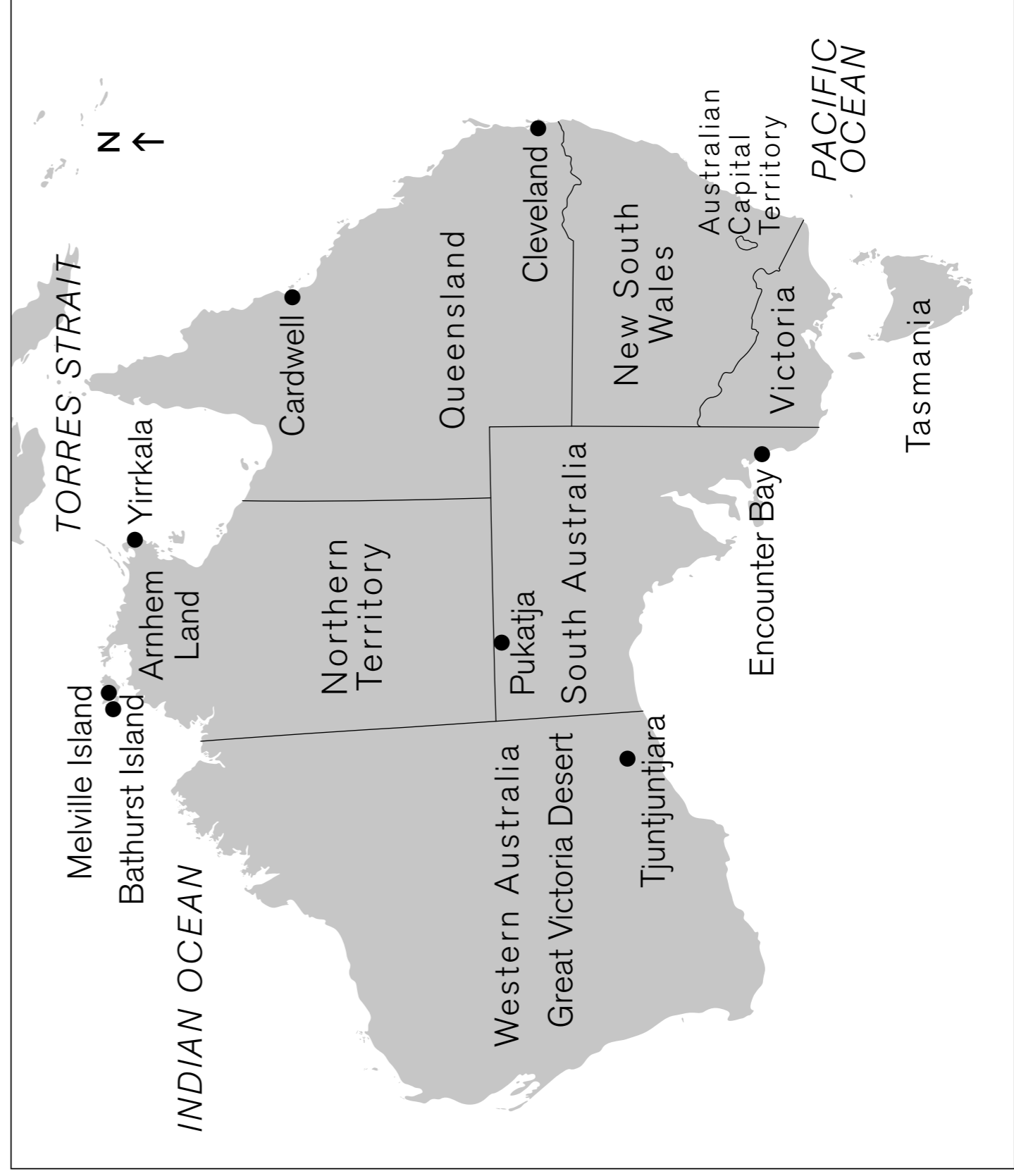


# Large print information



Please do not remove  
from this display

## Relating to ancestors Indigenous Australia



Large panel in centre of display:

## Relating to ancestors

Indigenous Australia

**Indigenous Australians understand that ancestral beings created the land, seas and all living things, passing on knowledge of how to live from and care for the land. People burn bush-land to maintain the fertility of species and perform ceremonies to mark important life stages.**

Ancestral knowledge is passed from one generation to the next through painting, dancing and telling the stories of the great ancestral beings. It is embodied in the designs and materials of art works and functional objects, which also reflect the great environmental and cultural diversity of Australia.



Hamzah Taylor lighting a hunting fire near Parrngurr community, Western Australia, 2009

Photo © Jenny Chang, Martu Ecological Anthropological Project

Relating to ancestors

## Painting ancestral stories

Aboriginal Australians often depict the great travelling paths of ancestral beings in their paintings. In the guise of humans, plants or animals, spiritual beings crossed the land, creating features such as hills and waterholes. Some of these ancestral journeys (or 'Dreamings') cover thousands of miles.

The places where the ancestors stopped or performed important deeds have great spiritual significance. Many of these sites and their associated stories are known only to men or only to women.



Left to right: Lennard Walker, Roy Underwood and Simon Hogan painting Pukara, 2013

Photo © Spinifex Arts Project

## Displayed here

**Pukara, 2013**

**Simon Hogan** (born about 1930),

**Ian Rictor** (born about 1960),

**Roy Underwood** (born about 1937)

and **Lennard Walker** (born about 1946)

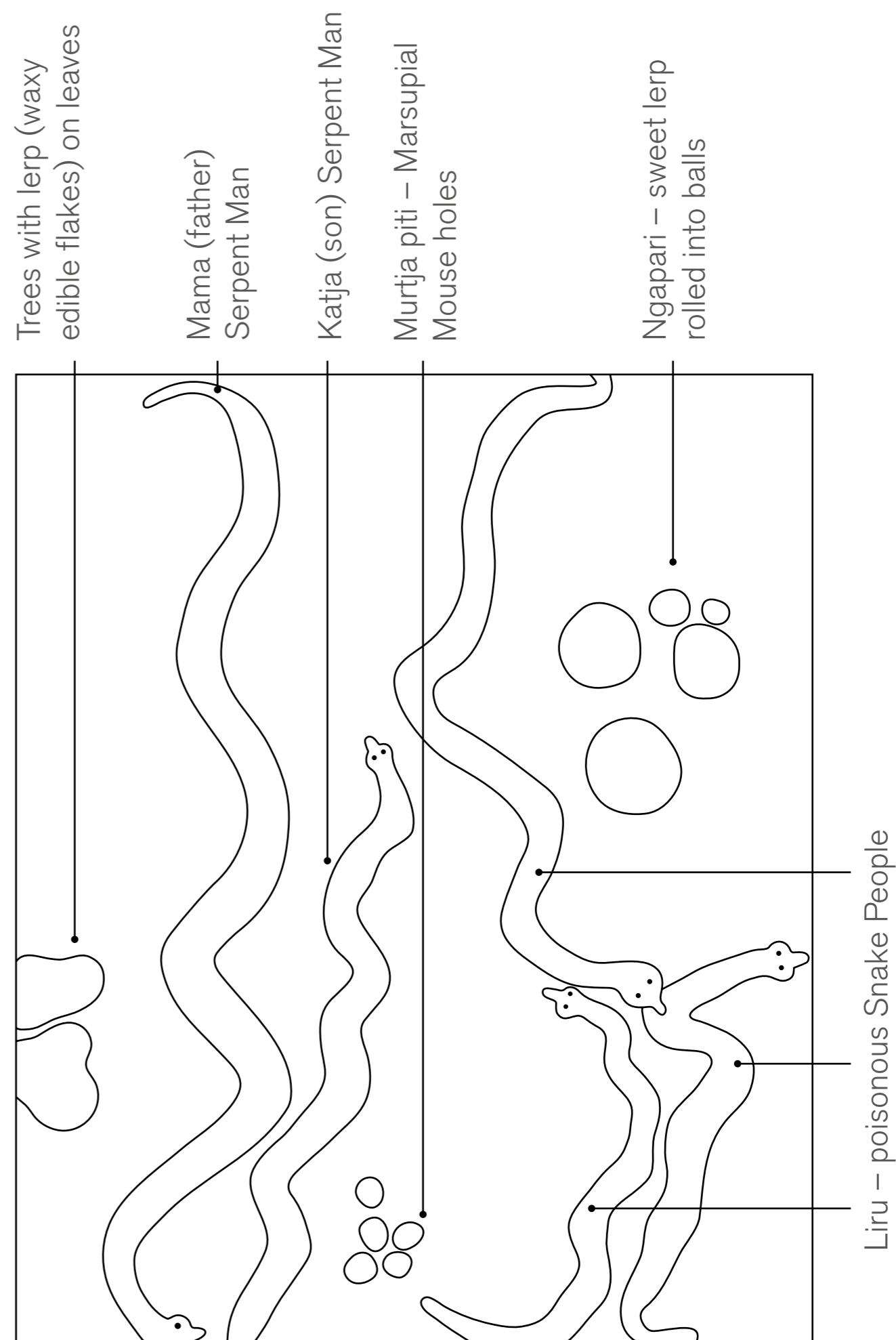
Acrylic on canvas

Pukara is an important men's place in the Great Victoria Desert of Western Australia. The artists, all senior men of the Spinifex people, depict ancestral beings (father and son) in the form of water snakes travelling on a journey of initiation.

When I die, my paintings will keep going.  
They will keep telling all the people, my family  
and whitefellas, the story of Kamanti where  
I was born.

Lennard Walker, 2012

2013,2035.1



Relating to ancestors

## Inspired by ancestral land and traditions

**Inspired by their environment and new materials, Indigenous Australians are bringing artistic innovation to ancestral traditions.**

Sculptural objects made from plant fibres have long been part of Indigenous Australian culture. Historically, woven fibre baskets and sculptural forms were made for practical or ceremonial use, but since the 1970s, a growing number of fibre works have also been produced for the fine art market. In Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory women create woven sculptures of ancestral beings and animals.

In Pukatja (formerly Ernabella) in South Australia, Aboriginal artists use a wide range of materials and techniques. These include batik, a method of producing coloured designs on cloth by brushing or stamping hot wax on the parts not to be dyed. The textile designs are inspired by ancestral landscapes, local plants and animals.



Dry creek bed, river red gum tree and spinifex grass, Central Australia

Photo © John Kean

## Displayed here

### **Sculpture of a camp dog**, about 2011

(top shelf left)

**Lena Yarinkura** (born 1961)

Paperbark, wood and earth pigments  
on pandanus

### **Sculpture of a camp dog**, about 2011

(top shelf centre)

**Lena Djamarrayku** (born 1943)

Paperbark, wood and earth pigments  
on pandanus

### **Sculpture of a camp dog**, about 2011

(top shelf right)

**Lena Yarinkura** (born 1961)

Paperbark, wood and earth pigments  
on pandanus

These artists live in Arnhem Land, where women traditionally make woven string bags for carrying food from tough pandanus leaf fibres. Yarinkura was taught to weave by her mother, Djamarrayku. In the 1990s, Yarinkura began to use these techniques to create life-sized sculptures inspired by ancestral stories, local animals and daily life in Aboriginal settlements and camps. These works by mother and daughter represent the dogs commonly found in and around Maningrida. In some outstations there are more dogs than people.

I pass on my ideas to my children...  
and to my grandchildren. It is important  
that I teach them, because one day I will  
be gone, and they will take my place.

Lena Yarinkura

2011,2008.5; 2011,2008.6; 2011,2008.7

**Textile**, about 2000

(above top shelf, left)

**Nyuwara Tapaya** (1971–2005)

Batik on silk

**Textile**, about 2000

(above top shelf, middle)

**Alison Milyika Carroll** (born 1958)

Batik on silk

**Textile**, about 2000

(above top shelf, right)

**Tjariya (Nungalka) Stanley** (born 1939)

Batik on silk

Women at Ernabella Arts in Pukatja, South Australia, began producing batik work after visiting Indonesia and seeing the techniques used there. The artists are inspired by the colours and forms of the ancestral landscape of the desert region in which they live. They do not attach specific meanings to their designs.

Oc2001,09.2; Oc2001,06.4; Oc2001,06.3

Relating to ancestors

## Objects in focus

**The Torres Strait Islands lie between the northern mainland of Australia and Papua New Guinea. Although many Islanders now live on the mainland, they still retain strong connections with their island homes. The sea, sky and land remain central to their identity and spirituality.**

Before Christianity was introduced to the Torres Straits in 1871, Islanders held elaborate funerals involving mask performances and ceremonial dances. Often wearing turtle-shell masks, feathered headdresses called *dhari* and pearl-shell chest pendants, they danced accompanied by drums. Contemporary masks and head-dresses often incorporate new materials and forms, but they are still inspired by ancestral beings and stories.





Alick Tipoti performing with the Zugubal Dancers at the Indigenous Australia Late: Origins Festival at the British Museum, June 2015

Photo © Benedict Johnson

## Displayed here

- Mask, 1880s**  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Mabuiag, Torres Strait, Queensland

Made in the flattened form of a shovel-nose shark with two small fish swimming above it, this mask would have been worn in dance ceremonies. The back of the mask is decorated with three men wearing headdresses. Two carved bird heads face backwards. The materials include turtle shell, wood, wool, cassowary feathers, goa nuts, and cowrie and pearl shells. Mabuiag artists were masters of making masks from turtle shell, a tradition unique to the Torres Strait. The turtle-shell plates were moulded and sewn together into complex forms.

**2 Kaygasiw Usul** (Shovel-nose shark dust trail reflected in the heavens as the Milky Way), 2014

**Alick Tipoti** (born 1975)

Tipoti, from Badu Island in the Torres Strait, was inspired by the mask from Mabuiag (1) to create this mask. He uses fibreglass stained with polyester resin for the transparent effect of turtle shell, and plastic, nylon, superglue and traditional materials. Tipoti's mask represents an ancestral shark, the Kaygasiw Usul, whose tail fin stirs up an underwater sand trail that forms the Milky Way. The small masks on top represent ancient dancers and the mask inside the mouth symbolises the main dancer.

I'm obsessed with the concept of bringing masks to life through performances and spiritually connecting with the totems [objects or animals adopted as spiritual emblems]. I immediately thought of the Kaygasiw Usul when I saw this mask... the chants, dance and rituals that came with it.  
Alick Tipoti, 2014

**3 Warup drum, 1880s**

**Artist's name unrecorded**

Saibai, Torres Strait, Queensland

The Torres Strait drum known as a warup is shaped like an hourglass. This one is made from wood, lizard skin, cassowary feathers, shell, lime and goa nuts that rattle when the drum is played. It is decorated with human figures and animals, including a dog, crocodile (with footprints), turtle, fish and cassowary.

The cross on the skin is a symbol of Christianity, introduced to the Torres Strait in 1871.

**4 Dhari headdress, 1880s**  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland

The dhari symbolises the unity of Torres Strait Islanders and features on their flag. This headdress with cassowary and cockatoo feathers belonged to an island leader called Maino (about 1863–1939), who worked closely with the British anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940).

**5 Stone-headed club, 1880s**  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Moa, Torres Strait, Queensland

Clubs like this one were used in warfare and ceremonies.

Oc+3278; 2015,2026.1; Oc+.3401;  
Oc89+.93; Oc6530

**6–8 Pearl-shell pendants, 1800s**  
**Artists' names unrecorded**  
Mer and other islands, Torres Strait,  
Queensland

Pearl-shell pendants with incised designs were worn by men performing ceremonial dances.

Pendants left to right:  
Oc89+ 19; Oc89+20; Oc2430





Every part of Australia is associated with a different Indigenous group



Large panel in centre of display

## Relating to ancestors

Indigenous Australia

**Indigenous Australians understand that ancestral beings created the land, seas and all living things, passing on knowledge of how to live from and care for the land. People burn bush-land to maintain the fertility of species and perform ceremonies to mark important life stages.**

Ancestral knowledge is passed from one generation to the next through painting, dancing and telling the stories of the great ancestral beings. It is embodied in the designs and materials of art works and functional objects, which also reflect the great environmental and cultural diversity of Australia.



Clockwise from the left: Myrtle Pennington, Ngalpingka Simms, Kunmanara Hogan, Kunmanara Thomas, Tjaruwa Woods

Photo © Spinifex Arts Project

Relating to ancestors

## Weaving ancestral knowledge

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders believe that ancestral beings were transformed into animals and plants, and the properties of plants embody ancestral knowledge. Maintaining land and sea resources, knowing how to use the different parts of plants and creating objects from them is thus important spiritual as well as economic work.

Plants are used for food, to make implements for daily use and objects for sale. The materials and forms used in fibre craft reflect the great diversity of environments across Australia. Many have been used for thousands of years, but there is also much innovation.



Abe Muriata starting a basket, about 2015

Photo © V. Keenan, Girringun Aboriginal Arts Centre

## Displayed here

- 1 Basket**, about 1888  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Plant fibres  
Cleveland, Queensland
- 2 Basket**, 2015  
**Abe Muriata** (born 1952)  
Lawyer cane  
Cardwell, north Queensland

Abe Muriata continues an ancient tradition of making baskets from lawyer cane vine, which grows in the lush tropical rainforests of north Queensland. He learned the art by studying baskets in museum collections.

It took me three years to make my first basket... Those ancestors who made them – they are my master teachers.

Abe Muriata, 2012

**3 Unfinished basket**, about 1900  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Grass or rush fibres  
Goyder River, Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

**4 Jug**, about 2011  
**Tjunkiya Tapaya** (born 1947)  
Raffia  
Pukatja (formerly Ernabella),  
South Australia

**5 Basket**, about 2010  
**Jenny Mye** (1934–2015)  
Commercial packaging tape  
Erub, Torres Strait, Queensland

Torres Strait Islanders use materials such as discarded fishing nets and packaging tape to make new objects.

**6 Basket**, mid-1800s  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Plant fibres  
Tasmania

**7 Basket**, about 1878  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
Sedge-grass fibres  
Wimmera River, Victoria

**8 Yellow Reeds, Long Weave**, 2015  
**Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello** (born 1949)  
Glass

Martiniello makes works in glass to 'express my personal responses, as a contemporary urban Aboriginal woman, to my Grandmother's and father's traditional country, the land itself and the survival of cultural practices... traditional woven eel traps, fish traps and baskets'. This basket, made with an Italian technique using coloured glass rods, is inspired by traditional forms.



9 **Basket**, about 1850  
**Artist's name unrecorded**  
**Plant fibres**  
Encounter Bay, South Australia

Oc1954,06.386; 2015,2007.1;  
Oc1905,-.155; 2011,2009.1;  
2010,2031.1; Oc1970,04.2;  
Oc1960,11.60;2015,2015.1; Oc+4670

Relating to ancestors

## **Dealing with death**

**Purukapali is a major ancestral being for the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Islands. In accordance with ancestral law decreed by Purukapali, Islanders mark deaths with public funeral ceremonies called Pukamani, where men and women sing and dance, and erect posts on the graves of the deceased.**

Baskets known as tunga may hold both the dead person's possessions and payments for those involved in the ceremony. Men and women create elaborate body decoration and wear specially designed armlets and other ornaments. The men dance holding carved and painted hardwood spears. The distinctive painted baskets are placed upside down on top of the grave posts. Tunga are now also made for sale.



The late Justin Purunatameri dancing with a painted hardwood spear. He is wearing arm ornaments and bites on a spirit bag.

Photo © Ludo Kuipers

## Displayed here

**Ceremonial multi-barbed spears,**  
about 1913 (top shelf)

**Artists' names unrecorded**

Hardwood and earth pigments

Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

The spears with barbs on two sides represent women and those with barbs on one side symbolise men

**1 Tunga basket,** about 1913

**Artist's name unrecorded**

Folded and sewn stringybark decorated with earth pigments

Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

**2 Tunga basket,** about 1930

**Artist's name unrecorded**

Folded and sewn stringybark decorated with earth pigments

Melville Island, Northern Territory

- 3 Tunga basket**, about 2012  
**Jean Baptiste Apuatimi**  
(about 1940–2013)  
Folded and sewn stringybark decorated  
with earth pigments  
Melville Island, Northern Territory
- 4, 5 Women's ceremonial armlets**,  
about 1930  
**Artists' names unrecorded**  
(about 1940–2013)  
Bark, resin, earth pigments, human-hair  
string and natural fibres  
Melville Island, Northern Territory
- 6, 7 Men's ceremonial armlets**, about 1925  
**Artists' names unrecorded**  
Human-hair string, natural fibres, earth  
pigments and feathers  
Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory

- 8 Ceremonial armbands**, about 1925  
**Artists' names unrecorded**  
Pandanus, human-hair string and  
earth pigments  
Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory
- Spears left to right: Oc1913,-.134;  
Oc1913,-.136; Oc1913,-.138; Oc,-.139;  
Oc1913,-.141; Oc1913,-.142
- Baskets: Oc1913,-.145; Oc1930,0129.10;  
2012,2032.1
- Armlets left to right: Oc1930,0129.8–9;  
Oc1925,1117.34–35; Oc1925,1117.28

Relating to ancestors

## Painting ancestral stories

**Aboriginal Australians often show the great travelling paths of ancestral beings in their paintings. In the guise of humans, plants or animals, spiritual beings crossed the land, creating features such as hills and waterholes. Some of these ancestral journeys (or 'Dreamings') cover thousands of miles.**

The places where the ancestors stopped or performed important deeds have great spiritual significance. Many of these sites and their associated stories are known only to men or only to women.



Salt lakes and clay pans (dried-out lakes) in Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, Western Australia.

Photo © Louise Allerton

## Displayed here

**Kungkarangkalpa, 2013**

**Estelle Hogan** (born 1937),

**Kunmanara Hogan** (about 1945–2014),

**Myrtle Pennington** (born about 1939),

**Ngalpingka Simms** (born about 1945),

**Kunmanara Thomas** (1939–2016) and

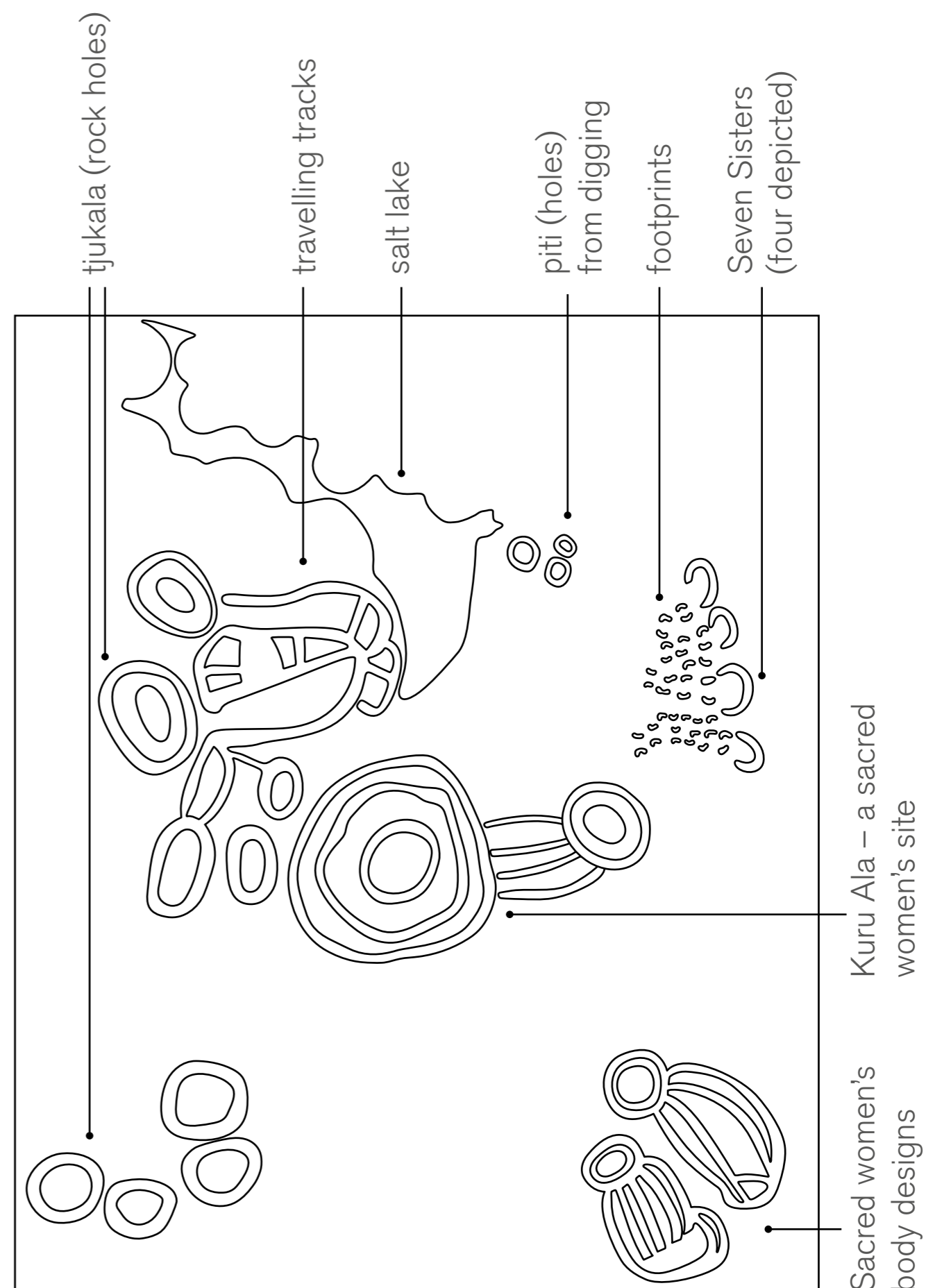
**Tjaruwa Woods** (born 1954)

Acrylic on canvas

Kungkarangkalpa (Seven Sisters) depicts an important woman's place near salt lakes in the Great Victoria Desert of Western Australia.

The artists, all senior women of the Spinifex people, depict a story about ancestral beings that took place there. Seven sisters who are singing and dancing across the land are being followed by a lustful man, Wati Nyiru. The women escape his unwanted attention by launching themselves from a hill into the sky, where they become the Seven Sisters constellation.

Acquired with the support of BP  
2014,2009.1



## **Portraits above (left to right)**

### **Simon Hogan**

Artist of the Spinifex people, Tjuntjuntjara,  
Western Australia, 2016

Photo © Brian Hallett

### **Jennifer Martinello**

Artist of the Arrernte people, Alice Springs,  
Northern Territory, 2014. Photo © L. Martinello

### **Abe Muriata**

Artist of the Girrimay people, Cardwell,  
Queensland, 2016

Photo © V. Keenan, Girringun Aboriginal  
Arts Centre

### **Alick Tipoti**

Artist of the Kala Lagaw Ya people, Badu,  
Torres Strait, Queensland, 2015

Photo © Benedict Johnson

### **Portrait of an Aboriginal woman from southeastern Australia**

Late 1800s. OcA3.7

Photographer Thomas Jetson Washbourne

