



**BULAAAN
BURUUGAA
NGALI
EXHIBITION**

...we weave together

EDUCATION RESOURCE

BULAAAN BURUUGAA NGALI EXHIBITION

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Acknowledgment

Arts Northern Rivers respectfully acknowledges Bundjalung, Yaegl, Gumbaynggirr and Githabul Country, the lands we work and create on. We appreciate the unique and vibrant array of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders artists and cultural practitioners from here and living here.

About the exhibition

Bundjalung and beyond are lands steeped in complex woven histories and identities with stories of connections and familiarities. Bulaan Buruugaa Ngali Exhibition shares the histories and identities of women who bring forth ancient weaving practices and knowledge systems.

Held over three regional galleries located on Bundjalung Country in the Northern Rivers region of NSW (Grafton, Lismore, Tweed), Bulaan Buruugaa Ngali Exhibition is a unique showcase of ancient and contemporary women's woven practices. Each weaver's story is interconnected in one way or another. They all have a strong appreciation and respect for renewing and continuing our ancient woven cultural practices.

Nine of our timeless, intricately woven Bundjalung ancestral belongings are featured in the exhibition alongside weavers' new representations. Held in the Australian Museum collection, these Bundjalung bags will be home for a while; conversing, sharing, informing, inspiring, affirming and connecting to their homelands. This is an exciting homecoming, one that weaves our history into the present.

- Kylie Caldwell, Exhibition Curator



Discussion Prompts

☆ Visualise the length of time that First Nations peoples have been caring for and weaving on Country.

☆ How do you feel connected to the place where you live or where you grew up? Consider your ancestors and how they might have felt connected to Country or place.

Weaving practices & ancestral objects

Weaving is both a spiritual and spirited practice that connects us as families, communities and as people. As I begin writing, I think about the generosity of spirit extended by the Bundjalung women, Casino Wake Up Time, when visiting Minjerribah back in 2015. I am a Ngugi weaver from neighbouring Quandamooka Country. In our community-based gathering we shared our lived stories of regenerating weaving practices with Elders, aunties, daughters, and granddaughters while experimenting with new materials and techniques.

This special time with Bundjalung women reminded us that weaving is collective and importantly about community coming together. Being neighbouring Country, our ancestral weavings share similar techniques and materials. We also share a deep sense of loss through ancestral belongings held in museum collections both nationally and internationally. Being reunited with ancestral belongings in museum collections is an important process in healing our histories.

Bulaan Buruugaa Ngali Exhibition celebrates the significant return of ancestral bags and baskets collected from the banks of the Richmond River and other areas across Bundjalung during colonisation. It is the first time in almost 145 years they are being returned to Country, creating a space for

contemporary artists to use the archive for cultural revival. As Kylie Caldwell (2022) says: "Our Ancestors' bags are highly significant. They have helped to weave our Ancestor's story into who we are today".

As women belonging to deep histories of weaving practices, our reconnections with Ancestral belongings provide a link to the past and a sense of belonging to Country. As Bundjalung woman Rhoda Roberts (2023) recalled when she visited museums "It's a powerful moment to hold something that validates your existence and highlights the nonsense of terra nullius". Having historical bags on loan from the Australian Museum return to Country for this project is not only returning stories but also creating pathways for knowledge to continue through reconnections with Country and community.

Bulaan Buruugaa Ngali Exhibition shows how cultural practices like weaving are once again part of our everyday lives and cultural expression. New works by Bundjalung Elders and weavers are inspired by Ancestors weaving and contemporary experiences, celebrating continuity in new ways today. Collectively, these works remind us of the role of weaving as healing and weaving as Country.

- *Sonja Carmichael, Ngugi weaver from neighbouring Quandamooka Country*

Discussion Prompts

☆ Investigate the ancestral baskets. What do you think they were made from and what they were used for?

☆ Baskets are functional objects made from plant fibers such as lomandra, pandanus and bangalow palm. In this exhibition, these baskets are presented as sculptural forms, cultural objects, and an historical archive. Why is it important to preserve cultural objects for future generations?

☆ Does your cultural practice include weaving? What are the weaving practices of your cultural heritage? What plants would your ancestors have used?



CONTEMPORARY WEAVERS

Bianca Monaghan

Bianca Monaghan is a proud Bundjalung woman, artist, weaver, and fashion business owner. Her family is from the small community of Baryulgil. Bianca loves sharing cultural stories and shares that passion through her wearable art, which she calls 'Jaana Bulaan,' meaning 'Stand Together' in her language. This wearable art is not just a form of expression for Bianca but also a way to promote unity and solidarity within her community.

Her artwork represents the connection between Bianca's three grandmothers to Bundjalung Country - Baryulgil. It explores their deep spiritual ties to the river, the land, and the surrounding landscape, reflecting the interwoven relationship between family and Country.

Bianca explores stories of Country and how they are passed down through generations. The Dirrangun Spirit is woven into her work, a powerful presence that reflects her cultural heritage. Dirrangun is a very powerful old woman who created the rivers and mountains, a story shared with Bianca by her grandmothers.

Bindimu

Bindimu is a Bundjalung, Gugu Yalanji, Gooreng Gooreng, Melanesian woman and a multidisciplinary artist and curator. Her practice includes fibre art and sand painting, DJing, soundscapes, and cultural dance, prioritising preserving Indigenous art practices such as fibre processing while living in a colonial landscape.

Plants, with their multi-functional roles, are indispensable in both traditional and modern life. The fibres woven into this dili bag are not just a product, but a vital part of our ecosystems. They play a crucial role in preserving, restoring, and protecting Country and waterways on Bundjalung, upon which we depend. The process of weaving a dili begins with the plants and the place, a conscious and cautious collection. Bindimu's dili embodies the sacredness of this embryonic relationship, a process that intricately weaves together multiple ecosystems. "This interwoven web of interconnectedness includes us, plants, animals, earth, water, fire and air, all dependent on each other for survival".

Casino Wake Up Time

Casino Wake Up Time is a collective of Bundjalung and Kamilaroi women who have been meeting and weaving for over ten years. The members are Aunty Janelle Duncan, Aunty Margaret Torrens, Theresa Bolt and Kylie Caldwell based in Casino. This work for the 23rd Biennale of Sydney represents countless hours of harvesting and picking natural fibres on Bundjalung wetlands, rivers and along roadsides, processing and splitting fibres, and weaving collectively.

The woven objects on cast iron frames represent stories of riparian zones, freshwater flow, kinship of plants and revitalisation of women's cultural weaving practices. The fibers that are important to Bundjalung weaving are buchic rushes, bullrush and lomandra grass; aquatic and riparian vegetation that are essential protectors in supporting healthy freshwater.

The bed frames suggest dormitory beds from violent colonial practices of removal and the paternalistic slumber state of society, government and industries regarding actions to care, protect and restore our freshwater systems. Kylie Caldwell says 'it is a domestication of acceptance, the complacency of freshwater care and negligence prevalent in our society. We need to show up and take care of these waterways!'

Janelle Duncan

WEAVING ON BUNDJALUNG: This woven bag is one of the first created by Janelle Duncan during her journey of learning to weave with Casino Wake Up Time. This dilly bag, an early piece, began its life at the Oaks Centre in Casino before being carefully completed at home. Crafted with love, patience, and care, it took Janelle over two months to finish. She credits Katrina Kelsey for teaching her the weaving basics that ignited a passion for the craft - a passion that has only grown since. This bag holds special significance as it was made during a time when Casino Wake Up Time was delving deeply into local Bundjalung plants and traditional weaving techniques.

CULTURAL ADORNMENT #1: This Cultural Adornment is an experimental woven piece. As Janelle's confidence in weaving grew, she began exploring different techniques and approaches. During this period, Casino Wake Up Time was invited to develop a collection for Australian Indigenous Fashion Week in 2014. This woven Cultural Adornment was created specifically for that event.

CULTURAL ADORNMENT #2: The long Cultural Adornment is a woven necklace that reflects Janelle's extensive journey in weaving. With over two decades of experience, she has dedicated herself to teaching, sharing, and practising this craft. This beautiful tradition has provided Janelle with strength and opportunities throughout her life.

Madeleine Grace

Madeleine Grace (Richey) is a K/Gamilaroi artist from Grafton, Bundjalung Country. Her art is influenced by her childhood, Country, and emotional connections.

Yinarr-gal warranggal guurama-li is Gamilaraay for 'strong women resisting'. These weavings were created, drawing from the story of strong resistance led by the women of the Kamilaroi (Gamilaroi) nation. Each small shield woven with lomandra and buchie rush or hand cut from Bangalow palm represents a shield held by a strong woman in resistance to the threat of colonial displacement and massacre. Learning the story of these strong warriors, Madeleine wanted to reflect on the role of women within our Aboriginal communities and the stories that Western ideologies perpetuate about gender roles and Aboriginal women. She wanted to share this story to enforce the strength, dependency and leadership Aboriginal women possess, whilst also remaining as the carers, the nurturers and the matriarchs of their communities.

This story also references the relationships and the communication between mobs, prior to colonisation. In this story, the K/Gamilaroi people had time to construct such a large resistance in preparation, telling us there was communication from neighbouring nations. They worked together, they found ways to support and ensure their neighbours' survival. Madeleine wanted to express these

feelings about strong women, their togetherness, their commitment to support and uplift each other, in an installation that captures attention.

"Yinarr-gal warranggal guurama- li is a piece I have thought of for a long time, and comes from a place of deep love and passion for all women and their strength, particularly in homage to my Mother, Aunties and Grandmothers who have stood strong and allowed us to continue to speak our language and exist as strong, resisting and nurturing cultural women today."

Lauren Jarrett

Lauren Jarrett is a Gumbaynggirr woman from the eastern reaches of the Far North Coast of NSW. Her ancestral connections are also to the Bundjalung and Dunghutti tribes. Lauren's practice has developed throughout her life with experience using several disciplines and media such as acrylics, oil, gouache, water colour, pencils, pens, plant fibre, man-made/ recycled fibre and textiles, as well as natural materials from plants and animals.

COMING TOGETHER AS ONE: This cape is made from plants foraged from the bush to the sea, string and ochre. The cape is a symbol of women and nature, dancing on and to Mother Earth. It brings together a representation of dance, mixing the ancient with new, stylised, interpretive, to tell stories through movement. The apron flows and sways, adding another dimension to the unfolding story. It gives a sense of protection as well as explores symbiotic movement with nature. The movement of plants swaying in the breeze becomes integrated with the dance movement, mimicking creatures, dancing on Mother Earth, giving thanks for life, bringing the ancient into the present.

WATER HOLDER: The woven vase tells of the coming together of natural fibres to create a vessel to hold plants and water. It is based on old style vases made of pottery; made from plants and ochre this one is a creative interpretive version of an

Egyptian vase. This woven water holder is purely decorative and is a reminder of how close people were with nature in all past tribal lifetimes, inventing useful and practical resources. Lauren was inspired by brothers and sisters over the seas who had the same needs as Gooris in Australia, using nature to create something of beauty as well as functional for everyday use.

SISTER TO SISTER: The weaving incorporates coloured wool gifted to Lauren by her friend, to make something beautiful representing their friendship. She has also used local plants and dyes, paper and raffia, mixed with the wool to make a bowl of friendship. It represents a uniting of races sitting in a circle, passing around the bowl of friendship, telling their story as it's passed. "Story to story. Sister to sister."

Tania Marlowe

Tania Marlowe is a proud local Bundjalung-Nyangbal woman, multidisciplinary artist and language tutor from Ballina/ Cabbage Tree Island. She works across multiple art forms, including weaving, textiles, painting, and printmaking, and she facilitates workshops. Weaving is the central element of Tania's creative practice, inspired by and acknowledging her Bundjalung Ancestors and elders. She creates contemporary woven works using fibres native and endemic to the Bundjalung region.

Ngunya Jugan (my Country) is a series of woven pieces using several local native plants. The weaving, wrapping and looping embody a fusion of modernity with ancient practice, symbolising the connection between house, home and country. An evolutionary ode to weaving reclamation, for the modern-day weaver carrying forth ancient practice and values, it's done on homelands and in houses, always on Country.

Ngunya Jugan is a symbolic gesture of the duality of living with the comforts of home while embracing and respecting old ways with new ones.

Krystal Randall

Krystal Randall is a proud local Yaegl/ Bunjalung woman and multidisciplinary artist. She works across multiple art forms, including weaving, painting, jewellery, and cultural costume design, and facilitates workshops on these art forms. Krystal is passionate about sharing and preserving her artistic practice and contributing to community development by sharing unique cultural knowledge and traditional artmaking techniques. Creating traditional adornments and contemporary jewellery is a significant element of Krystal's creative practice.

Krystal Randal is a maker of woven cultural wear, each unique to their own. 'Dyinda on Country' represents matriarchs on country; she has envisioned matriarchs wearing these pieces in ceremony, dance and when taking young ones out on country to pick and learn to weave. Krystal has used raffia in her works because of the range of colours and the soft flexibility it offers her weave. She has also integrated emu feathers to connect the pieces to Country and to its' native fauna.

Rhoda Roberts AO

Rhoda Roberts AO is a nationally acclaimed arts executive, practising weaver, writer and performer in theater, film and radio from the Bundjalung nation. In 2016, Rhoda received an Order of Australia for her distinguished service to the performing arts, leadership, advocacy and promotion of Indigenous culture.

Weaving is more than art, it's an essence of the circular rhythm, that can be continuous and has been crafted from the provisions of Country. We have returned full circle, to the old ways where once our grandmothers gathered, under the trees, weaving, as we lie back with our children, we are reminded under the dabbled shade that every leaf, and every star is an Ancestor.

Our life has a circular rhythm where we are always returning to what has come before. The language is no longer outlawed, and we proudly pronounce on our tongues the whispers of those ancient words, that held the knowledge. We have reclaimed the language of the plants, the waters, our environment and sky, and every generation has persisted to ensure our culture and knowledge continues but the persistent voice for equity endures - resilient, reminding, and robust every decade.

Kyra Togo

Kyra Togo is a proud Minyungbal, Tagalaka and South Sea Island woman. Her primary medium of expression is weaving, favouring the most available fibres in her surroundings, such as pandanus, lomandra, and raffia. Preserving cultural fibre knowledge, Kyra creates woven pieces that embody the beauty in functional artworks. She carries the continuation of weaving craft passed down by her ancestors and can now pass that on to her three children while living on Country.

On her journey of reclaiming ancestral knowledge and traditional ways of being through song, dance and story, weaving is an essential practice that helps her to realign her spirit, remember the stories of her old people and honour and respect Country - never harming or taking more than is needed to create art and woven works.

Each woven vessel has a story, with memories made and recalled. Remembrance of the past slides in through action and practice, offering a deeper sense of belonging and appreciation.

The lomandra carrier was made with Kyra's daughter Zella Agnes, who often shadows during the picking stages. Zella is named after her great-great grandmother Audrey Zella Slockee, and carries her other great-grandmother Agnes Marrappa as her middle name. Zella expressed that she

needed a bag with a long handle, worn over her shoulder or across her forehead, deep enough for her fibre to go into and not fall back out of. Kyra's youngest daughter, Aura, who tagged along, would sing into lomandra strands and whisper sweet secrets to some before splitting the fibre with her teeth. Collecting and weaving with pandanus takes Kyra back to yarns with her nana, Agnes Doreen.

"I saw the sparkle in her eye when she would revisit the days of being a young girl picking pandanus palms with the women and other girls. I never asked too many questions, as it took her a very long time to even be able to tell me. She opened up while I was weaving. I took some fibre to North Queensland. It must have triggered so many memories, which I'm thankful for! Otherwise, I don't know if she ever would have told me!".

These stories are woven into our history: *Ganngaan Leern Duu*
- *Remembering the Past*.

Margaret Torrens

Bundjalung weaver and artist Margaret Torrens is a significant member of Casino Wake Up Time, a local women's weaving group based in Casino. Her mother first established the small creative collective, and Margaret is the longest-standing member.

Mallanganee means Place of Tall Pines, and it's the place where Aunty Margaret's mum, Phyllis Caldwell grew up. While short in stature, Aunty Phyllis stood tall, raising a family of fourteen. Margaret celebrates her mother's story and the memories of growing up in Mallanganee, in a small shanty hut near the creek where they spent most of the summer swimming.

Discussion Prompts

☆ Examine the different woven artworks and identify any themes or stories in the works.

☆ Which artwork is your favourite and why? What makes you feel connected to this artwork?



Ancestral makers

Bulaan Buruugaa Ngali Exhibition features the iconic photograph of a wistful-looking Aboriginal woman adorned with dingo fur and a snake necklace, identified as Mary-Ann Cowan through persistent research. *Four Generations, 1873-1874* (pictured left) presents a multi-generational portrait of women with large, intricately woven string bags. The rare images capture cultural adornments (dress) and women's belongings.

The photograph provides historical insight into the lives and cultural practices of Bundjalung communities, staged in a studio. Ironically, the reality depicted in the photos was far from the local Aboriginal people's existence. Many of the valley's original people lived on the outskirts of town in less-than-ideal conditions, often due to the impact of European settlement and the subsequent forced changes to their traditional way of life.

The exhibition showcases three images by John William Lindt (1845- 1926) from the Grafton Regional Gallery Collection. Studio photographs of Aboriginal people, taken between 1868 and 1876 in Grafton, provide a sparse capture of the Bundjalung individuals and families during that period.

- *Kylie Caldwell, Exhibition Curator*

Discussion Prompts

☆ Investigate the Lindt photographs. Consider what information is supplied and what information is missing.

☆ Pick one of the contemporary works. If this work were to be included in an archive such as a museum or gallery, what kind of information might be included to help future generations 200 years from now understand the artwork and the artist that made it?

