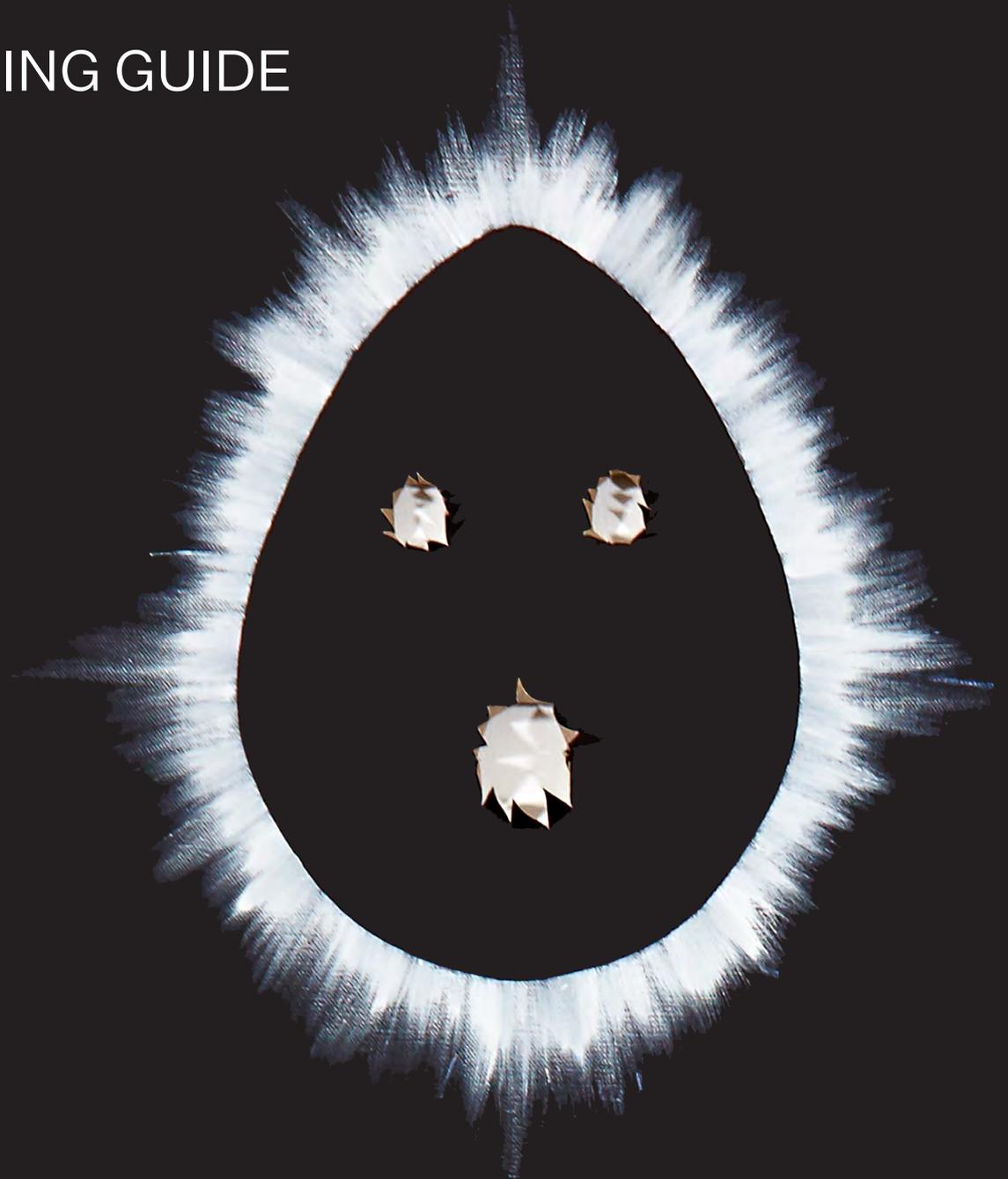


ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND, ONE FOOT IN THE WATER

LEARNING GUIDE



ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND, ONE FOOT IN THE WATER

A La Trobe Art Institute exhibition touring with NETS Victoria. Curated by Travis Curtin.

This exhibition tours on the lands of many Indigenous Nations. La Trobe Art Institute, NETS Victoria, and the artists and curator of *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* respectfully acknowledge and celebrate the continuing culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders across Australia.

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are advised that this exhibition and its collateral materials includes the names of those who have passed

Cover Image:
Nell, *Mother of the Dry Tree* (detail), 2017, acrylic paint and mixed media on linen, wood, 296.5 × 223 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney. Photograph: Jenni Carter

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About this Learning Guide

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water, is a La Trobe Art Institute exhibition touring with NETS Victoria, curated by Travis Curtin. It features the artists Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Nawurapu Wunuramurra.

Each artist provides a highly unique, engaging, and sensitive approach towards our shared mortal condition, exemplifying the way art can help us learn to better live with death.

The exhibition seeks to encourage a range of conversations that normalise experiences of dying and death, providing insight into the ways the living hold on to and let go of the dead, as a person's physical presence transitions into a memory, and we are left with objects that carry the residue of their being.

This Learning Guide is aimed at supporting students and teachers to engage in discussions and activities before, during and after a visit to the *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* exhibition. It can be used in conjunction with the *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and information provided on the [NETS Victoria website](#).

The resource includes:

- An introduction which incorporates an interview with exhibition curator, Travis Curtin.
- Discussion of the exhibition themes.
- Curriculum Links.
- Starting Points for Discussion and Learning Activities.
- A Glossary of Terms.
- Images and information for each artist that includes a brief biography, discussion of the work included in the exhibition, questions, activities to encourage student discussion, research and understanding.
- Suggested resources for discussing death with children for teachers, parents, and carers.

About the Exhibition

Introduction

At a time when many are experiencing complex feelings about the fragility of life and future uncertainty, *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* explores the subject of mortality and the inseparable link between life and death.

The exhibition presents paintings, sculptures, installations, and sound works, that challenge us to reckon with death and dying as an inherent part of life, invoking experiences of loss, impermanence, transience, remembrance, memorialization, and varied expressions of grief.

Featuring contemporary artists Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Nawurapu Wunujmurra, the exhibition explores the personal and universal nature of death and dying, grief and loss through diverse points of view.

We all know death is part of life. As exhibiting artist Nell says “Dying isn’t funny, I don’t want people to think that I think it’s funny, but it is part of life. And we don’t talk about it enough.”

Many of us have reasons for not wanting to discuss death and dying – particularly with young people. But if you are bringing students to this exhibition, it may be helpful to know that recent research by Dr. Carla Kennedy (Graduate Researcher, Social Work La Trobe Regional Health Services, La Trobe University) found that many bereaved students and families in fact wanted more opportunities to discuss their experiences. During her research, Kennedy et al found that:

“There was a desire from participants for the school community to be more open and communicative about death, dying and bereavement and the deceased in an empathetic way, allowing open conversation to be part of the curriculum and providing advice and information to the wider community.”

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water offers an opportunity for gentle discussion of this nature. Curator, Travis Curtin invites us to consider that “...an exhibition itself functions as a kind of transitional zone or in-between space, where artists and viewers (and the curator too) can speculate about assumptions, propose ideas and consider the interrelationships between artworks and indeed between cultures.”

Each exhibiting artist offers their own unique viewpoint about our shared mortal condition. Artists Nell and Sara Morawetz draw inspiration from personal experiences of the death of a loved one. French & Mottershead,

on the other hand, have created an interactive work that invites us to contemplate our own mortality. Layered with their own contemporary art practises, the works of Nawurapu Wunurmurra, Mabel Juli, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Timothy Cook provide insights into the many different cultural rituals and stories that various peoples have developed over time to help mourners honour and come to terms with the passing of a loved one. Richard Lewer, Catherine Bell and Michael Needham ask us to consider other societal ideas, practices, and attitudes surrounding death and dying.

The exhibition seeks to encourage a range of conversations that normalise experiences of dying and death, providing opportunities for viewers to discuss how we are different and how we are the same, in the way we honour and celebrate, memorialise and ultimately learn to live with the passing of a loved one, and indeed contemplate our own mortality.



Foreground:

Nell

With things being as they are ... 2017

Background, left to right:

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

Purukuparli 2020

Waiyai 2020

Timothy Cook

Kulama 2013

Kulama 2014

Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy

Puruntatameri

Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019

Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020

Photograph: Ian Hill

Preparation for Teachers

Planning Your Visit

Logistics

Before attending the exhibition, you may like to contact gallery staff to find out:

- Opening Hours, Covid-19 protocols, transport and parking options, cloakroom and refreshment facilities and admission fees.
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours.
- Education and Public Programs, artist talks etc. that may coincide with the exhibition.

Resources for Teachers Engaging with First Nations Culture

This exhibition includes artwork by contemporary First Nations artists Nawurapu Wunujmurra from Yirrkala in the Miwatj region of Northeast Arnhem Land, Mabel Juli from the Warmun Community in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia, and Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, from Milikapiti on Melville Island in the Tiwi Islands. Please consider the cultural safety of these artists in the way you draw from their work to develop lessons for your students before, during and after your visit.

Following are resources to assist you:

- The Australia Council's guide: *Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts* (2019):
<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/protocols-for-using-first-nati-5f72716d09f01.pdf>
- SNAICC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Cultural Needs resource <https://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/02932.pdf>

In addition, each state has an Aboriginal Education Association or Education Department who provide guidelines for teachers presenting school curriculum content relating to Aboriginal culture and history. These organisations strongly recommend consulting with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal sources for information and working with local community people and Elders, always respecting their intellectual and cultural property rights, as grieving protocols, like other cultural practices and beliefs vary across the many different Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. You may already have contact with Aboriginal families at your school or know of Elders in your community, whom you could ask to provide a local perspective when discussing this work with staff and students, or your Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group is also a good first point of contact.

VIC: www.vaeai.org.au

NSW: www.aecg.nsw.edu.au

ACT: www.education.act.gov.au/public-school-life/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education

QLD: www.qut.edu.au/about/oodgeroo/embedding-indigenous-knowledges-in-curriculum/making-connections

TAS: www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/



Kurrumungarimily Pukamani site, Melville Island, 2019.
Courtesy of Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti.
Photo: Will Heathcote

Resources to Support Conversations with Students About Death, Dying and Mortality

Whilst death is part of life, for various reasons this may not be a topic that teachers have discussed with students. As such, some preparation could be helpful for teachers to ensure they are ready to support productive conversations with their students before, during and after visiting the exhibition.

Principals and teachers may also like to discuss the upcoming excursion and its themes with their school's Student Well-Being Coordinator to enable them to be alert to any additional support students may need.

Teachers are reminded that some students and other teachers or parents/carers accompanying the excursion may be bereaved or grieving. Some, especially younger children, may be yet to experience the death of a loved one, which can hold its own set of fears and anxieties. Families who have experienced the suicide of a loved one may have more particular support needs.

Teachers of First Nations children need to be aware of Sorry Business and other situations that might have arisen in their community(ies), or even in the media, regarding the passing of a First Nations person. For First Nations peoples, losing an individual can be felt deeply across many communities and it is important not to assume that a child is not affected by a passing because they appear unconnected.

There can also be shame talking about passing/grief outside of kinship structures. It is also important to remember that Sorry Business or grieving protocols vary significantly across the many different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is up to each educator to learn about those that are observed by the community they teach.

Although protocols are dependent on the community, one commonality is the importance of instilling pride in culture. Celebrating the success of the First Nations artists in *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* and their artworks is paramount. For First Nations peoples, pride in culture is paramount and this should be apparent in all classrooms. Stressing the success of these artists and the **importance of their work should go hand in hand with unpacking the exhibition's themes of loss and grief.**

For Student Wellbeing

Following are further resources regarding how to talk to children about death. Reflection questions for teachers, parents and carers are also provided to assist them to prepare for conversations with the young people they care for, if prompted by the exhibition.

Prior to your visit, teachers may wish to discuss the following with your students:

- Expectations for appropriate behaviour at a public gallery, regarding the safety of both students and artworks.
- Teachers may like to introduce students to the exhibition themes by engaging them in a discussion prior to their visit. As well as serving as an orientation to the exhibition, this may also help to identify any students for whom these themes may be particularly difficult. It can also provide an opportunity to highlight any wellbeing resources the school can make available.



French & Mottershead
Grey Granular Fist 2017
chair, sensor, audio player, directional speaker, sound: 24 mins
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists
Photograph courtesy of the Wellcome Collection

Introductory or Follow-up Activities for Students:

- Discuss any special cultural, community or family practices students have experienced or observed that celebrate and/or mourn the life of someone who has passed away.
- Read a book (or a passage from a book), with students to help introduce the topic such as *Catch A Falling Star* by Meg McKinlay, Walker Books Australia (2019), *Swallow The Air* by Tara June Winch, UQP (2021) or *The Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson, Penguin UK (2015).

For Teacher Wellbeing (Reflection Questions)

It may be helpful for teachers to reflect on how this exhibition may sit with their own experiences with grief and bereavement. Amidst the business of organising a school excursion, it can be difficult for teachers to be aware of how their own experiences of grief may impact their responses to students.

Before and/or during the visit, teachers may like to consider:

- How might or how does this exhibition relate to my own grief journey?
- How might my own reactions to the exhibition influence my responses to bereaved and other students?
- How can I be ready to answer any questions students may have or discussions they may wish to have before, during and after visiting the exhibition? What support do I need?
- Am I aware of any students who may be bereaved and/or grieving who may need special consideration?
- How can I put myself into the shoes of bereaved students and consider what they need from me as their teacher?

Parents' & Carers' Reflection:

Another way schools may like to deepen the value of this experience is to involve parents and carers in encouraging discussion with students before and after visiting the exhibition.

NB: This could perhaps be included in excursion permission request materials sent to parents and carers prior to your visit, along with contact details for your School Student Wellbeing Coordinator.

Parents/Carers may like to ask *themselves*:

- How might or how does this exhibition relate to my own grief journey?
- How might my reactions to the exhibition influence my responses to my child/the child I care for?
- How can I be ready to answer any questions they may have or discussions they may wish to have before or after visiting the exhibition? What support do I need?
- Is there anything I might like to discuss with my child's teacher or the School Student Wellbeing Coordinator?

Parents/Carers may like to ask *their child or the child they care for*:

- What did you find challenging/peaceful/interesting about the exhibition?
- What were some of the feelings you had while you were looking at the exhibition?
- Do you have any questions or feelings you would like to chat about?

Further Wellbeing Resources:

- **Sorry Business – What is Sorry Business?** (Secretariat of National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care or SNAICC), <https://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/sorry-business/>
- **Australian National University, Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network** <https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/resource-centre/indigenous-children-families>
 - > **ANU resources include a series of short videos by a team of Indigenous Education Consultants, Lecturers & Researchers discussing Trauma, Loss & Grief for First Nations Peoples: Part 1 can be accessed here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7roTUE-iPA>

- **Death – How to Talk About it with Children – Raising Children’s**
Network resource: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/connecting-communicating/tough-topics/death-how-to-talk-about-it>
- **How to Talk About Suicide with Children, the ABC’s Radio Program**
Parental As Anything with Maggie Dent resource:
<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/parental-as-anything-with-maggie-dent/>
- **Good Grief – an education program to support children and young people**
who are struggling with experiences of change, loss, and grief:
<https://www.goodgrief.org.au/>
- **The Australian Centre for Death and Bereavement** has a comprehensive
list of bereavement support services: https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/Other_Bereavement_Services/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/Other_Bereavement_Services_1/Other_Bereavement_Services.aspx?hkey=932f8d8f-695d-4443-99d0-8bbeafc6e378



Nawurapu Wunurḡmurra
Mokuy (detail) 2012
natural earth pigments on kapok group of 5 works
261.5 × 18 × 35 cm
La Trobe University Art Collection
Photo: Ian Hill

Curriculum Links: Levels 7–10 Learning Areas

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water provides students with the opportunity to engage with multiple aspects of the Australian Curriculum from Level 7 to VCE.

The Arts – Visual Art

- Explore ideas and practices used by artists, including practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent different views, beliefs, and opinions (ACAVAM114)
- Explain how visual arts conventions communicate meaning by comparing artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks (ACAVAR117)

The exhibition presents the work of eight contemporary Australian and three international artists, including the mediums of painting, sculpture, sound and community arts practice.

Starting Points for Discussion:

- How do you think artists in this exhibition have used their practice of making art to help them live with loss or the passing of a loved one?
- Which of these works did you find the most personally moving? What were the elements the artist used to create this feeling in you? Was it the work itself or the story behind it that affected you?
- Choose two artworks by different artists. Describe and compare the materials they used in their work. What qualities do these materials give the artwork? Can you find information about why they chose these materials for this work?
- Discuss with your class -what is the role of artists in society? How can the process of making or experiencing artwork help us cope with difficult events or emotions?

Learning Activities:

- Create an artwork about a difficult time in your life or a milestone – large or small (eg. Richard Lewer's *As a bald man, I miss going to the barber*). It could be a self-portrait, or a work that conveys your emotions about this event. What medium and materials will help you express the emotion of your work?
- The concept of permanent/impermanent is explored through different materials across the exhibition, (Nawurapu Wunujmurra's *Iarrakitj* as compared to Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther* for example). Create an artwork that reflects the concept of a life cycle and/or time passing. What materials will best convey your idea?
- Create an artwork based on an object that is very special to you (eg. Sara Morawetz's *March 17*). The object might remind you of someone special to you, a significant time in your life, a cultural or family tradition. The artwork must convey something of your emotions about this object to the audience. It could be in written form, a performance or visual art.
- Richard Lewer's *Crucifixes* (2018) and Catherine Bell's installation *Final Resting Place* (2018–20) both use repetition to convey concepts of the universal, the inevitability of death and our shared humanity. Create an artwork utilising repetition, perhaps using stamping, photographic or printmaking techniques, to explore these ideas further.



Richard Lewer
As a bald man, I miss going to the barber 2019
oil on copper
150 x 160 cm
Courtesy the artist and Hugo Michell Gallery

Humanities and Social Sciences – Civics and Citizenship; Diversity, and Identity

Explore:

Year 7

- How values, including freedom, respect, inclusion, civility, responsibility, compassion, equality and a ‘fair go’, can promote cohesion within Australian society (ACHCK052)
- How groups, such as religious and cultural groups, express their identities; and how this influences their perceptions of others and vice versa (ACHCK053)

Year 8

- The values and beliefs of religions practised in contemporary Australia, including the Christian traditions of Australian society (ACHCK065)
- Different perspectives about Australia’s national identity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and what it means to be Australian (ACHCK066)

Year 9

- How and why individuals and groups, including religious groups, participate in and contribute to civic life (ACHCK079)

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water has relevance for **Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding** as it explores ideas, beliefs, stories, rituals and ceremony from Yolŋu, Gija and Tiwi Islander peoples, along with Buddhism, Christianity and Secular Humanism, regarding death and dying, and how different individuals and cultures celebrate and mourn the life of a community member and loved one.

Artworks can be compared and discussed in relation to what they may reveal about the artists’ individual ideas and beliefs about life and death, as well as layers of community or cultural meaning, rituals and stories.

For example, Sara Morawetz’s work *March 17* (2020) refers to the day her stepfather, Peter was killed in a motorcycle accident in 1988, just before her 6th birthday and just after his 28th birthday.

Morawetz says “He was actually trying to sell the bike he was riding to pay for the custody battle with my biological father and it was only due to a fluke set of circumstances (his car was being repaired, the phone line to our house was faulty so he wasn’t receiving inquiries) that he was actually riding it that day.”

Morawetz chose to memorialise her stepfather through photographing his wallet and its contents from that day which the artist describes as “everyday, innocuous – a simple archive of his 28-year-old life.” She made these photographs, along with a story of the events surrounding his death, into an accordion-fold book in his memory. This work is an edition of 32, one book for each year of Peter Morawetz’s absence at the time of its making. This poignant artwork can perhaps be seen as the artist’s own expression of bereavement, which although undoubtedly spiritual, does not appear to be informed by a particular formal religion or specific cultural point of view.

The three tutini (also referred to as Pukumani poles) reveal how the Tiwi people observe the passing of a loved one. These three artworks were created by two artists; Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, who carved the tutini, and Timothy Cook who painted the tutini with Jilamara (designs). Tutini can be made as works of contemporary art (such as these three) or for the Tiwi ceremony known as the Pukumani ceremony. The Pukumani ceremony that is the culmination of ritual mourning for a deceased person involves tutini which are traditionally commissioned by the in-laws of the deceased person, to be placed at the gravesite during a performance of kawakawayi (song) and yoyi (dance). Tunga (bark bags) are sometimes placed upside down on top of the poles to signify the end of life. Made from local timbers and ochres, the poles are then left to the elements, returning to the bush from which they were made.



Sara Morawetz
March 17 (detail) 2020
Accordion Fold Artist Book
24.13 x 289.56 cm

Starting Points for Discussion & Learning Activities:

- With your class, discuss and compare the work of these artists. How does the way in which the deceased has been remembered differ? What elements do they have in common? What do you think this says about the cultures the artists are part of?
- Select two other artists in the exhibition. Research more about the practices and beliefs they have drawn on to create their work. What do they have in common, and what is different about how these practices and beliefs honour the life of a loved one?

Resources:

The *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* exhibition catalogue also contains several texts that include artists and community leaders speaking about the cultural stories and practices their work is drawn from.

- *Garn'giny, death and rebirth*; Mabel Juli interviewed by Dominic Kavanagh (pp. 48–55)
- *Purukuparli story* Pedro Wonaeamirri (pp. 77–81)
- *Pukumani* Pedro Wonaeamirri (pp. 88–94)
- *Manikay: The song knows the destination* Wukun Wanambi Edited by Kade McDonald
- *Bäpurru* Yinimala Gumana in conversation with Kade McDonald, (pp. 114–125)

NB: This discussion relates to Nawurapu Wunurmurra's *Mokuy* and *Garrapara* works in the exhibition.



Nawurapu Wunurmurra
Garrapara (detail) 2012
natural earth pigments on stringybark
292 × 17.5 × 16 cm
La Trobe University Art Collection
Purchased 2013, LTU2458
Photo: Ian Hill

Health & Physical Education – Personal, social and community health

Y 7 & 8

Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing

- Analyse factors that influence emotions, and develop strategies to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity (ACPPS075).

Contributing to healthy and active communities

- Investigate the benefits to individuals and communities of valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity (ACPPS079).

Y 9 & 10

Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing

- Investigate how empathy and ethical decision making contribute to respectful relationships (ACPPS093).
- Evaluate situations and propose appropriate emotional responses and then reflect on possible outcomes of different responses (ACPPS094).

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water explores ideas, beliefs, stories, rituals, and ceremony from Yolŋu, Gija and Tiwi peoples, along with Buddhism, Christianity, Secular Humanism, about death and dying, and how different cultures celebrate and mourn the life of a community member and/or loved one.

This offers many prompts for discussions regarding Personal, Social and Community Health to:

- Explore different viewpoints from personal experiences of the death of a loved one to family, community and/or cultural perspectives and practices.
- What are some of the important milestones celebrated with your family, carer(s) and/or friends? Are these occasions important you? What do you do to celebrate or acknowledge these milestones? How does acknowledging milestones help us, or can they be difficult?
- Demonstrate the value of diversity by sharing and exploring how cultures differ in behaviours, beliefs, and values around death and bereavement. Students may use this opportunity to share family or cultural practises and consider how these rituals can help the bereaved cope with the death of a loved one.

- Examine the influence of emotional responses on behaviour and relationships and communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing.

Starting Points for Discussion & Learning Activities:

- Choose two artists from different backgrounds. Research more about their practices and beliefs they have drawn on to create their work. What do they have in common, and what is different about these practices and beliefs? Discuss whether you think their work comes from an individual, community or cultural or multiple viewpoints.
- Describe some of the individual and/or cultural responsibilities, stories or rituals that have been explored by the exhibiting artists through their work. Compare these with rituals that students have observed in their own family or community when someone passes away.
- Discussion: How can these rituals and responsibilities help mourners to cope with or process the passing of a loved one?
- How have artists such as Nell and Sara Morawetz used their artwork to cope with grief and loss? Students may use the opportunity to share an experience of losing a loved one and perhaps what they found helpful or unhelpful in this situation? Alternatively, the School Wellbeing Coordinator, or someone else from the school community could be asked to share with students about how we can be affected by grief and loss and what help is available from the school and wider community.



Mabel Juli at Garn'gin, Darrajayin, 2011
Courtesy of Warmun Art Centre
Photo: Frances Kofod

Levels 7–10 General Capabilities

The Starting Points for Discussion & Learning Activities and questions contained throughout this Learning Guide can be used to explore Levels 7–10 General Capabilities as follows.

Critical & Creative Thinking

- Students may explore the exhibited artworks and be encouraged to further research the artists' practices, ideas, methods, cultural and other influences, compare artworks and examine how each artist has conveyed meaning and emotion in their work.
- The exhibition can be used to inspire students to create their own artwork, and/or;
- To reflect on how different artists as individuals or collectively through cultures make sense of the personal and universal nature of death, loss, and bereavement.

Personal & Social Capability

- Students and teachers may find this exhibition useful to generate discussions around the difficult topic of death and loss, perhaps exploring students' emotional responses and personal experiences or considering it from different cultural, community or religious perspectives. Throughout the pandemic, we have all had to endure loss – the loss of important social occasions marking an important milestone for example, or perhaps being unable to visit a loved one in hospital or attend a wedding or funeral.
- Students may use the opportunity to share an experience of losing a loved one and perhaps what they found helpful or unhelpful in this situation? Alternatively, the School Wellbeing Coordinator, or someone else from the school community could be asked to share with students about how we can be affected by grief and loss and what help is available from the school and wider community.

Intercultural Capability

- *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* explores ideas, beliefs, stories, rituals and ceremony from Yolŋu, Gija and Tiwi peoples, along with Buddhism, Christianity, Secular Humanism, about death and dying, and how different cultures celebrate and mourn the life of a community member and/or loved one. Students can gather greater awareness of and

respect for cultural diversity within the community and reflect on how intercultural experiences influence attitudes, values, and beliefs, what is different and what is shared.

Cross-Curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water includes the works of contemporary Aboriginal artists from culturally distinct regions:

- Renowned Senior Yolŋu artist **Nawurapu Wunungmurra**, of the Yirritja moiety from Yirrkala, in the Miwatj region of Northeast Arnhem Land. For more information about the artist and the Yirrkala community, see: <https://yirrkala.com/>
- Senior Gija artist **Mabel Juli** from the Warmun Community in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. For more information see: <https://warmunart.com.au/art/artists/senior/mabel-juli/> and <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/works/2016.34/>
- Tiwi artists **Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri** from Milikapiti on Melville Island, Northern Territory. For more information, see: <https://jilamara.com/artist/timothy-cook/> <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/timothy-cook/> <https://jilamara.com/artist/patrick-freddy-puruntatameri/>

Each artist's work demonstrates a sophisticated combination of contemporary arts practice, cultural traditions, stories, and rituals along with the artists' own unique perspective, providing a rich opportunities for students to learn more about the distinct qualities of each artist's homelands, communities, cultural and artistic practices.



Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli (detail) 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood,
cockatoo feathers
98 × 14.5 × 12.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Jilamara Arts
and Crafts Association, Milikapiti
Photograph: Will Heathcote

Curriculum Links – VCE

VCE Art

Unit 1: Artworks, experience and meaning.

Choose one or two artworks from the exhibition.

- Describe the art elements and art principles you can see in these works.
- How has the artist used these elements and principles to convey meaning?
- What do you think this work is about? Research the artist(s) further. How does what you discover about the artist's personal experiences, culture and beliefs add to your understanding of their work?
- What emotions does the work evoke in you? How do the elements and principles the artist has chosen, work to create this feeling?
- How do the materials the artist has chosen, communicate meaning and emotion to the viewer?



Nell
With things being as they are ... 2017
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill

Unit 2: Artworks and contemporary culture

Choose one or two artworks from the exhibition.

- Research the artist and their work further. Where and when was this work made? How do you think this influenced the way the artist made this work? How does what you discover about the artist's personal experiences, culture and beliefs add to your understanding of their work?

Nell's large acrylic painting, *Mother of the Dry Tree* (2017) was based on a tiny Renaissance painting *Virgin of the Dry Tree* (1465) by Petrus Christus' (also called *Madonna of the Dry Tree*). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_of_the_Dry_Tree for more information.

- To hear Nell talk about the work directly see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgS3-24AM2s>
- Compare the two works. What are the key elements of Christus' painting that Nell employs in her work? How has she made these elements her own?
- How has the artist used these elements to convey meaning? How do they relate to contemporary culture?
- What emotions does the work evoke? How do the elements and principles the artist has chosen, create this feeling? How does this compare with the feeling you get from Christus' painting?

Unit 3: Artworks, ideas and values

- Consider Richard Lewer's *Crucifixes* (2018). What does this symbol represent to you? How does he use the element of repetition to convey meaning in this work? Research the depiction of this form. How has it been used in different cultures over time? What other spiritual symbols can you see in the exhibition?



Richard Lewer
Crucifixes 2018
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill

- Consider Michael Needham’s *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020), which the artist describes as “a memorial bestowing ornamental overkill to a mourned ambiguous subject.” What do you think the artist is saying with this work? How does this work contrast with that of artists such as Nawurapu Wunurpurra, Sara Morawetz or Timothy Cook?

Unit 4: Artworks, ideas and viewpoints

- Many of the artists in this exhibition have used natural and/or ephemeral materials to create their work – Nell, Catherine Bell, Mabel Juli, Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Nawurapu Wunurpurra. What qualities does this give the exhibition as a whole? How do you think this relates to the exhibition themes?



Michael Needham
Monument to Muther [sic] 2020
 Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
 Photo: Ian Hill

- Research and compare Sara Morawetz's *March 17* (2020) and Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's *Tutini (Pukumani poles)* (2019, 2020 and 2020). How do these works each acknowledge the life of someone who has passed away? What is similar and what is different about the ways these works do this? How do you think these works were shaped by the time and place they were created in?
- Consider one of the central themes of this exhibition that speaks to you; personal/universal; legacy; transience; grief and loss; or choose your own. Describe two or three artworks in relation to this theme. Compare the differences and similarities between how this theme is expressed by different artists. How would you tackle this theme in your own work? You may choose to write about this or create a work that demonstrates this.

VCE Studio Art

Unit 1: Studio inspiration and techniques

- Students are encouraged to bring along their visual diaries to note down their observations about the exhibition.
- Choose two or three artists to research further regarding their inspiration and influences, materials, and practice.

Unit 2: Studio exploration and concepts

Inspired by the exhibition, create a work that:

- Uses a limited or monochromatic colour palette. How will you use this to convey meaning?
- Explore a difficult memory or experience. What art elements and principals could you use to help will you convey the emotion of your work?
- Uses ephemeral materials. How does the temporal nature of your work convey meaning?

Unit 3: Studio practices and processes

Choose an artist's work from the exhibition that you feel has a particular relationship with your own work or a direction of work you'd like to develop. It may be a technique, material or process the artist uses that you would like to learn more about and apply in your own work, or it could relate to the concepts or themes of their work.

- In your visual diary, note down your research and ideas for any aspects you'd like to explore further. Write down what appeals to you about the artist's work, and why. Describe the connections you see with your own work and interests.
- Use this as a starting point for a series of drawings that explore how you would like to develop a major piece or body of work.

Unit 4: Studio practice and art industry contexts.

- Choose two artworks from the exhibition. What do you think may have been involved in the preparation, presentation, and conservation of these artworks?
- In your visual diary, record your observations about the exhibition design. What do you notice about how the artworks are presented? Consider lighting, placement, relationship to the gallery space, colour, care of the artwork, traffic/how viewers move around the work, cultural and aesthetic relationships.
- Consider two works by two different artists that have been placed near each other in the gallery. What do you notice about the relationships between these works? Why do you think the curator chose to place these works in this way? Is there a relationship based on size/shape/colour/meaning or do they relate to the architecture of the gallery in some way?
- Refer to the interview with exhibition curator, Travis Curtin. What were some of the considerations for the exhibition design, preparation and presentation? What are some of the considerations for touring this exhibition?



Foreground:
 Timothy Cook and Patrick
 Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
 Background, left to right:
 Timothy Cook
Kulama 2014
 Mabel Juli
Garnkiny Ngarranggarni 2020
 Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
 Photo: Ian Hill

Interview with Exhibition Curator, Travis Curtin

Can you tell us a little about your process for selecting works for this exhibition?

The selection developed thematically, based on personal experience and some key ideas and artists. The work of Mabel Juli and Timothy Cook were both strong influences on the development of the theme. My partner passed away in 2015, after living with cancer for four and a half years. So out of that collision of art and experience the thematic framework developed.

For years I had been looking at artists who explore themes around death, loss and grief in their work. There are a lot of artists who explore mortality in their work, but I focused in on artists who return to that theme, developing some complexity in how they embody such themes in their work.

Materiality was a strong influence on the selection of works. The materials the artists used, their colour, were all important. Finding artists with a diversity of experience was also really important. Then the interplay between works. How they relate to each other, in terms of colour, form, the formal composition of the works, scale – having really minute and monumental work, work that speaks to the deeply personal, and the universal, singular and repeated experience.

Mabel's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* paintings and Timothy's *Kulama* paintings, they've been producing this work for decades, so they have always been on my radar, and their work has informed the kind of work I'm interested in. Whereas Nell emerged from further research around the theme. In particular, early on, her work *The Wake*.

Richard Lewer was a little bit left of field, but in his work there is this constant returning to the more difficult experiences, traumas and the less spoken about experiences, and death is part of that.

The inspiration for the title of the exhibition, *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* stems from a desire to capture the inexpressible range of feelings that emerge from experiences of loss. The title is an attempt to capture the complexity of this experience in a poetic, expressive way. It refers to the shift from life to death as a period of transition from one state to another, from an earthly, grounded form into something more intangible. In a literal sense, from a solid form to a liquid form. For me it was important that the title of the exhibition acknowledged death as an incredibly intense and finite moment, but also a drawn out, elongated and sometimes life-long process of simultaneously letting-go and hanging-on to the departed, reflecting the way the lived presence of a loved one resonates throughout time.

The title of the exhibition and this line of thinking was also inspired by the work of the late-great Yolŋu artist Nawurapu Wunungmurra and his rendition of *Garrapara*, in the three larrakitj exhibited in *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water*.

“Garrapara is a Dhalwaŋu clan estate, coastal headland and bay area within Blue Mud Bay. It marks the spot of a sacred burial area for the Dhalwaŋu clan [...]

Garrapara has been rendered by the wavy design for Yirritja saltwater in Blue Mud Bay called Muŋurru. Muŋurru is deep water that has many states and connects with the sacred waters coming from the land estates by currents and tidal action. This sacred design shows the water of Djalma Bay chopped up by the blustery south–easterly winds of the early dry season.

From freshwater the waters migrate to Muŋurru the mighty undifferentiated Yirritja saltwater ocean that plays at the horizon, which receives and unifies all the Yirritja coastal saltwaters in one. It is from here that the water (soul) transmogrifies to vapour to enter the ‘pregnant’ Waŋupini, which carry the life-giving freshwater back to the start of the cycle.”

(Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala)



Kurrungarimily Pukamani site, Melville Island, 2019. Courtesy of Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti. Photograph: Will Heathcote

What were some of the surprising connections you observed between artists and artworks? How did you express these through your arrangement of works in the space?

The placement of French & Mottershead's *Grey Granular Fist* and Richard Lewer's *As a Bald Man I Miss Going To The Barber* was a key connection that emerged early when looking at layouts and arrangements and was part of the reason behind including the work.

Grey Granular Fist is a sound-based work that requires you to sit in a chair and, over a period of twenty minutes, a voice talks you through what would happen if you were to die there in the gallery and decompose. The act of sitting in the chair creates a relationship with the chair in Lewer's painting, and the image of Richard reflected in the mirror, having his last haircut as a bald man. That was a key experience I wanted to create for the audience.

Grey Granular Fist is one of the most confronting works in the exhibition, because it is directly addressing you as an individual and your own mortality. It felt very important to include a work that did that, and in the arrangement at La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) it was the last work experienced by the audience, so after engaging with other people's experiences of loss, grief, mortality you're left with that moment of addressing your own. The experience shifts from a gentle, slightly comical representation in Lewer's painting into this more introspective moment. There's a lot of work that is very hard hitting with its subject matter that I considered but chose not to include because I didn't want to confront people's fears but more so provide a context to be with and discuss them.

When installing an exhibition I try not to be too rigid with the placement of works. It's always nice to find those happy accidents or serendipitous moments that you don't always see until you're moving work around. The circular forms of Nell's 'Sprite resting in hat' are placed next to Timothy Cook's 'Kulama' painting with its circular forms that represent the rings around the moon at a certain time of year for a Kulama ceremony. This simple formal relationship creates a connection between two very different works, two very different experiences of mortality, but they're connected. There's that shared humanity.

The cruciform is another visual connection between different experience and works in the show. I avoid saying 'the cross' because in Mabel Juli's work, it represents the star, Wardel, in the *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni*. I tried to avoid crosses in the exhibition all together, but they did find their way in through a couple of artists. Positioning Nell's small cross in relationship to Mabel's draws into question the readings we have of iconography around death. Their work contains the same form but communicate completely different meaning. Mabel's work is deeply embedded in Gija culture and the significance of *Ngarranggarni* around the origins of death for Gija people, and Nell's reflects her Christian upbringing.

Richard Lewer also does this with his installation of crucifixes. Some audiences will read that form in relation to Christianity because of the iconic weight of the religion in European culture. But Lewer's installation draws that reading into question, offering the image of the cross as both a symbol of salvation and one of suffering as a form of capital punishment. He has talked about it as a loaded image.

There's also a similar connection between the way Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's figure carvings found their place in the exhibition in relation to Nell's figures, her ghosts and eggs with their circular eye forms and open mouths. These relationships happened during the process of selecting works.

In the original exhibition, before the audience experience French & Mottershead's work, they walk past Catherine Bell's vessels, made by participants in her workshops. They see those many experiences of embracing mortality, then continue past Richard Lewer's many crucifixes, finally taking a seat in French & Mottershead's chair. That trajectory was a really important one that I hope can be recreated in each of the venues on the tour. You can imagine how different it would be if the chair was placed first, for example. There's an intended sequence.



Foreground, left to right:
Nawurapu Wununmurra
Mokuy 2012
French & Mottershead
Grey Granular Fist 2017
Background:
Richard Lewer
*As a bald man, I miss going to
the barber* 2019
Installation view, La Trobe Art
Institute, 2020
Photograph: Ian Hill

What were some of the curatorial considerations regarding exhibition design that may be of particular interest to VCE Studio Arts students (Preparation, Presentation, Promotion and Conservation)?

Preparation: In terms of planning the schedule, I work backwards from the opening date, which is fixed, to ensure milestones in the process are met, these include deadlines for copy, delivery of any built elements, design and installation signage, booking freight, delivery of works, photography for the catalogue and promotions, ensuring artworks arrive on time so there is time to condition report each item before installation. The trickiest artworks to send were the works from the Tiwi Islands. These were new works that travelled from the remote community of Milikapiti, Melville Island by barge to Darwin, from there it was shipped to Bendigo by truck.

I started planning the show around 14–15 months ahead of the exhibition, but as an idea it has been bubbling away for a long time.

Presentation: Acknowledging the seniority of First Nations artists is very important in terms of placement. The first works that you encounter in the exhibition are Mr Wunupmurra's three Larrakitj. Being the most senior and only deceased artist in the group it was important he led the way. The installation itself is a kind of monument. Then moving on to Mabel Juli, the next most senior artist, followed by Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri.

Michael Needham's *Monument* at LAI was positioned to create an element of surprise, taking advantage of the monumental scale of the work.

Lighting is always a key consideration in my approach to curating. I'm formally trained as a lighting designer and worked across performance, the visual arts and music, prior to curating. There are museum guidelines around maximum levels of lighting exposure, but for me there's also always a trade-off between ambient mood and visibility. It was important to maintain accessibility in the first gallery space in the original exhibition at LAI, with open, bright lighting, with a more subdued ambience in the second gallery space that invites you into a more contemplative, internal dialogue between yourself and the artwork. More subdued lighting in the second space was key, particularly for the French & Mottershead work, so the viewer didn't feel like they were on display when they experienced the work. We didn't light the chair itself, but the painting behind it.

Permissions: Throughout the entire process, from the initial artist approach to the return of works, it's important to me to maintain clear communication and transparency with artists and/or their representatives. My work has been really influenced by working with curator Glenn Iseger-Pilkington, his approach had a lasting effect on me and is driven by building genuine relationships with artists first.

This is then formalised in an MOU (memorandum of understanding), a kind of initial agreement between the presenter (LAI) and the artist. An MOU outlines who is responsible for what, and a commitment to an artist fee. That is then formalised in a loan agreement, with the artist or the lender of the work, once the loan list has been finalised. The loan agreement lists all the works that will be loaned and outlines the relationship, copyright, distribution of images, timelines and deliverables.

In relation to the development of the exhibition tour with NETS Victoria it was important to ensure each artist knew what was going on during the various stages of development. Clear communication is essential.

How has curating this exhibition shaped your own perspective on death and dying?

I think it has influenced the degree of openness and willingness to talk about one of the most challenging aspects of living – dying. Whilst that was the impetus for the exhibition from the start, I think the process of working with other people’s experiences and material has encouraged more of a willingness and openness to talk about my own experience.

I think like most things, the more we discuss our experiences, the more commonplace and part of life they become. Rather than being something that is pushed off to the side, that you deal with on your own, which you can feel very alone in, I think that having a sense of community and embracing death as a shared human experience can be hugely beneficial.



Foreground, left to right:
Nawurapu Wunurumurra
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2012
Background, left to right:
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Waiyai 2020
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Timothy Cook and Patrick
Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art
Institute, 2020
Photograph: Ian Hill

What were some of your formative experiences you would like to share that led to the creation of this exhibition?

I experienced the loss of my partner six years ago, after a 4.5 year treatment process for cancer, so that was hugely formative. That experience put work that dealt with subject matter around death and dying more on my radar and encouraged my drive to share that work and somehow have it contribute to more open conversation. I experienced that loss and then went back to work and life afterwards, not really discussing it with a lot of people, except on a very surface level. I feel like that was a formative influence on the development of the exhibition.

Were you aware of coming from any religious or other spiritual teaching? Has creating the exhibition been helpful to you personally?

I tried to keep the exhibition fairly secular. I tried to avoid those more obvious references, instead looking at other forms of representing an experience and feeling that is kind of unrepresentable.

Nell's work is heavily influenced by Buddhist spirituality, there are underlying religious influences in some of the other artists' work, references to Christianity, in Timothy Cook's work for example. I've learnt quite a bit more recently about Mabel Juli's perspective around what happens after people pass away, bound with Gija spirituality – so looking at more complex experiences, more layered ideas of spirituality. In Timothy Cook's work there's also the deep influence of Tiwi culture. Had we had more infrastructure there's kind of infinite possibilities of how to do that, I think. If it were a much larger initial exhibition, including more diversity might enhance the experience. I think it's in complexity and multi-layering where the conversations happen.

Sara Morawetz's work reflects practices around memorialization which are unrelated to religion. In a lot of the reading I did around different faiths, aspects of memorialization are key to many, if not all cultures in some way. Ways of the living, carrying-on the legacies of the dead and ensuring that a kind of life-force is maintained and looking at the way objects operate in that process is key.

There are various forms of memorial in the exhibition, Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther* references colonial headstones in gravesites; then there is Sara Morawetz's humble artist book; and then you have *Tutini* from Tiwi culture; *Larrakitj* from Yolŋu culture. They are all forms of memorial, they are all forms of legacy for the living. Whatever meaning is ascribed to that transition or transference of being, whatever the religious or spiritual underpinning, there's that desire for the living to create an inanimate form that relates to the person, as an act of memorialising. Nell's work does that too. That whole body of work is a way to create objects that intimately bind the creator to the person that has been lost.

How has curating this exhibition shaped your own perspective on death and dying?

It has diversified my appreciation for different people's experiences. Every time someone would come in, an audience member, that I would have a conversation with, I learnt something new. I have learnt a lot about being more empathetic to people and learning more about other people's experiences of this universal, innate aspect of humanity. Just how similar and how different it can be for everyone. I think any conversation around the more complex human experiences is highly beneficial and helpful. Whatever those experiences are, not just around death and dying and loss. But we all encounter death, dying and loss.

What would you like students to take away from the exhibition?

Had I been exposed to a show like this that opens dialogue, prior to my experience with my partner, I might have engaged with it very differently. Just being open to developing more dialogue around various forms of loss, around Covid, for example, the language we use around loss and grief, trying to avoid the negative stigma around those things or that grief is something you do in private for five minutes and then you move on. It's something you carry with you, or that you live with, that you experience, and that experience is valuable rather than something to be shut away or repressed.

Art can play a key role in the way we process all sorts of life experiences, particularly some of the more difficult ones. Art and making can be a place of solace, a form of expression. Catherine Bell really captures that beautifully. That anybody can take her workshop and create and engage with their own mortal condition, whether they're in a hospice facing it directly or a student at a primary school, that process of making ... discussion.

With Nell, her making is a form of grief process, likewise with Sara, making as a form of grief. Not working through or beyond grief but a way of being with it. For someone like Nell, that is an ongoing, lasting thread in her work, Lucky (her son) lives in her work, in a beautifully quiet way.

There are many professions that help us cope with the death of a loved one, what do you think artists can offer?

Artists offer a huge amount, again looking at Catherine's project, and what that offers for someone who is dying, someone who is losing someone, someone who has lost someone, someone who has never experienced loss. It helps to educate us, the act of doing, the act of making or discussing someone else's creation of an artwork, helps us learn more about ourselves and learn more about other people and the world we live in, different experiences, in a more engaged, thoughtful way. An artistic engagement can allow people to speak in a way that a counselling session doesn't. It is a different avenue for expression and communication, and I think the more channels and avenues we have to express all those things the better.

Themes

Death and Dying, Mortality, Grief and Loss

- **Activity:** Discuss some of the important milestones celebrated with your family, carer(s) and/or friends? Are these occasions important to you? What do you do to celebrate or acknowledge these milestones? How does acknowledging milestones help us, or can they be difficult?

The exhibition looks at experiences of death and dying, grief, loss, and mortality from many points of view. In works of art by Sara Morawetz and Nell, we can imagine how these artists have used processes of making to manage and their grief, following the death of a loved one. We may also learn how different communities, such as the Yolŋu, Gija and Tiwi peoples, come together in their own distinct ceremonies, to celebrate and mourn their loved ones' passing.

The exhibition includes Nawurapu Wununmurra's *Mokuy* (2012). The artist identified that "these are happy spirits. They are going home. The mokuy or nanuk (spirits) come in together, Dhuwa and Yirritja to the sacred ground called Balambala, past Gāngan, the other side for all the mokuy to get together. The spirits go there and that's where they make the yidaki sound. It's like showing yukuwa (sacred yam emblem) and morning star feathers – they are different. Like same goes with yidaki, different sounds for Yirritja and Dhuwa. The Yirritja and Dhuwa play yidaki to call in the mokuy to the same ground Balambala. The Yirritja mokuy come in on the birds, djilawurr (scub fowl) and bugutj-bugutj (banded fruit dove). The Dhuwa mokuy they come in from ranj side (saltwater)."

Tiwi artist Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's figure carvings, *Purukuparli* (2020) and *Waiyai* (2020), depict key figures in the Purukuparli story which tells how death first came to the Tiwi people and how to come together for ceremony when a community member passes away.

"This story of Purukuparli, his wife and son, is important to Tiwi life and culture. It teaches lessons about life and is also the beginning of our ceremonial culture. Since the time when Purukuparli danced his dead son into the sea at Yimpinari, the Tiwi people have come together for the Pukumani ceremony – to sing, dance and farewell the spirit of our family so they can be at rest back on Country. Pukumani ceremony is a grieving ceremony, but it is also a celebration of life. Every dance has a song. The song and dance are how you connect to the land and the spirit of the deceased person. To let go and say goodbye, see you next time on your Country." (*Purukuparli*, Pedro Wonaeamirri, as told by him for LAI's *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue pp. 74–78, La Trobe Art Institute 2020). NB: Read the whole story in the catalogue.

The *Tutini (Pukumani poles)* (2019, 2020 and 2020) carved by Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, with jilamara (designs) painted by Timothy Cook, in their ceremonial form, are instrumental in the Pukumani ceremony, the culmination of ritual mourning for a deceased person. As described by Wonaeamirri for the Exhibition Catalogue (2020), several months after the burial, family commission in-laws of the deceased to carve and decorate elaborate tutini. These are then placed at the gravesite during a performance of kawakawayi (song) and yoyi (dance), and tunga (bark bags) are placed upside down on top of the poles to signify the end of life, demonstrating the Tiwi way of bringing the community together to share in mourning, celebrate the life of their loved one, and to see their spirit safely back to Country.

A communal experience of a different kind, Catherine Bell's work *Final Resting Place* (2018–20) is comprised of 100 small vessels hand-carved from floral foam, in the shape of funeral urns by community participants whom she has invited to attend her *Facing Death Creatively* workshops. During these workshops, participants use the process of making to consider their own mortality more deeply, and in discussion with others. In turn, viewers of the work are also prompted to give time to these considerations.

In a more direct way, French & Mottershead's *Grey Granular Fist* (2017) offers each audience member the opportunity to contemplate their own mortality by listening to audio that describes what would happen if they were to die in the gallery and decompose in the environmental conditions of the gallery or museum.

In Richard Lewer's *As a bald man, I miss going to the barber* (2019) we find a lighter moment to consider the many small losses we experience, perhaps even without paying them specific attention, like letting go of the simple enjoyment of a trip to the barber.



Catherine Bell
Final resting place (detail) 2018–20
100 vessels hand-carved from floral foam,
100 digital photographs, digital photo
display installation

Materiality

- **Activity:** Choose two artworks by different artists. Describe and compare the materials they used in their work. What qualities do these materials give the artwork? Can you find information about why they chose these materials for this work?

Materiality was also a primary influence on the curator's selection process. In many works, organic materials illustrate the ephemeral or impermanent nature of life, or the life cycle, as they return to the earth or Country.

Catherine Bell uses biodegradable florist foam as an easy material for novice workshop participants to use, but also to support them to contemplate their own inevitable return to the earth. In French and Mottershead's work, the body of the viewer becomes part of the material of the artwork as its weight triggers the audio recording to begin, the audio describing how the body will break down after death in the context of the gallery.

Conversely, the imposing weightiness of Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020) deliberately attempts to defy this natural conclusion. The artist describes the work as "...a memorial bestowing ornamental overkill to a mourned ambiguous subject. Made from steel, cast-iron and adorned with funereal lighting and artificial flowers, it is ... a means of questioning implicit and often justifiably guarded sentimentality around loss."



Michael Needham
Monument to Muther [sic] (detail) 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photograph: Ian Hill

Needham's work presents an overblown tribute, reminiscent of the Gothic style of European monument that can be identified throughout Australia, monuments that carry with them the legacy of colonialism, continuing to exert an uncomfortable presence on invaded Country. The hyperbole evident in the scale of the work and level of ornamentation, perhaps mocking the self-importance of the European tradition.

The heavy physicality of this work contrasts with the natural materials and design of other artworks, such as Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Timothy Cook's *Tutini (Pukumani poles)* (2019, 2020 and 2020) or Nawurapu Wunurmu's larrakitj titled *Garrapara* (2007, 2007 and 2012), forms that in ceremonial contexts are intended to erode and return to the earth over time. While a person's life is honoured in these works and the ceremonies they can be a part of, it does not seem to be held on to, held up, or glorified in the same way. The deceased is seen as part of, not superior to nature.

The selection of materials has resulted in strong colour relationships between the works. Mabel Juli's painting *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* (2020), for example, uses charcoal to create a deep black sky, that contrasts dramatically with the bright white of Wardel (the star) and Garnkiny / Garn'giny (the moon).

Note on translation: There are multiple spellings for the moon in Gija. Garnkiny and Garn'giny are both used in this exhibition and catalogue. 'Garnkiny' is an older spelling, 'Garn'giny' is more recent.



Michael Needham
Interstice 2017
antique window frame,
dental plaster, steel, acrylic
169 × 160 × 12 cm
Photographer: Ian Hill

Linked by a similar colour palette, Nell created many of her sprite pieces from clay that she recycled from an artist friend's abandoned artwork, which for her imbues the piece with greater significance and marks a moment in time when her friend was vacating (or "passing through") the studio complex she worked in. These and the other objects that form the installation all sit on four Japanese tatami mats, a reference to Nell's first overseas travel experience, which she says had a profound effect on her life. Nell's work, through her use of materials is layered with meaning and memories, while incorporating her own and universal ideas and beliefs about the world and the nature of life and death.

Scale – The Personal vs the Universal

- **Activity:** What are some of the important milestones celebrated with your family, carer(s) and/or friends? Are these occasions important to you? What do you do to celebrate or acknowledge these milestones? How does acknowledging milestones help us, or can they be difficult?

Scale and singular versus repeated forms that emphasise personal versus universal experiences of death contributes a third strong theme. There are contrasts between the grand scale of Nawurapu Wunujmurra's larrakitj and Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020) on the one hand, and Nell's delicate *Sprite resting in hat* (2017), on the other. We can also compare the strong, singular forms of Mabel Juli's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* (2020), the memorialization of a single life in Nell and Sara Morawetz's works, with the repeated forms of Nawurapu Wunujmurra's *Mokuy* (2012), Catherine Bell's vessels, and Richard Lewer's *Crucifixes* (2018), each of which remind us that death comes to us all, universally, and we can find solace and strength in sharing our experiences of grief with our communities.

Objects, Memorisation & Legacy

- **Activity:** Consider Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020), which the artist describes as "a memorial bestowing ornamental overkill to a mourned ambiguous subject." What do you think the artist is saying with this work? How does this work contrast with that of artists such as Nawurapu Wunujmurra, Sara Morawetz or Timothy Cook?

Sara Morawetz's *March 17* (2020) refers to the day her stepfather died at the age of 28. She chose to represent this terrible event through photographing Peter's wallet and its contents from that day which the artist describes as "everyday, innocuous – a simple archive of his 28-year-old life." She made these photographs, along with a story of the events surrounding his death, into an accordion-fold book in his memory, in an edition of 32, one for each year of his absence at the time of making the work. This unique tribute can perhaps be seen as the artist's own expression of bereavement, which

although undoubtedly spiritual, does not appear to be informed by a particular formal religion or specific cultural point of view.

In Morawetz's work, we may feel the fleeting nature of Peter's short life, here one minute, gone the next, through a random set of circumstances. What do the remnants of his life say about him? And yet, coupled with the story of his intentions before he died and relationship with Sara, we get a very strong sense of his character trying his best to do what he felt was the right thing, a beautiful quality memorialised in this work.

Nell has described how the death of her son Lucky, due to stillbirth, profoundly changed her life and is now expressed ongoingly in much of her artwork. Works such as *I AM Passing through* (2017) on the one hand suggest the momentary transition of a life, also demonstrate how Nell has kept this tiny lifeforce alive and continuing through her practice.

Again, the humble sincerity of these tributes contrast in scale and emotional intent with the sardonic humour and grandiose gesture of Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020), which calls into question Western ideas about legacy. What have we left behind? What will we leave behind? How will we be remembered?



Nell
Mother and Child #2 2017
hand-blown glass, metal stool
91.8 × 39.4 × 38.1 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
STATION, Melbourne and
Sydney
Photo: Ian Hill

Artists and Artworks

Catherine Bell

B. 1969, Sydney / Eora Nation
Lives and works in Melbourne / Naarm

Catherine Bell is a multidisciplinary artist and Associate Professor (Visual Arts), Australian Catholic University. Bell's practice-led research focuses on the generative potential of grief, loss and memory in a creative context. In recent times, she has located her practice within an archive and healthcare setting. Bell has generated a growing body of work from her workshop series, *Facing Death Creatively* (ongoing since 2018).

Bell has participated in artist residencies in the oncology ward and Caritas Christi Hospice at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. During her residencies Bell further developed the *Facing Death Creatively* workshops with patients and staff, encouraging discussion around death and dying.

Bell holds regular solo exhibitions with Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. Recent group exhibitions include *Craftivism*, Shepparton Art Museum, Vic, and regional tour (2018–20); *Pairs*, Firstdraft, Sydney (2018); and *Ceremonial*, Craft Victoria, Melbourne (2016).

Catherine Bell is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

For this exhibition, Catherine Bell presents *Final Resting Place* (2018–20) comprising 100 vessels hand-carved from floral foam. This body of work engages with both our individual and collective sense of mortality, presenting a collection of vessels that have been accumulated through ongoing workshops led by the artist, starting with workshops held at St Christopher's Hospice in London, as part of the *Facing Death Creatively* symposium in 2018.

The artist says:

“At these workshops, conference delegates sculpted biodegradable floral oasis foam to create a small urn, which would become a “portrait” of the maker, and a catalyst for imagining their final resting place. Working with this medium communally to produce fragile urns provided an opportunity to promote healthy and meaningful reflection on mortality. The dust that accumulated during the creation of the little urns was collected in ziplocked freezer bags, which participants took away to use as the basis for opening discussion with loved ones about their final resting place.

Participants were also invited to scatter the biodegradable dust in the location where they could imagine themselves being buried, or their ashes dispersed, and to email me a photo of the site.

The sculpted forms created during the workshops were relinquished and became part of a growing archive of individually hand-crafted pots, which represent the community that created them at a particular place and time”

(Catherine Bell, ‘Final Resting Place’, 2019).

Further reading:

Catherine Bell “The Remains of the Day” exhibition catalogue Sutton Gallery, Published Jul 1, 2014 https://issuu.com/cebell/docs/catherine_catalogue_online

Catherine Bell “*We Die As We Live*,” 2017, St Vincent’s Private Hospital, Melbourne. https://issuu.com/cebell/docs/catherine_bell___we_die_as_we_live

Interview with Craft: <https://www.craft.org.au/maker-interviews/2016/11/14/gallery-interview-catherine-bell>

Artist website: <https://suttongallery.com.au/artists/catherine-bell/>



Catherine Bell
Final resting place (detail) 2018–20
100 vessels hand-carved from floral foam, 100 digital photographs, digital photo display installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Photographer: Ian Hill

Timothy Cook

Tiwi

Skin group: Marntupuni (House Fly)

Dance: Tartuwali (Shark)

Country: Goose Creek

B. 1958, Melville Island

Lives and works in Milikapiti, Melville Island

Timothy Cook is a senior Tiwi artist who has been creating paintings, prints and carvings at Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association for over 20 years. Cook favours the 'old designs' learnt from his elders. He paints exclusively with natural earth pigments sourced from various locations near his home in Milikapiti, Melville Island.

In recent years, Cook has become one of the most iconic Tiwi artists to paint the Kulama (coming of age ceremony) design. The Kulama and the Pukumani (mourning) ceremonies are the two major Tiwi cultural ceremonies that involve painting jilamara (design) on the body, kawakawayi (song) and yoi (dance). The Pukumani ceremony also involves commissioning, carving and painting tutini.

Cook has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions since 1997 and his works are held in significant public and private collections. He was awarded the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2012 and has been shortlisted for many other awards, including the Wynne Prize (2020) and the Hadley Art Award (2019).

Timothy Cook is represented by Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti, and Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney.

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water features two large Kulama paintings from 2013 and 2014, which in the context of the exhibition, speak to the inseparable relationship between life and death in Tiwi culture, the marking of time, and the transition of one state to another, the ceremony being a significant milestone for young Tiwi men.

'The Kulama ceremony is a traditional initiation for young men which coincides with the harvest of wild yam. The ceremony is performed in the late wet season (March-April) when a ring appears around Japparra (the moon). Elders of both sexes sing and dance for three days, welcoming the boys into adulthood. The boy is then renamed with his true man's name. The circles in his work symbolize the moon, yam and ritual circles of the Kulama ceremony, the "cross" reflects his spiritual life, the pwanga (dots) reflect the japalinga (stars). Some of Timothy's paintings also represent Japparra the moon man, a significant figure in the Tiwi creation story.'¹

Three *Tutini (Pukumani poles)* (2019, 2020 and 2020), carved by Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and painted with jilamara (designs) by Timothy Cook are also featured. Pedro Wonaeamirri, outlines the significance of the tutini and the *Pukumani* ceremony as follows;

‘When a Tiwi person dies, a time called Pukumani begins. At the start there is a smoking ceremony to cleanse areas where the person lived and worked; the funeral when the body is buried; then after some time a small ceremony to start the making of the tutini (Pukumani poles); and finally the main Pukumani ceremony where the spirit is put to rest. Six months or a year after a person passes, the family of the deceased begin to organise the Pukumani ceremony. During Pukumani, we do not use this person’s name, even people who hold that name are called by their middle name. The Pukumani ceremony marks the end of this time, six months or a year after the funeral. After the main ceremony the name comes back and Pukumani for that person is over.’²

1. <https://jilamara.com/artist/timothy-cook/> (Retrieved 19/7/2021).
2. Pedro Wonaeamirri, *Pukumani, One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1196869/One_Foot_On_The_Ground.pdf p89.

Further reading:

Artist website: <https://jilamara.com/artist/timothy-cook/>

MCA: <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/timothy-cook/>



Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
natural earth pigments on linen
200 × 220 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Jilamara Arts and Crafts
Association, Milikapiti, and Vivien Anderson
Gallery, Melbourne
Photographer: Ian Hill

French & Mottershead

Rebecca French

B.1973, London, England

Andrew Mottershead

B.1968, Manchester, England

Live and work in London, England

French & Mottershead are a collaborative artist duo comprising Rebecca French and Andrew Mottershead. Over the past 18 years French & Mottershead have developed a substantial body of site-specific, socially engaged, participatory projects. They create multi-artform experiences that are as playful and poetic as they are subversive, inviting participants to think again about who they are, their ties to place and one another.

French & Mottershead redefine how we relate to familiar locations, making use of detailed social and forensic investigations into the ways that our identity is embedded in environment, architecture and public space.

French & Mottershead have exhibited extensively across the UK and internationally, including at Tate Modern, Centro Cultural São Paulo, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) and Salt, Istanbul. Works from their *Afterlife* series have intervened in woodlands, waterways, galleries, online and in domestic spaces in the UK, Europe, Australia, the USA and China.

The work *Grey Granular Fist* (2017), is part of the *Afterlife* series, one of four sound recordings of spoken narratives that examine how the body decomposes in different settings: a woodland, underwater, at home, and in the case of the included work, in a gallery. Drawn from consultation with forensic anthropologists, ecologists, and conservators these *'immersive digital art works [offer] listeners an intimate, visceral and poetic glimpse of their own mortality.'*¹

The work appears to be a simple timber chair, however once the viewer sits down, their weight triggers an audio recording that details what would happen if they were to die in the gallery and their body was to decompose and be taken into storage as part of the gallery collection. In this way, the viewer's own body becomes part of the materiality of the artwork.

Andrew Mottershead, described the process of researching and making the work as follows;

“It's been a crash course in human decomposition. We've explored the impact of temperature, moisture, animals and all the environmental factors. We've also been mining case studies and observed animal

bodies decomposing... What we've found out is that the story of human decomposition is about transformation, renewal, and change.”²

1&2. <http://frenchmottershead.com/works/afterlife/> (Retrieved 19/7/21)

Further reading:

Hines-Green, Adam. 'French & Mottershead: Woodland.' *Art Monthly* 431 (2019): pp. 38–39. Reich, Hannah.

'Dark Mofo: festival-goers experience death, decay and degloving on River Derwent in audio work "Waterborne."' *The Hub on Art*, ABC Arts, 23 June, 2018. abc.net.au/news/2018-06-23/dark-mofo-waterborne-audio-tour-river-derwent-body-decomposing/9898448.

Artist website: <http://frenchmottershead.com/works/afterlife/>



French & Mottershead
Grey Granular Fist 2017
chair, sensor, audio player, directional speaker, sound: 24 mins
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists
Photograph courtesy of the Wellcome Collection

Mabel Juli

Gija

Skin group: Nyawurru

Ngarranggarni: Emu and Echidna

B. circa 1932, Five Mile, near Moola Boola Station

Lives and works in Warmun

Mabel Juli is a Gija Elder and senior artist currently working at Warmun Art Centre in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. Juli is a strong Law and Culture woman and an important ceremonial singer and dancer.

Juli started painting in the 1980s with the encouragement of celebrated Warmun artists Queenie McKenzie, Madigan Thomas and Rover Thomas. She has created a body of work characterised by bold, minimalist compositions in natural earth pigments and charcoal, depicting subject matter informed by her detailed knowledge of the Ngarranggarni passed down from her family. Juli primarily paints Ngarranggarni relating to her country, Darrajayin. She is renowned for her depictions of Garnkiny doo Wardel (Moon and Star), which explore the subjects of forbidden love, kinship and the origins of mortality from a Gija perspective.

Juli has exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions and hundreds of group exhibitions. Her works are held in significant public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas. She is an eight-time finalist in the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

Mabel Juli is represented by Warmun Art Centre, WA.

The exhibition features Mabel Juli's painting *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* (2020). Read Mabel's telling of this story in Gija language, with an English translation in the *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* catalogue.

“The concept of Ngarranggarni is an expansive and complex one that defies simple definition or translation. It is common across many language groups in the Kimberley region.”¹

Frances Kofod in the Gija To English Dictionary defines Ngarranggarni as;

“The time when the landscape took its present form and the rules for living came into being...” Much work by Warmun artists concerns sites formed by the actions of spirit beings or the human ancestors of life forms that now live among us as animals and plants.²

Many Ngarranggarni places were created as these agents metamorphosed into or shaped hills, rocks, rivers, springs and waterholes. However, the Ngarranggarni is also a framework that continues to encode, nourish and maintain Gija law and conceptions of

social organisation, trade and exchange, kinship relations and family ties, custodianship of country and the practice of song, dance, spirituality, art, language and philosophy.”³

1. <https://warmunart.com.au/culture/> Retrieved 16/7/2021.
2. <https://warmunart.com.au/culture/> Retrieved 16/7/2021.
3. <https://warmunart.com.au/culture/> Retrieved 16/7/2021.

Further Reading:

Artist website: <https://warmunart.com.au/art/artists/senior/mabel-juli/>

Garn’giny, death and rebirth Mabel Juli interviewed by Dominic Kavanagh Gija transcription and translation by Frances Kofod, *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1196869/One_Foot_On_The_Ground.pdf



Mabel Juli
Garnkiny Ngarranggarni 2020
natural earth pigments and charcoal on linen
120 × 180 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Warmun Art Centre, Western Australia
Photograph: Ian Hill

Richard Lewer

B. 1970, Hamilton, New Zealand / Aotearoa Lives and works in Melbourne / Naarm

Richard Lewer is best known for paintings, videos, animations, and drawings that explore extreme events, crime scenes, illness and the difficult or repressed aspects of our history and society. Lewer's works are accessible and their subjects familiar, but they have a critical edge that probes what is beautiful and sinister about our society while avoiding moralisation. Lewer is concerned less with concrete facts than with the way places can become repositories for the psychic residue of extreme events, painful activities or fears.

Lewer has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally. His work is included in many significant private, museum and university collections in Australia and New Zealand. Recent solo exhibitions have been held in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Auckland, Jakarta, Perth and Canberra. Lewer has been awarded numerous prizes including the 5th Basil Sellers Art Prize (2016), the City of Albany Art Prize (2015), the Blake Prize (2014) and the Black Swan Portraiture Award (2013).

Richard Lewer is represented by Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide.

Artworks by Richard Lewer that feature in this exhibition are *As a bald man, I miss going to the barber* (2019), a diptych painted with oil on copper; and *Crucifixes* (2018), an installation of 100 ceramic crosses. These works demonstrate the artist's capacity to cover subject matter ranging from lightly poignant to soulful tragedy with equal compassion and curiosity.

Richard has discussed the crucifix as a 'loaded image'. Though raised a Catholic, Richard Lewer defines himself as a Contemporary Social Realist. He has written that "the crucifix, to me, is an unmistakable visual representation of absolute vulnerability, with its twisted human form evidence of extreme physical suffering, whereas for others, it offers a beacon of hope, as with death there is always the opportunity to transcend this life to a better place."

The repetition of *Crucifixes* (2018) is contrasted with the singular experience depicted in Richard's self-portrait, *As a bald man, I miss going to the barber* (2019), illustrating one of the key themes of the exhibition; the personal versus the universal nature of death.

A finalist in the 2019 Doug Moran Portrait Prize, '*As a bald man, I miss going to the barber*', depicts the artist's final visit to the barber, an example of time passing and the smaller losses we experience in life, as we move towards its inevitable end.

Further reading:

Art Collector Magazine. 'At home with Richard Lewer.' Interview by Emil McEvoy. Art Collector. 20 May, 2020. Video, 11:00. youtu.be/Qp0pKd_aYaI.

Hammond, Kirrily. Richard Lewer: nobody likes a show off. Caulfield, Vic: Monash University Museum of Art, 2009.

Artist website: richardlewer.com

hugomichellgallery.com/portfolio/richard-lewer



Richard Lewer
Crucifixes (detail) 2018
fired stoneware installation
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide
Photograph: Ian Hill

Sara Morawetz

B.1982, Newcastle / Mulubinba

Lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

Sara Morawetz is a conceptual artist who uses a range of media to examine the systems and structures that measure experience. Morawetz investigates concepts such as time and distance to explore their physical and emotional potential.

Recent projects involve collaborations with scientists from institutions including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the USA National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Her work has been exhibited in Australia and internationally, including at the Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris; Australian Consulate-General in New York; Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival Chicago; Open Source Gallery, New York; and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney. Morawetz has received numerous awards and prizes including the Churchie National Emerging Art Prize (2016), the Moya Dyring Studio Scholarship (2018), the Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship (2018) and the Terrence and Lynette Fern Cité Internationale des Arts Residency Fellowship (2020).

The title of Sara's work included in the exhibition, *March 17* (2020) refers to the day her stepfather, Peter was killed in a motorcycle accident in 1988.

The artwork takes the form of an accordion-fold book that includes a series of photographs of Peter's wallet and its contents from that day which the artist describes as "everyday, innocuous – a simple archive of his 28-year-old life... made invaluable by his absence."

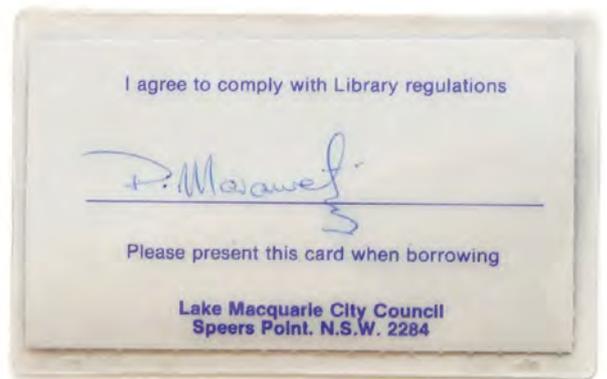
Without the story and events surrounding these objects, they would be completely unremarkable, however once we know their story, they have become an intimate and moving memorial to the character of their former owner.

Further reading:

Artist website: www.saramorawetz.com

QUT Art Museum. 'An interview with Sara Morawetz: 2016 winner of "the Churchie" national emerging art prize.' Brisbane: QUT Art Museum. 25 October, 2016. Video, 17:04. vimeo.com/188908992.

Sarah Morawetz. 'Walking in search of the metre: Sara Morawetz'. Sydney: TEDxSydney, 20 September, 2019. Video, 11:24. [youtube.com/watch?v=YKWA252yxAA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKWA252yxAA).



Sara Morawetz
 March 17 (detail) 2020
 artist's book (accordion fold) artist's proof from an edition of 32 plus 3 artist's proofs
 24.1 x 315 cm (fully extended),
 24.1 x 24.1 x 0.6 cm (closed)
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photograph: Sara Morawetz

Michael Needham

B. 1977, Victor Harbour / Ngarrindjeri Country Lives and works in Kyneton / Taungurung Country

Michael Needham's practice fuses drawing, object-making and sculptural installation that responds to specific sites and cultural contexts. His work explores myth, belief and residual melancholia in the contemporary psyche, focussing on uncanny sensibilities around mimicry and memorialization. Needham's works are often remnants of a corporeality no longer present, mimicking historical forms in unfamiliar contexts as a form of reflective critique.

Needham's new work, *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020), developed for this exhibition, indicates a critical shift in his methodology. It offers humour as a counterpoint, capable of both softening and compounding his work's weightier associations: death, melancholia, the legacies of colonialism and its imposing presence in the Australian landscape.

Needham has exhibited in numerous Australian group and solo exhibitions and has also exhibited in Italy and Japan. His work has recently been shown in Bendigo, Ballarat, Broken Hill, Lorne, Melbourne, Kyneton, Mildura and Hobart. Needham's new work, *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020) was developed specifically for *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* and shows, as the artist has stated, a shift towards "sardonic humour to both soften and compound the weightier associations within the subject matter."

The artist describes the work as follows:

"Monument to Muther [sic] (2020) is a memorial bestowing ornamental overkill to a mourned ambiguous subject. Made from steel, cast-iron and adorned with funereal lighting and artificial flowers, it is the third in a series of irreverent larger-scale sculptural installations that overplay formal posturing as a means of questioning implicit and often justifiably guarded sentimentality around loss..."

Needham's work presents an overblown tribute, reminiscent of the Gothic style of European monument that can be identified throughout Australia, monuments that carry with them the legacy of colonialism, continuing to exert an uncomfortable presence on invaded Country. The hyperbole evident in the scale of the work and level of ornamentation, perhaps mocking the self-importance of the European tradition.

A second work by the artist included in the exhibition is titled *Interstice* (2017). Created using the frame of a three-panel church window where previously richly coloured stained-glass windows have been replaced by starkly white opaque dental plaster cast against heaped-earth. Instead of translucent light and beguiling narrative and symbolism, the viewer is faced with an unreadable void that offers little comfort.

Also displayed are three small *Reminders* (2016), described by the artist as

‘a suite of cast-iron stumps, mimicking their previous visual form and state as broken timber posts. With jagged ends pointing up, they are positioned like fossilized fragments of a ruin commonly seen in the Australian landscape, be it a dwelling or a field of trees. As a process and proposition, casting records and memorializes; ... Cast-iron – here the preserving, substituting material – was a primary industrial material of the settler colonies in Australia and it remains an iconic presence in 19th Century cemetery ornamentation.’

Further reading:

Artist website: <https://michaelneedham.com.au/home.html>

de Clario, Domenico. ‘Melancholy of loss.’ In *Landscape with grave: inherited loss and representation*. Mildura, Vic: Mildura Arts Centre, 2016.

McLean, Ian. ‘The anatomy of melancholia: F & M Needham in Mildura.’ In *Landscape with grave: inherited loss and representation*. Mildura, Vic: Mildura Arts Centre, 2016.

Needham, Michael. ‘Art and body-space: mirrored corporeality.’ Needham, Michael. ‘Colonial visions: melancholy landscapes for the living and the dead.’ In *Landscape, Wilderness, and the Wild Conference*. Newcastle, UK: Newcastle University, 2015. michaelneedham.com.au



Michael Needham
Reminders (detail) 2016
cast iron
8 parts, each 50 × 15 × 15 cm (approx.),
installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph: Lakshal Perera

Nell

B. 1975, Maitland / Wonnarua Country Lives and works in Sydney / Eora Nation

Nell's practice traverses performance, installation, public art, video, painting and sculpture. Her art probes apparent binary oppositions: light and dark, life and death, happiness and sadness, popular culture and the sacred. Nell has developed a distinctive aesthetic and body of iconography over the past two decades. Key themes of her practice include religion, spirituality, philosophy, sex, rebirth, mortality, and rock 'n' roll, her first and enduring passion.

While the extremes of human existence are immediately perceptible in her works, often communicated through a black and white palette, the experience of living in the 'in-between' is of central importance.

Over the past two decades, Nell's works have been included in over 250 exhibitions in Australia and overseas.

Nell has participated in numerous residencies and delivered major public art commissions, including Eveleigh Treehouse (2019) and Happy Rain (2019), Sydney. She was a 2020 Carriageworks Studio Artist and her works are held in significant private and public collections throughout Australia and overseas. Nell is represented by STATION, Sydney and Melbourne.

The work selected for this exhibition was created in the context of the artist grieving the loss of her son Lucky. It includes her large painting *Mother of the Dry Tree* (2017) and thirteen-part installation *With things being as they are...* (2017)

About this body of work, the artist has stated:

'In my painting the mother and the child are separated, as if calling to each other. I had a stillborn baby boy [...] and it was, goes without saying, incredibly traumatic and changed my life irrevocably and it really changed my art practice too. I made a commitment to make art about my life, a long time ago and now this little spirit's very much in my work [...]. My arms ached afterwards and so I wanted to make these little vessels or little spirits that I could hold in my arms.'¹

Mother of the Dry Tree (2017) was based on a tiny Renaissance painting, *Virgin of the Dry Tree* (1465) by Petrus Christus' (also called *Madonna of the Dry Tree*). The key elements of the Petrus painting – the A's, the tree and the mother and child, form an underlying structure to tell her own story using her own visual language. For example, in the original painting, several letter A's hang from the tree, referring to the Catholic hymn *Ave Maria* often sung at funerals. Nell's A's on the other hand refer to one of her favourite bands; ACDC, an important and recurrent theme in her work.

With things being as they are... (2017), comprises thirteen sculptural elements, some of which are presented on Japanese tatami mats, a reference to Nell's first overseas travel experience, which she says had a profound effect on her life. Several egg-shaped forms, sprite forms in clay and glass ghosts, signify the little spirit who 'passed through' her life, but is now ever present in her artwork. Their open eyes and mouths appear to be in a state of shock, or perhaps refer to Buddhist teachings about being awake to fully experiencing the joy and sadness that comes with mortality. Nell has been a practising Buddhist for more than ten years, and the word Buddha means the one who is awake, the enlightened or awakened one. Nell has also said she uses these simple face forms with easily-read expressions, to connect with people across language and age barriers.

Layered with meaning, Nell's works represent moments in her life, incorporating her own and universal ideas and beliefs about the world and the nature of life and death.

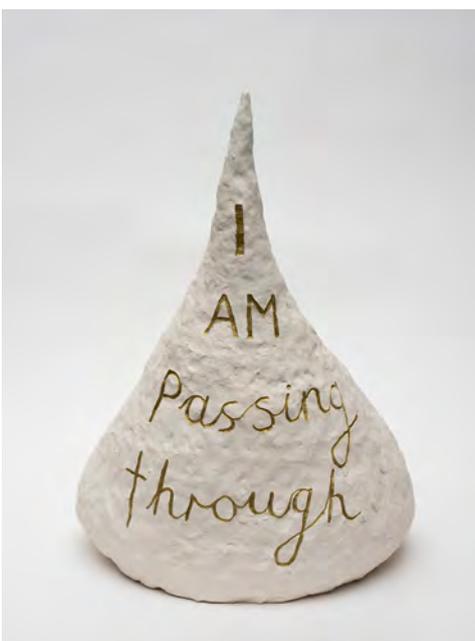
1. Nell, 'Love and music,' interview by Rachel Storey, Art makers, ABC Arts, 22 June, 2017, video, 5:56, <http://iview.abc.net.au/show/art-makers/series/0/video/AC1646H009S00>. (Reproduced on p. 22, One Foot on the Ground PDF. La Trobe Art Institute 2020).

Further reading:

<https://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artist/nell>

<https://stationgallery.com.au/artists/nell>

<https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/nell/>



Nell
I AM Passing through 2017
earthenware, enamel paint
63 × 44 × 45 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
STATION, Melbourne
and Sydney
Photograph: Ian Hill

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

Tiwi

Skin group: Miyatini (pandanus)

Dance: Jurrukukini (owl)

Country: Munupi

B. 1973 Darwin / Larrakia

Lives and works in Milikapiti, Melville Island

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri has contributed to the development of Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association since the late 1980s. Puruntatameri learnt to carve from his father, Paddy Freddy Puruntatameri, a highly respected and renowned carver. His father taught him which timber to use, how to make spears and how to source ochre and make red pigment by heating yellow ochre.

Puruntatameri is well known for his skilful carvings of his totem Jurrukukuni (owl). His works are held in many major collections throughout Australia, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Throughout his career, Puruntatameri has participated in major Australian group and solo exhibitions. He has recently been commissioned to make tutini (Pukumani poles) for Paralika tutini Jilamara (2019), a major group exhibition of Tiwi tutini at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and NIRIN, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2020).

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri is represented by Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti.

In addition to carving three tutini for the exhibition, Puruntatameri also contributed two meticulously decorated figure carvings of Purukuparli and his wife Waiyai, two of the central figures in the Purukuparli story, which is fundamental to Tiwi life and culture.

‘It teaches lessons about life and is also the beginning of our ceremonial culture. Since the time when Purukuparli danced his dead son into the sea at Yimpinari, the Tiwi people have come together for the Pukumani ceremony – to sing, dance and farewell the spirit of our family so they can be at rest back on Country. Pukumani ceremony is a grieving ceremony, but it is also a celebration of life. Every dance has a song. The song and dance are how you connect to the land and the spirit of the deceased person. To let go and say goodbye, see you next time on your Country.’¹

Purukuparli is the story of how death first comes to the Tiwi people, through the death of Jinani, Purukuparli and his wife Waiyai’s son. The story also teaches the Tiwi people to come together for ceremony when a community member passes away.

1. Pedro Wonaeamirri, *Purukuparli story*. p. 76, https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1196869/One_Foot_On_The_Ground.pdf

Further reading:

Artist website: <https://jilamara.com/artist/patrick-freddy-puruntatameri/>

Cumpston, Nici, ed. *Tarnanthi: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art*. Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2019.
Isaacs, Jennifer. *Tiwi: art, history, culture*. Carlton, Vic: Miegunyah Press, 2012. jilamara.com/artist/patrick-freddy-puruntatameri



Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Waiyai & Purukuparli 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood, cockatoo feathers
Left: 93 × 14.5 × 22 cm; Right: 98 × 14.5 × 12.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti
Photograph: Will Heathcote

Nawurapu Wununmurra

Yolŋu

Clan: Dhalwaŋu, Narrkala group

Moiety: Yirritja

Homeland: Gurrumuru

B. 1952 Miwatj, Northeast Arnhem Land

Died 2018 Nhulunbuy, Northeast Arnhem Land

Nawurapu Wununmurra was the eldest son of the late Yaŋgarriny Wununmurra, the first Aboriginal artist to have his copyright recognised in an Australian court and the recipient of the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) first prize in 1997. From an early age Nawurapu assisted his father. As his own spiritual authority increased, he produced works in his own right.

Following his father's passing, Wununmurra stepped into a senior role with his brothers. His ceremonial responsibilities required him to move between the homeland centres of the Miwatj region, Northeast Arnhem Land and beyond into Central Arnhem Land. In his later years he lived at Yirrkala, Gurrumuru, Gän_gän, Gapuwiyak and Wändawuy.

Wununmurra was involved in all major group projects stemming from Yirrkala in the 1990s and since 1995 he has exhibited widely in group and solo exhibitions throughout Australia. In 2015 he travelled to Makassar, where a batik from one of his paintings was presented to the Indonesian Textile Museum.

Wununmurra's works are held in private and public collections throughout Australia and overseas, including the Australian National Maritime Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, USA.

Featured in this exhibition are five *Mokuy* (2012) from the La Trobe University Collection.

Nawurapu Wununmurra identified that 'these are happy spirits. They are going home. The mokuy or nanuk (spirits) come in together, Dhuwa and Yirritja to the sacred ground called Balambala, past Gängan, the other side for all the mokuy to get together. The spirits go there and that's where they make the yidaki sound. It's like showing yukuwa (sacred yam emblem) and morning star feathers – they are different. Like same goes with yidaki, different sounds for Yirritja and Dhuwa. The Yirritja and Dhuwa play yidaki to call in the mokuy to the same ground Balambala. The Yirritja mokuy come in on the birds, djilawurr (scub fowl) and

bugutj-bugutj (banded fruit dove). The Dhuwa mokuy they come in from raji side (saltwater).'

(Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala)

The exhibition also features four larrakitj (memorial poles) titled *Garrapara* (2007, 2007, 2012), described by Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre as follows;

'The larrakitj had its traditional use for the Yolŋu of north-east Arnhem Land as an ossuary or bone container erected as a memorial to a dead kinsman up to a decade after death. After death the body of the deceased was often ceremonially placed on a raised platform and left to the elements for an appropriate time. The area would then be abandoned until the next stage of the ritual.

This took place once it was determined that the essential eternal spirit of the deceased had completed its cyclical journey to the spring from which it had originated and would in time return again. This might be several years. Ritual saw the bones of the deceased placed within the termite-hollowed memorial pole for final resting. Mortuary ritual would end with the placement of the larrakitj containing the bones standing in the bush. Over time the larrakitj and its contents would return to mother earth. The larrakitj has often been referred to as the mother's womb.

In a contemporary context, the larrakitj is used as an instructional tool for younger generations. Artworks of this nature have multiple layers of metaphor and meaning, providing lessons about the connections between an individual and specific Country (both land and sea); the connections between clans; the forces that act upon and within the environment; and the mechanics of a spirit's path through existence. The knowledge referred to by this imagery deepens in complexity and secrecy as a person progresses through a life-long learning process.'

(Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala)

Further reading:

<https://yirrkala.com/>

Bäpurru Yinimala Gumana in conversation with Kade McDonald and Manikay: The song knows the destination. Written by Wukun Wanambi, edited by Kade McDonald. https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1196869/One_Foot_On_The_Ground.pdf



Nawurapu Wunurjmurra
Mokuy (detail) 2012
natural earth pigments on kapok group of 5 works
261.5 × 18 × 35 cm
La Trobe University Art Collection
Photograph: Ian Hill

Glossary of Terms

Biodegradable – A substance or object that is capable of being fully decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms and thereby avoiding pollution.

Cruciform – Object shaped like a cross.

Decompose/Decomposition – The breaking down of a life-form to its elemental state, to become rotten or decayed.

Ephemeral – Lasting for a very short time.

Grief – A feeling of extreme sadness; intense sorrow caused by experiencing someone's death, significant loss or other detrimental life event.

Impermanence – The philosophical problem of change, a concept found in many religions and philosophies, particularly Buddhism, whereby it is recognized that we live and die.

Impermanent – Not permanent; temporary; something that does not last for ever.

Legacy – A person's accomplishments or impact on the world; an amount of money or property left to someone in a will; A legacy of an event or period of history is something which is a direct result of it and which continues to exist after it is over.

Materiality – The materials and/or quality of the materials that an artwork is made from.

Memorialize – To preserve the memory of or commemorate. If a person or event is memorialized, something is produced that will continue to exist and remind people of this person or event.

Mortality – The condition of being mortal or subject to death, or of one day having to die.

Secular – Not connected to religion.

Sorry Business – An important time of mourning for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when they mourn the loss of a family member by following traditional ceremonies and practices, that involves responsibilities and obligations to attend funerals and participate in other cultural events, activities or ceremonies with the community.

First Nations Languages and Culture

Yolŋu Language & Culture

Larrakitj –

‘The larrakitj had its traditional use for the Yolŋu of Northeast Arnhem Land as an ossuary or bone container erected as a memorial to a dead kinsman up to a decade after death. After death the body of the deceased was often ceremonially placed on a raised platform and left to the elements for an appropriate time. The area would then be abandoned until the next stage of the ritual.

This took place once it was determined that the essential eternal spirit of the deceased had completed its cyclical journey to the spring from which it had originated and would in time return again. This might be several years. Ritual saw the bones of the deceased placed within the termite-hollowed memorial pole for final resting. Mortuary ritual would end with the placement of the larrakitj containing the bones standing in the bush. Over time the larrakitj and its contents would return to mother earth. The larrakitj has often been referred to as the mother’s womb.

In a contemporary context, the larrakitj is used as an instructional tool for younger generations. Artworks of this nature have multiple layers of metaphor and meaning, providing lessons about the connections between an individual and specific Country (both land and sea); the connections between clans; the forces that act upon and within the environment; and the mechanics of a spirit’s path through existence. The knowledge referred to by this imagery deepens in complexity and secrecy as a person progresses through a life-long learning process.’

(Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala)

Moiety –

‘Yolŋu worldview sees every species of plant, animal, fish, bird or any place or person as belonging to one of the two balancing halves of the world (moieties); Yirritja or Dhuwa’

(<https://yirrkala.com/culture-and-environment/> Retrieved 20/7/21)

Mokuy – Nawurapu Wunŋmurra identified that

‘these are happy spirits. They are going home. The mokuy or nanuk (spirits) come in together, Dhuwa and Yirritja to the sacred ground called Balambala, past Gāngan, the other side for all the mokuy to get together. The spirits go there and that’s where they make the yidaki

sound. It's like showing yukuwa (sacred yam emblem) and morning star feathers – they are different. Like same goes with yidaki, different sounds for Yirritja and Dhuwa. The Yirritja and Dhuwa play yidaki to call in the mokuy to the same ground Balambala. The Yirritja mokuy come in on the birds, djilawurr (scub fowl) and bugutj-bugutj (banded fruit dove). The Dhuwa mokuy they come in from ranj side (saltwater).'

There are relationships between Yirritja moiety clans that are renewed through Yukuwa ceremony at particular sites which relate to the ritual exchange of sacred objects, song and dance. Yukuwa is a yam whose annual reappearance is a metaphor for the increase and renewal of the people and their land. Traditionally the invitation to such a ceremony is presented as an object in the form of a yam with strings emanating from it with feathered flowers at the end. This is a suggestion of the kinship lines which tie groups together.

When these ceremonies are held by mortals during the day the spirits conduct their own rituals at night. Their nocturnal activities are often audible in the main camp during such ceremonies. It seems as if it is a necessary part of their farewell to this dimension to have this last ceremony.

(Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala)

Gija Language & Culture

Garnkiny or Garn'giny – The Moon or relating to the Moon Dreaming (Garnkiny Ngarranggarni or Garn'giny Ngarranggarni) in Gija language.

Ngarranggarni – Frances Kofod's Gija Dictionary defines Ngarranggarni as

'The time when the landscape took its present form and the rules for living came into being... Much work by Warmun artists concerns sites formed by the actions of spirit beings or the human ancestors of life forms that now live among us as animals and plants.'

(From <https://warmunart.com.au/culture/> Retrieved 30/08/21)

Note on translation: There are multiple spellings for the moon in Gija. Garnkiny and Garn'giny are both used in this exhibition and catalogue. 'Garnkiny' is an older spelling, 'Garn'giny' is more recent.

Tiwi Language & Culture

Jilamara – Design(s) in Tiwi language; can refer to ceremonial body painting in Tiwi culture or the designs used in Tiwi artwork.

‘When we are dancing all painted up, we are disguising ourselves from the spirit world. That is the meaning of the word jilamara: design that we paint on ourselves to disguise ourselves. Now we use these design styles to make art at the art centre and still for ceremony as well.’

(Wonaeamirri, Pedro, *Pukumani story*, p. 94. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue. La Trobe Art Institute 2020).

Kulama –

‘The Kulama ceremony is a traditional initiation ceremony for young men and an annual celebration of life, taking place during the late wet season on the Tiwi Islands (March–April), when a ring appears around Japarra (the moon). The ceremony is held over three days, coinciding with the harvest of wild yam and is attended by both men and women. Elders sing and dance to welcome the boys into adulthood. The boy is then renamed with his true man’s name. Kulama is a celebration of life, of transition from one stage to another. The circular forms depicted in Cook’s Kulama paintings symbolise the moon, yam and ritual circles of the Kulama ceremony; the pwanga (dots) represent japalinga (stars).’

(Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti)

Pukumani – In Tiwi culture, Pukumani is a ‘grieving ceremony’ where the community comes together

‘to sing, dance and farewell the spirit of [the family member] so they can be at rest back on Country. Pukumani ceremony is a grieving ceremony, but it is also a celebration of life. Every dance has a song. The song and dance are how you connect to the land and the spirit of the deceased person. To let go and say goodbye, see you next time on your Country’

(Wonaeamirri, Pedro, *Pukumani story*, p. 84–89. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue. La Trobe Art Institute 2020).

Pukumani is not a funeral ceremony but comes later to help the family and community grieve and then complete the grieving process as follows.

‘...The Pukumani ceremony is for everyone to dance and get involved and connect with the spirit of the deceased – to let go of that person and finish the grieving process.’

(Wonaeamirri, Pedro Pukumani, p. 84–89. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue. La Trobe Art Institute 2020).

Tutini (Pukumani poles) – Carved and painted ceremonial objects significant to the Pukumani ceremony in Tiwi culture.

‘It is the in-laws who are commissioned to make Pukumani poles and do all the work in preparation for the final ceremony. When they are given the tomahawk these workers go out and cut the timber for making the tutini and shelter. The tomahawk is to cut the wood and the lighter is to burn and prepare the wood. It is also used to burn the yellow ochre and make the red colour. The ochre is to paint the poles, tunga (bark bags) and the bodies of the dancers.’

(Wonaeamirri, Pedro, *Pukumani story*, p. 84–89. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* Exhibition Catalogue. La Trobe Art Institute 2020).



Left to right:
Timothy Cook and Patrick
Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
natural earth pigments on
ironwood
238 × 27 × 22 cm
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
natural earth pigments on
ironwood
204 × 28 × 19 cm
Courtesy of the artists and
Jilamara Arts and Crafts
Association, Milikapiti
Photograph: Ian Hill

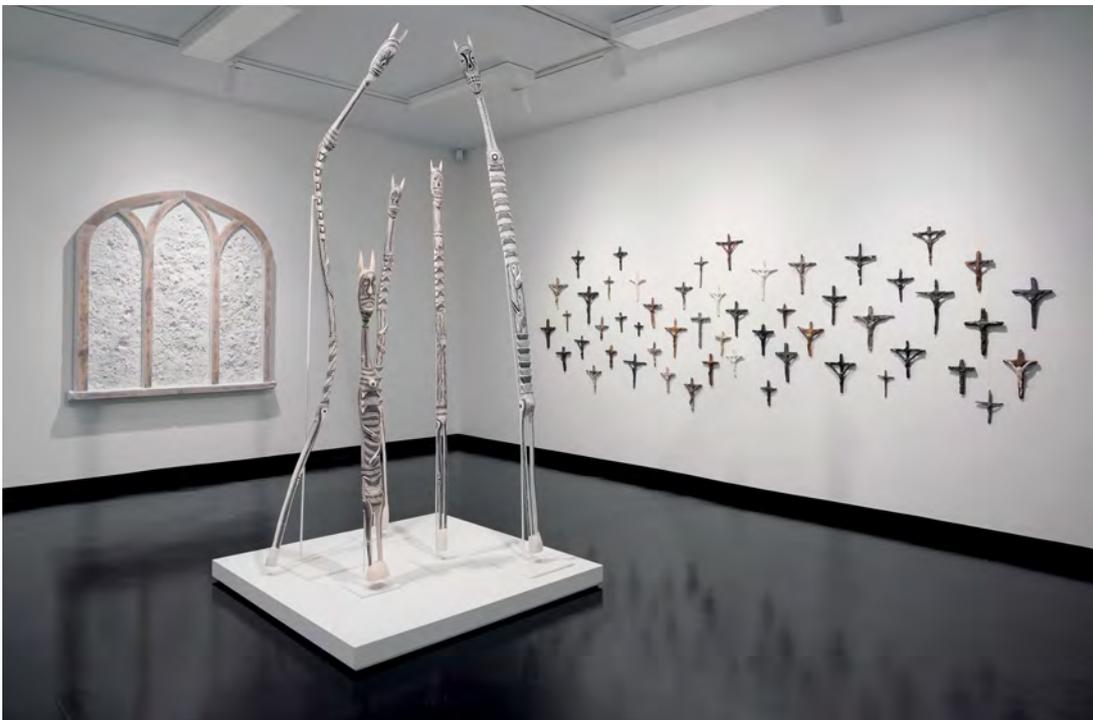
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From far left to right:
Michael Needham
Interstice 2017
Nawurapu Wununmurra
Mokuy 2012
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes 2018
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photograph: Ian Hill

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water

A La Trobe Art Institute exhibition toured by NETS Victoria. Curated by Travis Curtin.

Artists

Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Nawurapu Wunurmurra.

Learning Guide

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