

COOMADITCHIE

KEEPING CULTURE ALIVE

ARTISTS

LORRAINE BROWN
NARELLE THOMAS
SHANE BROWN
ALLISON DAY
DEREKE BROWN
JESSICA MOOK-BROWN
TYNAN LENIHAN
MEAHALA LANGLO-BROWN

CURATED BY

LORRAINE BROWN
NARELLE THOMAS
KRISTY THOMAS

Images:

Front cover. (detail) Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Coastal history of the fishing journeys and the seasons*, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 91cm.

Right. Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Owls*, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm.

FOREWORD

In 1993, Lorraine Brown, Narelle Thomas and Donna Castagna painted 16 vibrantly coloured panels for the Gallery's façade and Arts Precinct. The paintings were a statement of important themes and included reptiles, birds, mammals, earth and sea, time, birth, childhood, dance, colonization, an acknowledgment of loss and hope and celebration for the future. The panels were on display during the third World Indigenous Peoples' Conference, which was held in Wollongong, and allowed important local cultural narratives to be viewed by all members of the Wollongong Community and visitors to the city, and are among the first of many public art projects by Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation which was incorporated in the same year.

In schools, on buildings, meeting places and throughout Port Kembla, the contribution and generosity of sisters Lorraine and Narelle cannot be overstated. Their work speaks to all and communicates their knowledge. Ever conscious of passing on oral traditions, which may usually transpire in closed and familial settings, Lorraine and Narelle have included all community members by continually seeking out opportunities to place their work where it can be seen by many.

In addition to this prolific public art practice, Lorraine and Narelle have been involved in many temporary exhibitions and public and education programs within Wollongong Art Gallery and beyond. Back at the Hub, the Kemblawarra Community Hall, Lorraine and Narelle pass on their knowledge and painting skills to those who access their social well-being programs, Southside Festival, employment welfare and education services, and bush regeneration programs which engage Aboriginal people of all ages from the very young to the elderly.

The Gallery thanks Sue Leppan and Kristy 'Lil' Thomas for their continued organisational support and artists Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, Dereke Brown, Shane Brown, Allison Day, Meahala Langlo, Tynan Lenihan, Jessica Mook-Brown for sharing their cultural stories and the exhibition *Ngalawa - Keeping Culture Alive* which brings together three generations cultural knowledge for our community.

Louise Brand

Program Director (Acting)



COOMADITCHIE **KEEPING CULTURE ALIVE**

“Culture honours our ancestral ties – Culture tells us where we come from and tells us who we are. Culture reminds us of who we are connected to and that we are part of the oldest living cultures in the world. For these reasons it is really important to keep Culture Alive.”

– These are the thoughts of Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas the Elders, founders and premier artists of Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation.

Nearly 30 years ago sisters Lorraine Brown, Narelle Thomas and Donna Castagna were invited to create two murals at the Kemblawarra Public school. One mural told the Dreaming story of Windang island and the other the cultural history of the area – the story of the steel city combined with the story of the traditional owners of this part of the country.

Since that time Lorraine and Narelle have been using art to tell stories and share their knowledge of culture and local history. The sisters believe that art is an accessible way for people to gain an understanding. Lorraine and Narelle use bright colours to reflect the local landscape – the Illawarra bush and, the ocean, the lake and the rivers. On occasion they will use the earthy colours of central Australia as their way of connecting with the land – a reminder that our country “Always was and Always will be Aboriginal land”.

Lorraine and Narelle believe very strongly that an understanding of Aboriginal culture is vital to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It is important for young Aboriginal people to remember their history and have an understanding of what life was like for their forebears. Narelle says that it is

important that young people remember what their Elders had to go through so they can appreciate what they have now. “There was a real risk at one point in our history that cultural knowledge could be lost and we need to be sure that never happens again. We can never let it die. Knowledge of our culture helps us to be proud Aboriginal people.”

It is also important that non-Aboriginal people have an understanding. Because understanding creates a bridge which is the best way toward reconciliation.

Since those two original murals Lorraine and Narelle have shared their cultural knowledge through beautiful public artworks, paintings and art workshops. Using art as a way of teaching and sharing cultural knowledge evolved over time. The reactions of people watching the artists create their works in Wollongong and surrounds made the artists aware of the wonderful medium that art is.

“People talk to us while we are working” and in that space they feel comfortable to ask questions and learn more. And through art the artists have been able to share their knowledge with their children and grandchildren, and by encouraging them to paint the cultural knowledge is passed down through the generations.

Three generations of artists

Lorraine Brown is the premier artist of the Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation. Lorraine is a Yuin/Jerrinjah woman born in Bega, one of seven children. Lorraine views her ability to paint as a gift. “We’re East Coast Saltwater People”, Lorraine says and explains her use of bright bold colours “My colours symbolise my life. I had a great childhood, great parents and family and extended family”.

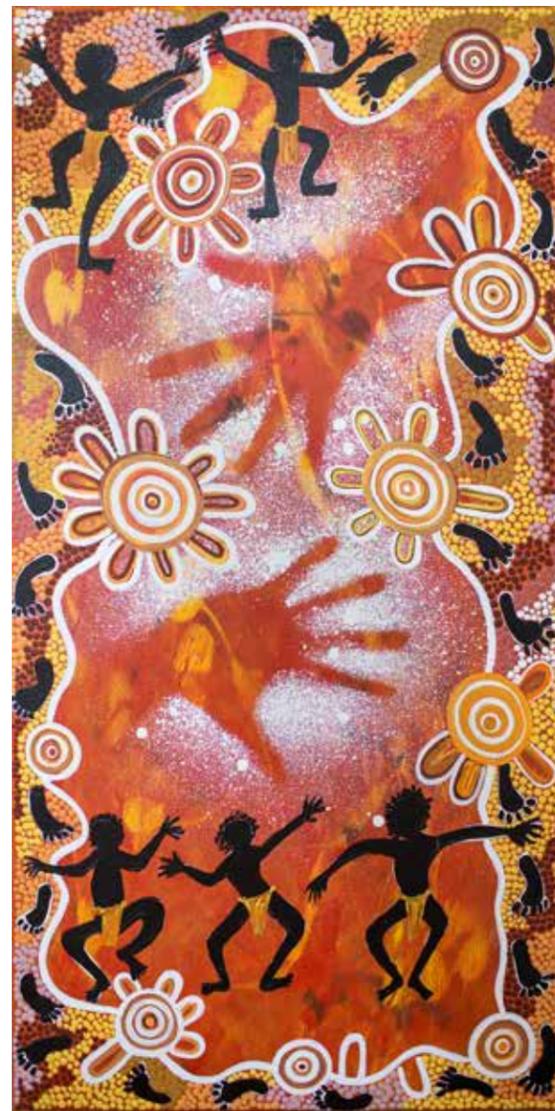


Image:
Far left. Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Dragonflies*, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 91cm.
Far right. Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Always was Always will be*, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 91cm.
Left. Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Frogs*, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 91cm.



Image: Shane Brown, 2019, *Waterbirds - large*, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 91cm.

Narelle Thomas is also a premier artist and one of Lorraine's sisters – they have been painting together for the last 30 years. Lorraine does the fine work and Narelle fills in the details. Lorraine and Narelle work like professional dancers, one leads and the other follows and no-one steps on any toes. It is clear they have been working together for years.

Two of Lorraine's sons Shane and Dereke have both Yuin and Dunghutti heritage. Shane has been painting since he was 12 years old and has a distinctive style. He is strongly influenced by nature and his cultural heritage. Dereke took to painting more recently. He enjoys painting alongside his partner Allison Day and is one of Coomaditchie's emerging artists. Influenced by a group of strong women Dereke is enjoying understanding his own artistic skills and the power of storytelling through the art of Aboriginal paintings.

Allison Day grew up in the Wollongong area and her paintings reflect the colours and influences of the Illawarra. Alison's paintings are rich with symbolic references to her life experiences and original kinnection to country, the Dunghutti people. Ally is also a skilled weaver and potter and works with groups sharing her skills and knowledge.

While many of Lorraine and Narelle's grandchildren enjoy painting, three of them have focussed on developing those skills. Tynan Brown is Shane's son and Lorraine's eldest grandchild. Tynan is a Yuin man who only took to painting in his later teens. As a young child he would draw prolifically and only after a great deal of encouragement from his grandmother and great-aunt did he start painting. Tynan enjoys depicting the native animals that live in the bushland that surrounds him.

Jessica Brown and Meahala Langlo are Lorraine's granddaughters and two of Coomaditchie's emerging artists. Jessica has been painting since a very young age and has been selling her art since she was in primary school. Jessica has also worked on large public art projects in the Wollongong area. Meahala's matriarchal lineage is Yuin and patriarchal is Murruwarri. Meahala is strongly influenced by the teachings of her grandmother.

So much beautiful art has been made and so many stories shared since those two murals at the Kemblawarra public school - public artworks throughout Wollongong and surrounds, paintings owned by individuals and organisations and the Dreaming Story books created by young people at Coomaditchie. The Elders and the artists of Coomaditchie are doing what they can keep to keep Culture alive.

Sue Leppan 2020



Image: Dereke Brown and Allison Day, 2019, *Kangaroos*, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61cm.



Image: Tynan Lenihan, 2019, *Goanna*, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 120cm.



Image: Allison Day, 2019, *Ocean deep*, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 91cm.

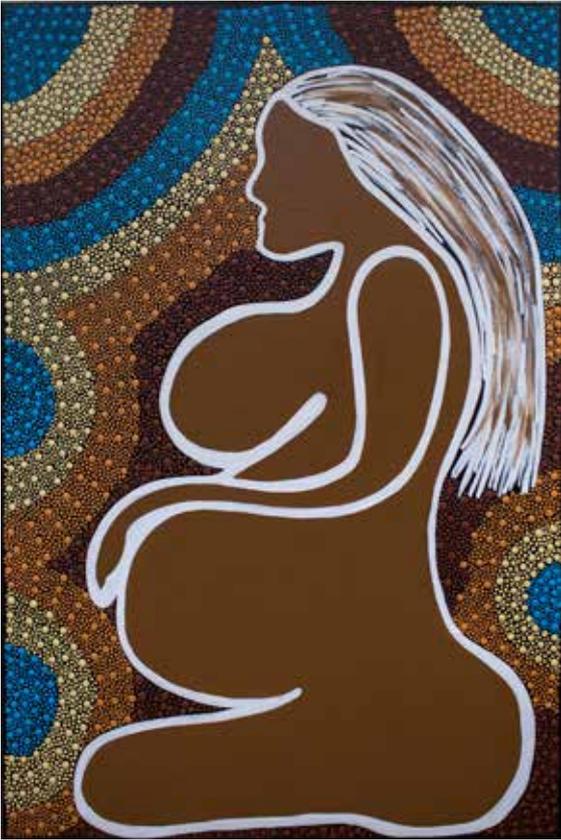


Image: Meahala Langlo, 2020, *Meahala's lady*, acrylic on canvas, 51 x 75cm.

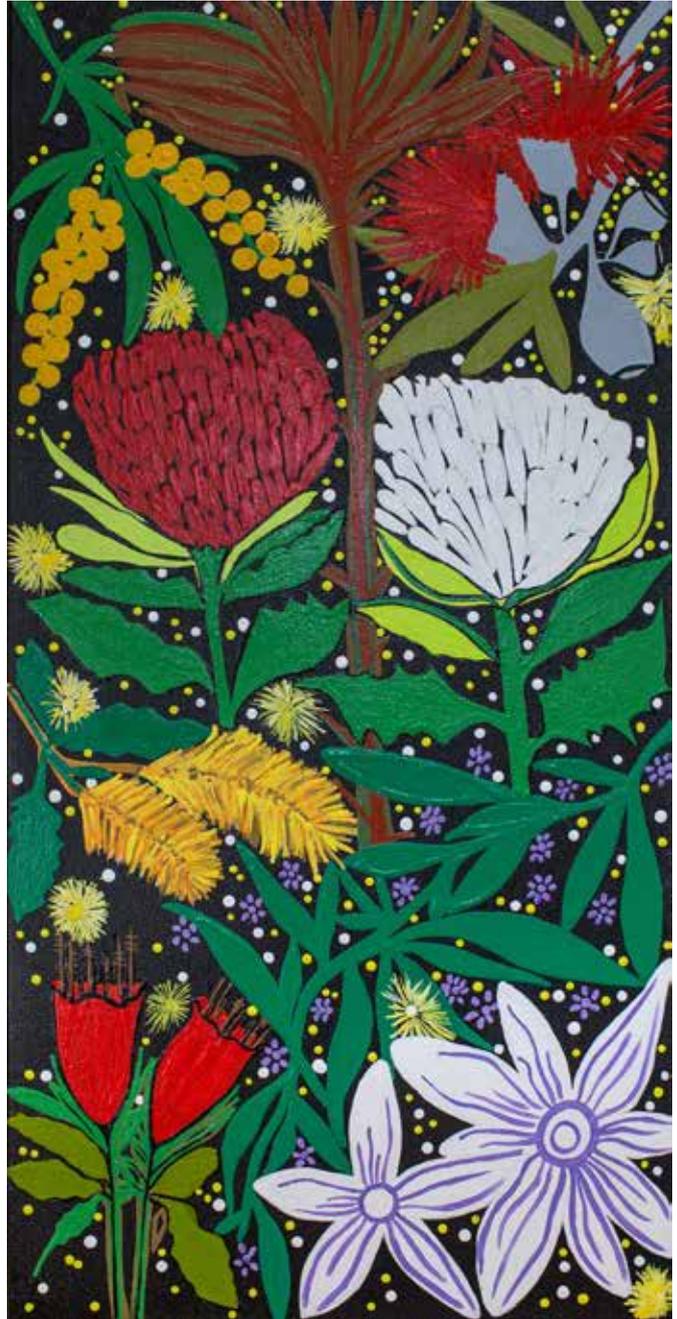


Image: Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, 2020, *Native Plants, Those of the Dreaming, Edible Medicinal and Bush Candies*, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 91cm.



Image: Jessica Mook-Brown, 2020, *Community Konnects*, acrylic on canvas, 51 x 61cm.



Coomaditchie
United Aboriginal
Corporation

COOMADITCHIE: KEEPING CULTURE ALIVE Wollongong Art Gallery, 30 Oct 2020 – 21 Mar 2021

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