



Us Mob

1 July - 23 September 2023

Bundoora Homestead Art Centre

Aunty Bunta Patten, Aunty Frances Gallagher, Uncle Herb Patten, Aunty Gwen Garoni, Aunty Gwen Brooke, Uncle Kennedy Edwards, Aunty Lorraine Nelson, Ray Thomas and Uncle Talgium Edwards. Curated by Sharon West, Dr. Lyndon Ormond Parker and Simon Rose.

Us Mob presents important art works of twelve Victorian Koori Elders, both past and present, expressed through a variety of art mediums and cultural themes, evoking a love for culture and Country. *Us Mob* honours the memories as well as legacies of the Elders who attended the Indigenous Art Unit of the School of Art, RMIT University, at the Bundoora West campus (2005 to 2012). Like nearby Bundoora Park, the campus is populated by magnificent, remnant river scarred trees providing a significant Koori cultural backdrop for the unit. *Us Mob* also complements the 2023 NAIDOC theme 'For Our Elders'.

The Elders exhibiting represent four Victorian language groups.

From the North of the state in the Murray River lands, brothers Talgium and Kennedy Edwards and Lorraine Nelson interpret their Yorta Yorta culture. Talgium works in multimedia including woodcarving within a storytelling stance. Kennedy pays homage to their ancestor Tommy McRae, producing contemporary renderings in acrylic of McRae's corroboree drawings.¹ Lorraine Nelson's works include embellished and colourful design arrangements, alongside figurative depictions of bird and fish life.

Guntijmara lands, in the west of the state, are represented by Lorraine 'Bunta' Patten, Gwen Brooke and Frances Gallagher. All feature landscapes depicting the mountains of Gariwerd, the Hopkins River and the Framlingham mission where they all spent their childhoods. Bunta's use of charcoal is a direct reference to Framlingham residents cleaning their teeth with charcoal. Frances' work includes seascapes of the nearby coast. Gwen works in brightly coloured ink drawings and like Bunta and Frances, are rendered via a figurative picturesque landscape trope, which could account for the Elders admiration of the landscapes of Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira.²

Northeast of Melbourne, the central Victoria Taungurong lands are represented by Gwen Garoni's large and detailed landscapes. Gwen honours her ancestors through depictions of tribal campsites and

the Coranderrk reserve. Contemporary renderings of Country include the destruction of land by the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009.

Herb Patten and Ray Thomas are the Gunnai/Kurnai artists representing the Gippsland lands of Eastern Victoria. Herb is influenced by the markings of historical shields and is concerned with mark making and harmony in design and colour exploring these through various dry and wet media works. Ray combines tribal motif designs with figurative imagery as well as portraiture employing beautifully layered airbrush techniques. His work also expresses an underlying political message on Indigenous rights.

Bundoora Homestead Art Centre is a meaningful venue for this exhibition, as it has hosted many of the Elders work over the years, supporting exhibitions such as the Unit's annual Reconciliation exhibitions, Gwen Garoni's first solo show and the Gumbri White Dove Award.³ The City of Darebin has acquired many art works, including works by students not in this current exhibition, for the Council collection. The National Gallery of Victoria also acquired works from the Unit, purchased from the *Grugidj White Cockatoo* graduate exhibition which was held at the RMIT School of Art Gallery in 2005. The recognition and acquisition of works over the years is an exceptional outcome for all the students completing their TAFE program.

In some ways, *Us Mob* functions as a homecoming for many of these artworks, serving as a significant retrospective showing. *Us Mob* reflects what was an artistic hub. It was not unlike an Indigenous art centre where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Elders and students worked alongside each other in large studios, guided in visual arts and media production by passionate arts practitioners and educators both of Indigenous and settler heritage.

We envisage that this exhibition will offer the non-Indigenous viewer a glimpse into the Elders personal perspectives and dialogues of culture that they may have never seen before in one showing.

Us Mob also recognises, deservedly, the diverse talents of Koori Elder artists. This exhibition is an acknowledgement of their significant contribution to the Koori art movement. Moreover, *Us Mob* honours the lives and stories of the students and Elders who have passed on since the Unit closed in 2012.

Many thanks to former teachers, Dr. Lyndon Ormond Parker and Simon Rose for their expertise in the formation of this exhibition. Many thanks also to former Bundoora Homestead Director, Jacqueline Healy for her support of the Indigenous Art Unit over the years, and to the current curatorial team at Bundoora Homestead. To the private lenders of artworks, we thank you for your contribution to this exhibition. Most of all, thank you to the artists and the families of the Elders, both past and present, for their assistance and care with this exhibition.

Sharon West

Teacher 1999-2005

Teacher and Indigenous Art Unit Coordinator 2006-2012

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1. Tommy McRae (c. 1835–1901) is a renowned Kwatkwat artist whose illustrative style depicting Aboriginal life was ahead of its times, and whose work is held in many institutions including the National Gallery of Australia and the Melbourne Museum.
 2. Albert Namatjira (1902-1959) is a famous Aboriginal artist who painted in a predominantly European style in the Hermannsburg School. Later, research into his work discovered the coded messages and stories contained within his paintings were expressions of sacred sites and cultural knowledge.
 3. The Gumbri White Dove Award was a biannual exhibition of works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists living, studying or working in Victoria, shown at Bundoora Homestead in the 2000s and 2010s. The award was named after Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Jessie Hunter whose Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung name was Gumbri, meaning white dove.

Image on cover: Aunty Gwen GARONI (Taungurong, 1935-2014), *Basket Weaving at Corenderrk* 2008. Acrylic on canvas. Copyright the artist, courtesy Sharon West.



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