

Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Wemba Wemba, Yorta Yorta, Bidjara, Wadawurrung,

Wadawurrung, Wiradjuri, Palawa, Taungurung, Palawa, Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj

Layers of Blak



Thelma Austin
Mandi Barton
Lorraine Brigdale
Nikki Browne
Deanne Gilson
Tammy Gilson
Elijah Money
Yasmin Silveira
Sammy Trist
Dominic White
Tracy Wise

The Koorie Heritage Trust acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of Naarm, the Wurundjeri Peoples of the Greater Kulin Nation, on whose lands we operate.

We pay respect to each of the Blak Design participants and acknowledge the continuing culture of the Barapa Barapa, Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj, Bidjara, Gunditjmara, Palawa, Taungurung, Wadawurrung, Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri, and Yorta Yorta peoples.

We pay respect to all First Peoples and celebrate our continuing culture.

Layers of Blak

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are advised that this publication contains the names and photographs of deceased people.

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Blak Design Program cohort, Blak Design workshop, RMIT University 2022
Front row (left to right): Thelma Austin, Mandi Barton, Tracy Wise, Sammy Trist
Middle row (left to right): Tammy Gilson, Yasmin Silveira, Shamana Seery,
Nikki Browne, Deanne Gilson
Back row (left to right): Dominic White, Elijah Money, Lorraine Brigdale
Photograph: Christian Capurro

TOM MOSBY
CEO, KHT

Foreword

Wominjeka.

Layers of Blak presents over 50 individual pieces of jewellery designed and produced by 11 Victorian First Nations artists and designers. The exhibition is the outcome of KHT's second iteration of the ground-breaking Blak Design program, which provides an opportunity for talented Victorian First Nations artists and designers to further develop their individual skills and professional practice, while fostering broader design collaboration.

Developed in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria and RMIT University, and generously supported by the Ian Potter Foundation, the KHT's Blak Design program aims to support, promote and celebrate First Nations cultural innovation within the design sector. It provides a platform for First Nations designers to develop and diversify their arts practice, develop their commercial profile, and gain exposure to valuable networking opportunities and expert advice through an intensive mentoring process.

The 2022 program commenced with an online introductory week of talks featuring prominent figures and advocates of First Nations design, including Wailwan/Kamilaroi architect Jefa Greenaway; Professor Brian Martin, Bundjalung, Muruwari and Kamilaroi Director of the Wominjeka Djeembana Indigenous Research Lab, Monash University; Simone LeAmon, inaugural Hugh Williamson Curator of Contemporary Design and Architecture, National Gallery of Victoria; Myles Russell-Cook, Senior Curator, Australian and First Nations Art, National Gallery of Victoria; Shonae Hobson, Curator, First Nations Art, National Gallery of Victoria; Ngarara Willim Centre (RMIT University); Emily McCulloch Childs, Melinda Young and Emily Beckley (The Indigenous Jewellery Project); contemporary artists and jewellers Blanche Tilden (also a Program mentor), Laura Deakin (also a Program mentor), Paul McCann (Marrithiyel artist and designer), Vicki Mason and Pip Chandler; and, 2021 Blak Design Program participants Sharn Geary, Lisa Waup, Beverly Meldrum, Jenna Lee, Sandy Hodge and Ange Jeffery.

Following the introductory week, the participants undertook two separate blocks of intensive two-week workshops in the silversmith studio space at RMIT University. The workshops are founded on collaboration and two-way learning, with Blanche Tilden, Laura Deakin and Lindy McSwan engaged as mentors. A range of subjects are covered in the workshops, from building practical design skills and engaging with cultural storytelling to providing guidance on commercial and small business practices. On behalf of the participants and KHT, I would like to extend a big thank you to each of the mentors for their invaluable guidance, generosity, care and the wealth of experience shared with each participant. Thanks also go to Kit Wise, the Dean of the School of Art at RMIT University, and Mark Edgoose, Co-ordinator of Undergraduate Studies, Gold and Silversmithing, School of Art, RMIT University. The support, generosity and spirit of partnership extended by Kit and Mark were key to the success of these hands-on workshops.

Layers of Blak provides an insight into the rich cultural traditions of First Peoples from South East Australia, as reflected in the contemporary jewellery made by participants. The participating designers weave together cultural experiences and personal stories using a variety of materials and techniques that reflect Country, family and Community to create unique pieces that are complex in their *layerings* and underscore individual experiences. This fully illustrated publication provides an invaluable record and insight into the journey taken by each participating designer, and the perspectives and experiences of mentors Blanche Tilden, Laura Deakin and Lindy McSwan.

I extend my deepest thanks to all those involved in the 2022 Blak Design program, including program mentors Blanche Tilden, Laura Deakin and Lindy McSwan, along with their colleagues at RMIT University, Mark Edgoose, Claire McArdle, Kristen Sharp, Daniel Palmer, Kirsten Hayden and Jason Wade.

I would also like to acknowledge Sharn Geary (Blak Design Coordinator). A participant in the first iteration of the program, Sharn's eye for detail and care for the participants, and their work and stories, has contributed significantly to the successful

Layers of Blak provides an insight into the rich cultural traditions of First Peoples from South East Australia, as reflected in the contemporary jewellery made by participants.

TOM MOSBY



Work in progress by Elijah Money,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

delivery of the program. I thank Sharn for her tireless effort and all that she has achieved. Special thanks must also go to Simone LeAmon (Hugh Williamson Curator of Contemporary Design and Architecture, National Gallery of Victoria) who also worked hard to see this program to fruition. Thanks also to the KHT exhibitions and collections team Gail Harradine (Curatorial Manager), Travis Curtin (Curator), Savi Ross (Assistant Curator), Pierra Van Sparkes (Assistant Curator), Katherine Giesen-White (Collections Coordinator), and Gemma Jones (Public Programs) who provided vital support in organising and liaising behind the scenes on both the Program and exhibition.

The Blak Design program is supported by the Ian Potter Foundation in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria, RMIT University and Fed Square. The *Layers of Blak* exhibition is proudly supported by Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program, the Australia Council for the Arts, and ANZ.

Finally, the 2022 Blak Design program and the *Layers of Blak* exhibition would not have been possible without the dedication, time, energy and extraordinary talent of the participating designers. I wish to acknowledge, thank and extend my sincerest congratulations to each of them: Thelma Austin (Gunditjmara), Mandi Barton (Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Wemba Wemba), Lorraine Brigdale (Yorta Yorta), Nikki Browne (Bidjara), Deanne Gilson (Wadawurrung), Tammy Gilson (Wadawurrung), Elijah Money (Wiradjuri), Yasmin Silveira (Palawa), Sammy Trist (Taungurung), Dominic White (Palawa) and Tracy Wise (Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj).

Ngoon Godjin | Thank You



Thelma Austin

'When we look at our beautiful Aboriginal matriarchs there is something so special and elegant about them. I want to show that in the beauty of the leaves.'

Left: *Blak Queens* —
The journey of an Aboriginal woman connecting with the journey of a gumtree
Bubba crown — *Germination and growth* by Thelma Austin (Gunditjmarra)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

The beautiful crowns made by Thelma Austin (Gunditjmara) are intended to be placed on the heads of Blak Queens, whom she encounters daily in her life. For Blak Design, she has made three distinctly different head-pieces, crowns that honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in general but the women in her own family in particular. Embedded in the work is a depth of emotion, as well as a strong desire to symbolise the crucial role that respect plays in daily life: respect that is deserved by all women, and also a source of pride. Her three crowns represent the life journey of an Aboriginal woman, from conception (where the spirit chooses the mother) to returning to the Dreaming. Thelma has connected this journey with the life-cycle of the gum tree: from flower buds to seed release, then to germination into a sapling, which grows into a tree to repeat the cycle.

Thelma's starting place was wanting to make work that in some way would be a tribute to her Nan (Mummy Ella), her father's mother and the matriarch on the Aboriginal side of family. She also wanted to acknowledge the trauma in her own life, the family violence that her mother experienced and Thelma witnessed. "I was born into that violence, I was born black and blue from the floggings my Mother endured in her pregnancy, but when I was about eight, I got sick of the violence and said it wasn't going to happen to me," Thelma says.

She had wonderful role models in her Nan, Mum and Aunties who were active helping with many organisations. "I grew up around Fitzroy, I would walk down Gertrude Street with family and see community everywhere, taking note of all the women and the Elders, from parkies to heads of organisations, they were all I aspired to be, they were all 'Blak Queens' in my eyes."

Thelma has worked a lot in spaces trying to grapple with domestic violence issues affecting all ages of women, from girls to Elders. She decided, in Blak Design, not to repeat the emotions and trauma of abuse but to focus on the

other end of the spectrum, something beautiful: a tribute to women by making them regally adorned Blak Queens.

The first crown incorporates the idea of growth. "It is a bubba crown, for a child on the first path of life," Thelma says. "It is made in silver with very fine, simple details of the layers of Country on the front, because it is for a young person." The second is the Aunty-girl crown, covering the years from a woman's 20s to the time she becomes the matriarch of her family- the middle stage of life. It was made with recycled metal from the jewellery workshop and is rich with markings and different colours. The hand-cut designs are made to resemble gum leaves. "This depicts the journey towards flowering, the part of life's journey where we get a lot of experiences, a lot of ups and downs, and the time when you could become a mother and a grandmother or an Aunty. Even if you don't physically have children, you will be a Mother, Aunty or Grandmother through our kinship systems."

In the final crown, Thelma honours her Elders, the matriarchs of family and community, by working with the stage of the gum tree after fertilisation, where the gumnuts are drying out and the seeds falling on the ground. It incorporates silver, copper and bronze, worked together with hand-cut elements, the spine of the gumleaf "backbone" is etched into the design. "When we look at our beautiful Aboriginal matriarchs there is something so special and elegant about them, there is something amazing and strong about them. I want to show that in the beauty of the leaves. Matriarchs are the backbone of family and community, and they pass on the knowledge to women in the Aunty phase of their lives, so they can pass it onto the new cycle of growth through the next generation.

"This work is all about the journey of an Aboriginal woman and the passing on of knowledge that gets handed down through every generation, like the gumtree. That circle of time is never-ending."



THELMA AUSTIN
(Gunditjmarra)
*Blak Queens - The journey of
an Aboriginal woman connecting
with the journey of a gumtree*
*Bubba crown - Germination
and growth 2022*
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



THELMA AUSTIN
(Gunditjmarra)
*Blak Queens - The journey of
an Aboriginal woman connecting
with the journey of a gumtree*
Aunty crown - Flowering 2022
sterling silver, copper
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Thelma speaks of her own life as a single mother, eventually meeting a man she loves who understands respect. “I have stepped into the space of being a woman, really owning it and not worrying about the male-dominated space. He treats me like a Blak Queen and I want my sisters around the world to have that, especially Blak women. There is an overwhelming amount of abuse Aboriginal women face from the moment they’re born.” Thus, her Blak Design work is part of a larger project to start workshops talking to Aboriginal girls and women about these issues and setting a benchmark for what they deserve. The beautiful Blak Queen crowns embody those wonderful ambitions and a strong sense of hope and optimism. “We can settle for nothing less than being treated the right way, standing up to say what we deserve, and decolonise the learnt behaviours for men and women. And stand in our power as ‘Blak Queens’.”



THELMA AUSTIN
(Gunditjmarra)
Blak Queens - The journey of an Aboriginal woman connecting with the journey of a gumtree
Matriarch crown - Fertilisation and seed release 2022
sterling silver, copper, brass
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Thelma Austin, Blak Design
workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Mandi Barton

'My jewellery is about
strengthening my connection
— but it also could be about
somebody else strengthening
theirs as well when they see it.'

Left: *Danin (Float) Necklace 2*
by Mandi Barton
(Yorta Yorta, Barappa
Barappa, Wemba Wemba)
Photograph: Fred Kiroh

Experiences growing up in inner-urban Footscray in Naarm (Melbourne) are central to the choice of materials and stories used by Mandi Barton (Yorta Yorta/Barapa Barapa/Wemba Wemba). An artist of long-standing, Mandi was nevertheless uncertain how to proceed at the beginning of the Blak Design program — but she knew she wanted to ground the work in her personal background and story, the essence of who she is as a contemporary First Nations woman.

“The other work I’ve done recently is not about me, so I wanted to share my own story this time,” she says. “That is a little bit uncomfortable, but it is about having my own voice and sharing culture. Usually, I am a quite quiet person, so it is a privilege to be able to share this story through my design work.” She says the entire experience was about trusting her intuition and sense of self. “I needed to get out of my head and go with it, because sometimes I think too much.”

A key element for Mandi was exploring the life of her grandmother on her father’s side. “It was about drawing on my connections with her, even though I never met her, as she died when my Dad was young,” Mandi says. “But the stories told about her have stayed with me. My grandmother was Stolen Generations and she was never offered a connection to knowledge and culture. She didn’t talk much about cultural things; she only talked to my father a few times about it and that was when they were in the bush together and not with anybody else.”

Mandi’s own upbringing in an urban environment involved a level of disconnection from her Country – but she still managed to make the most of it. “My jewellery is about how I connected as a kid who grew up in Footscray around factories, in a family where we didn’t have a car a lot of the time or go for drives. Even though my dad has such a big family, they were far away.” Her father worked in the First Nations community, so she had connections there, but she found that, even in Footscray, she was drawn to connecting with Country, especially with water. Memories of making little paper boats to float down the creek are especially

significant. “That connection was what I had at the time, and there were other, different aspects of how I connected.”

One part of Mandi’s professional life, aside from her art-making, is facilitating culturally safe spaces, and her work in Blak Design has drawn on this, creating that sort of space for herself. “My jewellery is about strengthening my connection — but it also could be about somebody else strengthening theirs as well when they see it.” This why it felt right to represent her daughters in some way in the work, but with the challenge of keeping the focus on her own story. “I wanted to acknowledge them without telling their story for them, so I have thought a lot about how to do that,” she says.

While the work incorporates emu feathers, Mandi wanted it to also include materials of her own that would represent aspects of her culture, and possum skins immediately came to mind. She also needed metal. “I wasn’t sure what metal to use and remember how, as kids, we’d collect cans for money instead of putting them in the bin.” This led her to using a very unexpected material: Coca-Cola cans.

The objects she made use the metal and possum skin segments in the shapes of rafts or canoes, with an emphasis on the idea of floating, joined together with rivets. Much time was spent on the construction, working out how to work them together so that one material did not overwhelm the other. “I didn’t want them fighting each other but we worked out how to do it so that one isn’t controlling the other. The possum skin comes through gaps in the metal. It is like culture coming through, and it is a nice match.”

Mandi was intrigued to discover that using sterling silver in the work also had symbolic resonance. “I want to experience life, move up and do well so I can be an artist and designer full-time,” she says. “I want the benefits of that, and that is a drive for me, because I have always had bad self-doubt.” But now she wants something more. And silver – such a precious metal – helps to symbolise that aspiration.



MANDI BARTON
(Yorta Yorta, Barappa Barappa,
Wemba Wemba)
Danin (Float) Necklace 1 2022
Danin (Float) Necklace 2 2022
Danin (Float) Necklace 3 2022
possum skin, aluminium
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

1 & 2 4B ROOM

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Work in progress by Mandi Barton,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Lorraine Brigdale

'With weaving, with making,
you are imprinting something
into the item itself.'

Left: *Remember* by Lorraine
Brigdale (Yorta Yorta)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

On a visit to Melbourne Museum during the research phase for her Blak Design work, Lorraine Brigdale (Yorta Yorta) explored collection items made by First Peoples. It was a powerful experience when she viewed the shields, woven objects and other cultural belongings on display. “The stories are there, they just come out at you when you see them,” Lorraine says. “My experience was that I walked into the place and I could feel the spiritual stories, feel the ancestors, the presence of the people who made these things. The tears just sprang to my eyes. With weaving, with making, you are imprinting something into the item itself.” Intuitively, she picked up on that and responded to those deep reverberations.

An experienced artist who loves to experiment, Lorraine has in the past worked extensively with the ideas and physical forms of traditional shields and their markings, but for Blak Design she has explored another of her interests – the art and craft of weaving, especially as it applies to dilly bags. Beginning with sketches in her journal – beautiful tangles of ink on paper that replicate the weave of the dilly bags – Lorraine then moved on to turning them into three-dimensional versions.

“When I am doing weaving, I am not thinking,” Lorraine says. “I am just there, in the action. I was a bit torn to be moving away from shields, but excited by the weaving process. Seeing the images I had drawn coming to life in my hands by me weaving them in binding wire – it was wonderful.” Lorraine says the act of weaving connects beautifully with her psyche, and with her own story – learning more about her inherited culture at this stage in her life, and being shown how to create from the land itself and what it offers.

Lorraine has long used a coil technique in weaving, so it made sense to continue it in these new works. The tradition of coil weaving lives on with Lorraine’s Yorta Yorta mob. Her Aboriginal family, on the maternal side, originates from the Ulupna Clan in the Barmah Forest on the border of NSW and Victoria, and one of her driving aspirations is to use her art-



LORRAINE BRIGDALE
(Yorta Yorta)
Remember 2022
Remember 2022
Remember 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Remember by
Lorraine Brigdale (Yorta Yorta)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

making to help her own descendants and others to be strongly connected Yorta Yorta people through deeper involvement and knowledge.

While dilly bags are traditionally woven with natural grasses or bark transformed into fibrous string, Lorraine this time used black binding wire, which somehow captured the nature and texture of her drawings. But the transformation also made the wire versions become original objects in themselves.

“I have this thing about the resilience of ancestors, how strong they’ve been and how we mustn’t forget what they have done for us,” Lorraine says. “So, in terms of dilly bags, I am interested in that whole culture of weaving and making practical products that can be used as well as functioning as adornments. This and making tools was a big part of our ancestors’ daily lives – they couldn’t just run down the shops and buy a bag.” Thus, she loved the poetic qualities of the dilly bag and its connection to the ancestors, and the wire-weaving took off. “Even though they were done by me, they had a different look to the drawings. You can’t just replicate; they became like secondary images.”

The next step was to put the woven dilly bag forms through a press, pushing the weave into flat silver sheets. “It was such an amazing experience: seeing it go through the roller mill and coming out with the shape embossed into the silver was so exciting.”

The outcomes are extraordinary, with three wire dilly bags hanging from a leather thong, and three silver sheets having been embossed with a mesh pattern and the rich, curling imprints of the wire bags. These textured metal sheets, with a light patina, hang from handmade oblong-shaped silver link chains. “I see it as fine art and craft,” Lorraine says. “Craft techniques are actually what it all comes down to, even though the ‘craft’ aspect is often looked down upon by the art world. In Aboriginal design, artists don’t look down on craft at all; it is an important part of the art-making, not separate.”



LORRAINE BRIGDALE
(Yorta Yorta)
Remember (detail) 2022
Remember (detail) 2022
Remember (detail) 2022
wire, leather, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Work in progress by Lorraine Brigdale,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Nikki Browne

'I am trying to get away from the tokenistic blakfella situation, where you turn up and they expect you to 'look' a certain way. For me, it is about a contemporary way of telling my story.'

Left: *STOP KILLING COUNTRY*
by Nikki Browne (Bidjara)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

In the lead-up to doing Blak Design, Nikki Browne (Bidjara) was working outdoors with a school group at Healesville Sanctuary when a small branch of blue-gum leaves tumbled from a tree and landed on her. It amused her, and helped determine the direction she wanted to go with her designs. An artist of extensive experience, she has always loved the extraordinarily long leaves of the blue gum, which can extend up to 45cm. How though, she asked herself, could she incorporate them into a piece of wearable art?

The creations she ended up pursuing – one featuring leaves, the other the spines of sea urchins – are reminiscent of shawls, but also of traditional possum-skin cloaks in the way they extend protectively across the heart-centre. Embedded in them is Nikki's long-standing passion for connecting with Country, with issues of sustainability and protecting wildlife being of particular interest. Healing, medicine, culture and connection to the environment are threaded through the work.

“And those big gum leaves: I have always loved them and collected them since I was a little girl growing up in Cockatoo. Mum's best friend had this tree with these enormous gum leaves, I was fascinated by them. I used to paint them and give them as bookmarks for Christmas and birthday presents. They are ridiculously oversized, and a lot of people wouldn't realise they grow this big.”

Suggestions that it would be impossible to use them gracefully in a piece of jewellery goaded her on and an exciting journey began, with many technical skills and techniques being passed on to her during Blak Design. With another strong interest in the history and effects of industrialisation, Nikki has used old cogs from a sewing machine she had dismantled – she loves recycling when she pulls things apart to see how they work. The cogs, made of an ultra-tough metal alloy, have been used as a brace from which the copper-plated leaves dangle.



NIKKI BROWNE
(Bidjara)
STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sewing machine cogs, gum leaves,
resin, copper, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



NIKKI BROWNE
(Bidjara)
STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sea urchin spines, sewing
machine cogs, copper
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



NIKKI BROWNE
(Bidjara)
STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sea urchin spines, copper, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



NIKKI BROWNE
(Bidjara)
STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
gum leaves, gum nuts, resin,
copper, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

“The cogs reflect the churning of industry since colonisation,” Nikki says. “Industry is needed – but it is wrecking Country. I’m interested in how can we continue industry but in a better way, for example by getting people out of logging and into new, sustainable industries that look after Country. Industry at the moment is killing Country and not protecting us.”

Her use of sea urchin spines follows a similar train of thought and the metal cogs connecting them have been heated so that the material is reminiscent of the iridescent swirls of an oil slick – suggesting the effects of waterway pollution injuring or killing sea fauna. Unlike the large blue gum leaves, the spines jangle together musically when they dangle, their dried surfaces hardening to an almost ceramic type of material. “I imagine the music under the sea and fresh water ways, yabbies and eels moving and making sounds under the water, just like when the wind blows and the trees move and you get those whistling sounds,” Nikki says. “And just because we can’t see something [in the ocean depths] doesn’t mean we shouldn’t look after it and protect it.”

Both her neck-arrangements are reminiscent of shawl-like forms, a reference to the traditional usage of possum skins and other adornments used around the upper torso. “I like the idea of wearing Country as an artform,” Nikki says. “I am trying to get away from the tokenistic blakfella situation, where you turn up and they expect you to ‘look’ a certain way. For me, it is about a contemporary way of telling my story.”

When she interacts with school groups, Nikki often begins by talking to them about deep listening – to the birds and trees, to connect with the space. “For some Elders and older Aboriginal people there are two veins of thought: one is that we don’t share and we keep our culture to ourselves, because it was stolen and we need to keep it sacred. The other is to share it so that we do have this opportunity of people loving our culture and understanding what it is. To me, sharing culture is creating this wave of understanding and respecting of our Country’s history: you see it now, there is more culture being woven into our everyday lives through business,

advertising and education, I feel like there is a curiosity and awareness, there are more arts, there are more Aboriginal people and culture being received really well. People want to know and I love that sharing of culture, at the same time understanding and respecting cultural lores, that there are some elements that really do need to be kept private and sacred for our future generations.”

NIKKI BROWNE
(Bidjara)
STOP KILLING COUNTRY (detail) 2022
sea urchin spines, sewing
machine cogs, copper
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh





Sea urchin spines used by Nikki Browne,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Deanne Gilson

'Country is in me and held within
my adornments that are not
really contemporary jewellery
designs, but something new....'

Left: *Past: Mok burreyin
Wadawurrung Ba-gurrk Murnong,
Goim Ngurgang Toor Murrup (Proud
Wadawurrung Women Digging
for Murnong alongside Female
Kangaroo Spirit, All Standing Proud).*
Pre-colonisation by Deanne Gilson
(Wadawurrung)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

When refining her ideas for Blak Design, Deanne Gilson (Wadawurrung) was determined to invest her work with meaningful insights into pre- and post-colonial history, focussed on her matrilineal ancestors. The result is a trio of creations she describes as truth-telling artworks. They evoke the future, present and past, referring to the artist, her mother Aunty Marlene Gilson, and her mother's mother Rita Dalton (nee Fagan). These three Wadawurrung women are represented via the three female kangaroo tails standing proud. The works' powerfully symbolic elements acknowledge historical trauma and injustice, but focus on a positive and transformative power.

The use of the tails is central: kangaroos cannot stand without a strong tail to balance and move forward, and this is a metaphor for standing proud and moving into the future, and for the passing down of knowledge, Deanne says. The tails are embellished with other materials so that they resemble elaborate collars or neck adornments. They refer, on one hand, to traditional ancestral practices, and on the other hand to the oppressive Victorian-era garments Aboriginal women were made to wear post-colonisation. On another level, the works speak of climate change and how women's business is carried out today. This is steeped in the knowledge and oral story-telling handed down by Deanne's matriarchal ancestors. "Country is in me and held within my adornments that are not really contemporary jewellery designs, but something new and other, not the 'exotic other,'" Deanne says. "Instead, there is my voice as a First Nations woman, mother, sister, Aunty and Nan."

The first piece, with a dyed black tail, black velvet and lace, references the way Aboriginal women have been subject to the male and female colonial gaze, and continue to be affected by it. "We were made to look like the white woman, dressed up like a trophy wife and made to act like her and be like her, but not treated like her," Deanne says. "We were her domestic and his sexual slave." She says the black velvet refers to the derogatory term used for Aboriginal

women's sexual organs. But the use of the colour black on the tail refers to sad emotions rather than skin colour. "I do not want this sadness to define and have power over my voice anymore," Deanne says. "These emotions are still present as underlying trauma but do not define my voice into the future." Significantly, the positioning of the tail overlays the lace: thus, the strength and culture of the Victorian-era Aboriginal woman prevails. "She is still standing proud, the forefront of strength for our children. This tail was made out of love for my Nan. It is a symbol of her strength and resilience and her fighting spirit. My dear Nan, her story is now made visible for the first time and we see her. She watches over me as a butterfly in my garden and as I look for the chocolate lilies sprouting every year on Wadawurrung Dja (Country)."

The second tail features the murnong (yam daisy) cast in silver. "A couple of hundred years ago now, my ancestral women went about their daily lives, harvesting the murnong tubers, feeding their children and creating beautiful adornments and clothing to wear out of possum and kangaroo skins," Deanne says, noting that the female kangaroo skin was used to wrap up *pupups* (babies) because its fur is shorter—infants can't choke on it—and softer than the males' fur. Also used for clothing and adornment were emu feathers, shells, native grasses and reeds. The women used sacred digging sticks to harvest murnong tubers, an important food source. The sacred stick was buried with the women so that they could continue their work in the Dreaming and watch over their children from the spirit world. Other references are to the native bee—pollinator of indigenous plants—and to water, painted on the skin as a traditional Wadawurrung mark. "We are made up of water and connected to the water spirit that runs through Country, we cannot be separated from it. The sterling silver has allowed me to highlight the many components of my story-telling and is a contemporary jewellery aspect of my work; it has a beautiful feminine essence that aids in highlighting the beauty of our women, stories and culture."



DEANNE GILSON

(Wadawurrung)

Past: Mok burreyin Wadawurrung

Ba-gurrk Murnong, Goim Ngurgang Toor

Murrup (Proud Wadawurrung Women

Digging for Murnong alongside Female

Kangaroo Spirit, All Standing Proud).

Pre-colonisation 2022

female kangaroo tail, sterling silver, silk

thread, velvet, yellow ochre (sourced only

on Wadawurrung Country), acrylic paint

Collection of the artist

Photograph: Fred Kroh

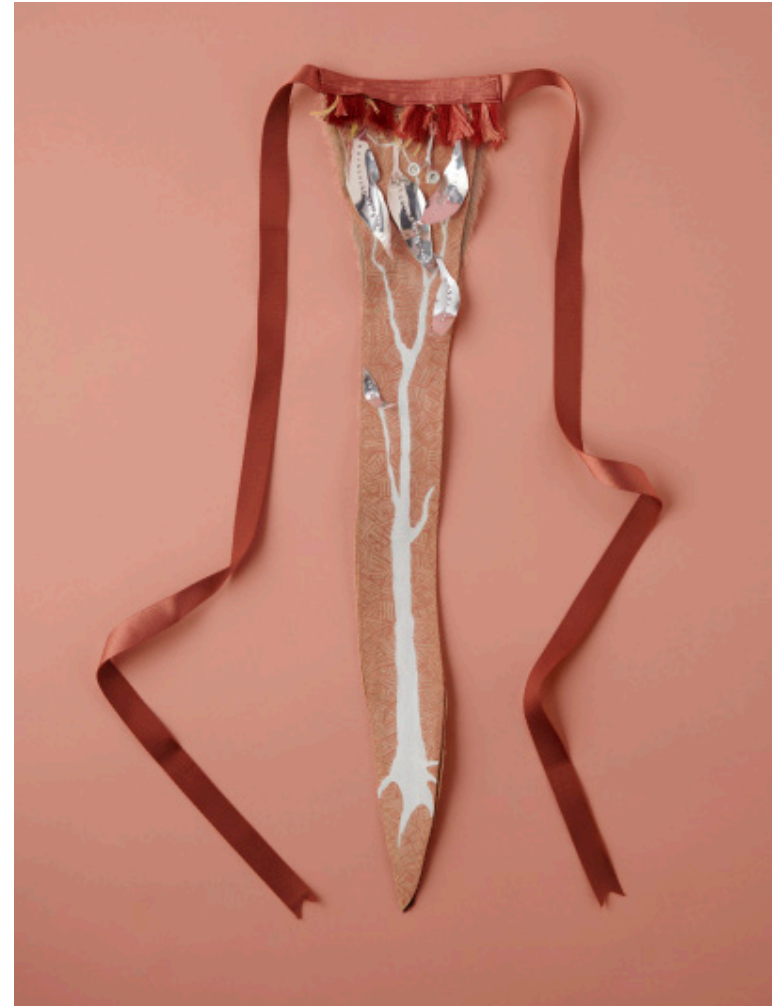
The third tail points to a brighter future and uses the Creation Story's flowering gum blossom as a symbol of Deanne's lived experience, her love for her grandson Arlo, and her love for indigenous plants and flowers. "I go on daily walks on Wadawurrung Dja and notice the blossoming of the different seasons as they change throughout the year and subtle changes in the environment, good and bad. As I walk, I often wonder about how Arlo's life will be when I'm not here and how so many indigenous plants and animals are fast disappearing. My goal is to use my art practice to immortalise as many as I can from my Country, to leave images behind for our future generations."



DEANNE GILSON

(Wadawurrung)

Mok burreyin Wadawurrung Mundi-gurrk, Goim Ngurgang Toor Murrup, Nan's spirit watching over me as a Butterfly and gifting me Chocolate Lilies. Post Colonisation to Present Tense 2022
 female kangaroo tail, sterling silver, cotton, organza, silk thread, velvet, lace
 Collection of the artist
 Photograph: Fred Kroh



DEANNE GILSON

(Wadawurrung)

Mok burreyin Wadawurrung Ba-gurrk (Wadawurrung Women Standing Proud) Future Tense, Our Children Being Embraced 2022
 female kangaroo tails, sterling silver, cotton, silk thread, pink and white ceremonial ochre, acrylic paint
 Collection of the artist
 Photograph: Fred Kroh



Deanne Gilson, Blak Design
workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Tammy Gilson

'Reclaiming language and exploring ancient knowledge systems with fire are empowering and an important part of my work and an expression of my emotion.'

Left: *Mongarrk perk:perk wirring*
2 (echidna quill earrings)
by Tammy Gilson (Wadawurrung)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

A proud Wadawurrung woman and award-winning master weaver, Tammy Gilson draws upon the spirit of her ancestors and how Country makes her feel. This informs her creativity and drive. Tammy's love for cultural fire and returning fire to the landscape has influenced her adornments along with an echidna gifted to her from Country. "Reclaiming language and exploring ancient knowledge systems with fire are empowering and an important part of my work and an expression of my emotion," she says.

The Blak Design program was new territory for Tammy. In the works she produced, she used lost-wax silver casting and techniques such as hammering. She worked with imagery and materials encountered during cultural burning. "This body of work represents my journey working on Country, inspired by fire spirit and the echidna. I see opportunities of using different materials and resources to create artefacts of today. I explored the opportunity of combining echidna quills into my designs as were traditionally used by the ancestors in adornment-making."

In May this year, Tammy led Victoria's first women's cultural burn workshop, *wiyn kalk:kalk*, on Wadawurrung Country. "It is important we have a voice in the cultural fire space because we are often not recognised as much as the men," Tammy says. "We burnt *baggup dja* - grass-tree Country - at Beremboke (meaning 'sister') and this has been my inspiration to creating one of the adornment pieces." The grass tree is Tammy's favourite tree and the oldest species on Country. It relies on fire to flower, and the flower stem also has a traditional use as a firestick. After the fire the next process is to work the soil with a digging stick to aerate the soil and plant seeds, "The digging sticks were quite magical and the women always carried them," Tammy says.

In the work *ngarrama and wiyn kalk wirrng* Tammy has used the lost-wax process to cast a digging stick out of sterling silver, concave on one end and pointy on the other. She also used the flower stem/fire stick, which was cut into three pieces, re-burnt and set with the resin from the grass tree.



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Ngarrama (to burn) 2022
sterling silver, grass tree
flower stem, grass tree resin,
charcoal, possum fur
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



“This represents three generations of women who welcomed visitors to the *wiyɲ kalk:kalk* workshop – my mum (Aunty Marlene) and daughter (Indigo) and myself.”

Tammy describes how the sacred fire brought the group of *bagurrk* (women) together to enrich each other and exchange cultural knowledge, such as the origin of the first Wadawurrung fire-maker, Karkorak, a woman also known as the *corella*, who brought the fire riding down the wind. “Today, we return the *wiyɲ murrup* (fire spirit) back to Country and manage the landscape as the ancestors once did. After the burn, the *bagurrk ngarrimili* (women danced) ceremony and played their clapsticks as the fire returned.” The flower stem/fire stick was part of this ceremony.

Prior to inspecting the burn site on the way home from sister Country, Tammy found a large echidna by the side of the road which had fallen subject to the passing of a car. “I collected the echidna with great respect and took this home to prepare for adornment-making using traditional methods that had been passed down to me,” she says. The quills have been used in Tammy’s work *mongarrk murrun*, *mongarrk perk:perk wirrng*, *darrabarruk mongarrk perk:perk* and *mongarrk perk:perk wirrng 2*.

“I gave new life to the echidna quills, cleansing and passing through smoke then transforming into linkages of chain held by hammered sterling silver.” She describes the use of the quills as life re-birthed – and relates back to cultural burn practices when using a slow, cool-burn which allows for animals and insects to get out of the way, providing safe passage. Combining these elements and showcasing their contemporary use acknowledges “my journey and is a reflection of the reality in truth”.

Left: *Darrabarruk mongarrk perk:perk* (new echidna quill adornment) by Tammy Gilson (Wadawurrung)
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Wijn kalk wirring
(firestick earrings) 2022
grass tree fire stick, sterling
silver, grass tree resin
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Mongarrk perk:perk wirng 1
(echidna quill earrings) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Mongarrk perk:perk wirng 2
(echidna quill earrings) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Darrabarruk mongarrk
perk:perk (new echidna
quill adornment) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TAMMY GILSON
(Wadawurrung)
Mongarrk murrin
(echidna alive) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Tammy Gilson, Blak Design
workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Elijah Money

'What brings us so close together is our community and family — and I wanted to hone in on the beauty of community and connection.'

Left: *Namesake*
by Elijah Money (Wiradjuri)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

One of the exciting parts of the Blak Design program for Elijah Money (Wiradjuri) was being encouraged by the teaching staff to refine and consolidate his ideas so that he could combine his enduring interests in the literary and visual arts. The result was that he honed in on making a single work that brings together many strands of meaning and identity.

A multi-disciplinary artist, Elijah has a particular focus on being nimble, working between writing, performance, visual media and installation, dealing with recurring themes such as colonialism, gender, sexuality and Stolen Generations. "I came into Blak Design wanting to do something fun and tongue-in-cheek," he says. "I was really excited and then as we pushed and pushed, it became something else - I was lucky to be quizzed and probed. It is still fun, but it speaks strongly to my poetry practice as well."

Writing a 25-word poem titled *Namesake* to be used in his Blak Design piece, Elijah selected words that refer to his various surnames - Wiradjuri (Williams), paternal (Makeham) and maternal (Money). Other words are deployed powerfully - "fragile", "rattled", "blood", "bones" and more. "I wanted the poem to be succinct," Elijah says. "There are a lot of coded meanings in it. I didn't want to delve into trauma and capitalise on pain and grief but to use the words as a way of recognising that things may have been a bit tough at times, but it is all a learning journey. So, it is all about growth, change, exploration and self-discovery, autonomy and reclamation."

Elijah has created a series of tiles onto which the words are emblazoned. The work began by creating the tiles in wax and carving the words into each one using a suitably sharp tool, and also using stamps. The wax was then sent off to be cast into recycled silver. These tiles have been oxidised so that the writing is highlighted. Each tile is joined with its neighbour by nine-carat gold wire. "There are about 150 soldered links or points, and no clasp," Elijah says. "This means it hangs straight down and can be worn around the shoulders like a scarf. If you dangle it, it is about 100



ELIJAH MONEY
(Wiradjuri)
Namesake 2022
sterling silver, 9ct gold
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



ELIJAH MONEY
(Wiradjuri)
Namesake (detail) 2022
sterling silver, 9ct gold
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

centimetres long and makes a beautiful chandelier noise. The gold and black look so deadly together, it is such a sexy look.”

The structure of the scarf-like necklace is important: as Elijah explains, he wanted to imply a sense of strength through the use of delicacy, and in this way the fine gold wire links contrast with the heavier oblong tiles. “Despite colonialism there is always something shiny if you refuse to be trampled on,” Elijah says. “What brings us so close together is our community and family – and I wanted to hone in on the beauty of community and connection. Our Blak matriarchs are the core of our community and it is an honour to be able to pay homage to my own Blak matriarchal lineage of my own grandmother, Dorothy Williams.”

While one of his jumping-off points at the start of the program was the idea of armour and how to protect oneself, that got stripped back to the idea of the scarf – he had thought he might make a series of them (that may come later) but in the end he felt that a clear focus on one object was important, especially as it is literally open-ended, unlike a necklace that has a clasp attaching one end to the other. “It was important that it didn’t have a clasp,” he says. “My voice doesn’t end here and neither does community’s voice: it is an ongoing aspect of life and I wanted there to be no literal closing. It is not a full circle but continuous.”

Texture was also an important consideration. While burrs have been filed back so they can’t injure, Elijah has retained a certain level of scratchiness on the surface where the poetry has been inscribed. “I don’t necessarily want the piece to be comfortable or easy to wear,” he says. “It lends itself to exploring why that would be. Our stories aren’t always easy to tell and while I don’t think my voice is the one that ‘needs’ to be heard, I am very comfortable with who I am, and I wanted it to be there.”



Elijah Money, Blak Design
workshop 2022

Photograph: Christian Capurro



Yasmin Silveira

'I've felt culturally safe enough in this space to produce a body of work that I'm honoured to share with people now.'

Left: *Unbroken Links*
by Yasmin Silveira (Palawa)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Embarking on the Blak Design program has been transformative for Yasmin Silveira (Palawa), expanding her cultural knowledge and influencing her practice as an artist. With much previous experience in the visual arts, jewellery-making was new territory for Yasmin, but she now feels her creative options and skills have moved to a new level. "A door has been opened that cannot be shut," she says. "I'm now empowered to share my culture through my works."

Yasmin's work brings together significant places, with her Palawa mob in lutruwita (Tasmania) and her living on Bunurong land in Naarm (Melbourne) being key considerations. This was a springboard for new exploration in the work she has produced, which incorporates shell-like forms into a necklace. "I'm tying two cultures together with these works," she says of the designs she has made. "I came to this by contemplating what connects and/or divides cultures and therefore my identity. Water (Bass Strait) connects and divides my present home and my ancestor's home. And my Dad's family came from India by sea. I wanted to talk about migration, both voluntary and involuntary. My Trawlwoolway ancestors were taken away from their home, their Country, their life source. Whereas my Indian side came to this country for a better life, and have thrived. I thought about how future generations will be proud to wear cultural objects, like a body adornment, without shame or uncertainty. And I thought about my Indian culture, another crucial part of my family heritage that I've always known and lived, and the significance of jewellery to Indian culture, too."

Yasmin's work is strongly influenced by shells found in Australia's south-eastern waters, in particular the beautifully iridescent maireener shells that are only found in lutruwita (Tasmania), though some wash up on this side of Bass Strait. Musselroe Bay is where Yasmin's ancestors lived: she did research on the molluscs of lutruwita (Tasmania) and discovered many shapes she wanted to incorporate.

"These maireener shells are a significant cultural resource for the Palawa people, used for trade, strung traditionally

on sinews and worn as body adornments, and given to visitors on Country in ceremony," Yasmin says. She has also used limpet shapes, which represent a common shell she finds on the Bunurong beaches where she lives.

The necklace *Unbroken Links* began life as sheets and sticks of metal, and she ended up using brass and sterling silver. She spent a lot of time saw-piercing, and eventually developed the shell-like forms which were cut out of silver sheets, with metal jump rings forming the chain. The shell shapes she has made from flattened metal have been worked into dome shapes, and with their wavy lines and asymmetrical designs, she describes them as being an abstract take on a shell shape. "There was lots of filing and sanding, which takes a lot of time, to remove burrs and produce a nice finish. Making these objects is completely different to the other mediums I've worked with. The level of detail is much greater, there is not as much room for error, and you want to be careful because you are working with some serious tools, and precious metals."

While working on her jewellery, Yasmin was using as a background resource the catalogue for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) touring exhibition *Kanalaritja: An Unbroken String*. "It tells the history of stringing shells and how the tradition is still sacred and strong among Tasmanian Aboriginal women today. It is something I long to be taught on Country by community and Elders I've yet to meet."

Yasmin says that even though she has studied fine arts, focusing on painting and printmaking to an advanced diploma level, it took her a long time to be comfortable enough to dig deeper and gain the confidence to find her own voice in her practice. "I had an amazing experience with like-minded artists and wonderful teachers, but couldn't connect culture and art comfortably," she says of those years. "Also, because I was still uncovering my family's Aboriginal history, I didn't have all the pieces yet."



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Maireener Hoops 2022
maireener shells and sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Now, having done Blak Design, she has felt some healing from cultural trauma that affected her in recent years. “I’ve felt culturally safe enough in this space to produce a body of work that I’m honoured to share with people now,” Yasmin says. “Uncle Kutcha Edwards made an album called *Circling Time* that reminds me that in an Aboriginal construct, time (and healing) is not linear, it’s circular; things come full circle and then around again.”

She says making her own jewellery has encouraged her in both her art practice and business endeavours. “They both rely on me keeping connected to mob,” she says. “Looking forward, I will definitely keep making with metal as I’m only just scratching the surface of what’s possible with this craft.”



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Coral Ring 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Coral Ring II 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Limpet Ring 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Maireener/Limpet Earrings 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



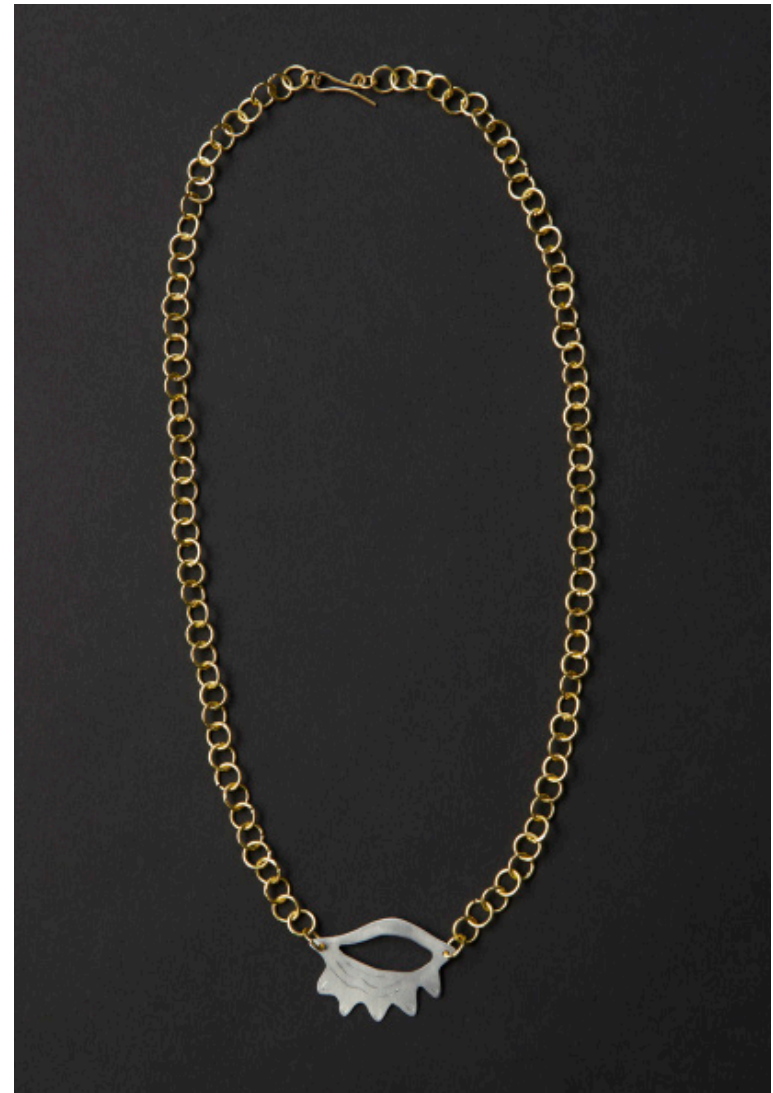
YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Maireener & Coral Necklace 2022
maireener shells, moss jasper beads,
waxed cord, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Unbroken Links 2022
brass, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Urchin Necklace 2022
brass
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



YASMIN SILVEIRA
(Palawa)
Triton Shell Necklace 2022
brass, silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Work in progress by Yasmin Silveira,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Sammy Trist

'This is a story of how delicate life is. We need to take care of ourselves, and each other — and if we take care of Country, Country will take care of us!'

Left: *Damselfly Dreaming*
by Sammy Trist (Taungurung)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

The damselfly has been a recurring presence in the life of Sammy Trist (Taungurung), through stories and personal experience, and it has long been a source of inspiration. Sammy was born and grew up on Wurundjeri Country, has lived on the Mornington Peninsula with her family for 18 years, and has been teaching her Indigenous culture in various educational settings for the past decade. She describes her cultural connection and educational opportunities as vital to her life, and the creation of art as a form of healing therapy.

Sammy has always made art, and an important learning was from her Aunty Irene in the making and use of emu feather flowers. Years later she started to extend these skills by using other native feathers and ran workshops on how to make feather flowers. More recently, art became a larger focus while working at an art gallery and learning necklace-making; so she was excited at learning new skills in the Blak Design program. "I thought it would enhance and extend what I have already been learning," she says. "But I wasn't sure what direction I would take or what skills I was going to learn."

The ancient greenling damselfly (*Hemiphysalis mirabilis*) appeared in her consciousness as she began making drawings. Everyone around her seemed greatly drawn to what she was doing so she began to extend the idea by turning the drawings into wire constructions. As she did so, she thought about the way the damselfly has manifested in her life and history.

"It has always been present in some way, and wherever I have gone they have appeared in my path," she says. "I have always loved the shape and colours and it sort of just happened, I started drawing them – it just came out of the memory of what one looked like and I kept creating them." Sammy's great-grandfather grew up on a property outside Yea, and her own father spent a lot of his childhood in Yea, visiting his grandparents.

"I saw one at the Yea Wetlands when I was younger: I didn't know what it was at the time, but I just thought it was really



Damselfly Dreaming by
Sammy Trist (Taungurung)
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Taungurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
emu feathers, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

beautiful, this bright green thing that was buzzing past me. There is a picture of one at the entrance of the wetlands. I am just really connected to it. And when I told my Dad that I was focusing on the ancient greenling damselfly in my jewellery, he commented: 'Oh yeah, I remember seeing them as a kid at the Yea Wetlands'."

Sammy began to research the topic more deeply and discovered that the ancient greenling damselfly is a species of the creature endemic to south-eastern Australia, but that its natural swamp habitat is now threatened. Badly endangered, the creature is known to exist not only around the Yea Wetlands but also at a site at Wilson's Promontory, on King Island and at Mt William in lutruwita (Tasmania). Dating back to the Jurassic period, it is only 24mm long and is a bright metallic green colour with some white markings.

"When I discovered how rare they are, almost extinct, I saw that this was a chance to educate on our environment and about how delicate the ecosystem is," Sammy says. In 1996 the Upper Goulburn Waterways Authority commenced a program of removing willows that were choking the Yea River before replacing them with local species, and in 2002 Murrindindi Shire Council established the Yea Wetlands Committee of Management (COM), to assist with the management of the wetlands. This committee secured a grant for further development of the wetlands and to regenerate the area on which the Yea Wetlands Discovery Centre sits today. The water is clean and the damselfly can only breed in clean water.

"Sadly, sightings have become rare, so make sure you keep an eye out next time you visit," Sammy says. "This is a story of how delicate life is. We need to take care of ourselves, and each other - and if we take care of Country, Country will take care of us!"

Sammy's research and drawings, followed by experiments using wire, has resulted in three necklaces with pendants,

earrings and some exciting trials with anodising titanium – an idea that came from Blanche Tilden for which Sammy is grateful. The process causes the surface to transform into a bright metallic green colour, almost exactly replicating the distinct tones of the damselfly. The pendants have clear wings and Sammy created their structure by entwining silver and titanium wire, winding them around each other to accentuate the colour. “I just kept going – you don’t know where something is going to end up, until you try different things. I love the process of working with wire and weaving it – I find it very calming, soothing and any anxiety you might have disappears.”



SAMMY TRIST
(Taungurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
emu feathers, sterling silver,
water reed
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Taugurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized titanium,
cumbunji
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Taugurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized titanium,
cumbunji, water reed
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Tangurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized titanium
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Tangurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, oxidized silver,
anodized titanium
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Taugurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
anodized titanium, sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



SAMMY TRIST
(Taugurung)
Damselfly Dreaming 2022
anodized titanium, sterling silver, silk
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



example
of biggest

Work in progress by Sammy Trist,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Dominic White

'I reject that notion of passivity of
Indigenous people: I want to thrive
with it and connect with ancestry.'

Left: *Steel kelp chain* Necklace
by Dominic White (Palawa)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Dominic White (Palawa, Trawoolaway) has a strongly developed interest in investigating the underlying meanings of the forms and materials we use in daily life. For Blak Design, he wanted to interrogate the concept of the collar and the many ways it manifests across cultures and time, as well as the significance of materials – from steel, and its crucial role in colonial, industrial history, to the usage of kelp by various clans, especially in lutruwita (Tasmania). With a wealth of experience in education and the arts, Dominic began his research by thinking about the differences and similarities between the collars we wear for adornment in the contemporary world, such as the Western-style business-collar-and-tie, and more oppressive forms such as the slave collar. He says there is an economic and philosophical element underpinning the various forms.

Dominic was struck by a concept he read about which suggested that to understand colonialism, it is necessary to understand steel – a material that has been crucial in the oppression of many peoples and cultures, from its production through to its application. “That concept is a strong one and it made me want to use a material like steel in a non-traditional way,” he says “Steel is a colonial material that requires the construction of a society that enables steel to be harnessed and has an exploitative relationship with the environment. That sort of [colonial] society has to have a particular sense of harvesting, of ownership, and that the end result is worth the damage that it will cause. There is a sense of conformity to a certain mindset or philosophical understanding about ownership, the delineation between what is ‘ours’ and what is somebody else’s.” Dominic says that he was also very interested in using a common material like steel in a way that makes it seem valuable and precious. “The idea of making something beautiful out of steel is confronting for many ways of thinking,” he says.

He notes that while the business collar-and-tie does not imply slavery in a literal sense, it does convey the idea of how we are controlled in a metaphoric way. “It symbolises how you live and die through the law, business and a lack of deep relationship,” he says. “Compromises are inherent in the business collar. It allows us to blow up caves.”

In his Blak Design works, Dominic has not only used steel, but also kelp – a material used by various Indigenous clans for many purposes. In lutruwita (Tasmania), Elders continue the thousands-of-years-old tradition of weaving water carriers and other practical objects from deep-sea kelp. Dominic loves the way kelp is so resilient and strong – when it dries, it is incredibly tough and beautiful. In a series of necklaces, he has used it in many forms, one work comprised of kelp discs that have slits punched through them to accommodate a linking cord. They are threaded into each other, and as the kelp dries it curls around itself to form a bead that has ‘kelpness’ but also conforms to the idea of beads.

“One of the things I think about is my ancestors on the Bass Strait islands – the women who negotiated a future for themselves,” Dominic says. “They were trying not to be a passive, dying race but to do the best for themselves. I reject that notion of passivity of Indigenous people: I want to thrive with it and connect with ancestry.” Thus, he uses his work to reclaim various materials and transform them into positive expressions of beauty.

Pushing his concept vigorously, Dominic has also incorporated sterling silver in a way that suggests the elegant and the refined. Using blacksmithing skills for some of the work he has made, Dominic was also interested in the idea of wearing objects for pleasurable display. “My sense of adornment is pretty limited, but I wanted to look at how jewellery might be taken into the context of contemporary art, to explore ideas.”



DOMINIC WHITE
(Palawa)
Round silver kelp overlap chain no 1 2022
sterling silver, grass tree resin, epoxy
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Overall, he says his work moves towards the idea of the necklace as something that connects different parts of cultural experience together, whether they be represented by steel, silver or kelp. If disconnected, those elements come apart.

“We bring ourselves to our art and one of the pleasures of wearable art is that it is made for display. We all carry concepts with us: sometimes they are embedded in objects and I like the idea of those objects being carried beyond me.”



DOMINIC WHITE
(Palawa)
Round kelp overlap chain no 1 2022
bull kelp, sterling silver, xanthoria resin
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



DOMINIC WHITE
(Palawa)
Silver kelp chain
Necklace 1 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



DOMINIC WHITE
(Palawa)
Kelp Ruff 2022
bull kelp, sterling silver, rubber
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



DOMINIC WHITE
(Palawa)
Steel kelp chain
Necklace 1 2022
mild steel
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Work in progress by Dominic White,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro



Tracy Wise

'As a spiritual person I observe everything through my travels, so I was very open to what was appearing before me.'

Left: *Jahgany* by Tracy Wise
(Barkindji Ngaympaa Maligundicij)
Photograph: Fred Kroh

Walking along Laverton Creek one day, Tracy Wise, a proud Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj woman, saw an eel, it was not in the creek, but high above her in the sky – what looked to be an image of an eel as the clouds. It was slowly floating there for a while, then it eventually melted away, and it put her in mind of using her creative talents to make something eel-related, such as an eel-trap. “It got me wondering about the traditional people who may have lived along the creek and caught eels for their meals,” Tracy says. “So, I went on a whole new journey of learning about the eel and the traditional people of this Country.”

Tracy’s explorations with creativity in recent years have been rich and rewarding, with a strong spiritual foundation underpinning her interests and connecting her to nature and Country, walking along the lands of the Boon Wurrung people (as Tracy later discovered), where she usually goes for the bird life. “I am a real cloud person,” says Tracy, “they mimic the ocean in the swirls are like rip curls, they are connected in that sense to the sea with its circular currents; and clouds, of course, produce water.”

Embarking on Blak Design, she pursued the eel theme with great curiosity, with her other desire being to make jewellery – something she’d always wanted to do. She went into it with great passion, continuing to see eels in clouds, as well as in road signage and on roads, and in stencilled artworks on the road along Flinders Lane to warn motorists of a hump and to slow down. “As a spiritual person I observe everything through my travels, so I was very open to what was appearing before me,” she says. “There was a lot of trial and error when I got started but the concept sat in the space of knowing and creating and using the skills being learnt. Then, my creative flow was unlocked thanks to the talented co Blak Designer Lorraine Brigdale, who shared her knowledge with me; there and then I started weaving an eel trap with natural grass material found on the campus and wire. I’m a natural wire weaver.” The act of weaving, she says, is a spiritual practice that brings deep connection.

Tracy’s work reflects the cycle of an eel’s life. This entails the creature moving between the sea, estuaries and freshwater. It starts at the egg stage, with spawning happening in the sea, then progressing to larvae, to “glass” eel (baby) and elver stages, to juvenile and adult eels making their habitat in freshwater. Freshwater eels can live for many years from 25 to 35 years with the female living longer than the male.

Tracy’s work includes small swivels, doubling as eggs, larvae-forms and more mature eel shapes. She has interwoven brass wire with natural grass, and the necklace incorporates an eel-trap shape that can be adjusted to trap the neighbouring eel inside. Many components were made with the lost-wax process, casting wax-modelled shapes into sterling silver.

Tracy’s research for the pieces was underpinned by reading stories about eel-related practices among various groups. The Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people, for example, have traditionally gathered along the Birrarung (Yarra River) to mark the luk (eel) season, while the Gunditjmara World Heritage Listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape includes the famous eel trap system at Tae Rak (Lake Condah) for trapping, storing and harvesting kooyang (eel), a practice that has been dated back thousands of years. And the Bundjalung people have a creation story of the giant eel Jahgany, who created three islands along the Clarence River.

A highlight for Tracy was when N’arweet Carolyn Briggs AM visited the Blak Design workshop and, looking at Tracy’s work, explained how the eel was part of her own Boon Wurrung culture; Tracy encouraged her to try on the eel jewellery, which she did. “I had been worried and concerned about being culturally inappropriate by using the eel and when I found there was a Dreamtime story, it made me feel better that I could do the eel trap; then Auntie Carolyn came along and it all made sense. It was meant to be.”



TRACY WISE
(Barkindji Ngayampaa Maligundidj)
Jahgany 2022
Australian native grass, brass,
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TRACY WISE
(Barkindji Ngayampaa Maligundidj)
Jahgany 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



TRACY WISE
(Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj)
Jahgany (#3 eel trinket) 2022
sterling silver
Collection of the artist
Photograph: Fred Kroh



Work in progress by Tracy Wise,
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

Artist Biographies

Thelma Austin



Thelma Austin is a Gunditjmara woman living and raising her family on Wurundjeri Country. Thelma was raised between Collingwood, Fitzroy, and Preston, with many trips to Framlingham to see her mob on the Mission. Her first artistic teachings were at the Nindeebya workshop with Aunty Jan Chassell in Aunty Jan's art and craft workshop under the Fitzroy Stars Gym at 99 George Street, Fitzroy. Thelma was always at the Nindeebya or the gym which was run by her Dad (Jock Austin) and Mum (Patricia Austin).

Thelma taught her children to have a love of art by passing down the knowledge she was handed from Aunty Jan and others at Nindeebya. Thelma has always loved painting, making jewellery, creating cultural art in her garden, building models with different materials, and collecting art.

The KHT Blak Design program has taken Thelma's love of art to another level. It was the first time Thelma studied art. The program helped Thelma connect to Aboriginal Fitzroy through her memories, stories, learning, and work.

Mandi Barton



Mandi was born in the western suburbs of Sydney and grew up in Footscray in the western suburbs of Naarm (Melbourne). She is a Yorta Yorta, Barapa Barapa, Wemba Wemba woman, a mother of three daughters, an Aboriginal community member, and a creative who still resides in the western suburbs of Naarm (Melbourne), Victoria.

Mandi's art and design aspires to strengthen identity and cultural knowledge, and provide opportunities for storytelling, connecting communities, and illustrating concepts and relationships.

She has been an artist since her uni days in the late 1990s, and attained her Cert III in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and Design at RMIT Bundoora, Victoria.

Mandi's purpose is to create culturally safe places, so her main aim is that her works connect with the audience. She paints murals on various surfaces, paints with acrylic on canvas and creates digital art. However, she also likes to experiment by utilising different materials such as emu feathers, possum skin, sand, twine and metal.

Lorraine Brigdale



A proud Yorta Yorta woman, Lorraine's creative journey and discovery of her Aboriginal family are undeniably linked. The years developing her art alongside a growing knowledge of her Aboriginal family have brought her a sense of meaning and belonging.

A current theme in Lorraine's practice is acknowledging the strength and resilience of Aboriginal people, Ancestors and Elders. Her Dhungaludja (strength) series of shield paintings (all painted during the COVID-19 pandemic era) are made with Lorraine's handmade watercolour paints. The series is a contemporary acknowledgement of Aboriginal shields created by Aboriginal people throughout time.

In a recent addition to painting and weaving, Lorraine has been practicing jewellery making as a member of Blak Design. Her resulting contemporary jewellery collection titled *Remember* is inspired by the craft of Aboriginal women, and depicts silver and wire dilly bags.

Nikki Browne



Nikki Browne is a Wurundjeri Country-based Bidjara artist. Her Mob is from Carnarvon Gorge in Queensland. Her work is inspired by their love of Country, environment, wildlife, and culture, and engages the viewer with spiritual stories that connect to environmental issues. Although sometimes political, Nikki's artwork conveys a great passion for the protection of Country and culture.

Nikki is driven to create work that makes a statement for change. Through her arts practice she is a voice for change by addressing issues impacting the environment and our vastly growing endangered species crisis.

Nikki takes inspiration from her Grandmother Heather Williams (née Prince), her Mother Jean Browne, and her son Ronan Howard. Throughout her life they were always out on Country talking about the beauty and importance of respecting and nurturing the Country around them, and being guided by our ancestors.

Working mainly in sculpture, Nikki also creates public art, and is now exploring jewellery through her journey with Blak Design.

Deanne Gilson



Dr Deanne Gilson is a Proud Wadawurrung woman from Ballarat in Victoria. Her award-winning multidisciplinary art practice has spanned thirty-nine years across many different mediums, including painting, clay (sculptural installation), fashion and fabric design, photography, drawing and, recently, jewellery after participating in the Blak Design program at the Koorie Heritage Trust in 2022.

Deanne celebrates her continued living culture through her art and design practice by reviving traditional marks used by Wadawurrung family, conducting contemporary ceremonial business and including oral stories like her Creation Story. In her artworks, Deanne depicts many indigenous plants, trees, birds, often painting endangered species to highlight the importance of taking care of the land and all living things. Working with the notion that time is traversed and all is connected through layers of Dja (Country), from the cosmos, to Sky Country and Under Country. Deanne also explores the issues faced by Aboriginal women stemming from the white male and female gaze.

Deeper connections to the spirit of her ancestors are felt by paying homage to their knowledge, particularly that of her Nan Rita Dalton and her Mum Marlene Gilson, and highlighting Dja through the use of natural ochres sourced by herself on Wadawurrung Dja.

Tammy Gilson



Tammy Gilson is a heart-warming Wadawurrung woman, and award-winning master weaver.

Tammy holds a Graduate Diploma in Land and Sea Country Management, and is particularly embedded in returning cultural fire to Country, all of which informs her multidisciplinary art practice to create Wadawurrung artefacts of today.

Tammy lives on Wadawurrung Country at Kareet Bareet, overlooking Kangaroo Creek. Her work is inspired by cultural landscapes and utilising sustainable resources that have purpose and intent to acknowledge and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Country we live on.

Her work includes relying on ancient knowledge systems, incorporating fire and water, and designing eel baskets and woven flower arrangements.

Her career highlights are participating in the Blak Design program, performing ceremony for Prince Edward, and winning the 2019 RMIT Emerging Artist Award in the Koorie Art Show at the Koorie Heritage Trust.

The knowledge Tammy passed onto her children, Indigo and Rhyder, is a legacy to guide their future.

Elijah Money



Elijah Money (he/him) is a queer Wiradjuri brotherboy who was raised on Kulin Nations where he continues to reside. His practice includes visual art, written work, installations, performance art, and more. These are done with strong recurring themes of colonialism, assimilation, skin colour, gender, mental illness, sexuality, climate change, Stolen Generations, and identity, as well as critiquing the Eurocentric Western idealised structure that each person in so called “Australia” is forced to maintain.

Notable highlights include co-curating *A Sight for Sore Eyes* 2020 (Midsumma X Black Dot); video artwork for *ALIWA!*, 2021 at Counihan Gallery; participant for Writing Residency and host of Deadly Poets Yarn, 2020 (MPavilion); digital artwork and written work, 2020 (Archer); painted murals 2019, (Melbourne University); visual artist and participant for *Poetry and the Political* (NextWave 2020); installation artist in 2019 for *WestRave* (CoolRoom, Due West); installation artist for *Tesselate*, 2019 & 2020; and, multimedia solo show *gurudhaany birranydyang*, 2022 (Sawtooth, Launceston).

Yasmin Silveira



Yasmin is a Palawa and mixed-race artist working and living on Bunurong Country in Naarm (Melbourne). She is a descendant of the Trawlwoolway people, from Tebrakunna Country in north east lutruwita, (Tasmania).

Yasmin is experienced in painting, printmaking and digital design, and is now venturing into the three-dimensional world of metalwork and body adornments.

Her subject matter ebbs and flows between people and place, often reflecting on the relationship between the two.

Yasmin has an Advanced Diploma in Visual Arts (Fine Arts) and operates Black Wattle Arts Collective, an online platform for sharing and selling ethical arts and crafts. Yasmin currently works for a local council across visual arts, and diversity and inclusion spaces.

Sammy Trist



Sammy Trist is a Taungurung woman of the Kulin Nation. She was born and grew up on Wurundjeri Country. Sammy has lived on the Mornington Peninsula with her husband and two children for 18 years. She spent 30 years working in Early Childhood Education. For the past ten years, she has enjoyed teaching her Indigenous culture in various educational settings.

Creating art is Sammy's therapy. It allows her to express her connection and knowledge of her Indigenous culture through Kulin art.

Dominic White



Dominic is a Palawa man and a descendant of the Trawoolaway through his birth mother's family. Dominic was adopted as a child, and has been following a process of reclamation of his heritage.

Dominic works as a multidisciplinary artist, exploring connection, observation, responsibility, and obligation in different mediums. His work tries to understand the cultural and historical human activities and interactions with place and materials. Often the material cultural context informs the work.

Trained as a printmaker, Dominic's work spans contemporary printmaking, sculpture, photography, and now jewellery.

Dominic is based in Bunnerong/Boonwurrung Country, Mornington Peninsula, a father of two, and teaches art part-time to support his art making.

Tracy Wise



Award-winning artist Tracy Wise is a proud Barkindji Ngiyampaa Maligundidj woman based in Mildura on Millewa Mallee Country. Tracy is a spiritual artist, natural fibre weaver and jewellery maker with a passion for contemporary design. She started her art practice in 2015 alongside her mum Mary Wise, and began weaving in 2020. Tracy acknowledges her past grandmothers and ancestors by continuing their ingenuity when creating and making contemporary designs.

Blak Design Tutor Biographies

Laura Deakin



Laura Deakin is a Melbourne-born contemporary jeweller who lived and worked in Munich, Germany for 13 years and recently moved back to St. Andrews, Australia. Laura designs and makes jewellery using a combination of traditional, contemporary and experimental materials and techniques. Laura's jewellery is distributed to and exhibited in galleries worldwide.

Lindy McSwan



Lindy McSwan's creative practice is founded in gold and silversmithing. The qualities and potential of material and experience of place are the foundation of Lindy's artwork. Her palette of materials includes steel, enamel, rusted found objects, paper, handmade pigments, and fabric. Lindy's work has been exhibited, collected, and awarded nationally and internationally.

Blanche Tilden



Blanche Tilden has forged an international reputation as a designer and artist. She holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts, a Graduate Diploma, and is currently completing a PhD at the School of Art and Design, Australian National University, Canberra.

Blanche's work has been acquired by major Australian and renowned international museum collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Corning Museum of Glass, New York, and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. In May 2021, *Blanche Tilden—Ripple Effect: a 25 Year Survey* curated by Jason Smith, opened at Geelong Gallery, and is now touring to five Australian venues.

As a designer and maker of contemporary jewellery, Blanche has developed a unique visual and material vocabulary to discuss ideas of value that reference mechanical technology, modernity, industrial materials, and the built environment. Ever curious, creative collaboration is an important aspect of Blanche's practice; it generates exciting opportunities to exchange ideas, build understanding and create lasting connections.

Blanche Tilden, Laura Deakin
and Lindy McSwan reflect on
the extraordinary achievements
realised during the 2022
Blak Design program.

Blak Design tutors in conversation

Blanche Tilden is an established artist, craftsperson and designer, specialising in the fields of contemporary jewellery and studio glass.

Laura Deakin is a contemporary jeweller whose artistic practice focuses on political issues in combination with classic and modern techniques.

Lindy McSwan is known primarily for her silversmithing practice working in the form of the vessel using a broad palette of materials.

Andrew Stephens is an independent visual arts writer, curator and artist.

AS: Since Blak Design's first iteration in 2021, how has the studio experience evolved?

LD: Blanche and I hadn't worked together before Blak Design in 2021. We knew of each other professionally but had only met once, and neither of us had worked with our technician Lindy. When we started working out the program, we talked about how to break the course down into jewellery techniques that we know and understand. This was a really fun way to start thinking about how the program could be structured.

BT: These techniques included lost wax casting, sawing shapes from sheet metal, and making chain with wire. One of the things we did at the outset was develop a kit of tools and materials for each student. The course was delivered through face-to-face teaching at the Gold and Silversmithing Workshop, RMIT University in February and July, plus one-on-one video tutorials in between, and seminars at the Koorie Heritage Trust. With the toolkit, participants could keep working independently outside of the weeks spent in the workshop at RMIT. Some of the participants added the tools and materials to their established studios, and others with no previous jewellery making experience were able use their Blak Jewellery toolkit to set up and work at home at their kitchen table.

LD: Once we were working together at RMIT, we pretty much straight away got into working with wax - each participant created a small object that was then cast in silver. This experience of seeing materials transform - where metal can change from a solid to a liquid with the application of heat, and that something made in wax could be then cast in metal was hands on, immediate and inspiring. Many of the participants continued exploring this technique and have included cast silver elements in their work for the exhibition.

BT: In the first week of the face-to-face teaching, each participant was introduced to the fundamentals of different ways of working with metal. As well as casting, we demonstrated how to use unfamiliar metalworking tools,



Elijah Money, Thelma Austin and Yasmin Silveira, Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

‘That change to an exhibition outcome shifted the focus from making a commercial product to participants telling their own story. Jewellery is a great means of communicating personal stories.’

BLANCHE TILDEN

demonstrating basic hand skills such as using a piercing saw and pliers, filing and drilling.

LD: Initially, in 2021, the idea was that a few of the participants might go on afterwards to create a production piece that could be commercially available. Over the course of the first cohort, though, that goal shifted quite considerably: it was the decision of the group that they would prefer to have an exhibition.

BT: Only three people would have had that commercial opportunity. It came from the participants that they didn't want to be in competition with each other – so there was already a strong collegial and supportive atmosphere among the group. To me, that seemed an important thing to foster.

LD: And it was also a great decision because while Blanche and I both work in the commercial area, our expertise is preparing a body of work for an exhibition space.

BT: That change to an exhibition outcome shifted the focus from making a commercial product to participants telling their own story. Jewellery is a great means of communicating personal stories. Exploring a concept and conveying a story in a piece of jewellery is a complex, layered and nuanced process, where technical and conceptual concerns need to be balanced and work together.

AS: How was this teased out?

LMcS: I think for the designers, expectations and ideas about what they wanted to make was probably quite different to actually going through the process. The eleven participants had 160 hours of face-to-face learning with the three of us – so much was introduced to them and it was up to each artist what they wanted to take in terms of skills and techniques to express their ideas. So, the focus initially was on refining those ideas.

LD: Before we went into the studio, we had one-on-one tutorials with each student and talked to them about what they would like to make. We were furiously making notes, thinking of examples from the field of contemporary jewellery



Above and overleaf:
Blak Design workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

that we could show each participant, to help broaden their understanding of what jewellery can be. This approach created a really safe space – we built a rapport with each participant, letting them know we were there to support them, and hear what they had to say, while having these one-to-one discussions.

BT: In the group, there is a mixture of those who have a strong cultural identity and others who are strengthening that through this project, being introduced and supported through KHT to find out more about their ancestry or culture. We encouraged each participant to be confident – to find their own voice. As a starting point, we asked them to bring whatever was of interest to the class: materials, photographs, stories, a journal. They had agency and ownership from the start. We would say: we are teaching you how to solve jewellery making problems. We can possibly solve the problem for you, but you need to do it.

AS: I imagine there was a lot of two-way learning at work during the whole process, too?

BT: For me, two-way learning began by asking each participant to share aspects of their history and interests, that they could explore through jewellery. Listening to the generous sharing of personal stories was incredibly moving and affecting. Traditional skills such as weaving were explored in metal, and collected materials were used in innovative and surprising ways. I learnt about cultural practices and objects, the totemic significance of plants and animals and the deep connection each participant has to their family and Country.

LD: Being artists, we are always looking outwards. Observation, annotation and commentary are the common tools of my practice. While creating the program and teaching it, I learned a great deal about the Victorian First Nations participants and their experiences as artists, makers and teachers. Techniques that I know and understand in a metal were sometimes quickly translated to organic materials, while stories and history found their way into the shared safe

space of the classroom, onto paper and into adornment. It was confronting to hear difficult stories shared through generations and inspiring to see these harnessed to drive an idea forward.

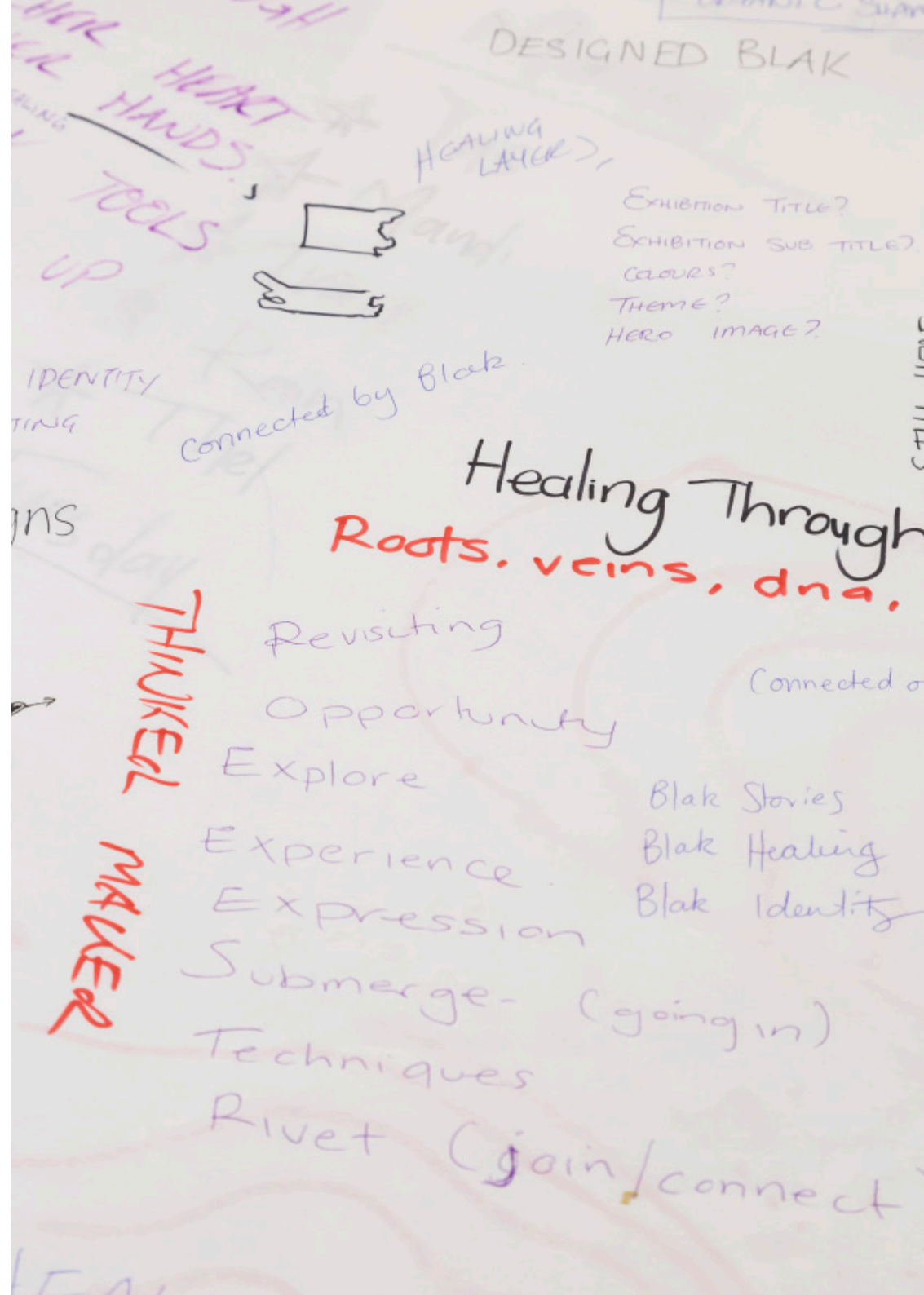
LMcS: Several of the Blak Designers brought culturally important materials to the workshop. For example, possum skins, a fire stick, echidna quills, kelp, feathers, grasses, leaves and gum nuts. These materials were unfamiliar to Blanche, Laura and me. So, there were considerations and challenges for us in how best to work with these materials. Based on individual Blak Designers' ideas for how such materials might be used to make jewellery, we needed to resolve what techniques and tools were best suited. I would say this was one part of the learning experience for us.

AS: So, there was a lot of experimenting all round?

LMcS: Yes, the designers learned about the importance of testing things and trying it out – so many things are unpredictable and there are many variables. We also emphasised the importance of documenting the process in case you want to repeat it down the track – there are so many decisions and steps when designing and making something.

BT: We noticed that when the participants each told their story, their jewellery really came alive – these conversations were an important part of their shared creative process while working with us. People felt empowered by this – they were speaking through these objects in a unique way. While finding a way to tell that story in quite technically demanding materials, sensitivity, respect and understanding were very important. Participants were guided with a gentle hand; we didn't push anyone to a point where they weren't comfortable, but rather encouraged them to find their path to tell their unique story.

LD: Jewellery often requires a good measure of engineering. Earrings can't be too heavy, a necklace should sit well, and rings need to be comfortable. With this in mind we needed to 'solve' the questions of wearability within each new set of



materials for each participant. It was a lot of fun and the one-to-one discussions that Blanche and I held with each participant at several stages along the way were full of discussions around the best approach, combined with a lot of trial and error.

LMcS: It was about offering options and letting each artist make the decisions. Between us there is 70-plus years of experience, Laura has studied in Germany, Blanche has recently finished her PhD and I am still at RMIT as a postgrad – so we just want to offer as much as we could and share skills. I hope some of these skills might be passed on to future generations to be able to tell their stories.

BT: Because the outcome of Blak Jewellery is a group exhibition, another skill taught in the course was working to deadlines and the step-by-step process of getting work ready for an exhibition. The process began with a table full of ideas and parts and drawings and models but to make a piece of jewellery that can be part of an exhibition, you need to resolve each aspect of a piece to have the finished work. Committing to something to the last five percent is the hardest part. You need to resolve it: How will the piece be worn? Will it have a catch? Is it comfortable? You need to keep going and answer these questions when making jewellery. Group presentations to the KHT curatorial team helped build the momentum and confidence for completing the work each participant planned to exhibit.

LMcS: All the participants were very committed to the opportunity they had, and they recognised and appreciated that. You could see what they were learning, collectively and individually. They were all there all the time, and always on time.

BT: At the end of the first two weeks of working together at RMIT, Laura and I gave each participant an envelope and in it was the “secret to success”: A copy of the Michael Leunig cartoon, “Keep Going”. A mentor gave me this cartoon early in my career, and it is best advice I’ve ever received. When making, you encounter problems, and you need to

‘Several of the Blak Designers brought culturally important materials to the workshop. These materials were unfamiliar to Blanche, Laura and me. So, there were considerations and challenges for us in how best to work with these materials.’

LINDY MCSWAN



find solutions. And each Blak Jeweller has found amazing solutions, creating beautifully resolved work. As a maker, I learnt so much from each participant, and my own practice has been enriched by this experience.

LD: Absolutely. Lifelong friendships and bonds have been created, and stunning work has been made – it really has been an incredible experience.

Yasmin Silveira, Blak Design
workshop 2022
Photograph: Christian Capurro

List of Works

All measurements are in millimetres, height before width before depth

THELMA AUSTIN Gunditjmara

Blak Queens – The journey of an Aboriginal woman connecting with the journey of a gumtree

Bubba crown – Germination and growth 2022
sterling silver
66 x 145 x 145 mm

Aunty crown – Flowering 2022
sterling silver, copper
145 x 195 x 200 mm

Matriarch crown – Fertilisation and seed release 2022
sterling silver, copper, brass
95 x 180 x 200 mm

Collection of the artist

MANDI BARTON Yorta Yorta, Barappa Barappa, Wemba Wemba

Danin (Float) Necklace 1 2022
possum skin, aluminium
415 x 145 x 35 mm

Danin (Float) Necklace 2 2022
possum skin, aluminium
455 x 100 x 25 mm

Danin (Float) Necklace 3 2022
possum skin, aluminium
460 x 125 x 25 mm

Collection of the artist

LORRAINE BRIGDALE Yorta Yorta

Remember 2022
sterling silver
360 x 40 x 7 mm

Remember 2022
sterling silver
380 x 40 x 7 mm

Remember 2022
sterling silver
370 x 40 x 7 mm

Remember 2022
wire, leather, silver
400 x 38 x 6 mm

Remember 2022
wire, leather, silver
450 x 45 x 9 mm

Remember 2022
wire, leather, silver
450 x 45 x 9 mm

Collection of the artist

NIKKI BROWNE Bidjara

STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sewing machine cogs, gum leaves, resin, copper, silver
1030 x 670 x 10 mm

STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sea urchin spines, sewing machine cogs, copper
320 x 370 x 10 mm

STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
gum leaves, gum nuts, resin, copper, silver
2 parts: 210 x 65 x 15 mm; 200 x 70 x 12 mm

STOP KILLING COUNTRY 2022
sea urchin spines, copper, silver
2 parts: 130 x 28 x 12 mm; 130 x 25 x 12 mm

Collection of the artist

DEANNE GILSON Wadawurrung

Past: Mok burreyin Wadawurrung Ba-gurrk Murnong, Goim Ngurgang Toor Murrup (Proud Wadawurrung Women Digging for Murnong alongside Female Kangaroo Spirit, All Standing Proud). Pre-colonisation 2022
female kangaroo tail, sterling silver, silk thread, velvet, yellow ochre (sourced only on Wadawurrung Country), acrylic paint
1120 x 240 x 60 mm

Mok burreyin Wadawurrung Mundi-gurrk, Goim Ngurgang Toor Murrup, Nan's spirit watching over me as a Butterfly and gifting me Chocolate Lilies. Post Colonisation to Present Tense 2022
female kangaroo tail, sterling silver, cotton, organza, silk thread, velvet, lace
1036 x 466 x 35 mm

Mok burreyin Wadawurrung Ba-gurrk (Wadawurrung Women Standing Proud) Future Tense, Our Children Being Embraced 2022
female kangaroo tails, sterling silver, cotton, silk thread, pink and white ceremonial ochre, acrylic paint
785 x 290 x 45 mm

Collection of the artist

TAMMY GILSON Wadawurrung

Darrabarruk mongarrk perk:perk (new echidna quill adornment) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
675 x 57 x 15 mm

Mongarrk murrung (echidna alive) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
510 x 22 x 22 mm

Mongarrk perk:perk wirrng 1 (echidna quill earrings) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
2 parts: 135 x 22 x 7 mm; 132 x 23 x 6 mm

Mongarrk perk:perk wirrng 2 (echidna quill earrings) 2022
echidna quills, sterling silver
2 parts: 88 x 25 x 6 mm; 85 x 24 x 8 mm

Ngarrama (to burn) 2022
sterling silver, grass tree flower stem, grass tree resin, charcoal, possum fur
760 x 43 x 13 mm

Wiyng kalk wirrng (firestick earrings) 2022
grass tree fire stick, sterling silver, grass tree resin
2 parts: 90 x 45 x 10 mm; 90 x 45 x 10 mm

Collection of the artist

ELIJAH MONEY Wiradjuri

Namesake 2022
sterling silver, 9ct gold
920 x 20 x 6 mm

Collection of the artist

YASMIN SILVEIRA
Palawa

Coral Ring 2022
sterling silver
25 x 24 x 7 mm

Coral Ring II 2022
sterling silver
28 x 28 x 9 mm

Limpet Ring 2022
sterling silver
28 x 28 x 5 mm

*Maireener & Coral
Necklace 2022*
maireener shells, moss
jasper beads, waxed
cord, sterling silver
265 x 135 x 7 mm

*Maireener/Limpet
Earrings 2022*
sterling silver
2 parts: 50 x 30 x 12 mm
each

Maireener Hoops 2022
maireener shells,
sterling silver
2 parts: 45 x 40 x 5 mm
each

*Triton Shell Necklace
2022*
brass, silver
260 x 37 x 7 mm

Unbroken Links 2022
brass, silver
370 x 260 x 5 mm

Urchin Necklace 2022
brass
360 x 50 x 7 mm

Collection of the artist

SAMMY TRIST
Taungurung

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, oxidized
silver, anodized titanium
470 x 260 x 20 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
anodized titanium,
sterling silver
470 x 70 x 10 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
anodized titanium,
sterling silver, silk
440 x 75 x 10 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
emu feathers, sterling silver
2 parts: 280 x 85 x 42 mm;
250 x 130 x 17 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
emu feathers, sterling silver,
water reed
2 parts: 265 x 40 x 19 mm;
250 x 50 x 10 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized
titanium, cumbunji,
water reed
2 parts: 100 x 21 x 6 mm;
98 x 22 x 6 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized
titanium, cumbunji
2 parts: 78 x 23 x 8 mm;
78 x 22 x 11 mm

Damselfly Dreaming 2022
sterling silver, anodized
titanium
2 parts: 63 x 45 x 11 mm;
54 x 42 x 13 mm

Collection of the artist

DOMINIC WHITE
Palawa

Kelp Ruff 2022
bull kelp, sterling
silver, rubber
455 x 535 x 55 mm

*Round kelp overlap
chain 1 2022*
bull kelp, sterling silver,
xanthoria resin
ed. 1/40
215 x 215 x 12 mm

*Round silver kelp overlap
chain no 1 2022*
sterling silver, grass tree
resin, epoxy
ed. 1/40
260 x 260 x 12 mm

*Silver kelp chain
Necklace 1 2022*
sterling silver
260 x 200 x 8 mm

*Steel kelp chain
Necklace 1 2022*
mild steel
460 x 300 x 40 mm

Collection of the artist

TRACY WISE
Barkindji Ngayampaa
Maligundidj

Jahgany 2022
Australian native grass,
brass, sterling silver
265 x 160 x 32 mm

Jahgany 2022
sterling silver
75 x 75 x 10 mm

*Jahgany
(#3 eel trinket) 2022*
sterling silver
80 x 10 x 10 mm

Collection of the artist

Red ochre cliffs, Bunurong Country
Photograph: Yasmin Silveira



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