

AWAKENING HISTORIES EDUCATION RESOURCE



Awakening Histories is a partnership between Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA and Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA).

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

This education resource has been developed by Educators Melissa Bedford (MUMA) and Jenn Garland (PICA) in consultation with Curator - Indigenous Amanda Haskard (MUMA). All photos otherwise stated: Andrew Curtis.

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Elders—past, present and emerging—of the lands on which this exhibition was created and is presented. We acknowledge Aboriginal connection to material and creative practice on these lands for more than 60,000 years. This exhibition was developed on Yolŋu, Bard, Bunurong Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri Country and will tour to the unceded lands of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation.

Content Warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this resource may contain the images and names of deceased persons

Educators are advised that *Awakening Histories* contains themes related to the ongoing impacts of settler colonial histories on the First Peoples of northern Australia and the Makassan seafarers of South Sulawesi, Indonesia

About this Education Resource

This education resource has been produced to support school-aged young people and their teachers to engage with the touring exhibition *Awakening Histories*. Educators are invited to use the materials within and adjust them to meet the learning needs of their students.

The resource can be used before, during and after a visit to *Awakening Histories* and in conjunction with the poster/publication accompanying the exhibition.

The resource includes:

- Tips for getting ready for your excursion
- Exhibition dates
- Links to the Australian Curriculum and protocols for engaging with First Nations art in the classroom
- An introduction to the exhibition *Awakening Histories*
- Trade and Winds: A contextual map of trade routes between the Makassan seafarers of South Sulawesi, Indonesia and northern Australia
- Focus artworks from the exhibition with accompanying starting points for discussion and learning activities

Tips for Getting Ready for Your Excursion

Contact the gallery presenting *Awakening Histories* to make a booking for your class and find out more about:

- Gallery opening hours
- Transport and parking options
- Scheduling group bookings
- Cloakroom facilities
- Any admission fees
- Options for guided education programs hosted at the venue

Before visiting *Awakening Histories*, you might like to familiarise your students with the practice of some of the exhibiting artists and some of the key themes within the exhibition, using this education resource as a guide.

Exhibition Touring Schedule

Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA)

4 October – 6 December 2025

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA)

6 February – 29 March 2026

Advice for Engaging with First Nations Art and Culture in the Classroom

Educators are encouraged to respect the protocols created to protect the integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and cultural expression.

Western Australian Educators

<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/aboriginal-advisory-body>

Victorian Educators

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/koorie-education/resources>

Links to the Australian Curriculum

Awakening Histories is relevant to students at all stages along their learning journeys. This education resource is broadly aimed at school students from levels 4–10. Senior secondary and early-years educators are invited to adapt this material to meet the needs of their students. The starting points for discussion and the activities within this resource provide opportunities for students to learn as both audience and artist. There are suggestions for having conversations about artworks in the gallery as well as prompts for making their own artworks.

Visual Arts

Awakening Histories relates to Visual Arts curricula at all levels of the Australian Curriculum: <https://v8.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>

Awakening Histories is a thematic, group exhibition that offers young people opportunities to engage with the work of contemporary artists who use a range of materials and technologies to represent their ideas and develop empathy for multiple viewpoints. Students who engage with artworks in the exhibition have the opportunity to further develop their capacity for critical thinking, aesthetic knowledge and understanding about the practices of artists.

Students are invited to explore:

- How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international contemporary artists have worked with their own knowledges and skills to communicate about what they value and share their ideas and perspectives with audiences.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international artists express and communicate ideas and observations about their individual and collective experiences to others in imaginative and meaningful ways.

They will develop their understandings of:

- Australia's histories and traditions through the arts, engaging with the artworks and practices, both traditional and contemporary, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- Regional and global cultures, and their arts histories and traditions, through engaging with the artwork by international contemporary artists

Cross-Curriculum Priorities

Engagement with the artworks on display in *Awakening Histories* provides opportunities for students to learn about:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

- **Connections to Country/Place:** holistic belief systems connected to land, sea and sky
- **Culture:** language groups, ways of life and resilience in responding to the impacts of colonisation
- **People:** acknowledging the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia

- **Asia and its diversity:** the traditions, cultures and belief systems of the Makassan seafarers
- **Achievements and contributions of the people of Asia:** how the Makassan seafarers contributed to and continue to contribute to world history and human endeavour
- **Asia-Australia engagement:** how Australia is part of the Asia region and our histories from ancient times to the present are linked.

General Capabilities

Engagement with the artworks on display in *Awakening Histories* provides opportunities for students to develop the following general capabilities:

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding
- Personal and social development

Introduction to *Awakening Histories*

Awakening Histories is a thematic, group exhibition exploring the deep and abiding connections between First Nations Peoples from the north of this continent—now known as Australia—and the Makassan seafarers of South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Using ocean-centred storytelling to evoke embodied memories and relationships, it presents a counter-narrative to Eurocentric histories of discovery, unsettling the long-held perception that Australia was isolated until colonisation. The exhibition honours First Nations People's connections to Country—land, water, sky—and longstanding history of interaction with people, plants, ideas and technologies from across the seas.

Awakening Histories features the work of contemporary artists and collectives from Australia, Indonesia, China and the Philippines—including new commissions—alongside significant works drawn from national and international collections. Artworks in the galleries reflect upon and represent both the cultural aspects (language, storytelling, dance and memories) and material aspects (trepan/sea cucumber, tamarind, textiles, shells, ceramics and prau/sail boats) of pre-colonial migration and trade.

Awakening Histories developed during Monash University's ARC Laureate project *Global Encounters & First Nations Peoples: 1000 Years of Australian History*. A curatorium based in Australia and Indonesia worked together to highlight art and storytelling to extend the research and invite audiences to reflect on these abiding connections in a contemporary context.

Key Themes

Awakening Histories addresses various key themes that students may like to research further including:

- Pre-colonial connections between the First Nations peoples of Northern Australia and the Makassan seafarers of South Sulawesi, Indonesia
- The counter narrative to Eurocentric histories of trade in the region and resilience of First Nations peoples
- Friendship, reciprocity and cultural exchange between the First Peoples of Australia and the Makassan sailors from South Sulawesi, Indonesia
- Storytelling, songs, dance and language that connect to land, sea and sky
- Mapping trade routes
- Pre-colonial trade of trepang (sea-cucumbers), tamarind, textiles (woven sail cloth), shells and ceramic pots and jars.
- Fishing, eating and celebrating together
- Sailing boats known as Makassan praus
- The life cycle and cultural significance of tamarind trees
- Trade-winds and the environment, and how seasonal changes connected with the arrival and departure of sailing boats and seafarers

Exhibiting 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), The Mulka Project, Dhambit Mununggurr (Djapu, Wandawuy, Dhuwa), Ipeh Nur, Wilda Yanti Salam, Darrell Sibosado (Bard), Ms M Wirrpanda (Dhudj-Djapu), Bulthirri Wunungmurra (Dhalwanu), Mr N Wunungmurra (Dhalwanu), Ms D Yinupingu (Gumatj, Rrakpala), Wonggu Mununggurr (Djapu, Dhuwa), Mawalan Marika (Rirratjingu, Dhuwa), Watjung Mununggiritj (Gumatj, Yirritja) and Bununggu Yunupingu (Gumatj, Yirritja).

Curatorium

Professor Rebecca Coates
Monash University Museum of Art

Amanda Haskard
Monash University Museum of Art

Dr David Haworth
Monash University
Global Encounters Senior Research Officer

Hannah Mathews
Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

Dr Melanie Oliver
formerly Monash University Museum of Art

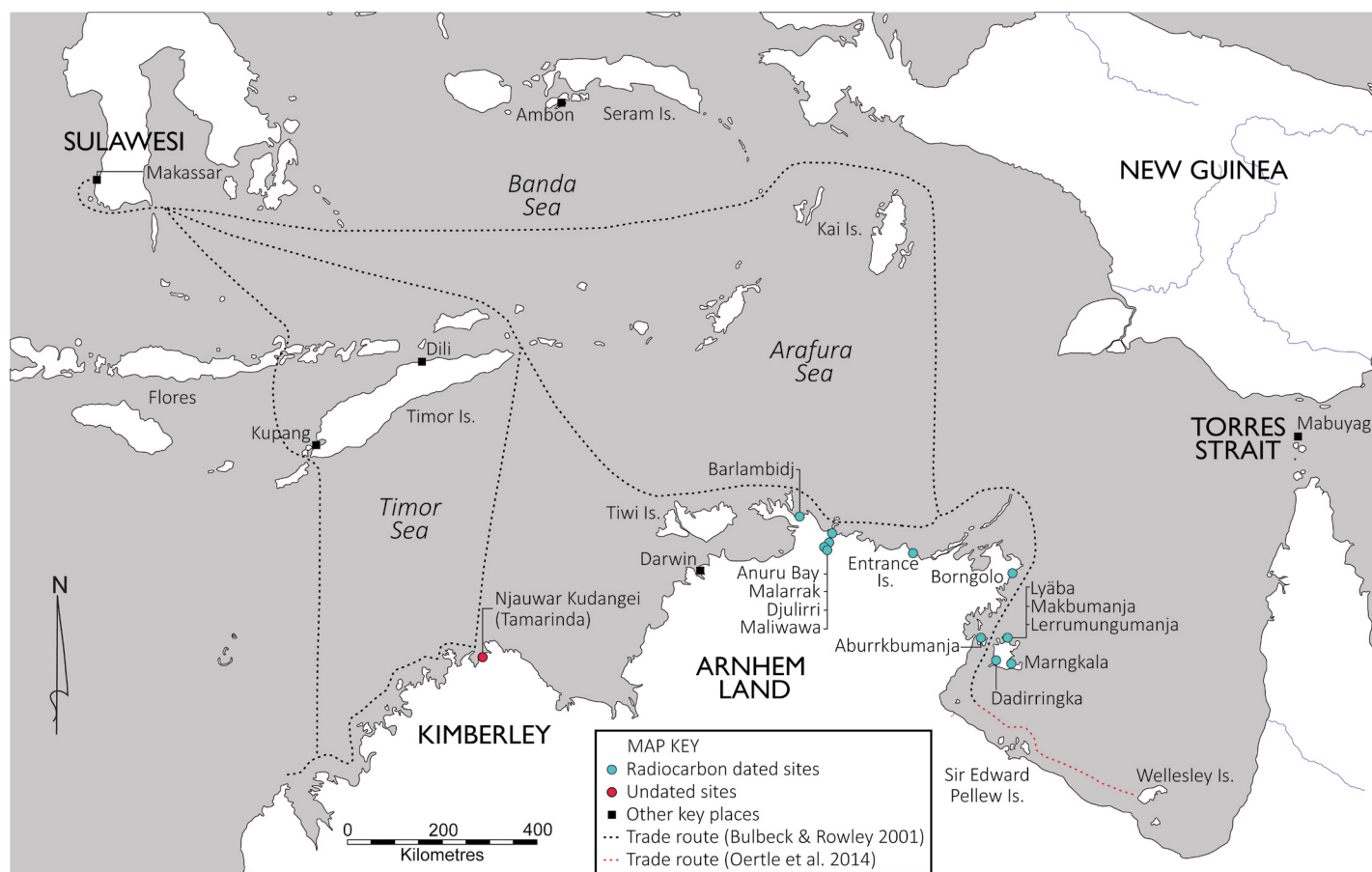
Francis E. Parker
Monash University Museum of Art

Nurabdiansyah Ramli (Abi)
Makassar State University

Professor Lynette Russell AM
Monash University
Global Encounters Project Lead

Pierra Van Sparkes
formerly Monash University Museum of Art

Contextual Map: Trade and Winds



Focus Artworks

This section of the education resource encompasses a detailed introduction to five focus artworks and a suite of suggested learning activities and starting points for discussion.

Cian Dayrit *Footprints of a Battle 2025*



Cian Dayrit

Lives and works in Rizal, The Philippines

Footprints of a Battle 2025

objects and embroidery on fabric
approx. 136 x 155 cm

Embroidery: Henry Caceres

Research assistance: Cathy Manalo

Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by Monash University

Museum of Art | MUMA, Naarm/Melbourne

Introduction to the Artwork

Maps feature prominently in Filipino artist Cian Dayrit's practice as a way of visualising the complex relationships between places, histories and myths related to centuries of colonialism in South-East Asia. Before Spain colonised the Philippines and made Manila a place associated with galleon trade, it was already a major port city, home to diverse trading communities including Chinese merchants who transported cargoes of trepang (sea cucumber) northwards to China.

The process of creating this artwork involved researching colonial-era military and mercantile maps of historic trade routes and mining in the region. The information held within these maps was then reimagined by Dayrit and transformed in hand-embroidered symbols that highlight historical and ongoing processes of extraction, displacement and trade, offering audiences unexpected ways of seeing the world.

Footprints of a Battle deliberately inverts the typical map of the trade routes between Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos to present an unexpected view of places connected by trade, migration, conflict and plunder. Against this backdrop, the links between the trepangers and the First Peoples of the North Coast of Australia emerge an exchange grounded in reciprocity rather than imperial exploitation and dominance.



Learning Activities

- A QR code is embedded within the artwork inviting audiences to engage with the research data Cian Dayrit has drawn upon to inform the development of *Footprints of a Battle*. While you are in the galleries use the QR code in the work to explore the kind of resources that have been traded within this region over time. Then as a class work together to find the embroidered symbols within the map that relate to each of these resources.
- Cian Dayrit has acknowledged the work of researcher Cathy Manalo in compiling the data that underpins this artwork. How important do you think it is for contemporary artists to undertake research about the topics they make art about? Discuss.
- Cian Dayrit has produced a map that disrupts and inverts the usual way we would encounter a map of South-East Asia to emphasise an alternative world view. What do you think the intention of the artist is?
- This artwork has been exquisitely embroidered with coloured threads by the artists' collaborator Henry Caceres. Look closely at the artwork and see if you can interpret what each of the different colours represents.
- Back at school research the history of your local region, then draw a map to tell a story about an aspect life in the area. Consider the kind of symbols you might include to help tell your story. Then explore hand embroidery to create your own textiles artwork inspired by the artist.

Darrell Sibosado
Niman Aarl (Many Fish)
2021–25



Darrell Sibosado

Bard

Lives and works in Lombadina, Kimberley region, WA.

Niman Aarl (Many Fish) 2021–25

carved mother of pearl, ebony, turtle shell and trochus

200 cm diam.

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Gadigal Country/Sydney

Co-commissioned by Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA, PICA & Boorloo Contemporary | Perth Festival supported by Wesfarmers Arts

Artist Statement

‘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.’

—Darrell Sibosado, 2025

Introduction to the Artwork

Contemporary First Nations artist Darrell Sibosado’s practice combines traditional Bard pearl shell carving and contemporary art. Together with his family Darrell is mastering the skills tied to these materials whilst sharing stories and cultural knowledges across many generations. Their home in the remote community of Lombadina on the Dampier Peninsula, is surrounded by vivid red earth, white beaches and pristine waters. The Kimberley coastline remains central to Bard life and art, shaping culture, food and story.

Niman Aarl is a large-scale installation created on Bard Country or Kayu Djawa as it was called by the Makassans. The work features five hundred hand-carved fish made from mother of pearl, trochus, ebony and turtle shell, materials collected and used by their ancestors for generations. The artwork also nods to the Makassans, who visited the Kimberley to collect and trade trochus and turtle shells and also trepang.

Niman Aarl (Many Fish) invites audiences to reflect on their impact on the environment and what happens below the surface of the sea. Inspired by how surface ripples reveal hidden movement under the water, *Niman Aarl* speaks to the unseen effects of human interference upon natural ecosystems.

Learning Activities

- The Makassans traded pearl and turtle shells similar to the ones in this artwork with the people of Bard Country for centuries. What are some items or materials that you trade with your friends?
- Darrell is revitalising traditional arts practices within his community so they can flourish and evolve into contemporary forms. An important aspect of his work involves teaching pearl shell carving to his nephews as a way of passing down knowledge to the next generation. What is a skill or tradition that has been passed down to you? Who is teaching you this knowledge?
- Darrell is inspired by what he sees in the ocean around his community. Each of the individual shell elements within this artwork are incised with patterns and tribal motifs, symbolising the Bard people's deep connection to the spiritual elements of ocean and water. Together their reflective qualities of the shell represent the movement of a school of fish swimming in the ocean. The notion of bringing together a community of people or a school of fish is significant within this artwork. Can you and your class brainstorm some other examples of contemporary art where the artist has made many similar elements and displayed together in an installation? What is the meaning of those artworks? Compare and contrast some other examples of installation art with this artwork.



Dhambit Munungurr

Gunyanjara Makassans 2025



Dhambit Munungurr

Djapu

Lives and works in Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land, NT.

Gunyanjara Makassans 2025

earth pigments and acrylic on stringybark
223 x 87 cm

Monash University Collection, Narm/Melbourne
Purchased 2025

Artist Statement

'I am Dhambit Munungurr. Dhambit means rock in Elcho Island. A rock in the beach represents Dhambit. That's where my name is from. I am Munungurr, Djapu Clan, and my totem is shark. The shark eats the small fish. Deep in the open Sea. My mother's name is Gulumbu Yunupingu. She is Gumatj. Married to my dad. Dad had two wives, but they were sisters. I was born in Yirrkala, in Yirrkala Clinic, same wäŋa (place) that is the Yirrkala Art Centre that I paint in now. My homeland is Waŋdawuy, that's where my grandfather with 30 wives lived! His name was Wöŋgu Munungurr.

I paint in blue, and I think about what's in the deep blue Sea. Baru—crocodiles, fishes, whales, Darrpiya—octopus, miyapunu—turtles. We live next to a deep Sea. We are not out in the inland, Diltji—away from the sea. I paint in blue because that's how we live, the blue

in my paintings, we can see the Sea outside. The Deep Sea. The Art centre gave me blue from the blue ink cartridges. I can't grind the *gunḍa* (ochre) myself, the rocks to make colour, because of my disability.

Nuwayak (Bark) is important to Yolŋu. My people have been cutting bark long time. Up here, for many generations. My husband collects the barks for me in the Wet season. He hunts for the bark from the Eucalyptus Tree. It is hard to get the bark. Traditionally it is cut with an axe, but my husband uses a chainsaw. He cuts the tree down, because the tree dies anyway. The good straight bark. I was there watching him. Gurtha (Fire) straightens the bark. We straighten the bark with Gurtha, but my husband does it at home, with a gas torch, and then he brings the bark to the Art Centre two weeks later for me to paint. All my bark comes from my husband Tony. I don't trust anybody else. He's the only husband I met.

In my painting we see Yolŋu people meeting the Makassans. It was a good exchange. The Makassans came to see the place, and to introduce *ḡarali* (tobacco). Yolŋu people could get *ḡarali* or anything from the traders. They collected the *Dharripa*—the *trepang* (sea cucumber)—for their food. I have memories of friendship and cultural exchange with the Makassans from my mother who told me. Other people talking about Makassans. Old people. I could hear them talking.

It is important to me to tell the Makassan Story through my art because I heard a lot of Creation talking. Of nature. I paint it because it's my ancestor's Story, my grandmother's Story. It's part of the history of the place where I live, *Gunyaḡara*. Makassans came to *Yirrkala*, the *rangi* (beach) at *Yirrkala*. *Dhalakarr*, near the beach at *Yirrkala*. Makassans came to see the place. All the Makassans came in first.'

—Dhambit Munungurr, 2025

Learning Activities

- Artist Dhambit Munungurr is a senior Yolŋu (Yolngu) woman from coastal Northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory whose practice shares her deep understandings of Country and the Creation on the Land and the Sea. Look carefully at the artwork *Gunyaḡara Makassans* (Gunyangara). What symbols and motifs can you see Dhambit has included within the artwork to connect audiences with her ideas?
- Dhambit is a custodian of important stories and she makes art to preserve and share knowledge with the people who see her work. What does it mean to be a custodian? How do you think being a custodian influences Dhambit's art-making?
- Dhambit's totem animal is a shark. What do you know about the importance of totem animals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and First Nations peoples around the world? Do some research to find out more. Reflect on whether there are any animals in your own culture and life experience that are of special significance to you and why?
- Dhambit is the first Yolŋu artist to have permission to create artwork with blue paint, and it has become a signature colour in her practice. What does Dhambit reflect on about her use of the colour blue within her artists statement? What kind of ideas within her painting relate to the colour blue? Are there some other artists in art history that are renowned for working with blue as part of their practice? Who are they? Choose one of these artists to do some further research about. Then in a visual analysis compare and contrast Dhambit's practice with the artist you have selected.
- Dhambit painted her artwork *Gunyaḡara Makassans* onto bark and in her artists statement she shares some insights about the processes used to harvest and prepare this material for painting. How have these processes that have been going on for millennia changed in contemporary times?
- For many centuries before European colonisation, the Yolŋu and Makassan seafarers from Indonesia were friends and trading partners. The subject matter

in *Gunyanara Makassans* presents the history of Makassans on Yolŋu Country and the places where the visiting Makassans camped, which is important knowledge for the community. In her role as a custodian of these stories, Dhambit depicts boats, coastline and trees in the painting *Gunyanara Makassans* and speaks to the Country and places where the Makassans prepared the Dharripa (sea cucumber) for many generations. Why do you think it is important for Dhambit to honour and share these stories of friendship and cultural exchange through her artwork with wider audiences? Discuss.



Jenna Lee

***Category of Significance:
Ancestral (Tamarindus
indica) 2025***



Jenna Lee

Larrakia

Lives and works in Naarm/Melbourne

***Category of Significance: Ancestral
(Tamarindus indica) 2025***

pages of *Aboriginal Words and Place Names*,
silk, wire, video projection

dimensions variable

Glass: Marcus Dillon

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery,
Naarm/Melbourne

Commissioned by Monash University Museum
of Art | MUMA, Naarm/Melbourne

Artist Statement

'In my art, I primarily work with second-hand colonial-settler books that were written about us, without us. I pull them apart and transform them into new forms with my intervention acting as the missing voice.'

—Jenna Lee, 2022

Introduction to the Artwork

First Nations artist Jenna Lee draws on her of Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman, KarraJarri Saltwater, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and Anglo-Australian ancestry to explore language, materiality and the stories we inherit.

Category of Significance: Ancestral (Tamarindus indica) is a multimedia installation inspired by the tamarind trees Lee grew familiar with during her childhood in Darwin. To create the work Lee has transformed multiple copies of the problematic text *Aboriginal Words and Place Names* into a material to make the sculptural paper seedlings. This historical publication presents a false idea of there being a singular Aboriginal language across Australia. Deeply intrigued by what is lost in translation, the artist has undertaken a meticulous process of deconstruction and reconstruction to reclaim cultural legacies. Additionally, Lee worked with glass blower Marcus Dillon to create the forms of the tamarind seeds and has overlaid the whole project with an evocative video projection simulating the movement of the wind in the trees.

Jenna Lee grew up knowing the tamarind tree as an important marker of place and signifier of Indigenous burial sites. Each of the fifteen sprouting paper and glass tamarind trees in the installation refers to a specific tree that is identified on the Northern Territory's *Register of Significant Trees*. Every tree represents a community who would have gathered in mourning, to remember, reflect and honour someone's life, under the shade of a tamarind tree. Trees are part of the landscape, easily overlooked without knowing this archival information, and the work creates a map of Country through botanical knowledge, story and heritage.

Learning Activities

- Tamarind trees produce edible fruit in pods that have a sweet tangy flavour used in many cuisines around the world. Have you ever tasted tamarind before? Do some research to find out more about some of the dishes where you might find the tamarind as an ingredient. You might like to buy some tamarind paste and experiment with cooking one of these dishes.
- Originally grown in Africa and Asia, tamarind trees were first introduced to Australia by the Makassan seafarers. As a reliable source of vitamin C, eating tamarind prevented the traders from becoming unwell with scurvy while at sea. Do some research about how historic sailors from different parts of the world who had no access to fresh food supplies prevented scurvy. What other kinds of foods were transported and where were these plants grown?
- Jenna Lee is a saltwater woman whose cultural traditions are related to coastal areas and the sea. There are many different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who live along the coastline where the ocean is an ancestor and provider, offering food, protection and guidance. Do some more research about other contemporary First Nations artists whose practice is connected to saltwater
- Jenna Lee's art practice often uses paper and pages from the book *Aboriginal Words and Place Names* as a material to sculpt with. What do you think the pages of this book represents within the context of Jenna's heritage and artwork?
- There is a dynamic projected element that is part of this installation. How does the movement in this projection add to the meaning of the work?
- The glass tamarind pods were made on campus at Monash University with expert collaborator Marcus Dillon. Why do you think including the glass material is integral to the work?

- Trees and plants have a life cycle and some change during the seasons. What stage of the life cycle are the tamarind trees within *Category of Significance: Ancestral (Tamarindus indica)* in?
- Look carefully at the trees around you at school and at home. Where do you think these trees come from? Do some further research to find out if they originate from Australia or were brought here from overseas?
- Are there any plants that remind you of people in your family? How do you feel when you see these plants? Design and make your own artwork inspired by a plant story that is significant to you.



Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Tanpa Sempadan
(Without Borders) 2023



Abdul-Rahman Abdullah
Malaysian Australian
Lives and works on Binjerup Noongar Country,
WA

Tanpa Sempadan (Without Borders) 2023
carved Jelutong wood, glass
35 × 270 × 115 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Moore Contemporary,
Boorloo/Perth
Image courtesy of the artist

Artist Statement

Reflecting on his mother's tales of crocodiles in the river through her kampung (village) in Sungai Linggi, Malaysia, the artist says:

'There seemed to be a casual brutality to their presence, swimming was fun, being dismembered by an apex predator was not. I imagined the vigilance it would take to enjoy the water and decided that I'd never test it.'

—Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, 2023

Introduction to the Artwork

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah is an artist who lives and works on Binjerup Noongar Country in the Peel region of Western Australia. His practice centres on sculpture and installation, exploring intersections between identity, culture and the natural world. He carves intricate sculptures by hand, often from timber of animals and objects that carry stories, drawing on personal and cultural histories.

Tanpa Sempadan (Without Borders) is a life-sized sculpture of a large saltwater crocodile, hand-carved by Abdul-Rahman over many months in his home studio on Binjerup Noongar Country. It is inspired by his mother's stories of the river running through her kampung (village) in Sungai Linggi, Malaysia which is home to one of the last wild crocodile populations in the Malay peninsula.

The crocodile is a powerful symbol in many cultures, appearing in mythologies from Egypt to the Pacific. The unpainted surface of the sculpture shows its raw material of pale wood, giving it an otherworldly quality. In Indonesian and Malay myths, the buayah putih is a white crocodile carrying spiritual or mystical significance.

A recurring figure or symbol, the white crocodile is said to occupy specific waters throughout Southeast Asia to South Africa. Take for example, the Seri Pahang of Chini Lake (Malaysia), Bujang Senang of Batang Lupar (Sarawak) or the creatures of Lake Fundizi (South Africa), Setu Bababkan (Java) and Kallang River (Singapore).

For Abdul-Rahman, the white crocodile represents not only *'a physical apparition that divides us from worlds beyond understanding'*¹ but a predator at *'top of the food chain with a territorial violence that parallels our own'*. As the title of his artwork suggests, it is a symbol of a borderless existence, moving from human to spiritual worlds, travelling the waters across boundaries between nations and cultures.

Tanpa Sempadan (Without Borders) explores the deep histories and shared waters that connect rather than separate people and species, questioning the boundaries and borders we force upon our world. It invites us to reflect on our own territorial instincts and relationship to the natural world, serving as *'a reminder that we're not the only monsters in this house'*.

Learning Activities

- Think about stories you have heard from family members about an animal. What feelings do these stories create, such as fear, respect or affection? What do they reveal about relationships between people and animals?
- The Jelutong wood used by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah has a pale, natural colour and a fine grain. By leaving the surface raw and unpainted, our attention is drawn to the material itself. Why might the artist have decided to do this? How does the colour affect the way you perceive the crocodile?
- The white crocodile appears in many myths and visual traditions across Southeast Asia and beyond. These stories often describe the white crocodile as a mystical creature that lives in specific rivers or oceans. Research myths and folklore involving the white crocodile across the Asia-Pacific region. What qualities or powers are attributed to the creature? Why do you think the white crocodile appears in different places and cultures? How do these stories help people understand the natural world and their place within it?
- The artwork's title *Tanpa Sempadan* means 'without borders' in Malay. Borders are often boundaries separating countries that have been created along geographical features such as mountains. Not simply lines on a map, borders are social, cultural and political constructs that shape how we understand identity and belonging. What kinds of borders do humans create, whether physical or shaped by values, beliefs and traditions?

¹ Source: <https://abdulrahmanabdullah.com/artwork/5137130-Tanpa%20Sempadan.html>

- Rivers and oceans are geographical features that connect rather than separate people, species and places. Waterways are spaces of movement used as routes for trade, migration and cultural exchange. Think about the waterways that are part of your own life and environment. These may include rivers, wetlands, beaches or even stormwater systems and the paths water take through your neighbourhood. Conduct a site visit and document your observations through photos, sketches, sound recordings, notes or samples where appropriate. How does this waterway function as a connector linking places, people, ecosystems or activities? What kinds of boundaries does it cross, whether geographical, environmental, social or personal?



Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA

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Opening Hours

Tue–Fri: 10am–5pm. Sat: 12–5pm

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA)

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Opening Hours

Tue–Sun: 12–5pm