

Cultural Statement

The National Gallery respectfully acknowledges that we are on the Country of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people of the Kamberri/ Canberra region. We recognise their continuing connections to Country and culture, and we pay our respect to their Elders, leaders and artists, past and present.

We respectfully acknowledge all Traditional Custodians throughout Australia whose art we care for and to whose lands National Gallery exhibitions and staff travel.

Throughout these Art Cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are also referred to as First Nations peoples and First Peoples. These terms are interchangeable.

The National Gallery recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names throughout these Art Cases. The place names are current at the time of print but may change over time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that these cases may contain images and voices of, and references to, deceased people. Where possible, permission has been sought to include their names and images.

About the Art Cases

The National Gallery's Art Cases program comprises five art-filled cases. The cases travel to schools, libraries, community centres, galleries and aged-care facilities throughout Australia, where the works can be discovered by adults and children. A key feature of the Art Cases program is that the works can be handled.

Five cases are available for touring, each with its own theme:

- Bodies (Red)**
- Country (Copper)**
- Earth (Blue)**
- Past, Present and Future (Yellow)**
- Form and Function (Orange)**

For further information or to book an Art Case, please email touringprogram@nga.gov.au
The program is free of charge. The National Gallery arranges freight and insurance.

The National Gallery's Art Cases program is generously supported by the Neilson Foundation with grateful acknowledgement of founding patrons Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn.



CONDITION REPORTING

Each venue is responsible for reporting the condition of every work in the Art Case upon arrival and dispatch. Condition reports and instructions are held in the cases. For further assistance, please email touringprogram@nga.gov.au

These works have been chosen for the stories they hold, for the way they look and feel, and for their ability to tour to many places. Please do not wipe the objects or attempt to clean or fix them if they break. If a work is damaged, please contact Touring Exhibitions as soon as possible.

Please safely return all works to the right place in the right case at the end of each session. Lock the case and store it in a secure location. At the end of each year, all the cases come back to the Gallery. Our conservation team checks the condition reports and looks at all the objects. They clean them with specialised materials, tools and expertise, ready for the next year.

BEFORE YOU START

When handling the objects, adult supervision is essential. It is helpful to have several adults present to assist, and to work in small groups. The suggested ratio is one adult to ten participants.

Please ensure that:

- hands are clean at all times
- works of art are handled with two hands
- personal jewellery is removed to prevent scratching
- all materials such as ink, textas, paint and solvents are kept well away from the objects
- ideally, all participants are seated when handling the objects.

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

This resource is designed to support object-based learning, encouraging students to actively explore and interrogate works of art by looking, handling, responding and making.

Country

The Country Art Case brings together First Nation works showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, ideas and stories about land and Country. Many of the works in this case are made from natural materials, sometimes sourced via cultural collection. Knowing how material is collected from the environment can give an insight into the relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the natural surroundings. This case also looks at shared histories of First Nations and non-First Nations peoples since colonisation, and the adaptive nature of First Nations peoples when looking after and utilising their land and Country. First Nations ideas and philosophies provide a holistic view of land and Country, connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through place, spirit, culture, practice and ceremony.

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

This resource is designed to support object-based learning by encouraging students to actively explore and interrogate works of art through looking, handling, responding and making. The Country Art Case also provides rich scope for critical and creative thinking and investigates concepts of Country, culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge. This case is relevant to Visual Arts and Science (Biology), and the cross-curriculum priorities of Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Teachers may adapt or extend this resource for use with groups of different ages and across learning areas.

The National Gallery values feedback from students and teachers on the resources we provide. To share student work or feedback, please email learning@nga.gov.au



Lena Yarinkura

Rembarrnga/Kune peoples

Bush mice 2002

aluminium and wood

Purchased with support from the Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © Lena Yarinkura/Copyright Agency 2023

Throughout Aboriginal and Torres Strait art, representations of totemic animals and ancestral figures have been used for different reasons. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, animals, plants and spiritual beings are ways of identifying different groups of people and the lands they occupy, much like plants and animals are used in state and national emblems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have used this identification class system from time immemorial.

Imagery of animals and plants forms much of the subject matter for carvings, fibre sculptures and paintings created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. An essential part of everyday life is the gathering of materials and resources to create these works.

On these excursions, people often see small animals such as djirrkinj (bush mice) busily searching for food. Native mice and rats are found in many habitats across the Australian landscape, including mangrove, desert and alpine regions.

These *Bush mice* are made from aluminium by a process called sand casting. The artist has used plasticine to make a model for the cast, which is later transferred into solid aluminium. Many artists are drawn to the natural silvery colouring of aluminium and appreciate its long-lasting properties. These are the first two of only 25 sculptures made from individual casts. This is known as a limited edition—a restricted number of sculptures is produced and then the cast is destroyed.

Although she works across many different materials, Lena Yarinkura (Rembarrnga/Kune peoples) is most well known for her innovative fibre sculptures. Yarinkura will often work collaboratively with her husband, artist Bob Burruwal (Rembarrnga people), whose subject matter includes Yawk Yawk spirits, camp dogs and various animal species such as the northern quoll, bandicoot and bush mouse.

LOOK

Compare Lena Yarinkura's two bush mice. Discuss the similarities and differences.

THINK

What material do you think these sculptures are made from?

Why do you think Yarinkura chose these materials?

CREATE

Research Australian animals from your area and choose a favourite to sculpt from clay. Use a pencil or modelling tool to add marks and textures.



James Tylor

Kaurna people

Kaurna Wirri Katha 2020

Mallee eucalyptus timber and animal fat

Purchased 2021 with support from the Neilson Foundation for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © James Tylor, courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney

This object has dual purposes—each end is used for a different reason. On one end of the tool is a rounded, carved club while opposite is a sharpened digging stick that is also used as a handle. In the Kaurna language, a club is called a wirri and a digging stick is called a katha.

Wirris are used for hunting animals and birds for food collections year-round, and are thrown and used to hit an animal for capture. The katha end of the object is used to dig up yams like the ngampa (yam daisy) and walyu (chocolate lily) in the wirltuti (springtime) and bulrush roots in the hot, dry warltati (summer).

The katha was also used as part of the animal skin cleaning process. After an animal had been killed with the wirri, Kaurna people used the katha to scrape the flesh off the animal hides to make cloaks for clothing in parnati (autumn), ready for the cold, wet weather in the kudlila (winter).

LOOK

Cast your eye over James Tylor's *Kaurna Wirri Katha*. What do you notice about the materials and textures?

What do you think its use might be?

THINK

The Kaurna wirri katha is a cultural tool that has been made over many generations. What do you think this tool means to Tylor?

CREATE

Expand your Kaurna vocabulary. In Tylor's language, a club is called a wirri. The double RR in wirri is a rolling R sound. Now say wirri and roll the R with your tongue.



Penny Evans

K/Gamilaroi people

Burnt banksia 2020

terracotta clay, black slip, underglaze, pooling glaze and wire

Purchased 2021 with support from the Neilson Foundation for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © Penny Evans

Penny Evans is a K/Gamilaroi artist based in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. Her ceramic works reference her cultural heritage and celebrate Kamilaroi/Gomeroi carving traditions. She is primarily concerned with the history and aftermath of colonisation on First Nations peoples and the environment. For Evans, history is not in the distant past—it is something that lives and is present in her body and actions. The objects she makes are an important way of acknowledging the past and, at the same time, healing the traumas that affect people to this day.

ARTIST STATEMENT

'Burnt banksia is an ongoing and evolving series of work. It speaks to our native plants and how they respond to fire and traditional practices of firestick farming and cultural burning to maintain and sustain our precious Country. Fire is needed for some species to release their seeds from woody fruits that rely on an environmental cue—fire—to know when to drop their seeds. This includes species of hakea, banksia and eucalypts with serotinous cones or fruits that are completely sealed with resin.'

LOOK

Feel the patterns and textures in the banksia pod sculptures by Penny Evans.

What elements can you identify?

THINK

Evans makes her objects appear burnt to talk about the resilience of nature after bush fires.

What positive effects can fire, or Aboriginal cultural burning, have on Australian ecosystems?

CREATE

Identify other Australian plant species that need fire to regenerate. Mould your own woody pods with clay.



Carol McGregor

Wathaurung people

Gather bags II 2018

possum skin, ochre, binder and waxed cotton thread

Purchased 2021 with support from the Neilson Foundation for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © Carol McGregor

These vessel-like forms present us with different ways of looking at the concept of gathering. Whether gathering materials or bush foods, they also show us the gathering of information, histories and stories. Before the colonisation of Australia, First Nations peoples would gather with other groups and share stories, resources, practices and ceremonies. With the arrival of colonists, First Nations practices such as skin cloak-making were discouraged or forbidden by missionaries and slowly began to disappear. Traditionally, these cloaks were marked with designs that expressed personal identity and group affiliations and were given to infants at birth. Later, these cloaks would be added to over time—growing, gathering and sharing its story with its owner.

Stitched, patterned and coloured by hand, despite their irregular nature, they fit imperfectly together inside one another. Like a nurturing family, each one is connected by the touch of the next. In defiance of colonial interruption, the artist uses possum skins and traditional techniques to show the persistence and revival of pre-colonial traditions. Collectively, the material, techniques and placement of each gather bag become significant parts of the work, evoking the power of passing on cultural knowledge, showing the importance of collective sharing and displaying the strength found in being together as a people.

LOOK

Closely observe and feel the possum skin vessels.

What do they remind you of?

THINK

Carol McGregor uses possum skins to 'show the persistence and revival of pre-colonial traditions'.

Why do you think it's important to keep traditions alive?

CREATE

Close your eyes and visualise what your own vessel would look and feel like.

What memories or stories would it hold?

Share your personal vessel story with your group.



Jimmy John Thaiday

Erub Mer people

Kebi nam 2018

ghost net, rope and twine over wire frame

Purchased 2021 with support from the Neilson Foundation for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © Jimmy John Thaiday

Several different varieties of turtle nest and breed along the shores of the Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands and are important to the Torres Strait Islander peoples in many ways. The turtle is a traditional Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islander totem and has been part of their customs for generations. As part of customary lore, Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islander peoples can also hunt sea turtles. This primary food source has been in practice since pre-colonial times.

Found along the same coastlines that these sea creatures nest in is abandoned debris from commercial trawling. Discarded fishing nets, also known as ghost nets, are notorious for trapping marine animals such as sea turtles, dugongs and dolphins. Sea turtles make up 80 percent of the marine life that is found caught in these nets.

In an environmental effort, Erub Arts Centre and its many artists, including Jimmy John Thaiday, are using these abandoned ghost nets to help cleanse and care for the shorelines, ridding them of discarded materials. Their objective is to raise awareness of the negative impact ghost nets have on the Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands and many other coastlines around Australia. Creating artworks that use these materials provides a window into how First Nations peoples have cared for their Country and continue to do so.

LOOK

What materials do you think this sculpture is made from?

THINK

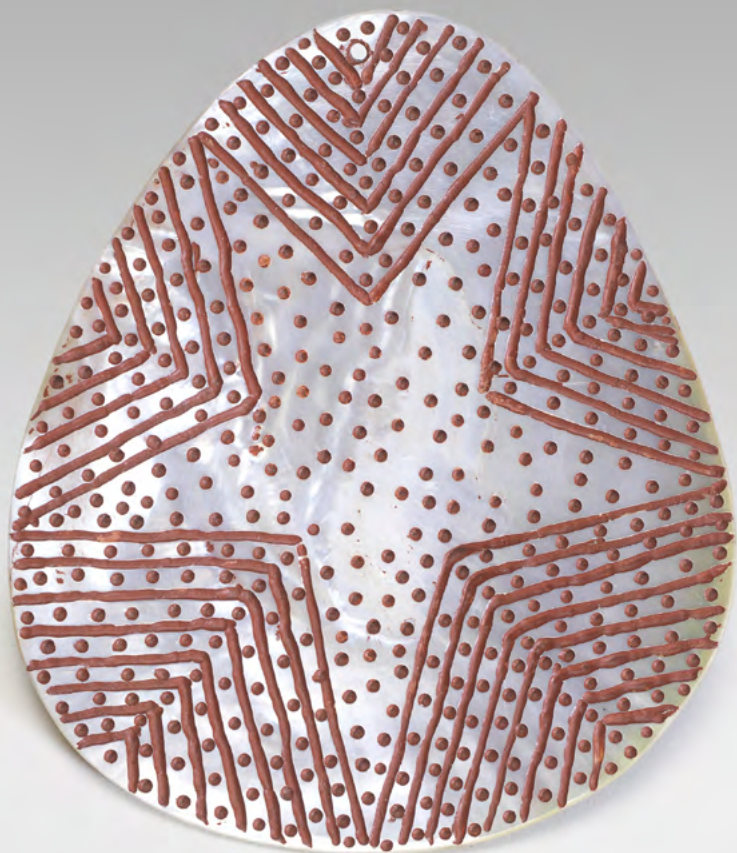
Jimmy John Thaiday uses abandoned ghost nets to raise awareness about his culture and ocean sustainability.

Why do you think artists reclaim found materials?

CREATE

What found objects could you use to make your own sculpture?

Choose a selection of discarded or found materials to create your favourite animal.



Aubrey Tigan

Bardi/Djawi peoples

Riji (pearl shell) 2009

carved pearl shell and red ochre

Purchased with support from the Elaine and Jim Wolfensohn Gift for the National Gallery of Australia Art Cases © Aubrey Tigan

Aboriginal people from the Kimberley region wore decorated pearl shells, known as riji or jakuli in the Bardi language, during ceremonies. Large shells were attached to hair belts worn around the waist, while smaller shells were worn around the neck.

Pearl shell comes from pearl oysters, gathered from the sea at low tide or from offshore reefs, or sourced from cultured pearl farms. After a lengthy process of cleaning, chipping and grinding the outer shell away, the shiny inner face is ready for engraving. Contemporary Aboriginal artists maintain cultural customs by engraving traditional geometric or figurative designs onto the shell. The designs are highlighted using a mixture of ochre or charcoal and resin or fat rubbed into the grooves created by the engraving.

A respected Traditional Elder and lawman from the Bardi and Djawi people, Aubrey Tigan lived on the Dampier Peninsula north of Rubibi (Broome) in Western Australia. A trained jeweller and renowned carver, pearl shell was his preferred medium. Tigan engraved on pearl shell to maintain traditional culture. He used old and new designs, which he often saw in his dreams, drawing on his deep knowledge of the coastal environment.

LOOK

Run your fingers over *Riji* (pearl shell) by Aubrey Tigan. How does it feel?

How does the surface change if you slowly tilt it back and forth?

THINK

Riji shells still play an important role in the Kimberleys in northwest Australia.

Did you know that these shells—not pearls—were highly prized?

Why do you think this might be?

CREATE

Cut a pearl shell shape out of iridescent or shiny paper and create patterns inspired by your natural environment.