

Ceramics Residency at JamFactory for Waringarri Arts artists Peggy Griffiths & Jan Griffiths



(L to R) Peggy Griffiths working with new techniques, Jan and Peggy Griffiths with JamFactory ceramic trainer Gus Clutterbuck. Works in progress during the residency. © Waringarri Arts 2017

The relationship between Waringarri Aboriginal Arts (WAA) in Kununurra and JamFactory in South Australia began in early 2016 when the art centre engaged JamFactory facilitators Gus Clutterbuck and Sylvia Nevisic to deliver ceramics and jewellery workshops to artists in the Waringarri studio.

JamFactory is a not-for-profit organisation which supports and promotes design and craftsmanship, providing skills and business training for artists and designers. With locations in Adelaide and Seppeltsfield in the Barossa, it incorporates retail spaces and purpose-built studios for ceramics, glass, furniture and metal design, where individual studios are able to be tenanted by artists.

After the success of the initial April 2016 workshops in Kununurra, follow-up workshops continued with ceramicist Gus Clutterbuck, who developed a strong relationship with the artists at Waringarri art centre. The JamFactory residency came about after Peggy Griffiths was awarded a DCA Creative Development Fellowship, it made sense to continue her work with Gus to develop her arts practice in ceramics and to broker an opportunity for Peggy along with her daughter Jan to visit the JamFactory studios and avail themselves of the state of the art facilities.

Working with ceramics is a new choice of medium for both Peggy and Jan Griffiths, indeed with Jan having only tried her hand at it for the very first time in 2016. Peggy had worked with ceramics once before, many years ago on a trip to Darwin with other Waringarri artists and her friend, the now deceased Daisy Biting, where they undertook workshops in printing and ceramics at Charles Darwin University. Remembering that experience and presented again with the opportunity to work with clay in the Waringarri studio, Peggy decided she wanted to have another go at it and asked her daughter Jan if she was interested in joining in, which in turn inspired Jan to give it a try.

Peggy is one of Waringarri Art's most senior, consistent and dedicated artists. Committed to her arts practise and cultural responsibilities, she has always demonstrated ardent support for the art centre and so it comes as no surprise that her reasoning for this most recent involvement was driven by, in her words; 'learning new things... it helps the art centre with new ideas.' And again, when asked what she was hoping for and looking forward to the most about the JamFactory residency her response; 'We were looking forward to it so that we could learn and bring ideas back to Waringarri Arts'.



(L to R) Jan & Peggy in the JamFactory ceramic workshop, Peggy feeling the clay, and sculptures ready for firing.
© Waringarri Arts 2017

Before attending the workshop in Adelaide, Peggy and Jan did a bit of research, examining work by other ceramic artists in recent exhibitions in Sydney including 'Clay Stories; Contemporary Indigenous Ceramics from Remote Australia' at Sabbia Gallery and 'Water Objects – Echoes' at Cross Arts Projects. However, both artists were resolute in the belief that what they saw was completely different to what they were trying to do.

And so, in April, rugged-up for the cold and excited about what was to come, the pair flew to Adelaide. The residency got underway with an exploratory visit to The Pug Mill, a ceramic and pottery supplier of glazes, stains, slips, tools, equipment and bisque ware where Peggy & Jan perused the range of materials available and considered possibilities. After being introduced to JamFactory facilitators and touring the studios, both Peggy and Jan were impressed by the layout and what they saw, and were especially taken by the glass making, which they both found fascinating. In the ceramics studio they were particularly interested in the numerous glazing techniques offering various outcomes that were available.

Peggy and Jan began by painting designs onto large pre-prepared platters and bowls, which Peggy in particular enjoyed, and from there they worked up to developing sculptural pieces. As Jan accounts; 'I felt doing plates wasn't the right for thing for me. I like doing 3D – making sculptures and figurines. When I started making figurines I had so many ideas. The clay just kind of showed me what it wanted to be.'



(L to R) Peggy painting platter and finished (unfired) work. © Waringarri Arts 2017

Jan's first foray into ceramics in 2016 immediately caught the eye of fellow artists and staff at Waringarri Arts. Her unique artistic approach and choice of subject matter was further validated when works were selected for inclusion in the Revealed 2017 exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre. 'For me it was a learning experience. It was the first time for me to work with ceramics and show other people. My ceramic sculptures were a story that was dedicated to my grandmother and her sister and to my uncle who was part of the stolen generation and someone our family lost. These sculptures are also dedicated to all the Stolen Generations people across Australia.' Another significant piece by Jan included in her Revealed installation was a life-size coolamon, she explains; 'I learnt to make the coolamon by slumping a slab of clay and then after that - after looking at the clay for a while the bush foods was what came to me.'



*(L to R) Platter, sculpture and coolamon installation by Jan Griffiths in the 2017 Revealed exhibition at Fremantle Art Centre.
© Waringarri Arts 2017*

During the course of the JamFactory residency, both artists experimented more with the clay than ever before, learning new glazing techniques, sgraffito and making different shapes. Peggy particularly liked the big roller they had for mixing and making slabs of clay and according to Jan, 'I learnt a lot more about making figurines – faces, hands and shaping people.' Neither artist struggled with any real or perceived pressure to produce during the residency, a true professional, Peggy brushed off the question of whether it was difficult to find inspiration, saying 'The more you do, the more ideas come to you.' And Jan's diligent approach saw her rise above the limited time pressure, 'My diary of ideas helps me. I do drawings and make notes about what I have been learning.'

As the residency progressed, both Jan and Peggy developed similar interest in new sculptural forms yet distinctly conveyed different approaches to subject matter. Known for paintings depicting the winding waterways, billabongs, hills, ant pits, spinifex and grass plains of her traditional country, Peggy's subject matter of choice to depict while working with ceramic was, as she puts it, 'My country.' Notably, Peggy chose to emphasize the hills of her country in sculptural form, for example her Jalin Hill sculpture – 'Jalin Hill is showing my country.' She steadfastly proclaims that 'Doing it in ceramics is the same as painting... it is the same way of storytelling as we do with our paintings. We are just using ceramics to tell the story.'



*(L to R) Assortment of landscape sculptures by Peggy Griffiths, Peggy at work, and Jalin Hill sculpture
© Waringarri Arts 2017*

Jan agrees, 'We are telling the same stories, sometimes just translating the same images from painting to ceramics.' Jan especially enjoyed the process of shaping the clay into figurines, 'I look at the clay for a while until I get the feeling of what it wants to be.' In terms of subject matter; 'I am

taking my Dad's paintings and making them into ceramics.' Jan's father, Alan Griffiths, is well known for his paintings that portray representations of country as well as his more light-hearted figurative paintings, characterised by small naïve style figures depicting cultural stories, corroborees and station life including cattle mustering and camel treks. As demonstrated by the performance group she made during the residency, in an effort to celebrate culture, understand and pass on family stories, Jan claims she is learning to translate her dad's stories via her figurines; 'These figures are telling the stories from my dad's painting and are a way for me to be learning these stories.'



*(L to R) Warrior by Jan Griffiths, her performance group sculpture in the making, and finished (unfired) work.
© Waringarri Arts 2017*

It's fair to say that both Peggy and Jan gained a lot from their experience at JamFactory and that new ceramic development now coming from Waringarri Arts will be worth keeping an eye on. Cathy Cummins, Waringarri Arts Manager, who accompanied Peggy & Jan for their first week enthused, 'It was so wonderful to be in such a creatively inspiring place! Peggy and Jan seemed to really enjoy their time and have learnt a lot of new techniques as well as creating a number of beautiful works.'

The Jam Factory has invited Peggy to exhibit in their Collect Gallery during this year's Tarnathi Festival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in October. The exhibition, a multi-media first for Peggy, will feature Peggy's ochre on canvas paintings alongside a selection of the new ceramic sculptural pieces, painted platters and bowls. Jan will also be included in the show with an adjoining selection of her work.

When collectively asked if they will continue making ceramics both Peggy and Jan respond with a resounding 'Yes'. However, when prompted to reveal what she plans for future ceramic making and the upcoming show, Peggy only fuels curiosity and anticipation, not giving anything away, she teasingly says with a big grin; 'You will have to wait and see!'

To keep abreast with new ceramic artwork developments be sure to follow the Waringarri Arts social media channels and check out their website www.waringariarts.com.au

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