

Time with people is a strange thing. A day with the right person can stick with you for a lifetime. A day with the wrong person can be forgotten as quickly as the seconds that passed while reading this sentence.

Gathering days, yarning circles, and weaving circles can feel naff for some young mob—like they belong in the 80s. We often associate a gathering day with a NAIDOC program we've been dragged to because family had a stall or was running a workshop. Yet we keep gathering because we still need it. The truth is, the Auntie down the street who is a walking library on local botanicals might have the best day with someone like Debra Beale, and we can't underestimate or quantify the worth of that prospective interaction.

Debra is a Palawa/Yorta Yorta and Gamilaraay/Wonnarua woman who works with natural dyeing processes, utilising materials found in her environment from timber, feathers, and seaweed to the ever-dependable eucalypt. For the exhibition, Debra has broken down her making process, suggesting that the antidote to fast fashion is allowing viewers to trace each step from start to finish. Natural dyeing is a slow practice. There is a science to it. The age of the material, tannins, and soil profile at each site of harvesting all affect the process—the outcome is never the same. Suspended across the gallery, Debra's *Sacred I* collection of wearable garments and adornments are made *of* place and *about* place.

'barangga' invites the public to contribute to the exhibition through a range of events, workshops, and gatherings, cultivating an exchange of energies and knowledges. Sharyn Egan is a Nyoongar woman who is interested in how First Nations technologies and knowledges are re-framed as 'new'. Tools, natural medicines as well as innovations in sustainability and caring for Country are often perceived by non-First Nations peoples as new resources, a precursor to contemporary Western technologies. Yet, First Nations peoples have held this knowledge for millennia and are rarely attributed let alone compensated for these contributions.

Sharyn is on her own personal mission to un-ravel these stories and reveal the chapters that were ripped from the history books. Her expansive installation *The Nullians* presents a plethora of collected wooden objects made from Balga/xanthorrhoea which became a popular material in the 50s–70s for non-First Nations woodworkers. First Nations peoples have known of Balga's use for woodworking and toolmaking as well as medicine and nourishment for centuries. Sharyn explores its many uses in a new series of paintings made from Balga resin in a powerful reclamation of the material. Sharyn also presents *Boorongur (Totem)*, an interactive sculptural weaving project that is built over time by the participating collective. Her works are unfinished sentences, and we are the ones who can help contribute the missing words.

Luke Russell is a Gringai/Worimi man who considers the making process to be of equal importance to the final product. Within the materiality and process of making, the knowledge and energies of our Elders are held across time. Luke's practice is driven by a commitment to learning, teaching and sharing this knowledge, often letting participants keep the objects. By doing this, he hands individuals a reminder of their time together. The object becomes a mnemonic, solidifying the knowledge shared which will stay in their body, mind, and home. Working across a breadth of media, Luke is known for his expertise in tools and everyday objects from the woven to the woodworked. The value for him—as with each of these designers—is not only in the final product, but in the transference of knowledge, community building, and understanding of place that comes with making. What is often seen as a by-product, the production, is the core intent.

Leanne Tobin is a Dharug woman who is trying to give her audience a few hot tips in her work. She uses visual storytelling in ways that most people can understand, regardless of their background. By doing this, she is hoping you will find the

layers quickly! The complexities of First Nations stories are often so thick with meaning, it is difficult for people outside of these cultural circles to comprehend their depth. Storytelling can appear as a naïve way of maintaining culture, but First Nations peoples do not tell the same stories over and over again without reason. With each re-telling, the layers of meaning are strengthened and embedded in every listener. Leanne effectively simplifies stories for a broader audience. In *Ngalawan – We Live, We Remain*, she shares a creation story of the serpentine eel-like Ancestral Creator Gurangady/Gurangatty, using the fluid materiality of glass and animation to express their migratory journey.

First Nations designers and artists have been incorporating pictorial representations into visual language for the ease of people outside of their direct cultural ties for centuries. The intent of this is sharing. It encourages a deeper understanding of the environment and the peoples that have come, gone, and are still here, in the hope that we can all reach a stage of deep care. We want people to become invested in the health of this Country we all call home, but very few know intimately. It is harder to care about something you do not know in your body, that you cannot see change, age, hurt, or blossom. Leanne takes you halfway, knowing the time, practice, and learning needed to become fully immersed in a culture. We don't always have time for the rest of Australia to catch up, so we innovate and use language that is familiar.

First Nations people need more of that time together. Finding time to learn from each other, and to listen and watch Country is one of the biggest challenges of contemporary life. I often fantasise about sitting on the cliffs in Larrakia. I imagine sitting still for a whole year and watching the same spot of Country change. I want to watch as the foliage changes shape and colour with the seasons, observe which trees want to talk when the storms whip them into action, and the day-to-day patterns of each animal, big and small. I wonder how long I would have to sit to know my Country the way my body craves to know it.

A collaborative project from Yamaji/Wajarri designers and artists Elvie Dann, Margaret Whitehurst, Barbara Merritt, Jenine Boeree, Charmaine Green, Donna Ronan, Nicole Monks, Yarra Monks, Michelle Sims, and Chloe Sims is a manifestation of time spent together. Time and people are key to all the works presented. These artists have never worked together in collaboration before. They have never made kangaroo skin bags before, but you wouldn't know it watching them work. From embedded muscle memory and piecing together small pieces of knowledge held by each individual, the collective was able to create a larger picture of the process for all to share. Months on from their week together, several of these designers have not stopped making. It has been a revival of practice, and a testament to what time spent together can inspire.

First Nations design and this collective of designers all depend on time. Time together. Time with Country. Time teaching and learning. Now. When the world is time poor, what we really need is less hustle and more patience. Great designs, ideas, philosophies, art, and culture do not spring from a busy mind and soul. They come from a place of deep observation and connection. From tool-making to sculptural weaving, bush jewellery, and kangaroo bags, each designer will share their knowledge, skills, and stories in a series of making workshops throughout the duration of the exhibition. It is time they are offering. Time can be transformative.

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Coby Edgar, June 2023