

Acknowledging Country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artwork from the Epworth Collection



Epworth HealthCare acknowledges the Aboriginal people of three of the five language groups within the Kulin Nation; the Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri and Wadawurrung people; as the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we work and care for our patients.

Epworth Arts Foundation acknowledges the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the lands in Waurn Ponds where our public art gallery is located within Epworth Geelong. We honour and recognise the unique and continued spiritual connection of the Wadawurrung people to the land, seas and waters of over 10,000 square kilometres on the western side of Melbourne, including Geelong, Ballarat and the start of the Great Ocean Road on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Curatorial Statement by Kait James

Yanabil kimbarne Wadawurrung dja.

Acknowledging Country is recognising the past, present and future. It is a way for all people to show awareness and respect for indigenous culture and heritage.

Expressed through a range of media including painting, the artists acknowledge their connection to country and culture through unique and meaningful practices. Inspired by traditions, knowledge and skills passed down through many generations. As inherent storytellers, each piece embraces the diversity of first nations people's identity, continuous connection to country, survival, community and reaffirms resilience.

Relationship to Country is the fundamental link for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's way of life. Our creator spirits taught us how to live with the land, the sea and the sky and how to look after country. Acknowledging Country and ancestors is at the core of our being, knowing who we are strengthens and aligns First Nations' people mentally and spiritually.

Epworth's collection recognises First Nations' culture and strengthens their commitment to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Having a voice through Art allows First Nations' stories and songlines from the past, to continue now and into the future.

Nyatne

Kait James

*Artwork designed
by proud Yorta
Yorta and Gunnai
man Dixon Patten
of Bayila Creative
for Epworth's
Reflect
Reconciliation
Action Plan 2020-
2021.*

About the Exhibition

With funding support through the Epworth Medical Foundation's scholarship programme for Epworth HealthCare staff, the exhibition seeks to foster increased cultural awareness and competency through the stories of Aboriginal people told through visual art.

Epworth Arts Foundation thanks Wadawurrung artist Kait James for her reflections on the exhibited works from Epworth HealthCare's collection.

We acknowledge the following artists whose works are included in the exhibition:

Sandra Aitken	Gunditjmara/Dhauwurd Wurrung (Victoria)
Thelma Beeton	Palawa (Tasmania)
Taylah Cole	Koorie (Victoria)
DJC	Gunditjmara (Victoria)
Goomy	Gunaikurnai (Victoria)
Samuel Hoye	Gunaikurnai/Wurundjeri (Victoria)
Kait James	Wadawurrung (Victoria)
Rosella Namok	Lockhart River (Queensland)
Stephen Nicholson	Wurundjeri (Victoria)
Billy-Jay O'Toole	Wadawurrung (Victoria)
Darcy Pettit	Wiradjuri/Latje Latje/Mutti Mutti (NSW, Victoria)
Robert Ritchie	Yorta Yorta (Victoria)
Meri (Marie Taylor)	Barkindji (New South Wales)
Darren W	Yorta (Victoria)

We particularly acknowledge and thank Kait James who has shared her artwork, perspectives, stories and knowledge with Epworth HealthCare on its reconciliation action journey during 2021.

Artwork for the exhibition has been drawn from Epworth HealthCare's existing collection or ethically acquired with scholarship funding in accordance with the Indigenous Art Code <https://indigenousartcode.org/>, with a focus on the Traditional Custodian groups in Victoria. The stories of the artwork in the exhibition share the sense of pride and celebration that Aboriginal people have for their culture, and the trauma of historical and ongoing injustices committed against Aboriginal Victorians since colonisation.

For copyright reasons images of individual artworks are not reproduced. Audio recordings about the artworks and the artists by Kait James can be listened to in the gallery (via QR code).



Thelma Beeton
Palawa
Family Time at the Beach #2 2020

Thelma Beeton
Palawa
Diversity of the Mob 2020

Thelma Beeton is a Palawa woman who grew up in the small Murray River town of Swan Hill. Thelma is well known for her simplicity, distinctive use of colour and bold outline. Her work is inspired by her Palawa totem, the Tasmanian emu which is featured in almost all her work. Beeton describes her paintings as cartoonish, featuring bold colours designed to appeal to children. She loves connecting with her culture including researching the practice of mutton birding, a traditional hunting method for Aboriginal Tasmanians.

Originally a graffiti artist, she first starting painting on canvas with the Torch program in 2016 while serving time. Since her release, Thelma has a dedicated practice with a loyal following and has recently been exploring incorporating landscapes into her scenes.

Beeton's work is an inspiring artistic and cultural journey showing the resilience of First Nations women navigating a pathway through the justice system back to family and community.



Meri (Marie Taylor)
Barkindji
Spirit of My Nan 2018

Marie Taylor or Meri is a Bark-kin gi woman of the Darling River basin in far west New South Wales.

In this painting, Meri's grandmother is represented by the emu, her ancestor watching over her and her family. Walking over her ancestral lands of the Darling River.

Meri has used the colours of the landscape and traditional markings in this contemporary painting connecting her to country.

Many Indigenous people believe the emu spirit lives in the milky way and looks down to protect the land. The Emu in the Sky has important ceremonial and resource meaning. At different times of the year, the Emu may or may not be seen due tilt of the Earth and the seasons and can be used almost like a calendar.



Samuel Hoyer
GunaiKurnai/Wurundjeri
Our Wonderful World 2020

Samuel is a GunaiKurnai Wurundjeri artist. In this painting Samuel has depicted his love of the land, its uniqueness, beauty and wonder.

Aerial views are a characteristic of many Aboriginal art works, allowing the artists' imagination to hover over the country and observe both naturalistic forms of the landscape as well as metaphysical markings – these are the Songlines or Dreaming tracks laid down in the Creation time by the spirit Ancestors.



DJC
Gunditjmara
How The Gunditjmara Got Fire 2020

DJC is a Gunditjmara artist who's painting depicts the story of how Gunditjmara people got fire, a story told to them when they were a child.

The story takes place a long time ago when fire belonged to the crows who lived at Gariword, the Grampian Mountains. They were greedy crows and knew that fire was of great value. A little firetail wren, was watching the crows making fun and games with fire-sticks. One fire-stick fell to the ground and little wren picked it up and flew away. The crows chased him and Wren soon grew tired. So he passed the fire-stick to a hawk. The hawk, took the fire-stick and lit all the Country behind him. From that time on, there has been fire for all the Gunditjmara.



Sandra Aitken
Gunditjmara, Dhauwurd Wurrung
Footy Wall Hanger 2019

Sandra Aitken is a Gunditjmara artist. Born in Heywood, Victoria in 1954.

Talking about her practice Sandra explains: 'The Indigenous art of basket weaving was passed down to me through generations of my ancestors. I was taught and shown by my father's sister Auntie Connie Hart, who was a highly-regarded Gunditjmara basket weaver and a Community Elder.'

Footy Wall Hanger is made from raffia however Sandra uses a diverse range of materials in her practice, including grasses known as poonyart or spear grass), string, wool, copper wire, whipper snipper cord, and various different kinds of twine.

Sandra has extensive experience teaching and demonstrating her traditions and has worked with many audiences ranging from small children to adult classes and often teaches weaving workshops with her daughter Melissa, continuing on the custom of passing down the traditional knowledge.



Goomy
Gunaikurnai
Family Circles 2020

Goomy is a Guneye Kernye artist who has used traditional markings with contemporary colour creating movement and depth in this painting called Family Circles.

Goomy describes this painting as being about his daughters and their journey circling through life. The circles are about times when life can go smoothly, and times when they don't.

This painting has a really strong sense of family and protection of family and the connections to culture.



Billy-Jay O'Toole
Wadawurrung
Journey across Wadawurrung Country 2020

BJ O'Toole is a well known and well respected Wadawurrung man who generously shares his cultural knowledge throughout the community. His Art can be seen around the Geelong region including major public works in Torquay, at the Indented head tennis courts, and the large Mural and Wadawurrung country sign above the Geelong Ring Road at Wandana heights.

BJ uses colours in his paintings found in the Wadawurrung landscape to tell stories and educate people about his culture.



Taylah Cole
Naarm (Melbourne)
Plastik: I Wove Your Trash To Repair My Pain 2019

Taylah Cole's Plastik: I wove your trash to repair my pain combines the traditional practise of gathering materials (flax and plant material) and traditional weaving techniques with contemporary colour and materials.

Taylah describe the work as being a commentary on the plastic bag ban, and the excessive use of plastic and the effects of colonisation on traditional weaving practises. At the time this work was made, the plastic bag ban had just come into effect. She asked her family and friends to donate their old plastic bags which she wove into this basket.



Kait James
Wadawurrung
Hungry for Land 2019

Kait James is a proud Wadawurrung woman.

In order to change the narrative, Kait subverts Aboriginal calendar tea towels from the 70-80's that stereotype and generalize her culture, by embroidering indigenous issues and pop culture references relevant to that time.

On this Tea towel, Kait has embroidered what really happened that year for first nation's people. In 1972, four Indigenous men set up a beach umbrella on the lawns opposite Parliament House in Canberra to protest against land rights. This grew into the Aboriginal Tent embassy. The Embassy has taken many forms over the years and continues to be a powerful symbol for Aboriginal rights to this day.

Kait has also recreated the Ningla A na sign which translates to Hungry for our Land and the Gough Whitlam slogan It's Time, also from the same year.



Rosella Namok
Lockhart River, Cape York Peninsula
Old Couples 2002

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Trevor and Karen Korn. Gratefully received by Epworth Arts Foundation Limited in 2019.

Rosella Namok is an Indigenous artist from the Lockhart River area but currently resides in Cairns. Her paintings reflect both traditional stories and contemporary themes associated with cultural, social and environmental concerns. Through a technique developed by watching her grandmother drawing in the sand, Namok creates her signature finger-patterned linear arrangements by pulling her fingers through the paint.

After adding layers of multi-coloured high gloss paints, Rosella allows some layers to dry and with the final wet coat she will 'whip' the painted surface with her fingers or long thin sticks, creating the rhythmic patterns
Through her choice of colour and composition Rosella explores the broader, universal dualities of life; the traditional and the modern but also the land and sea.



Darren W
Yorta Yorta
Seven Sisters 2020

Darren is a Yorta Yorta man; his painting depicts the Seven sisters hunting for food on their long journey.

The dreaming story of the Seven Sisters is one of the most widely known, the songline covers many different language groups from the central desert to the West Coast. The narrative does change in different parts of the country but uses the group of stars known as 'The Pleiades' as a metaphor to illustrate traditional marriage laws and the protection and power of ancestral spirits.

The seven sisters are seen to be running away, fleeing from the man who wants to take one of the sisters for his wife. Under traditional law, the man pursuing the sisters is the wrong skin group and forbidden to marry. They travel across the land, and then from a steep hill they launch themselves into the sky in order to escape. But the man follows the sisters into the sky, travelling in the form of a star in Orion's Belt and is forever chasing them across the night sky.

The Pleiades star cluster has inspired similar stories that appear in Native American, Hindu and Ancient Greek mythology.



Robert Ritchie
Yorta Yorta
Family 2019

Robert Ritchie is a Yorta Yorta man, he describes the painting as representing family.

Bunjil the eagle being the provider and protector, gathering food. The grass trees or black boy plants) stand proud within the rich orange ochre landscape, represent mother, father, baby and children. The elders look on, protecting the family, their country and ancestors.



Darcy Pettit
Wiradjuri/Latje Latje/Mutti
Long-necked Turtle Hunting in Flood Waters 2017

Darcy is a proud Wiradjuri/Latje Latje/Mutti Mutti man from Robinvale in north-western Victoria

Darcy was taught hard work, traditional skills and cultural knowledge from his father while hunting, fishing and collecting bush tucker from his country.

In this painting, Darcy refers to flooding of the billabongs. Like indigenous fire management, natural floods for inland rivers, billabongs and waterways were an important way to control vegetation but also boost regrowth and the regeneration of plants and animals.



Stephen Nicholson
Wurundjeri
Bunjil Flying Over Edgars Creek 2002

Stephen Nicholson is a proud Wurundjeri man.

In this work Stephen has painted the creator Spirit Bundjil flying over Edgars creek on Wurundjeri country.

Bunjil came from the sun and created all the living things. Having formed the earth and carving its features, plants and creatures. He then created people of the Kulin Nation by gathering up a quantity of clay from a river bed, divided it into two and worked the clay into the shape of two men and took stringy bark from the trees to use as hair.

Bunjil created people to look after the land and all its creatures, to do so he also created rules for people to follow, Respect the environment, Respect yourself, respect others, especially elders.

Bunjil turned himself into a wedge-tailed eagle to watch over the Land and all of his creation.

Before European settlement, the Wurundjeri-willam people gathered freshwater mussels, yabbies and trapped migrating eels in Edgars Creek. Back then; the grasslands adjacent to the creek were periodically burnt by indigenous people to promote the growth of the Murnong, or Yam Daisy, and to encourage emus, kangaroo and other mammals to graze fresh growth after fire.

Several sites along the creek retain spiritual and cultural significance to the Wurundjeri People.