



AWAKENING HISTORIES

INTRODUCTION

Awakening Histories has been informed by Monash University's ARC Laureate project Global Encounters & First Nations Peoples: 1000 Years of Australian History.

Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA
4 Oktober – 6 December 2025

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts | PICA
6 February – 29 March 2026

Awakening Histories traces the deep connections between First Nations peoples, Makassan seafarers of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and Southeast Asian traders, celebrating enduring relationships that remain prominent in art, language and material culture. Featuring new commissions and key loans, the twenty-seven artists and collectives presented in this exhibition share stories of migration, trade and cultural exchange, highlighting the role of trepang (sea cucumber), tamarind, palm wine, seafaring technology, textiles and patterns in histories shared across the ocean. The works reflect on stories and songs of the interactions that have taken place across the north of this continent, from the Gulf of Carpentaria, around Arnhem Land to Garamilla/Darwin—an area known as Marege to the Makassan trepangers—and beyond to the Kimberley region—or Kayu Djawa—with peoples who arrived each year on the North Wind. Foregrounding Indigenous sovereignty and ocean-centred storytelling, *Awakening Histories* reinforces the understanding of Country as sea, sky and land, the passing of knowledge through families and generations—living histories that counter recent assumptions about the relation of this land to the rest of the world, that its peoples were isolated, that it was 'discovered' by Europeans in the course of colonial expansion. The exhibition aims to shift understandings of this country's history and contribute to the dialogue around First Nations ways of knowing and being, and re-asserting sovereignty.

This poster, which features the bark painting *Gunyaŋara Makkassans, 2025*, by Djapu, Wanḍawuy and Dhuwa artist Dhambit Mununggurr, brings together statements from or about a selection of the exhibition artists to illustrate just some of the stories and connections shared in *Awakening Histories*.

Curatorium
Professor Rebecca Coates, MUMA
Amanda Haskard, MUMA
Dr David Haworth, Monash University, Global Encounters Senior Research Officer
Hannah Mathews, PICA
Dr Melanie Oliver, formerly MUMA
Francis E. Parker, MUMA
Nurabdiansyah, Makassar State University
Professor Lynette Russell AM, Monash University, Global Encounters Project Lead
Piera Van Sparkes, formerly MUMA.

Acknowledgements
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PICA
Perth Institute of
Contemporary Arts

MONASH
University | MUMA 50

PERTH FESTIVAL

Wesfarmers

ARTISTS

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Aziziah Diah Aprilya
Zaenal Beta
John Bulunbulun (Ganalbingu)
Cian Dayrit
Dogmilk Films
Gunybi Ganambarr (Naymil)
Global Encounters Monash and MAREGE Institute
Guan Wei, Colin Heenan-Purunatameri and
Michelle Woody Minnapinni (Tiwi)
Karrabing Film Collective
Abdi Karya and Sana
Jenna Lee (Larrakia, Wardaman, Karajarri)
Nancy McDinny (Garwa, Yanyuwa)
Mathaman Marika (Rirratjingu)
Mawalan 1 Marika (Rirratjingu)
The Mulka Project
Dhambit Mununggurr (Djapu, Wanḍawuy, Dhuwa)
Trevor Nakanapa Maminyamanja (Anindilyaugwa)
Ipeh Nur
Margaret Rarru Garrawurra (Liyagawumirr, Garrawurra)
Wilda Yanti Salam
Darrell Sibosado (Bard)
Ms M.Wirrpanda (Dhudi-Djapu)
Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra (Dhalwaŋu)
Mr N. Wunungmurra (Dhalwaŋu) and Ms D. Yinupiru
(Gumatj, Rrakpala)

Cover image
Dhambit Mununggurr
Djapu
Gunyaŋara Makkassans 2025
acrylic on bark
223 × 87 cm
Monash University Collection, Naam/Melbourne
Image courtesy of Raiton Ostry Gallery, Gadigal/Sydney. Photo: David Davies

PERKENALAN

Awakening Histories merupakan bagian dari proyek ARC Laureate Universitas Monash Pertemuan Global (serta Orang-orang First Nations: 1000 tahun sejarah Australia).

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Awakening Histories menelusuri keterhubungan mendalam antara masyarakat First Nations dan para penjelajah laut Asia Tenggara dari pelabuhan Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia, merayakan hubungan erat yang terus berlanjut dalam seni, bahasa, dan budaya material.

Menghadirkan karya-karya komisi baru dan karya-karya pinjaman yang penting, dua puluh tujuh seniman dan kolektif dalam pameran ini menghidupkan kisah-kisah migrasi, perdagangan, dan pertukaran budaya, memberikan sorotan pada peran teripang atau timun laut, pohon asam, tuak, teknologi pelayaran, peralatan logam, berbagai kain dan motif, dalam sejarah yang terjalin lintas samudra. Karya-karya yang menyingkap kisah dan lagu tentang perjumpaan yang berlangsung di utara benua ini, yang kini disebut Australia, mulai dari Teluk Carpentaria, seputar Tanah Arnhem hingga Garamilla/Darwin (wilayah yang disebut Marege oleh para pelaut Makassar), hingga Kimberley atau Kayu Djawa.

Asal-usul perdagangan trepang memang tidak tercatat jelas, namun pengusiran pemilik tanah di Kesultanan Gowa oleh kolonial Belanda pada abad ke-17 mendorong pertumbuhan perdagangan ini sebagai sumber penghidupan alternatif. Para pedagang teripang yang banyak berasal dari Makassar, Bugis, dan Melayu, dianggap sebagai komunitas Muslim pertama di benua ini. Armada besar perahu layar berangkat mengikuti angin muson setiap tahun, mengolah trepang berbulan-bulan hingga kembali membawa muatan ke Tiongkok. Perdagangan internasional ini berlangsung melalui negosiasi dengan bangsa-bangsa berdaulat di Marege dan Kayu Djawa. Namun, pada akhir abad ke-19, Pemerintah Australia Selatan memberlakukan bea masuk dan kemudian biaya lisensi untuk perahu-perahu tersebut. Tahun 1906 lisensi-lisensi tersebut dicabut, menutup praktik perdagangan yang berusia ratusan tahun.

Dengan menegaskan kedaulatan masyarakat adat dan narasi samudra-sentris, *Awakening Histories* menghidupkan kembali pemahaman Bangsa sebagai laut, langit, dan daratan, di mana pengetahuan diwariskan melalui keluarga dan lintas generasi, sejarah yang hidup, yang menantang asumsi bahwa masyarakat ini ter-isolasi atau "ditemukan" oleh kolonial Eropa semasa ekspansi. Pameran ini bertujuan untuk menggeser pemahaman sejarah negara ini dan menyumbangkan dialog seputar epistemologi First Nations, sekaligus mengukuhkan kembali kedaulatan atasnya.

MUMA mengakui bahwa pameran ini berlangsung di atas Tanah Boonwurrung, Bunurong, dan Wurundjeri, wilayah adat Suku Kulin yang tidak pernah diberikan.

TRADE MAP



ARTIST STATEMENTS

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Finding Bilas 2025, graphite on paper 76 × 56 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Moore Contemporary, Boorloo/Perth

This series of drawings offers a reimagining of my children within the worlds of their different ancestries. The Bugis heritage that arrives through my mother's family lineage in Malaysia and back to the old Luwu Kingdom in Sulawesi Selatan provides the foundations of something new somewhere new. We've found ourselves rooted in these unceded lands after different ocean crossings through the centuries. From the early movement of Austronesian people from Taiwan and Southern China through South-East Asia, expulsion from Sulawesi in 1664 through Borneo, Cambodia and finally peninsular Malaysia. My father's heritage arrives through the 1815 transportation of a convict from London to Sydney, to invade and occupy this continent. While we now call the dry heat and cold winters of a farm on Binjerup Nyungar country in regional Western Australia home, the cultural geography that describes us includes the vast ocean currents and humid mangrove coasts of the north. My kids will understand who they are by knowing where they've come from. — Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, 2025

Guan Wei
Australian Sea Cucumber Plate 2025, porcelain 32.7 × 32.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist and ARC ONE, Naam/Melbourne
Photo: Christian Caputo

Aziziah Diah Aprilya
Under the Tamarind Tree 2025 (detail), digital photograph
Image courtesy of the artist

Looking for tamarind trees across the two cultures became my gateway—an opening to new relationships, meanings, and questions about today's connection between Makassar and Australia. I began to wonder: How can we read this significant history through the perspective of a tree as a living archive—beyond categories and boxes? And can that kind of perspective invite us to ask deeper questions about our relationship as human beings with plants, and the shared spaces we inhabit with them? — Aziziah Diah Aprilya, 2025

John Bulunbulun
Ganalbingu
Murrukundja Manikay (Song Cycle), 1993-94 (detail)
Ochre pigments and gum on canvas and ochre pigments on stringybark canvas 161 × 226 cm
Janet Holmes à Court Collection, Boorloo/Perth

The paintings describe contact between Aboriginal people and Macassan traders and were produced by the artist to document and celebrate this little-known and under-valued relationship in the history of Aboriginal groups in the north of Australia. We find that Aboriginal people, particularly, from diverse locations and backgrounds, respond very positively to the notion of an earlier relationship of trade, co-operation and respect unlike that which is more commonly promoted in the events of 1788 as the first contact with other peoples. The recognition of their history is much more relevant to Arnhem Land groups, as indications of contact in the form of still easily-discovered artefacts, inclusion in ceremonial content and practical legacies such as the use of tools and technologies are interwoven in their lives today. The continued manufacture of dug-out canoes enlivens the retelling of tales of Macassan occupation to young people, as do the many loan words in general conversation, names of country and personal names.

During our presentation of the Murrukundja ceremony to Bugis Macassarese people in Ujung Pandang [Makassar] in October 1993, Bugis people recognised particular words in the song cycles, as well as revealing through an interpreter that Bulun Bulun was the name of a much-revered Bugis Macassarese animist priest. John Bulun Bulun as a new-born baby was recognised as an important leader of his group and named accordingly. — Diane Noon, Director, Maningrida Arts & Culture, letter to Anne Brodie, Curator, Holmes à Court Collection, 3 May 1993.

During my residency in Mandar, I learned how to build a boat and involved in ritual of boat making (Padewakang boat), and this experience fostered a strong bond with the sea. The local craftsmen treat the boat as a human body. They hold ceremonies and perform rituals throughout the process to celebrate each stage of boat building. For me, participating in this process, in which spirituality and technology merged, led to a profound revelation about a way of life and tradition. This work presents as a visual archive of the rituals and the disappearance of maritime culture, telling the story of the coastal communities' struggles. — Ipeh Nur, 2022-23

Cian Dayrit

Footprints of a Battle 2025

The textile map becomes an anachronistic account of the land as shaped by civilization—what has been cultivated, what has been used and what has been coveted. Portrait of an ecosystem as shaped by trade, migration, conflict and systemic plunder. From crops and minerals to labor and culture, tighter (supply) chains were always the cost of a connected world. This becomes a challenge to the colonial perspective which centers man as exemplified in plantations and extractive industries (Wynter). By exposing and highlighting crops, minerals, insignias and mythologies of domination, the work attempts to invoke Arturo Escobar's *pluriversal politics* which retraces our (arguably centralized bodies) footprint to carve paths for ushering in worlds and knowledges otherwise less shaped by axes of domination. We try to unsettle, destabilize dominant histories. How far we can see into the past and how far we can see into the future become fantasies that distracts us from seeing clearly what is in front of us. What we are observing is ourselves getting lost. On a different angle, perhaps we are carving new paths for collective liberation. — Cian Dayrit, 2025

Jenna Lee
Larrakia
Category of Significance: Ancestral (Tamarindus indica) 2025

This work brings together fifteen glass tamarind seeds, each sprouting saplings cut from the pages of *Aboriginal Words and Place Names*. The number gestures to the fifteen tamarind trees recorded on the Larrakia region's Register of Significant Trees, among them a burial tree at Mindil Beach (Mindil, meaning 'the shoulder of an ancestor' in Gulumoenjri/Larrakia language), now standing beside the bustle of a popular tourist night market.

Light flickers from leaves stirred by the dry-season breeze, animating the installation. Shadows drift and dance, carrying the sacred tree's spirit through the gallery.

The tamarind holds layered histories in the substance of its seeds. Carried across the sea, they took root on northern shores, becoming a marker of exchange and remembrance. At Mindil, the trees entwine with Larrakia traditions of burial, still standing as protectors of ancestors.

Through the transformation of a colonial text into saplings, the work reflects on how the whispers of history are present in our landscape, which the land remembers, even if people forget. — Jenna Lee, 2025

Ipeh Nur
The Body and Journey 2019-23 (detail), silk-screen print, 20 × 300 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and ara contemporary, Jakarta.
Photo: Silvanast

This work departs from a script of diary notes and reflection from my journey in 2019-2022. In 2019, I was invited to a residency in Pambusuang, a village in Mandar, West Sulawesi, where I experienced a traditional maritime culture and began to investigate current tensions that the local communities are facing. Millions of Indonesians live in coastal villages like Pambusuang and make their livings from the sea. Mandar is well known for its tradition of boat building. In recent years, the Indonesia government has initiated major embankment projects with the hope of protecting the coastline from rising seas, though these construction projects are threatening the ecosystem and affecting the livelihood of local fishermen.

During my residency in Mandar, I learned how to build a boat and involved in ritual of boat making (Padewakang boat), and this experience fostered a strong bond with the sea. The local craftsmen treat the boat as a human body. They hold ceremonies and perform rituals throughout the process to celebrate each stage of boat building. For me, participating in this process, in which spirituality and technology merged, led to a profound revelation about a way of life and tradition. This work presents as a visual archive of the rituals and the disappearance of maritime culture, telling the story of the coastal communities' struggles. — Ipeh Nur, 2022-23

Dhambit Mununggurr

Djapu

Gunyaŋara Makkassans 2025

Gunyaŋara was always Gumatj land but has also been other things in its history. It is a Marjarr. Marjarr are the places where the Makassans camped and where they prepared the Darrripa (trepang). They are usually a natural harbour with freshwater nearby. They were helped by the Yolŋu because sometimes the water sources were Yolŋu wells which only the landowners would know. Some of the Marjarr are Bawaka, Gunyaŋara, Galupa, Garrhalala, Dhanaya. Every marjarr has a Tamarind tree that the Makassans brought with them as a food source for the spicy food which they like. They would eat it with fish and stingray. It is an introduced tree from Indonesia and the Yirritja people, especially my mother clan the Gumatj sing the charpa (tree) whilst sitting under it. Some of these trees are hundreds of years old. Whereas the Dhuwa sing generally of the things natural to the continent and old the Yirritja are always the ones who sing the new things—Galuku (coconut), Galiku (fabric), Djaliikalika (gun), Njantiji (alcohol), Nārali (tobacco), Marthaŋa (ships), Galwaan (words) and Djambu which is the name of the Tamarind. And these songs often connect to Marjarr places. Gunyaŋara has several extant Makassan graves and stone structures connected to trepang preparation as well as many Tamarind. This painting depicts them and the praus which once harvested trepang here. — Dhambit Mununggurr, 2025

Wilda Yanti Salam
Winda Yanti Salam
The sapped palm wine is brought by boat Makassar River from the series Lontar dan Ballo: Tracing People to People Living Story 2025
digital photograph. Photo: Wilda Yanti Salam

The Makassans are known as the people who introduced alcoholic beverages and drinking culture to the Marege people of Northern Australia. I went to several places mentioned in the trepang (sea cucumber) route to research the types of fermented drinks consumed by Makassan seafarers, including ballo (palm wine) from Makassar and Galepong, and sopi (arrack) from Timor and Rote Island.

From this, I learnt that fermented beverages played a significant role in shaping the relationship between the Makassans and the island they passed across until they reached Marege. In Rote and Timor, palm-wine makers assert that the lontar palm is a plant that came from the sea. This matches the narratives of palm-wine makers in Makassar and Galepong, who state that lontar was brought by seafarers and family of the Gowa-Tallo kingdom to mark new territories.

Within the tradition of drinking ballo and sopi, there is an ocean of oral histories, myth, and ongoing stories of the Makassans, who not only voyaged but also shared knowledge of drinking culture. Lontar and Ballo are living stories about Makassar and Marege that still persist today, the spirit of people-to-people connection following the Trepang Route.

Besides learning about the connection between our ancestors and the people of Timor and Rote thru lontar, I discovered that lontar is the tree of life. Its leaves, trunk, stalks, fruit, roots, and fibers are used to mark the civilization of communities in Eastern Indonesia. — Wilda Yanti Salam, 2025

Darrell Sibosado
Bard

Niman Aari (Many Fish) 2021-25
Traditionally, we carve mother of pearl, ebony, trochus, turtle shell and dugong bone', says Darrell Sibosado.
Niman Aari is the second configuration of a large-scale installation created on Bard Country by uncle and nephews, Darrell, DJ and Eric Sibosado. It features over five hundred hand-carved fish made from mother of pearl, trochus, ebony and turtle shell, materials used by their ancestors for generations. This configuration nods to the Makassans, who traded pearl shell but mainly visited the Kimberley for trochus and trepang. Contact was limited, but from stories Darrell knows, it could have been more significant, as the Makassans would have been fishing and eating from the reef.

The installation invites viewers to reflect on their impact on the environment and what happens below the surface. Inspired by how surface ripples reveal hidden movement beneath the ocean, *Niman Aari* speaks to the unseen effects of human interference with natural systems.

Darrell says, 'I saw a fish in the trochus shell. It didn't need to be made, it was already there. So we made more. A whole school. Niman Aari.'

Darrell's practice brings together traditional Bard Country and contemporary expression. DJ and Eric, young artists learning under both Darrell and Garry Sibosado, continue this cultural legacy by mastering the skills, stories and knowledge tied to these materials. Their home, the community of Lombadina on the Dampier Peninsula, is surrounded by vivid red earth, white beaches and pristine waters. The coastline and sea remain central to Bard life and art, shaping culture, food and story. — Allegra Mazin, Artist Liaison & Public Projects Lead, N.Smith Gallery, Gadigal Country/Sydney



Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra
Dhalwaŋu
Wanŋupini (clouds) is the same story as my father taught me about the sunset. The sun is going down. The sunset on the clouds is like the red sails of the Makassan's ships leaving at the end of the season. We cry because the Makassans are leaving. The mokuy (spirit) is dancing and leaving—the body is dead and the spirit is going to Balambala.

This is Yirritja bapuru (ceremony), the same as my Grandfather, Yangarriny—this is his manikay (song).
The sun will rise again.
The Makassans will come back.
And the spirit will return.

My father, who passed away, taught me this story. He taught me how to paint the story of Wanŋupini. — Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra's artist statement supplied by Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala

Mr Nawurapu Wunungmurra and Galeri Buana Alit
Dhalwaŋu

When sacred Australian Aboriginal bark paintings met with the Indonesian tradition of batik tulis, a celebration of a shared Australia-Indonesia narrative was born. This relationship is rooted over centuries, leaving traces of kinship carried by the wind and connected by the sea.

Mr N. Wunungmurra / Galeri Buana Alit
Yirrkala Batik 2014, batik, 270 × 108 cm. Image courtesy of Jakarta Textile Museum

This is *Manda at Gurrumurru*, the bark painting by Mr Nawurapu Wunungmurra, a legendary Yolŋu artist from the Dhalwangu clan in the Northern Territory, which was transformed into a piece of hand-drawn batik made by the Pekalongan batik makers from the coastal area of Central Java, Indonesia. This work is part of the fifteen pieces of the *Yirrkala Batik* project initiated by former Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Paul Grigson, in 2014.

Through the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Wunungmurra tells the story of his ancestors' heritage, about the encounters between Makassans and Yolŋu sailors in Gurrumurru, a sacred area in Arnhem Land, where they shared dances, songs, games, cigarettes, and the search for trepang.

The octopus, one of the Wunungmurra family's totems, blends with the red triangle of Makassar sails across the horizon, the Yolŋu awaited the return of their boats each season. These traces are preserved in the Yolŋu Manikay (songs), Miny'tji (clan designs) and Bunggul (dances) about the Mangatharra (Makassan people).

Through *Yirrkala Batik*, the Australia-Indonesia relationship is celebrated in simple objects, commemorating deep connections, family memories and history, as well as hopes for a relationship that continues to move like waves and blow like the wind. — Abdi Karya, 2025



Ms D. Yinupiru
Gumatj, Rrakpala

Galiku is material used for dancing. Yirritja people, men, women, children, wear it during Garma and other times for funerals, or the kids dancing at school. It's special. We Gumatj identify ourselves with yellow fabric. Inside the Galiku is cotton and if you tear it off you see the threads. Galiku is the material that makes the flags and the sails of the praus. Our dance and song celebrates the North wind which brings those boats carrying our family back to us. It sings the wind which snatches at the flags makes them climb and fly and then tears them and finally whips them away as it becomes the cyclone. — Ms D. Yinupiru, quoted in Djarrjarrji—The Woven Cloth, ex. cat., Sullivan+Strumpf, Melbourne, 2024.