the resulting group exhibition at the Gold Coast City Art Gallery.



KATINA DAVIDSON

b. 1990, Brisbane, Queensland
Kullilli and Yuggera people
Lives and works: Brisbane, Queensland

Katina Davidson's artistic practice explores concepts of genetic memory and trans-generational trauma, and their relationships to significant locations and her identity. She is curious about how these concepts intersect with each other and how they consequently affect her experiences of the past and present as a Kullilli and Yuggera woman, and a descendant of the Purga Mission with maternal non-Indigenous Australian heritage.

While she strongly asserts herself as a painter with a fascination with light and colour theory, her practice has evolved to merge tools and methods of domesticity with 'high art' materials in increasingly non-figurative ways, introducing complex and conjoined contemporary social histories into the narratives in her work.

Katina Davidson, *Peek into the Crevice and Get Lost in the Periphery* (detail) 2016, manipulated Belgian linen. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

In 2011, Davidson graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art from QCA (Interdisciplinary Painting). She works broadly across genres as a practicing artist and curator, and has exhibited in various Brisbane galleries. She has taken part in professional development opportunities, such as the inaugural South Stradbroke Indigenous Artist Camp in 2014. Most recently, she was the recipient of the 2015 Wesfarmers National Gallery of Australia Indigenous Public Programming Fellowship. She has curated several social history exhibitions at kuril dhagun, SLQ.

WEFT AND WARP: BOUND TOGETHER

Over time, tides and sand have shifted and patterns and ways of life have changed. But Yunggaire has survived and continue to thrive, as have our people and our practices. Fibre art can appear ephemeral, fragile, and delicate. However, the works in this exhibition demonstrate that appearances aren't necessarily truth. From woven Pituri bags and warrior adornments to bark vessels and sturdy mats, stories of endurance, survival and celebration can be read.

Through the workshops and the exchanging of stories, patterns, skills and techniques, this project has also brought together generations, families and communities. The transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures continues and strengthens by engaging, creating, collaborating and performing. Importantly, new relationships were also formed from lineages across the lands and seas. Indeed, as *Gathering Strands* proudly attests, fibre art remains a powerful means of cultural exchange and endurance in Australia today.





ISBN 978-0-9924682-1-7

Gathering Strands exhibition catalogue first published 2016 by the Redland Art Gallery, Redland City Council.

Compiled by: Freja Carmichael

Design: Jenna Lee, Gilimbaa

Copy editors: Evie Franzidis and Stephanie Lindquist

Catalogue editors: Evie Franzidis and Emma Bain

Printed by: The Print Office

Paper stock: Cover 340gsm Splendorgel, Text 140gsm Splendorgel,
Text 125gsm Imitilin White

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Please note: The spelling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words and names varies. In this publication, they appear as provided by artists and/or verified by appropriate sources.

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This project has received financial assistance from the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland's Backing Indigenous Arts program and the Gordon Darling Foundation, and is supported by QYAC.



**Queensland
Government**



Publication supported by:



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



The *Gathering Strands* exhibition, workshops and publication would not have been possible without the support, generosity, and encouragement of a large number of people and organisations. Special thanks to all the Elders, Quandamooka community, and artists involved in the project.

Image attributions:

Inside front and back cover: Evelyn Parkin, *Honouring 'Aunt Margaret, Mum and Grannies'* 2016, Yunggaire. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Debbie Presley, *Entwined Traditions* (detail) 2016, Yucca fibre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Rene Clarey, *Colours of the Sea* 2016, Yunggaire, raffia and shells. Rene Clarey, *Raffia Basket with Recycled Rope* 2016, raffia, recycled nylon rope and shells. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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(left to right) close up of Aunt Mary Burgess, Sonja Carmichael, Aunt Rene Clarey, Toni Cope and Aunt Evelyn Parkin with Yunggaire. Photography by Freja Carmichael. Courtesy of Redland Art Gallery and participants.

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Elisa Jane Carmichael, *A Bed of Yunggaire* (detail) 2016, digitally printed cotton fabric, wire and fishing line. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Sarah Wapau, *Waving My Energy* (detail) 2016, coconut leaf. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Yunggaire (detail). Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of Yunggaire weavers.

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Hannah Gutchen and Hannah Brontë, *I am Your Spine* 2016 (detail), coconut leaf, coconut spine, raffia. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Carol McGregor, *A Minute Invitation* 2016, copper, brass, natural fibre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

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Yunggaire (detail). Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of Yunggaire weavers.

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Sonja Carmichael, *Pulan Pools, Baskets of Culture* (detail) 2016, natural raffia, nylon fishing net, synthetic fibre. Photography by David Williams, Gilimbbaa. Courtesy of the artist.

Jenna Lee – Graphic Designer

Jenna Lee is a proud Larrakia woman with a Bachelor of Visual Communication Design and is currently completing a Bachelor of Fine Art at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

Her design practice is strongly influenced by her heritage, drawing on the rich artistic practices of her Larrakia ancestors. Jenna believes that through design she has the opportunity to showcase the stunning beauty and intricate design aesthetics contained in Aboriginal culture.







