

**“Relating to Country”:**

**Listening, Reflecting and Relating**

**To**

**Contemporary**

**Aboriginal Stories**

**from**

**Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Fine Art**

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and exhibition is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or institution.

(Signed ) \_\_\_\_\_

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The perspective of the writer  
is as an  
English speaking immigrant (*1982*) coming to terms with a sense of place<sup>1</sup>.

**Note:** All photographs, unless stated otherwise, were taken by Kay Adlem and are a silent component to this topic.

Works of art shown as ‘figure page’ throughout this document are by Kay Adlem. These works are seen after the text acknowledging them and show the research progress towards the exhibition “Relating to Country”.

Note on spelling of place name: Wonnarua; preferred in Maitland area.  
Wanaruah; preferred in Singleton area.  
Won:arua; used in title and in main text as first recorded written version.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethics clearance H-606-0703 – July 2003

Ethics clearance is a University policy which is a National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. Commonwealth of Australia - June 1999. A letter of support from, ATSIC Commissioner for the NSW North East Zone, Rick Griffiths was included in the application for ethics approval for research involving the Aboriginal community. Participants have signed agreements that their stories can be included in the exegesis (*2004*). Protocol has been followed with individuals where and when needed and often in the form of an oral agreement. This has been stated throughout the exegesis and individuals have been given copies of how the information is used. Where approval was not possible because individuals moved away from the area, then people remain anonymous, unless cited from another source.

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## **Abstract**

The exegesis **“Relating to Country: Listening, Reflecting and Relating to Contemporary Aboriginal stories from Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley”**, is intended to fully acknowledge a unique Aboriginal culture of place.

My objective is to listen to Aboriginal peoples’ views on what it means to live in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia. I choose paper bark and bullock hides as metaphoric materials through which to extend participants’ stories. Participants’ stories comes from a background of European colonization in which Australia is generally considered to be a young culture yet in truth Aboriginal culture is one of the World’s oldest.

The research is significant in acknowledging the presence of ‘other’ stories and social values rather than an acceptance of the imposed colonial model. My interpretation explores a sense of belonging to country by ‘listening’ ‘reflecting’ and ‘relating’ through a fine art discipline to a contemporary Aboriginal culture which respects country. My studio work follows the patterns of ‘active listening’ by testing and investigating the research.

The exhibition **“Relating to Country”** (*figure page 1*) consists of two installations:

Installation I **“Guardians”**, a contemporary cultural  
celebration of place

and

Installation II **“In the Belly of the Bull”**, a memorial work  
incorporating accepted visual slices of history.

## Exhibition “Relating to Country” 2006



Installation I “Guardians”



Installation II “In the Belly of the Bull”

# **Introduction**

## Introduction

As a newcomer into Aboriginal communities, after being asked; ‘where are you from?’ I was inevitably asked, ‘why are you here?’ Written criticism over the years has also been concerned with the ‘motives’ of outsiders<sup>1</sup>. Many Aboriginal authors have legitimate concerns about the interpretation of Indigenous history and the delivery of essential services such as health, education, employment and housing. My justification to become involved has been through a personal search for meaning in my surroundings.

Arriving in Australia (1982) and taking up residence at Bolwarra (*high place*) near Maitland I found the local council’s admiration for a hundred and fifty year old building peculiar, especially as they did not appear to value Aboriginal carved sites which were far older.

After studying Australian history, mainly through Australian artists (1987-1991)<sup>2</sup>, I enrolled at Wollotuka (1992)<sup>3</sup> to study Aboriginal history, thinking I was catching-up with everyone else.

It soon became apparent this was not the case and my concerns began to focus on why outsiders were not taking an interest in a history of place. If one does not know a history, how will one develop an understanding and empathy towards a peoples’ plight? As artists how may we approach social issues with no respect and understanding of place and people?

My main objective is to listen to Indigenous peoples’ views on what it means to live in Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley. This is a question about ‘social, political and environmental identity’ which should be relevant to us all. Nine Aboriginal

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘motives’ of others is mainly through ‘trade’, ‘the alter ego’ and ‘cultural cliché’. Edward Said. “*Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*”. Pantheon, 1978: revised edition Penguin. 1995

<sup>2</sup> Awarded Bachelor of Arts Visual Arts 19 May 1990 – Awarded Graduate Diploma in Art 2 May 1992

<sup>3</sup> Awarded Diploma in Aboriginal Studies 27 April 1995 - Awarded Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies 4 April 2002

participants' and their stories become the foundation of the research in acknowledging cultural 'meaning' in an area of place, through a 'listening philosophy'<sup>4</sup>. Ethnographic<sup>5</sup> and action<sup>6</sup> research methodologies have been used in an attempt to 'see through the eyes of another culture' by working with participants in a collaborative approach.

These methodologies form the foundation of this exegesis as the agreement with participants is not to analyze the interviews but to accept the information as their stories. I have access by 'listening' but not by deconstructing the data. This approach is practiced by Feminist and Indigenous methodologies in educational research<sup>7</sup>. I am interested in finding meaning about the place in which I live. This is often referred to as looking for 'a sense of place'.

At the heart of the project is the paper bark material which is the connection between participants' stories and a culture of place. During the process of collecting the paper bark I have explored a different association to a unique cultural landscape. A direct analysis of participants' stories was avoided as I observe the stories by using the paper bark material in order to develop a deeper understanding. In this study I operate as co-participant and as the project advances, 'action' research methodology gives way to 'dialogical' art practice and methodology.

I hope to unlock events attached to participants' stories through the strategy of listening, as participants' stories are an exercise in 'listening'. How do we listen? Active listening, passive listening, creative listening, practical listening, electronic listening are all types of communication.

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<sup>4</sup> Gemma Corradi Fiumara. *"The Other Side of Language: A philosophy of listening"*. Routledge. 1990

<sup>5</sup> J.P. Spradley. *"The Ethnographic Interview"*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, USA. 1979 - pp.3-16

<sup>6</sup> E. Stringer. *"Action Research – A Handbook for Practitioners"*. Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, California. 1996

<sup>7</sup> P.H. Collins. *"Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment"*. Routledge, New York. 1991

P. Lather. *"Critical Frames in Educational Research: Feminist and Post-structural Perspectives"*. Theory into practice. 1992 - Vol. 31 - No.2 – pp. 87-99

W. Brady. *"Indigenous Australian Education and Globalisation"*. *International Review of Education*. 1997 - Vol.43 - pp.413-422.



Gemma Fiumara criticizes Europeans for an inability to listen<sup>8</sup>, which she sees as stemming from the scientific, analytical way we approach the logic of a 'truth'. Australia is dominated by a European culture that is imported and which is hierarchical and based in a measured logic in which aims and objectives are fragmented.

During my education in Aboriginal studies I found the contrast of cultures extreme in character, as traditional Aboriginal culture values an inclusive, balanced environment which is circular and takes into account the wellbeing of other-animals, all plants and eco-systems. It is a system that does not divide one thing from another.

In speaking about division the Aboriginal Consultative Group<sup>9</sup> (ACG) in 1975 recognized a disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student learning. A solution to lessen the gap was suggested in terms of the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in Australian education as the ACG believed this would greatly increase Aboriginal student interest in learning and also increase all students' knowledge of deep cultural meaning to place and a healthy respect for natural environments.

Richard Trudgen<sup>10</sup> has been an enormous influence on my understanding of communicational differences and the listening process. Trudgen was asked by Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra OAM to head the writing of "Why Warriors lie down and die". Richard Trudgen<sup>11</sup> had spent eleven years living in Aboriginal communities prior to this request and he spoke an Aboriginal language. As an outsider he was able to identify a way to address the imbalance between cultures and suggests: "The dominant culture must acknowledge the large part it plays ..." in a "...war of

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<sup>8</sup> Gemma Corradi Fiumara. *"The Other Side of Language: A philosophy of listening"*. Routledge. 1990

<sup>9</sup> Aboriginal Consultative Group. *"Education for Aborigines" Report to the School Commission*. June 1975 - p.3

<sup>10</sup> R.I. Trudgen. *"Why Warriors lie down and die": Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact*. \*Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

words”<sup>12</sup>. He saw communicational misunderstandings and explains them by using metaphorical story-telling from his early community development training days<sup>13</sup>.

The story of the ‘river babies’<sup>14</sup> explains the treating of the symptom rather than the cause. The babies float down the river and people collect them and look after them. Then someone said these ‘river babies’ are orphans and we need to build an orphanage. They build the orphanage and spend all their time running the orphanage often neglecting their own families. In all this, no one questioned: ‘what was going on up river?’

“The dominant culture has been very good at creating ... programs to care for the ‘river babies’ on behalf of the people, but almost no resources have been spent on discovering and dealing with the primary cause – why the ‘river babies’ are coming down the river in the first place.”<sup>15</sup>

The use of story-telling in Aboriginal communities involves a philosophy of intense ‘listening’ as the idea of stories is to create imagined images of the world generated by the story. The physical making of a work of art from a story or experience I believe can be a grounding catalyst to listening more intently as well.

Speakers on Brain Based Learning, Casey and Plank (2003) verified drawings as a powerful tool but during the debate<sup>16</sup> a question was put by the interviewer: “Would including drawing, visuals, pictures, mind maps be dumbing-down-the-content?”<sup>17</sup>. J. Rowell (2003) points out that the aim is not, ‘what do you know?’ but, ‘what can

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<sup>12</sup> ibid p.80

<sup>13</sup> ibid p.214


<sup>14</sup> ibid pp.214-217

<sup>15</sup> ibid p.216

<sup>16</sup> J. Joseph. “*A Brain Compatible Learning Experience*”. Brain Based Learning with Education Consultant John Joseph who speaks with: ABC Radio National - interviewed by Natasha Mitchell: Program title: “*All in the Mind*”. 19 November 2003:2.30pm-3.30pm. [abc.net.au/rn](http://abc.net.au/rn). John Joseph is from ‘Focus Learning’ South Australia. 2003

<sup>17</sup> J. Casey & D. Plank. “*A Brain Compatible Learning Experience*”. Brain Based Learning at Mathew Flinders Anglican College on the Sunshine Coast, Joanne Casey and Debbie Plank who speak with: ABC Radio National– interviewed by Natasha Mitchell: Program title: “*All in the Mind*”. [abc.net.au/rn](http://abc.net.au/rn) 19 November 2003 - time 2.30pm - 3.30pm

you make, design or create?’<sup>18</sup> This ‘creative time’ allows a student to absorb their studies. Rowell explains his theory by using the words ‘sensing and experiencing’, ‘reflecting and integrating’, and ‘acting out for ourselves’.

The loops  of ‘observing, reflecting and action’ or ‘look, think, act’ from Lewin, Kemmis (1981), McNiff (1988) and Stringer (1996)<sup>19</sup>, are a form of general research patterns. It is a continued repeating of the loop effect that drives the research or ‘knowledge getting’.

In looking for a link to connect my research in Fine Art to participants’ stories and Indigenous researchers I found a connection between Feminist<sup>20</sup> and Indigenous<sup>21</sup> research educationalists as both are insisting their histories be recognized from their point of view<sup>22</sup>. This includes the right not to analyze stories collected from others as it is seen as a form of contaminating valuable material. This is a relatively new way of using data. In general, data is collected and deconstructed through the process of analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Rowell. “*A Brain Compatible Learning Experience*”. ABC Radio National– Professor James Rowell from CaseWestern University – Cleveland US, is interviewed by Natasha Mitchell: Program title: “*All in the Mind*”. [abc.net.au/rn](http://abc.net.au/rn). 19 November 2003:2.30pm-3.30pm.

Professor Rowell has a book published called “*The Art of Changing the Brain*”. Stylist publishing. 2003

<sup>19</sup> R. Kemmis & R. McTaggart. “*The Action Research Planner*”. Deakin University. 1981

Jean McNiff. “*Action Research*”: *Principles and Practice*. MacMillan Education: Foreword by Jack Whitehead, Lecturer in Education at University of Bath. 1988

E. Stringer. “*Action Research*”. *A Handbook for Practitioners*. Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, California. 1996 - pp.15-38

<sup>20</sup> P.H. Collins. “*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*”. Routledge, New York. 1991

P. Lather. “*Critical Frames in Educational Research: Feminist and Post-structural Perspectives*”. *Theory into Practice*. 1992 - Vol. 31 - No.2 – pp. 87-99

<sup>21</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith.. “*Decolonizing Methodologies*”: *Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zen Books Ltd. London & New York: University of Otago Press, Dunedin. NZ. 1999

W. Brady. “*Beam Me Up Scotty!*” *Communicating across World Views on Knowledge Principles and procedures for the conduct of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research, paper presented to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Conference*. Hervey Bay. 6-11 December 1992

W. Brady. “*Indigenous Australian Education and Globalisation*”. *International Review of Education*. 1997 - Vol.43 - pp.413-422.

<sup>22</sup> P.H. Collin. “*Black Feminist Thought*”: *Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, New York. 1991

P. Lather. “*Critical Frames in Educational Research: Feminist and Post-structural Perspectives*”. *Theory into Practice*. 1992 - Vol. 31:No.2 - pp 87-99

For example, recently an analysis of Emily Kame Kngwarreye's work hailed her the ultimate 'Abstract' painter<sup>23</sup> by Margo Neale, an Indigenous writer<sup>24</sup> and others. This Western analysis offers a very limited view of Emily's work. Emily makes the statement that she paints the "whole lot..."<sup>25</sup> and to fully appreciate and understand her work it must be accepted on Emily's terms. I understand the strategic intention of Margo Neale and others as they bring Emily's work to an accepted recognition, through an economic strategy, within Western understanding at this time. The works of Emily remain poised, held for the future where their meaning will one day be fully recognized, by the general public, in Aboriginal cultural terms.

I acknowledge a connection with Feminist<sup>26</sup> research theories but find it would not be appropriate to directly align visual artistic expressions from Feminist Art Theories, or the early Feminist Movement, with Indigenous research methodologies.

Rigney<sup>27</sup> (1997) has closely aligned Indigenous research with Feminist research theories<sup>28</sup> in education. Rigney points out that a similar experience is found in, the "emancipation and liberation strategies"<sup>29</sup> of Feminists and Indigenous researchers, who adapt, borrow and modify existing research, not necessarily from a comparable source. It is important to travel your own path<sup>30</sup>, albeit through a maze of accepted but unrelated paths.

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<sup>23</sup> M. Neale. "Emily Kame Kngwarreye": *Alhalkere - Paintings from Utopia*. Queensland Art Gallery - Macmillan Publishers Pty.Ltd. 1998

<sup>24</sup> Margo Neale is Co-ordinating Curator for Queensland Art Gallery 1998. Other contributors are Roger Benjamin – Anne Marie Brody – Christopher Hodges – Philip Morrissey – Judith Ryan and Greg Weight.

<sup>25</sup> M. Neale. "Emily Kame Kngwarreye": *Alhalkere - Paintings from Utopia*. Queensland Art Gallery - Macmillan Publishers Pty.Ltd. 1998 – quote from beginning of book, no page number.

<sup>26</sup> This should not be confused with the Feminist Movement because papers such as; Larissa Behrendt. "Aboriginal Women and the White Lies of the Feminist Movement". Australian Feminist Law Journal. Aug. 1993 - Vol.1 pp.27-44: state the Feminist Movement did not help Aboriginal women.

<sup>27</sup> Lester Irabinna Rigney. "Internationalisation Of An Indigenous Anti-Colonial Cultural Critique Of Research Methodologies". *A Guide To Indigenous Research Methodology And Its Principles*. HERDSA Annual International Conference. The Flinders University of South Australia. 8-11 July 1997

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* – pp.9,10,11

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* – p.11

<sup>30</sup> Patti Lather. "Feminist and Post-structural Perspective": *Theory into Practice*. Volume XXXI, Number 2, Spring 1992 - pp.87-99

Patti Lather<sup>31</sup> (2004) understands that unrelated paths are complicated and she speaks about “getting lost in terms of what it means to not be in control”<sup>32</sup>. She refers to the “awkward position that was not so much about losing oneself in knowledge as about knowledge that loses itself in the necessary blind spots of understanding”<sup>33</sup>.

These blind spots become apparent in ‘the philosophy of listening’ by Gemma C. Fiumara<sup>34</sup> where she suggests that Western consciousness is removed from listening through the process of ‘logic’s hell’<sup>35</sup> and fragmentation<sup>36</sup> of aims. A story is told using the gathering of grapes as a metaphor for the listening process. There is no point to growing and picking the grapes if there is no place to store the grapes.

Growing (*the grapes*) is metaphorically ‘participants’ experience’.

Gathering together (*the grapes*) is the ‘listening to the experience’.

And storing (*the grapes*) is the ‘speaking of the story’ by participants.

It is important to listen first through body language, smell, day-dreams, associations, helplessness, passion, friendships and images. Fiumara found few comparisons about listening in Western culture<sup>37</sup> as objective knowledge is defensive and protects itself against any form of involvement. A relevant contemporary example would be climate change. We hear the words ‘acid-rain’ and ‘global-warming’ but we appear slow to listen. She identifies Western culture as obsessed by the question itself and points out that an inability to listen renders the question useless<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Patti Lather. “*Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Towards a Double(d) Science*”. *Shifting Imaginaries in Curriculum Research: Feminist Poststructural Modes Toward Enhancing Visibility and Credibility*. Paper presented to AERA, San Diego. Symposium: April 12-16, 2004 - pp.1-6

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* – p.1

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Gemma Corradi Fiumara. “*The Other Side of Language: A philosophy of listening*”. Routledge. 1990

<sup>35</sup> *ibid* – p.7

<sup>36</sup> *ibid* - pp.47,113

<sup>37</sup> *ibid* – p.6

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* – p.31

Listening is fundamentally an open pursuit<sup>39</sup> as it remains subject to change. Fiumara speaks about the manner of listening which “involves an unavoidable process of mourning”<sup>40</sup> and renunciation<sup>41</sup> of fragmentation. She sees listening as a positive experience in human relationships in terms of change, not loss.

This methodology or philosophy is similar to Trudgen’s theory in recognizing differences in listening strategies between Aboriginal and Western cultures. He found that Western culture has a problem with ‘silence’ and does not allow for a person’s ‘response-processing’ time<sup>42</sup>. This ‘response-processing’ time stems from an ‘active listening response’ by listening to every aspect of what is being said<sup>43</sup>.

This was explained some years ago by an Aboriginal man who was telling us of his invited visit to the local council offices. They had asked his opinion on a new development they were planning. He then played out for us what happened at that meeting. He said that he sat and listened to all their plans and when it was his turn to speak he picked up his didgeridoo and played the sounds missing in their development. He played for a long time not wanting to leave any sound out as he thought of the birds, the animals and the wind in the trees and how important they are. He then explained that the people at the meeting all listened, just like you are now, they were impressed and enjoyed the experience.

There he left it in the experience of the listener, as he did with us. Of course we wanted to know what happened. He casually said they built their big shopping centre and housing estate but this is what is missing ... and he continued to play the haunting sounds of the bush.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid* – p.28

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* – p.152

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* – p.123

<sup>42</sup> R.I. Trudgen. “*Why Warriors lie down and die*”: *Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact.* \*Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000 – p.80

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* – p.78

Trudgen would have experienced being taught by Aboriginal people and found the teaching methods to be generous in ‘time’ and ‘space’ allowing a person’s ‘response-processing time’. Trudgen used an example of Asian cultures as also having a longer ‘response-processing time’ after listening<sup>44</sup>. He observed that Asian culture considered it ‘uncivil’ to interrupt a person while in mid-sentence as “their attention is directed towards hearing the person correctly in the first place, not working out how to respond before a person is heard properly.”<sup>45</sup> Trudgen goes on to say: “Most dominant culture people, on the other hand, want to jump in and correct a speaker before they have finished.”<sup>46</sup>

Indigenous writers, Linda Smith<sup>47</sup>, Lester Rigney<sup>48</sup>, Wendy Brady<sup>49</sup> and others have experienced coming to terms with what must seem a confusing system which does not relate to a culture of country. In many respects this has caused painful compromises to be made. Smith and Rigney acknowledge and question the need to align Indigenous educational theories in research with Feminist theories which adapt, borrow, modify and respect the control of others by listening carefully.

I believe Indigenous philosophy is grounded in a unique base derived from knowledge of the universe and not from our fragmentized view of the world and I look forward to a time when this is fully recognized.

It is acknowledged that Feminist and Indigenous research theories come from the roots of qualitative inquiry. Plate 1 below shows an illustration by Harry F. Wolcott<sup>50</sup> to qualitative inquiry.

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<sup>44</sup> ibid – p.79

<sup>45</sup> ibid

<sup>46</sup> ibid

<sup>47</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *“Decolonizing Methodologies”: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zen Books Ltd. London & New York: University of Otago Press, Dunedin, NZ. 1999

<sup>48</sup> L.I. Rigney. *“Internationalisation Of An Indigenous Anti-Colonial Cultural Critique Of Research Methodologies”. A Guide To Indigenous Research Methodology And Its Principles*. HERDSA Annual International Conference The Flinders University of South Australia. 8-11 July 1997

<sup>49</sup> W. Brady. *“Indigenous Australian Education and Globalisation”*. *International Review of Education*. 1997 - Vol.43 - pp.413-422

<sup>50</sup> Harry F. Wolcott. *“Posturing in Qualitative Inquiry”*. 1992 - Ch.1– figure 1 - p.23

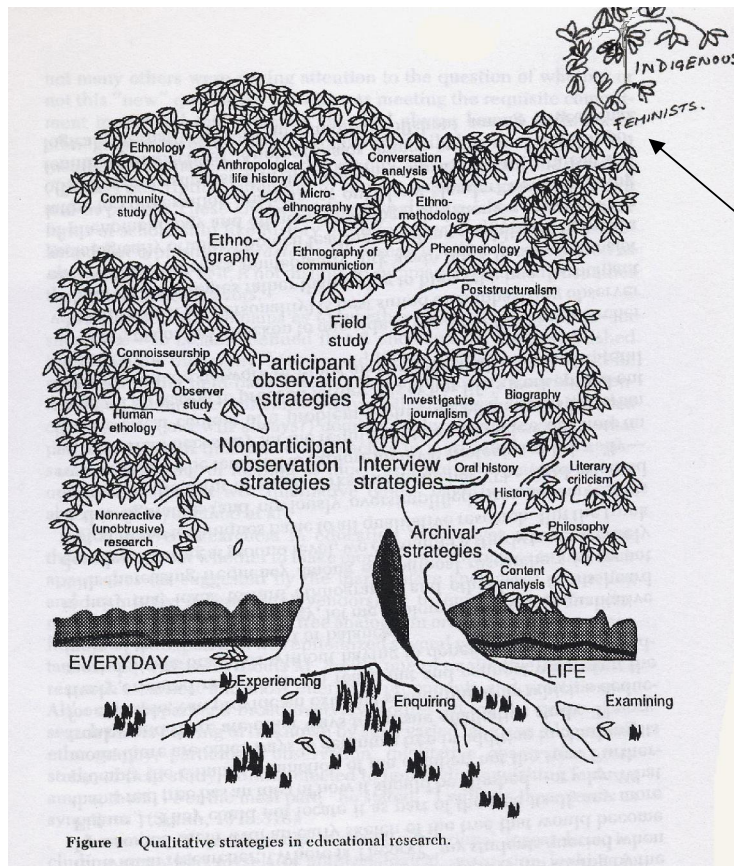


Figure 1 Qualitative strategies in educational research.

Plate 1

My project could be aligned with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>51</sup> and his theory of “dialogism”. Dialogic communication does not correct or silence a previous work or philosophy as its aim is to build on the multiple possibilities of society and in turn change those environments through participation and reciprocity. This is practiced in Aboriginal communities and participants feel comfortable in the dialogical process as I take the role of creative listener. Dialogical art practice is basically a collaborative public art practice in which political and social activity are employed to bring about change.

<sup>51</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin ‘Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’ - Russian philosopher 1897-1975 <http://en.wikipedia.org>  
1/08/2007 – pp.1-11



**Chapter one**, ‘Won:arua in the Hunter Valley’ explores ‘instruments of change’. In this chapter I set the scene for participants’ stories which follow in chapter two. It was necessary to step away from the general view of the Hunter Valley and remain open to the different boundaries of the region<sup>52</sup> which connect to participants’ stories. Through this approach I become aware of the strong historical aspects of Aboriginal cultural politics through Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council.

I also investigated ‘local public works of art’ as a way of understanding the psyche of the area from both Western and Aboriginal responses to the river which runs through Won:arua Country. I have produced two studio works which relate to the river from my investigations.

**Chapter two** relates to country through ‘Participants’ Stories’. In this section my research methodology was influenced by the work of Noel Olive<sup>53</sup> (1997). He brought together local peoples’ stories of the Pilbara in Northern Western Australia. I found this to be a good introduction to the Pilbara. It became even more meaningful when talking to people in the tourist centre and art galleries because they knew those people who had appeared in the book as either friends or family. By reading the book I was able to share the experience of the people living in that area which turned my visit to the Pilbara into a pilgrimage rather than that of a tourist.

I decided to adopt this way of working in Won:arua. The rationale for choosing stories from Aboriginal participants who are professionally involved in social, political and cultural education was determined by the high value placed on creativity by those organizations and communities. As stated, I do not analyze these stories as they are the foundation for me to ‘listen’ and inquire as to ‘what political

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<sup>52</sup> AIATSIS. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies. *“Aboriginal Australia”*. 1994  
 Central Mapping Authority NSW. *Touring Maps of the Hunter Region and South-East Australia*. 1981  
 Clouten. *“Hunter Valley Bushwalk: Inspiring and challenging walks around the perimeter of the Valley”*. 1981  
 Tindale, N.B. *“Aboriginal Tribes of Australia”*. n.d. - pp.127-131 & pp.191-202  
 K. Yeend. (Ed.). *“A Sense of Place in Maitland”*. 2003  
 A.W. Reed. *“Place Names of Australia”*. 1973

<sup>53</sup> Noel Olive. *“Karijini Mirlimirli” Aboriginal histories from the Pilbara*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press. 1997

and social events led to the development of these stories?’ This extends my ‘listening’ ability but it proved to be an incredibly difficult and complicated task, as it crossed the boundaries of the interview process.

To achieve this I made the stories physically into a work of art by printing them onto white cloth via transfers produced through computer technology: This technique assures their survival in the project. I did not attack the stories with an analysis but allowed the stillness of making the ‘paper bark bowls’ to develop as a form of cultural connecting to the landscape.

It was important to hear the character and voice of the participants and to place these stories into the main body of the project. This demonstrated the significance of the listening process as the stories re-entered the exegesis as a ‘communal work of art’.

## Participants' stories

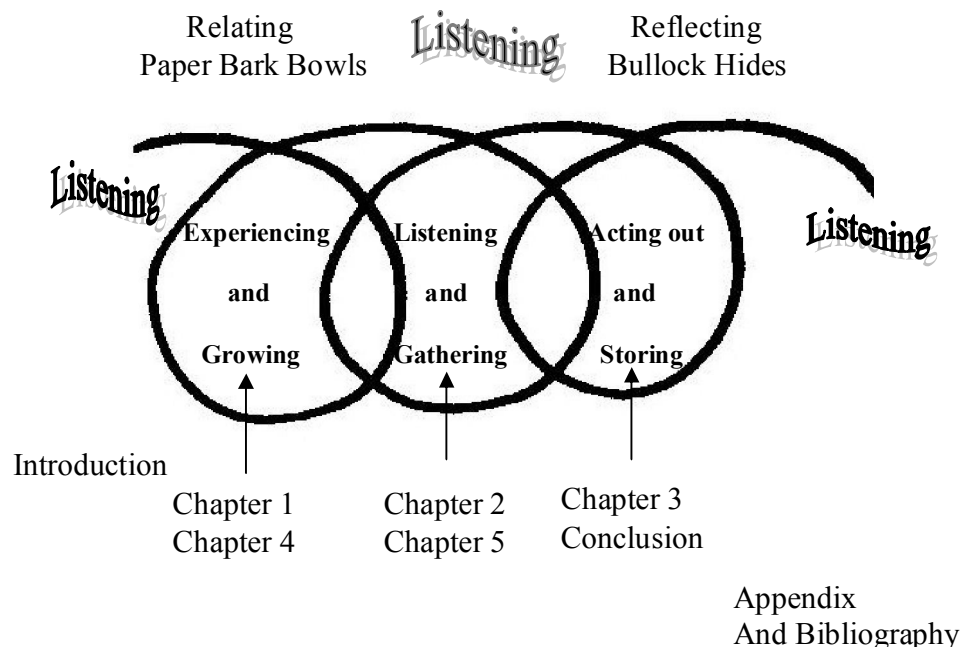


Plate 2 Research patterns

**Chapter three**, ‘Wrap Us in Paper Bark’, acknowledges the use of paper bark in relating to country as a philosophical act which places value in retaining the balance of the natural environment. This is achieved through a philosophy of listening which has been perfected by Aboriginal communities through cultural respect and deep knowledge of surroundings<sup>54</sup>.

There is no doubt we have a badly damaged planet<sup>55</sup> as the evidence is overwhelming. A study by Jeremy Rifkin<sup>56</sup> on the trend of an economic based society reveals frightening results for a planet that is “up for sale”<sup>57</sup>.

When I made my first paper bark bowl under the guidance of an Aboriginal woman (1998) my way of thinking changed, not only about ‘a sense of place’ but also in relation to general social values.

In my experience, having now been taught by a number of Aboriginal teachers in a variety of subjects I find value in respecting country. The paper bark becomes my ‘assimilation’ into a sense of place. The act of making the bowl takes me through the history of ‘paper bark’ and its associations. The bowl represents the ‘land’ itself and the ‘power’ of the material triggers an emotional reaction.

In Aboriginal traditional times paper bark wrapped the newly born, it was used throughout life and accompanied those departing back to the spirit pool<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> R.I. Trudgen. *“Why Warriors lie down and die”: Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact.* \*Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000


<sup>55</sup> David Suzuki. *“A David Suzuki Collection: A Lifetime of Ideas”.* Allen & Unwin. 2003

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy Rifkin is Head of the Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington, D.C.

From David Suzuki & Holly Dressell. *“Naked Ape to Superspecies”: A personal perspective on humanity and the global eco-crisis.* Allen & Unwin. 1999 – pp. 127-134

<sup>57</sup> David Suzuki & Holly Dressell. *“Naked Ape to Superspecies”: A personal perspective on humanity and the global eco-crisis. Chapter 5 “Your Money or Your Life Forms”.* Allen & Unwin. 1999 – p.127

<sup>58</sup> This saying about paper bark varies as some just say it is used throughout life while others use the emphasis at birth and departure. This information comes from many sources including, Wollotuka, the Wollombi Birthing Cave and by a variety of Aboriginal tour guides in Queensland’s Top End, the Northern Territory and TI.

**Chapter four**, ‘Listening and Relating’, provides an overview of contemporary theories which relate to ‘listening’. The repeating of the loops  is used to consolidate or challenge my earlier analysis of local public works of art.

The exhibition “Resettlement” proved to be a good collaborative and positive event which gave a serious, thoughtful view of Won:arua country.

This chapter sets the scene, not unlike chapter one did for participants’ stories, but this time it set the scene for historical events that have shaped participants’ stories. As these events are national and international I look at contemporary Aboriginal artists, Lin Onus, Mini Heath, Richard Bell, Fiona Foley and Trevor Nickols. These artists are concerned with landscape and social issues and have influenced my thinking particularly in relation to the organization of my “In the Belly of the Bull” series.

**Chapter five** is a ‘Reflective Journey into the Belly of the Bull’ which consolidates my series of works called ‘In the Belly of the Bull’. This series reveals the European social aspects of history which have affected participants’ stories. I followed Trudgen’s methodology where he realized that participants become the teachers<sup>59</sup> and this opened deeper concerns which were self-reflective.

Appropriation is a form of tradition. Ruth and Vincent Megaw in their book “Celtic Art”<sup>60</sup> speak about, traditional societies encouraging continuity with the past and building on what has gone before.

My use of appropriation takes the form of carefully chosen historical images which relate to events that have had consequences which are connected to participants’ stories. The use of bullock hides to carry the colonization story proved to be an

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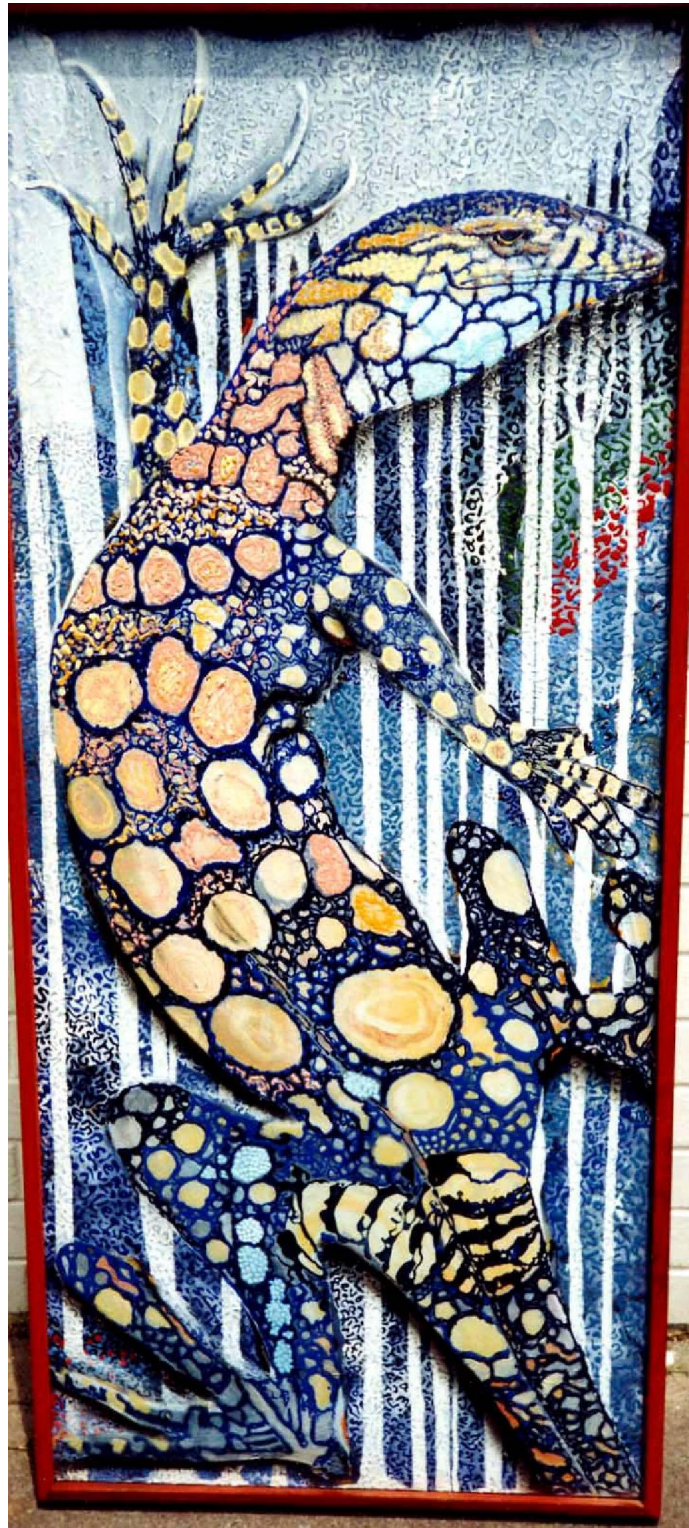
<sup>59</sup> R.I. Trudgen. “*Why Warriors lie down and die*”: Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact. \*Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000 – p.240

<sup>60</sup> Ruth and Vincent Megaw. “*Celtic Art*”: From its beginnings to the Book of Kells. 1989 and 2001 - p.16

emotional task, not unlike the making of the paper bark bowls. Both are telling the stories of colonization in different ways.

I see value in unlocking historical events which relate to Participants' stories and I admire the tenacity in which participants have encompassed these events. This section of the research mourns past struggles and recognizes the experience of participants in recovering and keeping strong a culture of place.

Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley is mountain, black soil and flood plain country and I choose the Goanna as a symbolic guardian to this area. The painting "Goanna", seen on figure page 2, also becomes a guardian to participants' stories and the paper bark bowls. Goannas are known for their tenacity and strength; they do not give up easily. They are able to blend into the background with tremendous patience, but will fearlessly confront danger head on when necessary.



Guardian "GOANNA" 2001  
Acrylic painting on canvas approximately 1500h x 800w  
Words in background describing the nature of goanna  
This work now belongs to Trevor Patten - verbal permission to use  
2003.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Won:arua in the Hunter Valley**

## Won:arua in the Hunter Valley

### Setting the Scene...

“Tell me the story of the river and the valley ... a story that brings us together.. with every living being in the valley..... under the arc of the great blue sky ... and the starry heavens ....”

Thomas Berry, *The Dreams of the Earth*<sup>1</sup>.

In 1997, as part of Maitland City Council’s Cultural Advisory Group, we were trying to place the name of Won:arua into the Council’s Cultural Plan 1998. Cultural Plans were part of an initiative “Cultural Accord 1996-2000”. According to M. Goss<sup>2</sup> this came about via the United Nations wish to address Human Rights Issues. There was also a push for Regional Councils to be introduced and the possibility of opening the debate on an Australian Republic. Goss explained that there was discussion as to whether Councils should become involved in Cultural matters. Our argument to place Won:arua and Aboriginal Cultural History into the City’s Cultural Plan was; if it was not included then it could not be addressed in key issues of action under ‘Cultural Events’, ‘Continuous Cultural Planning’, ‘Cultural Infrastructure’ and ‘Cultural Mapping’. We failed in our attempts<sup>3</sup>. I believe this was because authorities saw Aboriginal culture only as a primitive past.

In this chapter I develop a new map by placing both Aboriginal and Western boundary areas together<sup>4</sup> (*Map 3 – p.20*). I visit exceptionally fine Aboriginal stencil and carved sites. My visits to these sites were made with Aboriginal people and they know how the information is being used and oral permission has been given. I have used other local public sculptural works to compare meaning. The creative and written components were developed simultaneously to establish an understanding through listening in a creative manner.

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<sup>1</sup> David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell. *“The Sacred Balance”: Rediscovering our place in nature*. Allen & Unwin. 1997 – p.207

<sup>2</sup> M. Goss. Telephone interview. Subject: “*Cultural Award 1996*” policies connected to ‘culture’ in local government areas. 02 923024743 - Ministers Office 02 923021111- Premier Department. Ministry of Arts. 27 September 2000

<sup>3</sup> Maitland Mercury “*Cultural Panel in spotlight*”. By Garry Blair – Council Reporter. 13 Dec 2000 – p.3

Maitland Mercury “*Future of city’s cultural panel to be discussed*”. 26 February 2001 – p.5

<sup>4</sup> It is understood that the concept of ‘boundary’ is connected to modern politics



Won:arua is an Aboriginal language country which lies in the Hunter Region of New South Wales in Australia. Refer Map 1<sup>5</sup>.



MAP 1



MAP 2 - Hunter Valley

The Hunter Valley Regional boundary<sup>6</sup> is seen as the white area of Map 2. The Hunter Natural Water Catchment area is shown by the bold black line<sup>7</sup>. Won:arua is seen within the yellow ochre line<sup>8</sup> ("*Middle River of the Valley*"). By using the original name of Won:arua (*people of the mountains and the plains*) I hope to establish a meaningful association to place. As there are no public signs on our

<sup>5</sup> Central Mapping Authority NSW– *Touring Maps of the Hunter Region and South-East Australia*. 1981

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Keith Clouten. "*Hunter Valley Bushwalk: Inspiring and challenging walks around the perimeter of the Valley with detailed maps*". Published by Child & Henry – Australia. 1981- p.2

<sup>8</sup> AIATSIS. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies. "*Aboriginal Australia*". Map compiled by David Horton. Aboriginal Studies Press. 1994

highways which recognize Won:arua country, my study covers a number of different boundaries of the valley area. Histories written about the Hunter Valley give little indication of a continued Aboriginal existence<sup>9</sup>. Aboriginal occupation is mentioned as if in passing<sup>10</sup>; a glance which briefly acknowledges a very distant past<sup>11</sup>.

In contrast, the literature “Koori: A Will to Win” by Aboriginal author James Miller indicates that “...two main cultural groups lived in the Valley countries - the Wonnarua who inhabited most of the valley and the Worimi who inhabited the coastal lands around Port Stephens.”<sup>12</sup>

Maps by ‘Tindale’ of the 1940’s and 1970’s show Aboriginal language areas but for this study of Won:arua the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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- <sup>9</sup> J. Armstrong. “*Shaping the Hunter*” *The Engineering Heritage*. Produced by Newcastle Division Institution of Engineers Australia. 1983
- D. Baglin & B. Mullins. “*Australia’s Hunter River Valley*”: *Unique and diversified region of history, agriculture and industrial wealth, unified by a mighty river*. n.d.
- C. Boer. “*Scots Presbyterian Church Maitland*”: *The Establishment of the Presbyterian Congregation at Maitland (including Largs and Paterson) 1831-1984*. 2nd Edition. 1984 - pp.6-7
- H.J.C. Green. “*The Pioneer Settlement of the Hunter River Valley 1821-1831*”. Submitted for the degree of Master of Arts. The University of Newcastle. 1975
- P.Hunt. “*Morpeth Pioneer Town and Prominent River Port 1820-1870*”. Local History Thesis. An external student of Newcastle College of advanced Education in 1985. This Thesis won the 1985 Newcastle City Council Local History Award to Newcastle of Advanced Education students. 1985
- C. Hurst. “*Maitland City Council - Culture Plan - 1998*”. A directive of the State Government’s “Cultural Accord 1996”. Launched in Local Government Week 23-30 August, 1998 @ 10.50 am : Announcement in Maitland Mercury “*Planning for local culture*”. 24 August 1998 – p.9
- Maitland City Council. “*A History of Maitland*”. Published by The Council of the City of Maitland. 1983
- C.J. Mitchell. “*Hunter River*”. Robert Dawson. 1984 - Ch.2.- pp.18-19
- I. Stewart. “*Taming The River and The Sea: The Port Of Newcastle*”. 1983 - p.11
- A. Tinni. “*A Tale of the Trails*”: *Main Road Development: Land Access To The Valley*. 1983 - p.57
- J. White. “*Tocal*”: *The Changing Moods of a Rural Estate*. The Seven Press. 1986 - pp.13-32
- <sup>10</sup> Keith Clouten. “*Hunter Valley Bushwalk: Inspiring and challenging walks around the perimeter of the Valley*” with detailed maps. Published by Child & Henry – Australia. 1981
- <sup>11</sup> Dulcie Hartley. “*Men of Their Time*”: *Pioneers of the Hunter River*. Published by Aquila Agribusiness Pty Ltd. North Arm Cove NSW. 1995
- The State of New South Wales NSW Agriculture. “*Aboriginal land use at Tocal*”: the Wonnarua story by Jennifer Laffan and Cameron Archer. All about Tocal 8. NSW Agriculture Tocal. CB Alexander Agricultural College Tocal Paterson NSW 2421 Telephone 02 49398888 Web: [www.tocal.com](http://www.tocal.com) Launched at Tocal on Friday 5 November 2004 at 11am by Commissioner Rick Griffiths – Welcome to Country by Marj Anderson Elder of Wonnarua Nation.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Miller. “*Koori : A Will To Win*”: *The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia*. Angus and Robertson Publishers. With assistance of the Literature Board and the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australian Council and the NSW Premier’s Department, Cultural Grants Division. 1985 - p.12

Islander Studies (*AIATSIS*) boundary map<sup>13</sup> is used as a base for Map.3 because the Hunter River is shown. The map below (*Map 3*<sup>14</sup>) shows Aboriginal language areas surrounding Won:arua (yellow ochre) within both the natural water catchments (shown as brown and green broken line) and the regional boundary (shown as red line) of the Hunter Valley.



**MAP 3**

**Key:-**

Black line and different colour areas define Aboriginal language countries, extended by broken colour out-side of Valley boundary.

<sup>13</sup> AIATSIS. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies. "Aboriginal Australia". Map compiled by David Horton. Aboriginal Studies Press. 1994

<sup>14</sup> ibid

Keith Clouten. "Hunter Valley Bushwalk: Inspiring and challenging walks around the perimeter of the Valley" with detailed maps. Published by Child & Henry – Australia. 1981 – p.2  
Central Mapping Authority NSW– Touring Maps of the Hunter Region and South-East Australia. 1981



Aboriginal carved and stencil sites are connected to universal elements. They also retain a practical function as boundary and directional map sites. Baiame<sup>15</sup> (Plate 3), looks out over the Valley and sees the area as plentiful.



Plate 3 “Baiame”

R.H. Mathews<sup>16</sup> explains in his publication of 1893 that Baiame’s cave is said to be on Crown land<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> National Parks & Wildlife Service. *“Aboriginal Sites in NSW”*. Minister for Planning and Environment - Paul Landa. Published by National Parks & Wildlife Service. Printed by Graphics United Pty Ltd. 7 June 1979

<sup>16</sup> R.H. Mathews. *“Rock Paintings by the Aborigines in Caves on Bulgar Creek, Near Singleton”*. Read before the Royal Society of N.S. Wales. October 4, 1893. W-Sept.6, 1893

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* - p.357

Also see chapter two – *“Down the Track Ungooroo”* by Graham Ward, Rhonda Ward, Denise Hedges and Allen Paget. 2004 – p.108

Tommy Miller<sup>18</sup>, Wonnarua<sup>19</sup> Elder (*Plate 4*), is pouring water to reveal Baiame's foot prints<sup>20</sup>. Baiame travels by stepping upon the flat mountain tops. This is showing the time frame of an ancient land where the elements have worn and shaped the terrain.



Plate 4 Tommy Miller at Burra Gurra, a large engraving site

Burra Gurra, is where the ancient one treads from Mt.Yengo. On some maps this area is called Black Rock. There are a variety of Aboriginal map sites in the Valley and one of the largest is the Burra Gurra site in the Wollombi (*meeting of the rivers*) area.

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<sup>18</sup> Tommy Miller and James Miller the author of “Koori: A Will to Win” (1985) are cousins.

<sup>19</sup> The spelling of Won:arua changes to Wonnarua, this being the preferred spelling by people in the Maitland area.

<sup>20</sup> Tommy Miller. Trip to Burra Gurra (*4 wheel-drive*) Tommy Miller Wonnarua Elder, Paul Reid Gamilaroi man. Photograph taken by Kay Adlem. 2001. Verbal permission given by Tommy Miller to use in this project 2003.

The photograph below is of Pambalong woman Rebecca Saville<sup>21</sup> (*Plate 5*) at Burra Gurra in a cloud burst (2002). This is a rare experience. Tommy Miller a few months earlier at Burra Gurra had glanced at the clouds and was willing it to rain.



Plate 5

Rebecca Saville at Burra Gurra

This is looking at the big picture. This is part of the magic of the Rock. It is the connection to a vast universal time frame. The Aboriginal River is the Milky Way. It is not my place to interpret Aboriginal carvings or their placements; I only share the experience and the affect these creative sites and works have on me. Burra Gurra came alive as the heavy rain fell on the dry rock. The Emu foot prints appear to move and become very clear as the rain pours down onto the sites curvature. This is so like the gait of the Emu that the Emu becomes imaginatively present. Giant images emerge as if from nowhere. While viewing the phenomena, one image surfaced like a male whale. I felt this was a glimpse back in time. The animals are

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<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Saville. Trip to Burra Gurra with Caril Connors/Saville, Rebecca Saville. Photograph taken by Kay Adlem. Verbal permission to use photograph cleared by Rebecca and Caril. 2003



very close. The experience was completely unexpected as there was no sign of rain when we approached the area. The other strange occurrence was that when the rain started to fall it hit the small pools with an echoing sound as if the rock was hollow.

There are a variety of beliefs about the sites in the Wollombi area, some say they are not map sites and are not on the boundaries of language groups. It is the opinion of several Elders that the rock carvings show eight language groups to be part of the moiety<sup>22</sup> system within the two countries of Wonnarua and Worimi. The eight lines from the head (*Plate 6*) are known as ‘head knowledge’ in communication (*languages spoken*).



Plate 6 Lower Map Site at Wollombi – 1999

This same site, to the right of the figure, has a vast number of carved marks which appeared to indicate the presence of a large group sharpening spear heads. However, it turned out to be where the local council ‘parked up’ the road grading machine<sup>23</sup>. These sites or galleries are accessible to the public and explain the laws of a complex society attached to cultural relativism.

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<sup>22</sup> “Moiety” meaning two halves – two families

<sup>23</sup> This information was given while visiting this site with an Aboriginal woman and her husband. He worked for the local council as a very young man and this was his story.

In both Aboriginal and European societies the river systems are the veins of survival. The only Aboriginal name for the Hunter River, which runs through the centre of Won:arua, is 'Coquun'. There is no known meaning to this word, although there is an Awabakal word 'Ko-ko-in' which means 'water'<sup>24</sup>.

During the 1955 Flood the silt build-up at Boe-oon (*Maitland*) and Raymond Terrace came from the Wollombi area<sup>25</sup>. Connections to these areas would be strong, as people in the Wollombi area would be moving through the river systems to the sea following family members. The 1955 Flood was reported throughout the western world. There were many stories about the struggle and heroics of the local people. Eleven people lost their lives in the flood<sup>26</sup>. Ironically Maitland's first settlement of "the peoples' town" was formed by eleven well behaved convicts between 1818 and 1821<sup>27</sup>.

I concentrated on local public sculptural works which connect to the river to understand the differences from the Burra Gurra carved site which connects to the river via the sky 'milky way' river.

I studied four works<sup>28</sup> but focused on Throsby Creek Bridge crossing "Railings" (1996) and Maitland's "Sculptural Landscape" (1997).

The latter work comprises of fifteen flood poles (*Plate 8*). These works of art individually center on the 'Coquun' and to walk amongst them, as a collective, creates an incredible feeling of walking beneath the water level.

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<sup>24</sup> Glenn Albrecht. "Rediscovering the Coquun": Towards an Environmental History of the Hunter River. Address given at the River Forum - Wyndham Estate. ([gggaa@cc.newcastle.edu.au](mailto:gggaa@cc.newcastle.edu.au)) The University of Newcastle. 2000 - p.1

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Pearson. Interview on Hunter River movement at the University of Newcastle, Geography Department. 20 June 2003

<sup>26</sup> Disputes over the exact number of people killed in the 1955 Flood is still going on to date. 2008

<sup>27</sup> A.W. Reed. "Place Names of Australia". Reed Books Pty Ltd. 1973 – p.145

<sup>28</sup> Two works studied but not mentioned in the main text are: "The Hunter Tapestry" (1988) housed in the Great Hall at the University of Newcastle and "The Bond Store Mural" (1986) housed at Metford TAFE.



“Sculptural Landscape” builds on the local story of the river. By placing the work structurally as an extension of the Tourist Centre building would suggest a celebration of the river as a feature to the area. But we find individually, the fifteen poles are a memorial to Maitland’s fifteen high flood levels and the resilience of the local people coping with the ‘disasters’.



Plate 7  
'rowing miles' (*left*) by Mark Malmberg.

Each pole was created by Student(s) or Staff of the University of Newcastle School of Fine Art and Mayor of Maitland, John Martin.



Plate 8 "Sculptural Landscape" 26 July 1997  
15 Maitland Flood poles. One for each year of extreme high water level.

Further down the river, International Aboriginal artist Mini Heath designed the Pipi shell motif (*red area*) for a bridge crossing at Throsby Creek: The Pipi is symbolic of

food, livelihood<sup>29</sup> and the spiritual nourishment of culture. Artist Edward Milan designed the ships (*blue area*) on the crest of the ‘Pipi’ wave (*see Plate 9*). The ships riding the Pipi shell continue to take raw material in the name of National trade and economics. Emptying the giant quarry – Australia.



Plate 9

A bridge crossing at Throsby Creek, Hannel Street, Wickham now has ‘railings’ designed by Mini Heath and Edward Milan (1996).

When it came to producing studio works from this inquiry, first I chose an alternative ‘disaster’ element in relation to the commercial use and exploitation of the river. The use of pipes and pumps to extract water is a common practice. The soil in this area was considered the best in Australia but is so depleted that now turf for housing estates is grown rather than produce. Fourteen species of fish have disappeared along with the great red cedars and the river is a fraction of its original size. In my studio work I developed “A Tug of River Pipes” 2004/5<sup>30</sup> (*figure page 3*), a sculptural tugboat sailing in concrete, showing what has been taken from this environment.

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<sup>29</sup> Bridge Plaque. “*Bridge Railings*”. Designed from graphics created by Mini Heath and Edward Milan. The pipi shell motif is an Aboriginal design describing a life giving transformation. The pipi represents a motif of spiritual belief that transforms into a symbol of nourishment and livelihood in the estuarine and sand dune system of Worimi and Awabakal people. The ships motif portrays the essence of the Port of Newcastle’s waterways in the memories and lives of its people. Opened by Councillor Grey Heys – Lord Mayor of Newcastle. 7 August 1996. Funded by Newcastle City Council – Building Better Cities –NSW Ministry of the Arts - Transfield Construction Pty Ltd. – Honey Suckle Development Corporation – Waycon Services Pty Ltd. – Industrial Galvanisers Corporation Pty Ltd. and Union Steel. 1996

<sup>30</sup> Any reference to Indigenous burial poles is a visual, metaphorical reminder of our responsibilities.





A TUG OF RIVER PIPES  
2004  
We sail a boat in concrete

My second choice takes in to account the experience of the Burra Gurra site and the “Coquun” (*Hunter River*) which replenishes vast agricultural areas by bringing rich fertile flood plain soil to the area. The wetlands surrounding the cities are of extreme importance as filtering systems to a healthy ecological interaction. Studies show these should be retained at all costs<sup>31</sup>. Wallis creek is unusual in the fact that it drains naturally out of the Coquun rather than into it. The Wallis Plains area is known as Bo-un, or place of the Bittern<sup>32</sup>.

The painting “Flood Poles” (1998-2003) views the river and flood from the natural world. In this work the flood poles located at the Maitland Tourist centre are seen beneath the water along with a house brick to denote urbanization. Floating on the water is a duck.

I could have used the image of the Bittern<sup>33</sup> in this work to say more about the area. As an artist, I feel it is important to experience or to have at least researched your subject. I had no experience of ever seeing a Bittern, ducks I have experienced and their history with rain and water is part of our weather language.

Water supports life not unlike that of the Pipi who’s patterns are loosely represented in the swirl ripples of the painting ‘Flood Poles’ (*figure page 4*).

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<sup>31</sup> Hunter Catchment Management Trust. “*Hunter Bushland*”: *Resource Kit: A guide to managing vegetation on private land in the Hunter catchment*. Preface and Acknowledgements by Travis Peake. Supported by Natural Heritage Trust’s Bushcare Program – NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service – Department of Land and Water Conservation. 2003

<sup>32</sup> Glenn Albrecht. “*Rediscovering the Coquun*” : *Towards an Environmental History of the Hunter River*. Address given at the River Forum - Wyndham Estate. Hunter River. ([gggaa@cc.newcastle.edu.au](mailto:gggaa@cc.newcastle.edu.au)) The University of Newcastle. 2000 - p.9

<sup>33</sup> R. Doyle. (*Illustrated by*) “*A Field Guide to the BIRDS of Australia*”. Ed. G. Pizzey. Published by William Collins, Sons & Co., Limited. 1980 – Illustration section - p.16





FLOOD POLES - completed in 2003

Acrylic painting on board approximately 1200h x 1210w  
A few words are used in the swirl ripples

The Valley once had a very high canopy of Red Cedar trees where the sun light filtered through to an abundance of food. The timber, farming, mining and tourist industries have all had an affect on the natural food stores. Mention the Hunter Valley today and the majority of people will think of vineyards. Wine is a recent development to the area and a massive, consumer industry and export revenue for Australia. A wine label is a public image (*Plate 10*).



Plate 10 Wine label by Ned (*Kia-Kiro*) Thompson

Ned (*Kia-Kiro*<sup>34</sup>) Thompson spoke about a painting (*Plate 11*) he did of the vineyards prior to that of the wine label. He says, “...the work has no need of a title. I was staying in the vicinity of the vineyards, the mountains, frogs, lizards, birds, the kangaroos. It was being in that environment and having the feel to paint what was coming across to me at the time”<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Kia-Kiro means ‘Free Spirit’ or ‘Young Spirit’ from the Bilingra language. N.T.

<sup>35</sup> Ned Thompson. Interviewed by KA – 6 June 2004 at Bolwarra NSW. Verbal permission to use taped information. 2004



He continued by saying:

“If you look at the painting (*below*) it is the ‘earth’. You will see the earth colours in the rows, the energy and the spirit of the earth. It is what the earth can produce, it is about the connections. And whether it is European grapevines or Gum trees it is still what the earth has produced. With the wine label, I had a visual connection because I had already done a painting of Broken Back Ridge. I had seen the energy of the mountains going into the sky and I could see the growth of the vines running down below it, you just feel that. So when they asked me to do the label I just said; the only thing I can do is Broken Back Ridge. And they accepted it”<sup>36</sup>.



Plate 11 Painting by Kia-Kiro (*Ned Thompson*) 1998-9

Ned (*Kia-Kiro*) Thompson’s work illustrates a response to the contemporary life of the Valley and his work recognizes the Valley’s latest development.

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<sup>36</sup> Ned Thompson. Interviewed by KA – 6 June 2004 at Bolwarra NSW. Verbal permission to use taped information. 2004

**Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council** (1983) opened a Health and Multi-purpose Cultural Centre in Metford 9/9/1996 which is a new and stimulating development for the Valley. The centre has the “Henry Bolt Museum”, a pre-school and library, an equipped gymnasium, conference hall with catering facilities, bush tucker gardens and cultural exhibitions. But essentially it is a Lands Office and housing resource unit. This one centre covers education, housing, health and employment projects. There is an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 Aboriginal people in the Maitland area and these numbers are increasing<sup>37</sup>.



Plate 12 Opening Day at Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council 9/9/1996

The Land Rights Act of 1983 is the Constitution that the Land Councils of New South Wales have to abide by. The Land Councils' main aim is to claim any Crown Land not in use, acquiring housing for local Aboriginal people and pursuing Self Determination within the local community.

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<sup>37</sup> Mindaribba LALC. Personal communication with members of Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council. 2008



The first paper bark bowl I made was washed in the dam at Mindaribba LALC. This area is a black soil and water environment. (*For further information on paper bark bowl see chapter 3*).



Plate 13 Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council 2000

Before the Land Rights Act, a group called the Lands Trust<sup>38</sup> pushed and fought through the years putting pressure on the government<sup>39</sup> to retain an economic base by retaining control of Aboriginal land.

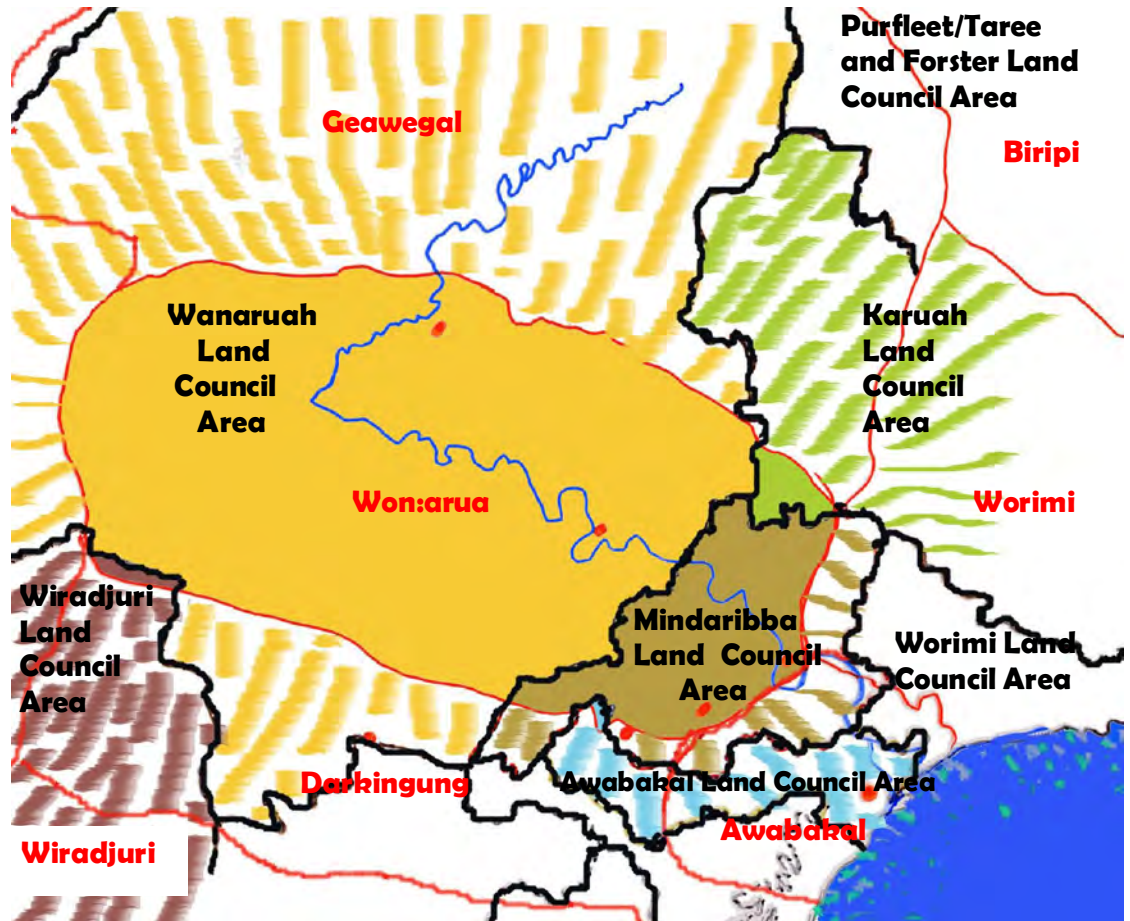
There is some confusion within Communities as to boundaries. This appears to have happened when the Land Councils were being set up. Land Councils first claimed Crown Land that was set aside as Aboriginal Communities during the ‘mission’ days.

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<sup>38</sup> NSW Aboriginal Lands Trust was formed out of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee in 1972  
H. Goodall. *“Invasion to Embassy”: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales. 1770-1972.* Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd. 1996 - p.351

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Talbott. Interview by Kay Adlem at Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council on the 28 January 1997

Both Purfleet and Karuah were Aboriginal Missions. Purfleet straddles Biripi and Geawegal Countries and Karuah overlaps Worimi, Won:arua and Geawegal Countries.



**MAP 4. Local Land Council Boundaries**

**Key:**

**Red lines** are boundaries to Language Countries

**Black lines** are Local Land Council boundaries

Various broken colour extensions are from those Land Councils who touch on Won:arua boundary<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> David Horton. "Aboriginal Australia". Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). Edition 3. 2000

New South Wales Aboriginal L.C. "Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983": Map of ... Aboriginal Land Councils. Production date July 2003 : Office of the Registrar. Department of Lands. 2003

The Hunter Valley has a tremendous political history of family connections in the struggle for cultural identity through Land Rights. John Maynard<sup>41</sup> tells the story of his grandfather Fred, who became leader of an activist group called the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (*AAPA*) in 1924. Fred was born in the Hunter Valley at Hinton in 1879 and his Uncle, Tom Phillips was an Aboriginal Farmer at the St. Clair Mission, Singleton<sup>42</sup>. John recalls:

“Fred was genuine but he could not make the people understand, ... You could see ..... he suffered for the people....(*but*) ..... was undermined from within his own group ..... our people are too often bought and seduced by promises and accept the crumbs and carrots dangled before them.”(*Reuben Kelly*<sup>43</sup>).

You can feel the frustration in his words of how ...

“The AAPA disappeared from mainstream public view after 1927 ..... there has been no concrete explanation uncovered for this apparent break up”<sup>44</sup>.

This is a common complaint<sup>45</sup>. It wasn't until 1957 when a National Conference was held in Adelaide that two National Aboriginal agencies were formed, the National Aboriginal Day Observance Committee and later the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (*FCAA*) which was to be known as the Federal Council for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (*FCAATSI*).

The first two nationally elected Aboriginal organizations followed some years after with the National Aboriginal Consultative Council (*NACC*) 1973, then by the

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<sup>41</sup> John Maynard. “*Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA)*”: *One God, One Aim, One Destiny*. Aboriginal History. Canbarra. Australian National University Press. 1997 – Vol.21 - p.1

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* - p.3

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* - p.10

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*

<sup>45</sup> H. C. Coombs. “*The Role of the National Aboriginal Conference*”. Australian Government Publ. Service. April 1984 - pp.1-47

National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) 1978. These were the first elected national political voices for Aboriginal people to the Australian Government. Bill Smith from Koompahtoo LALC was an elected member of the NAC and no doubt has a number of similar experiences to that of Fred Maynard. The NAC was disbanded and re-organized to become Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989. ATSIC was disbanded March 2005 and replaced with no nationally elected Aboriginal body, no Aboriginal voice (*figure page 5*).

Bill Smith has been criticized by his own people for the work he has done in the Wollombi area<sup>46</sup>, as he uses the ‘map-sites’ to teach young people today without the traditional scars of initiation. These connections to culture are important milestones to Won:arua Valley and shows the emergence and spreading of modern Aboriginal political involvement which is traditionally connected and continuing today.

The Valley is fortunate to have Kathy Marika living in the Won:arua area with Brian Gambley, her partner and their family. Kathy is a Rirratjinu women from Arnhem Land and her family created the “Marika Bark Painting” which is held in Canberra as the first petition to be sent to the Australian Government claiming land for the “Rirratjinu” people in 1963: This traditional bark painting (*Plate 14*), shows symbols of ownership, knowledge and basic rights<sup>47</sup>.

The second petition<sup>48</sup> (*Plate 15*) was sent in 1968. Both these works of art are legal documents which show the land as full. An International Indigenous Lobby group in 1970 fought for the right not to be assimilated into any majority ruling government. The Commission on Human Rights began to study Indigenous peoples around the world in 1971.

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<sup>46</sup> G. Ray. “Breathing life into tribal lore”: Hunter Valley Aborigines are part of a movement growing throughout NSW of blacks rediscovering their cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations. The Newcastle Herald. 31 March 1993 - p.8.

<sup>47</sup> J. Isaac. “Wandjuk Marika”. *Life Story as told to Jennifer Isaacs*. South China Printing Co. Ltd. 1995 – pp.100–105. Image of “Marika Bark Painting” from p.103  
G. Yunupingu. “Our Land is Our Life”: *Land Rights – Past, Present and Future*. Ed. Galarrwuy Yunupingu. University of Queensland Press. 1997 – p.4

<sup>48</sup> J. Isaac. “Wandjuk Marika”. *Life Story as told to Jennifer Isaacs*. South China Printing Co. Ltd. 1995 – pp.100–105. Second petition image from p.105.



The first petition sent to the Australian Government from the clan leaders in 1963, prior to the first Land Rights case.

Plate 14 Marika Bark Painting



The second bark petition sent to the Australian Parliament in 1968.

Bark painting by Jackie Dandiwinny Wanambi of Wuyal, the ancestral man who created many sacred sites in the Nhulunbuy area. Wuyal is carrying his stone axe and wears a maglayin object around his neck. His shovel nose spear and woomerah are beside him.

Plate 15 Bark Painting

Wandjuk Marika, Kathy's brother, speaks about losing the first Land Rights Case at this time. This was 'The Gove Land Rights Case' which officially recognised the fault in the term Terra Nullius. It also mentioned, for the first time, the importance of spiritual connection to land<sup>49</sup>: But it was to be the 'Woodward Royal Commission' (1973) that took this further.

Kathy and her family lost everything in a fire at her home not long ago, including her paintings and photographs. But despite this tragedy the family still organizes cultural exchange days, training for local school dance groups and traditional dance training in Sydney. Kathy speaks about dance as one of the most expressive forms of creativity<sup>50</sup> and is very firm that traditional dance should be taught in the correct manner of spiritually connecting to country<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> J. Isaac. "Wandjuk Marika". *Life Story as told to Jennifer Isaacs*. South China Printing Co. Ltd. 1995

<sup>50</sup> Inga Clendinnen. "Dancing with Strangers". The Text Publishing Company. 2003

Dance in first contact between Indigenous and European peoples was an important positive friendly strategy, along with facial expressions or face pulling.

<sup>51</sup> See chapter two - Narelle Miller "It'll be Right". 2004 – pp.176-177



Kathy Marika would often say that; “...when she looks out at the grass she sees her family”<sup>52</sup>. Brian and Kathy work as a team to bring Arnhem Land culture to all Hunter Valley people. Because they see the importance of this to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities they decided to set-up “Walnga Rom” (*Living Culture*)<sup>53</sup>.



Plate 16  
Kathy Marika at Mindaribba  
LALC- 2001



Plate 17  
Kathy Marika and her daughter at  
Mindaribba LALC in the Henry Bolt  
Museum. Kathy’s traditional paintings  
hang on the walls – 1997: Kathy was  
taught by her father.

<sup>52</sup> Kathy Marika. Personal conversation at Metford after delivering photographs from ‘education week’ launch at Mindaribba LALC. 2001

<sup>53</sup> T. Duncan. “*Understanding and culture*”: Book helps understanding importance of environment to aborigines (sic). *Traditional culture is alive and well*. Kathy Marika and Brian Gambley. The Maitland Mercury. 24 August 2000 - p.7

Lorna Lippmann (1981) recognizes that Indigenous resistance has been ceaseless. It only changed over the years,

..... “..from guerrilla warfare to meetings, marches, petitions ...”.

She speaks of the 1930’s as a ....

“....modern movement... beginning with the realization of survival and a declared Day of Mourning after 150 years of intrusion .... This was done to draw attention to the loss of an economic base.”<sup>54</sup>

Jack Patten, seen in the photograph<sup>55</sup> (Plate 18) on far right, is the natural grandfather to Trevor Patten (Plate 19) who lives here in Won:arua Valley. Although little contact was made with his grandfather because of Jack Patten’s political commitment, Trevor has continued the tradition of being politically aware and active.



Plate 18 “Day of Mourning”  
Outside the Australian Hall - 26/01/1938, Jack Patten (right)



Plate 19  
Trevor Patten  
1997

<sup>54</sup> L. Lippmann. “Generations of Resistance”: *Mabo and Justice*. Longman. First published in 1981. 1996 – p.35

<sup>55</sup> N. Parbury. “Survival”: *A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.107

Trevor Patten was born in a women's prison and 'grown-up' by his Grandmother. He is a Bungjalung man from Baryulgil country<sup>56</sup>. He is at present Project Officer attached to Mindaribba L.A.L.C. and arranges many cultural activities in the Valley area and beyond, especially to his own country, Baryulgil<sup>57</sup> on the Clarence River. Trevor has won many awards and is chief instigator for acquiring much of the Aboriginal funding used throughout the Hunter Valley. He is also an artist and his works of art are about the food chain. Trevor's work can be found in many public and private collections around Australia. Rarely will his works remain with him, the one seen below (*Plate 20*), is an exception. This one is his place.

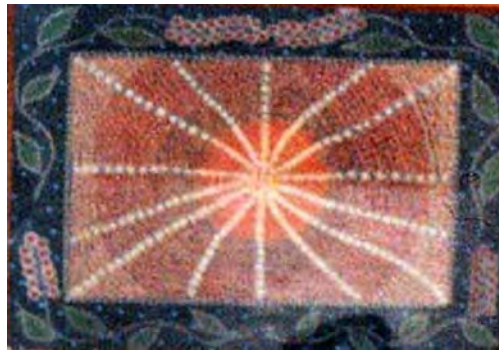


Plate 20 Trevor's place



Plate 21 Trevor Patten  
2004

It was Trevor who suggested and encouraged my involvement in collecting contemporary Aboriginal stories as he saw the need to express and record a living modern culture. He did not have a problem with my not being Aboriginal.

It must also be said that this study on Won:arua has by no means been exhausted, as the surface has only just been scratched between Maitland, Singleton and Wollombi: Won:arua extends far beyond these place names and many Aboriginal groups and organizations are working tirelessly towards cultural recognition. There are many untold Aboriginal histories and political associations within Won:arua Valley area.

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<sup>56</sup> Trevor Patten. Interviewed by KA – verbal permission to use information and photographs. 2004

<sup>57</sup> See chapter two - Narelle Miller. "It'll Be Right". 2004 – pp.165-168



This chapter has set the scene for participants' stories within Won:arua country. The research has investigated the relationship between artists of two different cultures, establishing a discrete local difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal creativity. I have concentrated on local public sculptural works which connect to the river.

The Burra Gurra site through the sky river is a celebration of the natural environment, whereas artists without a direct deeper connection to the area produce 'memorial works', in memory of disasters caused by the subject (*example: "Sculptural Landscape"- pp.25 & 26*). One is a positive and wide surveillance of the idea of the river and the latter a narrower examination of the same.

I have produced two studio works to address the key issues of the research in this section: The first work is a sculptural tugboat called; "A Tug of River Pipes" (*figure page 3 & p.27*) which is sailing in concrete. I am looking at the river but not seeing the river at all, as I look to what has been taken from the river just as "*Sculptural Landscape*" fashioned 'commemorative plaques' which is a memorial view of the river. The interest is not with the river only with the human element to the river. The second work is a painting relating to a positive view of flood which I call: "Flood Poles" (*figure page 4 – p.28*). This work recognizes other life to the river system.

A significant amount of political history attached to the Won:arua area was mainly viewed through the organization of Mindaribba LALC. People's connection to Mindaribba LALC and the creative "Marika Bark Paintings" came to be known through personal involvement. The 'Bark Paintings' are land petitions (*p.36*) and could be seen as legal documents to the rights to land. The land petitions are a positive explanation that the land is full by telling the stories through plants, animals and peoples connection and reliance on an area. This tradition is also continued by Land Councils and other Aboriginal organizations. Rick Griffiths CEO of MLALC, and former ATSIC Commissioner, fully understands the demise of having 'no voice', not only to the Australian Government but also internationally (*figure page 5*).



NO VOTE – started 1999 completed 2005 Magpie – Guardian  
 Acrylic painting on canvas approximately 1250h x 1000w (*middle section*).  
 Surrounding – Acrylic paint, glue and sand on board  
 Words are seen covering the Magpie