



July 02, 2015

Dear Friends,

Here's the latest news from the Desert River Sea team in Broome - Enjoy!

Philippa & Geraldine



Image credit: (L to R) Garry Sibosado, Michael Jalaru Torres, Mark Nodea, Bianca Nargoodah, Lillie Spinks, Amanda Smith & Japarti Joseph Nuggett at the Visual Arts Leadership Program at the University of Notre Dame, Broome, May 2015. © AGWA 2015

Visual Arts Leadership Program, Broome 2015

An important component of the Desert River Sea Project is the Visual Arts Leadership Program. This was conceived as a means of both supporting Kimberley-wide art practice and forging sustainable links with individuals capable of being community contacts and conduits for engagement between AGWA and remote artists. To this end, Desert River Sea has sought motivated participants possessing a degree of arts industry experience and proven ability to pass knowledge and skills back to community.

The intention is to build on and support identified individual and community strengths.

An annual symposium and workshop is the principle event in the VAL program. This year Broome was selected as the location in order to facilitate remote participation, make use of local expertise and increase Kimberley awareness of the program and other Desert River Sea activities. The Notre Dame Campus proved an ideal venue, as both the accommodation and workshop facilities were located together in the lushly vegetated grounds. A select group drawn from across the Kimberley attended, some independent artists, others working in art centres or other arts organisations. This year's group included Mark Nodea (Warmun Art Centre), Lillie Spinks (Ngurra Art Centre), Japarti Joseph Nuggett (Mangkaja), Bianca Nargoodah (Mangkaja), Amanda Smith (Marnin Studio), Garry Sibosado (independent artist Lombadina) and Michael Torres (independent artist Broome).

The objectives of the event were practical as well as theoretical. Participants would leave inspired by new ideas and equipped with new practical skills directly applicable to their arts practice and to community cultural documentation projects. They would also be provided with networking opportunities with other industry professionals and distant Kimberley colleagues. In addition the workshop would look towards ensuring a Kimberley voice in the curatorial process both for a proposed minor exhibition as part of the 2016 workshop, and the major exhibition at AGWA in 2018.

To these ends the event's major focus was on Storytelling Theory and Practice, with Marketing, Story, and the Mainstream Art World as a sub-theme. The symposium component comprised presentations and discussions with arts industry professionals from a range of backgrounds. The practical workshop included training in the use of iPads and digital software designed for rapid acquisition of video compilation skills. It was intended that these tools would place the design of and control over the recording of art and cultural practices directly in the hands of participants, allowing for autonomy of representation and interpretation.

The first morning was spent on a trip out bush with local Karajarri elder and guide Jimmy Edgar, who welcomed participants to his country and introduced them to sites of interest around Roebuck Bay. The group sat around a campfire to listen to Edgar's perspective on storytelling drawn from his background as a singer-songwriter, dancer, actor and guide, and then chatted over billy tea and a freshly cooked stingray which had been delivered wriggling on the end of a spear by a passing fisherman. Back on campus, the afternoon was dedicated to Tim Pearn's presentation on marketing and Aboriginal art and the place of 'story' within this, followed by a round table discussion of the workings of the broader mainstream art world.

The second day was the Storytelling conceptual component of the event. Wayne Barker

(Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre), Pat Lowe (author), Bernadette Trench-Thiedeman (animator), Erin Parke (journalist) and Michael Torres (photographer) spoke and encouraged discussion on their own work. Participants then followed suit with highly engaging presentations on painting, pearl shell engraving, textile art and other specific art centre projects.

The final day was dedicated to practical activities. Participants received demonstrations in software designed for compiling audio, photography and video files into short films using iPads. This was followed by the completion of a filmed piece by each participant on their own artwork or art centre, all of which are now available to view on the Visual Arts Leadership Program section of the Desert River Sea website, as well as on Facebook. As first videos, they are impressive.

Several art centre managers have noted that participants have continued this process on their return home and are planning ways to screen these films for art centre visitors; others are keen to start recording family stories as well. Artists such as Garry Sibosado, working independently of art centres and without marketing support, were excited by the promotional potential of the videos for their own practice.

The Broome office would like to thank everyone involved in making this year's event so rewarding, particularly the participants who were unflagging in their enthusiasm. We can't wait to see what next year's event brings!

For more images of the event click [here](#)



Image credit: (L to R) View of the new gallery space, Yarliyil staff Juanita Petrevski & Jeannette Swan at the new gallery front counter, view of the new gallery space.

Yarliyil Artists Thrilled with New Art Centre Studio & Gallery

Desert River Sea hit the road in May to touch base with art centres and other art making communities along the trail between Broome and Halls Creek.

We travelled east to Halls Creek to explore the new building that's just been completed for the Yarliyil Art Centre. We arrived a week before the official opening and Art Centre coordinator Jeannette Swan treated us to a lengthy tour of the purpose built gallery

space, storage areas and indoor and outdoor studio. Jeannette and newly appointed gallery assistant, Juanita Petrevski, had only just finished moving everything over from the previous premises and setting up the new space. A smoking ceremony had been scheduled for the following day and we were privileged to be there when artists Bidy Timbinah, Lulu Trancollino and Maggie Long arrived and saw the interior of the building for the first time. Bidy in particular expressed how touched she felt by the inclusion of paintings by the art centre's most prominent male artist, who had passed away the previous year.

The Studio area was dedicated to this temporary display of Mr Brumby's vibrant canvases. Arrayed on easels in this generous space they illustrate his ability in later life to work in an identifiable 'Halls Creek painting style' and yet develop its motifs into an aesthetic entirely his own. As advancing years caused an increasing physical frailty, so his style of dotting shifted away from a formal precision to become less precise. The authority with which he depicted his preferred subject matter (often the country around Wolfe Creek Crater for which he was a senior custodian) is reinforced by this more dynamic painted surface. Viewers are further drawn to his distinctive use of colour and form, often combining strong dark hues with vivid warm blues and purples in bold motifs and sparse dotting, lending a simultaneous delicacy and strength to his compositions. These works on display are a moving testament to the gentle nature of this Jaru man who, similar to many older Kimberley artists, spent his working life as a stockman caring for cattle and country across a wide swathe of the north.

Out the front, the Gallery area displays numerous works illustrating the diverse styles in which Halls Creek artists choose to work. Some of the younger emerging artists are experimenting with naturalism; there is certainly a history of landscape and figurative painting in the town, particularly amongst those working independently. The group of senior women who are at the heart of painting activity at Yarliyil are working in a more classical tradition however, offering works steeped in history, culture and a desert aesthetic. They are colourful expositions of country, from the highly-keyed depictions of soak waters by Rosie Lala, to the loosely dotted meditations on distant tracts of land traversed by Bidy Timbanah and the linear blues of Lulu Trancollino's Ord River country. In the few years since the art centre was re-established, there has also been abundant evidence of a willingness to experiment, particular in response to studio development projects. Currently Edwina Circuitt is supporting a flush of new work emerging from the Yarliyil studio verandah.

Jeannette tells us what the new building means for the artists and the community in an interview we conducted with her - to watch the video click [here](#)



Image credit: Artists Mary Puntji Clement and Gwen Clarke painting at the Kira Kiro Kalumburu Art Centre Studio © AGWA 2012

Kalumburu Filming

Desert River Sea is pleased to announce that the next round of filming in partnership with FTI for Indigenous Community Stories has been confirmed. In mid-July DRS Broome staff and the ICS film crew will be making the long trek to Kalumburu on the far north Kimberley coast, where a number of senior women will be recorded talking about their life stories and their art.

As those familiar with the Desert River Sea website will know Kalumburu artists have only recently been the beneficiaries of art centre support, with the Kira Kiro studio commencing operation in 2009. In six short years the core group of artists here have extended their painting practice from tentative copies of local rock art on canvas (for some their very first foray into painting), to large stylistically diverse pigment works now attracting national attention. Two of these women, Mary Puntji Clement and Betty Bundamurra have also exhibited works in China as part of a joint show with Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. This rapid development did not arise out of a vacuum however. The Kalumburu community has a unique cross-cultural history, even amongst the manifold Indigenous histories played out across Australia since European settlement.

The traditional custodians of north Kimberley coastal country experienced contact with Makassan trepang traders and early pearlers before Spanish Benedictine missionaries established an outpost of the New Norcia Mission in 1908. In the following decades Aboriginal people from areas further afield chose or were forced to live at the mission as a result of the pressures of pastoral activities and government policies of population control and containment. It became therefore something of a cultural melting pot and despite mission opposition to many traditional activities, various art practices remained strong. The roots of the contemporary art movement reach back decades as trade in art and artefacts, sometimes experimental in form, functioned as cultural as well as economic exchange between locals and Europeans.

With a rich traditional inheritance of visual arts practice, whether as the rock art, performance or object enhancement, as well as a history of settler interest in these traditions, it is not surprising that painting practice at the art centre quickly developed.

We hope that the filming of individual stories will lend nuance to this moving and complex history. Watch the next newsletter for the story on the Stories.

DRS Display at AGWA

If you happen to be in Perth between the 18th July and 7th September make sure you visit AGWA. There will be a display highlighting the *Desert River Sea: Kimberley Art Then & Now* project, screening artist stories captured during the 2014 collaboration with FTI's Indigenous Community Stories, alongside selected Kimberley artworks from the State Art Collection.

Read more [here](#).



Image credit: One of the Bardi dancers performing at the Essence of Ardi Festival, Lombadina © AGWA 2015

The Essence of Ardi Festival

On Saturday the 30th May the Lombadina community hosted the Essence of Ardi Festival. Hoped to be the first of many, this inaugural event aspired to showcase the culture, coast and country of the region through arts & crafts, cultural demonstrations, food, live music and dance performances.

Lombadina is located right on the coast, north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula. Home to the 'saltwater' Bard people, connection to the ocean has shaped local culture on many levels including traditional Law, recreation and diet. It is also evident in their art, particularly the coastal subjects depicted on pearl shells and totems used in traditional dances.

As we arrived a spear making demonstration was underway with visitors being shown how to straighten the timber shaft over an open flame. The spears commonly used around the Dampier Peninsula are a clever hybrid design, incorporating old and new materials – timber shafts, fishing line binding and steel rod points. Testament to the success of these spears mainly used for fishing, they were selling like hotcakes to locals and visitors alike.

The event organizers had skilfully recreated a traditional coastal scene; presented on a sandy bed the display included a paperbark shelter, campfire complete with shell midden and *galwa*, the traditional rafts of the North West Kimberley. To the organizers delight (and most probably also minor frustration) the inviting scene acted like a magnet to delighted and rambunctious children!

A temporary outdoor art exhibition was set-up showcasing the fine arts produced by locals including prints by Caroline Sibosado, pearl and ochre shell carvings by Garry Sibosado, *Ilma* by Roy Wiggan, *Riji* design prints by Darrell Sibosado and acrylic on canvas paintings by Ashley Hunter. Illuminated at nightfall this charming exhibition space was an alluring first port of call for most visitors upon entry to the festival, as well as a successful representation of the talent and artistic range of local artists.

For visitors seeking to purchase, the Lombadina Art & Craft Centre had a stall with smaller crafts, textiles and silk scarves available for sale. The Ardyaloon Women's Centre as well as the Djarindjin Women's Centre were also represented with stalls selling hand printed textiles and other artworks.

For people hoping to meet and chat to local artists, this event was wonderful because most of the artists represented either in the exhibition or stalls were present and enjoying the entertainment themselves. We had a bit of a "fan moment" when we learned that artists Roy Wiggan and Paul Sampi were happy to chat with us at length about their arts practice (amongst other things.)

A long list of talented local music performers kept the crowd entertained on the main stage throughout the evening which was capped off by a brilliant performance by the Bardi Dancers. The Bardi Dancers, accompanied by songmen, are a traditional male dance troupe comprised of elders and future leaders of the Bardi people. Originating from the Ardyaloon Community (formerly One Arm Point) these dancers perform in their distinctive style wielding *Ilma*, intricate totems, and wearing engraved pearl shell *Riji*.

Overall, the Essence of Ardi was great fun for visitors and we sincerely hope it becomes an annual event!

For more images and video click [here](#).



Upcoming Mowanjum Festival

The annual Mowanjum Festival is coming up soon; the event is taking place during NAIDOC week, on the 9th July. Held at Mowanjum Arts and Culture Centre on the Gibb River road 12 kilometres from Derby, this celebration is Western Australia's largest traditional Aboriginal performance event and is now in its eighteenth consecutive year. Due to recent funding cuts, the event organisers have had to make some serious adjustments by reducing the amount of visiting performers and by operating with a skeleton staff. Despite challenges, Mowanjum Arts & Culture aims to demonstrate that in a climate of uncertainty surrounding proposed community closures it can show cultural strength and promote reconciliation.

This year around 2000 visitors are expected to attend. Tickets can be bought at the gate with the festival open to the general public from 2pm. A variety of cultural workshops will be run including didgeridoo playing, boab nut carving and ochre painting. There are several new additions to this year's program. There will be a shadow puppet performance, as well as traditional bush medicine workshops conducted by the Yiriman Project, which will provide an opportunity for guests to learn about ancient healing techniques from Aboriginal practitioners. The corroboree starts at 6pm after the sun sets; guest performers at this year's event will be dancers all the way from Balgo.

For more information please contact Mowanjum Art & Culture Centre 9191 1008



Art Gallery of Western Australia
Cultural Centre Perth
WA 6000

+61 8 9492 6622 24hrs
desertriversea@artgallery.wa.gov.au
www.desertriversea.com.au



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