

# Acknowledging Country

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artwork from the Epworth Collection*



*Artwork designed by proud Yorta Yorta and Gumnai man Dixon Patten of Bayila Creative for our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-2021.*

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, weaving, photography, printmaking and textiles, 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*

### ***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.

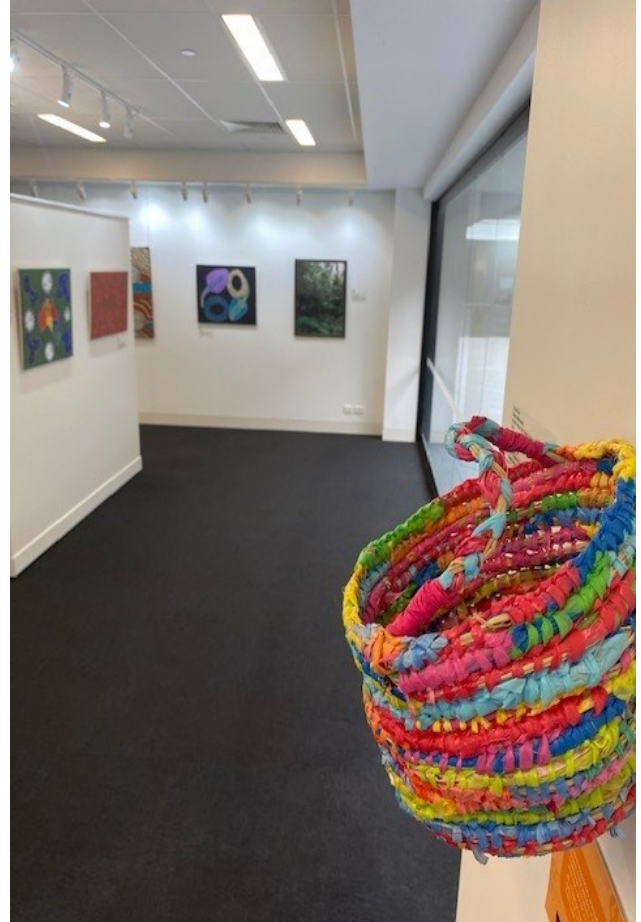
We acknowledge the following artists whose works are included in the exhibition:

Sandra Aitken	Gunditjmara/Dhauwurd Wurrung (Victoria)
Thelma Beeton	Palawa (Tasmania)
Taylah Cole	Koorie (Victoria)
DJC	Gunditjmara (Victoria)
Goomy	Gunaikurnai (Victoria)
Samuel Hoyer	Gunaikurnai/Wurundjeri (Victoria)
Kait James	Wadawurrung (Victoria)
Rosella Namok	Lockhart River (Queensland)
Stephen Nicholson	Wurundjeri (Victoria)
Amy Nuggett	Nyikina/Walmajarri (Western Australia)
Billy-Jay O'Toole	Wadawurrung (Victoria)
Darcy Pettit	Wiradjuri/Latje Latje/Mutti Mutti (NSW, Victoria)
Robert Ritchie	Yorta Yorta (Victoria)
Alan Stewart	Taungurung (Victoria)
Meri (Marie Taylor)	Barkindji (New South Wales)
Laila Thaker	Meriam Mir/Badulaig (Torres Strait)
Tomo	Wurundjeri (Victoria)
Darren W	Yorta (Victoria)
Jenuarrie (Judith Warrie)	Koinjmal (Queensland)

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 online. Audio recordings about the artworks and the artists by Kait James can be listened to in the gallery (via QR code). Transcripts of the recordings are provided below.



## **Acknowledging Country**

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artwork from the Epworth Collection**

**Robert Ritchie**

**Yorta Yorta**

***Family 2019***

Family by Robert Ritchie

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.

**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.

**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

**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.

**Goomy**

**Gunaikurnai**

***Family Circles 2020***

Goomy is a Guneye Kerye 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.

## **Alan Stewart**

### **Taungurung**

#### ***Remembrance 2020***

This photograph by Alan Stewart title Remembrance was the winner of the 2020 Metro Tunnel Creative Program 2D Award at The Koorie Art Show, and is about his connection to country and how during Covid, he wasn't able to return to country on a regular basis like we normally would.

Born in the Philippines, Alan was 9 before he visited Taungurung country, Alan said in an interview - it wasn't until I moved to Australia and I got to meet my extended family and really be immersed in culture that me and my sister were truly able to find out what 'community' and 'Aboriginal' really meant.

Of this image Alan said

"I remembered the whole process of getting out there first thing in the morning, because I wanted to get the good morning light coming through, and spending pretty much the whole day out there,"

"The framing of the photos I like to take is not in the sense of a European way of looking at things. So it's not a picturesque, perfect shot. [But] there is a lot in terms of the life cycle."

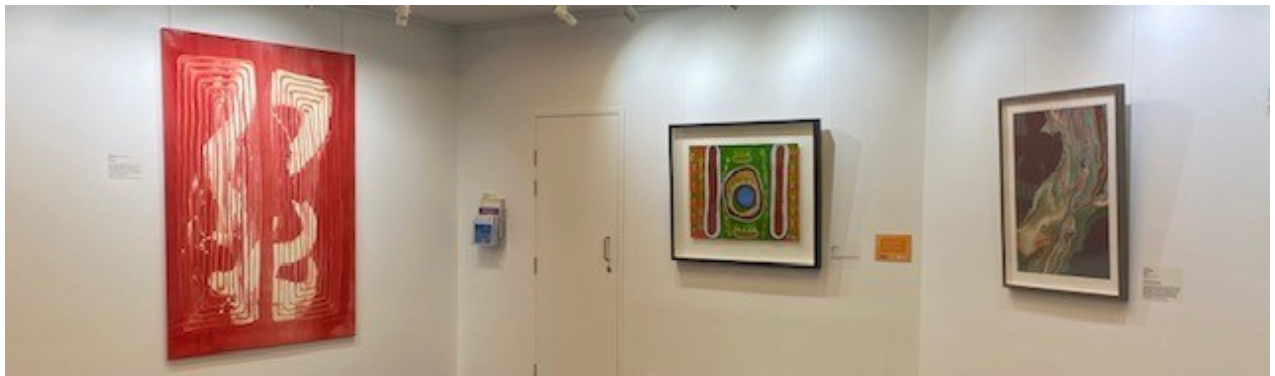
## **Taylah Cole**

### **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.



## **Rosella Namok**

### **Lockhart River, Cape York Peninsula**

#### ***Old Couples 2002***

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.

**Amy Nuggett**  
**Nyikina/Walmajarri**  
**Untitled 2003**

Amy Nuggett is a Nyikina Walmajarri woman born in 1940 in the desert country of Mangala. She is both an artist at Mangkaja Art and a specialist bush medicines. Her striking paintings a deep echo of her love of her desert country, places of her youth, of collecting seed, leaves and other bush foods and medicines, telling stories of waterholes, billabongs and fish from the river around Fitzroy crossing and the West Kimberley region.

Her paintings have been shown in Galleries all over the world and have been acquired by major galleries in Australia including the National Gallery of Australia and the National Gallery of Victoria.

**Laila Thaker / Blackshell**  
**Meriam, Badulaig**  
**Young Moss 2018**

Born on Yidinji country (Cairns), Laila Thaker is a fearless Torres Strait Islander (Meriam/Badulaig woman) on her mother's side, and Indian (Singaporean) on her father's side.

As a First Nations Performer and Artist, Laila has over fifteen years' experience in the creative industries. Currently creating under "Black Shell", Laila draws inspiration from the formations, textures and colours of her ancestral homelands.

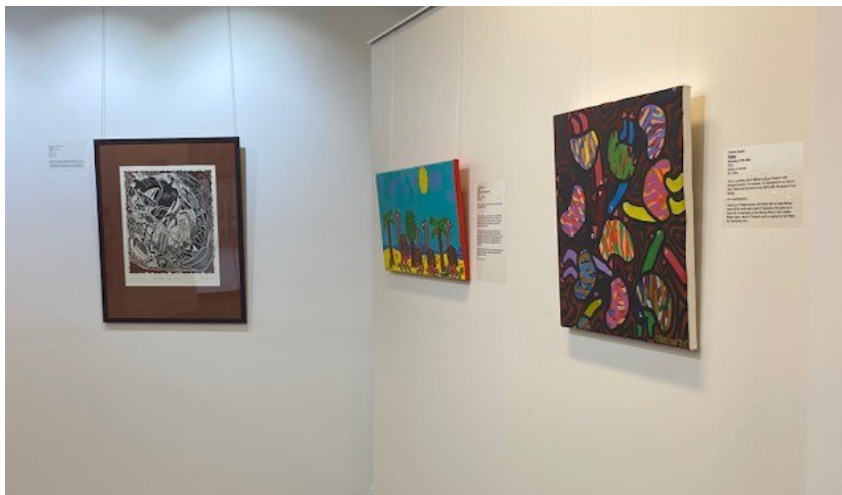
Laila likes to call her art practice a contemporary manifestation of my connection to country  
This image was created using acrylic paint and water on canvas resulting in an image, reminiscent of bark and moss. The work is then photographed and digitally printed on Canson Rag paper.

As an actress, she has been in various theatre, film and television productions including Wentworth, Informer 3838. Her role in Boutique Theatre's "Prayers to Broken Stone" won her "Best Emerging Indigenous Artist" for the Melbourne Fringe Awards (2017).

**Jenuarrie (Judith Warrie)**  
**Koinjmal**  
**A Place Far Away 1994**

Jenuarrie was born in 1944 in Rockhampton as Judith Warrie. She has been a practicing contemporary visual artist, printmaker and a potter for over 3 decades and is well known throughout Australia for her active involvement and leadership in supporting other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Jenuarrie uses traditional rock art motifs in contemporary bark works. Her works are often of traditional sea and country connections, the waterways and reefs of the coast and ancestral beings of creation time. Jenuarrie works were projected on the Sydney Opera House in 2017 as part of the Badu Gili Festival.



**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.

**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.

**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.



**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.

**Samuel Hoye**

**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.

**Tomo**

**Wurundjeri**

***Hands of Time 2020***

Tomo is a Wurundjeri man who described this work as representing his knowledge of culture being a ripple effect over time.



The hand stencils similar to the ones in this painting are very common in rock art in southern and eastern Australia.

Aboriginal people put a mixture of ochre, water and animal fat (sourced from emu, kangaroo or echidna) into their mouth and blew it across their hand which rested on a rock surface.

As these stencilled hand prints were commonly made on rock walls or shelters of north-facing rock, they were protected against weathering and lichen.

Some hand prints were left to mark territory, association to the site or hierarchy of importance.

Children's hand stencils are usually found in lower areas where they were made when the child was very young. Only after initiation were they allowed to place a second hand print. Elders were the only ones who could have the stencil of the entire forearm on a rock wall.

The higher up a hand stencil on the rock, and the more of the wrist and arm appeared, the more important the person was.

### **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.



*Images from The Art Gallery of Ballarat, July 2021 where Hungry for Land was included in Kait James' solo exhibition Hang Us Out to Dry.*

### ***Gallery location and opening hours***

The public art gallery is located between the main hospital foyer and the education precinct on Level 1 (ground level) of Epworth Geelong, 1 Epworth Place, Waurn Ponds.

When the hospital is open to visitors, the gallery is open to the public free of charge daily from 8.30am to 5.00pm.

### ***Reconciliation Action Plan***

For information about Epworth HealthCare's first steps in committing to reconciliation action please visit <https://www.epworth.org.au/-/media/project/epworth/epworthweb/documents/corporate-social-responsibility/epworth-healthcare-rap-march-2021.pdf>

### ***Interested in the stories and makers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art?***

Staff, patients, visitors and visiting medical officers interested to find out more about artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists with connection to Victoria, including where to purchase, are encouraged to visit:

#### **The Torch**

<https://thetorch.org.au/>

Indigenous Australians make up **around 2% of the Australian adult population** but represent **28% of the national adult prison population**. Indigenous men are **15 times more likely to go to prison** than non-Indigenous men and Indigenous women are **21 times more likely to go to prison** than non-Indigenous women.

Since 2011 The Torch has been providing art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders in Victoria through its Indigenous Arts in Prisons and Community program.

#### **Koorie Heritage Trust**

<https://korieheritagetrust.com.au/>

Koorie/Koori/Gurri is a generic term used by contemporary Aboriginal people and communities of Victoria and Southern New South Wales to identify and differentiate themselves from Aboriginal groups from other parts of Australia. Aboriginal people and communities in Queensland refer to themselves as Murris, Nunga in South Australia and Nyoongar in southern Western Australia.

The Koorie Heritage Trust at Federation Square takes Koorie peoples, cultures and communities from the literal and figurative fringes of Melbourne to a place that is a central meeting and gathering place for all Victorians and offers a range of programs and services including the only public collection in Victoria dedicated solely to Koorie art and culture.