

POTTER
MUSEUM
OF ART

65000 YEARS

A
Short
History
of
Australian
Art

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY
GRADE 3 / 4 CASE STUDIES



Ngarrngga
to know, to hear, to understand

University
of Melbourne
Museums and
Collections



*65,000 Years: A Short History of
Australian Art*

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY
GRADE 3 / 4 CASE STUDIES

Acknowledgement of Country

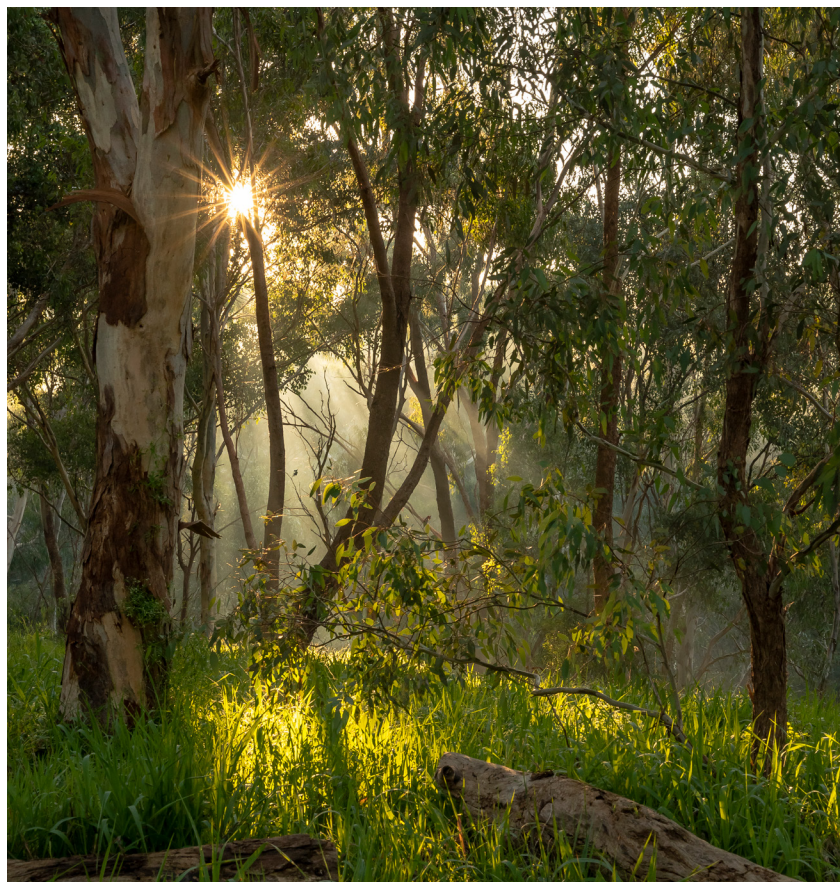
These education resources have been developed on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples.

Ngarrngga honours the traditional custodians of Country/ Place throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection of First Peoples to lands, waters, cultures, and communities.

We pay deep respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, histories, and cultures, and to Elders past and present.

We recognise Indigenous peoples as the first educators and their continued leadership in teaching, learning and research.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous Knowledge to the work of Ngarrngga.



Sunrise Through Trees, Alphington, Wurundjeri Country.
Photographer: Tiffany Garvie. Source: Ngarrngga. Used under licence.

Advisory

Curated in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and custodians, *65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art* reveals the importance and brilliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' foundational and ongoing contributions to art history.

The exhibition is also about truth-telling. For societies with shared histories of violence or injustice, truth-telling about the past is essential for overcoming division and achieving genuine democratic and prosperous outcomes for all citizens. Australian curricula frameworks recognise the importance of truth-telling, emphasising the critical role of education for building comprehensive understanding of the rich tapestry of truth that comprises Australia's history.

We advise all viewers that the exhibition contains references to dispossession, the Australian Wars, violence, massacres, child removal, missionisation, incarceration, and deaths in custody. Some works in the exhibition contain derogatory images or titles with outdated terminology. These do not reflect the University's viewpoint, but rather the social attitudes and circumstances of the period or place in which they were created.

We would also like to advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers that that the exhibition and education resources include works by non-Indigenous artists that may cause distress. The exhibition and its education resources also feature the names, images and works of people who have died.

Ngarrngga's resources are developed within the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education by educators, in close consultation with academic and Indigenous Knowledge Experts. Guided by our principles and best practice Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) processes, as outlined in our ICIP Declaration, all resources are designed to empower educators to confidently showcase Indigenous Knowledge in their teaching and learning. As part of an ongoing research program, Ngarrngga follows iterative cycles of development, meaning our resources are never truly final. They are living documents, continually evolving in response to emerging needs, feedback, and systemic changes.



Ngarrngga

to know, to hear, to understand

ngarrngga.org/

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Introduction

Welcome to the Grade 3 / 4 education resource for the *65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art* exhibition. This booklet contains and explains the knowledge, perspectives, and understandings being made available to educators and students through this education resource.

Ngarrngga's education resources foreground Indigenous knowledge as the foundation for interpreting and enacting curriculum. This approach respects the holistic, interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge in creating curriculum engaged and aligned resources for educators.

This resource features five works of art by Indigenous artists, selected by the curatorial team specifically for Grade 3 and 4 students and educators. By exploring the ways artists use digital media, possum skin and paint to innovate and share Indigenous knowledge and perspectives connected to Country and culture, the resource creates a rich context for learning through reflection and dialogue.

The knowledge shared within each case study is storied in context of its respective work of art and in relation to the broader suite of case studies. The storylines for each case study work in complement, setting the scene to scaffold rich learning experiences that entwine Indigenous knowledge with elements of the following learning areas, subjects and/or strands:

- Technologies (Digital Technologies)
- The Arts (Visual Arts)
- English (Language, Literature/Texts, Literacy)
- HASS (History, Geography)

These connections draw from and reflect a balanced integration of key content and concepts from New South Wales syllabus, Victorian and Australian Curriculum frameworks. Mapping for where the development of skills, knowledge, and understandings supported by this education resource align with curriculum content, capabilities, and priorities is provided in the Support Materials booklet.

While the connections made are comprehensive, they are not exhaustive. Educators are invited to exercise their agency to contextualise and create connections beyond those offered.

Connections to Country

Through five in-depth case studies, you will examine powerful artworks by Indigenous artists that give voice to connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their culture, and the land and Country they have inhabited for millennia.

Each case study highlights the significance of the featured work, and how the artists' work with creative and cultural practices to express and share connections to Country, assert their rights, and advocate for cultural preservation and healing.

The case studies provide context about each artist's background and the stories they share through their art. Curious questions are woven across the case studies, inviting students to think about artists' motivations, the messages and meanings shared, and their own responses to these.

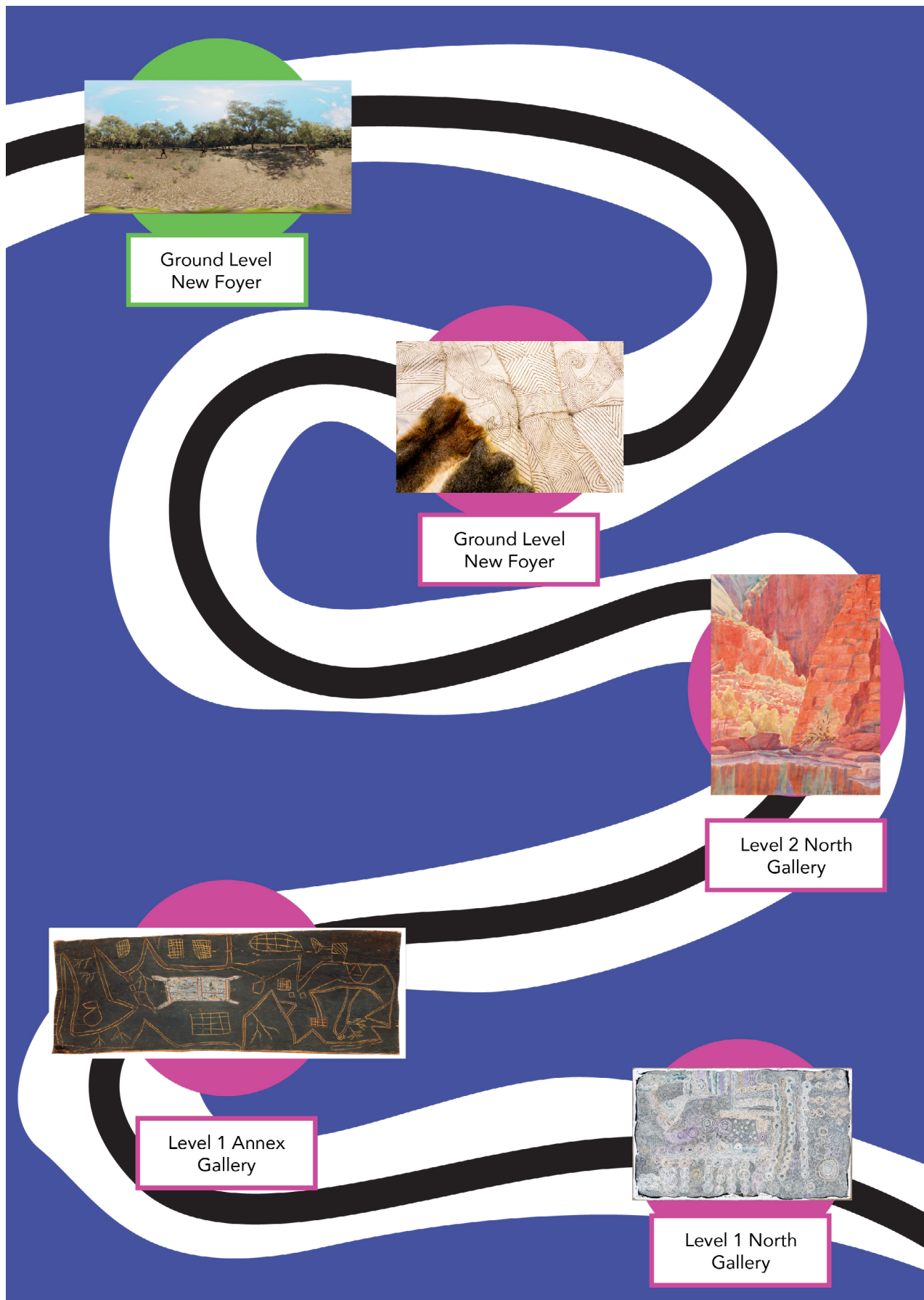
Reflecting, sharing and discussing responses to these questions can help students make connections, identify and question what they think and know, and better understand the meaning and importance of connections to Country for Indigenous peoples.

These conversations can be used as a basis to inspire further inquiry into related social movements and historical events noted in the case studies. In coming to know, hear and understand with these case studies, we invite students and educators to:

- Explore Indigenous artists' experiences, values and views connected to their ancestral lands, cultural belonging and age-old traditions.
- Engage with and discuss the visual language artists use to share stories about their enduring connections with Country.
- Consider how and why Indigenous artists protect, maintain, share and innovate cultural knowledge.
- Build appreciation for the strength and ingenuity of Indigenous peoples upholding their deep connections to land, culture and knowledge over millennia.

This resource offers insights into the resilience, ingenuity, and activism of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It foregrounds learning encounters designed to build recognition and appreciation for enduring cultural practices, innovation, and custodianship of Indigenous knowledge demonstrated by the artists. Students will also come to know, hear and understand the vital role artists play in asserting their rights, freedoms, and self-determination.

Exhibition tour map



Key information – Artists and featured works			
Content considerations	Artwork Detail	Case study storylines	Location in gallery
Cultural safety: impacts of invasion, colonisation, displacement, and destruction/theft of Country and culture.	Brett Leavy Kooma, born 1965 <i>Virtual Narrm 1834, 2025</i> Geospatial virtual heritage digital media installation	Imagining Country	Ground Level New Foyer Exhibition Theme/Section: <i>Welcome to 65,000 Years: A short History of Australian Art</i>
Sensory and space: employs digital visual technologies and emits sound.			
Cultural safety: impacts of invasion, colonisation, displacement, and destruction/theft of Country and culture.	Mandy Nicholson Wurundjeri-willam, born 1975 <i>Possum skin cloak, 2012</i> Possum skin, thread, charcoal	Communicating Country	Ground Level New Foyer Exhibition Theme/Section: <i>Welcome to 65,000 Years: A short History of Australian Art</i>
Cultural safety: impacts of invasion, colonisation, displacement, and destruction/theft of Country and culture.	Albert Namatjira Western Aranda, 1902–1959 <i>Quarta-Tooma (Ormiston Gorge), 1939</i> Watercolour and gouache on paper	Colours of Country	Level 1 North Gallery Exhibition Theme/Section: <i>Central and Western Deserts</i>

<p>Cultural safety: impacts of invasion, colonisation, displacement, and destruction/theft of Country and culture.</p>	<p>Minimini Numulkiyaya Mamarika Anindilyakwa, c. 1900–1972</p> <p><i>Map of Groote Eylandt and surrounding islands with Mamarika (the south-east wind), 1941–45</i></p> <p>Earth pigments and orchid bulb extract on Stringybark</p>	<p>Mapping and making with Country</p>	<p>Level 1 Annex Gallery</p> <p>Exhibition Theme/Section:</p> <p><i>Groote Eylandt Collection, Macassan Iconography</i></p>
<p>Cultural safety: impacts of invasion, colonisation, displacement, and destruction/theft of Country and culture.</p>	<p>Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton Pitjantjatjara, born 1945 and Pitjantjatjara, born 1950</p> <p><i>Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country) 2022</i></p> <p>Synthetic polymer paint on linen</p>	<p>Caring for Country</p>	<p>Level 1 North Gallery</p> <p>Exhibition Theme/Section:</p> <p><i>Central and Western Deserts</i></p>

To know, hear and understand

Indigenous Knowledge

Organising Ideas/Elements: Country/Place (Land)

- Interconnection of people, culture and place, Impacts of colonisation

Organising Ideas/Elements: Culture (Kinship)

- Cultural landscape, cultural norms and values

Organising Ideas/Elements: People (Communication, Deep Time)

- Custodial responsibility to safeguard cultural heritage

Organising Ideas/Elements: People (Rights and Freedoms); Identity (Arts)

- Self-determination, resistance and advocacy, modes of and mediums for communication

To know: Discover how Indigenous artists preserve, sustain, exchange, and advance cultural knowledge and artistic practices over generations. Develop appreciation of the enduring nature of culture, and recognise the role artists play in protecting, innovating, and sharing knowledge and stories of Country.

Indigenous Focus

- **Imagining Country** with Brett Leavy
- **Communicating culture** with Mandy Nicholson
- **Colours of Country** with Albert Namatjira
- **Mapping and making with Country** with Minimini Numulkiyaya Mamarika
- **Caring for Country** with Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton

To hear: The case studies provide background on the artists, their creative practices, cultural traditions, and the ancestral stories of Country expressed through their art. Learn about the artists' lives, their contributions to art and society, and the ideas and perspectives they communicate through their work. In looking, listening and learning about these artworks, we can start to appreciate these artists' deep sense of belonging and connection to their Country and culture, sustained over tens of thousands of years.

Indigenous Topics

- **Legacy and longevity** of cultural practice (always was, always will be)
- **Innovation and ingenuity** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- **Creation and custodianship** of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems

To understand: Participate in discussions that spark curiosity, encourage reflection on the artists' motivations, the messages conveyed or withheld in their works, and how to respond respectfully. Build understanding for how and why artists share and sustain their cultural traditions over time and across different contexts.

Imagining Country – Brett Leavy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share a special relationship with Country. When we learn about Country, it is important to remember that it is more than a physical location or place, or the land, water and sky features that might be seen or found there. While these things are all part of Country, the relationships between people, culture and community and their values, beliefs, knowledge and stories are part of Country too. Country brings everything together into something much bigger, broader, and deeper than any single part alone.

"Country is everything. It's family, it's life, it's energy. It's connection."

— Jude Barlow (AIATSIS, 2022)

As we explore *65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art*, we will see, hear and learn about different knowledge, stories and meaning that Country holds for artists, and how they express and share this through their art. Each will offer lots for us to think about and wonder with, as well as meanings to imagine, share and discuss together.

We start our learning about connections to Country through the work of Kooma artist, Brett Leavy, who introduces us to the Country we are learning in, on and with today.

Curious question: Which First Peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Country featured in this work, and why is it important for us to know this?

Given that the Potter Museum of Art is built upon the unceded lands and waterways of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, the University of Melbourne commissioned an artist who could imagine and virtually recreate a work that would let people see and appreciate what this Country was like before colonisation. *Virtual Narm 1834* is the first work we learn with and is also the first work people see and hear when they enter the exhibition.

"...below the bricks and mortar of the city is a connection for First Nations people... we want to say 'Hey this city is here, but don't forget First Nations were there before'."

— Brett Leavy (as cited in ACMI, 2020)

Curious question: Which different names do you know for the city of Melbourne?

Inspired by conversations and collaboration with Wurundjeri Elders and his research into colonial records, Leavy combines Indigenous knowledge and digital technology to help us see and imagine what life was like here before colonisation.



BRETT LEAVY (Kooma, born 1965)
Virtual Narm 1834 2025
geospatial virtual heritage
Commissioned by The University of Melbourne, 2023

Through this work, Leavy allows us to see how land, animals, culture and people all connect in stories of life on Wurundjeri Country. *Virtual Narm 1834* imagines people carrying important cultural objects like shields and wearing beautiful possum-skin cloaks. The cloaks have special markings that reflect the knowledge and stories of the people wearing them, as well their role in the community.

Curious question: What things do you see that are different between how Leavy's imagines Narm in 1834 compared to today? What things look similar or like things you've seen before?

By looking at, listening to and learning about these stories, we can start to understand why it's so important for people, their community, culture and the land to be connected together.

"Through these digital realms, I aim to educate, inspire and foster a deeper appreciation for the environmental stewardship and cultural resilience."

— Brett Leavy (artists' exhibition text, 2025)

Curious question: How does watching the *Virtual Narrm 1834* animation make it easier for you to imagine what life and the land was like back then? What's different about seeing it move and come to life compared to just reading about it, hearing stories, or looking at still pictures?

Through *Virtual Narrm 1834*, Leavy invites us into the rich stories, knowledge, and traditions of Wurundjeri culture. The activity and stories of Country that Leavy imagines here show us that even though many things have changed since then, the strong connections between people, community, culture, and Country remain strong and important today.

With works like *Virtual Narrm 1834*, we can see and think about how these connections continue to shape the story of Country and the world around us now. It also shows us how important artists are for sharing, protecting and celebrating the world's oldest living culture.

“...it’s about knowledge sharing. It’s about telling stories; digital storytelling is part of it. It’s about really immersing people in the culture. We want to gain better respect, understanding, knowledge about mob. And I just think this medium is the best...”

— Brett Leavy (as cited in ACMI, 2020)

Communicating culture - Mandy Nicholson

This exhibition brings together over 400 precious artworks and cultural objects from all over this continent and its islands. Think about this for a moment – this is a truly enormous exhibition! While it took the curators many years to carefully put together this exhibition, this is a tiny moment in time compared to the past, present and future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture.

While this exhibition includes an impressive range and number of works, very few original examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and cultural objects remain from when the Europeans first arrived. This is due to efforts made to stop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from practicing their cultural traditions.

“These are precious works for the present-day traditional owners whose cultural heritage was largely destroyed.”

— Marcia Langton (2024, p. 10)

Despite those efforts, many stories, skills and knowledge for making special cultural objects like possum skin cloaks continue today. Wurundjeri-wilam artist Mandy Nicholson plays an important role in making sure these traditions will keep on communicating important stories, meaning and knowledge of Country into the future.

Nicholson was born in Healesville and lives and works in Melbourne/Narrm on the lands of the Kulin Nation. Through her possum skin cloaks, she shares knowledge about her special connections with Country that show us why storytelling is so important for the care and continuity of culture and Country.



MANDY NICHOLSON (Wurundjeri-willam, born 1975)
Possum skin cloak, 2012
possum skin, thread, charcoal
Commissioned by Melbourne Medical School in its 150th Anniversary Year
The University of Melbourne

“The First Peoples of south-eastern Australia have been making possum skin cloaks since time immemorial—today the practice is flourishing.”

— Joe Hinchliffe (Museums Victoria, 2019)

Possum skin cloaks are very special cultural objects for Aboriginal people in southeast Australia. They were traditionally worn in ceremonies and to keep warm. In her possum skin cloaks, Nicholson communicates stories of Wurundjeri Country and why it is important to pass down this knowledge from one generation to the next.

Curious question: Looking closely at this possum skin cloak, how do you think the design is made and marked into the cloak?

“Possum skin cloaks often have personal maps and stories illustrated on the inside. Traditionally, they are etched with mussel shells, possum jawbones or kangaroo incisor teeth. Today, cloak makers commonly scorch their designs into the pelts using burning tools.”

— National Gallery of Victoria (2025)

When Aboriginal artists make special works like possum skin cloaks, they think very carefully about the designs. This is really important when the designs contain cultural information, knowledge or stories. The artists usually work together and talk with Elders in their community for guidance. The Elders know the proper ways to protect and share cultural knowledge responsibly.

“The University of Melbourne asked me to create a cloak with traditional Wurundjeri designs, and which also reflected a student’s life at University/ The use of traditional Wurundjeri symbology is respecting the fact that Parkville is on Wurundjeri Country and as a sign of respect to my ancestors.”

— Mandy Nicholson (University of Melbourne, n.d)

The University of Melbourne is honoured to have received this possum skin cloak from the artist. It is worn to celebrate First Nations peoples at important University events. When not being worn, the cloak is carefully looked after and displayed at the Old Quad building.

With this cloak, Nicholson invites us to know and learn about the following meanings in her design:

“The swirl throughout the design depicts two things. Firstly, it represents the smoke of a welcoming fire (by way of a traditional Wurundjeri Welcoming Ceremony). This welcomes all students, from local areas and from all over the world.”

“Secondly, the smoke swirls depict the learning and personal journeys of students and the connections that they make personally and professionally while at University. This can be on a small scale and on a larger scale where, once they have completed their courses, they share this knowledge with their own and the wider community.”

— Mandy Nicholson (University of Melbourne, n.d)

Sometimes, artists are allowed to include special cultural symbols or details in their designs, but they may not be allowed to explain everything about what those symbols and details mean or the stories behind them.

This could be because some of that knowledge is meant only for certain people, like special knowledge that is just for men or just for women. It is important to understand and respect that there are some things that cannot be shared with everyone.

Curious question: Can you think of any further reasons why artists might need to keep some knowledge private and not share everything? If an artist is not able to answer questions about their work, what could you say or do to show you understand and respect that?

When artists share stories of Country and culture with us, we need to treat them with care and respect. If there are some things they cannot explain or share, we should understand they are taking care to protect their cultural knowledge and traditions.

“...culture is at the heart of what makes us human, and how we must think and act in ways that show how we demonstrate respect and care for each other.”

— UNESCO (Framework for Culture and Arts Education, 2024)

With her possum skin cloak, Nicholson shares a story of welcome, care and encouragement for students studying at the University of Melbourne that we can appreciate as well. While there may be more details we want to know, we must appreciate that artists may choose not to explain everything about their work, nor do they have to.

On those occasions, we can take the opportunity to wonder about the deeper meanings we may not be permitted to know or fully understand. We can always enjoy knowing that it contains a special secret meaning, even if we don't know all the details.

Colours of Country – Albert Namatjira

When Western Aranda artist Albert Namatjira (c. 1902-1959) painted his Country, he created something very special - much more than a simple painting of land, water and sky. Working with the colours of Country itself, Namatjira's paintings share the deep relationships and connections that make up Country in all its vibrance. For Namatjira, Country shaped what he knew, how he lived, and how he saw himself, his family, and the entire world.

"The name Albert Namatjira is synonymous with Aboriginal art. A proud Western Aranda watercolourist, Namatjira inadvertently shifted the way the general public viewed Aboriginal art from the late 1930s on."

— Shanyssa McConville (2024, p. 243)

Albert Namatjira is a key figure in Australian art, culture and history, and famous for his paintings that showed and shared his deep connection to Country. He painted in a traditional European style, using watercolours to capture all the bright colours and intricate details of the Country he knew so well from living there (AGSA, 2025).

Born in Hermannsburg (Ntaria) in the Northern Territory, Namatjira grew up surrounded by the breathtaking MacDonnell Ranges (Tjoritja). From a young age, he developed a deep love and respect for this Country, which played an important role in inspiring him to become an artist.

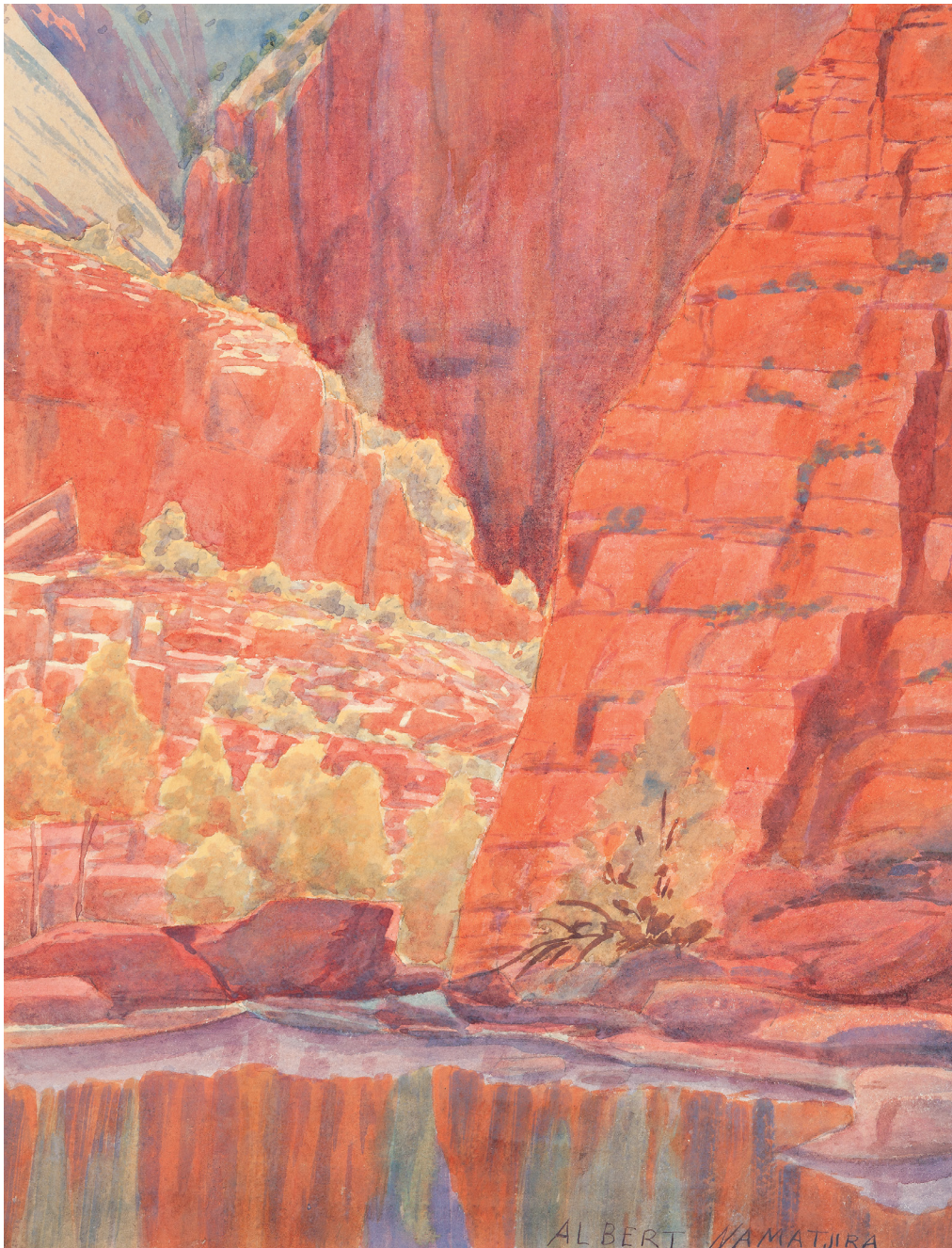
Curious questions: What do you imagine Albert Namatjira especially loved about his Country? Can you think of somewhere that is an important part of who you are, and feels really special for you, too?

Think about what makes this so special for you – does it have something to do with the land, water or weather, the people there, or events and activities? How might you share or explain this to people, to help them understand?

Namatjira first learned watercolour painting from Victorian art teacher and artist Rex Battarbee at the Hermannsburg mission. After Namatjira saw Battarbee painting watercolour landscapes of significant sites in his Country, out in the open air, he was inspired to learn.

Battarbee gave Namatjira six open-air watercolour lessons, and Namatjira guided Battarbee through his Country in return. It did not take long for Battarbee to realise that Namatjira was extremely gifted at painting.

Like his mentor Battarbee, Namatjira painted Country outside in open air, where he could see and paint in the moment. Namatjira's deep knowledge of his Country made his watercolour paintings very special and unique. He painted with key details, drawing from his own personal perspectives and connections with Country.



ALBERT NAMATJIRA (Western Aranda, 1902–1959)
Quarta-Tooma (Ormiston Gorge), 1939
watercolour and gouache on paper
Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art

Curious question: Imagine stepping into Namatjira's *Quarta-Tooma (Ormiston Gorge)* painting. What sights, sounds and smells can you imagine?

*"I find in his paintings a marvellous sense of distance and space.
His eyes can look so far away and seem to know what's there."*

— Lloyd Rees (as cited in Edmund, 2014, p. 352)

Namatjira brought the stories and knowledge of special sites into his paintings, with an exciting sense of colour. He painted areas differently within his works to highlight special knowledge and features known to him, showing his deep awareness and understanding of how his Country looked and felt in different seasons and times of day.

Namatjira and his Western Aranda relatives and descendants painted watercolour representations of their Country. Ntaria is also home to the Hermannsburg Potters, who make art connected to the same place.

"We would sit down, watching him [Albert] paint the landscape. We was watching him thinking, 'Oh, that's a nice painting.' Then, everyone started to learn to paint."

— Judith Inkamala, Chair and senior member of Hermannsburg Potters Aboriginal Corporation (as cited in McConville, 2024, p. 249)

Namatjira's watercolours of Western Aranda Country created a bridge between Aboriginal and Western art and paved the way for other Indigenous creators across the country to become artists.

"I saw Namatjira painting his colour country, admired the nice paint, and saw my colour country".

— Ginger Riley Munduwalwala (as cited in Ryan, 2001)

These memories from artists like Judith Inkamala and Ginger Riley Munduwalwala remind us that Namatjira inspired many artists in and beyond Ntaria to make art about Country, and that his paintings continue to inspire artists today.

Because of the Indigenous knowledge Namatjira brings into his paintings, they are so much more than a simple landscape - they are a celebration of his connection to Country.

The term 'landscape' is a Western definition for a work of art depicting the land. With this same Western thinking, when artists talk about the shape of a painting, they might describe its format as 'portrait', which is taller than it is wide, or 'landscape' which is wider than it is tall.

Curious question: Have you heard the words 'portrait' and 'landscape' used to describe works of art before? What kinds of things do you usually see in portrait-shaped works versus landscape-shaped ones?

Interestingly, Namatjira's painting *Quarta-Tooma (Ormiston Gorge)* is in a portrait format.

"...People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country..."

— Deborah Rose-Bird (2016)

While Namatjira paints his Country in many different shapes and formats, this example might give us some clues for thinking about Country as being more than just land or a scene to look at.

“...People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy...country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness.”

— Deborah Rose-Bird (2016)

Whatever way we look at and think about *Quarta-Tooma* (Ormiston Gorge), it is a wonderful example of how Namatjira's paintings - in the full colours of Country - express his deep connection to, understanding of and love for his Country.

Mapping and making with Country – Minimini Numalkikiya Mamarika

When some of us hear the word Country, we might think about geography, meaning the different environments or landscapes within a place. Or we think about it as a nation – a country - where we come from, live or that we know about.

Looking back across the artists and works of art we are learning with; we can see the very special relationship Indigenous peoples have with Country. Through their art, these artists show us how and why Country is more than just the physical place, or the land, water and sky you can see.

While those are part of Country, Country includes the relationships between people, culture, and community, and the values, beliefs, knowledge and stories they share. Through their art, these artists show us how Country brings all of these things together into one broad, deep concept that cannot, and should not, be separated into single parts.

“The remarkable bark paintings in this exhibition date from 1935 to early 1950...these extraordinary works of art are first representations on bark of important ancestral beings, sacred clan designs and totemic animals in the region, made specifically for outsiders.”

— Potter Museum of Art (2025)

Something really special about this exhibition is that it features fifteen bark paintings by Anindilyakwa artist Minimini Numalkikiya Mamarika (c.1900-1972) from Groote Eylandt.

The Anindilyakwa people have lived on the Groote Eylandt archipelago for around 6,000 years, and their Songlines explain how the lands, waters, animals and Anindilyakwa people themselves were created, showing their deep cultural ties and connection to their sea Country.

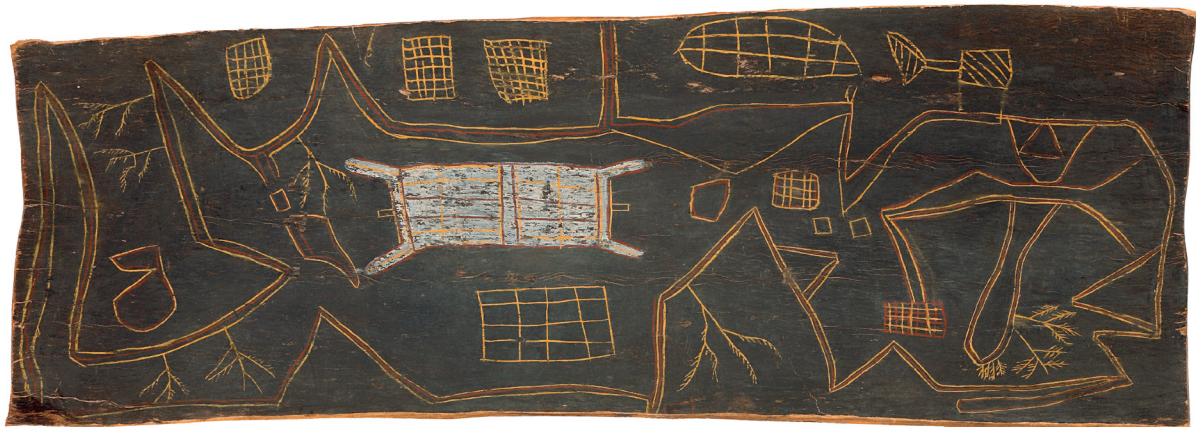
Groote Eylandt is the biggest island in a group of islands called the Groote archipelago, located in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is its own separate island with its own unique Indigenous history and cultural traditions belonging to the Anindilyakwa peoples of Groote Eylandt.

“The Anindilyakwa people have inhabited the archipelago for approximately 6000 years and have deep cultural ties to their Sea Country.”

— Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers & Anindilyakwa Traditional Owners (2020)

Before British invasion, fishermen from the Macassan and Bugis peoples would sail all the way from Sulawesi in Indonesia to the coast of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. They would make this long journey every December, which is the wet season in the tropics.

These visits by the Macassan fishermen greatly influenced and shaped the spiritual beliefs and material cultures of the Aboriginal peoples living along the Australian coasts (AGSA, 2025). Their main reason for making this trip was to fish for a special kind of sea creature called trepang, a sea cucumber (AGSA, 2025).



MINIMINI NUMALKIYIYA MAMARIKA (Anindilyakwa, c. 1900–1972)

Map of Groote Eylandt and surrounding islands with Mamarika (the south-east wind), c. 1941–45

earth pigments and orchid bulb extract on Stringybark

The Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture, part of the Indigenous Art and Culture Collection
The University of Melbourne

Curious question: What features and creatures of Country can we see in Mamarika's painting?

Mamarika's works are created from a birds' eye (from above, looking down) perspective, showing trees and the white symbol for *Mamarika*, the Anindilyakwa name for the southeast wind, which brings monsoonal rains and, until 1907, annual visits of Macassan traders to Groote.

"Mamarika is the name given to the dry season south easterly wind that blows almost constantly from April to September in the Western Gulf of Carpentaria."

— Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (2025)

After 1901, the newly formed Australian Government banned the Macassan and Bugis fishermen from coming to trade. The last prau (sailing boat) left Arnhem Land in 1907, ending the fishermen's long journeys to Groote.

"...sea creatures, birds, animal tracks, Macassan praus, mission boats, ceremonial participants, ancestral creators and the Milky Way, tumble freely across the stringybark surfaces..."

— Potter Museum of Art (2025)

The way the symbols and imagery are painted in this work are similar to what we would expect to see in a map (from above), but some are made in a special 'picture sheet' style. This means not everything is shown from the exact same angle or viewpoint (Gunn, 2024). For example, it looks like a map, but the trees are drawn sideways in a horizontal position instead of straight up and down, from above.

Since Mamarika was born in the early 1900s, he likely saw the Macassan fishermen sailing to the waters around Groote Eylandt. The images, symbols and stories he has shared about their meaning show his deep connections with different cultural groups and places around Groote Eylandt.

Curious question: Why do you think Mamarika chose to document stories and knowledge of his Country in this map-style way? What might be some important reasons for artists wanting to carefully record and share their cultural information through their bark paintings?

Mamarika's painting maps out important events, connections, relationships, activities and advocacy efforts between different peoples, places and his Country. His paintings bring forward deep histories and knowledge from long ago through to today. The stringybark surface, the ochre colours, and the black manganese background are all materials gathered from Mamarika's Country.

Mamarika's bark paintings contain deep knowledge about his Country. For this bark painting, it is understood that Mamarika also used tools gathered and made from his Country to paint with, like the tip of a chewed stick, a strip of bark, or the light touch of a feather to create finely drawn delicate lines and marks

Curious question: Have you ever noticed symbols or icons that seem to repeat in Aboriginal works of art or cultural objects? These meaningful symbols or images that represent important ideas or stories are called iconography. Can you think of any examples of iconography you may have seen before?

As another example of art as Country and Country as art, Mamarika's painting maps out his memories, the oral traditions he was told, and his experiences with different people and his Country.

It is important to remember that these bark paintings are more than just art, and more than just maps. We should not limit our understanding of them to only those things.

These bark paintings contain Indigenous knowledge in special ways unique to the artists' identity, traditions, and relationships with the land, places, people of their whole Country.

Caring for Country – Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton

When we learn about culture and Country, it is important to keep in mind that they are interconnected. They include relationships between people, culture, land, sky, water and more that stretch over long periods of time in ongoing cycles. Culture and Country connect in ways that are much bigger, broader, and deeper than any one of the parts we might think or learn about within them.

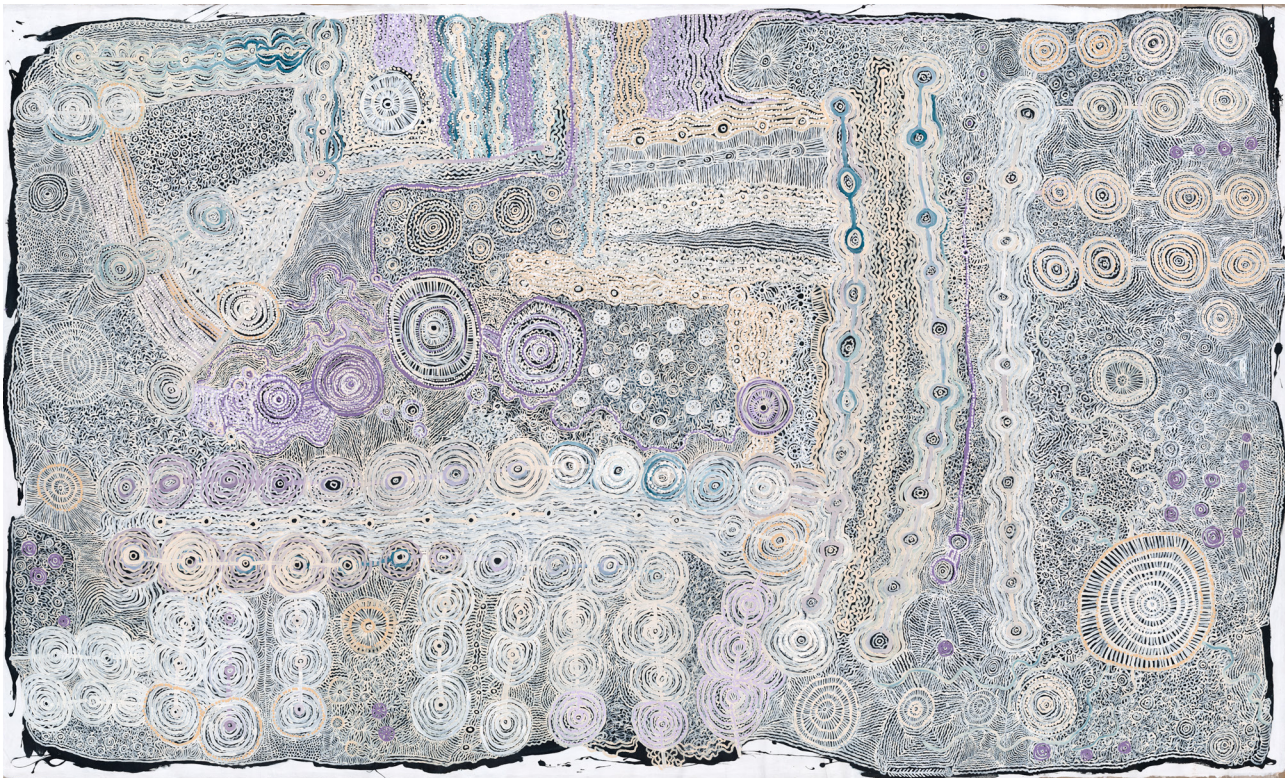
"Art created by Australia's First People is embedded in Country across Australia...The energy in these artists' work comes from a deep connection to Country and culture."

— Eve Chaloupka (2024, p. 185)

When learning with *65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art*, remember that culture and Country are interconnected by the same bonds of care we have seen, heard and discussed within and across the works of art, stories and knowledge we have explored.

We round out our learning about continuity of culture with this magnificent painting by Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton, an aunty and niece duo of *ngangkari* (traditional Anangu healers) from the Anangu, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands, and who live in Indulkana community.

Curious question: Take a close look at this vast five metre wide and three metre tall painting – it is such an impressive size! What special or interesting details stand out for you? What thoughts, feelings or impressions do you have?



BETTY MUFFLER (Pitjantjatjara, born 1945)
MARINGKA BURTON (Pitjantjatjara, born 1950)

Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country), 2022
synthetic polymer paint on linen

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Commissioned by The University of Melbourne, 2022

Purchased with funds donated by Peter and Ruth McMullin, 2023

Their collaborative painting *Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country)* offers a window into their role as custodians of Indigenous knowledge and the powers they possess to heal people and Country. These powers, their Country and their culture are an essential part of who Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton are.

Curious question: What do you think it means to be a 'custodian of knowledge'? What roles and responsibilities might come with being a custodian?

Betty Muffler was born in 1945 at Yalungu near Watarru. In painting her birthplace, she includes references to her own *tjukurpa* creation stories of the emu. Maringka Burton was born in 1950 near the Anumara *tjukurpa* (Caterpillar Dreaming) site south of Irrunytju in Western Australia.

"Tjukurpa (pronounced 'chook-orr-pa') is the foundation of Anangu Culture. In the same way that a house needs to stand on strong foundations, our way of life stands on Tjukurpa."

— *Tjukurpa katutja ngarantja (Tjukurpa above all else, Parks Australia, 2025)*

Together, Betty and Maringka paint the Country where they were born and belong, blending sacred *tjukurpa* (creation stories) from their respective birth countries. This painting was commissioned especially for this exhibition to celebrate the strength of Anangu women's art, law and cultural continuity.

Curious question: What does it mean when a work of art is commissioned? How might commissioning works made by Indigenous artists help support the sharing and continuity of culture?

Their enormous collaborative painting *Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country)* makes a powerful statement about the strength of Indigenous knowledge and the importance of keeping Country strong and healthy and culture alive. Through their paintings, Betty and Maringka allow us to see into and learn a little about the mysterious world and practices of *ngangkari* healers.

"We have done so much work together as healers. We both started off painting on our own, each of us painting the Country where we were born and belong. These places are an essential part of each of us."

— Maringka Burton (as cited in Cobby Ekkerman, 2020)

Ngangkari skills are passed down through generations, and each healer has a different specialisation. Each *ngangkari* has their own unique way of healing. Some can heal people's injuries or illnesses, while others use their powers to help heal and care for the land itself. Betty and Maringka have worked together and alone as *ngangkari* for decades, collaborating on epic paintings in recent years about this work.

"Betty and Maringka's works are massive in scale. There is no way you could hand them on the walls of a domestic home. Yet, if you think about the amount of land they care for, works such as Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country) are tiny."

— Eve Chaloupka (2024, p. 75)

An important story and message in Betty and Maringka's painting and *ngangkari* practice is how important it is to care for each other, the land, and their Country. Their paintings are important for advocating for ongoing care and healing after the British military tested nuclear weapons on the Anangu lands at Maralinga and Emu Field between 1955-1963.

The nuclear testing had terrible impacts – the Anangu people were never asked for permission and their presence on the lands was ignored. With continued efforts to heal and revive the land since, it will still take a very long time to fully repair all the damage.

By using their ancestral knowledge to keep people, culture and Country healthy and strong, *ngangkari* play a very important role in Anangu communities today, and as they have always done.

"Some of my favourite artists are undercover truth-tellers"

— Eve Chaloupka (2024, p. 75)

Through their healing work, practiced in paint and as *ngangkari*, Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton bring truth and power to heal people and care for culture and Country that has been passed down unbroken from one generation to the next.

Curious Question: How might engaging with Betty and Maringka's meaningful artwork help build greater understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures and their enduring connections to Country?

Ngangkari Ngura (Healing Country) reminds us that we need to listen, learn from, and stand alongside Aboriginal peoples in their ongoing journey for greater rights, self-determination, and healing.

"These artists are philosopher kings and queens who bravely and boldly call out injustice, racism and convention in clever, caring, creative and hopeful ways."

— Judith Ryan (2024, p. 30)

65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art celebrates the incredible resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over many, many thousands of years.

The works of art tell powerful stories about the challenges and injustices people, culture and Country have faced, as well as the enduring strength, hope, and healing power that allows culture to be passed down and continue, always.

We hope learning about Betty and Maringka's work inspires you to further your learning and appreciate the resilient, clever, and caring spirit of Aboriginal Peoples. There is so much more to discover about their powerful abilities to heal, revive, and care for their communities and ancestral lands.

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