

Once woven, each form is finished with an application of ochre sourced from Country, mixed with PVA glue, and painted across the threaded surfaces. This final act of connection grounds these suspended forms in the earth from which their materials came.

Yeatman has spoken directly of the ancestral presence of her grandmother that accompanies her making:

When I'm doing weaving, I can feel like she's there watching me... Every time I pick up a cane and get some pandanus, set myself up, I know she's there beside me all the time, and inspiring me to keep on doing what I'm doing. I just want to keep the culture alive, we can keep it going.²

This sense of continuity is central to the work. Yeatman's sculptures are not memorials to a vanishing tradition; they

are living expressions of a practice that remains generative, adaptive, and deeply rooted in place. Drawing on the traditional techniques used by her ancestors for items made to carry food from the sea and rainforest, she extends into the contemporary gallery context without diminishing cultural weight. The result is a body of work that holds multiple registers at once: formal, material, spiritual, and relational.

Babim, Muudjum, Djanguul marks a significant moment in Yeatman's practice: her first solo exhibition and the fullest expression yet of an artistic vision that has been quietly developing for more than three decades. It is also a fitting acknowledgement of one of Far North Queensland's most important cultural voices.

Angela Goddard,
Cairns Art Gallery Director, 2026



1. Sophia Sambono, *Our Stories: Contemporary Indigenous Weaving*, exhibition catalogue (Cairns: Cairns Art Gallery, 2025).
2. Philomena Yeatman, interview with Sarah Scragg, 2026.

27 Jun –
22 Aug 2026

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Philomena Yeatman: *Babim, Muudjum, Djanguul* has been supported through the Cairns RSL Club Artist Fellowship Awards

COVER IMAGE:

Philomena YEATMAN
Gunggandji
b.1960, Cairns, Queensland
Babim, Muudjum, Djanguul (detail) 2026
lawyer cane, Pandanus, terracotta ochre, clay, wood glue
Courtesy of the artist and Yarrabah Arts and Cultural Precinct
Photographer: Michael Marzik
Installation at Cairns Art Gallery, June 2026

PHILOMENA
YEATMAN
Babim, Muudjum, Djanguul

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Philomena Yeatman is a proud Gunggandji woman from Yarrabah, celebrated as a master weaver and cultural custodian. Born in Cairns in 1960, with Gunggandji heritage from her mother's side and Kuku Yalanji from her father's, she was raised in the Yarrabah community, where her deep connection to culture began.

Yeatman initially explored printmaking and jewellery design before fully embracing weaving, ceramics, and painting. Her most significant practice is weaving, a tradition she learned from her grandmother, who taught her to create baskets and mats from pandanus and cabbage palm using natural dyes sourced from country.

As writer Sophia Sambono has observed,

Weaving is one of the most ancient artforms practiced throughout the globe. The styles, purposes and materiality of each woven form is influenced by the locality—the land and Country—of their creators.¹

In 2025, Yeatman completed *Mother's Womb*, the first of her large-scale sculptural woven works, for the group exhibition *Our Stories: Contemporary Indigenous Weaving* at Cairns Art Gallery. The work, measuring over 1.5 metres in diameter, marked a decisive shift in scale and ambition. Following this, the Gallery recommended Yeatman for the Cairns RSL Club Artist Fellowship, providing her with dedicated time and resources to develop a sustained body of work in this new mode.



The five works that comprise *Babim*, *Muudjum*, *Djanguul* (which translates from Gunggandji to Grandmother, Mother, Daughter) extend the formal language of *Mother's Womb* into an expansive installation of suspended forms. Each work employs the womb as its organising form, connected by slender threadlike umbilical cords that evoke both biological and cultural transmission. Together, the works articulate the matrilineal chain through which Yeatman's knowledge of weaving has been passed—from grandmother to mother to artist—and then outward to community.

The labour-intensive process of making these works is steeped in specialised knowledge. Yeatman harvests pandanus from swampy lowlands and lawyer cane from hillside country, and subjects each material to a careful process of stripping, twirling, and drying before she begins to weave them.

Weaving itself takes place in Yeatman's studio at the Yarrabah Arts Centre, a space inseparable from her community. In the early stages of conceptualising and making these works, Yeatman was supported by the then Arts Centre Manager, Simone Arnol, herself a proud Gunggandji woman from Yarrabah. Arnol passed away in 2026, and her contribution to this project—and to the broader arts community she served—is warmly acknowledged.

LEFT:

Philomena YEATMAN
Gunggandji
b.1960, Cairns, Queensland
Entwined Presence 2026
lawyer cane, Pandanus, terracotta ochre,
clay, wood glue
Courtesy of the artist and Yarrabah Arts
and Cultural Precinct
Photographer: Michael Marzik
Installation at Cairns Art Gallery, June 2026

RIGHT AND FAR RIGHT:

Philomena YEATMAN
Gunggandji
b.1960, Cairns, Queensland
Babim, Muudjum, Djanguul (detail) 2026
lawyer cane, Pandanus, terracotta ochre,
clay, wood glue
Courtesy of the artist and Yarrabah Arts
and Cultural Precinct
Photographer: Michael Marzik
Installation at Cairns Art Gallery, June 2026