

# CAIRNS ART GALLERY

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20 SEP –  
30 NOV 2025

**SKINSHIP**  
*COLLECTION IN FOCUS*  
ARTWORK LABELS

# **Craig KOOMEETA**

1977

Wik-Alkan people

## ***Apelech Brothers: Face Markings***

2005

ochres with acrylic binder on linen

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Lynne Saunder, 2019

The artist depicts two symbolic traditional face markings which is representative of the Apelech Brothers who were significant mythological beings that shaped the creation story of the people of Aurukun, West Cape York. The Apelech brothers travelled south along the central western coast of Cape York Peninsula, singing, dancing, and creating the totemic centres and apportioning the Country between different Wik clan groups and languages of that region. Traditionally, sculptural forms of the Apelech Brothers were used in ceremonial dance. Here, the artist recreates the painted face markings worn during these ceremonies, using natural ochre pigments sourced on Country.

# **Alair PAMBEGAN**

1966

Wik-Mungkan

## ***Bonefish Man & Dancing Spirit Man - Winchanam Ceremonial Dance***

### ***Winchanam Clan Body Design***

2020

ochre and acrylic binders on linen

Purchased Cairns Art Gallery with the assistance of the Cairns Art Gallery Foundation, 2021 Commissioned Cairns Art Gallery

The paintings explore the use of body painting and totems in the Winchanam initiation ritual of the Wik-Mungkan people. The figures in *Winchanam Ceremonial Dance* represent two brothers in the Walkaln-aw (Bonefish Story Place). The story follows their journey from the tip of Cape York Peninsula in search of a home—only to meet a tragic end and transform into bonefish. In *Winchanam Body Design*, Pambegan depicts the striking red, black and white body painting designs worn during Wik-Mungkan initiation ceremonies. The ochre pigments are sourced from specific sites on Country, shown to Pambegan by his father, revered lawman and artist Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan.

**WOYAN-MIN Project – Cultural Production Team,  
Wik & Kugu Art Centre**  
**Cultural Advisor, Linguist & Translator: Perry Yunkaporta**  
**Filming & Editing: Gabriel Waterman**  
**Narrators: Waal Waal (Peter) Peemugina, Keith Wikmunea, Lex  
Namponan**

## ***Yalkang Kee'than: Ceremony & Art in Aurukun***

2024

video

Courtesy of Wik and Kugu Arts Centre

This film was produced through the Woyan-Min Project in partnership with the Wik & Kugu Arts Centre. Based in Aurukun, the Woyan-Min Project is dedicated to preserving and promoting Wik cultural heritage and documents all productions in Wik-Mungkan, the language of Aurukun.

The film documents a traditional Bora ceremony and its associated totemic dances. Bora, meaning 'sacred ground' or 'ceremony,' refers to initiation rites and sacred rituals marking the passage of young men into adulthood. Drawing on archival footage from 1962—filmed around the Aurukun Mission for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies—the film captures senior dancers performing Bora. Adorned with elaborate headdresses and body markings made from ochre and clay, the dancers re-enact creation stories and embody totemic beings that underpin Wik law and cultural knowledge.

The original 1962 film documents eight ceremonial dances: Sara – Creator from the North; Erli-Abbin – The Tiger Shark; Wolkollin – The Bonefish; Punka – The Wallaby; Pikowa and Kina – The Saltwater and Freshwater Crocodiles; Taipan – The Snake; Wala – The Lizard; Wuka and Mukan – The Flying Foxes; and Ningkushun – The Freshwater Shark.

Each performance incorporates totemic carvings and designs that continue to hold deep cultural and artistic significance for Wik people today.

# **Teho ROPEYARN**

1988

Injinoo Ikya

## ***But you don't look Aboriginal***

2017

vinylcut on paper

Purchased Cairns Art Gallery, 2019

The title refers to one of many ignorant comments Aboriginal people are faced with because of their physical appearance. The presumption of mainstream Australian society is that Aboriginal people should have dark skin and live remotely to be considered Aboriginal. Aboriginality is brought into question purely through appearances, denying any consideration of diversity. This denial is also present within Indigenous people's skin as darker skinned Aboriginal people question the authenticity of those with lighter skin tones. The work highlights the diverse backgrounds of Aboriginal people, and how despite appearances - the spirit and bloodlines of our people does not change. The colour red used within the work, emulates our immemorial bloodline of identification as Aboriginal people. The body design is repeated to reference our spirituality - remaining constant regardless of Indigenous people's skin colour.

Teho Ropeyarn, 2017

# **Rosella NAMOK**

1979

Aangkum (Ungkum)

## ***Old girls . . . they talk in the sand***

2004

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Geoff and Fran Barker, 2005.

Namok began painting as a young girl, helping her father decorate the bodies of dancers with ochre in preparation for traditional ceremonies. Using her fingers, she would apply the body paint and create the appropriate designs. These early experiences laid the foundation for her distinctive painting practice, in which she continues to draw directly onto canvas with her fingers. In this five-panel work, she pays homage to the storytelling practice of senior women – “old girls”- who would trace lines in the sand while yarning. Namok translates this gesture into paint, dragging strong linear marks across layered washes of colour to evoke memories of daily life in and around her community of Lockhart River, Cape York Peninsula.

# Heather KOOWOOTHATHA

1966

Wik-Mungkan/Kugu and Yidinji/Djabugay/Gunggandji

## ***Mother and daughter's reunion***

2013

## ***Youth under Siege***

2013

etching on paper

Purchased Cairns Regional Gallery, 2014

Koowatha's works draw on cultural knowledge passed down from both her mother's and father's heritage – Yidinji from Yarrabah and Wik Mungkan from Aurukun, Queensland. Her father was a young boy when he was taken from his mother in Aurukun and relocated to the Normanton Mission. Her mother was also taken at a young age and placed in a dormitory in Yarrabah, south of Cairns. These histories of displacement and separation inform much of Koowootha's artistic practice. *Youth under siege* explores the complex realities faced by Indigenous youth, depicting a young person with an anguished, uncertain gaze. Their body is etched with symbolic markings and tattoos representing native flora and fauna – signs of cultural identity and resilience.

# Simone ARNOL

1976

Gunggandji

# Bernard Singleton

1976

Yirrkaandji/Umpila/Djabuguy

## ***Galka' (eat clean) 3***

## ***Yabulam' (Strength, foundations) 1***

from the ***Emanate*** series

2023

Archival inkjet on cotton art paper

Courtesy of the artists and cb0ne Gallery, 8 Hele Gallery

These photographs form part of the *Emanate* series, a collaboration between multidisciplinary artists Simone Arnol and Bernard Singleton. In these works, the artists bring together their individual practices and shared cultural knowledge to stage a series of portraits featuring members of their extended families holding cultural artefacts and weapons. Each person is painted with clay and natural pigments in patterns that echo the material objects they hold, blurring the line between body and object. For example, in *Yabulam (Strength Foundation)*, the model is seen holding lawyer cane vines. As the artists explain,

*Yabulum (lawyer can vine) is traditionally used for building and binding. It embodies strength, resilience and the journey of building strong foundations and inner strength. Our traditional fibres and materials serve as a physical testament to the enduring spirit of our old people and their ability to overcome adversity.*

## **Tony ALBERT**

1981

Girramay/Kuku Yalanji

### ***Moving Targets***

2015

single channel video, sound, 6:35 mins

Gift of the artist, 2019

Tony Albert's single channel video work, produced in collaboration with choreographer Stephen Page, is a powerful reflection of the racialised violence and injustice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – particularly young men – in contemporary Australia. *Moving Targets* references the fatal shooting of two young Aboriginal men by police officers at Kings Cross, Sydney in 2012. The video shows a young man, filmed in slow motion with a red target over his chest. This gesture is both stark and symbolic, referencing the literal and metaphoric ways in which First Nations bodies have been marked, criminalised and targeted throughout Australian history. *Moving Targets* invites a collective moment of stillness and recognition. The work challenges audiences to confront the inherited systems of violence and the ongoing need for accountability, justice and healing.

## **Janet FIELDHOUSE**

1971

Kala Lagaw Ya /Meriam Mir

### ***Turtle Charm***

2023

buff raku trachyte, clau raffia, wire

Purchased Cairns Art Gallery 2024

# Janet FIELDHOUSE

1971

Kala Lagaw Ya /Meriam Mir

## 1. ***Dogai (Evil Spirit) 1&2***

2020

Buff Raku Trachyte, raffia, feathers

## 2. ***Memory Marks (Scarification)***

2020

clay, feathers, jute string

## 3. ***Crab Claw (Scarification)***

2020

Cool Ice porcelain, feathers, hemp string

## 4. ***Comb Dance***

2020

clay, raffia, feathers, wire

## 5. ***Body Scarification***

2020

Buff Raku Trachyte, clay, feathers, raffia, wood

## 6. ***Water Charm***

2020

Buff Raku Trachyte, raffia

Purchased Cairns Art Gallery and Cairns Art Gallery Foundation, 2021, Commissioned by Cairns Art Gallery

Fieldhouse is a ceramic artist whose practice draws from the material culture, spirituality and ceremonial traditions of her Torres Strait Islander heritage. Combining contemporary ceramic forms with traditional knowledge systems, Fieldhouse uses clay to reconnect with cultural practices that have been disrupted or dispersed over time. Her sculptural works explore themes of identity, gender, and ancestral connection – often referencing adornment, scarification and performative ritual. Through a careful process of shaping, inscribing and embedding natural fibres and weaving into her ceramic forms, Fieldhouse gives material presence to intangible cultural memory.

*My work is an expression of my Torres Strait Islander heritage: the material culture, rituals of social and religious life, and artefacts which are created to fulfil the functional and spiritual needs of the peoples of the Torres Strait.*



# Grace Lillian LEE

1988

Meriam Mir

## ***Yellow: Empowerment***

2016

cotton webbing, goose feathers, beads, timber cane, cotton and wool thread

## ***Black: Infinity***

2016

cotton webbing, timber cane, cotton and wool thread

## ***White: Enlightenment***

2016

cotton webbing, timber cane, cotton and wool thread

## ***Red: Acceptance***

2016

cotton webbing, goose feathers, beads, timber cane, cotton and wool thread

Purchased by Cairns Regional Gallery with funds from the Friends of the Gallery, 2016.

Commissioned by the Cairns Regional Gallery

Lee is a fashion designer and artist whose practice draws on her Torres Strait Islander heritage and explores the intersections of cultural identity, body adornment and contemporary fashion. Known for her intricately woven sculptural forms, Lee reinterprets traditional weaving techniques through a contemporary lens, creating wearable artworks that honour traditional Torres Strait practices, while expanding their presence within fashion and art spaces.

*I am celebrating these techniques in a contemporary form, utilising materials, which would not usually be used. I use the prawn weaving techniques, which I learnt from Uncle Ken Thaiday in 2010. I have adapted and developed this technique through exploring different fabrications and playing with scale, shape and form. These forms I have created are a reflection of me exploring my identity, my diverse mix of who I am and where I come from. It's a way to celebrate and share and be proud of being a multicultural Australian woman.*

Grace Lillian Lee, 2016

# Naomi HOBSON

1978

Southern Kaantju/Umpila

1. ***The God Brother***
2. ***The God Child***
3. ***The Promised One***
4. ***The Grandfather***
5. ***The God Son***
6. ***The God Mother***
7. ***The God Father***
8. ***The God Daughter***

from the ***January First*** series

2020-21

digital print on paper

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Naomi Hobson, 2023

In *January First*, Hobson documents the Coen community's New Year celebration known as Auwa—a contemporary custom that brings families together to mark renewal, connection, and cultural continuity. The portraits feature individuals and families in intimate domestic settings, holding loved ones, cherished items, or pets. Each photograph is a quiet testament to kinship and the power of community.

*At the immediate start of a new year, we carry white clay, white powder, or white flour to rub the face of Coen people's specific customary relations - like grandparents, godparents and cousins. This confers the letting go of inhibitions between partners and relations, albeit for a short period. It nonetheless is surrounded by celebration, song and dance, laughter and fun where many relationships reform and renew each year. But for others it is also a ritual associated with reflection; letting go, acknowledging the moving on of deceased loved ones.*

Naomi Hobson, 2020