BIG IDEAS FIRST NATIONS

CATALOGUE

THIS IS NEW IDEAS
THIS IS ANCIENT LEGACY
THIS IS BOUNDLESS CREATIVITY

Newcastle Museum

NSW GOVERNMENT

ADAM MANNING

KAMILAROI

CONNECT:

https://www.adammanning.info
@adam_d_manning_

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

Adam Manning was born on Awabakal/Worimi Country and has Kamilaroi kinship. As an original Custodial Descendant of Kamilaroi Barray (Land), and a composer/percussionist and artist/designer, rhythmic expression connects him to Land, People, Culture and Story and articulates the natural frequency (heartbeat) of Ngaya Barray (Mother Earth). Given this, his rhythmic expressions are articulated in varying forms. In the main, these varying rhythmic forms/expressions are both old and new, and or cross-disciplinary.

Interview Pg. 8 & 9

GAMBIRRA ILLUME

YOLNU

CONNECT:

gambirra.com
fb: Gambirra Art

AVAILABLE WORK:

POA

Residing on Awabakal & Worimi Country for the last 12 years, Gambirra Illume A.K.A. Mamma G is a Yolnu woman from Northeast Arnhem Land, N.T. Over two decades practicing and advancing as a multidisciplinary artist, Gambirra is a producer, facilitator, cultural arts educator, and clinical mental health coach. Gambirra works closely with her husband and two daughters. The Illume family are a creative and passionate bunch who use the arts as a vehicle to transcend boundaries, unite, inspire and bridge social change and wellbeing. Creating and sharing through the arts is a spiritual and philosophical process for Gambirra.

Interview Pg. 10 & 11

JACOB CUMMINS

GAMILARAAY

CONNECT:

@jacob.cummins.music

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

A Gamilaraay man born on Bidjigal country, living on Awabakal country for almost 5 years. Jacob's been playing music for about 16 years, and have had a foot in almost every door, having played in heavy metal and hardcorebands, jazz, big bands, playing and recording blues, writing Irish and Italian folk music, and producing classicat/orchestral music. Jacob studied a Bachelor of Music (Composition) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music after high school but dropped out his third year after rearranging priorities. Since living on Awabakal country, Jacob's been working in the community supporting people getting out of gaol with drug/alcohol and transitional support.

Interview Pg. 12 & 14

JAKEOB WATSON

GOMEROI

CONNECT:

@jakeob.watson

fb: Jakeob Watson Artist

Artist, mentor, husband, father of 7. Born and raised in Maitland, NSW. Jakeob's art is his dreaming for the world to see. He works on many surfaces like custom sneakers, canvases, sculpting and mural art with his style coming inspired by a blend of his graffiti, hip-hop culture and Indigenous culture.

Interview Pg. 15 & 16

AVAILABLE WORK:

Custom handpainted Nike Airforce Ones (Size 9)
$450

JASMINE MIIKIKA CRACIUN

BARKINDJI/MALYANGAPA

CONNECT:

www.jasminecraciun.com

@kik_design_

Jasmine Miikika Craciun is a multi-media artist and graphic designer residing on Gadigal land. While working predominantly in digital illustration and mural, her artistic practice also includes animation, sculpture, textile and installation. Jasmines art-making process is informed by her diverse familial background (Barkindji, Malyangapa, Romanian, Austrian) with the goal of celebrating the strength of those who came before her. Jasmine has been exploring the intersections of her identity and the places she is deeply connected to but geographically separated from. A sense of place and home are important themes in Jasmines work, identifying the disruption of diplacement experienced by all of her grandparents throughout recent and colonial history and how that has shaped who and where she is today.

Interview Pg. 17 & 18

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

KACHINA DAVIDSON

YORTA YORTA

CONNECT:

@kachina.davidson.artist

Kachina Davidson is a proud Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri and Waywurru woman. She is a 3rd generation Indigenous Artist, following in the footsteps of both her Mother and Grandfather. The latter, growing up on the Cummeragunja Aboriginal Mission on the Murray River, before moving to Tasmania in his early 20s. Kachina was born in Hobart, Tasmania in 1977, and lived there until 2014. Since that time, she and her husband have been living on Wonnarua country, in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales. She is an emerging artist, having started painting in April 2021. Kachina works in a Contemporary Intuitive Style, primarily painting in acrylic on canvas. Her works are bold and unique, drawing inspiration from the diverse, native flora and fauna of Australia, as well as the striking landscape and geology. Each piece incorporates a tribute to her heritage. Kachina is an Artist Member of the Indigenous Art Code.

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

MAREE BISBY

WIRADJURI

CONNECT:

Equire for contact information:
enquiries@newcastlemuseum.com.au

Maree Bisby is a proud Wiradjuri woman, born and raised on Awabakal country. Maree has had the privilege of working far across the Newcastle and Hunter Region with her work in Childhood Disability. Maree uses traditional storytelling to create meaning with a contemporary palette. Bright, detailed meaningful work created to promote exploration through the many layers on each. Maree is guided through her creations with direct contact with ancestors, always starting with a blank canvas waiting for the guidance to come her way.

Interview Pg. 19 & 20

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

MARIA TATTERSALL

YUWWAALAARAY/ KAMILAROI

CONNECT:

Equire for contact information:
enquiries@newcastlemuseum.com.au

Maria is a proud Yuwwaalaaray/ Kamilaroi woman. Born and raised in a small community North West of NSW, Brewarrina and the town is on the Barwon River. She's the youngest of 5 children and comes from a very strong family. Maria's been living and working on Awabakal Land for the past 9 years and I love living there. The land is beautiful, the beaches and the community are welcoming. Over her working career Maria's lived and worked on her country, Barkindji Country and now in Awabakal country, plus working in many other parts of this beautiful land. She has a background in Health and health education, and has been painting for just as long as she can remember. Maria loves to tell stories through her art, it'ss contemporary Aboriginal Art that comes from her heart and soul.

Interview Pg. 21 & 22

AVAILABLE WORK:

Emu dreaming
$6,000

NGAIRE PAKAI

WIRADJURI/MAORI

CONNECT:

@ngaire_pakai

Ngaire is a proud Wiradjuri and Maori woman from Dubbo. She has been involved in Wiradjuri dance and art from a very young age and has continued her learning of Indigenous knowledges into adulthood personally and professionally. Ngaire is undertaking her Bachelor of Education (Secondary) majoring in Visual Arts and Drama and is passionate about embedding Indigenous perspectives into education.

Interview Pg. 23 & 24

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

SHANE DIXON

WANGKUMARA

CONNECT:

Equire for contact information:
enquiries@newcastlemuseum.com.au

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

Shane is a proud Indigenous young person who has lived in the Woodberry area for 8 years. Shane was placed in Juvenile Detention in 2022. During this time he began learning to paint and noted it 'really helped him' when it came to controlling his anger and focusing on positive behaviours. Shane picked up the practice quickly and now is eager to share the practice with those around him.

Interview Pg. 25 & 26

SHELLIE SMITH

AWABAKAL

CONNECT:

@awabagirl

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

Shellie Smith is a proud Awabakal woman and an 8th generation Novocastrian. She uses a combination of research and creative practice to reconnect to her Aboriginal heritage. A current PhD student, her research is focused on the reawakening of traditional cultural practices of the Awabakal people and how a better understanding of these practices can inform contemporary design that is responsive to Country. A graduate of Architecture, Shellie has a love for living history and uses a combination of historical research, personal story and the interpretation of archived objects to rebuild culture and make the traditional relatable to today.

Interview Pg. 27 & 28

TIMOTHY JACKSON

WIRADJURI

CONNECT:

www.timberlina.com.au
@thetimberlina

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

A natural performer, larger than life, she never fails to surprise and delight! Originally hailing from Wiradjuri Country in Central West NSW, Timberlina is a proud First Nation Queen, a move to the 'big city' in her formative years saw Timberlina dabbled in all things dance and drama. After short hiatus from the limelight, Timberlina was re-born in spectacular style and glittery glory in early 2017, and continues to be an ever-evolving chameleon of the performance and hosting world. Timberlina's over-the-top style and dazzling repertoire, coupled with her naughty quick wit, will keep you fabulously entertained for hours. Timberlina was crowned Miss Photogenic in Miss First Nation Supreme Queen 2023 and Miss Congeniality in the Miss First Nation 2018. Newcastle's leading lady, Timberlina is best know for her sell out weekly drag bingo shows and involvement with events such as Timberlina's Drag Off, Blush, Knockers & Moles, Divas on the Green & Diner en Blanc.

Interview Pg. 29 & 30

VIRGINIA MCDONALD

WORIMI

CONNECT:

@ginimacart

Virginia is a proud Worimi women who has lived 32 years living on Awabakal land. Current artform is Glass Coolamons, a modern interpretation of traditional wooden carrying vessel. Each glass Coolamon represents the original wooden vessel cut from the local Gum Trees. Embellishments are all hand crafted and colour infused and soft tacked to the vessel in firing. As Virginia cuts the glass she follows the side cut of each tree and envisions the axe as it chops it away.

Interview Pg. 31 & 32

AVAILABLE WORK:

Kooringal Baa
$750

WANDA MATTHEWS

ANAIWAN/GAMILAROI

CONNECT:

www.redbubble.com/people/wanda-matthews

Proud Anaiwan/Gamilaroi woman, born and raised on Awabakal/Worimi Country. Self-taught and transitioning between oils, lettering, aerosol, sketching, cake decoration and acrylic, sculpture and weaving. Wanda studies her native language (Gamilarray), teaches art and culture, provides service for the Land Council and vulnerable people. She feels a strong, undiscovered connection to the waters of the Torres Strait, and with daughter Sarah, commits to revive culture, pass knowledge and to connect with Ancestors.

Interview Pg. 33 & 34

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

WANJUN CARPENTER

GUNGGANDJI

CONNECT:

@jun__wan

Wanjun Carpenter is a mixed media artist and musician from Newcastle, NSW. Working across various creative fields and contexts, his artistic practice is centres around the exploration of his own indigenous identity and the construction, misrepresentations, questions and tensions inherent in that identity.

Interview Pg. 35 & 36

AVAILABLE WORK:

Nil

WAYDE CLARKE

BIRPAI/WIRADJURI

CONNECT:

www.alejandrolauren.com

Wayde is a proud Wiradjuri/Birpai man, also known as Aléjandro, He's a queer, Aboriginal artist. Wayde's work explores identity and perception through his own experiences as a person of colour who identifies as gay living in Australia. He creates installations to take on the world and bring attention to issues that are important to him.

Interview Pg. 37 & 38

AVAILABLE WORK:

See above website.

Q: So the first question's really simple. So just more introductions. Tell us about yourself, and just a little intro about who you are more as an artist.

A: Yamma, my name is Adam Manning. I was born Awabakal/Worimi lands and grew up on Worimi country. I'm an artist, musician and researcher at Newcastle University. A lot of my art and my thinking is based around patterns and rhythms. Therefore my expressions all have some sort of pattern or theme underlying, a fundamental expression of who I am, where I come from, and, of course, the things that I interact with.

Q: I wanted to ask as well as very more about your connection specifically to Newcastle. And if there's something like in particular that is special about Newcastle to you?

A: Newcastle for me has been a consistent piece of Country in my life and mostly because this is where my family reside. And even living away from Newcastle for a brief period I'd always come back to this place and it's perhaps always felt like home. There's a few reasons I think, obviously because of the people, family. I love the trees, the beautiful beaches, and perhaps one of the most iconic places or landmarks for me in this area is Mount Sugarloaf. One of the reasons for that is that it seems like it's just always there - it's always overlooking. And it's easy to forget that when we all live really busy lives. I think it's just this really strong figure, a culturally significant place. That's always, always present.

Q: The next question is just to tell me a bit more about your artistic practice. Just all of the nitty gritty details about what like what your process is, and what your inspiration is?

A: My artistic practice is really quite broad. And when thinking about what that means, from an inspiration perspective, again, it's really relating to expressing patterns. And that expression happens in a visual form. Whether that's through paintings, video, art installation, or in a sonic form.

Q: Tell me about the clapsticks that are in this exhibition.

A: The clapsticks that have been created as part of this exhibition - for me they're a highly significant Instrument and also a piece of art, or artefact. Whichever one would like to refer to them as.

When growing up I've always played percussion as an instrument. And when reflecting on what that means for a First Nation perspective, this particular instrument is perhaps the first instrument and hand-held instrument that we use today. As a percussionist, someone who strikes to produce the sounds, this particular instrument is quite significant to me, and I think for many others too. Through the Guparr Aboriginal Men's Shed at Raymond Terrace with Uncle Justin and Uncle Greg, I've been able to then make my own sticks with others there and learn that process. We want to expand on that through some of the thinking about pattern and expression more from a contemporary context, it's been a really deep and personal experience. This particular part of my work really exhibits visually, my genuine connection with that instrument, the respect and some responsibility to ignite that flame within everyone. I hope that people will understand that this is an instrument that comes from here, it's incredibly significant. And it's an instrument for us all to connect with, and to be proud of.

I feel comfortable with saying that they are arguably the first instrument ever. It's naturally, then, over to the researchers to validate this. I'm comfortable with this idea, but at this point I don't have the academic rigour behind it. Basing it purely on the basis that we're the oldest living culture in the world, and it's part of ceremony and gatherings for us. Naturally, it's an instrument that's played all around Australia, and by females and males. It's such an inclusive instrument. And I think when you think about all those factors, you have to logically come to the conclusion that it would have to be.

Q: Did you want to speak on your patterns of yarning video as well?

A: The patterns of yarning is based around a performance with four individuals. One drum kit player, David Jones, who is arguably one of the best in the world. Beautiful Yidaki (Didgeridoo) player Ray Kelly Jr, with Anthea Wickstrom on violin and myself on percussion. What we did was have a yarn based around some of the sort of markings that were on Ray's didge. And that then started to navigate us into a story based around sunrise and sunset, and how we just don't even acknowledge those things in our lives. They're so significant and quite sacred in their own ways. So, we wanted to then create an improvised yarning collaboration piece based around exactly that. And that's what we did at the Lock Up, and we recorded that experience. We decided to add some simple Lo Fi graphics to, perhaps, visually contextualise some of the story as well. And those particular graphics are based around using a programme that responds to the sounds.

It's a fairly simplistic kind of approach, and sort of contextualises it in this in this way that hopefully, from an observer perspective, kind of asks the question of what's going on here? And strikes, some interest, to ask 'how do I understand this more?' And for them to then be hopefully become more aware of how the notion of yarning can be used within a creative means and as a creative output.

Q: As a Kamilaroi person, do you feel your identity has directly contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: The answer is definitely yes. The more you think about these things and the older you get, you realise that this stuff not only gives you purpose, it's also just is a responsibility. It feels right. That's something to be proud of – where we are, who we are. And sharing that with the broader public, with all Australians, so that, we can all feel proud and supportive when it comes to our culture.

It's taken time to perhaps just focus on that. I think through working at the University, it's allowed me to not have to engage in as many commercial projects, wherever it might be. Now I can be a little more selective, ask myself culturally is this worth it? Because otherwise, you're playing or producing something for the sake of something like money and some kind of transaction. I've just been lucky enough to have a job where I can really focus on my own values culturally, who I am and express those cultural connections in whatever way I can.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is headed?

A: Where's the future going, what are we doing the future? I think, it's perhaps a little bit hard to make claims around that. I do think there's this general push. I'll give you an example. When you go to an art gallery there was always just the 'the Indigenous section' right? And now I've seen some galleries where it's spread throughout. That's a change and a shifting in the way that we're doing things. You know, that sort of categorisation is perhaps less and less present. There's a broader acceptance of cultures. And hopefully that continues.

Q: Introductions, who you are and your artistic practice?

A: I'm a Yolnu woman from the Gumatj Clan of Northeast Arnhemland, in the Northern Territory.

I'm pretty busy, I've got my finger in a lot of pies. I love collaborating and developing projects with other artistic communities, educational sectors. My passion is in better understanding people's stories and journeys, holding space to acknowledge those stories, and then linking it into how we have a common thread as humans. So over two decades, I've been practising as a multi-disciplinary artist and advancing in that practice, becoming a producer and a workshop facilitator for cultural arts awareness and education, and I'm currently working as a clinical mental health coach.

Q: What's your connection to Newcastle? Is there anything particular that's special to you about Newcastle this area?

A: I think for me, Country is the core of every connection. And that's a whole other realm to discuss, but for an Indigenous woman or person, connection to Country is the core of our societal and relational connections. Connectivity is the core of everything. So how it sustains you, how it inspires you, how it nurtures you, is very important. And the Newcastle region has provided all of this on many levels. For example, from its temperate climate to its beautiful flora and fauna, to a progressive cosmopolitan community, and a healthy artistic and creative community. Which in turn has provided many flourishing opportunities for myself and my family.

Q: Tell us about your artistic practice.

Well, first and foremost, my artistic process is philosophical and spiritual. And I draw inspiration from my cultural heritage and the natural world. Over the years I have also drawn from studying the human condition, and linking our shared experiences and challenges.

In regards to song writing and producing audio components of a production - I try to translate that philosophical and spiritual journey and instil that in people to have a similar experience. And with the visuals, it can be abstract. I draw from my traditional cultural techniques and symbolisms. My work can be contemporary drawing from those traditional ways. I also love to explore visionary art, connecting to evolution, and how we need to adapt to keep telling our stories and expressing our stories.

In regards to mediums, with my painting, I have mostly worked with acrylic on canvas or acrylic on other things. I've painted vehicles, I've painted murals, shells, stones, all sorts of tools and implements, anything I can get my hands on. I also enjoy doing body art and face paintings.

And for many years, I was a full-time visual artist and exhibiting artists where I would do solo exhibitions, group exhibitions, and I ran two art galleries. So that was a full-time job for me.

Q: Your pieces in the exhibition, do they tell a story? When did you create them? Feel free to elaborate.

A: To tell you the truth. I don't remember exactly what year I created it. It was a part of a solo exhibition I did that was called connected. So Infinity depicts connectivity. And it's quite a contemporary piece. I've thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was a journey onto its own. Often, I will start with a background, and it will just take its own course and unfold. This one in particular, and the more I sat with it, there was a shadow that had a presence and the description of the painting, "I walk with you through the ancient fields of existence, ancestral genes, descendants of this earth and stars above, engulfed by the mystery of life. A natural process of fear, love, and or echoes the celestial and earthly realms."

Walking through the ancient fields of existence for me is about that evolution and in particular the beginnings

of creation and the mycelium network. Which connects individual plants together to transfer and transmit information using electrical impulses, which is absolutely amazing. Transfers water and minerals, carbon and nitrogen.

And recent studies have shown that mycelium being a fungi, that we as humans or especially the animal kingdom, our DNA shows that we are we have a lot more connected than plants. So engulfed by the mystery of life. That's where it's so expansive, Infinity. Its boundless, and our existence and descendants of Earth and the stars above. And you know, we also come off the stars, we are stardust. It's a big one this painting.

One thing about fungi is, despite lacking a nervous system fungi does transmit information using electrical impulses. And we pick up on that we feel these impulses. And if there's one thing about First Nations cultures, it's that connection to Country and having deep relationships with other living beings.

Q: As an Aboriginal person, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: I draw from my cultural lineage. I draw from Country. It's that connection, It's expressed in all the work that I do.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think First Nations creative practices is heading towards awareness and education, healing and bridging.

Q: What can establishments like museums and galleries do to better support its future?

A: Host, invite or collaborate in programmes to provide that platform for storytelling and to share ideas, to further develop these stories and linking stories of the past stories of the present and ideas for the future.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about yourself just personally and as an artist?

A: My name is Jacob Cummins, I'm a Gomeroi man. Mum's side are from around Gunnadah area, and Dad's side, although he grew up around Barraba, his family is from out further West like Walgatt/Coonamble way as well.

Artistically, music's my primary medium. I've been playing guitar as my main instrument for just over 16 years, and picked up a few different instruments along the way. I play the Irish whistle, the mandolin, bass because it's similar, but not at the same professional standard as guitar. I've played a lot of different styles over the years as well. Predominantly I've played in metal bands, I play in a hardcore band at the moment, but I've played blues and jazz bands as well. I write orchestral music. I write a lot of traditional folk music from the other parts of my ancestry - Italian and Irish to honour that as well.

Q: What are your connections to Newcastle? Is there something in particular about Newcastle that's special?

A: I've been living Awabakal Country for over three years now. I've lived in Sydney my whole life. that's where I was used to and I thought I'd probably never leave. I would like to go Northwest and live on Country, but realistically, I probably would've just been Sydney my whole life. My current partner, and I met because our bands played a show together. I was still working in hospitality at the time, and she's a high school teacher. Once we were together, she was already graduated and working. I couldn't really expect her to move down here, so those circumstances led me here. There was nothing incredibly negative or toxic about my life in Sydney, but there was also things that it wouldn't hurt if they were to change.

It's a beautiful area, really nice Country. And I'm edging closer to my own Country, which is nice. But I guess as for what's special about the Newcastle area, obviously that moving up here meant I could live with my partner. It was also a very right place, right time scenario for a career change for me as well. I ended up being extremely lucky in getting a traineeship in community services, doing drug and alcohol, and transition support for people getting out of jail. That field is something I had wanted to get into for quite a while, but I guess out of complacency and comfort I never really wanted to change too much.

Overall, it's been this really massive healthy shift of almost every aspect of my life.

Q: Can you tell me a bit more about your artistic practice?

A: Straight out of school I got into I was accepted into the Sydney Conservatorium of Music to do classical composition in a Bachelor of Music. I made it to pretty close to the end, I dropped out in the third year. My priorities were at a bit different stage, but it was it was a really cool experience. You know, maybe I'll go back someday, maybe I won't. Who knows? Depends where life takes me.

As for orchestral music, I predominantly use software. Obviously, me and no one I know can afford to hire a real orchestra. Software instruments bridge that gap and make creating that kind of music a lot more accessible. I can have an entire realistic sounding orchestra localised entirely within my computer in my house, which is pretty awesome. I've had an interest in orchestral music for a long time. Film scores in particular was what sparked it, the impact that music has on a scene or on a movie as a whole. This can be part of the process for me, if I read a book or watch a tv series, whether it's a certain part or it as a whole, I think what would the music sound like? And what sort of emotions do you want to bring into it?

Q: Tell me more about your piece in the exhibit.

A: A few years back I was involved with this very direct to action activist group, like a grassroots level. And a lot of places on the Murray Darling system were incredibly dry, it's a whole other can of worms with irrigation, cotton farming and businesses abusing their water licences. This group I was involved in we were delivering water.

This particular time we were going to Walgett, because there was just there was no water in the rivers. There was no safe drinking water from taps. Nothing was being done about it about it, we were doing it ourselves.

There was a Lakota man with us, Uncle Andrew, we'd finished up delivering water for the day and I was having a yarn with him. He said to me that you can tell a lot about how a man treats a woman by how he treats the earth. And I thought about that a lot over the years. I was planning out what I wanted to do with this piece, where it was going to come from, and that's how I ended up with Matricide. By meaning that word is, killing one's mother. And it's just making that link between the disrespect and disregard of this Country, of every mob's land, and the disrespect of women in society. Particularly Aboriginal women too. I don't need to go on a on a tangent about statistics to back that up because there's no shortage of them.

The next question was how do I write a piece of music that pays respect as a lament for aspects of both culture and language and physical lives as well? All that has been lost due to that disregard and disrespect. Whether it's mother Earth or matriarchs, both give, provide and sustain life.

I was approaching it like I was writing any other orchestral piece, but this time I'm actually going to be playing the melodies on a real instrument. The main melody was something I've had written for years. It's shown up in a couple of different musical projects I've had since then, but it's never kind of been realised into something. I start with the strings on the software and just plot that out. In orchestrating the full string section, you get everything you want, gives me a bit of a scaffold for what the other sections we're going to do. And once a whole piece at the 90% mark, then I'll start more seriously doing the guitar side of things. A majority of the parts that aren't main melodies were improvised. And of course, there is a guitar solo in it, because there should be. And that was predominantly improvised too.

Matricide as whole had a video attached. But it's important to take into account that this is a piece of music with a video to support it. Not a video or a short film, with music to support it.

Q: As Gomeroi person, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: It definitely does, obviously in the aspect of storytelling as a way to convey emotions and lessons and knowledge something that we've been doing for 10's of 1000's of years. I think that in a modern context, for any mob artist regardless of their medium, something that shines through as a strength having family and ancestors that have done this for a very long time. It's then something that I feel we're innately extremely good at.

On top of that as well, I think about the band I was in before my current one - Dispossessed, we did a lot of fundraising and advocacy for different grassroots causes or community groups. Being able to use the platform for the things that can go directly back into the community and having that as a part of a creative process was, was really special. It's similar to writing Matricide, having all those all those emotions and feelings, as the motivator and the inspiration for either writing or performing, or whatever, it adds another layer to it. It's coming from a deeper place, and honouring my family and ancestors along the way.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think in a musical sense, in this last little while anyway, it has been heading in the right direction. I feel like there's a lot of new artists constantly popping up and being quite successful, as well. I feel like it's something that'll keep growing and expanding, regardless of genre. There's a lot more space for it, a lot more non-Indigenous Australians are opening up to and becoming more receptive to the messages that are coming out of the songs. Quite simply put, more people are listening.

Q: What can establishments like museums and galleries can do better to support the future of First Nations artists?

A: Having the space for it in an ongoing way. And, making sure that there's opportunities and things for, particularly young artists, to pursue this. And not just in a career sense, also just support in maintaining that connection to culture and being able to fly the flag, and display that with the most pride that you possibly can. Having opportunities for younger artists is the biggest investment for the future.

JAKEOB WATSON
GOMEROI

INTERVIEW 7/4/23

Q: Could you introduce yourself and tell me just a bit about yourself as an artist and personally as well if you'd like?

A: My name is Jakeob Watson, I'm an artist, mentor and a father. Born and raised in Maitland. I live here now with my wife, and our seven children. My journey as an artist started through contemporary traditional art, traditional Aboriginal art and has evolved within my other cultures of hip hop and graffiti. I've blended the two to create my own style and its sort of taken off. I do all different kinds of art, from canvases to murals, custom sneakers, digital art and jersey designs. As well as running workshops and programmes to teach art and culture with my wife.

Q: I wanted to ask about your connections to Newcastle and the Hunter region and if there's something in particular that's special to you about the area?

A: I was born and raised in Maitland, as my parents and their parents were as well. Anywhere along that Hunter River, I feel deeply connected to. I was born and raised in the Hinton area, so we grew up on the Hunter River there. That's probably the number one thing for me, the river and its connection to every town that it passes through. It's a massive lifeline, through a traditional way of life and even modern way of life. Water is very important for our souls and our spirits.

Q: The next question is about your artistic practice, can you tell me more about it?

A: I've recently been working very closely with Playstate curate, it's a gallery space and an art shop down on Union Street, Newcastle. And they've been curating some spaces for a few local artists. So I've done a couple of fun jobs with them recently, like the Nobbys boat shed, teamed up with local artists and we painted the boat set up at Nobbys. And also working closely together with those guys to deliver a few workshops over the school holidays bringing graffiti culture and graffiti to the youth around the area.

I paint murals, it's probably the most love I get while creating. I think public art is a must for every creative. That's the key to my soul, I think. My practice and my techniques a bit different too. I'll come up with a concept in my head, but I will basically freestyle everything on the wall. And then I let the paint do the talking and I'll just vibe out and flow on the walls. I'll get all my colours and my shading done and I'll leave the outline the complete outline to the end so I'm shocked myself when I see it all pieced together. Makes the long part and hard parts worth it.

All my inspiration, I come up with when I while I'm dreaming or in deep thought. My inspiration seems to always come from my wife, our children, and nature. All the beauty that Mother Earth has, whether it's the plants and animals, my artwork will have a lot of our native plant life from around my area.

Q: Could you tell me a bit about your piece in the exhibition?

A: For this specific piece I really wanted to take in the vibe of the exhibition and do something contemporary. I'm customising a sneaker, something I love to do, and bringing in that hip hop element. I painted it in a of a blend of my style, showing off both cultures - being Aboriginal and hip hop.

So it's a walk in my shoes. Just showing that journey I walk between the culture of hip hop and traditional Aboriginal culture. These are the things that guide me in my life and with my family. And these cultures cross over very heavily. They both have their basis of music, art, dance. All based off peace, love and unity.

Q: As a Gomeroi person, do you feel your identity has been attributed to your creativity?

A: My identity is everything to who I am. Everything about my art has come down to my understanding of self. And also that connection to Wonnarua Country, being born and raised here, the connection to the land where my ancestors, my grandparents, my parents were raised.

It's up to us as, as artists to identify that we are still living on Country, connecting to Country, we are still connected to our culture. When we create our artwork and tell our own stories, we can tell them how we want, we can we can adjust to the new modern ways of life. We can bend our styles, we can bend our techniques, and we are still practising culture, we are still connected. We are still here, We are still surviving.

Q: Do you have any thoughts on where the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think it's only getting more seen. The traditional sense of Aboriginal art is growing in the in the world market but also there's the contemporary Aboriginal art scene as well. There's a lot of artists out there doing really amazing things in the digital spaces and stepping into social media. I think that's where it's going to take off for a lot of our new creatives.

Q: What can establishments, like museums and galleries, do to better support the future of First Nations creative practice?

A: Exactly what you guys are doing now. Reaching out, reaching out to local, up and coming artists. Letting them speak from their soul, and giving them a space. As I said about public art, having a space just to create is going to take every artist upwards. So the more that you guys can put on events like you are, the better.

JASMINE MIIKIKA CRACIUN
BARKINDJI/MALYANGAPA

INTERVIEW 30/3/23

Q: So first of all, introductions. Tell me a bit about yourself.

A: My name is Jasmine Miikika Craciun. I'm a Barkindji and Malyangapa woman on my mother's side, and on my dad's side I'm Romanian and Austrian. And I studied graphic design, but I'm sort of in bit of a middle zone currently, doing mural, public art and digital art. And then more traditional forms of art as well. So a bit of everything at the moment.

Q: What's your connection to Newcastle? And is there something in particular that's special to you about Newcastle?

A: I was born in Newcastle and grew up there. For me, Newcastle was really special, I think because of the ocean. Traditionally my family are river people, but I think for me, having like, some sort of connection to a natural body of water was really important and really special. The beaches and the oceans of Newcastle have had a big part in my growing up. I didn't grow up on my own country, but I think that growing up on Worimi and Awabakal Country was pretty special. I think it's also where my dad grew up, and it's where my grandparents came when they immigrated. My mum came to Newcastle and then made that her home as well with my dad and then me. Since then all of us have spread out, me, mum and dad have all left doing different things. But it's still considered this place of home even though none of us are necessarily there right now.

Q: Could you just tell me a bit more about your artistic practice?

A: It began when I was young, and it was always a hands on craft. Then I studied graphic design at Newcastle University, which was really eye opening for me. Even though my parents were really supportive of me doing creative things, I didn't see myself fitting into that traditional art world. I didn't see myself as being talented enough to be seen as an artist. So graphic design was this way of creating and working within the art field without being in these traditional spaces.

Then I was just really lucky to be given some mural opportunities, which made me go back to that more hands craft that I originally loved about art. Now I've been balancing that for a long time, between the digital and then more hands on mural work and public art projects.

In the next few years, I'm hoping to focus in again on personal art projects, and maybe now trying to be in a bit more of that traditional art space, which is a bit daunting. But I think, realising that I want to be able to tell my own family stories is like a big drive for that. And having more autonomy over what I create, whereas graphic design is very much for other people. So I feel like I'm in a bit of a time of transition.

Q: As a Barkindji and Malyangapa woman, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity, and if so, how?

A: I think it definitely has, especially through the concepts and the stories of my work. It's very heavily influenced by my family stories, and the ongoing family stories of, in particular, my mother's side. I'm also trying to utilise textile techniques and skills learned from both my own mum and my dad's mum. And then I've been trying to interweave those two sides of my family together. In particular my grandparents, because I feel like both grandparents on both sides have these amazing stories of change and displacement, and what home is to them. I think those stories are what heavily inspire the work that I want to create. And the work that have created in the past.

Q: So where did you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think it's heading everywhere. It's so cool. I just think that we have all these opportunities at our fingertips, especially with technology, I think that we can open up so many more doors for young people. I'm always talking about it. But I really think that graphic design for young people, or just digital art in general, especially in regional

communities, will be such a game changer. It becomes more accessible. Because I think we'll have so many young people who are just take the world by storm. Digital art was like such an amazing beginner for me and opened up so many doors, I can't imagine what like the next generation of kids are going to do with it. They're basically born knowing how to use technology, I think it'll be amazing.

We're in such a connected world, when it comes to things like TikTok and Instagram. We have created these connections to the smallest places all over the world. So I think while young people are gaining more access to this we're just going to see more and more creativity coming out of the tiniest places, which is great. And hopefully some people who may not have had the opportunity to be seen before will be seen. And they'll be able to tell the stories that matter to them. One of the biggest things I tell my cousins is that the perspectives that they have growing up in their small town growing up in Wilcannia, it's something that other people just don't have. They have these incredible perspectives on the world that they can share and tell these stories to people, because they have this lived experience. And I think that's so special.

Q: What can establishments like museums and galleries do to better support First Nations future in creative practice?

A: I think one of the main things that they need to do is branch out from the same thing, like what I was saying earlier about being able to see works from regional places. I think that bigger galleries could benefit from supporting younger artists who maybe don't have a connection in any way to the art world. That's where that sort of fear of institutions comes from as well, it is feeling like even though you might see more Aboriginal people in there, a lot of the time, you're also seeing Aboriginal people that have grown up totally differently to you. I've had a lot of privilege in my upbringing, so then it's going back again, and trying to really support those people that have no connection to those spaces whatsoever.

And I think it's happening, there's these amazing programs with galleries where they're working with regional communities. And I guess we'll just see it happening as time goes on too.

MAREE BISBY
WIRADJURI

INTERVIEW 30/3/23

Q: The first question is just introductions, so if you just wanted to tell me a bit about yourself and yourself as an artist as well?

A: My name is Maree Bisby, and I'm part of the Wiradjuri Nation. Both of my parents are actually Wiradjuri. I've got a bit of a strange story in that no members of my family that I can trace have actually been artists. I really look at my journey as an artist as just absolute true connection to culture. Because somewhere, and somehow, I have been given the gift of being able to keep our storytelling alive. I haven't ever really undertaken any form of study or anything. But the feedback that I get is that, the traditional markings, and the ability to tell the story is just so authentic. I don't actually know what a piece is going to look like when I start, I have to wait until I get the message as to what is next.

Q: I'd love to know more about your connection to Newcastle, is there something in particular about Newcastle that is special to you?

A: I was born and raised here in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, so it is just home for me. I lived a couple of years in Western Australia and it was just a given that one day I would return. It has been a while since I have returned back to Newcastle, but I think the sense of freedom and the sense of wellness is what I admire most about Newcastle. It's quite progressive in the in the ways that we are thinking more about Aboriginal culture. And I like it when there are the opportunities to showcase artwork at a much higher level.

Q: Can you explain your artistic practice a bit further?

A: I'm pretty much I'm a person that will give anything ago. I think that when you get the calling, then you have to try it. So hence the paper mache in this piece. Predominantly I do just use acrylic, but I do to paint it onto a mixed media. I've got a piece that's floating around the Hunter Valley at the moment that was my first really big weaving. I've also done artwork on bark, handbags, shoes, you name it. I use whatever I need to produce the marking that I need, I have done a lot of 3D pieces.

The weaving piece was a really big moment to actually take that deep breath and put my work out there. A lot of being an artist is wondering will it be good enough? How will it be perceived? And I just got the message from my ancestors that it's perfect, and just send it out there.

Q: Can you tell me more about your piece in the exhibit?

A: My dad was a man of very few words. But when he did talk to you, he captured an audience. He was very much a traditional oral storyteller. He was a very keen fisherman, and I think the shark idea came about because growing up we always had these taxidermy full size marlin and yellowfin tuna on our walls. And it was always this joke that when my dad passed that I would get them because Aboriginal artwork on a yellowfin tuna or a marlin like is just open a world of possibilities. I haven't bought myself to actually replicating them just yet, so I thought I'd start with the shark.

For me, it's just trying to relive some of those bigger moments as a child and look through the lens of my dad in the stories that he would tell. I can put those stories on this shark and give true representation of a lot of Aboriginal men who had fought so hard for any kind of identity. My dad would tell the story of when he wasn't dark enough to go into the Aboriginal pubs, but then he was too dark to go into the white pubs. He was stuck.

I now work in the disability industry and have come a true advocate for fairness and opportunity for all. And I think that a lot of that comes from hearing those kinds of stories around racism, where do people actually fit in, that we're still quite a long way from true acceptance and true reconciliation. And so, I just thought to get a message out there about my dad, and his journey would be just such a privilege and a really lovely way to honour the memory that I have of him.

Q: As a Wiradjuri person do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity, and if so how?

A: Having that connection to my ancestors, I can start a piece and have no idea how it's going to end up and then, without sounding too full of myself, it'll be perfect. That's just how things work for me, so whether or not that's my ancestors channelling through? They can get their say as well.

I think for me as well, I view the world in patterns. Of course, I see the real world, but I just notice the patterns on a tree, or I'll notice the patterns on a rock or the formation of something. I feel that Aboriginal markings and storytelling are derived from nature, and our surroundings, because everywhere we go, it's giving us those markings. And it's giving us those symbols. I'm never fearful of putting in markings or symbols that may not make sense to other people, because it makes sense as to what I've seen or been inspired by.

Q: What can places like museums and galleries do to better support First Nations creatives?

A: Don't make the process so difficult for people to put an expression of interest in. Having to go through the process of some higher-level corporate application takes me ages and I do work in the corporate world myself. And I just think how is that opening the door for people who want to give it a go?

MARIA TATTERSALL
YUWWAALAARAY/ KAMILAROI

INTERVIEW 30/3/23

Q: I just wanted to just jump right into it and ask you about yourself.

A: I'm Maria Tattersall, originally from Western New South Wales. A little town called Brewarrina. My family don't actually originate from Brewarrina, my Country is closer to the Queensland border. And we are the Yuwwaalaaray people and also descendants of Kamilaroi.

We ended up in Brewarrina because we were moved, my parents and my grandparents were moved around on missions. I wasn't born on my Country I grew up in Brewarrina as the youngest of five. I'm the only one that's finished high school and I'm a lot younger than my siblings. They sort left school at reasonably young age and went straight into the workforce because they needed to survive. I

grew up with my one of my older sisters caring for me because mum and dad were constantly working. My father who I had a great connection with, he was gone for weeks on end, working in the earth moving business. But there was always family around, I always had my aunts and my uncles too. So we kept our culture alive within our small group. The language was lost and was not allowed to be passed down at the mission, I know words, but I can't put a sentence together.

I did some schooling in Sydney, I was always interested in nursing. But I've always had a love for art. I didn't paint for a while when I had my children, because my life was just so hectic. My youngest was in infant school when I decided to pick up a paintbrush again. And look, I just love it. I love it when I'm in the moment, it just helps me. I tell my story through my art.

I've also had a career in health. A really good career. I'm working in Community Services at the moment, but I'm hoping to go back to health very soon. I do miss it.

Q: My next question is about Newcastle and what your connection is, and if there's anything particularly special about Newcastle so far? Especially since you moved here not long ago.

A: I've got a lot of family connection here that lived here for many generations. I like the colours of the water, I'm a freshwater girl through and through, but it's calming the ocean. The waves, the sounds of the waves. I love the greenery of the countryside in some parts of Newcastle, it sort of feels like home. And how connected Aboriginal people who are from this Country are to the land and the culture that makes me feel so good. I have colleagues, friends, who till practice with their traditional foods and their artwork and how they get their story out through what they do. I just to listen to them, there's a lot of the positive stuff people are doing in Newcastle. It's makes my connection to Newcastle that much more.

I've even got friends who started off with me in kindergarten, way out west. And I discovered that they're actually living in Newcastle when I first got here, and we've reconnected. It's a big place, but it's not really… you know? I know that if I'm in a predicament, there's somebody that I can call.

Q: I was wondering if the art style that you use is based on anything you grew up with? Or if it's more your own style?

A: There's is a bit of both. But this one that I that I've entered into the exhibition, it's because I do have a love of looking at the night sky.

Q: Tell me more about the piece in this exhibit.

A: There's a little bit of everything in this piece, but I was always trying to showcase the sky. And the seasons when the Emus lay their eggs, and that we see of the Emu in the Milky Way. In a certain time of the year, when you look up into the sky, you can see the Emu is either upside down, or it's facing the right way up. When the Emu is sort of upside down, it's not laying. And when it's facing the right way up, that's when the female Emus lay their

eggs, and that we see of the Emu in the Milky Way. In a certain time of the year, when you look up into the sky, you can see the Emu is either upside down, or it's facing the right way up. When the Emu is sort of upside down, it's not laying. And when it's facing the right way up, that's when the female Emus lay their eggs. And painted the eggs in different places, because then the male takes over. See all of the feet that are walking around? That's the males looking for their eggs to sit on. The handprints are when different groups of Aboriginal people collect them for food. We don't take them all, we just collect them at certain parts of each season so they can replenish for the next season.

It's just a different piece. It's got some elements of our traditional way of painting, but there's a lot of its contemporary in it as well.

The materials that I use, I use acrylic of course, and I use gold leaf and silver leaf. I also use clay, that thickens the paint to make it stand out even more. It all depends on how I visualise my ideas. I try and think of what types of medium will tell the story that I'm seeing. And the colours remind me of home.

Q: I just wanted to see if you wanted to elaborate any more on how you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity?

A: I think it's my life and how I experienced it, and how I see life as an Aboriginal person. I feel that comes through in my artwork. And if you ever had see any of the other artworks that I've done, or if you had a chance to speak to me before even seeing my artwork, you would know it's from me.

Q: What can museums and galleries do better to support the future of First Nations creative practice?

A: I see so many people who produce such beautiful artwork, but don't have the platforms to get it out there. I've looked at a lot of galleries around Newcastle, and it's a lot of fine art galleries, I see my artwork as fine art as well. But if you produce your artwork at fine art galleries? You know, you feel judged straightaway? Because it doesn't fit inside that box or fine arts for people?

I've always wanted to have my own gallery. To bring artwork in from all areas of New South Wales, to exhibit and sell, because there's a lot of beautiful work out there. And there's a lot of stories that need to be told. But I was wondering what do I even do to become a gallery owner? I'd love to find out.

NGAIRE PAKAI
WIRADJURI/MAORI

INTERVIEW 12/4/23

Q: So this one is really just introductions for you to tell me about yourself, what you do, personally and as an artist?

A: I'm Ngaire Pakai. I'm a Wiradjuri and Māori woman from Dubbo, living here in Newcastle. I came to Newcastle in like 2015 to start studying. I'm still at uni, studying to become a visual arts and drama teacher. I also work at Speaking in Colour as an Aboriginal educator, cultural facilitator and artist, and then I just do personal art for myself as well. It all depends on what comes up really.

Q: I just wanted to ask about your connection to Newcastle. And if there's anything specific that's special about Newcastle to you?

A: I came to Newcastle in 2015 to start uni. I was back and forth between here and Dubbo over the years, but now I've been here permanently over the last couple of years. And what brought me here was really just my friends. I wanted to be closer to my 'found family' and the people that I love, and this is the place where we all gravitated to. Now being here for so long, having so many connections, I've formed more over time here through work and uni, making more friends through other friends, and connecting with the mob up here. Now Newcastle feels like home, I've made my place here.

Q: Can you tell me a bit more about your artistic practice?

A: I paint, and I also do some digital art. I like really playing with different types of mediums. So working on some textile art, because I'm also a really big sewer. I love fixing up my clothes and making new ones. But paintings the easiest and the most comfortable, it's what I've learned to do. I've been doing it for so long, so it's easy to play with it and change it up.

Q: And your pieces in the exhibition, I'd love to know more about them?

A: Yes, the surfboard and the swimmers. So, the original design was just digital, it was made for a specific purpose of going on T shirts. And then I've been doing it again on canvases and on the surfboard, and creating art from it, kind of like a sister piece to the original design. None of them are the same, they just have the similar elements.

I spent probably like 72 hours directly on the board just painting, but it was over the course of a week. And then every time I got sick of looking at it, I moved on to one of the canvases. I was able to chunk that time and chunk the creativity and move on to the other pieces. So I was always moving and painting, feeling really productive.

Originally, I got a brief and as I was feeling it out, I started creating something that I felt fit and told a story. It's about the celebration of being women, sea life and the Surfest culture.
Cherie and Sharleen, one of the other girls that works here at Speaking in Colour, put it into words for me properly, I don't believe that the words to explain it like they can. But that's why I work visually, I recognise that my strength is creating art. And I lean on others to, pick up where I'm weak and play on their strengths. And that's what we do at Speaking in Colour, and Sharleen's strength is words and giving meaning.

Q: Do you feel like your identity as a Wiradjuri and Māori person has contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: Absolutely, yes, my identity informs my art making. It's really cyclical in the way because I express my culture through my art, and my art is also about my culture. When I first started doing art at uni, they don't really teach you how to make Aboriginal art. So making Aboriginal art was always an individual approach, it was something to just explore how I felt and explore my own identity. So I find it helps me learn more about my culture, but also more about myself.

It's really difficult to talk about, I do so much Aboriginal painting and art making in like so many different mediums and then have my Māori side and I don't have a really strong connection. That my connection is like my name and my mother, but I just don't have avenues for learning about Māori culture. I feel like I'd be leading myself blind if I started practising Māori art. I'd love to one day give my Māori side the amount of respect and intention that my Indigenous cultural upbringing has.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think I see a lot with Speaking in Colour, we see a lot of First Nations practice taking up space in normally white dominated areas. People who want to learn. In the past, we were facing mass discrimination, but now we've really asserted ourselves, and have started gaining respect and cultural protocols in those spaces.

And I see a lot of interesting stuff with art that's serving multiple functions. In fashion, music and poetry, all in the digital media landscape. We're not confined to what those early ideas of what Aboriginal art is anymore, it's so expansive, and so fluid. A lot of Indigenous creators taking up space in multiple industries to show off just how individual each of our cultures are. Just being able to distinguish there's a difference between Central Australia and the eastern and western coasts, and how individual each of our like styles are. Even though we're all First Nations people were also multicultural in our Indigenous identities and in our creative arts space.

Q: What do you think establishments like museums and galleries can do better to support the future of First Nations creative practice?

A: That's a big one, that's talking about allyship and voice. Not just collaboration, but also autonomy in those spaces. There's having a visual presence in the museum's but also being a part of decision making, and curation too. We have a lot of Indigenous people who hold so much knowledge, and then they have no current standing with museums or the process. Start building that network of people who want to be involved, who are also Indigenous creatives or who are involved with Indigenous creatives, know them and have good connections. Who are not just there to get artwork out of someone, but will sit down, have a cup of tea and talk to you. Talking to you as a human being, and not just as someone who's going to produce something. There has to be a two way street, you can't just expect someone to give you their creative output of they don't feel valued at the same time.

SHANE DIXON
WANGKUMARA

INTERVIEW 13/4/23

NOTE: This interview took place over a video call with Shane's case worker, Rab, present to assist with the interview and speak for Shane if he was unable. Shane was present for the entire interview and understood Rab's words on his behalf to be true and accurate.

Q: Can you introduce a little bit about yourself?

Shane: I was born in Kempsey. I grew up in Kempsey and family are from Bourke. I've been locked up for three months now. And I really love doing art.

Q: What's your connection to Newcastle?

Shane: I go to the beach there with my family and spent time with my Mum, my brothers and sisters. They go to Newcastle a lot, they're from Woodbury. I've never lived in Newcastle, but I've stayed in Newcastle once or twice with my mates.

Q: Can you tell me about how you got into art?

Shane: So I got to the centre, and felt down. And then I put me in school programme, and there was an art teacher in there. I ended up going to that class and I started painting. It made me feel happy and back to normal. A goal for me is that I want to design my own shirts, design my own clothing with Aboriginal designs on it.

Rab: Something for Shane is his art and culture is a safe place. It's sort of part of his plan right across the centre, we can support Shane through cultural practices as well. So that's a real big thing for him. When we see him in the groups with the other peers, there's about nearly 30 people at the moment that are Aboriginal, Shane has actually become one of our cultural leaders. Because he's so knowledgeable around who he is, his identity and how he connects with it. He can really give off cultural values and a moral vibe to the other boys.

Q: I love the piece in our exhibit, how did it come about?

Shane: So, there was a cultural group around and we were doing a dance. The dance was the Brolga dance. And after that dance, I just liked it. I thought I'd do a painting about it and I'd done the two Brolgas. I'd chose those colours because it had really been a rainy day, the day that we danced. It was like their colours when they're in the water.

Rab: He said he wanted it to represent the thoughts from the dancing and the day.

Shane: Then my worker, Paul from Samaritans. He asked one day if I would sell my artwork and if I would put it on show. And I said I'd love to do it and he came back a couple weeks later and he said my artwork been accepted.

Q: Do you feel like your identity as a Wangumarra man has contributed directly to your painting?

Rab: For anything cultural Shane is just so valued in the centre and across all the boys as well. It's not a perfect environment or circumstance for Shane, but he's been able to explore some cultural identity and cultural activities. Artwork is just one of them. We're just actually trying to get Shane a bit of funding and get some paints to do more paintings in the centre.

And that's where we just continue as cultural participants ourselves, as Aboriginal families, just nurturing with Shane. A lot of these ideas and thoughts come from how he connects directly with a lot of tradition. Sort of like an old soul, you know?

Q: What do you see in your future as a First Nations artist?

Shane: I want to become famous for my art work, and make a name for myself doing it. I really enjoy it. I just want to go somewhere with my art, just go places and put it in show so that everyone can see what I can do and what I do for a living.

Q: What can museums and galleries do better to support First Nations artists?

Rab: I think from an Aboriginal perspective, is reaching out to the major organisations. Because most of the time for you visit our organisations, they'll have art work from community in their buildings. That's a sense of pride within our art community. If it's explored further on then into museums and they can be walking into a museum and see their name and their artwork up there. And maybe there's a lot of reservations as well, with Aboriginal artists around copyright. So I think that's just from your end, create opportunities with other ways to gaining that trust, to know it's not going to be exploited. Like you've already had those conversations already. Even just having sort of informal exhibitions, I think would bring more Aboriginal people rather than having to submit art work or pieces into museum exhibitions just maybe even like, giving them opportunity to have the artwork in Newcastle museum where people can see it.

SHELLIE SMITH
AWABAKAL

INTERVIEW 4/4/23

Q: First is just introductions to tell me about yourself and yourself as an artist as well.

A: My name is Shellie Smith, I'm an Awabakal descendant. My family has always lived in and around Newcastle and the Lake Macquarie area. My artistic practice really focuses around reawakening culture, particularly Awabakal culture. So often I look to things in collections, like museums, and archives, and draw inspiration from that. And then recreate it in a contemporary way.

Q: This is a good time to talk about your connection to Newcastle, which is pretty obvious already. But is there something in particular that's special to you about Newcastle?

A: For me, the thing about Newcastle is I'm always drawn back to it. I think I was the first person in our family to be born off Country but returned soon after. I've lived in Worimi and Awabakal country my whole life. Growing up I always thought we were particularly boring because my whole family lived in the same street. And it wasn't until I had my son that I realised how special that was. To have four generations living side by side and on our own Country.

I've moved away a couple of times, but I've always come back to Newcastle. And my partner always says, whenever I go places, I always compare it to Newcastle. Here, everywhere you go, there's water. Whether it's the river or the ocean or the lake. I struggle being far away from the saltwater.

Q: Can you tell me a bit more about your artistic practice?

A: I start with place and a story, and then that tells me the material or the method to use. I don't think I've got one particular style; it's always driven by the place and each place has a different story to tell. So I've always struggled with just doing a project if I don't have an inspiration or something. I always need to make with purpose.

Q: I'd love to know more about your piece in this exhibition.

A: As an Awabakal woman, my connection to saltwater and to fishing was something I wanted to explore, and something that felt right in that space. The museums location adjacent to Coquun (Hunter river) as well my own memories of going fishing with my Grandmother became the inspiration for this work.

I've been wanting to make fishhooks for quite a while, I think it really relates to this place specifically. In the displays of the artefacts in this museum we have a lot of grinding stones, and they're used in the manufacture of fishhook.

The hooks are very simple and delicate, and will be housed behind a Perspex sheet, reminiscent of museum displays. I collected all the shells for the fishhooks from Cowrie Hole, and the fishing line is local Kurrajong. I'll be combining them with a digital print that's capture traditional imagery of water and fish, casting shadows and keeping the objects, like aspects of our history, just out of reach.

Q: As an Awabakal person, do you feel your identity is contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: The Awabakal people's culture was so disrupted by colonisation, making the art practice is a really important way of reconnecting, reawakening and reconnecting. I use that as my vehicle to make connection.

I think going to collections, looking at those and getting inspiration from them is so important. Otherwise, they just remain objects locked away in cabinets, when really, they should be out and being used. That's why I love looking at those grinding stones, and then actually finding stones, grinding the shells and working it out by actually doing it. I think people would have a much greater connection to it if they understand how it's made, how it was used, to why it was used. I think that the actual practice of working out how to make something is just as important as the end result.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think it's really vibrant. I think it's a really dynamic space, you see a lot of people working in this space and the creativity that's coming out of it. The ownership that this next generation has on reclaiming their culture, being proud and presenting it is really inspiring for me. I love seeing what other First Nations and Indigenous creatives are doing, it's so amazing to see their interpretation of the way they want to express their culture.

I feel like there's lots more opportunities, there's a lot more support. And there's a real appetite within the general public to connect with it and consume it.

Q: What do you think establishments like museums and galleries could do better to support the future of First Nations practice?

A: I think supporting First Nations to have an access to the cultural items, and be able to interact with them. Whether that be through participatory descriptions, but also allowing those people who have cultural connection to those objects have a say in the way they're displayed and the way they're described. I think is really, really important that the stories that are connected to them can be told, and a deeper understanding can be shared about those objects.

Decolonizing the way they're displayed. These objects have agency and they are entities within themselves. They're not objects to be owned and consumed. And that's a really different way to the Western way of collecting and cataloguing. Commodifying culture and objects, as opposed to just letting them breathe and live.

TIMOTHY JACKSON / TIMBERLINA

WIRADJURI

INTERVIEW 23/3/23

Q: The first question is really just an introduction for you to talk about yourself and everything that you do. So, I'll just give you the floor.

A: I am Timothy Jackson, also known as Timberlina around the town. In drag, my pronouns are she/her – out of drag it's he/him. I am a proud Wiradjuri person, and now live on Awabakal land. I've lived in Newcastle for the last, oh god this is going to sound really bad… I think it's 16 years now?! So I grew up out west until I was 12 and then moved to the big smoke, as we like to call it. I went to school here, studied events, and then I got into drag six years ago. And I've been doing drag ever since.

Now I just travel around to regional towns doing my bingo show, my trivia shows, my cabaret shows. And for me, my art form is drag. But what people are going to see this exhibition is the costume that I've worn.

Q: Tell me more about the costume?

A: I competed in with Miss First Nations in 2018, it's an all First Nations drag competition and I did a take on the goanna. And turned out nothing like it should've looked in my head, it didn't come out in the textiles that I used. And then I had the opportunity this year in 2023 to go back and compete in Miss First Nations: Supreme Queen. I wanted to go back and do an elevated look on all the stuff that I previously did, so I did the goanna again. I had some friends sew three thousand scales on to the costume, which was a lot of work and it took them two months to hand stitch them on.

I was watching them… I thought it would be super easy, and it's really not. It is so detailed. My friend that made the costume for me, she has more attention to detail then me when it comes to that kind of stuff. She wouldn't let anybody else touch it except for her mum. So we could have made it a lot faster, but she just didn't trust anybody else to line up all of the scales to be matching.

Q: And this is the costume you won your award in?

A: Yeah. And the best thing about Miss Photogenic is for that award, you have one judge, which is the photographer. With all the rest of the competition there's between 10 and 20 judges judging you. So, it all just depends on what the judges are after. For me winning Miss Photogenic was the most rewarding because you have to impress one person. Which is so much harder than the 20, you might impress 10 of the 20. But impressing just one person… I was like DAMN.

Q: What's your connection to Newcastle? And is there something in particular that's special about Newcastle to you?

A: My connection to Newcastle is that my mum was originally born here on Awabakal land, but her family is Wiradjuri. And growing up in a small country town and then moving to Newcastle, we thought it was the big smoke coming from the bush. And then going to school here, the connection is the people, Newcastle people are just bred completely different. Where it's been that surfy culture, and I go into their bars now and turn them a little bit queer for a night. It's so rewarding. And people have really taken to it and they love what I'm bringing to the town. They're already so supportive of a drag performer. If you look back 10 years ago at what it would've been like, I don't think it would have been the same.

I've just always come back. I've travelled and lived in Sydney, in the Whitsundays doing events, but I always come back to Newcastle. And I think Newcastle is home for me now.

Q: Is there anything in particular that you take inspiration from, with your drag?

A: Everyone and everything. I guess in the everyday is my culture, the heartache we've had. But it just depends on like event that I'm going to and what I'm feeling for that event.

Drag for me is like, so there's Tim, and Timberlina is the extroverted Tim, Timberlina is so out there. Gets away with a lot more than what Tim can. And it's just rewarding. My artform is to make people laugh and feel happy and confident when they're leaving the venue.

Q: As a Wiradjuri person, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity, and if so, how?

A: Yeah. 100%. So, when I started drag many, many years ago, six years ago - my biggest thing was to take drag back to Country and spread my wings. Growing up in a regional town, there was nothing like this. So, for me, it was so important to go back to Country to showcase my new character that I have. To show mob that we're here, we're queer, and we can be whoever we want.

For me, and for all of my performers that work for me, my biggest thing is that they can't start a show until they identify the land that they're on. I believe that's a small way of making a pathway through showing that we respect the land that we're on as well. Because when I started that six years ago, acknowledgement of Country was not a thing, you would never hear it. None of my performers will start a show without acknowledging the land they are on, which is something that I'm so proud of. And I still to this day have people come up to me and thank me almost crying for incorporating that into my show. We shouldn't have to be thanked for that. So, all of those little things just make it so great, to know that I am making change for the future.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading? And you can talk more about this in reference to drag?

A: I think the First Nations creative practice is heading bigger and bigger. And we should go back to Country and find these artists that are doing amazing work and bring them into the cities or even get them on display in their numerous cities, in the museums and galleries. Because the artwork is so "swearword" stunning, and it needs to be put in front of more people.

Q: What can establishments like the museums and galleries do better to support First Nations future in art?

A: They can just reach out, or have First Nation consultants come in and work with them to get First Nations people into these museums and galleries. Give them full exhibitions, not just a little season, they should be on display permanently. Government agencies that own and operate all the museums and galleries, even the private ones, need to hire a consultant of First Nations people that have connection to the land and the mob that can bring their artforms in and display them. It's just that you need that connection with mob, so they can trust you.

Q: The first question is just about introducing yourself and telling me more about yourself.

A: So, my name is Virginia McDonald and my people are from Worimi country. Mary Ann Bugg was the famous Aboriginal woman who married Thunderbolt the bushranger, and my lineage is from her sister. And so that's where I actually draw a lot of my inspiration from is the bush. My father was a log getter, so our family spent a lot of time in the actual bush.

It was very interesting, but a very dangerous and hard job. My sister and I, we used to go and help him drive the tractors and trucks. We always felt safe in the bush with dad and the knowledge that he gave us. But the saddest thing about it, each of our male lines worked in that industry and they all got killed in the bush. Even my dad died young. I have a respect for the bush, because it is a dangerous place.

I've always loved art. I wanted to go to university and study art, but coming from a low social economic background and a small country town, that wasn't afforded to me. I then just went and got a normal job and got married, I ended up working for the university for 20 years. And I then ended up developing idiopathic intracranial hypertension, which is fluid on the brain. It's incurable and very hard to treat, so I've got two brain stents and I've also got a VP shunt. I was pensioned off and I thought it gave me a great opportunity to actually do some art lessons and so I did a drawing lesson through the uni. Then I found Art Mania over at Wallsend and they're one of the only places that does a lot of glass work.

Q: Is there something about Newcastle that's special to you?

A: I've lived here in Newcastle for 33 years, out at Edgeworth but I'm originally a Gloucester girl, Wards River. And I've got my I've got two children, Emma and Sarah, and they're both very active in the local Aboriginal community. I feel like I'm in both sectors, I'm a Newcastle person, and a Lake Macquarie person. It's just one big place to me, because it is one big place culturally. It's Awabakal. And it is only the Hunter River dividing Worimi and Awabakal. It's so close, I can stand here in Newcastle and still look at home.

Q: Tell me a bit about your artistic practice?

A: I tried a lot of mediums because I wanted to do a lot of art that took me back to the bush. Like making pottery banksias and ceramic sticks. I was enjoying it but my hands got so tired from what's happening to me, and I'll get shaky. Hence, I started glass and fell in love with it. And I thought this is really hard. And there's a lot of learning that involves infusing the colours of the glass, the different glasses, you can't just pick any glass up and do what you want to do with it. There are all sorts of different things to take into account.

Q: And this led to you making your pieces in the exhibition?

A: Well one day I though how cool would be if I could manage to make a modern interpretation of a coolamon in glass? How do we do this? The director at Art Mania, Fee Madigan has been so supportive to me, she really has great knowledge and respect for community. So, we got the glasses together, we're doing little pats and we've managed to slump them, and cut them. In eighteen months, I have been fine tuning, experimenting with the shapes, different glasses. To try and get them to look like grains of wood.

So, when I cut a coolamon, I'm envisioning I'm at that tree and I'm cutting it. But then you've also got to think when you're preparing glass, your upside down because don't really want the bottom of the coolamon to look the nicest. So, everything is back to front and upside down. And every coolamon is individual. There's no two the same. It's just beautiful, because you can't make them identical. It's just like a tree, like every other wooden coolamon that you cut from a tree, they're not identical. And so naturally, the bigger your tree, the bigger the coolamon, and the harder it gets. Most people think that when you've got a big tree, like a big gum tree, they're not going to be as rounded but they're not. When they're taken off the tree you could shave the back of them to get a flatter edge to lay the baby. So that's why there's all different shapes of wooden coolamons because they did serve for different

purposes. Whether you're out picking the berries, carrying the baby, or you just wanted to get some water.

Q: Do you feel your First Nations identity contributes to your creativity?

Yeah, so I had a very bush upbringing. Basically everything I do is related to the bush. And bush colours.

And my father being like a timber getter, you would see a lot of trees that had had coolamons cut out. And often like people have the impression that they die. But they don't. It's just beautiful, I feel really happy to be here and creating something that honours this.

Q: So the one of the questions is about where you think the future of First Nations creative practices heading, from your experience do you see anything in the future for people in the next generation?

A: Absolutely. I feel that Aboriginal art and practices and culture is going to be a really hot item in the next 20 years. It's sad but, Australians are the last to realise this. You travel overseas and people love our culture, people love our products. It does sadden me to think that children in other countries learn the correct history of Australia, when we are still teaching that Captain Cook found us… not!

WANDA MATTHEWS
ANAIWAN/GAMILAROI

INTERVIEW 3/4/23

Q: First introductions, please tell us about yourself.

A: My name is Wanda Matthews. I'm a proud Anaiwan and Gamilaroi woman, so that's Uralla and Tamworth. I was born and raised on Awabakal Country, and I live and work here. At the moment, I'm working with an organisation called Full Stop Australia. They're a domestic violence service in a space in Sydney, I work from Newcastle supporting people through the National Redress Scheme. So, survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. I'm also working for TAFE now teaching Aboriginal mentoring and identity, and this year I've been working in the art space with TAFE.

I'm a board member of the Awabakal land council. I really enjoy spending time with community and helping rebuild the land council, we're making some great changes and there's some really big new exciting things to come there. So really looking forward to being a part of those great changes.

I also study my native language, Gamilaraay, which is the language of the Gamilaroi people. My daughter and I study that together were to our third stages that at the moment. So I'm very much enjoying language and culture and most of all the arts. I love to paint and experiment, learn and develop my life skills as an artist as well through culture.

Q: What's your connection to Newcastle? Is there something really special or particular about this area that keeps you here?

A: I just can't fault the place really. The place has a lot of history and I really love that it's such an old historical place. And I love learning. We are so close to everything, I'm a big saltwater person so I love the ocean could probably never live too far away from the ocean. So I'm glad to have that nearby and we have such beautiful beaches. I really love the fact that we're so close to the country and can take a drive in a day out in the country and back home again. You can hardly think anything about Newcastle that this is a negative.

Q: So tell us about your artistic practice.

I've actually had a strong relationship with art my whole life, andsince the beginning that I've experimented with many mediums. From a young age I'd sketch and drawing. I did learn some oil painting at the age of 15, I really enjoyed that.

I also had a good stint with some street art, so aerosol art, and we would be paid to provide big graffiti pieces for businesses. And we were fairly well established in Newcastle for a little while at a particular time in my late teens. I loved my lettering, I really had an interest in letters and then moved into cake art. Cake decorating, and loved making art with food. And now currently, I'm still doing cakes for family and friends.

I am currently painting quite a bit with acrylics, mainly. I am experimenting with sculpture and Aboriginal weaving, enjoying learning that and developing skills there.
And teaching in that space as well now so I'll be spending more time probably experimenting again with some of the different mediums that we need to teach and pass on. I think in the future, I would like to combine some of my previous trials for example, some of the aerosol art with some Aboriginal art in a more contemporary way.

Q: Tell us about your piece in this exhibition.

A: So in Gamilaraay language it is called Guugarr, which is the more commonly known word for goanna. But he is specifically a sand goanna. He is one of the Totems for some parts of Gamilaroi Country, I think it really depends on where your family's from.

Living in Newcastle I don't really have access to them in the wild, so I don't have a lot of ability to connect with them. So having one for myself in a similar fashion, he's not an exact replica but he is based as close as I could

make him without making too many little intricate parts on his toes that might fall off if they were bumped.

He was made as part of my studies, so I had a time limit to do him, I only had a very short time. And I was really surprised that I could come up with something so easily and organically, I suppose. Feeling a spiritual connection to country through that Totem and to ancestors is really important for me.

He's made out of air drying clay. And he was made with actually aluminum foil on the inside. For me, I was experimenting and I gave it a go, I didn't know if I'd succeed. But once I found that I made that shape quite quickly and then sculpted him over the top, I found that there was flexibility as well on the inside, so I could manipulate his legs quite a bit. And with him taking so long to dry it gave me the time to look back and think oh no, that that leg needs to be a little bit higher. So I could twist and turn things until I was happy enough with it. I'm a bit of a realist. I like to have things looking as real as possible.

Q: So as an Aboriginal person, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: I'm really big on reviving culture and keeping our culture alive. And over the years, we've lost so much from colonisation, and a lot for me is lost connection with culture because my family were told to not identify as Aboriginal. I would love to travel and learn from traditional artists, but in the meantime, all I can do is learn from other areas and other people and practice some traditional methods in a more contemporary way. I had often connected with Aboriginal art in the past when I was younger without recognising that connection, because I was not raised Aboriginal. But there's almost an intergenerational sense that there may be a learned trait or learnt talent there. And maybe that knowledge is passed down, without me being able to explain that very well… it's just, sometimes things just feel so natural and familiar.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: I think we have a really good opportunity at the moment with a lot of people who previously wouldn't have embraced our culture. I suppose there's a really big search now for knowledge around culture, I think we have opportunity to, we need to hurry and learn from those traditional people who are still practising traditional culture and art and other forms of practices. We need to quickly learn from them as much as we can, before it's lost forever.

I think museums and galleries can help support by bringing some of the traditional works back, as well as promoting and providing support for people. I think it's a good opportunity when museums and galleries have the spaces, and the people who work there with the knowledge and the ability to be able to share with community members. Opportunities to learn how to curate, I would myself would love to learn a bit more about how to how to put together an exhibition.

And another thing I was thinking of as well, ICIP, the Indigenous, cultural, intellectual property, awareness around this is really important. When displaying pieces, certain works for example, culturally may not be appropriate to hang near others for certain reasons. As far as, I mean, there's there may not always be that consideration, and a lot of traditional practice, but considering for example, there might be a couple of people in community who still aren't able to, to give eye contact to each other or be in a room together. And there's a lot to learn and not everyone can learn everything, but I think there's a lot of cultural considerations that need to be had when putting together an exhibition.

WANJUN CARPENTER
GUNGGANDJI

INTERVIEW 30/3/23

Q: So the first question is just introductions, if you can tell me about yourself as an artist?

A: I'm Wanjun Carpenter, I guess you could call me multidisciplinary artist or mixed media artist, I work across all sorts of platforms. Traditionally I work with photography, that's where I really started. And then I moved on from photography and started making some other pieces like with my paper making and stuff like that.

I then went on to projections, projection mapping, and cinema, which is where I'm at now. And I'm moving into the analogue video world as well at the moment, I'm using Resolume and some old analogue mixers. As well as TVs and old cameras to create that VHS appeal. They're just a great utility for when you're using really clear footage, it kind of breaks it up a little bit. So how it works is I go out and record with my VHS camera, then I bring it back and I record the footage onto an SD card via the TV. Then you get all these crazy scanlines to make it even more lo-fi.

I'm also DJing with it as well, I'll go into clubs and set up projectors in 3D map. Then use all that footage in Resolume.

Q: What's your connection is to Newcastle? And is there anything like specific that's like special to you about Newcastle?

A: I moved to Newcastle when I was 12 years old, my nan lived here and I wanted to be closer to my nan. She's lived her since the mid-80s, so I always came to Newcastle. I've been around everywhere in mainland Australia, and I've always just come back to Newcastle. It's just the best. It's a good balance between city life and country life. Good surf, and everyone's so lovely here. It's a small community of artists and musicians, but such a solid community of artists and musicians.

Q: This question is more about your artistic practice, which we've already dived into a bit. But I just want to like focus on what you specifically draw inspiration from?

A: Some of its aesthetic, I just like to make nice things. And then the other part of it is political, and about my heritage and what it means to be Indigenous. As well as other political statements like climate action and equal rights for various minority groups.

I'm also heavily inspired by my friends. David Lobb who's one of my best mates, he's an incredible multi-disciplinary artist. I'm really inspired by the beautiful works he makes, and the way he talks about life, his dreams and what's it's like to exist in the world. It's just nice to get a different perspective. I love working with Dave, our practices just merge really well together.

In most of my practice now there is a little bit of collaboration. I built my skill set now so I can go out and work with other people, then make works that are incredibly unique. You can't get that without working with somebody else, bouncing ideas off somebody and seeing those ideas come into fruition. You know, my Indigenous background is always about sharing, that's a part of our culture. Our culture is based around spoken word and like passing ideas down from generation to generation through word of mouth. So, it just makes sense to collab with other people and pass those ideas over to them. And vice versa.

Q: Your piece in this exhibit, what's the full story?

A: It was made for a show called 'Response'. We had to respond about how COVID has impacted us as an artist over the pandemic period and our experience. My experience specifically was about not having any community there, specifically the arts community, which I plays a huge part in me as a person. I kind of felt stuck in an empty room. I could walk around and like hang out in the empty room. But there's nothing in the room. Without those people in my life, and the arts in my life. And also the funding, the lack of funding was a part of the empty room too. So it was a culmination these things.

It just made it really hard mentally, mentally straining and emotionally straining, as you probably know yourself. There's a time lapse part where it's like time passing by, doing it's thing… and then it skips over to a time where I'm just floating around the middle of the ocean, which is kind of empty space as well. I utilised the water footage because the ocean is just so, and it was also really dark and gloomy. It's meant to be first person but not necessarily me. Cutting through those different places and experiences and in a disjointed way, you're experiencing all these different periods at different times but it's never linear.

And then at the end of the it, it's just floating in the in the water with the sunrise. It's kind of, I guess it's a cliche, a cliché hope shot. The light at the end of the tunnel.

Q: As a Gunggandji person, do you feel your identity has contributed to your creativity? And if so, how?

A: It's all about community and carrying on things I've been taught by my Elders, my Aunties and my parents. And naturally that carries over into my art. That's where my ethics and morals comes from, and puts me in the right direction.

Q: Where do you think the future of First Nations creative practice is heading?

A: It feels like Indigenous voices are being heard, and more Indigenous artists are starting to emerge. And as technology progresses, I feel like there will be a lot more like multidisciplinary artists doing mixed media, which is great. Traditional art is incredible, but it's also felt like the sole identity of Aboriginal art. I would really love to see more mixed media, contemporary art. I do think that traditional art plays an integral role in Aboriginal culture and artistic practice, but I think it can definitely exist together with contemporary art too. And I would hope that people will see that in the broader community it's not just the one style. It's more than that, and it's all relevant.

WAYDE CLARKE / ALEJANDRO LAUREN

BIRPAI/WIRADJURI

INTERVIEW 31/3/23

Q: First, introductions. Tell me about yourself.

A: My name is Wayde Clarke, but my artists name is Alejandro Lauren. Alejandro is my alter ego, I'd have to say. They're the one that pushes me out of my shell, I can just really go up and talk to people. Throughout high school I was a very recluse and very much shell, I had this amazing teacher who got me into drama and art. She said I needed to do this because I had so much potential as a character. I really grateful for her because that's what made me who I am today.

I'm an Indigenous man, I grew up in Dubbo on Wiradjuri lands. But my people are Birpai, my fathers from Taree and my grandparents are from the Purfleet mission. So I've got Birpai blood, but I was brought in Wiradjuri ways, that's where my Wiradjuri ties come in.

Q: The next question is about what your connection is to Newcastle. And is there something in particular that's special about Newcastle to you?

A: I wasn't born in Newcastle, I lived in Dubbo for about 17 years until I finished school. And I was like - I'm out! I chose Newcastle because one of my sisters was already living here. I moved here not knowing anyone and other than my sister is 9 years older than me, so I wasn't going to be hanging out with her and her friends. But my what I found about Newcastle is that it's got a strong community here, people tend to look out for each other. I haven't felt unsafe with identifying as a gay man or an Indigenous man. I haven't felt much prejudice on either of those sides. I feel people here like to live with love, and just enjoy life. I's kind of like a slow city and I really enjoy that.

Q: Tell me more about your artistic practice.

A: It's mostly digital, and paintings. I use a lot of mixed media, crayons, rip out magazines and paste it on for texture. Anything can be used, leaves, dirt, sand, anything you can find can be used as art. You've got boundless opportunities.

I do a lot of digital campaigns for like businesses, comedians, posters, festival, and so on. But then I do get the occasional commission, which is always very personalized. If someone wants a commissioned painting, I need to know who they are. I want to know everything about them. I need to ask these questions like, have you been through anything? Have you lost anyone? Who are you closest with? Because I like to put that all in one big artwork, and just go balls to the wall and make it really special for them.

There is a lot of happiness in my art. But there's also a lot of trauma. I like to make it really bright and colourful, and I think it's because I tend to avoid things. If I just put it in a positive spin, it's all going to be okay. I was hit with a lot of things at a young age, my mom was really sick. And she was a single parent. She's still alive. But she's still very sick. Growing up and I would never leave her side. She got sick when she was pregnant with me, she was diagnosed with stage four cancer. They told her she wouldn't live after the pregnancy and you can get rid of the baby now, but she was already six months pregnant. I get my resilience and stubbornness from my mother, definitely.

And I just paint all this into a little picture. And once people say, oh what's this about? And they can just resonate with it so much. I think a lot of people understand their life is good, even though they've been hit with some bad things.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about the piece in this exhibit?

A: It's quite colourful, but it has a darker meaning behind it. I haven't got a name for it yet, but I'm thinking of calling it solidarity. It's about women supporting women who have been through dark times. It's special to because I've got a lot of friends who are girls, I've got two older sisters, my mom was a single mom, and it's just really celebrating them. I was shaped by women, they need to feel safe, they need to feel respected.

Q: So as a Birpai person, do you feel that your identity has contributed to your creativity?

A: Growing up, I didn't have a lot of connection to my culture. My dad didn't really know much about this connection either, but I knew I was Indigenous. And I loved the fact that I was Indigenous. But Dubbo, it's a bit racist. My sister copped it the worst, like she's a lot darker than me. I just remembered like, she used to come home crying when she was shopping with her friends, because she was searched by the police. I just felt really awful for her. And I just always felt that I wasn't white enough to be with the white kids, and I wasn't black enough to be in the Indigenous community.

While growing into adulthood, I really started to appreciate and search for more about my culture and my identity. Talk to my Aunties and just ask questions and that really helped me discover my culture. I still didn't really do a lot of Indigenous artworks; I had impostor syndrome with that. But I came to a point where I needed to be connected not only to my identity, but my ancestors and my people who were here before me and tell my stories through Indigenous art. And it has really rooted me into my community and into who I am as an Indigenous queer man. By doing my artworks I can tell my stories through the way that my ancestors used to tell stories. But I'm telling my own stories and struggles, which people have all been through, because it's a human experience.

Q: Where do you see First Nations creative practice progressing in the future?

A: I think we're coming into an age where the world is waking up, voices are being raised and the people who are working in higher positions now have to listen. I think we're at a stage where it's just going to get better. It's not where it needs to be at the moment, but it's going to get better. I just love all the modern Indigenous artworks, just so different to our predecessors. I would love to see what our country looks like in the next 20 years, we're already such a multicultural country now.

Q: What can establishments like museums and galleries do better to support First Nations artists?

A: I think museums and galleries just have to be open and accepting.