

# 3. Indigenous ways



## Protocol tips

### Aboriginal diversity

[From Marcia Langton, in *Native Title: An Opportunity for Understanding*, Proceedings of an induction course, Native Title Tribunal, Perth, pp. 244–45]

Aboriginal cultures are extremely diverse and pluralistic. There is no one kind of Aboriginal person or community: there are regions which can be characterised, however, with reference to history, politics, culture and demography...

The first region is settled Australia, stretching south from Cairns around to Perth in a broad arc, an area in which most provincial towns and all the major cities and institutions are located, and where a myriad of small Aboriginal communities and populations reside with a range of histories and cultures. The impact of the particular frontiers in this arc and the outcomes are complex and diverse.

The second region is remote Australia where most of the tradition-oriented Aboriginal cultures are located. They likewise have responded to particular frontiers and now

contend with various types of Australian settlement.

In a very general sense, the facts, as well as the appearance and style of the cultural and social life of Aboriginal people in these two regions are quite different. They are grounded in different cultural bases, histories and socio-political conditions...

Demographic features of Aboriginal cultural regions are factors for consideration as well...It is well known but barely documented that not just Anglo but other acknowledged ancestral histories of groups such as Asian (Chinese, Malaysian, Filipino for example), Afghani, Maori, Pacific Islander (Samoan, Vanuati, Solomon Islander, etc.), Torres Strait Islander and so on have an effect on the social orientation, alliances and political styles of local Aboriginal groups.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse and no tips on protocol will be relevant for all situations. The most important thing is to ask what protocol applies in the community with whom you want to work. Make sure you are very familiar with Museums Australia's 1993 policy *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (see *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* in the Supplementary Reference Material) before you go into the field — it is an essential starting point.<sup>4</sup> Many people with whom you liaise may be biculturally competent and will be able to advise you of the differences in expected norms of behaviour. The following tips are intended

only to provide some insights into issues that could be relevant and are not intended to be prescriptive for all situations.<sup>5</sup>

- Contact the relevant authorities (e.g. ATSIC state and regional offices) to find out what community and land councils need to be contacted when working with the community of interest.
- To seek advice, first contact Aboriginal people who work for government in areas such as National Parks and Wildlife, or the environment, or in museum and heritage areas. For example, most National Parks and Wildlife departments will have Aboriginal liaison officers or advisory committees. Similarly, state and national

museums will have Indigenous staff and some will have advisory committees and/or representatives on museum boards and councils. These people will be used to working in both spheres. (See list of contacts in *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* in the Supplementary Reference Materials.)

- If you wish to enter a site, you need permission from the relevant Aboriginal Community Council. In Queensland you will need a permit from the Cultural Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment. You will be required to show evidence of your contact with people from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. To visit any designated Aboriginal lands in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia, a visitor permit must be obtained from the local Aboriginal community council.
- To consult with the descendants of the traditional people of an area, contact cultural groups, language and heritage groups or education centres, and approach land councils to ask for assistance in finding the appropriate people to consult. For example, many remote communities have an arts and crafts centre. It may be useful to contact the person who runs this as he or she can often be a catalyst or go-between.

## Introductions

Be prepared to spend some time sharing some personal background information such as where you live, how long you have been in this area, where you grew up, where your family comes from. For some Aboriginal people introductory protocols are very important and formal as Colleen Wall, Program Manager Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, The Arts Office Queensland, described in her paper to the RGAQ Cultural Linkages Conference:<sup>6</sup>

Firstly, I must acknowledge the local Elders and thank them for allowing me to come to their country. This means before I acknowledge my white 'elders' such as premiers, ministers, etc. in that same gathering. Then I must introduce myself culturally to the local people of the area within which I am travelling. I was born in Gurang Gurang area. My people come from the Kabbi Kabbi group in the regional area of Bundaberg, Central Coastal Queensland, Australia. Most of my relations are from these

two areas as well as Wakka Wakka group. I am Colleen Wall, daughter of Alfa Beezley and Herb Geizler. My father had a German father and an English mother. My mother had a mixture of Australian Aboriginal/Maori and Vanuatu/English cultures. My extended family are Beezley's, Minnicons, Laws, Bayles, Geizlers. I must continue in this way until I am recognised and accepted in the area.

## Communication<sup>7</sup>

- Make sure you meet with as many people as possible and try to ensure that you are not meeting with people from only one faction. Communities are not homogeneous and there may be many differences based around family groupings, political viewpoints and contact history. In particular, the result of government dispersal policies means that there may be people from a variety of Aboriginal language groups now living in one area. This can lead to tensions between families who are descendants of the original landowners and those who have come from somewhere else.
- Look, listen and learn. Do not go into a community with an attitude that you know all that needs to be known. Every community is unique with regard to customs and protocols. Take the necessary time to find out about the local customs and protocols. Until then, try to be sensitive as to what activities might be unacceptable. Phil Gordon, Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Australian Museum, advises:

There's no set formula. It is about building up of trust. You can't expect to go in and find people enthusiastic about your project. People are likely to be suspicious about what you are on about and may not be interested. It has to be a long-term thing. You can't just think I'm going to do this in three months. Just as you wouldn't expect to go into a small community in a country town and get everybody onside in that town overnight, it is the same in Aboriginal communities too. It's learning the political connections and alliances within a community. For example, you may not be talking to the most appropriate person; just because this person wants to talk to you doesn't mean they are the right person.

I think listen, treat people the way you'd like to be treated, be aware that there are political alliances and go in with honesty and be willing to talk through things. Know that you are

probably going to be an alien in a strange land, there will be aggression at you at various times. You will have to work your way through various issues.

- Don't be too afraid. If you have built up relationships and established trust and you make a mistake, somebody will tell you.
- To ask questions appropriately, you may avoid appearing rude if you wait, have a cup of tea, talk about the weather, get to know each other and then ask questions indirectly. Possible strategies include a hinting statement followed by silence, volunteering information for confirmation or denial followed by a silence, waiting for a later meeting before receiving an answer.
- Do not assume that eye contact means the same thing in all communities. For many European Australians, direct eye contact and a firm handshake mean courtesy and forthrightness and are important in establishing trust, but in some Aboriginal communities direct eye contact may be avoided as a matter of cultural protocol. Don't assume, however, that all Aboriginal peoples in all situations will wish to avoid eye contact, as this will vary.
- Disagreement may be passive in Aboriginal communities. People may say 'yes' to you to avoid the conflict of saying no directly, and wait for a less direct way of saying no. Some Aboriginal people may use indirectness and circumspection in expressing disagreement. Non-Aboriginal people may mistakenly think that an Aboriginal person agrees with them, especially if they do not take the time to wait for the Aboriginal person to express his or her real opinion, after he or she has politely agreed with views already expressed.
- Indirectness and circumspection may be part of the process of consensus which may be used by Aboriginal people to reach decisions.
- When speaking about important issues, some Aboriginal people may prefer to speak through a leader or spokesperson. Do not assume that the spokesperson or leader will occupy an official position in an organisation or be a media personality. Be guided by the choice of spokesperson proposed to you.
- It may be appropriate to avoid yes/no questions or questions like 'do you understand?' and instead paraphrase what you believe to have been said and wait for addition or correction.
- It may be inappropriate to expect everything to happen at one meeting or with an instant decision. Listen to what is being said and be comfortable with a silence. Allow time for people to think.
- Attitudes to time may be different and it may be respectful to show patience.
- The community may not be as excited about your project as you are. Be prepared to take no for an answer.
- Don't overstay your welcome. Communities have other things to do, especially in remote places.
- Ask when is the best time to come and how long to stay. In remote communities ask what they would like you to bring — maybe fresh food or milk.
- When opinions are conflicting, adopt a consensus model, listen widely, take it all on board, and act fairly to all involved.
- As part of a reconciliation process, people may want to deal with the history that has come before. You might be seeking advice on interpretation in a museum display but consultation may, in fact, mean listening and accepting their hurt, for example about the impact of government practices. (For more information on reconciliation, see contact addresses in part 2, 'Resources'.)
- Be seen at public community special events and get to know people socially.
- Consider common interests such as children or concerns for the future.
- Avoid making promises you can't keep.
- Keep in mind that there are different types of knowledge and that these might conflict. For example, spiritual knowledge and scientific knowledge may differ considerably. It is not appropriate to belittle the spiritual knowledge that Aboriginal people have lived in Australia since the Dreaming by insisting on the anthropological approach which posits theories of migration and puts a limit on the Aboriginal occupation of Australia.
- There are particular semantic differences which you might easily overlook. For example, when Aboriginal people speak of 'getting shame', it is not the same as when non-Aboriginal people speak of 'being ashamed'. Whereas being ashamed is linked

to wrongdoing or defect as well as others' bad opinion and a wish to be invisible, getting shame includes feeling as if one is near a person or a place where one shouldn't be, fears of doing the wrong thing, of bad consequences and of other people's bad opinions and a desire to be out of the unpleasant situation. So Aboriginal people talk of 'getting shame' when non-Aboriginal people would not speak of 'being ashamed', for example when an Aboriginal person is entering a strange place or meeting strangers.

- Aboriginal languages may not have a word for thank you. This means that if you do something for someone they may not need to say thank you but instead may have an obligation to repay your deed.

## Issues

### Secret/sacred<sup>8</sup>

Information about the Dreaming or the law or ceremony is restricted to those who have the right to know, such as the elders or the initiated. There can be men's secret/sacred objects and information as well as women's secret/sacred objects and information. There are also men's sites and women's sites, and you would be breaking religious rules if you did not respect the gender differences. It is important to be aware that some items sold to galleries or collected by museums have secret/sacred status and may not be displayed or reproduced in catalogues or other media. For instance, the Wandjina is a very special image from the Kimberley area. Rights to reproduce this image are governed by Aboriginal laws and there may be strong penalties for unauthorised uses. Consultation is essential.

At a Regional Galleries Association of Queensland (RGAQ) 1997 workshop, 'Working with Indigenous Artefacts: Awareness, Understanding, Respect and Protocols', Michael Aird, Curator of Aboriginal Studies, talked about how he manages the collection of Aboriginal material at the Queensland Museum (see case study 3) and how he approaches 'dealing with secret and sacred objects and with the items that may be ceremonial or are, or in a lot of cases you just don't know':

I look at it as the main aim is not to offend anybody. There's all these issues, there are no rules for it...no set way.

It is about respect and about drawing upon the time you have spent with the old people, that feeling of the way you think that your old people would want things to be handled.

Michael acknowledges that he, too, faces dilemmas, such as what do you do with a commercially made bullroarer:

You can go into any tourist shop such as those at the airport at Cairns or the Gold Coast and see them by the hundreds. What do you do with them? Do you put them out on the shelf and say: 'You can buy them at the airport. Why shouldn't I treat them like that?'

I get an object like that and put it in a box up on the top shelf so that it is out of the way. Aboriginal people do not want to come here and see bullroarers, even if they were just made for the tourist trade.

There is not a need to lock them up, but there is still a need to put them out of public view so they don't offend someone. So even though I know it is not secret/sacred, not ceremonial, I know it would offend someone. So that is the main issue.

### Human remains<sup>9</sup>

The utmost sensitivity is required when dealing with the issue of human remains in museums. *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* makes it quite clear that human remains must never be displayed to the public, and must be stored with the utmost respect in conditions approved of by communities until community representatives can make arrangements to take them back to their country for a respectful burial ceremony. The issue is fraught with the deepest emotions and is a very important part of the reasons for the deep resentment that is felt by many Aboriginal people towards museums. At the RGAQ 1997 workshop, 'Working with Indigenous Artefacts: Awareness, Understanding, Respect and Protocols', Shayne Rawson, Indigenous Exhibitions Officer, Regional Galleries Association of Queensland, spoke of his experience of resolving some of these feelings:

When I first starting working in museums I was very wary about working with skeletal remains. I was really worried but I went and spoke to the old people and they reassured me and said it is better that it is someone who really cares about them.

We had to move them from one place to another and one of the people I was working

with said that we were going to use supermarket boxes. But we raised that it should be done properly.

### Women's and men's business

There are definite divisions of responsibilities for knowledge belonging to men and women, and in some Aboriginal communities it will be more appropriate for a man to consult men and for a woman to consult women. Men and women can be custodians of their own knowledge in the form of art, designs, performance and storytelling. Owners of such knowledge have the right to express it through song, dance and design, but the circumstances in which this is done and who may see is restricted. Check whether the project requires someone of a particular sex.

### Sorry business

In some communities, it is not permitted to speak the name of someone in the community who has recently died. This is particularly true for close relatives of the person. It is polite to follow the lead of the community on how long this applies. Similarly, images (such as photographs or video) of the person would offend relatives of the dead person. For this

reason, television programs and books sometimes carry the warning 'this program contains images of deceased people and may be offensive to people of X region' or 'permission to use this image has been given by surviving relatives'.

### The stolen generation<sup>10</sup>

The immense pain and suffering documented in *The Stolen Generation Report* will have escaped no one reading this kit. At the time of writing, the Howard government had not yet apologised for the government practices which removed Aboriginal children from their families in a systematic attempt to destroy Aboriginal culture.

Museum and heritage workers are advised that they will be confronted with powerful emotions and often deep-seated frustrations and resentments experienced by Aboriginal people as a result of these practices. Acknowledgement of this pain is fundamental to an effective consultation process.

The practice of removing Aboriginal people from their land, taking them from their families and forcing them to adopt another culture has had enormous impact on the

## Reconciliation

[From Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/car/>]

Reconciliation is a process which strives to improve relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community. It is based on recognition of:

- the unique position of Indigenous Australians as the original inhabitants of this continent
- the need to overcome continuing disadvantage they suffer as a legacy of policies and practices which dispossessed them of their traditional lands, separated Indigenous children from their families and actively discouraged their participation in Australia's economic and social development
- the wish of the vast majority of Australians to participate in the creation of a confident, harmonious nation as we approach the Centenary of Federation in 2001.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has adopted a vision statement which guides all of its endeavours:

A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

Since it was established through a unanimous vote in both houses of the federal Parliament in 1991, the Council has focused on the task of defining and explaining the core elements of reconciliation, and in raising awareness of, and support for, the process across Australia.

As it approaches its final term, the Council now believes that an important part of its role is in encouraging and facilitating practical projects and agreements which make reconciliation a reality on the ground.

identity of many Aboriginal people. Debra Bennet McLean, an intern curator at the Queensland Museum and the Queensland Art Gallery, discussed the issue from the viewpoint of Aboriginal artists and writers at the RGAQ 1997 workshop, 'Working with Indigenous Artefacts: Awareness, Understanding, Respect and Protocols':

We need to acknowledge that Aboriginal people have a strong desire to reclaim their identity... There's a good many instances of people throughout this country who haven't had access and continual links with Aboriginal people from their ancestral line. So they have lost that information and they are very angry about that... Each artist must take a personal journey, each writer must make a personal journey and search that history out to ensure and authenticate for themselves.

An important reminder for museum and heritage workers who use archival photographs comes from Kylie Winkworth, a New South Wales museum consultant and social historian. Kylie had used an archival photograph of two Aboriginal girls who had been taken away from their families to help tell the story of the stolen generation. She attempted to trace the identity of the girls through Link Up and eventually did locate one of the people in the photograph.

The woman described how the use of this archival photograph by the media had been incredibly hurtful for her. Every time there was a story about the stolen generation there was the photograph of her and her sister in their neat white cardigans with the white family in front of the television set. The photograph itself had been taken before the white family had sent her off to a home in Melbourne while keeping the sister. Understandably she had been incredibly traumatised by the experience and the appearance of this photograph on television was intensely painful, epitomising not only the loss of her own family life but also the rejection when the supposed 'new and better' (sic) family sent her away to an institution.

## Ownership and copyright<sup>11</sup>

Copyright protects the individual creator's rights in literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work which are expressed in a material form. Exceptions are where work is created in the course of employment in which the creator is a paid employee rather than a freelancer (the employer owns the copyright); or where a person commissions photographs, portraits,

engravings, sound recordings and film and a fee is paid (the person who commissions the work owns the copyright); or when material is published by the Crown (the Crown owns the copyright).

Copyright law provides a means of payment for the sale and use of an author's or creator's or artist's work and also maintains the integrity of the work. However, copyright law as it stands at the moment has a number of limitations in protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property:

- Copyright law does not necessarily protect community or family ownership and responsibility for a design. For example, the copyright applies to an individual artwork but not a particular design style.
- It does not protect oral storytelling, dance and song or oral knowledge of flora and fauna or medicine since these are regarded as lacking material form. Copyright law does come into effect when these things are documented, for example on paper, film, audio or video.
- Sacred/secret material is not specially protected as such. However, in the Mountford case, where an anthropologist published an Aboriginal group's sacred knowledge divulged to him 35 years before by tribal elders, the book's sale was banned because it was ruled to be a breach of confidence.
- Since the term of protection is usually the author's life plus 50 years, this prevents copyright protection of, for example, traditional rock art.
- In addition, even when copyright does cover Aboriginal peoples' and Torres Strait Islanders' creations, such as the work of an individual artist, lack of knowledge about the legal rights of creators may mean that the artist still does not benefit.

Several options are currently being considered to improve the protection available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural property. In the meantime, it is important that museums not only are informed about copyright law but also are aware they must consult on customary law so as to deal fairly, morally and appropriately in terms of Indigenous protocol on these matters.

Customary law is about responsibilities as much as rights; it is about custodianship as

much as ownership. Penalties under customary law for divulging sacred knowledge without permission are very serious, including death and dispossession of Dreaming rights.

Indigenous Australians are asking that all aspects of their cultural and intellectual life be returned to their control, with the right to define access and the proper use of cultural and intellectual property by others, and to ensure just economic return from the use, sale and reproduction of, or access to, their cultural heritage. This includes art, stories, ceremony, language, performance, songs, traditional medicine and knowledge of Australia's flora and fauna, and also the documentation and use of this heritage through films, video, audio tapes and photographs.

#### What might this mean in practice?<sup>12</sup>

- Interpretation must be guided and developed by Aboriginal people and things should not be done without their approval. This means considering Indigenous protocols in addition to existing copyright laws. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities may have rules of communal ownership which are additional to, or even conflict with, ownership under the Copyright Act.
- The use of an individual artist's work is covered by copyright law and therefore cannot be reproduced in a museum publication without permission. You would, of course, expect to pay a fee for the reproduction of that work. It is important to remember that just because you own the object, for example a painting in your museum's collection, it does not give you the right to reproduce an image of it in a museum publication.
- Copyright of oral history tapes and transcripts is covered in more detail in the Supplementary Reference Material. The copyright of the tape is owned by whoever supplies the tape, for example, the organisation employing the interviewer. The copyright of the transcript is probably owned jointly by the interviewer and interviewee. Where the ownership lies depends on whether the interviewer has created the transcript by structured questions and editing of the transcript or whether the interviewee has created it by the stories told with minimal intervention by the interviewer. To resolve this issue, it is usually recommended that a written agreement is signed. An example of a release form is included in '6.10: Oral History', *Museum Methods: A Practical Manual for Managing Small Museums*, Museums Australia Inc. (NSW), reproduced in the Supplementary Reference Material.
- Commissioning an artist to produce pieces for an exhibition should involve a fee and an agreement which covers ownership of copyright and rights and permission to use images of the work in catalogues, public relations and educational kits, for example. If the agreement does not cover a particular use, such as one that was not anticipated at the time, you must gain specific permission for such additional uses. This is, of course, even more important if it is a commercial use such as a postcard or a poster. In general, keep the communication open — every time there is an approach to use the material, inform the artist and ask permission again.
- Permission to use a design or element of a style, such as in an artwork or graphic design, must be obtained from the custodian of the design or style — this is a community ownership matter so it is necessary to ask permission from the elders of that community. Such a use should involve appropriate compensation such as a negotiated fee. This is consistent with traditional practice whereby particular designs and knowledge were exchanged (that is, with permission and for appropriate compensation) via the trade routes that criss-crossed Australia.
- Some galleries have begun to educate the public by requiring a statement of written approval from the community custodian to be displayed alongside works of art, such as contemporary work that has drawn on a traditional style or design.
- Permission to document Indigenous knowledge such as storytelling, song, dance, flora and fauna, and traditional medicine should be obtained from the custodian. This is an issue of community ownership and custodianship of intellectual property that is not in a material form as protected by the Copyright Act. So it is a matter for the elders of that community. However, this raises the issue that if this documentation is done by a museum employee, the museum would own the copyright unless an

agreement is specifically entered into to arrange otherwise. An alternative approach would be for the community to commission the documentation (perhaps for a fee that might be waived in lieu of a loan fee), and then the community would own the copyright. Another approach is to provide the training necessary for the community to do its own documentation in material form so that the copyright remains with the community.

- Particular agreements can be drawn up. See case study 8 for an example where

Aboriginal people and a museum have negotiated a contract giving the museum permission to display the intellectual property of the Wiradjuri people in the form of the stories and artwork developed for the keeping place exhibition as a loan for a period of time.

- See case study 9 for discussion of an approach to ownership including signed releases, verbal contracts, payment for the oral histories, copyright to the storyteller as author and royalties to the people in the photographs.

### **NIAAA Policy Statement: Non-Indigenous Usage of Indigenous Cultural Expression**

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The National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association (NIAAA) is concerned about the number of non-Indigenous artists, writers and performers incorporating Indigenous Australian cultural expression into their works.

Images such as the rainbow serpent have been employed by non-Indigenous artists in their art work. Specific Indigenous designs have also been used such as the rarrk, X-ray and dot designs. Even more flagrant is the usage of sacred images such as the Wandjina and the distortion of significant cultural items such as the Torres Strait Island head-dress. These are distinctly Indigenous images and designs and are associated with central themes in Indigenous Australian cultures.

The National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association is an organisation that advocates for the greater recognition and acceptance of

the legal and cultural rights of Indigenous artists. In line with international developments concerning the rights of world Indigenous peoples, specifically the principles and guidelines of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Economic and Social Council's *Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*, NIAAA strongly urges non-Indigenous artists, writers and performers to respect the cultural and spiritual significance of their images and designs to Indigenous people and refrain from incorporating elements from Indigenous cultural heritage into their works without the informed consent of the traditional custodians. It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have control over the development of their own forms of artistic and cultural expression, as well as its interpretation and use by others.



## Policy guidelines for museums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities<sup>15</sup>

Museums support the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination in respect of cultural heritage matters. Self-determination means having the major say in decisions about their lives and community needs.

a dynamic reality and will deal with the history of interaction between Indigenous peoples and European settlers and avoid presentations which imply that Aboriginal culture died out with European settlement and/or perhaps mysteriously reappeared in 1988.

### Museum activities: collection, conservation, communication<sup>14</sup>

- Museums will obtain and take into account the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regard to Indigenous cultural items, including what should be collected, how it should be cared for, who may see it and what should be returned or removed, and what is said about it in accompanying documentation, research material and labels.
- Museums will give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities all information about their collections of Indigenous cultural items so that communities can make informed decisions about such items.
- Museums will lend cultural items from their collections to museums and other venues, especially local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander keeping places.
- Museums will make available all documents, including photographs and audio visual material, held by them which are relevant to Indigenous communities.
- Museums will encourage Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to conduct research into Indigenous cultural items held by museums.
- People from the relevant Indigenous community will be involved in improving or adding information about Indigenous items in a museum.
- Public programs about Indigenous peoples such as exhibitions, education programs, special events, publications and media releases will involve Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in ongoing consultation and in the program.
- Museums will present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history as

### Management and staffing<sup>15</sup>

- Museums will promote the employment of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in all activities involving their culture and heritage.
- Museums will train Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in all aspects of museum activity.
- Museums will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members to maintain and enhance community networks outside the institution and within the community's time frame.
- Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders will be involved in policy decisions affecting their cultural heritage through representation on museum boards, councils and advisory bodies.

### Intellectual property issues<sup>16</sup>

- Museums will recognise the moral rights of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders as the owners of their heritage. Museums will respect the rights of Indigenous peoples for control of their heritage.

The heritage of Indigenous people includes all objects, sites and knowledge regarded as pertaining to a particular peoples clan or territory. This means all moveable cultural property, all kinds of literary and artistic works such as music, dance, song ceremonies, symbols, designs, narrative and poetry; all kinds of scientific, agricultural, technical and ecological knowledge, including medicines, flora and fauna; human remains; immovable cultural property such as sacred sites, sites of significance; and photographs, video tape and audio tape of these materials.

Every element of an Indigenous people's heritage has traditional owners which may be the whole people, a particular family or clan, an association or society, or individuals who have been specially taught or initiated to be its custodians.

In the case of objects or other elements of heritage which were removed or recorded in the past, the traditional owners of which can no longer be identified precisely, the traditional owners are presumed to be the entire people associated with the territory from which these objects were removed, or where the recordings were made or the direct descendants of that people. — *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*

- Objects or any other elements of an Indigenous people's heritage will be collected, managed and displayed in a manner deemed appropriate by the peoples concerned.
- Information obtained from Indigenous peoples including information about any aspect of heritage described above will not be published without identifying the traditional owners and obtaining their consent to publication.
- Indigenous people will be supported and trained to research and record their own traditional knowledge.
- All forms of tourism based on Indigenous peoples' heritage will be restricted to activities which have the approval of the peoples and communities concerned and which are conducted under their supervision and control.
- Artists, writers and performers will refrain from incorporating elements derived from Indigenous heritage into their works without the informed consent of the traditional owners.
- Where traditional knowledge is sought, payment will be made for that knowledge.

## Human remains<sup>17</sup>

- Museums will enter into meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities regarding human remains.
- All requests for the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remains will be promptly, cooperatively and sensitively dealt with by museums.
- If a museum is asked to keep or hold on to human remains by the relevant community, or if remains are unclaimed, the museum will properly store them in an area separate from other parts of the collection and will treat them with respect at all times.
- Access to human remains held by museums will be carefully controlled according to the wishes of the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Human remains will not be displayed to the public.

## Secret and sacred materials<sup>18</sup>

- Museums with secret and sacred items in their collections will try to find out where the items come from, who owns them and whether these traditional custodians want the items to be returned to the community or held by the museum on behalf of the community.
- Museums will agree to return secret and sacred material to the community if asked.
- Unless museums are asked to return these items, they should store them separately from other collections, and in a way that reflects their significant nature. Only people granted access by traditional custodians or their descendants or museum management will have access.
- Secret/sacred items will not be displayed to the public unless the community elders determine otherwise.

## Case studies: Museums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

### Case study 1

#### Welcome address from an Elder of the Ngunnawal people

Matilda House, 'Welcoming address' in *Creating Heritage Partnerships*, a selection of papers from the Creating Heritage Partnerships Conference, 21–23 August 1995, National Museum of Australia, Canberra (reproduced with permission of Matilda House and the National Museum of Australia)

My name is Matilda House and I am the Chairperson of the Ngunnawal Land Council. On behalf of the Ngunnawal people, welcome to our country...

It is a relief to us that in the past few years Aboriginal people have been included in your consultation processes. Aboriginal people have always had reason to fear museums. Images of Truganini in a glass case; the head of the patriot, Pemulwy, in a jar; and our skeletal remains placed next to dinosaurs in display cabinets have made us shudder. More recently, we have been invited to see the more private collections held by museums here in Australia. We have been astonished to be able to touch and feel the art and artefacts of our ancestors. They lie in neat rows on narrow shelves, identified by tags...

Ladies and gentlemen, we, the Ngunnawal people, have some big issues about the past and future facing us too. If you step outside this building you will glimpse sections of our traditional museum. It stretches much further than the eye can see. Our ancestors chose to keep the past hidden and secret, and the knowledge and significance of sacred sites and ancient stories passed down orally through the Elders for countless generations.

I am sure I do not need to remind you that events following the invasion of 1788 destroyed so much of our culture, our heritage and our knowledge about the past. Many of us lost our way during that time. For many of us survival was only achieved by forging new national units...

There is much that unites Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The historical process of national unity is so inextricably

linked to the arrival of non-Aboriginal people in this continent that it is difficult to say that this is only our history. It is a joint history, an interactive history. It is therefore important that we forge new partnerships in the telling and the displaying of that history...

This is just one of the issues facing us, the Ngunnawal people. Like many Indigenous communities in Australia, we have been proud to play a role in the national survival of our people. In more recent times, however, we have dared to dream that we can also survive as a community. Ladies and gentleman, until recently you had been led to believe that the Ngunnawal people had become extinct. To borrow from Mark Twain, I have to now tell you that rumours of our demise were greatly exaggerated.

It is true that our people were driven off their lands, that under the Aboriginal Acts our families were divided, that policies aimed at destroying our spiritual associations with the land were very successful and that, through the assimilation process, many of our people have been lost. In the past few years, however, we have been slowly sewing back the fragments of our past. We have found many that were lost...

I cannot deny the important role non-Aboriginal records have played in this process. I cannot deny, either, the role our non-Indigenous neighbours, friends and specialists have played in providing the fragments we needed to prove our continued existence.

There are still so many of us out there who are lost and who need the opportunity to have access to the records to find the answers to their crisis of identity. Our young people

have not had the benefit of the stories of the Elders. We, the modern Elders, have to recreate those stories as best we can and with as much help as we can, so that we can pass on our community identity and heritage to our descendants.

The concept of a community keeping place, therefore, plays an important role in our survival. It is no longer safe nor wise to assume that our sacred sites can continue to lie undisturbed in the open. The keeping place will protect the records and the artefacts and the skeletal remains. We are beginning to accept this and realise the need for us to adapt to historical change to ensure our continued survival as a people.

There are so many other issues facing us along these lines and as yet we do not necessarily have the answers. We need to ascertain, for example, the point at which our history belongs to us, the Ngunnawal people, a point at which we should not necessarily have to share our history with others. There is that past that belongs with those of our ancestors who lived long before the non-Aboriginal invasion. Do we have to share that, or is there a way that we can continue to protect our sacred sites without fear of encroachment by strangers?

There is that past in which our history becomes interactive. It is a history we have to share because it involves so many others. For example, Aboriginal people from non-Ngunnawal communities who have arrived in our country over a long period of time

and now consider this place their home; the white settlers and their descendants; and much more recent migrants from so many other cultures.

And what about our traditional culture, or at least those parts of our culture that survive? Must we share that too? Is it in our interests to share it? These are decisions we have yet to make after long consultations between our people and others.

I am sure you understand something of the crises that face Aboriginal people about the past and how important the consultation process is in the forging of cultural heritage partnerships. With the advent of the 21st century before us, I can understand also, your need to make decisions about future planning for national and regional museums, keeping places and cultural centres.

But I must ask for your patience if you wish to include Aboriginal people in cultural heritage partnerships. We have a lot of catching up to do and we need to think deeply about the way forward. For the first time in history since the invasion, we are in the position to make decisions about our past that will affect our future survival. Please do not leave us behind in your haste to meet your own deadlines. We have been here for thousands of years, and if we are to share the next few thousand years together then we must work closely and accept the time it takes to achieve joint aims.

## Case study 2

### Communication cues: Torres Strait Islander people

An extract from *Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mum, Proper Communication with Torres Strait Islander People; Consultation and Negotiation with Aboriginal People* (reproduced with permission of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs within the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care)

**Accept** that, as a visitor, you are in another cultural world and on another person's property — be humble.

**Acquire** a sound knowledge of the Torres Strait Island cultural diversity.

**Adapt** — be flexible with councils, communities, groups and individuals — everyone is unique.

**Advise** accurately and sensitively in an independent and timely manner.

- Allow** Island chairman or councillors to determine seating arrangements at a meeting.
- Analyse** situations or problems carefully and in detail to provide an appropriate solution or outcome.
- Answer** all questions or requests concisely.
- Anticipate** problems or consequences when dealing with councils or groups — not everything is going to work to plan.
- Apply** common sense when visiting Islands, organisations or individuals — think ‘where am I?’, ‘who am I?’, ‘what am I here for?’
- Appraise** each meeting or contact situationally — no two happenings are alike.
- Appreciate** the cultural differences of each Island community — they may appear the same at first, but each is unique.
- Arrange** your meeting or contact well in advance — work around other people, not yourself.
- Assess** the issues to be discussed prior to meeting — something may have been overlooked which could be important to both parties.
- Assist** councils, organisations and individuals in a diligent and professional manner at all times.
- Attempt** to learn the local language — this will be appreciated by the person or group you are contacting.
- Avoid** being blunt or abrupt when addressing meetings or answering questions — this will not help the communication process.
- Budget** for your field trips and meetings; make sure the funds are available prior to committal.
- Carry out** all requests for assistance in an honest, accurate and expedient manner.
- Check** well before if any other peak agencies (e.g. ICC or TSRA) are meeting on the agreed meeting day.
- Circulate** all information relevant to the meeting freely across the community — they have a right to know.
- Collaborate** with councils, organisations and individuals — jointly approaching projects, programs and initiatives
- provides for healthy working relationships and outcomes.
- Communicate** effectively and sensitively with all people — remember that communication is a two-way street.
- Conduct** yourself in a dignified, friendly, polite and courteous manner — you are under scrutiny, and will be remembered by your conduct, not your position.
- Consider** the feelings of another when meeting — sensitivities may surface when broaching certain subjects, e.g. family, death, religion and politics.
- Consult** with council or acknowledged community elders; try not to single out one person or contact, as this may offend.
- Control** your temper and keep your voice down when a person does not understand you — this can cause confusion and create anger.
- Contribute** constructive ideas — do not put words in another person’s mouth — be interactive, not overbearing.
- Coordinate** meetings effectively, ensuring all stakeholders are consulted and arrangements planned and actioned — use a check list.
- Counsel** all people in a caring, sensitive manner as required — be objective and independent.
- Define** your role simply and clearly when addressing a meeting or making contact with individuals — try not to ramble on or complicate the situation.
- Demonstrate** effectively by providing clear explanations and examples of ideas, issues, options or projects — clearly illustrate your position.
- Develop** healthy working relationships with councils, communities, organisations and individuals — promote goodwill and understanding between all parties.
- Disseminate** information or ideas broadly across all stakeholders in a fair and equitable manner — ensure no one is disadvantaged.
- Document** details of meetings accurately so as to reflect the true nature of the events of the day — this is important for future referencing and action.
- Encourage** participants in discussions, meetings and forums to present their

views or ideas on the issues of importance.

- Ensure** that all contact protocols are observed while visiting Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Establish** networks to enhance the working relationships with councils, communities, organisations and individuals — it is impossible to go it alone.
- Evaluate** outcomes of meetings, noting where improvements can be effected — learn as you go.
- Examine** how you deal with people — what seems logical to you may not be the same to others.
- Expedite** requests for assistance as soon as practical after contact — this will help to maintain confidence from others.
- Facilitate** discussions, meetings and forums only when requested — to take control may seem offensive.
- Feel** sensitively for the customs and culture of the community which you are visiting — be cautious.
- Gather** accurate and appropriate information on the profile of the target community prior to the arrangement of the meetings.
- Generate** interest in particular issues — be dynamic and encourage involvement.
- Identify** key stakeholders in the community, as well as chairman and council; others may include elderly men and women and respected younger people possessing higher education.
- Instruct** in a culturally sensitive manner — different people learn in different ways; no one method may be appropriate.
- Liaise** frequently with all stakeholders — maintenance of contact ensures regular exchange of occurrences, issues and ideas.
- Maintain** accurate, up-to-date information about current issues and policies which may impact on Torres Strait Islander society.
- Negotiate** sensitively with others when attempting to reach agreement — give a little, listen a little, learn a little, find out what the other party needs.
- Notify** council, chairman, organisations or individuals well in advance of your visit,

e.g. date in, out, meeting venue, purpose, permission to visit.

- Observe** contact protocols when speaking to a person of the opposite sex — inappropriate contact may inflame emotions of others.
- Organise** meetings methodically — successful outcomes come only from substantial input.
- Participate** in community activities when invited to do so — enjoy celebrations, festivities; protocols apply.
- Plan** to succeed — planning is the essence of achieving objectives; if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.
- Prepare** to meet with groups of both gender — concentrating on one or the other can be counterproductive.
- Produce** positive outcomes — if you are viewed as an achiever within the community, respect and trust may follow; most people recognise successes.
- Promise** only what you are capable of achieving or are willing to produce — letdowns are for a lifetime.
- Provide** accurate information and advice in an independent and timely manner — keep to the facts.
- Remain** silent if unsure what to say — prolonged silence is quite acceptable; let someone else pick it up.
- Respect** family, feelings, customs, culture, values, religion, politics, land and property — remember: no respect, no cooperation; no cooperation = no result.
- Respond** in a clear accurate manner — show understanding of the issue; paraphrase if necessary, and react appropriately.
- Show** interest in community affairs — be responsive to current initiatives and activities; be involved to the extent so as not to interfere with local politics.
- Speak** at a rate which can be easily understood — jargon and acronyms can confuse.
- Thank** the council and community for extending the invitation to visit and for the hospitality provided.
- Use** a go-between if unsure of culture or language — this will avoid embarrassment to both parties and allow the visitor to keep face.

**Validate** all arrangements prior to travel to an Island community — give enough room for flexibility in case of late changes.

**Work** within the parameters of your responsibility — meddling in another's business may strain your relationship with the community; keep to the plot.

**Expect** to get a hostile reception if you turn up over the Christmas/New Year period — family and religious festivities take precedence over all else.

**Yarn** only about yourself — but not too much; malicious gossip deeply offends and causes grief to people; community dynamics are very complex.

**Zoom** away from here — think about what you have just read; apply this wisdom in everything you do; think of others; establish good rapport; listen, listen and listen some more.

### Case study 3

#### Managing a collection

Interview with Michael Aird, Curator of Aboriginal Studies, Queensland Museum

I see the main role of this collection as being an example of what a community can do on their own. They can have total control over their collection...I think my role or the museum's role is to aid that process and to encourage people to take it on themselves to start documenting their history and collecting things. — *Michael Aird, 1997*

I was brought up in an urban situation...coming to the Queensland Museum and having an opportunity to work with the collection helps you get an idea of who you are...I think every Murri kid should have the chance to experience the collection. I always felt sad that only about 3% of the collection was ever on display at any time and so the other stuff you just don't see. That is why I think it would be good for every community to have its own keeping place so the people of the community can look at their material culture with pride. If they don't have enough money to have a keeping place, they can approach a local institution, possibly a local school or library or council chambers, to house their collection for them until they do. — *Shayne Rawson, 1997*

Michael Aird, Curator of Aboriginal Studies, manages the collection of Aboriginal material at the Queensland Museum and has 10,000 artefacts and 6,000 photographs to manage. The following principles guide his approach.

#### Make object stores accessible

Staff are committed to making the collection accessible for as many people as possible. The object store is organised so that what is appropriate to be seen is on open access shelves. Materials that are inappropriate to be seen, such as human remains and secret and sacred material, are stored in locked cupboards and access is given only to people sanctioned by the community.

#### Allow easy access to the documentation

Documentation is kept on open shelves in A4 folders. People are encouraged to visit and to look through both photographic and object files and to add to or correct information.

Documentation on secret and sacred material and on skeletal remains is kept separate and is accessed only by people with good reason who ask specifically for such access and have the support of their community.

#### Encourage community to be curators

People from the communities are invited to explore the collection and to tell the curator about the artefacts. The expertise of these individuals who are invited to

indicate the importance of particular artefacts is valued and acknowledged.

#### **Make loans of material to communities**

Objects can be loaned to communities upon request. For example, objects might be loaned for ceremonies or for the youth of the community to experience. Such requests might be weighed against the potential for deterioration to the object.

#### **Handover of skeletal remains**

A handover program for all human remains in the collection is under way. Communities are encouraged to claim ownership of skeletal remains so that they can be given a proper and respectful burial in their country. The museum respects and cooperates with the particular ritual and ceremony that the community wishes to adopt for the handover.

### Case study 4

#### **Pathways 2: Trade routes**

Interview with Debra Bennet McLean, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Officer, Queensland Community Arts Network

We're going to be asking these people where they gained their influences, what they feel it is that drives them, what inspires them, what urges them to create the way they do, how do they see their art connecting with past practices or family histories, how these stories intersect with tribal migration paths...The collective stories of all of these people will coalesce to provide a strong cultural map of the evolution of Indigenous art practices...and will begin to address such issues as who first designed that long skinny kangaroo on the boomerang?...who was the first person to make a plywood map of Australia?...how did cross-hatching get to be something that people from south-east Queensland put into their art work when we know that it comes from other areas? —  
*Debra Bennet McLean, 1997*

#### **Description of project**

This is a cultural history project initiated and undertaken by members of the Indigenous community. It is in part a family history project and in part a study of the origins of Indigenous art and designs. The project involves a partnership between the Queensland Art Gallery and the Queensland Museum and will result in an exhibition to be shown at both venues, perhaps by the year 2000. The museum personnel involved include Margo Neale, the curator of

Indigenous Australian Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, and Debra Bennet McLean, then an intern placed with the Department of Indigenous Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, and with the Curator of Aboriginal Studies at Queensland Museum.

#### **Process of consultation**

A consultative committee has been set up for the project. The process of community consultation is absolutely essential to the project. The approach is, therefore, that it will take as long as it has to take and the exhibition has not been locked into a schedule at either venue.

Debra Bennet McLean has surveyed the collection at the Queensland Museum, chosen artefacts, traced the history of these artefacts and then conducted oral histories with artists from the communities. Setting up visits with artists from the communities involved a number of steps:

- The first step is to approach the elders of the community, introduce yourself and your family history and explain your project, ask to be referred or introduced to appropriate people.
- Then you start following the trail, making visits to people who are recommended and to others whom they



in turn recommend. This involves introducing yourself to these people, letting them know who your grandfather and grandmother were and what their country was, showing them objects from the collection and probably also involves '100 cups of tea and piles of chicken curry'.

- It also involves listening to and remembering what people are telling you even when it does not seem directly relevant at the time. It is important to acknowledge what you have been told from one visit to the next. If you do, you will see recognition in people's faces that you did remember the names you were told and events from the past. You may not necessarily know the significance of this information at the time — connections come later.
- If you are visiting an area where you have relatives, it is protocol to have them introduce you to the elders of the community.
- It involves working intuitively, following up on people who are recommended and on people who visit the museum or gallery. Listening to stories about visual references to country and collecting photographs about the country is very important. For example, references to a

particular hardwood, a place for crystal or petrified wood can help you research the origin of objects in a collection.

- Eventually, artists will come to you to talk to you about their work and where their influences come from.
- When you get to dead ends, you can go back to the elders, explain your predicament and ask for more assistance. You can also approach contemporary artists working in remote, rural and urban areas to talk about their process of learning the old skills.

An important step in protocol with oral histories is to develop a relationship with the person. You must let them know who you are, who your people are and where they are from. And you must be patient and think of this as an organic long-term project. It involves a lot of listening. Everything is done on consensus and it takes time. It is about paying your respect to the old people. I say this is the project I have been given to learn patience. It might take weeks for the person to think about what you have said and to talk to someone else about it and then to get back to you to say that something was not quite right and that the best person to talk to is someone who has just gone away for a month and so on. — *Debra Bennet McLean, 1997*

## Case study 5

### The Warriparinga Interpretative Centre: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together

A paper presented by Georgina Williams, Elder of the Kurna people and a member of the Kurna Heritage Committee, and Don Chapman, Cultural Planner, City of Marion, at Creating Heritage Partnerships Conference, 21–23 August 1995, National Museum of Australia, Canberra (reproduced with permission of Don Chapman and the National Museum of Australia)

*Georgina Williams begins the story...*

#### Introduction to Warriparinga

Warriparinga is the first place, meaning it is the first place of the journey of the ancestral being Tjirbruke and has great significance for my people — the Kurnas.

The Tjirbruke story is the best known and most intact of the Kurna dreaming stories. It was at Warriparinga that Tjirbruke took his murdered nephew's body to be smoke-dried and where he avenged his nephew's death.

Tjirbruke is remembered as the creator of

springs along the coast of the Fleurieu peninsula and with the making of fire. Also, the site is well documented as a former traditional camping ground.

My involvement with Warriparinga and Marion Council grew out of a series of developments that I helped to activate from the early 1980s and includes:

- the setting up of the Noarlunganung Community Services Centre around 1985
- research work to produce a booklet on the Tjirbruke story in 1986
- a project to erect cairns at each Tjirbruke site along the Fleurieu coast from Brighton to Cape Jervis
- the establishment of the Tjirbruke Dreaming Forum with three local governments and local environment groups to oversee and manage the Tjirbruke sites
- the establishment of the Kurna Heritage Committee, around 1990, to act as custodians for all Kurna heritage sites on the Adelaide Plains.

I will now hand over to Don Chapman to give the story of the development of Warriparinga from the view of the city of Marion.

*Don Chapman continues...*

### **Introduction**

Today I will tell the story of the City of Marion's attempt to form closer links and foster understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; give you a brief background to the City of Marion; and make particular reference to the Warriparinga Interpretative Centre project.

The image taken from the cover of the Warriparinga Interpretative Centre Conservation and Management Plan of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children playing together at a community consultation workshop captures exactly what the project is about. It is about conserving and utilising the Aboriginal, European and natural heritage of the Warriparinga site for future generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The children played together on the day, and at subsequent workshops, oblivious to the problems their parents were discussing. It

seems to me now that they were a perfect 'model' for what we hope will be the outcome of all reconciliation projects such as this one — that is, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coming together and working together.

The Management and Conservation Plan hails Warriparinga as a 'landmark project... [that] will enable Kurna people to celebrate a homecoming to their land, assist them in evolving a sustainable future and promote the process of reconciliation between all Australians'.

### **Beginnings of the Warriparinga project**

Marion Council's involvement with the Warriparinga Interpretative Centre began in early 1992, when it set up a partnership with the then State Department of Environment and Planning to pilot a scheme to develop and implement strategies which integrated environmental issues into the community.

Out of this community partnership came a concept to set up an environment centre in Marion through direct participation with local representatives of the Kurna Heritage Committee. This initiative developed into the current proposal for the Warriparinga Interpretative Centre.

### **About the City of Marion**

The modern corporation of the City of Marion covers an area of 54 square kilometres and is the state's fifth most populous local government area with some 75,000 inhabitants in the 1991 Census of whom some 368 or 0.5% were Aboriginal people.

The Council operates under a detailed corporate plan committed to creating a healthy and safe environment and improving the quality of life of all its community.

Council prides itself on its modern and innovative approach to providing services to its community. Many of its traditional services such as libraries, development control, rubbish collection, reserves, road maintenance and community services have now been augmented by new services devoted to health, environment, community relations, waste recycling, cultural and economic development, strategic and integrated local area planning.

### **Involvement with the Aboriginal community**

Prior to 1992, the city had little involvement with its Aboriginal people except to assist and support the work of Palya Gathering of Aboriginal Women, by providing a venue for meeting, exhibition and promotion, but did little else.

However, the responsibility for further involvement in Aboriginal activities by the city lay directly with Paul and Naomi Dixon of the Kurna Heritage Committee, who are custodians of the Warriparinga and Tjirbruke site at Brighton.

Their determination, spurred on by the success of Mabo, led to the adoption of the Kurna Heritage Committee's plans for the Warriparinga's Interpretative Centre, and the flying of the Aboriginal flag, the staging of a successful exhibition of their art, called Kurna Neporendi, in the city's Chambers Gallery, and their appointment as live-in caretakers of the Warriparinga site over the years from 1992 to 1994.

These developments were not achieved without heartache. For example, the issue of raising the Aboriginal flag in the Year of Indigenous People met with all sorts of opposition in the Council Chamber. Cries of respect for flag protocol were met with taunts of racism until a stroke of pure genius led Council to recommend the erection of two more flag poles to add to the three outside the Administration Centre. Consequently, the Aboriginal flag flies over the city to this day.

Another development was the creation of cross-cultural training workshops in partnership with the City of Marion and the State Department of Family and Community Services. The training is available for the staff of both organisations and designed and facilitated by Aboriginal people.

The key aim of the workshops is to provide non-Aboriginal people with an opportunity to broaden their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and in particular the South Australian Aboriginal community and the Kurna people.

In addition, the city undertook a strategic planning program called *Working Together*

in 1994. The planning involved detailed consultation about the community's needs and aspirations and extended beyond the local community to include other levels of government and interested parties.

The *Strategic Issues* document produced in April 1995 recognises the Kurna Aboriginal people as the custodians of many archaeological and cultural sites in the Marion area. Importantly, it agrees to consult with the Kurna people and other relevant agencies to create a register of archaeological and cultural sites and to develop strategies to enable consultation in an appropriate way with Aboriginal residents to ensure their involvement in relevant issues.

And, of course, it was not simply the positive outcomes of Mabo and the Year of Indigenous People, and the urgings of Kurna Heritage Committee representatives, that spurred Marion on to do more on behalf of Aboriginal people. It became apparent when the Local Government Association of South Australia published a comprehensive survey report addressing equity and access issues in February 1994 called *Local Councils Belong to Aboriginal People Too* that other councils were doing more than ever.

### **The Warriparinga project — introduction**

The site of the Warriparinga Interpretative Centre is on a state heritage-listed parcel of Council-administered reserve land of some 6 hectares, just 14 kilometres south-west of the Adelaide GPO, and bounded by South, Sturt and Marion roads.

The land was given to Council in 1884 by Science Park. The land is significant for Aboriginal, European and natural heritage reasons. Georgina has already explained the importance of the land to the Kurna people. The land was used after European settlement to plant vines to establish the important viticulture base for the area. The reserve land includes an 1850s farmhouse and coachhouse, a formal garden and orchard, and a community-operated native revegetation area as well as being the only 'natural' part of the Sturt River on the Adelaide Plains.

### **Management**

Since its inception, the project has been managed by a Community Steering Committee, composed of the Kurna Heritage Committee, the City of Marion, Flinders University, the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, the State Heritage branch, the Marion Historical Society, Clovelly Park Community Health Centre, the State Tourism Commission and the Friends of Laffer's Triangle. The Committee is charged with setting up the management structure of the Centre. Its first step was to commission a conservation and management plan to determine feasibility of development on what is a very sensitive site of Aboriginal, European and environmental significance for Marion and the wider community.

### **Origin of the planning process**

The Council and the Steering Committee chose a cultural development process to advance the project. This thinking was informed by the experience of an earlier cultural development model at another heritage site owned by the Council called Perry Barr Farm at Hallett Cove.

The model contained three key elements:

- detailed consultation with the community and participation by the community in the development of plans. The theory behind this approach was to try to gain as much understanding and ownership by the community as possible.
- access by all sections of the community in the development of the plans. We wanted to talk to any individual or organisation who could possibly have an interest in the project.
- involvement of consultants such as artists, architects, landscape architects, heritage architects, archaeologists, specialist advisers and facilitators, to drive the consultation process and develop the plans. Neither Council nor the community possessed the specialised skills these professionals could bring to the project. Also it is well worth noting that the Steering Committee chose a team of consultants that included three members of the Kurna people, Georgina Williams being one of them.

The first step was the commissioning of a management and conservation plan informed by a brief developed by members of the Steering Committee over 18 months. The bulk of the funding for the plan was provided by Marion Council and assisted by grants from the State Heritage Department and a Reconciliation Grant from the Australian Local Government Association.

### **The plan itself**

The Management and Conservation Plan took 12 months to complete. Allow me to summarise its contents. It begins by describing the cultural, social, educational and tourism opportunities for Warriparinga. It then details and assesses the site's Aboriginal heritage, its European heritage and its ecology. Concept design proposals which respond to the site's opportunities, heritage and ecology are detailed in sections on landscape, architecture, and interpretative signs and symbols. Planning issues addressing the boundary conditions of the site and the surrounding MFP land are discussed and the final section describes potential implementation strategies, funding opportunities and management issues.

### **Opportunities for the site**

The report states that the Warriparinga site has great potential to develop cultural, social, educational and tourism opportunities for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians which can contribute to a spirit of reconciliation between these cultures.

It seems that every great project requires a great threat to drive it to completion. Earlier this year, such a threat arose when the state government announced plans to build a Southern Expressway — the current proposed route cuts off a portion of the triangle of land and river that Warriparinga shares, and crosses an artefact scatter site identified during the completion of the Management and Conservation Plan. It remains to be seen whether this threat can be transformed into an opportunity.

Of even greater importance is the fact that Council, the Steering Committee and the

Kaurna Heritage Committee are currently discussing the possibility of transfer of the reserve land to Aboriginal control. This will need to include a detailed strategy for support and land management. However,

such a development adds a dimension not included in the report — an opportunity for a joint partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in which the non-Aboriginal people do not hold all the cards.

## Case study 6

### City of Unley Museum

Interview with Marie Boland, Curator of the Unley Museum

#### Where did the idea for an Aboriginal exhibition in this museum come from?

The City of Unley Museum is a council-funded local museum which has traditionally had a very Anglo-Saxon feel. Since its beginnings it has been associated with the prominent British families of the district. The museum was not very inclusive of differences in its collection and displays. Most of the volunteers had been associated with the museum for 10 years and there was a strong sense of their ownership.

For 10 years, most displays had centred on the Anglo-Saxon view of local history. At the time of the 125th anniversary of Unley it became obvious that disproportionate attention was being given to 'founders' of the area such as Thomas Whistler who had in reality lived in the area for only a few years. This was in stark contrast to the neglect of the Kaurna people who have had an intimate association with the area for more than 40,000 years. I was struck by the monument in the local Heywood Park which had plaques on three of its four sides commemorating early European settlers and a local mayor. The fourth side was blank. This was such a powerful example of the gaps in the presentation of local history, particularly of how the Aboriginal perspective had been left out of the history of the area.

#### How did you go about getting support for the idea?

I was very aware that consultation with Aboriginal people is essential for museums

in displaying and interpreting Aboriginal cultural heritage. I knew it was the responsibility of the museum to seek out the right people to consult. So I sought advice from Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute and their Aboriginal Education Officers about whom I should be talking to. This led me to Mr Lewis O' Brien, a respected Kaurna elder, who came out and went for a walk around Heywood Park with me and gave his support to the project. He in turn recommended that I work with Mr Darryl Pfitzner (Milika) who is a renowned Aboriginal artist, sculptor and designer. Mr Pfitzner agreed to work with the museum staff to develop an exhibition, *Same Story, Different Places — an Urban Dreaming*, which would represent the history of the original owners of the land around Unley. His involvement was essential because his role was to represent the voice of the Aboriginal community in the exhibition.

We then set up a reference group for the project including representatives from the Kaurna Elders, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, the State History Centre, the Council's Department of Community Services, the Friends of the Unley Museum, the volunteers of the Unley Museum and the residents of the Heywood Park area.

In the meantime, I sought and received a grant of \$16,000 under the Visions of Australia National Touring Exhibitions program to develop the exhibition. This involved getting support from other museums intra and interstate to take the exhibition after it has been on display at Unley.

**What is the exhibition *Same Story, Different Places — an Urban Dreaming* about?**

The exhibition presents an interpretation of local history nominally focusing on the Kurna experience. The title and exhibition itself, however, express the endemic nature of those experiences throughout Australia.



The centrepiece is a replica of the Heywood Park memorial which this time commemorates the experiences of the local Kurna people. Installation by artist Darryl Pfitzner (Milika) from *Same Story, Different Places* (Photograph by Eric Algra)

The centrepiece is a replica of the Heywood Park memorial which this time commemorates the experiences of the local Kurna people. Attached to the memorial are scraps of paper which speak of the supposed 'native reserves' of Unley which were all subdivided and sold, the dispersal of the Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal Children's Act which enabled children to be removed from their families unless their parents got their 'dog licences' and were exempted from the provisions of the Aboriginal Act and declared no longer Aborigines. As the exhibition is travelling, Darryl also felt that the story should try to reflect the experiences of urban Aboriginal people not just in Adelaide but throughout Australia.

Most importantly, the exhibition is about the local museum acting as a collaborator and partner with Indigenous peoples as set out in the Museums Australia policy, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, rather than as a portrayer of Aboriginal peoples as 'other' or as 'on the road to extinction'.

**What impact has the exhibition had?**

Our museum has never felt so fresh and dynamic and visitor numbers have shot up, in fact doubled since it has opened. Partly this has been the response from the schools. The Aboriginal Curriculum Unit has taken the exhibition on as a model and has held inservice workshops at the museum involving both the artist and the curator.

Word of mouth is attracting people through the doors who never would have visited before.

The experience of developing the exhibition has also had an impact at the museum. Darryl worked at the museum over a long period and informal discussions went on over morning and afternoon teas that certainly had an effect. One way this is evident is in the language of many of those associated with the museum. From a starting point of 'what have Aborigines got to do with our museum and our history', there is a new recognition of the Kurna people and of their place in the local story.

### ***Same Story, Different Places* — the artist's statement**

Hopefully you'll enjoy this exhibition and take the time to read the text. Maybe even explore some aspects more fully via the details affixed to some of the installation.

*Same Story, Different Places* (and just as easily *Different Stories, Same Place*) is a narrative at its broadest interpretation. We have used the floor installation as a symbolic arrangement to embody concepts of dispossession, dislocation and exclusion.

But this basic imagery is also the core we used to weave the stories around and through.

The blackfellas sprouted heads of stringy bark (great powers of regeneration in these trees) and I enjoyed the subtle manipulations of this wood to create their personalities.

Introduced pine became whitefellas and the more I carved into them the more bizarre they became (unkind history!).

And the dog (a boxer?). Well it was originally a sea chest on the beach; locked, material, possessive. Marie was chasing up some copies of what Aboriginal people called 'dog licences' (they're on the obelisk) and dog licences gelled with dog boxes and coolers (cells) and other obscenities. Then I heard about the old Murri man who died in hospital, thrashing around as he relived the trauma of 70-odd years ago. He'd been abducted from his family and home by the 'Child Welfare' agency, hunted down by dogs. And as I made that dog, it was no surprise that the head became crocodile-like, slightly sly and odd. And I made damn sure that he pissed on someone's leg.

Well, that is all I want to say, except this: that I hope in the warmth and humour, along with the drama and the tragedy, you find in this exhibition an overwhelming sense of pride and strength.

[The installation is by artist Darryl Pfitzner (Milika) from *Same Story, Different Places*; photographs by Eric Algra]



## Case study 7

### Cobar Regional Museum

Interview with Colin Jones, Curator of Cobar Regional Museum

*A Long Time Comin', The Story of Aboriginal Cobar* aims to bring to the museum part of the local history that has had only a cursory mention in the past. It tackles the problem of many regional museums where the display of Aboriginal culture stops at life before European contact.

This is an exhibition about Aboriginal people and their culture in the Cobar Region. It focuses around contemporary people and in particular the Bilargiyalu, a subgroup of the original Wangaaypuwan (Wongaibon) inhabitants, looking at their history: from before European occupation, through the early years of contact, the dispersal process and through to the issues that affect them today. — *Exhibition brief*

The consultant curator for the exhibition, Elaine Ohlsen, provides a welcome and an introduction, beginning with the Ngiyampaa greeting:

Yamakara

Hello people — welcome to  
Wangaaypuwan Country

The acknowledgements begin with the names of Aboriginal families whose involvement has made the exhibition possible — sixteen families are listed and seven individuals thanked in particular.

#### **What advice would you give to a small museum in regional Australia that wants to work with its local Indigenous community?**

The most important thing is to get to know the community, to interact socially and

develop friendships. If you are not prepared to do this, you will not get the trust of the community. I was lucky that the previous curator had established good links with the community and with the Aboriginal Liaison Officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It was also fortunate that the Wangaaypuwan people have retained their Ngiyampaa language and their knowledge of their cultural heritage.

Phil Gordon, Aboriginal Liaison Officer of the Australian Museum, provided helpful advice as did David Kaus of the National Museum of Australia.

I would recommend the Museums Australia policy, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations* (the plain English version), as a useful resource and the Creating Heritage Partnerships Conference that the National Museum of Australia organised in 1995.

#### **What difficulties were encountered?**

You have to allow time for consultation and resultant changes. The exhibition brief, for example, went through many, many changes as it was developed.

Because it was a contemporary exhibition, it involved Ngiyampaa people who continue to live in the area, other Aboriginal people (not Ngiyampaa) who have moved into the area and Ngiyampaa people who now live elsewhere. All three groups wanted input and there were sometimes different views on how their culture should be interpreted, especially with their creation stories.



## Case study 8

### Albury Regional Museum

Interview with Elizabeth Close, Curator of Albury Regional Museum

#### **What can you tell me about the project you are doing with the Aboriginal community at Albury Regional Museum? How did it begin?**

I was inspired at the launch in Hobart in 1993 of the Museums Australia policy, *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, to come back and do something to improve what the Albury Museum had done so far to include Aboriginal people. We had a strange collection and rather odd displays. The collection had very little documentation — perhaps one word, ‘boomerang’, and then the name of the historical society which had donated it.

So I contacted an Aboriginal Heritage Consultant who looked at the collection and advised which few items were from the Wiradjuri — the local Aboriginal people. I sought advice from the Ministry of New South Wales and decided that we should approach the Wiradjuri people with the offer to assist them to tell their story in a section of the Albury Museum that would be their space.

The Land Council was able to tell us who we should speak to and then one of the Wiradjuri elders came up with the names of people for a small advisory committee for the project. The base committee has six people and includes elders, women and some younger people.

#### **How has the consultative process worked for the project?**

It has been going about 2 years so far developing the storyline and program for their exhibition. The work goes on independently of me and new people will come to each advisory meeting. The advisory group meets and I provide sweet coffee and biscuits and I listen. The group talks about what they want to say in the exhibition, I listen, write it down and then get their OK, for example at the start of the next meeting, that the written version I recorded at the last meeting is what they do want to say.

#### **Have there been particular cultural protocol issues?**

One important issue has been the issue of ownership within the process. We asked for and got permission from the Council of Elders to be able to have their stories within the museum.

We needed to address their concerns about ownership of this cultural heritage. For example, their ownership of the drawings and artwork being done for the exhibition needed to be recognised and also that they could take them away when they pleased.

When people loan objects to the museum there is a procedure of documentation and a certificate of gift. What we have done for this project to address concerns about ownership of their cultural heritage is to develop a special form to show what has been given to their keeping place on long-term loan. Everything for their keeping place can be acquired on the collection management database in a different way, so that everything they own can be identified very quickly and it can be stored separately.

Another issue of concern is that the Aboriginal community will include not only the people who are the descendants of the original landowners but also people who have come from somewhere else perhaps as a result of government policies and this may be true too for people with positions on the Land Council. So it is important to seek permission from the elders of the local area to tell the old stories but also it was seen to be important to show how Aboriginal people are part of the local community today.

#### **What advice would you give a small museum with Aboriginal collections which is just starting to think about how to approach the collection?**

The most important thing is consultation, really listening — the museum is not driving the agenda, the community must own the process and the story.

Respect for each other is important, but humour is too. You are all allowed to be human. Someone will tell you if you step over the line.

You need to be up-front about budgets and not promise what you can't deliver. If there is not enough money to do what the

community wants to do then you can talk about doing the project in stages. For example, for dance programs to accompany the exhibition, you could seek separate additional funding. Perhaps you could set up the room as a work in progress, get paintings up and then start to tell the story in stages.

## Case study 9

### Shadows in the dust

Interview with Peta Hill, independent curator and producer

#### How did the *Shadows in the dust* project come about?

During 1986 and 1987 I spent time researching a film about Petford Training Farm in Far North Queensland, a station where Aboriginal and non-Indigenous youths learn the lore of the stockman. In Kowanyama, I sat on the rails at Yelko stockcamp and shot two rolls of black-and-white film while stockmen yarded cattle.

The proof sheets shocked me. The photographs were very powerful. Archetypal. Images of men on horseback emerging from the dust. Immediately it was named *Shadows in the dust* and I knew it would be very significant in my life — when it took form.

I knew that it would, in some way, provide common ground between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians: a meeting place to facilitate greater awareness and understanding.

It took years to focus this project — to reach a point of confidence to make it so public; to understand what I was doing and stand behind it.

#### Resolving the project

Research for *Shadows in the dust* took me to Argentina, where the mythology of the gaucho is important to the national psyche. I lived in Europe for a couple of years and returned to Australia in late 1992 to complete *Shadows in the dust*.

My starting point was at Petford Training Farm and it was my idea to photograph

Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people working together on stations on Cape York Peninsula. At Petford I worked with Hans McGreen, Dhuubi man from Hope Vale, who told me:

This is an Aboriginal story, Peta. My people opened up this country to cattle but we haven't told our story yet. If the Old People don't tell their story soon, this history will be lost. You need to record the stories of my people as well as take their photographs, Peta. This project must be a book. Other people should know what has happened. My people will pull together to help you with this.

I told Hans I needed to think about it for a couple of weeks. The newly defined version of *Shadows in the dust* would be years' work and a long haul to raise the necessary funding.

I am still surprised by how long this project is taking and the depth of energy it has demanded of me.

Importantly, Hans was right. People on Cape York Peninsula have pulled together for this project. Black and white people. It has been phenomenal: a level of collaboration that has given the project its foundation and integrity.

#### What protocols have you learned about on this project?

*Ask permission*

It doesn't matter how many times I have been to a community, I always fax first to ask permission to visit. Always, always, always follow that.

*Not taking anything for granted*

I don't know all the rules and protocols of Aboriginal culture and I do not know any of the languages of the people with whom I am working. I am careful not to assume anything and if I don't know how to go about something, I simply ask. There are plenty of people who do know and who are more than happy to share their knowledge.

*Be prepared for it to take time*

Relationships are more enduring and certainly more important than the project. It can take a long time to build the relationships necessary for a project like this. People on Cape York have the time. Do I? This is what a project like this is about, above all else.

*Integrity*

I do what I say I am going to do. If I say I am going to send pictures back, I do it. If I say, 'I'll be back next March' and then find I can't afford it, I phone to say plans have changed.

*Patience and respect*

Patience is fundamental. Relationships or situations cannot be forced. The people with whom I am working are the ones who will decide when and with whom I should meet. It's not my place to call these shots. I simply talk with the elders about what is needed and then receive their direction on how to go about it.

*Speak with the right person first*

There is clear protocol regarding who should be approached first, second and third, etc., in a community. If this protocol is understood before entering the community, then communications within that community will tend to flow appropriately. Damage from an inappropriate approach can be difficult to mend.

Family relationships are profoundly important to Aboriginal people and, in most cases, the people you approach first in a community will determine subsequent relationships made in that community. Other families will tend to stay right out of your path.

*Not to take sides*

I tried not to identify with a particular community or organisation on Cape York. It would have unduly politicised the project and limited my ability to meet and work

with people if I had, say, identified with the Cape York Land Council. Some communities do not hold the CYLC in high regard. Others do.

I work with non-Indigenous people as much as I work with Indigenous people on Cape York. People there have known each other for generations and expect to be neighbours for generations to come. There is a spirit of cooperation.

The stations need each other. I think I was respected and accepted because I did the same. Didn't side. I just accepted people for who they were, whatever their views, and went about my business.

*Ongoing consultation*

Elders have directed me on this project. There has been a lot of talking about purposes, content and form. Copies of tapes, transcripts and photos are sent to contributors. Everything is approved or edited by contributor(s) before it is included in the exhibition.

*Editing*

The spoken word is very different from the written word. For this reason I edit transcript quotes for inclusion in the exhibition, then submit the draft to the storyteller himself/herself. The text is then re-edited by the storyteller and returned to me. It takes time.

I am confident in this process because our purpose is well understood. Also, I know the person telling the story and the rhythm of their speech and the timbre of their voice. I recorded the tape and so understand their intent as they were speaking. Likewise, the storyteller is confident in this process and is well able to fine-tune the final draft until they are happy with it and their intent is clarified.

*Releases and contracts*

I have been thorough with both written and verbal contracts. All project material has a written contractual release which says I can use the material for the 'project'. It does, in fact, give me very broad licence to use the material, which I need to be able to pass on to a publisher.

I also have a verbal agreement with each person, regarding conditions under which the material will be used.

I believe I have responsibility to educate each person with whom I am working about the media and the law: about their rights of ownership. We talk through contracts, in detail. Then we talk through a 'verbal contract' and discuss the consequences of both.

#### *Payments*

Payments have been discussed up-front with each person/station. We have talked about the financial reality of the project, alongside its objectives. The agreement reached is that the project pays expenses, such as a decent weekly 'boarding' fee when I am working on a station. And I pull my weight helping out in other ways when I am there. Then, if the project runs into profit, each contributor will be back paid per interview/hour. Royalties are paid on all sales.

#### *Project management*

I formed a company in mid-1995 to manage the project.

#### *Copyright*

As photographer I have copyright on the images. The storytellers and printmakers have copyright on the stories and the linocuts. The company has title on use of these stories and linocuts for the project.

#### *Commercial use*

The photographs are for sale as limited-edition exhibition prints. A royalty is paid to the subject(s) therein and the balance is returned directly to the company to contribute to ongoing project costs. Revenue from sales of linocut edition prints is split between the artist and the project.

The same applies to publication fees paid by the media.

#### *Publicity and promotion*

No publicity is worth a loss of integrity. Journalists I have worked with understand this and some have been generous in letting me vet stories before they go to press.

#### *Archiving material*

I have researched appropriate archiving of project materials and not yet decided on where it should rest. People on Cape York have asked me to hold it, as the relationships and contracts have been made with me. Copies of all materials have been returned to communities on Cape York.

I am concerned that the studio I work from

does not have optimum temperature and humidity conditions. In the long term, some material will probably be housed at AIATSIS (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies).

#### *Maintaining contact and assessment of outcomes*

Financial restrictions and the demands of managing the exhibition and raising funding have made it difficult to spend any real time on Cape York in the last couple of years.

It is now important that I show everyone what has become of this project since they last saw me. I need to give each community a presentation of slides and video material. Financially, the project cannot afford this at the moment.

This opportunity for communities and individuals to assess results of their input — and to celebrate the successes of their work — is a crucial part of a project like this.

#### *Funding*

Chasing it is 98% of my job. The most stressful and exhausting part.

#### *Feedback*

Lack of feedback is a real problem for an independently produced project such as this. Feedback forms for each venue may be one solution. Direct requests for feedback to each organisation and venue with whom I am working may be another.

#### *Independent production*

It's been a big call, to keep *Shadows in the dust* on the road by myself. An organisation with appropriate infrastructure might be better suited to meet these demands. The overheads take a real bite out of the funding I am successful in securing. And administration has crippled the time I would otherwise spend on improving content and giving the project a more creative edge. But these compromises are part of the picture.

The bottom line is that this is a project that needs heart and commitment — and the heart and commitment need ongoing support. Without the ongoing support I have received from Visions of Australia, Arts Queensland, the Cape York Land Council and countless people along the way, I might have been swallowed up by the isolation of managing this project! It really has made a difference.

## Case study 10

### **Emily Kame Ngwarreye: Alhalkere — paintings from Utopia exhibition, Queensland Art Gallery**

Interview with Margo Neale, Curator of Indigenous Australian art at the Queensland Art Gallery

#### **How did the Emily project begin?**

For several years people had been talking about the need for a public gallery tribute to this artist who had been so widely acclaimed. For such an eminent Australian contemporary artist not to be given a retrospective seemed a little ironic. She was not scheduled for a solo at any other public gallery so the Queensland Art Gallery, to its credit, was prepared to take up the challenge. It was a huge commitment for all concerned. Given that she was well into her eighties and near the end of her life, it was important that we started sooner rather than later so that she could be included in the process as part of the curatorium, consistent with Indigenous practice and consultation.

#### **What was the consultative process for the exhibition?**

The exhibition's development was embedded in collaboration, shared ownership, community and consultation in which there was no single expert but a series of people who had engaged with Emily or worked with her over the years. The curatorium consisted of Debra Bennet McLean, the Aboriginal trainee curator, myself and the artist. The artist was part of the curatorium from early 1995 until her death in late 1996 and after that those closest to her in the community took over, but her wishes as relayed to us were always paramount. We involved the artist as much as she wanted to be involved. We'd send her the pictures, and she would talk to the intermediaries about which works she thought were important to include and about anything really. There was no formal structure. Using intermediaries was important. The community worked out among themselves who was the spokesperson for her and which people had the correct relationship to her to represent her at the opening. I, personally, didn't want to be yet another person in line wanting something from her so we involved the

people who had worked with her since the 1980s before she was known as an individual artist. Christopher Hodges, the Director of Utopia Art, Sydney, was indispensable. The artist told him that if she was to pass on, he was to see her wishes through and 'get it right'.

The second tier of the collaborations was the consulting curators who knew the artist and went to Utopia regularly and through them, of course, we had other connections to people, specialists in the field who had worked with Utopia Art including an independent researcher, Anne Brody, who used to work with the Holmes à Court Collection and brought the first works on canvas from Utopia for that collection.

The next step of consultation was to set up a local Indigenous Community Consultative Committee attached to the Indigenous Australian Art Department. They each had access to elders and other members of the local Murri community who, we felt, needed to feel a sense of ownership of this big event occurring in their community. They, in turn, had their own further lines of communication. We would just tell them what we were up to and they would always raise something we hadn't thought of. A consultative committee for gallery exhibitions is important because it provides access to many different sections of the community and they can pick up the sensitivities and relay things. It's a buffer, an advisory body that can ensure the proper protocols are being observed. If decisions are made and there's a comeback, it's shared. So, when you get into this stuff, you just don't know what might come back that has to be dealt with collectively.

The senior members of the local Aboriginal community were involved with the exhibition so they could be the cultural hosts to the Utopia community. A series of workshops were conducted, building a support



Utopia Room: view from the back wall of the special rocks displayed with the statement of permission on a label  
(Photographs courtesy Queensland Art Gallery)



group for the exhibition. Although the gallery acts as the custodian of the actual objects, it cannot be the cultural caretaker, it can't be the cultural host, it can only be the caretaker of the material aspects. Because this is another land, another country, the Brisbane Murri community were hosts for members of the Utopia community who came to this place. The local community would care for the spiritual and cultural aspects. The works are, in fact, the embodiment of Emily's spirit and of her country, especially since she had recently died. Respect and protocols were even more important at this time.

### The Utopia Room

The Utopia Room evolved out of consultation with the community. It was a space to show the spirit of the place that informed her work, the land, the cultural traditions and the community. It was difficult to do because I couldn't tell the gallery in advance what was going to be in it because I needed to wait for the community to decide.

Greeny Purvis Petyarre and Lindsay Bird Mpetyane, senior male custodians of Alhalkere, sent down rocks or 'pieces of

country' to 'show that the paintings in the exhibition have important stories'. These pieces of Emily's dreaming sites had to be accompanied by a statement of permission. I couldn't use these rocks unless I had permission, which got faxed through, and put on labels two days before we opened.

We got the Utopia community people down to the gallery early to allow them the opportunity to place the rocks and to feel comfortable with the new context. So when the people arrived and inspected the room, they thought 'oh, it's all men's stuff...we haven't got any weaving or women's ceremonial things'. I got onto Gloria Petyarre who was in Adelaide at a gallery somewhere and I hear she's got this really special stuff that Emily made and had given to her; been through eight decades of ceremonies and she might bring it down. So we left a space in case and...down she comes with these very special women's ceremonial dance belts and skirts that have never been out of her possession before, so it was an enormous responsibility. She didn't want to just hand them over — she wanted a ritual. So I got the director, management and exhibition staff down and we did a proper handover and took photos, so that we acknowledged the importance of the occasion. Somebody could think that because she walked in with it wrapped up in a humble rag she was treating it very casually, but she obviously wasn't. So it was important to be sensitive to this.

#### **Advice on the consultative process**

It's not about just getting a bunch of works into the gallery for a show, especially Emily's work. It's all of this other business to do with the cultural and spiritual value of the works, particularly as she had passed away. It's no good anyone starting the consultative process at the last minute or paying lip service to it. Either you don't do the consultative process or if you do it you've really got to do it properly. You have to have confidence in your convictions, but you remain sensitive about it, because once you've tabled matters, you must give the responses serious consideration and sometimes you may not be in a position to take the advice asked for, often because of institutional difficulties or resources.

#### **Dealing with the factions**

So the point I'm making is that this consultation process is very political. You've got to talk to the right people, not everybody. Some people think you need to call a big community meeting with all the factions but this is a mistake because instead of talking about the art exhibition, they will be there to exercise their superiority over another faction and to play out all their own agendas. This is the reality of community meetings, whatever the culture.

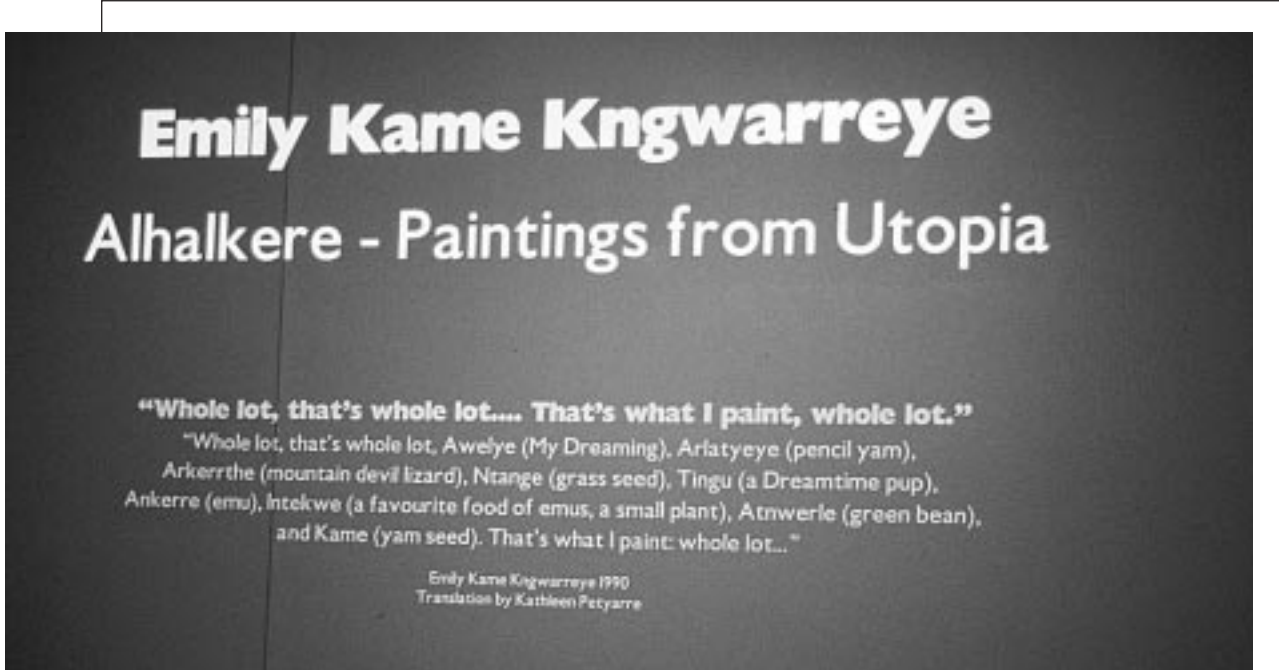
Instead you just pick the two or three you need to talk to and then go to another two or three and consult with them independently. You have to talk to a whole range of people, but separately. And you've got to think about why you're talking to them. You don't talk to Uncle Neville Bonner or Aunty Ruth Hegarty about which pieces you should have in the exhibition, but you would talk to them about protocol. People will feel obliged to help and answer, but the basis on which they judge it may have nothing to do with the process. People can be put into positions where they have to make up a story if they don't know it, or to save face they've got to appear to be authoritative and have an opinion, even if it is out of their range. People too often believe that all Indigenous people know everything Indigenous. Homogenising in any culture is wrong.

So what we had to learn, and we're learning all the time, was to let everybody talk, talk it through and raise the issues and take them on as their own, to feel some ownership of the project. I find that potential problems resolve themselves when people in a group such as the consultative committee take responsibility. You have to relinquish control and accept the outcomes.

#### **How did you go about finding the right people to consult?**

Talking, talking to people all the time...you never really know, you think you know, but you've just got to keep deferring to others.

In terms of consultation with the Utopia community, we would pass the questions to one or two people and let them sort things out between themselves, including who the right person to deal with would be on



particular matters. That wasn't our role. Then you have to just wait, so allowing time is essential.

In terms of the local community, the Indigenous Australian Art Department's consultative committee, which included other professional people in art and cultural-related work areas, suggested others in the community depending on the matter

Entrance sign to exhibition with Emily's quote (Photograph courtesy Queensland Art Gallery)

at hand, whether it be who should be asked to open a show, perform, attend workshops about the exhibition, resolve conflicts, provide support or advise on protocol and so on.