

CAIRNS
ART
GALLERY

9 NOV 2024 –
19 JAN 2025

PRINTED TEXTILES
COLLECTION IN FOCUS

ARTWORK LABELS

Brian ROBINSON

b.1973

Language Group: Maluyligal (Mua), Wuthathi (Shelburne Bay, Cape York) and Dayak (Borneo)

Clan Group: Kala Lagaw Ya of the Maluyligal (Mua Island)

... the blooms continue to flourish

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

Born on the Torres Strait island of *Waiben* in 1973, and with an idyllic childhood spent on the 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 stylised Torres Strait Island flora customarily used in his linoprinting, relief sculpture and installation media. 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.

Robinson states:

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.

Ryan PRESLEY

b.1987

Language Group: Marri Ngarr

Bedburner

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

Born in Alice Springs in 1987, Ryan Presley is now a Brisbane-based artist whose father's family originates from Peppimenarti/Port Keats in the Northern Territory while 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 art promotes dialogues that will urge 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... [a] sombre meditation on modern colonial attitudes and the ramifications of following directions.

By venturing into the political and social areas of the public psyche, Presley satisfies his personal curiosity around conflicting heritages and their endorsed worldviews.

Heather Wundjarra KOOWOOTH

b.1966

Clan Group: Djabuguy, Yidinji and Wik Mungkan

Traditional women's building materials

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

Born in 1966, Heather Wundjarra 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 parents were from the stolen generations and met each other in Yarrabah. Koowootha is motivated by the traditional stories of her parents' respective cultures.

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

The 'back-story' for this textile design is Koowootha's understanding of plants that provide the materials for the objects shaped by women.

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... 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.

Teho ROPEYARN

b.1988

Language Group: Angkamuthi / Yadhakana, Woppaburra, Butchulla, Badu, Mua, Mer

Clan Group: Injinoo Ikya

Udhyama upanthi arrirra ayki wantah

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

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 the Elders of his home community, Injinoo, at the tip of Cape York Peninsula. Ropeyarn's rhythmic composition and carving technique transfer well to black-and-white textile design.

In this graphic design 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.

Claudia MOODOONUTHI

b.1995

Clan Group: Wik Mungkan, Lardil, Kayardild.

Language Group: Kaiadilt and Wik Mungkan

Burkunda

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

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 (Sally 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 realised her marks would easily transfer from canvas to softer linen.

Gordon HOOKEY

b.1961

Clan Group: Waanyi

Language Group: Waanyi

Wallaroo

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

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* and has exhibited and undertaken art residencies in several countries.

Hookey's art confronts the tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, and he pointedly attacks bigotry and vernacular customs. Strongly defined figures (almost 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 satirical style makes a natural transition to textile imagery. Many of his paintings feature the signature kangaroo character, 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 flag sunglasses that symbolise seeing things the Aboriginal way.

Hookey states plainly:

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

Vernon AH KEE

b.1967

Clan Group: Waanyi, Kuku Yalanji, Gugu Yimithirr, Koko Berrin and Yidinji

Language Group: Kuku Yalanji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr

brutalities

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

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*, Vernon Ah Kee is a prolific and highly awarded international artist.

In September 2014, Vernon Ah Kee travelled to Turkey and 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 and the removal of his family from the mainland to Palm Island.

During Ah Kee's visit to Turkey, the advance of ISIS, with its attempted genocide just over the border, affected him deeply. 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 and living on the edge of erasure. *brutalities* represent persons who harbour such perceptions with a toxic state of mind.

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.

Arthur ROUGHSEY

b.1967

Clan Group: Lardil

Language Group: Lardil

Thuwathu

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

Arthur Roughsey was born in 1967 into the *Lardil* language group of Mornington Island. He is connected to the *Mornington Island Arts and Crafts Centre*, where artists 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 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.

Naomi HOBSON

b.1979

Clan Group: Southern Kaantju and Umpila

Language Group: Southern Kaantju and Umpila

Pa'ii (Three sisters)

2015

custom-printed linen

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2015 Commissioned Cairns Regional Gallery

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

Hobson was inspired to become an artist who could capture her country, the seasons and special places etched in her memory. She is a painter, photographer and ceramic artist and her work is held 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.