

## NSW Government Heritage Volunteer Award

Congratulations to June and Roy Barker of Lightning Ridge on the receipt of their recent NSW Government Heritage Volunteer Award. On 29th October, the NSW Government held its second awards ceremony, recognising the efforts of 25 volunteers who had made 'outstanding contributions .... in the conservation of the State's cultural heritage'. June and Roy were the first Aboriginal people to receive this award.

June and Roy involved many people in the Brewarrina community in their mammoth task to conserve and interpret the Brewarrina Mission site. The old Mission site had little remaining to show what it had been like. Their project, much of it done in temperatures in the high 40 degrees, will ensure that memories will not be lost and that future generations will be able to visit the area to see where their families lived.

Our Group is aware of the generosity of the Barkers from their crafting a beautiful stone axe and stand for us to present to Kevin Cook a couple of years ago. Last year one of our members, Dr Ruth Fink Latukefu, gave a talk to the Group and friends about her time spent among the people at the Brewarrina Mission many years ago, so we have seen photos of the people who lived there and heard of their lifestyle.

*Jackie O'Hare*

## Mother's Photo after 50 Years

I really haven't thought about Brewarrina for many years, because I was there such a long time ago. Then Lizzie Landers asked if I would give a talk about my research at Brewarrina Aboriginal Mission in 1954. Shortly after I'd agreed, phone calls started coming from Brewarrina Aboriginal people. They'd heard of the grape vine and some wanted to come to the talk.

Sharon Coffey and some friends managed to turn up on the night, in early August and we all enjoyed meeting her. She recognised a lot of people in my photographs. Pinned up on the wall, they were A4 sized black and white enlargements, printed from the original negatives, which are now held by AIATSIS in Canberra. Among them were some nice pictures of Lily Hall, who had worked in the manager's house and been my friend. She and I had gone fishing, pig hunting and travelled together to Lightning Ridge. Lily brought some of her younger children along, including her son Harold Hall who was then about thirteen. Later that year, Lily came to visit my parent's flat in Macleay Street as our guest. It was her first time to stay with a non-Aboriginal family.

One Saturday morning last year, I got two surprise phone calls from Brewarrina. The first was from Lola Bonney, who introduced herself as Lily's daughter. She had only been nine years old when I was in Brewarrina, and had obtained my number from Sharon when they

met recently at a funeral. I asked her how long Lily had lived and was sorry to learn that she had died when Lola was only thirteen, in 1959. In my photos, Lily had looked strong and healthy, yet she must have died in her mid-forties. Lola said they had no photos of their mother. Sharon had told her I had some.

An hour later there was another phone call. A gruff voice said, "Guess who this is?" Momentarily I thought it was my son playing a trick and nearly said so, but then the voice said, "Do you remember me, Harold Hall?" "Of course I do, I've only just spoken to your sister Lola". Harold gave me his address in Brewarrina, as Lola had done, and I promised to send him copies of some photos. The following week I took my prints to a photocopier place and had the copies laminated, posting some to Lola and others to Harold.

Then in mid November, Sharon Coffey emailed this lovely message: "I just got back from Brewarrina early this morning around 2 a.m., I left Brewarrina at 4.30 pm yesterday. Just before I left I happened to run into Harold Hall at the Café de Lux (Pippo's café). He told me that he received some photos from you and was very proud. You really made his day. He looked so happy and content and he couldn't stop thanking me for putting him in contact with you. If only you could've seen the joy on his face!"

*Ruth Fink Latukefu*

# BIALA HOSTEL REPORT

Another year has gone. It has been a successful year here at Biala (most of the time). We are all, students and staff, looking forward to the long holiday.

Our three children, Tiana, Liam and baby Claudia, all had chicken pox during this last term. Fortunately, Carissa Gallagher was the only student to also get it. They were all pretty sick and sorry for a while of course.

We have had Leonie Dennis working as our relief this term, which has been really good for the girls and us. Our staff, Zita Colless our cook, Lara Rutley and Angie Smith our night watch, and Aunty Dawn who was our weekend cook for quite a while, have worked well.

There are changes being made by Aboriginal Hostels for 2004 which are a bit of a worry. House parents will have no full time relief or weekend cook or recreational officer. There will be a person employed for only 20 hours a week to help us out. You can imagine, we are sure, that as house parents/managers we do not have much free time, especially together. So it will be even harder this year. As with teenage girls the world over, our girls have explosions and dramas that come about. While we try to provide a good family atmosphere here at Biala, we really need good staff and support to do this. We will just have to wait and see how things go this year.

We did have a big meeting recently at Biala attended by Greg Hazel from Aboriginal Hostels, together with representatives from agencies and other support people from the community to discuss matters concerning Biala. It was really good to see and hear the concern from people at the meeting and hopefully results from this meeting will also help Biala this year.

There have been many activities during the last half of 2003, which the girls have undertaken. The hockey team, in which most of the girls played, won a very exciting grand final, which was played at Turramurra. Some of the teachers from Mackellar came to watch the grand final, which was really nice too. The girls were, of course, very excited with their win.

Manly Vale U/16 Ladies Soccer team, in which Emma Franks, Carissa Gallagher and Denise Reynolds played, won their grand final at Cromer Park. We all went to watch the game and had a very exciting day. The girls were rewarded again at the Manly Vale Soccer Club's presentation night.

Emma Marne competed in the discus event at Homebush in the Zone Athletics Carnival. Well done to all of our sporting girls.

Some of the girls danced at the NAIDOC Week concert at the Powerhouse Museum and were wonderful to watch. The dance group was also asked to perform at some local schools.

The young Manly footballer Kane Mason from Goodooga, who was tragically killed near Macksville, was related to some of the girls here. We all attended a memorial held for Kane at Harbord.

It was a very sad occasion but all the girls wanted to attend out of respect for Kane and his family. We were all glad that we went to honour Kane's memory.

We all attended a Family Fun Day at Manly Dam in July, which was part of the government's 'Families First' initiative. It was a wonderful day with other Aboriginal families and AECG members from the northern beaches area.

In November the local AECG held their annual awards ceremony at Narrabeen High School. It was a really great night – lots of beautiful Aboriginal kids from the northern beaches area, lots of families and friends and a group of students from Frenchs Forest Primary School. All of the students received a certificate for their efforts over the past year. The girls have all tried hard with their schoolwork most of the time and there has been much really good work done and many good results.

On the night a special presentation was made in memory of Sue Osborn, a dedicated and greatly loved member of the Aboriginal Support Group, who died in 2003. The award was presented to Year 7 student Stephanie Sharpley. This award will be made annually to recognise achievement in computer studies by an Aboriginal student in the Guringai region.

The Homework Centre has continued with our wonderful volunteers and some of the girls have received tutoring from Shane Leddin, Carl Birk and Julie Werner. It is hoped that more tutoring can be arranged.

Eliza Williams and Marissa Barker have finished Year 11 and we wish them both all the best for this year. Larka Cutmore and Tatum Moore both did the School Certificate in 2003 and we wish them all the best for this year.

All the girls have participated in a hospitality course at TAFE over the past two terms. They have cooked some beautiful food, learnt a lot of things and really enjoyed themselves. At the end of the course they put on a special graduation dinner at TAFE, to which each girl invited a special guest. It was a really enjoyable occasion and all the girls received a Certificate of Attainment in hospitality, which can be used as part of any hospitality course they may undertake in the future.

Kirinari Hostel at Sylvania hosted the 2003 AHL Graduation. We all had a great night with AHL staff, staff from Biala, Kirinari, Newcastle and Dubbo hostels and all of the students. The Biala Hostel awards given at this graduation were:

Academic	–	Stephanie Sharpley
Sports	–	Denise Reynolds
Most improved	–	Emma Marne
Encouragement	–	Marissa Barker

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On Saturday 6th December we held a Recruitment Day here at Biala to encourage participation of more Koori and TI families to send their daughters to Biala. One of the AHL changes is that house parents have to do their own recruitment and this was the reason for this day. It was a very happy and successful day and hopefully we can recruit more students as a result.

The Support Group very kindly sponsored Larka Cutmore for some music lessons at school last term. Larka is doing Music for the HSC and she greatly appreciated this support.

We at Biala would like to wish the members of the Aboriginal Support Group a very happy holiday season, and health and happiness for the New Year. Your ongoing support in so many ways is really greatly appreciated by us all.

*Judy and Ian Patterson*  
House Parents/Senior Managers

## BUNDJALUNG NATION EXHIBITION

On October 16, 2003, I attended the opening night of the **BUNDJALUNG NATION EXHIBITION** held at the Cromer Uniting Church. This was an exhibition by the artist Livo of very personal paintings reflecting his passion for his family, his people and his culture.

Many will know Livo as Steve Davis, the husband of Cassie and the son-in-law of Jackie O'Hare (Ferguson). He now uses his family given name of Livingstone – Livo. He found this name when he discovered his birth family in recent times. The paintings in the exhibition included portraits of family members and other inspirational paintings about his family and his life.

I was fortunate to be able to meet members of Livo's family from around the Tabulum area of NSW. These included his grandfather Harold Avery, who Livo says has given him "the inspiration and the pride in both my family and my culture", and also his aunt Pastor Annabelle Walker and his brother Robert.

Livo's paintings were wonderful and certainly reflected his passion. I would like to congratulate him and all those people who supported him in bringing this exhibition together and to wish him well for the future.

*Carol Ritchie*



## GURINGAI FESTIVAL 2004



**SALTWATER SWEETWATER GATHERING** is the theme for the 2004 **GURINGAI FESTIVAL**, a celebration of Aboriginal culture and heritage across Northern Sydney. It will be held from Reconciliation Week in late May until the close of NAIDOC WEEK in mid-July.

One highlight of the festival will be **WHALE SONGLINES**, an exciting new event celebrating the migration of whales along the northern beaches coastline. It will be a three-tiered project resulting in a spectacular parade and performance featuring giant puppets, lanterns, movement and music. Warringah Council has been awarded a grant from Festival Australia to develop and stage this event. For further information about **WHALE SONGLINES** please contact Karen Gardner, Warringah Council, ☎ 9942 2672.

*Pat Frater*

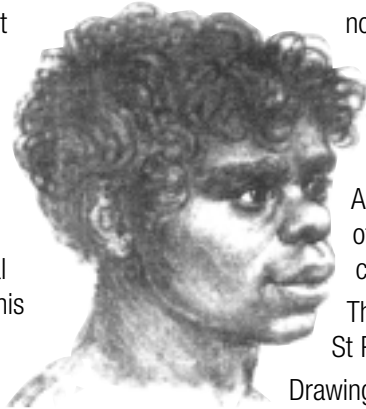
# BOOK REVIEW: HISTORY OF THE ABORIGINAL CLANS OF THE NORTHERN BEACHES

By Ian Jacobs – First published in 2003 by Northside Printing, Brookvale

This book is about the Aboriginal people who inhabited the Northern Beaches of Sydney for at least 6,000 years before the British invasion of 1788. (Some historians place their presence here nearer to 20,000 years) The author, Ian Jacobs, has lived on the Northern Beaches all of his life. He has taught History for twenty-six years and is Head Teacher of History at a local High school. Jacobs has a real passion for his subject and his desire to share his knowledge stands out on every page.

This comparatively small book contains an astonishing amount of information and detail and gives us a remarkable insight into the lifestyle and character of the Kuringai (or Guringai) tribe who lived in perfect harmony with nature along these shores before the catastrophic events of 1788 shattered their existence.

Jacob sets out to discover why, within a year of the British arrival, the Aboriginal population was so severely depleted and the



survivors reduced to the status of beggars in their own land. A notable character Boin (Bowen), who survived, lived a long life, attempting to maintain the tradition of his people while finding an accommodation with the newcomers. His eventful and dangerous life ended in 1853 when he was murdered by white bushrangers. A lovely conté drawing of his head made by a member of the Russian expedition of 1820 adorns the book cover.

The original drawing is housed in the State Museum of St Petersburg.

Drawings taken from W D Campbell's survey of Sydney's rock carvings (1899) cause us to speculate about the cultural practices and lifestyle of the Kuringai, who existed for many thousands of years on this eastern coastline, caring for and respecting the land that sustained them without causing damage to their pristine environment.

This book is now available at local public libraries and can be obtained from prominent bookshops: price \$20.

*Cara Storm*

## BOOK LAUNCH: STEPPIN' OUT AND SPEAKIN' UP

**The Time:** 9.30am, Friday 21 November, 2003

**The Place:** The Strangers' Lounge, NSW Parliament House

**The Outlook:** Sydney Domain, in hazy sun, view filtered through the patterns of a classic Moreton Bay Fig

**The Players:** Parliamentarian hosts, Older Women's Network organisers, Aboriginal storyteller/authors and other guests take refreshments with old friends or are introduced to new ones. Black, red and yellow are strongly evident in garments and accessories – it is a happy crowd.

As our own Support Group well knows, the lead up to publication of every book involves a story in itself, and a process. The Older Women's Network (OWN) Aboriginal Support Circle grew out of the parent OWN in 1994 to promote Reconciliation. It evolved into a dynamic group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous older women working to understand and support Aboriginal initiatives in social justice, health, education, the arts etc.

One way of gaining this understanding was to invite Aboriginal speakers to address meetings and in doing so, to learn how profoundly white society has impacted on Aboriginal culture. To quote from the book's introduction "With dignity, humour, compassion, sorrow and wisdom their stories unfolded – stories of grandmothers, aunties, educators, activists and artists making an incredible impression on their audiences."

To cement these stories in history and to acknowledge the wisdom of these women the concept of a publication was born. The tasks of recording the stories, editing, rechecking with the 15

selected contributors then pursuing the other long processes to publication culminated in this launch day.

Chairperson Michelle Blanchard, Deputy Director of the Koori Centre Sydney University and originally from Stradbroke Island, invited storyteller/activist/songwriter Betty Little to Acknowledge Country then to sing her composition Strong Koori Woman, a song dedicated to women role-models present and those of the world-at-large.

Guest speaker Linda Burney, Member for Canterbury, confirmed the Acknowledgment of Country, emphasising the depth of importance of that ritual. Never should it be just a matter of 'form' because behind the brief spoken words are the multiplicity of stories, as represented in *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*, of dispossession and heartache and of unfinished business as regards restoration of Aboriginal Rights.

Linda acknowledged also the breathtaking assembly of women of all backgrounds in the room, emphasising women's role in entrenching narrative in history. She referred to the passing on of stories around the kitchen table, in classrooms and wherever – indeed being at the heart of most important Australian stories and issues. In respect of 'differences', Linda mentioned Lady Deane's observation that she saw in Aboriginal mothers' aspirations for their families exactly the same hopes and wishes that Lady Deane had for hers. Though cultures may differ, far more issues unite women than divide them.

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Linda spoke (as we have come to expect), with the eloquence and passion of one who has lived her topic rather than learned it. Finally, Lucy Porter, co-founder of the OWN Aboriginal Support Circle (motto- "Listen, Learn and Understand") paid tribute to all who had contributed to *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up* – by way of the stories, editing, layout, design and cover, finance and production. The launch concluded with presentations and

expressions of appreciation to those contributors. The Support Group has purchased a few copies of the book for re-sale at the special 'launch-day' price of \$13 per copy. Alternatively phone Older Women's Network (02) 9247 7046 to purchase the book.

**Bronwyn and David Harrison**

## TRIBAL METAPHYSICS

### A Talk and Video Presentation by Nikki McCarthy – Aboriginal Artist

#### A REFLECTION ON THE PRESENTATION

I was intrigued and then irritated by the title – *Tribal Metaphysics*. Why does an Aboriginal artist use Greek terminology to describe her work? Surely there is an Aboriginal word that would be more appropriate, or even an Anglo-Celtic-Australian one.

Nevertheless the word – *metaphysics* – had caught my eye and I eventually went to the meeting more intrigued than irritated. In fact the irritation had completely disappeared as faces and voices, which had been growing familiar over the past few months, welcomed me.

When I actually saw Nikki I was confirmed in my feeling that it had its origin in viewing her photo in the Manly Daily double page promotional article. It was a feeling, only now firm in my mind, that Nikki is part of the great tribe of those people of mythical/mystical Ireland or Scotland. In fact, I found myself recalling some of those Irish stories that, although impossible, always make one doubt impossibility. Is that what *metaphysics* is about – doubting the impossible?

The presentation started with an all too quick reference to some of the work that Nikki had brought for display. There was a chessboard on which the game of Land Rights is played out. Instead of the usual pieces – kings and queens and pawns – there were representations of that which fostered harmony with the land as opposed to that which violated the dignity of humanity and the earth that gave it life. And there was that giant transparent glass phallus filled with feathers.

I think I am starting to understand the word *metaphysics*.

And then we saw the video of Nikki's work projected onto a crumpled/crinkled bed sheet. It might have almost seemed reasonable to think that the crumples/crinkles were part of the art.

In the video presentation we saw *Black Lightning*. Who on earth has ever seen black lightening, one might ask? But truth is, I saw it. And I saw Nikki's aura expressed in the mystic brilliance of crafted neon tubing. And I saw a glass didgeridoo. Why should didgeridoos only be made of hollow tree branches? I saw *Dream Catchers* that actually worked. The fact is that dreams can actually be caught. I saw her working with the Australian flag in a way that gave that symbol a dignity that it rarely has, at least for the Aboriginal people of Australia. And then the flag became an irrelevance, dispensed with. What remained was a work of vibrant colour reminding me of that which is more significant than empires, colonies, and tribes. There is, Nikki was saying in her art, an essential all-pervading vibrant quality about life, which must not be lost, cannot be lost.

Nikki's art was helping me to experience *metaphysics*. But her words were not less helpful. To those of us in sophisticated Western society we heard Nikki say, with a force equal to that in the last chapters of the Book of Job – "everything is unexplained".

I heard her say as she derided the stupidity of making distinctions on the basis of skin colour – "we all have the same coloured shadow".

In her self-questioning she responded with

the only Credo that is necessary and acceptable – "my heart is my Aboriginality".

With regard to religion she was able to say – "We are to be shown our spiritual path and we have to find our own way". And she made those two comments without any sense of contradiction between "to be shown", and "to find". It is as if she has found what she has been shown, and she has been shown what she has found. (Am I getting another clue about *metaphysics*?)

The Jehovah's Witness women, with whom Nikki talked, came back to her home week after week. And this coming back, I sense, was because she affirmed their dignity as human beings whilst at the same time refusing to come under the spell of their encyclopaedic Biblical knowledge. (And I imagined that it was precisely that knowledge that made it impossible for them to experience *metaphysics* or *catch a dream*. The JW women should have been at the meeting on Monday night to hear Nikki and see her work.)

But perhaps the best insight into *metaphysics* came as I heard Nikki talk about the feather. It is this symbol that adorns her Artist Statement. Feathers filled the giant glass phallus. Feathers featured in much of Nikki's work. And then I heard her say – "Feathers...they are so gentle and strong and resilient. They make flight possible".

On that Monday night at Narrabeen I knew I had met a woman who is gentle, strong and resilient and knows how to fly. Because of her I am coming to understand the meaning of the word – *metaphysics*. And a few other things.

**Grahame Ellis**



# NORTHERN REGION RECONCILIATION NETWORK

The Northern Region Reconciliation Network (NRRN) consists of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations within the Northern Sydney region working with the eleven Local Councils. The aim of the Network is 'to provide a forum for members to meet, discuss and act on matters related to Indigenous issues and to the advancement of the process of Reconciliation'.

Meetings are held every second month and are hosted by Northern Sydney Councils on a rotational basis.

The most recent NRRN meeting was hosted by Warringah Council and was held on 11th November, Remembrance Day. A very moving ceremony was held at the start of the meeting to commemorate this event. Kerrie McKenzie and Lorraine Mayer of the Lane Cove Reconciliation Group had arranged a table with beautiful Australian native flowers, potpourri and two large exquisite white candles.

After Acknowledgement of Country, Allen Madden from the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council lit the first Remembrance Candle saying: *"We light this candle to honour and remember Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who have fought and died on Australian soil since 1788, in defence of their country"*.

Kerrie McKenzie Co-Chairperson of the Network then lit the second candle saying: *"We light this candle to honour and*

*remember Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who have fought and died on foreign soil, in defence of their country"*.

A minute's silence coincided with 11 am and then we read together: *"In the spirit of Reconciliation, we move forward and work together for social justice and the inherent rights of Indigenous Australians; the truth telling of our shared history and the healing of our nation. We can then one day all walk together as Australians, with dignity, on this sacred land"*.

In discussion that followed we were reminded that Indigenous Australians have fought alongside non-Indigenous servicemen in every overseas war since the Boer War. Allen Madden stated that during World War II Indigenous servicemen serving as privates in the army were paid 3/- per day compared with 6/- per day for non-Indigenous servicemen of the same rank. The widows of Indigenous servicemen killed in the war were not granted war widow pensions nor access to Legacy. Indigenous returned soldiers were refused admittance to RSL Clubs and barred from applying for the Soldier Settlement land grants.

We understand that the Federal Government has made some funding available as compensation for the inequality of pay in World War II.

The next Network meeting will be hosted by Hunters Hill Council In February.

**Anna Bell**

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## THE GAMARADA UNIT

The 'Gamarada' Unit is the name given to the Aboriginal Programs Unit of the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE (NSI). The word Gamarada is from the Guringai language of the Eora nation, meaning friends.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit of the NSI has been supporting Aboriginal education in the Northern suburbs for many years, but it is relatively unknown. For this reason it was decided by the staff of the NSI Aboriginal Programs Unit to establish an identity for the unit that was readily identifiable for both the wider community and the NSI personnel.

To aid in the marketing campaign of the Gamarada Unit, a new design was chosen as the new symbol to represent the unit. It depicts a whale rising out of the ocean, and is seen as one of the key totems for the Guringai and neighbouring clan groups.

An open day was held in November at Meadowbank TAFE College to mark the launch of the name Gamarada and design. Both community TAFE personnel and students attended this.

Guest speakers included Mr Kevin Harris, Institute Director NSI, and Mr David Watts, Aboriginal Heritage Manager Warringah Council, who delivered an Acknowledgment of Country.

An Aboriginal dance group and free BBQ then entertained all.

It is envisaged that with an identifiable name and new design the Gamarada unit will, in time, become a highly recognisable entity within the Northern Sydney region.

**Rob Cohen**

A/ADM  
Gamarada Unit  
NSI TAFE





## Introduction to

# ABORIGINAL ART

I was privileged to attend a six session course on Aboriginal art at the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) last year. The distinguished art historian, Dr Garry Darby, took us on a most interesting and entertaining tour of the desert artists, the bark painters of Arnhem Land, the rock art of the Kimberley and the funeral art of the Tiwi Islands, using slides and videos to illustrate his talks.

Dr Darby explained that all Aboriginal art represents the land and its creator spirits. From time immemorial, the desert peoples of central Australia had, as part of their ceremonies, drawn symbols of this on the desert sand, their bodies and on sacred wooden funeral objects called *churinga*, but all these art forms were impermanent.

Unrelated groups were resettled at Papunya in the 60s. In 1971, a young teacher, Geoff Bardon, persuaded some men to paint their symbolic representations of their traditional lands on boards, using poster paint mixed with acrylic. They reluctantly did it as a form of recreation but couldn't see a lot of point to it until Geoff sold some in Alice Springs and took the proceeds back to them. Thus the modern version of Aboriginal art was born.

The painters started with their traditional ochre colours of red and yellow, plus black (from charcoal) and white (from clay) but quickly branched out into all the colours of the rainbow. They always paint with the board or canvas flat on the ground and so the paintings represent an aerial view of the land. Features of the landscape are shown as symbols. Thus a waterhole or a campfire is usually a ring and a person sitting is a 'U- shape'. The journeys of the creator spirits are shown by connected lines or animal tracks. Dots are used to fill-in, to decorate and sometimes to conceal sensitive aspects of the story being told.

Each artist paints only the stories he or she is authorised by tradition to pass on.

From these humble beginnings, a thriving art industry has developed. The work of artists of the calibre of Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri are admired all over the world and fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars. We are now recognising that these are the only art forms that are unique to Australia and that all other Australian art is derivative.

## DESERT ART

Desert art has evolved since 1971 and continues to evolve. The art communities at such places as Balgo, Utopia and Warmun have distinctive styles, as have individual artists. As the old painters die, others with new styles take their place, such as Lilly Kelly Napangadi. These artistic communities generally operate on a communal basis, with the business side in the hands of a white administrator. All paintings are purchased but prices paid vary according to the skill and standing of the artist. Artists share their takings with their families in accordance with Aboriginal custom.

Emily Kngwarreye, who had painted in the traditional way all her life, only took up modern forms at the age of 85 and went through eight or nine styles in the nine years up to her recent death. She was in many ways the doyen of the desert painters. She worked at a frenetic pace with a thick brush in each hand, sometimes running off the canvas onto the concrete floor. She was a very strong woman in every sense and could be irascible. Dr Darby recounted a story that illustrated both this and the way she expressed every aspect of her land in her paintings.

He was visiting Utopia with a group and asked her to explain her painting of yam blossoms – her totem was the yam. She was very reluctant to do so, saying several times to Garry, "you know the story" but finally said "there's the yam roots, the blossom and the emus". They were aware that Emily had painted the black roots on a white background before painting the pink and mauve yam blossoms over the top but there was no sign of emus. So after a period of silence, someone plucked up courage and asked where the emus were. Emily said impatiently, as if to a stupid child, 'the emus eat the blossom'. As far as she was concerned, the whole reality was there in the painting – the roots were there but obscured by the paint representing the blossom and the emus were there too in her mind's eye, presumably outside the canvas.

## ARNHEM LAND BARK PAINTING

Arnhem Land painters derive their inspiration from the ancient rock art of the region. Painting on the inside of bark houses has a long tradition. The bark paintings we are familiar with date from the late 19th century when anthropologists and missionaries persuaded leaders to paint in a portable form.

They have stuck to ochres and charcoal on bark and mainly depict creation stories such as the Djankau and the Wagileg sisters. Another theme is the Mimi – thin, frail creatures associated with the hunting of kangaroos and their cooking and apportionment. Features of Arnhem art are the delicate hatching known as rarrk and the x-ray depiction of totemic animals. In general, they have been more conservative than the desert painters in adhering to traditional forms.

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## **KIMBERLY ROCK ART**

Similarly, the art of the Kimberley is based on, and still mainly consists of, rock art. The paintings depicting the Wandjina, the oval faces with enormous eyes that were a feature of the 2000 Olympics Opening Ceremony, were part of a 3,000 year tradition associated with the monsoon rains that nurture the land. These rock paintings were re-painted each year to ensure the arrival of the rain. Thousands of such paintings survive in rock overhangs but only one man remains to pass on the secrets and maintain the images, so many have deteriorated.

A few painters have started putting these images onto art paper and canvas. Some images include pipe smoking figures, thought to depict Dutch sailors.

By contrast, the utterly different Bradshaw paintings (named after the pioneer pastoralist who discovered them) depict thin, elaborately decorated dancing figures. These predate the 3,000 year old Wandjina by some 14,000 years, giving rise to speculation that they were painted by earlier people who died out. The local Aboriginal people have no knowledge of them, so they are an intriguing mystery. These images are well preserved because the paint has sunk into the rock like a fresco and natural silica has covered them.

## **TIWI ISLANDS ART**

Finally, the unique art of the Tiwi people on Bathurst and Melville Islands is based on the mortuary practices of Pukumani, whose child's death after his wife's adultery with his brother brought death into the world. When someone dies, their name cannot be used and their house and possessions are taboo. They are buried with elaborately carved Pukumani poles surrounding the grave. From the art associated with this and other ceremonies, the Tiwi have developed thriving painting, pottery, textile and tourist industries.

Under the curatorship of Hetty Perkins, the Art Gallery of NSW has assembled a wonderful collection of Aboriginal art drawn from the above traditions in its permanent gallery *Yiribani*.

*Andrew Macintosh*



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# **NSW RECONCILIATION COUNCIL CONFERENCE**

*The NSW Reconciliation Council Conference was held in Sydney on October 24 and 25, 2003.*

*Lois Birk and Carol Ritchie attended as representatives of the Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater.*

## **FRIDAY PROGRAM**

Following the Welcome to Country, Lynette Riley Mundine, retiring Chairperson, and Colin Markham, Deputy Chair, addressed the meeting. Lynette explained how the Council for Reconciliation came about in 1991 and Colin said that governments should be pro-active to make Reconciliation happen and not be let off the hook, especially in regard to education.

The role of State Reconciliation is to network with Reconciliation groups, to be an advocate and to bring people together. The proposed model to restructure the association and the role of the regional and local groups were discussed. The rules should be seen as an equity statement affecting the lives of Aboriginal people. The new Board structures and regional boundaries were then adopted by voting. The model rules were also accepted and the election of office bearers took place. It was later discovered that the election of board members had been carried out in an incorrect manner. At a board meeting held at the end of the day it was agreed that the new Board would only act in a caretaker capacity at this stage and that a new vote for Board members would be held on December 13, 2003.

## **SATURDAY PROGRAM**

Linda Burney, MP for Canterbury, addressed the conference speaking about the history of Reconciliation and the inhumanity, poverty and destruction in Australia and globally. She read from Mick Dodson's social justice report and said that Reconciliation is about social justice, allowing Indigenous people to have choice and chance and to build relationships in the community.

Linda said the issue of Reconciliation is now off the agenda of governments and the media. This move began after the 1997 Reconciliation Conference in Melbourne with Howard's amendment of Native Title with the 10-point plan. The focus has shifted to migrants and refugees. The Australian people are now run by politics of fear. Despite what the government claims, the health, length of life and imprisonment for Aboriginal people is getting worse. She advised us to keep the base at the local level strong, to stay pro-active and to do small things. Local networks need to be strong now that the national body is not there for support.

... Continued page 9



... Continued from page 8

Kerrie McKenzie outlined the history of the area where the conference was taking place – the intense resistance of the Eora people and the major battles in the Central Railway area by Pemulwuy and his warriors. She also spoke about the plaque, which hopefully will be unveiled in February at Woodford Bay, Lane Cove, in memory of the resistance of the local Aboriginals. Discussion on the NSW Reconciliation Council's Strategic Plan followed. Suggestions for Reconciliation Week events included local school projects with possible Council funding, a designated day for communities throughout NSW to form special circles, a flame ceremony for spiritual healing, sculpture and statues of Aboriginal warriors/heroes, a booklet for children regarding culture and legends, lobbying for the recommendations on Aboriginal deaths in custody to be legislated and a special day for people in prison. Various workshops were held on the Strategic Plan.

## PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT WORKSHOP

The importance of local groups was stressed. Reconciliation is working towards the society we want. There was discussion on how cultural differences work and how they can be a definition, a justification for failures or as stereotypes. It seems that Aboriginal people are not allowed to change as others can and do.

ReconciliACTION Network is a group of young people, mostly under 30, who focus on specific projects. Of its 100 members, the majority of those living outside Sydney are Aboriginal and most of those living in Sydney are non-Aboriginal. They campaign, fund raise, offer skills training and have a website – [www.reconciliaction.org.au](http://www.reconciliaction.org.au). Members speak at schools, hold information stalls at universities and have produced an education kit.

## LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

Warren Mundine led this group and spoke about the Dubbo area. An Aboriginal theme had been introduced into the Australia Day function at Dubbo Art Gallery with Aboriginal art and performances and a politician had spoken on Indigenous issues.

Community involvement followed with Dubbo Council supporting the annual event, thus becoming involved in Reconciliation (even if they didn't realise it). The Aboriginal flag was flown on the council building and a law and order debate was held. An employment strategy, developed to help find work for young Aboriginal people, led to training for businesses, with cultural mentors. Council had formed a safety committee, which received funding from the Attorney General's Department.

Warren said it is better to work on a few issues at a time to prevent burn out, possibly holding a meeting or dinner, inviting a good non-confrontational speaker. He advised that if you pick your battle you do not expend energy on what you cannot win.

With regard to councils, Warren said find a "hero" among the councillors. The public forums at council meetings usually allow five minutes for each speaker and he recommended finishing with a question which council then has to answer. Media usually attends these meetings.

## E-COMMERCE

Corporate sponsorships on the website can be offered to local businesses who support Reconciliation by charging \$5 to \$10 per month to advertise on the website. General business included discussion on corporate sponsorship.

The two days of the conference were certainly interesting and stimulating and I met very nice people.

Carol Ritchie

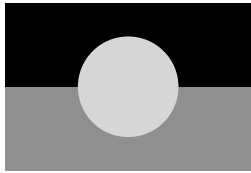
Stay in touch on our website...

[www.asgmwp.net](http://www.asgmwp.net)



*In one Aboriginal Language, Elimatta means 'our home'.  
In naming our newsletter this way, we express our dream  
for this country – a real home to both Aboriginal people and  
later settlers. That depends on us being 'at home' with each other,  
and to each other.*





# Working Together



## Warringah Council

On Tuesday November 11, 2003, a representative group of approximately 20 members of the Aboriginal Support Group Manly Warringah Pittwater attended a ceremony at Warringah Council. We gathered there at the invitation of the Council and the current Administrator, Mr Dick Persson. The purpose of the event, one in a series, was to recognize the contribution of volunteer groups in serving the residents of Warringah.

We enjoyed a supper and drinks provided by Warringah Council and a chance to catch up with one another prior to the formal part of the evening. It was a pleasant change to enjoy one another's company with no business to discuss and no decisions to be made.

Dick Persson began by Acknowledging Country using the bookmark produced by the ASG. He then introduced himself and shared a brief history of where he had worked prior to his current appointment. Through his management of health and housing services in different parts of Australia he became aware of the inequality and injustice experienced by Indigenous people and had worked to introduce measures to redress some of these issues. He expressed his concern that Australia still lagged so badly behind other developed nations in improving the life expectancy of Indigenous people and his belief that our national expenditure for Indigenous health was seriously inadequate.

He invited the group to attend the Council meeting scheduled for that evening and to move a motion that the *Acknowledgement of Country* become formalised as part of every Council meeting. He assured the group that this would become Council policy for the future.

Enid McIlraith responded on behalf of the group by acknowledging the support received from Warringah Council by the ASG over many years. She recalled the very successful meetings and seminars conducted in rooms provided by the Council.

Each member attending the evening received a 'Certificate of Service' and a red gerbera, which we accepted on behalf of all members not in attendance. Anna Bell accepted a framed 'Certificate of Service' for the Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater on behalf of all members, past and present, for their contributions over more than 20 years. The evening was an unexpected yet nonetheless appreciated gesture of recognition.

*Ingrid Storm*

*Warringah Council is flying the Aboriginal flag on the flagpole outside the Civic Centre.*

*The ASG-MWP also thanks Warringah Council for the cultural development grant which assisted with the production and printing of this issue of Elimatta.*

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### JOURNEY OF HEALING

to be commemorated on  
WEDNESDAY MAY 26, 2004,  
from 6 pm.

This is the 6th anniversary of  
NATIONAL SORRY DAY.  
(Venue to be advised)

### A TRIBUTE TO PAULINE McLEOD

master storyteller, poet, actor  
and animator, will be held on  
SATURDAY MAY 29  
at the Sydney Town Hall.  
Pauline McLeod died  
on May 22, 2003.

## AN INVITATION TO JOIN US...

**The Aboriginal Support Group  
Manly Warringah Pittwater**  
meets on the third Monday of each month  
at 7.30 pm.

On the first Monday of each month  
we conduct an Information Night  
at 7.30pm.

*Please join us at either or both of these evenings*

**at the Angopohora Room,  
Nelson Heather Centre,  
Cnr Pittwater & Jackson Roads,  
North Narrabeen.**

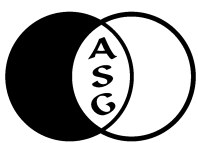
☞ *For further information* ☞

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Elimatta is produced by the Aboriginal Support Group – Manly Warringah Pittwater. If you use any material printed in Elimatta we would appreciate the extract being set in context and the source acknowledged.

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