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ABOUT OUR COVER

Featured on our cover is
Kunjinji fibre artist Marina
Murdilnga at Kubumi in north-
east Arnhem Land. Marina
is one of 33 artists featured
in the touring exhibition
*Menagerie: Contemporary
Indigenous Sculpture* and is
profiled on page 44.
Photo: Nicole Foreshew.
Courtesy the artist and
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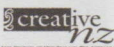
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WARNING

TO INDIGENOUS READERS

This issue of Object Magazine
may contain names and images
of deceased Indigenous people.

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Object brings together eight influential women of craft and design in Australia. Jane Burns discusses the very forceful and fruitful years of activity in studio crafts and design over the past 40 years.

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Marina Murdilnga's woven sculpture is refined and beautiful, and features in *Menagerie: Contemporary Indigenous Sculpture*. Nicole Foreshew, co-curator of the exhibition, writes.

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tayenebe

*I've heard Trucanini say she had got crawfish
in a basket and a shark came and she popped
the basket with the fish in his mouth,
and while he was eating it she got away.'*

Tasman Smith, 1910¹

WORDS BY JULIE GOUGH

Tasmanian Aboriginal baskets are unique. So are the women who make them. The almost immediate effects of colonisation on our people was to reduce our numbers to near non-existence. Two centuries later, more than 30 Tasmanian Aboriginal women and girls are working together to share, learn, recommence and pass on traditional kelp and plant weaving skills. *Tayenebe* – the workshops and the exhibition – celebrate Tasmanian Aboriginal women together. Each basket signifies more than its obvious physical purpose of containing and carrying objects.

The baskets are not empty. They are full of makers, their stories, their thoughts while making. All of the thoughts jump out of the baskets onto all of us.
Verna Nichols, 2008²

Almost 80 objects woven over the past two years from more than seven different types of lilies, rushes, sedges and irises, or shaped from bull kelp (*Durvillaea potatorum*), are exhibited in *Tayenebe*. The process of making is as important as the works themselves. The baskets represent the restorative experience of weaving, through which reconnection with extended

family, Ancestors, skills and knowledge, plants and Country is occurring.

It [weaving] tells me a lot about our early people, about our mothers and families and their movements in the seasons. The plants would be better in some areas than they would be in others, so it identifies movement in the country ... and that's so important, as far as where I've got from first discovering the plant to then discovering more about my own people.
Audrey Frost, 2008³

The return to making traditional objects in Tasmania is a powerful affirmation of the resilience of our people and culture. Only 37 historic Tasmanian Aboriginal twined baskets are known to survive in institutions across the world. These feature the s-stitch directional twist, unique to Australia.

The baskets that the women use for fishing have some worth, from the great amount of work that must go into them, and so they place considerable value on them and will only exchange them with reluctance.
Nicholas Baudin, 1802⁴

Our objects of culture, as with our Ancestors, were historically considered so special that they were consistently taken

and exhibited. Tasmanian Aboriginal people, post-colonisation, necessarily changed focus from living to surviving, and, more recently, to redressing the plunder of culture and Country by political action. These circumstances left little time for making. Creative work, until recently, has been considered a luxury, and pursued in private – and The Museum, any museum, has been regarded with suspicion.

Tayenebe is a south-east Tasmanian Aboriginal word that means *exchange*. In this spirit Tasmanian Aboriginal people commenced dialogue with the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 2003 to assist the NMA in developing an exhibition presenting contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. A collection of new material culture was made by dozens of contributors, in which the makers' identities, stories and materials were intrinsic. This relationship paved the way for the NMA publication, *Keeping Culture*,⁵ and in partnership with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) and Arts Tasmania the *Tayenebe* workshops program began in 2006. In 2008 the allied exhibition began to take form, with the appointment of a guest curator and the TMAG as the exhibition host.

Right: Vicki Maikutena
Watson-Green, Patsy
Cameron, Dulcie Greeno,
Patsy Cameron, Audrey Frost,
Baskets (l-r), white flag iris
(*Diplazaria moraea*), 2008.
Photo: Simon Cuthbert



I am making these baskets to learn. It's the skill. It's my connecting with culture. It's family. I think that we're weaving family into our basket.
Tahana Rimmer⁶

The complexity of *Tayenebe*, for the weavers and their families, and for the museums and galleries involved, gives it its longevity and resonance. The work of Elders, past and present, in the exhibition reminds everyone of the work that has gone before, and directs the responsibility for the maintenance and development of cultural practices to the next generation of makers.

More than anything, *Tayenebe* is, for the weavers involved, about reconnecting, about being in the right place, physically, emotionally, spiritually. The pressures of contemporary life are suspended for the fingers to be able to work a plant into a vessel.

Your heart's got to be in it. Your heart and soul have to be in it, and if you don't have that all you are doing is just weaving a basket. And it would mean nothing.
Nannette Shaw, 2008⁷

When Trucanini told her story of how a basket saved her life, little could she have

imagined how baskets would resurface to also sustain Tasmanian Aboriginal women generations later. 'Not lost, just sleeping' – in Verna Nichols' words⁸ – the reemergence of these objects, and the skills and knowledge to create them, make manifest how aspects of culture can endure quietly, waiting for their reason to return.

We're weaving our stories into our baskets.
Eva Richardson, 2008 ○

Tayenebe – Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work opened on 6 July 2009 at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, where it runs until 29 November. During 2010–11 Tayenebe tours nationally, thanks to Visions Australia, and to the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Casula Powerhouse, Sydney; Queensland Museum, Brisbane; Flinders University Museum, Adelaide; and the Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne. The exhibition features the work of Sonia Brown, Patsy Cameron, Kylie Dickson, Leonie Dickson, Audrey Frost, Betty Grace, Aunty Dulcie Greeno, Jacqui Langdon, Tanya Langdon, Vicki Maikutena Matson-Green, Fiona Maher, Aunty Muriel Maynard (dec.), Colleen Mundy, Aunty Lennah Newson (dec.), Ila Purdon (Auntie Girlie), Verna Nichols, Eva Richardson,

Tahana Rimmer, Zoe Rimmer, Nannette Shaw, Fanny Cochrane Smith (dec.), Nayda Smith, Trucanini (dec.), an unknown maker (dec.), Aunty Ida West (dec.) and Vicki West. An 81-page catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

Notes

1. N.J.B. Plomley, Caroline Goodall, Ernest Westlake and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (Launceston, Tas.), *The Westlake papers: records of interviews in Tasmania by Ernest Westlake, 1908–1910* (N.J.B. Plomley; with the assistance of Lynda Manley and Caroline Goodall, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania, 1991, p. 109.
2. Verna Nichols in conversation with the author (November), 2008.
3. Audrey Frost in conversation with the author (November), 2008.
4. Baudin, N, 1974, *Journal of Nicholas Baudin 1800 – 1803*, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide, p.345.
5. Amanda Jane Reynolds (ed.), *Keeping Culture: Aboriginal Tasmania*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2006.
6. Tahana Rimmer in conversation with the author (November), 2008.
7. Nannette Shaw in conversation with the author (November), 2008.
8. Verna Nichols in conversation with the author in 2008.

Julie Gough is an artist, writer and curator who lives in Hobart. Julie's art and research focuses on uncovering and re-presenting often conflicting and subsumed histories. Much of Julie's work refers to the impacts of colonialism, and her own and her family's experiences as Tasmanian Aboriginal people.