

**CAIRNS
ART
GALLERY**

Out of Queensland New Indigenous Textiles

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Artwork extended labels

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Gordon HOOKEY

Waanyi

Wallaroo

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Belonging to the Waanyi people, Gordon Hookey was born in the western Queensland town of Cloncurry in 1961 and currently lives and works in Brisbane. He is a member of the Aboriginal artist collective proppaNOW, has exhibited extensively around Australia and internationally since 1990, and has undertaken art residencies in several countries.

Hookey's art confronts the tensions at the convergence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures and he generally makes pointed attacks on bigotry and vernacular customs. Strongly defined figures – close to caricatures – are shown aggressively at odds with Indigenous, humanist and social justice values in narrative works alive with primary colour, signs, symbols and demonstrative explanations in text.

Hookey's pointedly satirical style has made a natural transition to textile imagery. Many of his paintings feature the signature character of a kangaroo, or small armies of them. Strident but endearing, these are Gordon Hookey's marsupials with attitude.

Here, the *Wallaroo* design is an infinite mob of multi-coloured kangaroos wearing Aboriginal flag sunglasses that symbolise seeing things the Aboriginal way. Hookey states plainly: 'The kangaroos are Murri people.'

[The Murri are the Indigenous Australians that traditionally occupied most of modern-day Queensland.]

Vernon AH KEE

Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples

Wallaroo

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Vernon Ah Kee was born in 1967 in Innisfail, Queensland, of the Yidindji, Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Koko Berrin and Gugu Yimithirr peoples. A founding member of the Aboriginal artist collective proppaNOW, and the recipient of multiple awards, Vernon Ah Kee is a prolific and highly respected international artist.

In September 2014, Vernon Ah Kee travelled to Turkey at the request of curator, Carolyn Christov Bakargiev. After visiting Istanbul, Ah Kee ventured into regions affected by the Armenian genocide a century ago. Ah Kee saw parallels with his own family's experiences, specifically, the undocumented massacres of Indigenous Australians in this country's history and the removal of his family from the mainland to Palm Island.

Just over the border, during Ah Kee's visit to Turkey, the advance of ISIS had a significant affect on him, prompting deliberation on what could possess a people to attempt genocide against another. The *brutalities* were then born of Ah Kee's experiences in Turkey. These works complement his well-known *Unwritten* series. The *Unwrittens* are those perceived as non-human, those living on the edge of erasure. *brutalities* represent what happens to persons who harbour such perceptions of other human beings and describe a state of mind that is toxic to the other.

This unflinching investigation of race, ideology and politics is expressed as forcefully in textile design as it is in Ah Kee's multi-faceted practice: from large-scale drawings of his forebears, to text-based video works and installations.

Ryan PRESLEY

Marri Ngarr

Bedburner

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Born in Alice Springs in 1987, Ryan Presley is now a Brisbane-based artist who came to prominence recently through his delicate watercolour illustrations with subjects insistent on Indigenous rights and recognition. His father's family originates from the Moyle River region (Peppimenarti/Port Keats) of the Northern Territory and his mother was born to Scandinavian immigrants in Australia.

Presley's art questions historical and social 'givens'. Through his own mixed-heritage experiences, Presley's interrogations seek to promote dialogues that will not only benefit him personally, but assist others to navigate the difficult present shaped by traumatic oppression of Indigenous peoples in the past.

Explaining his textile design titled *Bedburner*, Presley said he referenced Christian iconographic styles.

"The two-dimensional layout depicts dramatic incidents and the flow-on effect of the design reflects the flow-on effect of oppression enforced by institutional bodies. The waves and tides may peak and change, but the same forces continue to produce shocking events. My Lesser Gods project in 2014 was an interactive mixed-media exhibition exploring contemporary Australian issues through the lens of Western spiritual iconography. What begins as a simple game of mirroring audio and visual commands on the installation's central dance-floor, becomes a more sombre meditation on modern colonial attitudes and the ramifications of following directions."

Ryan Presley

By venturing into the political and social causes of the public psyche, Presley seeks to satisfy personal curiosity, and, in time, hopes to gain a level of catharsis around conflicting heritages and their endorsed world views.

Claudia MOODOONUTHI

Kaiadilt and Wik Mungkan

Burkunda

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Claudia Moodoonuthi is an emerging artist and currently lives and works in Brisbane. She 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. In 2003, Moodoonuthi relocated to Aurukun where she absorbed a strong respect for *Wik Mungkan* customs, lore and beliefs.

Claudia Moodoonuthi's canvas paintings are greatly influenced by her late Great-Grandmother, May Moodoonuthi, and the late Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda (Mrs Gabori), both among the seven Kaiadilt 'sisters' from Bentinck Island whose vibrant palettes made them famous in the past decade.

The title of Claudia Moodoonuthi's textile design, *Burkunda*, means 'body marks' and the horizontal marks are her Grandmother's. Some reflect specific ceremonies and others significant events. She states, "Body marks are given to us when we go through lore. My Grandmother's body marks have become mine."

As strong bands of colour, Moodoonuthi saw the immediate ability to transfer her marks from canvas to softer linen.

Naomi HOBSON

Umpila

Pa'ii (Three sisters)

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Naomi Hobson is an *Umpila* woman from Lockhart River and was born in 1979.

It was around ten years ago that Hobson was inspired to become an artist by the desire to capture her country, the seasons and special places etched in her memory. She was a finalist in the prestigious 2014 Telstra Art Award, followed by acquisitions of her work by major national collections.

Colour is central to Hobson's composition. She says:

"I love changing colours, mixing colours and applying them in my own style on canvas. I'm always looking for different shades and colourations. My colours often reflect my mood and the feelings I get from particular places on my traditional lands, lying between the eastern slopes of the McIlwraith Range, south of Lockhart River, and its western slopes north of Coen. I grew up spending a majority of my childhood on this country with my Grandparents."

The painting adapted and enlarged for this textile design is a story about the artist's paternal Grandmother and her two sisters – *Ngaya Pa'ii*. Three distinct oval shapes close together represent their individuality and families. The colours represent the sisters' warmth and nurturing presence. Their life journeys placed them on different paths but all are grounded in their Kanthanampu (Lockhart River) traditional heritage, with shared beliefs and stories, culture, and country.

Arthur ROUGHSEY

Lardil

Thuwathu

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Arthur Roughsey was born in 1967 into the *Lardil* language group of Mornington Island. He is among artists connected to the Mornington Island Arts and Crafts Centre who are inspired by one another and use contemporary materials to express mythic stories and the bonds between traditional culture and country.

Usually working on a dark ground, Roughsey paints constellations of small dots to abstract effect. Used here as a textile scheme in *Thuwathu*, Roughsey finds a naturally compatible medium for his ethereal effect.

A traditional story underpins the work, as Roughsey explains:

“This fellow, Thuwathu, he is the Rainbow Serpent. Thuwathu is his language name in our Lardil language. He died when his sister Bulthuku (the Shorebird), lit him up with fire when he wouldn’t share his shelter with her and her baby Jindirrbu (Willy-wagtail). Her baby died because of the cold rain when Thuwathu wouldn’t give them shelter. Now you see him up in the sky as the many different colours of the rainbow.”

Arthur Roughsey

Teho ROPEYARN

Angkamuthi, Yadhakana, Woppaburra, Batchulla peoples & Badu, Moa, Mer.

Udhyama upanthi arrirra ayki wantah

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Teho Ropeyarn was born in Mount Isa, Queensland, in 1988, and comes from the *Angkamuthi* and *Yadhaykana* clans on his father's side, and *Woppaburra* people on his mother's.

He creates bold, intricate linoprints reflecting cultural stories that honour their source, Elders of his home community, Injinoo, at the tip of Cape York Peninsula. Ropeyarn's rhythmic composition and carving techniques are well suited to a narrative black-and-white textile design.

In this graphic composition titled *Two sister birds* looking for scrub yam Ropeyarn places the two main bird figures in partial view among curving yam leaves. The story recounts two best friends, the *Utku* (Emu) and the *Alarrakudhi* (Brolga) gathering bush yam with their children for the tribe.

"The Utku betrays the Alarrakudhi by hiding her kids, pretending to have killed them; she tricks Alarrakudhi and persuades her to kill her kids also, because they can become too much to handle. But Utku was really jealous of Alarrakudhi and her well-behaved kids. Alarrakudhi then kills her children and keeps two. Tricking Alarrakudhi, Utku calls for her kids to come out of hiding, then turns to Alarrakudhi and says, I tricked you: I made you kill your kids whilst I hid my kids."

"My figures reflect the Emu and Brolga families who lived side by side hunting and gathering until jealousy destroyed family and friendship. At the end of the story, the Alarrakduhi has the last laugh, flying away whilst Utku remains on the land and cannot fly."

Teho Ropeyarn

Brian ROBINSON

Maluyligal, Wuthathi and Dayak (Borneo) people

. . . the blooms continue to flourish

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Born on the Torres Strait island of Moa in 1973, and with an idyllic childhood spent on Waiben (Thursday Island), Brian Robinson's heritage encompasses Maluyligal, Wuthathi and the Malaysian Dayak tribal groups.

For his large-scale blooms reproduced on linen, Brian Robinson adapted stylisations of Torres Strait Island flora that he customarily deploys in his linoprinting, relief sculpture and installation mediums. The conceptual drive here is Robinson's respect for traditional skills in gardening. Agricultural fertility entailed a respect for inherited ancestral land and knowledge of how to influence rainfall and the growth of plants through actions, words, songs and the use of figures and stones.

"The principal food crops were varieties of yam, taro, sweet potato, coconut, sugar cane and banana. Trees and bushes that provide useful materials are also cultivated. These include bamboo, tobacco, hibiscus [for rope and for the flower], seeds, pandanus and the wongai [for the fruit and the wood]."

"Today, gardening practices have changed dramatically with many islanders preferring to plant on smaller plots near their houses rather than travelling long distances on foot or by dinghy to clear old garden beds."

Brian Robinson

Heather KOOWOOTH

Djabuguy/Yidinji, Wik Mungkan

Traditional women's building materials

2015

custom-printed linen

Cairns Art Gallery. Commissioned by Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015

Born in 1966, Heather Koowootha grew up in Yarrabah near Cairns and belongs to the clan groups Djabuguy/Yidinji on her mother's side, and Wik Mungkan on her father's. Both her parents came from the stolen generations and met each other in Yarrabah.

Heather Koowootha is an emerging artist who has embraced painting, printmaking, jewellery and weaving. She is motivated by the stories embodying the traditions of her mother's and father's respective cultures.

Koowootha especially expresses her respect for women's nurturing and survival skills in her work. The detail in Koowootha's paintings has a narrative drive. Her energy for storytelling transitioned easily onto the textile surface, where her repeat designs are enlargements of domestic accoutrements made by women: pandanus mats, bowls and fruit baskets.

The 'back-story' for this textile design is Koowootha's understanding of plant cycles that provide the materials for the objects women shape.

“Community members gathered clustered lawyer canes that grew mostly all year round. These coiled canes live amongst taller trees and rely on height to seek the warmth of sunlight: they are known as sunshine loving plants but the moisture inside the cane helps to splinter it in half to support the frame of fruit baskets, bowls and food strainers to strain certain foods. Other tribes used these clustered canes to build shelters and hunting weapons such as bows and many other artefacts like fish traps and so forth.”

Heather Koowootha