

**CAIRNS  
ART  
GALLERY**

# **Reimagining between tradition and innovation**

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**Artwork labels**

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*Reimagining: between tradition and innovation* highlights the work of Indigenous artists from the Gallery's Collection. The exhibition looks at the significance of legacy in contemporary Indigenous art, where the generational transmission of cultural knowledge across time and place informs innovation and is intrinsic to developments in contemporary artistic practice. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who live in or who have cultural connection to Far North Queensland, understanding, respecting and practising age-old cultural rituals and traditions are deeply embedded in their work. This knowledge and understanding of culture and connection also encourages them to create works of art that can impart traditional knowledge to new audiences while reaching out to the next generation of artists and encouraging them to connect and engage with their culture as an expression of identity and belonging.

Through the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary works, this exhibition seeks to articulate the many ways in which artistic expression can transition from traditional works made from organic materials using ancient techniques, such as weaving, carving, body markings and scarification, to exciting and highly contemporary works made from man-made materials and using new media.

Close scrutiny of many of the contemporary works will reveal references that may initially seem ironic or incongruous, such as references to western art history and the appropriation of popular culture images and forms. However, these inclusions are deliberate and are selected by the artist for their ability to extend complex narratives between traditional and contemporary ways of life and culture.

# **Kalina DAY, Dulcie GIBAS, Andrew PASSI Snr, Andrew PASSI Jnr, Alick PASSI, Sabu TABO, Reteah TAPIM**

Meriam Mir

## ***Ebur Peris Peris, cabinet***

2019

Murray Island bamboo (*Schizostachyum* sp), poplar ply, stain, synthetic polymer paint, feathers, hibiscus bark, cowrie shells

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2019

For the *Ebur Peris Peris, cabinet*, a group of seven contemporary artists from Mer (Murray Island in the Torres Strait) created thirty-six hand carved feathers from bamboo poles. Each feather was hand painted to represent tail feathers of the *Deumer*, also known as the Torres Strait Pigeon.

For Meriam people, the black and white feathers of the *Deumer* are powerful cultural objects that symbolise both unity and individuality. Men wear a single feather as part of their headdress during special festivities. The feather is also used to identify which tribe the individual comes from.

The smaller feathers on *Ebur Peris Peris, cabinet* represent the Meriam funeral tradition. When a member of an important Meriam tribe or clan passes away, the body is decorated with feathers that serve to mummify and preserve the body.

The making of this cabinet was the result of a generous desire of the artists to create a culturally significant work based on sacred funeral rites and ceremonies to be shared with non-Indigenous audiences.

This work was created by Kalina Day, Dulcie Gibas, Andrew Passi Snr, Andrew Passi Jnr, Alick Passi, Sabu Tabo and Reteah Tapim.

# **Kapua George GUTCHEN Snr**

Meriam Mir/Erub, Meuram people, Erub (Darnley Island)

## ***Pedaukawa (Uncle Baldy)***

### ***Au Koskerr (senior lady)***

2012

woodfired stoneware with natural and found objects

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of Robina Cosser, 2012

## ***Koiet Le ra Takarr A Izurzur***

2010

digital print and watercolour

Private collection

Kapua Gutchen Snr was born in 1957 and is from Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Straits. As a respected Meriam Elder he is a passionate mentor for the music, art, dance, and language of his people.

Growing up on the island, Gutchen would listen to the Elders telling stories and legends, including stories about pre- and post-colonial times. These stories had a profound impact on him and continue to inform his art practice.

Gutchen works across a number of mediums. His ceramic works focus on representations of symbolic island identities, particularly the figures of an Uncle and Aunty who are prominent figures within the family. They are traditionally dressed, with a grass skirt and body adornment to show their cultural importance and the role they perform within the broader island community.

While Gutchen's Aunty and Uncle figures represent deep cultural values and community structures, his representation of them, using ceramics, is a contemporary invention and an exploration into new ways of creating art forms based on age-old traditions.

# Naomi HOBSON

Southern Kaantju/Umpila

*Iwayi*

*Iwayi*

2019

Terracotta, white slip glaze

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Redot Fine Art Gallery

*Iwayi*

*Tapil (Shovel-nose Shark)*

2020

Terracotta, white slip glaze

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Redot Fine Art Gallery

Naomi Hobson is descended from the southern Kaanjtu and Umpila people of the Coen and Lockhart River region on the east coast of the Cape York Peninsula. She lives and works in the remote Indigenous community of Coen where she is a passionate advocate for her culture and an inspiring role model for young artists in her community.

Hobson first began her career as a painter before expanding her body of work to include ceramics, and most recently, photography and the moving image.

Her ceramic works were first exhibited in 2018, and incorporated the clays and ochres from the region around Coen that have been traditionally used for ancient body markings and in ritual performances.

While the patterns and designs in her ceramic works are based on traditional line drawings, Hobson applies contemporary techniques to transform them into contemporary cylindrical ceramic poles to which she applies the sgraffito technique. While the geometric designs are based on traditional representations, such as those of the crocodile or shovel nose shark, the ceramic poles are an exciting transition into a new contemporary art form for the artist.

# Janet FIELDHOUSE

Kala Lagaw Ya/Meriam Mir

## *Bride Pendant*

## *Bride Pendant*

2014

buff raku trachyte, hemp string, feather

Collection of the artist

## *Confluence 15*

2018

cool ice porcelain, chocolate brown clay, buff raku trachyte

Collection of the artist

Janet Fieldhouse combines her Torres Strait Islander cultural memory and knowledge with the non-traditional medium of ceramics to redefine cultural representation and expression.

Recognising both her matrilineal connections to Badu (Mulgrave), Mua (Moa), Kirriri (Hammond) and Erub (Darnley) islands and South Sea Islander communities, and her father's European heritage, her art practice centres on issues of identity, family and community.

Fieldhouse explores cultural expression through experimentation using ceramics and fibre to create adornments for the body, particularly those used by women. Her intricate woven porcelain armbands are contemporary in appearance however they are based on a traditional weaving technique that is used in the creation of mats and baskets woven with pandanus palm.

Fieldhouse often applies designs from female rituals of scarification which involves the cutting or burning of the skin to create a permanent marking in scar tissue. These designs remain culturally significant and are used by her as a way to preserve them for future generations.

# **Grace Lillian LEE**

Miriam Mir/Erub

***White: Enlightenment***

***Red: Acceptance***

***Yellow: Empowerment***

***Black: Infinity***

2016

cotton webbing, goose feathers, beads, timber cane, cotton and wool thread

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery with the assistance of Friends of the Gallery, 2016

## ***A Weave Through Time***

2017

palm leaf, cotton yarn, plastic, cotton webbing

one channel video, 4.2 mins

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased Cairns Art Gallery Foundation, 2018

Grace Lillian Lee was born in Cairns in 1988 and her language group is Meriam Mir. Her body sculpture series are a fusion of traditional weaving and contemporary fashion and body adornment. In 2010 she graduated in Fashion Design at RMIT University, Melbourne. Her sculptural work is the result of a passion for learning traditional weaving techniques in order to create ornamental body sculptures that are unmistakably contemporary and which combine art, performance and fashion.

Lees' body sculptures draw on her mastery of the palm leaf weaving technique that is often referred to in the Torres Straits as 'prawn weaving'. It is a style that she learnt from renowned artist and mentor, Uncle Ken Thaiday from Darnley Island.

Grace is deeply interested in exploring the relationships between contemporary fashion and design, and traditional cultures and communities. She explains:

*'I want to explore how art and fashion meets and push the boundaries of creating a world where fabrications are pushed, and technique is embraced, and exploration of self-expression is widely accepted and explored'.*

Grace Lillian Lee Grace Lillian Lee is passionate about exploring her cultural connection to Torres Strait Island traditions. Her confident fusion of fashion and art provides her with unlimited scope to explore connections to country, and the conjoining of time past, present and future.

While honouring the cultural traditions of her ancestors, Lee embraces the present and the possibilities of the future. This exploration is sensitively realised in her work *A Weave Through Time* that comprises three women's dresses, each of which is designed to represent the passing of time and traditions – from a time long ago in the past, through to the present and beyond to an imagined future.

Each of the three dresses is created using different materials that reference a different point in time. The first piece is constructed from traditional organic materials including leaves, twigs and bark. The second piece is contemporary in style and made from woven white material, while the third piece is stylistically futuristic and is made from highly synthetic materials. A supporting video shows three generations of women in the artist's family to highlight the intersecting values of cultural knowledge with contemporary society.



# **Shirley MACNAMARA**

Indilanji Dhidhanu/Alyewarre

## ***Bush fascinator***

2013

spinifex with kangaroo and emu bone

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased with the assistance of the Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation,  
2014

## ***Bush fascinator***

2013

spinifex with Lorikeet feathers

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased with the assistance of the Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation,  
2014

Shirley Macnamara was born in 1949 and is from the Indjilanji/Alyewarre language group of northwest Queensland. Born into a family of drovers, she spent her early childhood on cattle stations in an area known as Spinifex Country because of the hardy, stringy grass that grows there in abundance. Today she is a respected artist and also runs her own cattle station near Mount Isa.

Shirley is an artist of great insight, creating poetic objects of great beauty and poignancy. Her sophisticated spinifex grass works are informed by age-old traditional weaving techniques and often incorporate different elements such as animal bones and feathers. These elements operate as spiritual codes and connectors to her culture while giving her work a highly individualised contemporary aesthetic.

Shirley's exquisitely conceived fascinators are a form of stylised contemporary headwear, which show an exciting and confident confluence of two very different cultures. They defy categorisation as they are steeped in tradition while connecting with the world of desirable fashion accessories.

# **Shirley MACNAMARA**

Indilanji Dhidhanu/Alyewarre

## ***Memoir #2***

from the *Memoir* series

2015

spinifex, emu feathers, wire, kangaroo bone, wax thread, ochre and fixative  
Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2015

Shirley Macnamara uses the Christian cross as a reference for death and, in this instance, the death of soldiers during war. Using her traditional weaving practice, Shirley winds spinifex in the form of a cross to signify death and loss.

# Claudia MOODOONUTHI

Wik Mungkan/Lardil/Kayardild, Kaiadilt/Wik Mungkan people

## *Off the Wall*

2014

synthetic polymer paint on skateboards

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2015

## *Burkunda*

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2015

Claudia Moodoonuthi is a young artist who spent the first seven years of her life on Bentinck and Mornington Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. During these formative years she developed a deep connection to the country and traditional ways of the *Lardil* and *Kayardild* people. The title of her textile design, *Burkunda*, means 'body marks' and the horizontal marks are her Grandmother's. Some reflect specific ceremonies and others significant events. 'Body marks are given to us when we go through lore. My Grandmother's body marks have become mine,' she says.

# **Dr. Thancoupie (Gloria Fletcher JAMES)**

Thaynakwith

## ***Moocheth the Ibis with her son Golpondon***

1989

textile

Private collection

## ***Yam***

2003

stoneware

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased, 2004

## ***Untitled***

c.1980

ceramic

Private collection

## ***Emu and Brolga Stories and the Food Plants of Albatross Bay, Western Cape York***

n.d.

cast Aluminium

Private collection

Thancoupie (Gloria Fletcher) was born in 1937 and died in 2011. She is a major figure in contemporary Australian art and is renowned for her ceramic pots engraved with lineal designs that tell her peoples' stories from Thaynakwith country, western Cape York.

Thancoupie's sculptural ceramics are organic in form. They were created using the slab technique and the concave surfaces of her own body, including her knees and elbows, to push the wall of the clay into free-form shapes.

Growing up, Thancoupie was taught by her female Elders about the traditional stories. They would tell these stories using symbols drawn repeatedly in the sand. These are the symbols that the artist has adapted and etched into the surface of her works. Together these patterns create a contemporary visual narrative and she would often refer to these works as her 'story pots'.

Later in life Thancoupie transitioned from ceramics and textiles to aluminium to create some of her largest and most important public art commissions. Thancoupie is widely regarded as one of Australia's finest and most important artists and is represented in public collections nationally and internationally.

# **Brian ROBINSON**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Maluyligal, Maluyligal (Mua Island, Torres Strait)/  
Wuthathi (Shelburne Bay, Cape York)/Dayak (Borneo) people

## ***... the blooms continue to flourish***

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2015

## ***Pada Kuyk: Power beyond the grave***

2019

Palight plastic, enamel spray paint, polyvinyl chlorid

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased by Cairns Art Gallery Foundation, 2020

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to land is spiritual and enduring. Their stories have evolved from the land and provide a foundation for artistic inspiration, and a way of expressing cultural identity.

For Robinson, a multidisciplinary artist from the Torres Strait, gardening traditions which include garden charms and blooms that provide protection over peoples farms, are a source of inspiration in his linocuts, relief sculptures and as motifs transferred onto linen textiles. Robinson's respect for traditional gardening skills includes an understanding of how plants can influence rainfall and how the growth of plants can be affected by actions, words, songs and the use of figures and stones.

Brian Robinson's *Pada Kuyk: Power beyond the grave* is symbolic of the tradition whereby a child of the deceased keeps the skull of the parent after death, to ward against dangers in the natural world. The skull is believed to carry supernatural powers that allow communication with the spiritual world.

# **Brian ROBINSON**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Maluyligal, Maluyligal (Mua Island, Torres Strait)/  
Wuthathi (Shelburne Bay, Cape York)/Dayak (Borneo) people

## ***Land Sea Sky - charting our place in the universe***

2016

linocut mounted on board

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation with the assistance of  
Leigh Heidenreich and Peters Bosel Lawyers, 2016

## ***Usal - the seven sisters that play amongst the stars***

2016

inocut printed on paper and mounted to board, pine dowel, rattan, shells,  
raffia, twine, feathers, plastic beads, plastic skull

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation with the assistance of  
Rosemary Goodsall, 2016

The Torres Strait printmaking practice stems largely from traditional wood carving traditions and oral story telling. Artists such as Brian Robinson use printmaking as a way to tell stories using lineal patterns as a narrative device, as well as more complex designs that radiate across the block and allow the viewer entry into the story from multiple viewpoints.

Robinson's works are layered with contemporary and traditional representations. They combine traditional European art styles, history and architecture, with Torres Strait storytelling. This approach allows the artist to introduce anachronistic elements such as the Pac-Man © ghost icon, to enhance the telling of a traditional story and further embellish complex narratives within his work.

This approach assists the artist in navigating his traditional culture. It enables him

# Lei

The Torres Strait lei collection presents works by artists from Waiben (Thursday Island), Saibai Island, Erub (Darnley Island), Mer (Murray Island), Mua (Moa Island), Bolgu Island and Badu (Mulgrave Island). In 2018, the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Cairns Art Gallery and Gabi Titui Cultural Centre worked closely with island communities to revisit the tradition of making lei in the Torres Strait and exploring innovative ways of creating contemporary body adornments using traditional and contemporary materials.

Traditionally lei were made for ritual ceremonies. They were made using natural materials from the land and sea. As part of the lei project, specialist curators and professionals travelled to the islands to conduct workshops with community members. Using a combination of organic and man-made objects, including found objects, recycled materials, seeds, plants, feathers and fibre materials, different island communities explored ways of applying traditional forms of lei making to create innovative body adornments embellished with synthetic and man-made materials and using contemporary techniques.



## **Mariana BABIA**

Kala Lagaw Ya, Ayth Koedal people

### ***Kulapiw Koewsa lei I***

2017

kulap seed (green), timber bead, coconut, nylon-coated trace wire, crimps  
Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

## **Lara FUJII**

Kala Lagaw Ya, Argan/Badhu people

***No. 1***

***No. 2***

2017

seeds, shells, nylon, kulap

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

## **Rachel Emma GELA**

Meriam Mir/Erub, Peidu people

### ***Erubian beads II***

2017

ceramic, seeds

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

# **Florence GUTCHEN**

Meriam Mir/Erub

## ***Home reef***

2017

rubber, kulap seed, ghost net, silver, shell, twine

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

# **Nancy NAAWI**

Miriam Mir/Erub, Peidu people

## ***Island Home II***

2017

kulap seed, copper pipe, shell, wongai seed, aluminium

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

# **Rosie WARE**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Miriam Mir

## ***Amazing Grace***

2017

aluminum, shell, coral, silk, polyester, steel cable, enamel paint

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

# **Wasie TARDENT**

Miriam Mir/Erub

## ***Porso small***

2017

nylon

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

# **Nathan TABUAI**

Kala Lagaw Ya

## ***Kataw Za***

2017

raffia, black lip pearl shell, PVC pipe, cable ties, nylon strapping, nylon cord,  
cassowary feathers, enamel paint, glue

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

## **Mary KAIGEY**

Meriam, Komet people

## **Rita LUI**

Meriam, Zagareb people

## **Helen MABO**

Meriam, Peibre people

## **Garee KAIGEY**

Meriam, Komet people

## **Helen DICK**

Meriam, Mer people

## **Delina NOAH**

Meriam, Komet people

## **Beverly MABO**

Meriam, Mer people

## **Segar PASSI**

Meriam, Dauareb people

## ***Messiah Luzab Lera Kaubo Arsir II***

2017

canvas, acrylic paint, thread, synthetic wadding, wing seed, shell, plastic, copper sheet, copper tube, nylon cord, PET plastic, coral, kulap seed, steel coated wire, wongai seed

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

## **Shirley DANIEL**

Samu people (Boigu Island)

## **Theresa CLERMONT**

Ragupine people (west Cape York)

## **Dadib INGUI**

Boigu Island

## **Bonita KAIDA**

Daru people (Papua New Guinea)

### ***Sa my pamle lei (This is my family lei)***

2017

PET plastic, ribbon, nylon, plastic chip and noodle packets, silver jump rings, Cassowary feathers, steel trace wire, timber beads, aluminum staples, satin ribbons

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2017

## Body Markings

This group of works relates conceptually and directly to the traditional practice of body scarification and body markings. Scarification rituals vary between cultural groups and were practised as a form of initiation and celebration of maturity and coming of age.

Today, body-painting designs, using ochres and paints, continue to use the ritual markings of scarification and are applied for specific cultural performances and dance. Each of the artists in this group of works references ancient line markings and body scarification in their contemporary art practice.

For artists Rosella Namok and Claudia Moodoonuthi, traditional body markings and stories passed onto them from their grandmothers have shaped the designs and lineal patterns incorporated in their contemporary art works.

Craig Koomeeta's painting depicts two symbolic traditional face markings relating to the Apelech Brothers. The Apelech Brothers are important mythological beings who created all the land and waters around the area known as Aurukun, on the western coast of Cape York Peninsula. Koomeeta has created a contemporary reference to the brothers, while honouring their significance in the Creation Story of the region.

# **Rosella NAMOK**

Aangkum (Ungkum)

## ***Body paint . . . all those aunties***

2002

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
by Geoff and Fran Barker, 2005

## ***Myself***

n.d.

synthetic polymer paint on masonite board

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
by Geoff and Fran Barker, 2005

# **Craig KOOMEETA**

Wik-Alkan people

## ***Apelech Brothers: Face Markings***

2005

ochres with acrylic binder on linen

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
by Lynne Saunder, 2019

## Dibi dibi

*Dibi dibi* are breast ornaments that were worn to give protection to men during battle. They shielded the warrior from harm, and gave spiritual power during travel. Today *dibi dibi* are designed and worn as a form of contemporary body adornment.

Joel Sam is a descendant of the people of Saibai Island in the northwest region of the Torres Strait. Sam's *dibi dibi* combine ancient motifs and styles with new materials such as braided raffia and twine neck-loops. The pearl shell pendant is often embellished with additional strands of raffia, twine, emu and cassowary feathers. The size of the pearl shell pendant varies according to the animal it depicts, and sometimes other traditional elements are incorporated, including boar tusks and recycled shark and dugong bones.

Samuel Savage Snr. is a descendant of the people of Erub (Darnley Island) in the eastern Torres Strait. In this region men wear *dibi dibi* during customary practices and ceremony. They are distinctive because of their incised radiating and repetitive patterns created using geometric and abstract shapes and designs. Savage creates *dibi dibi* that combine these traditional patterns with contemporary materials and techniques.



# **Samuel SAVAGE Snr**

Meriam Mir/Erub

*Dibi dibi*

*Dibi dibi*

2018

mother of pearl, raffia

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

# **Laurie NONA**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Maluyligal, Badhulgal/Maluyligal people

*Waru Kakurr Dhibadhib (Turtle egg Chest Plate)*

2017

etching, ed.1/15

*Giethalay Dhibadhib (Mud crab Chest Plate)*

2017

etching, ed.2/10

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

# **Glen MACKIE (Kei Kalak)**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Kulkalgal, (Central Torres Strait), Iama people

*Kebisu*

2017

vinylcut, ed. 2/25

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

# **Joel SAM**

Kala Kawa Ya/Saibailgu, Sui Baidam people

## ***Dibi dibi***

2018

twine, mother of pearl, raffia, dye, shell, cassowary feathers, emu feathers

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

## ***Dibi dibi***

2018

twine, mother of pearl, emu feathers, dye, recycled boar tusk, recycled shark bone

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

## ***Dhangalau Gi***

2018

natural twine, mother of pearl, spray paint

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

## Dhoeri/Dhari (Torres Strait Island headdress)

Torres Strait Islanders are the only group of people in the world to have mastered the use of the carapace of a turtle shell to create masks that represent spiritual forms and which are worn during particular ceremonies.

Ceremonial masks were traditionally made from land and marine animal parts and often included elements traded from neighbouring Papua New Guinea. These masks were decorated to represent a particular performance ritual such as initiation, or to communicate with omnipotent gods.

During the 19th and 20th centuries and the pervasive Missionary period, traditional masks were destroyed because of their cult-like nature. Others were collected by anthropologists and were acquired by museum collections around the world. During this time, the traditional practice of mask-making, along with their stories, all but disappeared.

In the late 20th century, however, modern technology and materials began to be used to replace traditional materials and designs. This resurgence of mask-making to regain and relearn design technique, has resulted in an extraordinary development of contemporary masks that incorporate highly sophisticated designs and patterns resulting in objects of great beauty and significance.

The Torres Strait Island headdress is known as a dhoeri (in the western Kala Lagaw Ya dialect) or *dhari* (in the eastern Meriam Mir dialect). It is a ceremonial head adornment and is part of a warrior outfit that was worn for battles with inhabitants of nearby islands and the coastal villages of Papua New Guinea.

During ceremonial performances and dances the headdress is used to tell stories of the past, including ancient legends, as well as more recent stories about first contact and the Coming of the Light. Traditional headdresses incorporate carved pearl shells, wood, turtle shells, bone, feathers and other media. Different designs are used and deeply symbolic. These designs can also establish cultural identity and connection of an individual.

Today, contemporary Torres Strait islander artists combine natural and man-made objects to create contemporary representations of the headdress that are collected by museums and buyers around the world. These works, while contemporary in appeal, are nonetheless steeped in ancient traditions that continue to be handed down from one generation to the next.

For Torres Strait Islander people, traditional and ceremonial dancing was a visual way of telling and retelling stories and included the use of dance machines and other apparatuses. The dance apparatuses and machines (*zamiyak*) were used to support and enhance the narrative of a dance and were activated at certain times during a performance to give a particular visual illustration to the story being told.

Dance continues to be a celebrated art form in Torres Strait Islander culture however some of the more traditional elements have been modified and reinterpreted, and now include modern technologies and contemporary materials.

Ken Thaiday Snr is an acclaimed Elder and cultural practitioner from the island of Erub (Darnley Island). His innovative works of art are a reinterpretation of *zamiyakal* machines and often incorporate symbolically significant elements of Torres Strait Islander cultural practices. These include the male headdress (*dhari*) that is worn during ceremony. More recently, Thaiday has collaborated with other artists to create extraordinary kinetic sculptural works that are used in performance to explain day-to-day hunting and fighting practices that continue today.

# **Obery SAMBO**

Meriam Mir/Mer, Mer people

## ***Maier Le Op Nog***

2011

fibreglass, shell, beeswax, native grasses, cotton twine, cassowary feathers  
Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
by Michael Kershaw, 2012

## ***Waiat Le Op Dari***

2011

feathers, cane, twine, gold lipped saltwater pearl shell, synthetic polymer  
paint, timber, coconut fibre, dyed beeswax, cowrie shell

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2012

## ***Meriam Le Op Dari***

2011

Queensland bean seed, feathers, cane, gold lipped saltwater pearl shell,  
freshwater pearl shell, dyed beeswax, coloured twine.

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2012

## **Alick TIPOTI**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Maluyligal, Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait),  
Badhu/Argan/Wakaid people

### ***Baywaw Mawa (Laag) II***

2011

fibreglass, resin, fibre, beads, rope & feathers

Cairns Art Gallery. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural  
Gifts Program by Alick Tipoti, 2012

## **Toby CEDAR**

Meriam Mir/Erub/Kala Lagaw

Ya/Mua/Peiudu/Erub/Samsep-Meriam/Mer/Wug people

### ***Beizam Le Op***

2015

pearl shell, feathers, fibreglass, synthetic polymer paint, cane, twine,  
bamboo cane, beeswax, kuluop

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2015.

## **Noel ZARO**

Meriam Mir/Mer, Dauareb/Meriam Samsep people

### ***Beizam Tereg***

c. 2010

feather, coconut fibre, coconut wood, cane, Torres Strait Pigeon tail feather, wood, plastic, ochre, acrylic

Private collection

## **Jimmy K THAIDAY**

Meriam Mir/Erub/Mer/Peiudu people

### ***Ghost net Dari***

2012

wire, recycled fishing net

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2012

## **Dr. Ken THAIDAY Snr.**

Meriam Mir/Erub

### ***Beizam (Hammerhead Shark) dance mask***

2001

black bamboo, plywood, nylon line, plastic, paint and feathers

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2001

***Black bamboo hammerhead shark headdress (small)***

2010

bamboo, marine ply, fishing line, eagle feathers

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2010.

***Eastern Island dhari headdress on a but fish (butterfish)  
wooden stand***

2010

bamboo, plywood, enamel paint, cane, wire, nylon, feathers, seed pods cat  
eye

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2012

**Yessie MOSBY**

Kulkalgaw Ya/Kulkalgal, Gudumadh people

***Initiation Dhoeri***

2012

Ground pigeon, Rainbow pigeon & White Turkey feathers, Wada seeds, gidi  
gidi seeds, bamboo, twine, grass, beeswax, ochres & mangrove dye

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation, 2012



# **Yessie MOSBY**

Kulkalgaw Ya/Kulkalgal, Gudumadh people

## ***Clan Dhoeri***

2012

Crocodile tooth, human hair, Cassowary & White Turkey feathers, Wada seeds, gidi gidi seeds, bamboo, twine, grass, beeswax, ochres & mangrove dye

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation, 2012

## ***Puberty Dhoeri***

2012

Cassowary, Sea Hawk, White Turkey feathers, Wada seeds, gidi gidi seeds, bamboo, twine, grass, beeswax, ochres & mangrove dye

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation, 2012

## ***Chiefs Dhoeri***

2012

Frigate bird, Rainbow pigeon, Heron, White Turkey feathers, Wada seeds, bamboo, twine, grass, beeswax, ochres & mangrove dye

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated by Cairns Regional Gallery Foundation, 2012

## **Segar PASSI**

Meriam Mir, Dauareb/Komet people

### ***A young Murray Island man in a mask***

1990

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of David Everist, 2019

## **Dr. Ken THAIDAY Snr.**

Meriam Mir/Erub

## **Jason CHRISTOPHER**

### ***Clamshell with hammerhead shark***

2013

aluminium, perspex and mechanical gearing

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2013

## **Glen MACKIE (Kei Kalak)**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Kulkalgal, (Central Torres Strait), Iama people

### ***Cult of the Four Bala***

2011

linocut. ed.50

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Canopy Art and Editions Tremblay NFP

## Rock art

Ancient rock art is found across the vast ancient landscape of the Australian continent and comprises symbols that reflect aspects of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal history, identity, memories and experiences. In rock art there is no distinction between natural and ancestral worlds.

Traditional rock art involved the practice of using ochre rocks, repeatedly chalking the surface of a cave or a rock wall. The imagery engraved onto the rock surface provided a visual documentation of events, including reference to Indigenous religious and mythical beings, depictions of good and bad spirits, combat, hunting and sourcing of food.

Rock art designs are based on lineal markings, which have become the source of inspiration for many Indigenous contemporary artists. The internationally recognised Australian Indigenous art movement began from this point on, as contemporary artists transformed traditional rock art imagery to convey contemporary issues around notions of identity and place, using different styles and media, including painting, printmaking, drawing and sculpture.

# **Rosella NAMOK**

Aangkum/Ungkum

## ***Freshwater turtle***

1997

etching, aquatint, ed. 6/10

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

## ***AWU woman***

1999

collagraph, ed. u/25

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

# **Evelyn SANDY**

Lama Lama

## ***Kaa 'uma***

1998

screenprint, ed. A/P

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

# **Leroy PLATT**

Kuuku Ya'u

## ***Stolen kids***

1999

etching, ed. 1/99

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

# **Terry PLATT**

Kuuku Ya'u/Lama Lama

## ***Looking for food***

1997

etching, aquatint, ed. 3/10

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

# **Silas HOBSON**

Kuuku Ya'u/Wuthathi

## ***Old man croc***

1999

etching, aquatint, ed.16/20

Cairns Art Gallery. Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2000

# **Goobalathaldin Dick ROUGHSEY**

Lardil

## ***Return of the Hunting Party***

1983

synthetic polymer paint on masonite

Cairns Art Gallery.

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

by Peter and Lee Coaldrake, 2019

## Dilly bags

The tradition of basket or dilly bag making varies throughout Australia and in particular in Far North Queensland. As a functional object, baskets were primarily used for carrying objects, food gathering and storage. Baskets were made to be versatile and some were designed specifically to support the weight of a newborn baby for travel.

Traditional basket making techniques have been passed down from generation to generation. Designs, shapes, different materials, cultural purposes and geographical location all determine the different forms that baskets may take.

Traditional basket and dilly bag making are fast becoming a lost skill, with some cultural groups discontinuing this tradition due to the lack of cultural knowledge. However, some weaving practices have been revitalised through the support of weaving collectives, and through the sharing of knowledge between cultural groups in support of continuing this traditional practice.

As a result, a number of contemporary artists continue to adapt traditional techniques while using new materials such as the pallet strap, wire, window screen mesh and ghost nets, to create extraordinarily complex and highly sought after fine art objects.

## **Elverina JOHNSON**

Gungganji/Gurugulu/Gimuy Yidinji

*Bana Dabul*

*Bana Dabul*

*Bana Dabul*

2018

Palm fronds, string, Lawyer cane, glue

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

## **Delissa WALKER**

Kuku Yalanji

*Kakan (dilly bag)*

*Kakan (dilly bag)*

2017

Black palm, Lawyer cane

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2017.

## **Wilma WALKER**

Kuku Yalanji

*Kakan (dilly bag)*

*Kakan (dilly bag)*

2017

Black palm fibre

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 2005

# **Sandra LEO**

Girramay

## ***Jowan***

2017

Lawyer vine

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2017

# **Desley HENRY**

Jirrbal, Jumbun people

## ***Jawun (Bicornial basket)***

2005

Lawyer cane

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2008

# **Abe MURIATA**

Girramay

## ***Jawun - white***

## ***Jawun - red***

2013-14

recycled found objects, paint, wire

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2014



## **Henry BRIM**

Djabugay, Bulway people

### *Yimbi*

2018

Lomandra grass, Fig tree string

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2017

## **Philomena YEATMAN**

Kuku Yalanji/Gungandji

### *Wirrgay (small)*

### *Wirrgay (large)*

2014

hand dyed pandanus

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2014.

## **Jacob GABEY**

Meriam Mir (Mer), Zagareb/Komet people

### *Calabash I*

2010

Coconut frond & bark

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2010.

# **Ruby LUDWICK**

Gunganji

## ***Basket***

2009

Pandanus fibre and natural dyes

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2010

# **Jenny MYE**

Meriam Mir/Erub

## ***Epei (basket)***

2010

Pandanus fronds

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2010

## ***Woven basket II***

## ***Woven basket I***

## ***Erub Epei***

1993

plastic woven strapping

Cairns Art Gallery.

Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery, 1998

# **Evelyn MCGREEN**

Gugu Yimidthirr, Thupi Warra people

*Wawu Djimburr Birra Whukay*  
*(horned basket for Eucalypt medicine leaves)*

*Wawu Bajin Mayi Maramaka*  
*(basket for collecting bush figs & grubs)*

*Wawu Bajin Thinburr Munyu*  
*(basket for windmill grass for damper)*

*Wawu Bajin Nirrpun (basket for collecting berries)*

*Wawu Bajin Whukay, Wayarr (basket for cherry & yam)*

*Wawu Bajin Tharrar & Girrbuti Mayi*  
*(basket for collecting cone shell and seaweed)*

*Wawu Bajin Bulganghi Dhangay*  
*(strainer for washing clams and shellfish)*

*Wawu Djimburr Waadthurr & Mulun*  
*(horned basket for collecting cone shells and quondong fruit)*

2009

synthetic polymer paint wash, linocut

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2017

## Warup (Torres Strait drum)

The warup or open-ended island drum is a traditional instrument that was used for ceremony and spiritual practices throughout the Torres Strait. Drums were traded with Papua New Guineans who often embellished them with handles.

Traditional Torres Strait drum designs are similar to the shape of an hourglass and were adorned with shells, feathers and carved patterns. One end of the drum is left open while the other end is covered with a membrane, which is made from cane-laced goanna skin and bees wax. The skin is beaten with the hand to create a deep bass sound, like thunder, which echoes out to support dancers and singers during ceremonial performances. Its distinctive and evocative sound can travel over great distances.

Today the design and use of the warup remains fundamentally unchanged, though it is now also used as an accompaniment to choirs and for island dancing and during festive occasions.

## **Daniel O'SHANE**

Kulkalgaw Ya/Meriam Mir/Kuku Yalanji

### ***Boroboro (drum)***

2015

linocut. ed.35.

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Canopy Art and Editions Tremblay NFP

## **Vincent BABIA**

Kala Kawaw Ya/Saibai, Ait Koedal people

### ***Legend drum of Wakemab***

2017

wood, seed pod, goanna skin, cane, feather, shark tooth

Cairns Art Gallery.

Purchased by Cairns Art Gallery Foundation, 2015

## **Glen MACKIE (Kei Kalak)**

Kala Lagaw Ya/Kulkalgal, (Central Torres Strait), Iama people

### ***Cargo I***

2009

linocut

Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Canopy Art and Editions Tremblay NFP

## Rainforest shields

The local cultural groups around Cairns are known for their painted rainforest shields. These shields are large and are painted with distinctive geometrical patterns and shapes that represent different tribal markings. Their construction, design and patterning are unique within Australia.

Shields made by traditional warriors were carved from the timber of local rainforest trees and were used for protection during battles, and were used together with enormous wooden spears that measured up to 1.5 metres in length.

Today, artists continue to practise the art of shield making, however they now use fibreglass and other contemporary materials instead of carved out timber from trees. Traditional designs and patterns continue to be incorporated into these contemporary objects, however acrylic and synthetic materials replace the ochres and clays that were used in the past. The designs tell the stories from long ago and serve to keep cultural traditions alive.

## **Michael ANNING (Boiyool)**

Yidinji, Nyudgunji people

### ***Shield (traditional boomerang design) & rainforest sword***

2009

ochre, charcoal on rainforest softwood (*Alstonia Scholaris*)

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2010

### ***Rainforest Tinaroo shield (traditional blood spots design) & rainforest sword***

2009

rainforest hardwood and native bees wax

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2010

## **Paul BONG (Bindur-Bullin)**

Yidinji

### ***Skeleton Creek Conspiracy - Puzzle of Language Memory and Meaning***

2015

2-plate etched and intaglio hand-painted design

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2015

# **Bernard Lee SINGLETON**

Umpila (Coen region)/Djabugay/Yirrganydji

## ***Wagay (sword)***

2011

gum, string, resin

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018



# Firesticks

Fire has played a major role in all human communities. From earliest times, humans developed the skills and equipment to make and sustain fire. In Aboriginal culture, fire was an important part of managing the land through controlled burning, and it was also used for cooking food that they hunted and gathered. Using different methods, friction between two pieces of wood would create hot embers that would ignite tinder material to create fire. The fire lighting technologies and their associated materials were always kept safe and protected from moisture.

In Aboriginal culture, firesticks were ritual objects comprising a decorated soft wood board to draw embers and two firesticks housed within a bee's wax top decorated with gidi-gidi seeds to keep dry from rain.

Making of firesticks continues to be practised by contemporary Aboriginal artists in and around the Cairns area. For these artists, including Michael Anning, Bernard Lee Singleton and Girringun Art Centre artists, the making of contemporary firesticks, allows them to explore the use of scale as well as innovative designs and pattern making. The resulting works are sculptural interpretations of an ancient object, but they continue to be of important cultural significance.

# **Michael ANNING (Boiyool)**

Yidinji, Nyudgunji people

## *Ant Mound Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *String Bag Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Fighting Boomerang Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Earth Oven Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Shield Pattern Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Return Boomerang Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Shield Pattern 2 Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

## *Dishes Firemaker*

– *Nalan (board) with Gugal (sticks)*

2017

natural ochre and charcoal ash on rainforest wood

Cairns Art Gallery. Purchased, 2018

# **Phillip DENHAM**

Girramay

## ***Bagu with Jiman***

2017

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Nephi DENHAM**

Girramay

## ***Bagu***

2019

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Phillip DENHAM**

Girramay

## ***Bagu***

2017

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Davina HARRIES**

Girramay

## ***Bagu***

2019

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Debra MURRAY**

Girramay /Jirrbal

## ***Bagu***

2013

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Alison MURRAY**

Girramay

## ***Bunyaydinyu Bagu***

2011

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Giringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **John MURRAY**

Girramay

## ***Bagu***

2010

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Theresa BEERON**

Jirrbal/Girramay, Irriyungul/Gayjal people

## ***Bunyaydinyu Bagu***

2017

ceramics

Collection of the artist

Courtesy of Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre

# **Bernard SINGLETON**

Umpila/Djabugay/Yirrganydji

## ***Gimala - Fire Stick***

n.d.

Private collection

# Unknown Artist

*Untitled*

n.d.

On loan, Cairns Historical Society Collection, AAB79-1-477