

Erub Arts



Yumpla 'everybody together'

Exhibition Catalogue
4 December – 29 Decemberr 2018

Yumpla – Everybody Together

Torres Strait stories, song and dance are powerful – like the waves, tide and wind that surround their island homes. Erub (Darnley Island) in the far north east of the Torres Strait, Queensland is home to 400 Erubam le (people) whose ancestors carved wooden canoes, significant stones and decorated weapons, dance ornaments and masks. Today the lines and rhythm of stories and histories are told in many ways and Erub Arts has evolved to provide a space for the development of a contemporary arts practice. Known internationally for their ghost net work (abandoned fishing nets) Erub artists present the exhibition *Yumpla – everybody together*, highlighting their stories and connections to the past in their foundational mediums of wood fired clay and charcoal drawings.

Many of the basalt rock formations on the island have significance in human legends as the people appear to merge with their surroundings as humans and the rock of the island become one. This is evident in the



Erub Artists
Sai Sai Le (people of the fishtraps) 2018
Ceramic
120 x 120 x 240cm

large ceramic work *Sai Sai Le (People of the Fish Traps)* with its representation of the stone fish traps that surround the island and the stacks of round rocks representing a family walking out on the low tide to collect fish.

The smaller ancestral figures are modern interpretations of rock carved figures from before-time, these figurative sculptures bear family names and often carry the characteristics of family members. Maryann Sebasio used a historical drawing from the 'Rattlesnake' voyage to recreate a family outside their hut – this family is Maryann's ancestors. Lavinia Ketchell takes this idea further by creating herself and her identical twin sister, expressing the notion of same but different. Jimmy K Thaiday works to revitalise cultural stories and spirit through objects and weapons, researching and recounting warrior conflicts and the proud tradition of Torres Strait men.

The charcoal drawings surrounding the figures have a strong velvety quality, many of these works have been collected by the Queensland Art Gallery and these drawings create a dialogue between the human forms, totems, and marks that were used as scarification and tattoos. The ladies have worked to create patterns that tell these stories.

The large scale charcoal work was one of two early works made when Erub artists and community members first explored their connections to New Caledonia and Lifou through the 1871 missionary event 'Coming of the Light' – Nosik Muri ged ge (young people of a far away land) is an important collaborative work led by Jimmy K Thaiday in 2013. It is the fore-runner to the work currently on display at the APT GOMA. This early work is raw, vital and highly energetic, alive with the immediacy



Ethel Charlie
Untitled 2018
Ceramics, natural fibres,
ghost net
33 x 35 x 20cm



Jimmy Kenny Thaiday
Ares Le Era Weku (Warriors' Anger) 2018
Ceramics, natural fibres,
ghost net
50 x 30 x 16cm

of first mark marking and reconnection of people separated by ocean and political borders.

These works, on show together for the first time show how new possibilities have created depth that comes from research and investigation.

Racy Oui-Pitt says *"I see things more clearly now, and it makes me look around at things in nature. I see potential in all things, ideas come more easily and I am able to express them."*

Florence Gutchen says *"We come back alive through our artwork now – it is time now for a revival."*



Ellarose Savage
Mother of the Sand 2012
Watercolour & charcoal on paper
116 x 156cm

Note: on large charcoal

Erub Arts first discussed the idea of connecting with lost families in the Pacific in 2007, after six of the centres founding artists had their lino prints – depicting the Coming of the Light - hung in the Telstra Awards. The artists have continued to develop this theme and subsequently continue to explore this history. There are four important events that underlie and inform the work, events separated by time, national borders and ocean.

In 1871, English and Kanak missionaries travelled from Lifou in New Caledonia to Erub, in the Torres Strait, to spread Christianity. This event is known as the Coming of the Light.

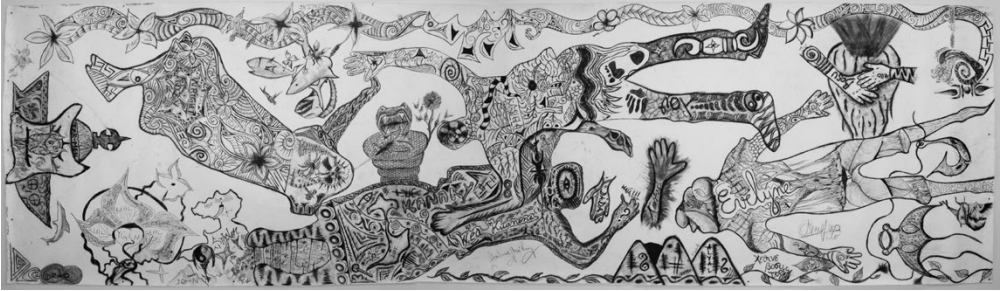
In 2011, descendants of these original Kanak missionaries travelled to Erub trying to find descendants of the missionaries, who were essentially their long lost family.

In 2013, a group of Erubian artists and their families travelled to Lifou to try and find family connections and also to develop new artwork which forms part of this exhibition.

In 2018, and group returned to Lifou with the support of QAGOMA and Tjibaou Cultural Centre, to create more large-scale charcoal panels

On Lifou, the Erubian artists discovered that many Lifou families had farewell their missionary ancestors, never to hear from them again. For many of them, the visit by the artists and their families was the first contact that they had had for 142 years. The large charcoal on paper scrolls represents these chance encounters between Lifou Islanders and their Torres Strait relatives, with those from both islands having their outlines traced and later decorated under the guidance of Erub artist, Jimmy K Thaiday. Erub Elder, Lesley Pitt described the progression of the drawings *"At first there appeared to be just lines with no true meaning but the next day as people came and drew together they put life into the paper, it was the people who made it (the art) come to life."* Each person had something to say about themselves, their connections to place and family.

Lynnette Griffiths - 2018



Erub Artists, *Nosik muris ged ge (young people of a far away land)* 2013, Charcoal on paper, 150 x 530cm

Photography: Lynnette Griffiths

Front image:

Maryann Sebasio, *Akur Meta* 2014, Ceramics, wire, natural fibre and ghost net, dimensions variable

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