

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan September 2024 – September 2026

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RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN
INNOVATE

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Acknowledgement of Country

The National Gallery of Australia respectfully acknowledges that we are on the Country of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples of the Kamberri/Canberra region. We recognise their continuing connections to Country and culture, and we pay our respects to their Elders, leaders and artists, past and present.

We respectfully acknowledge all Traditional Custodians throughout Australia whose art we care for and to whose lands National Gallery exhibitions and staff travel.

Warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that this publication may contain images and words of, and references to, people who have passed away. Where possible, permission has been sought to include this material.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placenames

The National Gallery of Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage by including First Nations placenames in the publication. The placenames are current at the time of print but may change over time.

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Place

A building is nothing without strong foundations, and ours are rooted deeply in Ngunnawal Country. We acknowledge all Traditional Custodians who have a connection to this place, including those who identify or name themselves differently, including the Ngambri, with whom the National Gallery has also had a strong relationship over many years. We also recognise that our place is part of a rich and connected cultural landscape and, therefore, we acknowledge the Gundangara to the north-east, the Wiradjuri and Walgalu to the west, the Ngarigo to the south and the Yuin to the east as neighbours in this cultural region. The pathways through the landscape that these groups travelled, traded and connected are among the oldest surviving and continuing networks in existence, and are a constant reminder that this place has always been a part of connecting to and sharing with a much wider world.

Of course, the National Gallery, like all Australian institutions, was not established with any meaningful connections to its local First Nations community or with any understanding of or reverence for the Country upon which it was built. Indeed, many institutions are heavily implicated in the policies and practices that excluded and marginalised First Nations people and culture.

As a young institution, we could easily convince ourselves that we have little linking us to earlier colonial processes. However, locally we must realise that almost every family was removed from the region to make way for colonial settlement and to create a national capital; that their cultures and languages were all but decimated by the genocidal ambitions of colonial and government policy, leaving communities today a legacy of violence and trauma through which they must navigate in order to mend and rebuild; and that many of

their sites of significance were flooded or flattened to make way for new national monuments like the National Gallery. We acknowledge our place in this history and commit ourselves to working with First Nations communities across our region and our nation to ensure First Nations communities and culture have a chance to build, grow and flourish as the very heart of our national cultural landscape, because we know that art allows us to speak truth and to heal. Art has and will change our world.

In celebrating our 40th anniversary, we also recognise that our presence in and on this place is minute. 40 years of 40 000, 60 000, more. The quantum of time First Nations people have spent in this place is unimaginable to any other human, and today connection to Country is understood as the compound experiences of tens of thousands of generations of existence on this land.

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Once, the Gallery saw itself as a balloon, floating above its geographical locale, viewing itself as entirely ‘national’ and bypassing the ‘local’. As we take on the responsibility of mending and strengthening the connections that First Nations families and communities have with our space and our collections, we begin to see ourselves as a tree: our roots firmly established right here in Ngunnawal Country, our building is our body, the core of our being, while our business reaches every corner of this continent, stretching far and wide like branches.

As a nation, we have always revered the National Gallery as an institution and its building as a masterpiece of Australian brutalist architecture and a great storehouse for Australian cultures. But only recently have we begun to truly acknowledge, embrace and love our place in the world in equal measure.

Bruce Johnson McLean
Wierdi | Birri Gubba people

Assistant Director First Nations
Engagement (2020–2024),
National Gallery of Australia

This essay was first published in Nick Mitzevich, Bruce Johnson McLean, Philip Goad, Lucina Ward and Simeran Maxwell, *Vision: art, architecture and the National Gallery of Australia*, Black Inc, an imprint of Schwartz Books, Melbourne, 2022, p 16.

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‘Positioning First Nations art and artists first is central to our vision as a national institution and our role to inspire through cultural experiences.’

**Ryan Stokes AO, Chair, National Gallery of Australia Council
and Dr Nick Mitzevich, Director, National Gallery of Australia**

Message from Council Chair and Director

It is a privilege to present the National Gallery of Australia's *Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024–2026*.

As caretaker of the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, the National Gallery of Australia (the Gallery) has played a critical role in showcasing the voices and culture of the First Nations peoples of Australia.

From works created on Zenadth Kes Torres Strait Islands in the north to Nipaluna / Hobart in the south and Mparntwe / Alice Springs at our centre, the national collection celebrates artists from across our country.

Aligning with the National Cultural Policy *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* we are committed to continuing to embed First Nations culture and histories at the heart of our creative program and acquisitions activity.

We will continue to collaborate with and share the stories of First Nations Communities and artists in a commitment to deepen understanding and respect of culture across Australia and the globe. Privileging First Nations art and artists is central to our vision as a national institution and to our role to inspire through cultural experiences.

The Gallery is passionate about and committed to elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and perspectives to enrich Australia's culture and national identity. To realise our vision, we will broaden our focus, build our capacity and strengthen capability.

The implementation of the *Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024–2026* embeds our commitment to elevating First Nations art and artists in all we do as stewards of the National Gallery.

Ryan Stokes AO

Chair, National Gallery of Australia Council

Dr Nick Mitzevich

Director, National Gallery of Australia

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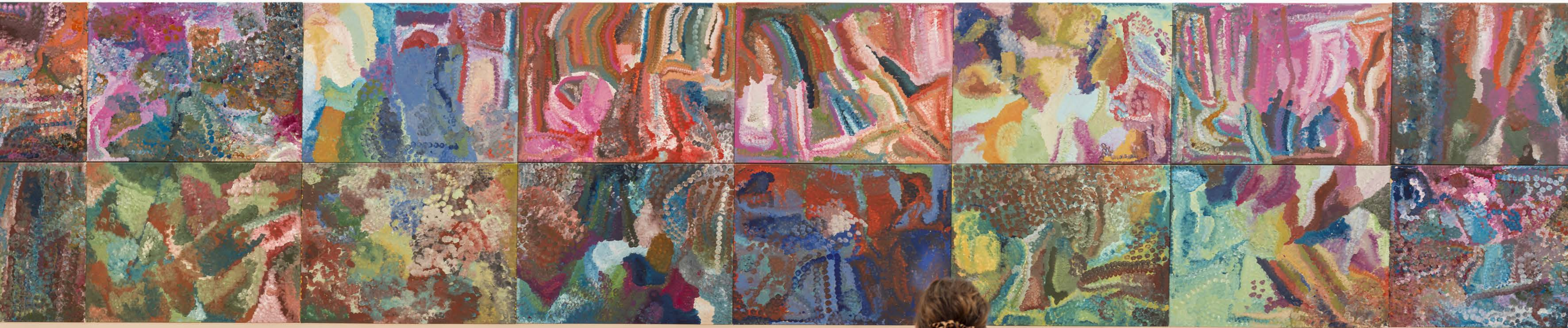
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Message from Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia commends the National Gallery of Australia on the formal endorsement of its inaugural Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Commencing an Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build strong foundations and relationships, ensuring sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

This Innovate RAP is both an opportunity and an invitation for the National Gallery of Australia to expand its understanding of its core strengths and deepen its relationship with its community, staff, and stakeholders.

By investigating and understanding the integral role it plays across its sphere of influence, the National Gallery of Australia will create dynamic reconciliation outcomes, supported by and aligned with its business objectives.

An Innovate RAP is the time to strengthen and develop the connections that form the lifeblood of all RAP commitments. The RAP program's framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities emphasises not only the importance of fostering consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, but also empowering and enabling staff to contribute to this process, as well.

With close to 3 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. The National Gallery of Australia is part of a strong network of more than 2,500 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and intention, and transformed it into action.

Previous page: installation view, *Emily Kam Kngwarray*, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra featuring Emily Kam Kngwarray, Anmatyerr people, *The Alhalker suite*, 1993, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 1993 © Emily Kam Kngwarray/Copyright Agency, 2024

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Implementing an Innovate RAP signals the National Gallery of Australia's readiness to develop and strengthen relationships, engage staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and pilot innovative strategies to ensure effective outcomes.

Getting these steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations to the National Gallery of Australia on your Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

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**Art can powerfully nurture
understanding, appreciation
and respect for First Nations
cultures and histories.**

Our vision for reconciliation

Art can powerfully nurture understanding, appreciation and respect for First Nations cultures and histories.

Our vision is to promote greater understanding, recognition, respect and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, artists and Communities.

We want to be an institution that listens to and empowers First Nations peoples and artists to tell their own stories, to present their own art and art histories and to speak truths—a space in which First Nations people and artists have agency to feel confident, to share and to lead.

We are committed to advocating for greater reconciliation within the art and cultural sector through elevating the presence, protocols, voices, stories and histories of First Nations peoples and to inspire meaningful engagement and action throughout our sphere of influence.

installation view, *Vincent Namatjira: Australia in colour*, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra featuring Vincent Namatjira, Western Aranda people, *Australia in Colour*, 2021, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased in celebration of the National Gallery of Australia's 40th anniversary, 2022 © Vincent Namatjira/Copyright Agency, 2024



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Located on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the National Gallery building opened to the public in October 1982 and is the Commonwealth of Australia's national cultural institution for the visual arts. Since its establishment in 1967, the Gallery has played a leadership role in shaping visual arts and culture across Australia and its regions. It continues to develop exciting and innovative ways to engage Australian and international visitors to share our national art collection.

As Australia's pre-eminent visual arts institution, the National Gallery provides social and cultural benefits to the community and enhances Australia's international reputation. The Gallery aims to increase understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of the visual arts by providing access to, and information about, works of art locally, nationally and internationally.

In a continually transforming world, our artistic programs reflect changing social contexts and audiences and highlight the stories and histories of all Australians. At the same time, we embrace global ideas, challenge our audiences and disrupt conventions with new concepts and forms of cultural expression. This vision includes increasing the representation of women in the artistic program and expanding the Gallery's role in elevating First Nations peoples, histories and cultures.

The National Gallery's ambitions and strategic objectives align with Australia's Cultural Policy *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* and our key strategic initiatives are positioned alongside the five pillars of that policy. The way we go about our work at the National Gallery is just as important as the outcomes we achieve.

Of our 383 staff, 2.6% identify as First Nations people and we have several roles dedicated to enhancing First Nations perspectives and voices in our work.

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First Nations principles are integrated into the Gallery's Ethics Framework, with the first ethical principle to 'be informed by First Nations perspectives, seek out and consider the perspectives of First Nations peoples and aspire to a deep and genuine connection to First Nations Communities'. The National Gallery's First Nations Advisory Group provides guidance and advice to the Director. It ensures the Gallery is informed by First Nations perspectives and helps us build deep and genuine connection to Country and Community.

All key plans, policies and frameworks at the Gallery seek to enact First Nations perspectives. Our organisational values outline our commitment to 'First Nations knowledge and perspectives inform and guide our work' and our leadership expectations 'promise to lead with a whole-of-gallery, First Nations first and growth mindset, uniting our people behind the strategic priorities'.

In 2022 we established action plans that aim to position the Gallery as a leader in an equitable and thriving creative sector. These plans include a [Gender Equity Action Plan](#), [Environmental Sustainability Action Plan](#) and [Disability Inclusion Action Plan](#). These action plans embed goals and deliverables relating to First Nations peoples and underpin the commitment to improving and championing First Nations representation.

Penny Evans, K/Gamilaroi people, gudhuwali, installing *BURN*, 2022, commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra for the 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony with the support of Pamela Pearce and Wally Patterson through the Patterson Pearce Foundation, image courtesy and © the artist



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**Through our Reconciliation Action Plan,
we lay the foundations to ensure that
First Nations art, cultures and engagement
remain central to who we are.**

Our Reconciliation Action Plan

Our history of reconciliation

First Nations art and culture is at the heart of the Gallery's identity. The Gallery's first director, James Mollison, began collecting Aboriginal art for the national collection in 1972 alongside other outstanding works from around the world. In 1987, when Australia prepared to mark the bicentennial of the invasion of the first British fleet on Bidegal and Gadigal Country, Mollison commissioned *The Aboriginal Memorial* 1987–88. Created by Djon Mundine OAM and 43 Yolngu artists from Ramingining and surrounding Communities, this major acquisition was a statement of commitment to the representation of Australia's First Nations art. In 2007, the Gallery established Australia's first and most significant

recurrent exhibition series of First Nations art: the National Indigenous Art Triennial. Three years later, the Gallery opened the largest display spaces dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the world.

To accelerate our ability to make an impact, we increased our First Nations staffing profile in 2019. In 2022, we established the First Nations Advisory Group to provide independent advice to the Gallery on matters concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, art and cultures. Having a group of independent First Nations advisors has strengthened the ways we work with First Nations art, artists and Communities.. It has also further connected us to the broader First Nations cultural and artistic landscape.

The Gallery is committed to making and realising ongoing impactful change within our institution and sector. We will continue to strive to create a better future for all Australians through our exhibitions and public learning programs. Through our Reconciliation Action Plan, we lay the foundations to ensure that First Nations art, culture and engagement remain central to who we are.

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Our Reconciliation Action Plan (continued)

The pillars of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is based upon the four pillars of relationships, respect, opportunities and governance.

Relationships

We continue to develop new and diverse ways to reach and connect with the widest possible audience to share and celebrate First Nations culture, knowledge and visionary artistic practice. We will do this by providing an accessible, inclusive, and diverse artistic program, promoted onsite, online and on tour and through a decentralised national collection supported by our Art Across Australia team. Connecting with First Nations Communities across the Country is critical to our aim to create connection and understanding of First Nations art. Sharing the national collection is a strategic priority.

Respect

We respect Australia's First Nations peoples as the longest continuing culture in the world and evidence the centrality of creativity, culture and art as the hallmarks of human experience. The Gallery holds the single largest and most significant collection of works of art by Australia's First Nations peoples, which serves as a visual record of this extraordinary continuum of living cultural practice. The Gallery celebrates this incredible global distinction, and the national collection reflects and amplifies the brilliance and diversity of First Nations art and cultures. Developing, conserving and managing an outstanding collection is central to our strategic priorities.

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Opportunities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived on the continent of Australia since time immemorial. Their art and cultural traditions are among the most enduring in human history and among the most exciting in contemporary society. The Gallery is custodian of the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as well as being the workplace of 383 people, including 10 First Nations people. We need to provide pathways and opportunities for our First Nations staff and grow the cultural capability of all our staff to seek out and embed First Nations perspectives in our corporate activities. We must support First Nations staff by ensuring a culturally safe work environment.

Governance

The Director of the National Gallery of Australia is accountable for the delivery of the actions in the RAP. The Senior Management Group are collectively responsible for ensuring the RAP is fully implemented across the organisation. The RAP Working Group, chaired by a member of the Senior Management Group is responsible for monitoring progress of the RAP and providing quarterly updates to the Director, Council and the First Nations Advisory Group. RAP Working Group comprises a cross section of staff and levels from across the Gallery's portfolios. This currently includes three First Nations staff.

The Terms of Reference state that at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff member must be present when the RAP Working Group consents to any major decisions. The National Gallery's RAP Champion is also the Chief Operating Officer, and is responsible for driving internal engagement and awareness of the RAP. National Gallery's First Nations Advisory Group may also be involved in advising on various actions under this RAP as required.

Following page: performers on the beach, Badhu Island in the Zenadth Kes/Torres Straits, Queensland, Australia

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Through art, we aim to nurture an emotional and intellectual connection between all Australians and First Nations cultures and peoples. We must, first and foremost, connect with local Communities and Elders, both inside and outside of the creative industries, to tell our whole story.



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We must continue to develop new and diverse ways to reach and connect with the widest possible audience to share and celebrate First Nations cultures, knowledge and visionary artistic practice. Sharing the national collection is a strategic priority. We do this by providing an accessible, inclusive and diverse artistic program that is promoted onsite, online and on tour and through a decentralised national collection supported by our Art Across Australia team and our digital initiatives. Through art, we aim to nurture an emotional and intellectual connection between all Australians and First Nations cultures and peoples. We must, first and foremost, connect with local Communities and Elders, both inside and outside of the creative industries, to tell our whole story.

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Relationships

Action 1.1
Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.1.1 Meet and collaborate with other like-minded organisations locally, nationally and internationally.	Review biannually (September, January 2024, 2025)	Deputy Director	First Nations Engagement Manager Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Indigenous Leadership Coordinator Head Curator, International Art Head Curator, Australian Art Head of Partnerships Head of National Learning Principal Content Strategist
1.1.2 Partner with relevant organisations to establish, empower and strengthen relationships with First Nations artists and Communities.	Review biannually (September, January 2024, 2025)	Deputy Director	First Nations Engagement Manager Indigenous Leadership Coordinator Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Head Curator, International Art Head Curator, Australian Art Head of Partnerships
1.1.3 Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, working closely with the First Nations Advisory Group.	December 2024	First Nations Engagement Manager	Head of Governance Principal Content Strategist

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.1.4 Continue the development of outreach and learning programs, touring exhibitions and public engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.	Review annually (November 2024, 2025)	Head of National Learning Head of Art Across Australia	First Nations Engagement Manager Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Principal Content Strategist Head of Communications Head of Marketing
1.1.5 Offer United Ngunnawal Elders Council and other Traditional Owner groups (that we have formal relationships with) three hosted meetings per year.	Review annually (November 2024, 2025)	First Nations Engagement Manager	Senior Management Group

Action 1.2
Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.2.1 Promote Reconciliation Australia's National Reconciliation Week resources and reconciliation materials to all staff.	Annually (May 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Digital Marketing Officer Head of Marketing Head of Communications RAP Working Group members
1.2.2 Participate in external National Reconciliation Week events (RAP working group members).	Annually (May 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager RAP Working Group members

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.2.3 Host a National Reconciliation Week event, with support from senior staff, that features First Nations art and artists from the national collection.	Annually (May 2024, 2025)	Deputy Director	First Nations Engagement Manager RAP Working Group members Senior Management Group
1.2.4 Register all our National Reconciliation programming on Reconciliation Australia's National Reconciliation Week website.	Annually (May 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Head of Marketing Head of National Learning First Nations Engagement Manager

Action 1.3 Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.3.1 Implement strategies to engage our staff in reconciliation.	May 2025, 2026	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group Leadership Group RAP Working Group First Nations Engagement Manager
1.3.2 Communicate publicly our commitment to reconciliation.	May 2025, 2026	Assistant Director, Marketing Communications and Visitor Experience	Head of Marketing Head of Communication First Nations Engagement Manager Indigenous Leadership Coordinator

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.3.3a Develop opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • celebrating First Nations peoples and culture through our public content channels including web content, exhibition and art collection, forums and public programs, social media • creating and publishing at least two new videos per year to highlight and celebrate First Nations art and culture 	Review annually (September 2024, 2025)	Assistant Director, Marketing Communications and Visitor Experience	Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Head of Marketing Head of Communication Principal Content Strategist and Head of Digital
1.3.3b Explore a First Nations ambassadors program and establish a group of donors that look to support First Nations programming at the Gallery.	September 2025	Head of Foundation and Private Giving	First Nations Engagement Manager Indigenous Leadership Coordinator Head of Partnerships
1.3.4 Collaborate with the RAP network and other like-minded organisations to develop ways to advance reconciliation.	Review annually (September 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group Leadership Group
1.3.5 Release the National Gallery RAP to staff with senior leader representation and involvement.	September 2024	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager Head of Governance Head of Communication

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Action 1.4

Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.4.1 Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions and future needs.	July 2025	Head of Human Resources	Chief Operating Officer Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
1.4.2 Develop, implement and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation.	July 2025	Head of Human Resources	Chief Operating Officer Head of Governance Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
1.4.3 Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	July 2025	Head of Human Resources	Chief Operating Officer Head of Governance First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
1.4.4 Educate senior leaders and managers on the effects of racism.	July 2025	Head of Human Resources	Chief Operating Officer Head of Governance First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
1.4.5 Research and develop best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	January 2025	Head of Governance	First Nations Engagement Manager

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Action 1.5

Understand and share best practice in First Nations community engagement.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
1.5.1 Advocate for cultural and intellectual property rights by sharing stories relating to ICIP (Indigenous cultural and intellectual property) through our media channels.	July 2026	Rights & Permissions Coordinator	Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Head of Communications Principal Content Strategist and Head of Digital
1.5.2 Establish a community engagement protocol that sets out best practice for engaging with artists and communities across the nation.	March 2025	First Nations Engagement Manager	Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Head of National Learning Head Curator, Australian Art Head Curator, International Art Head of Governance

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Above: portrait of Helen Ganalmirriwuy Garrawurra, Liyagawumirr-Garrawurra peoples, Yurrwi/Milingimbi, Northern Territory, 2021
Right: Tyson Friggo, Westfarmers Arts Leadership Residential, Wagga, 2022



Case study: partnership

Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Partnership



Installation view, *Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia*, National Gallery Singapore, 2022, foreground Yvonne Koolmatie, Ngarrindjeri people, works *Eel trap*, 1992, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 1995 and *River Dreaming*, 2012, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported by Sue and Steve Dyer in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum © Yvonne Koolmatie. Background Kunmanara Pantjiti McLean, Ngaatjatjarra people, *Palunya: that's all*, 2002–2004, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2006 © Mary Pantjiti McLean/Copyright Agency, 2024. photo: Joseph Nair, Memphis West Pictures.

Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Partnership

Over the past 14 years, the Gallery has built a unique partnership with Wesfarmers Arts, an organisation unrivalled in its corporate support for the arts in Australia and delivering tangible results. It offers Australia's only First Nations arts leadership development program from which 122 First Nations arts professionals have graduated (as at March 2024). Based on employment, professional development and mentorship outcomes, the Wesfarmers National Gallery partnership is the most significant First Nations partnership in Australia's cultural life. It demonstrates how much can be accomplished when business invests strategically and sustainably in the arts.

This partnership has enabled the Gallery to develop, present and tour critically acclaimed exhibitions that celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture. These exhibitions, supported by programs, publications and events, engage new audiences in innovative ways. Through this partnership we have reached new international audiences with the tour of *Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia*, curated by Tina Baum, Gulumirrgin-Larrakia/Wardaman/Karajarri peoples, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. Drawn from the national collection and the Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, *Ever Present* premiered at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 2021, before travelling internationally to

Singapore in 2022 and Auckland in 2023. The exhibition surveys historical and contemporary works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia. Included in the exhibition was Jonathan Jones, Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples, work *untitled (walam-wunga. galang)*, 2020–21, a collaborative project with Uncle Stan Grant Senior, Wiradjuri people, and Beatrice Murray, Wiradjuri people. This work celebrates the south-east cultural practice of collecting seeds, grinding them to make flour to make bread and feed families. Generously supported by Wesfarmers Arts, this work will be an enduring gift to the nation.

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Australia's First Nations peoples, as the world's longest continuing culture, evidence the centrality of creativity, culture and art as the hallmarks of human experience. The Gallery hosts the single largest and most significant collection of works of art by First Nations peoples of Australia, which serves as a visual record of this extraordinary continuum of living cultural practice. The Gallery celebrates this incredible global distinction. The national collection embraces, reflects and amplifies the brilliance and diversity of First Nations art and cultures and developing, conserving and managing an outstanding collection is central to our strategic priorities.

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Action 2.1

Increase the understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledges and rights through cultural learning.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
2.1.1 Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	July 2025	Head of Human Resources	Chief Operating Officer Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy First Nations Engagement Manager
2.1.2 Consult local Traditional Owners and/or appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors on the development and implementation of a cultural learning strategy.	March 2025	First Nations Engagement Manager	Head of Human Resources Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
2.1.3 Develop, implement and communicate a cultural learning strategy for all staff.	December 2025	Head of Human Resources	Senior Management Group Leadership Group Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy First Nations Engagement Manager
2.1.4 Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.	December 2025	Head of Human Resources Chair of RAP Working Group	Chief Operating Officer Senior Management Group Leadership Group Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy First Nations Engagement Manager

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
2.1.5 Develop and deliver new First Nations learning resources, including the <i>Art Through Culture</i> learning principles and program.	December 2024	Head of National Learning	Deputy Director First Nations Engagement Manager Education Manager, First Nations Head Curator, First Nations Art Senior Curator, First Nations Art Curator, First Nations Art Lead Artist Educator

Action 2.2
Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocol.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
2.2.1 Develop, implement and communicate a cultural protocol for the Gallery, including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.	March 2025	First Nations Engagement Manager	RAP Working Group Senior Management Group Leadership Group First Nations Advisory Group Head of Governance
2.2.2 Increase staff’s understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	March 2025	First Nations Engagement Manager	RAP Working Group Senior Management Group Leadership Group First Nations Advisory Group

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
2.2.3 Include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocol at the start of important meetings.	Review annually (November 2024, 2025)	Senior Management Group	First Nations Engagement Manager Leadership Group
2.2.4 Invite a local Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Deputy Director	Head of Foundation and Private Giving Head of Partnerships Head Curator, Australian Art Head Curator, International Art Senior Management Group
2.2.5 Maintain a living document of key contacts for organising and maintaining respectful partnerships.	March 2025	First Nations Engagement Manager	Head of Partnerships
2.2.6 Ensure Acknowledgement of Country text used in Gallery publications, entry signage, and online reflects the diversity and specificity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.	September 2025	Assistant Director, Marketing Communications and Visitor Experience	Head of Creative Studio Head of Visitor Experience Principal Content Strategist and Head of Digital
2.2.7 Recognise the valuable contributions that First Nations staff bring to the Gallery and acknowledge and support their ongoing obligations to Communities.	July 2025, 2026	Deputy Director Chief Operating Officer Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group Leadership Group

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Action 2.3

Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC week.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
2.3.1 Encourage RAP working group and senior management to participate in external NAIDOC events.	Annually (July 2025, 2026)	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager RAP Working Group
2.3.2 Review HR policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC week.	Review annually (July 2025, 2026)	Head of Human Resources	Leadership Group
2.3.3 Promote and encourage participation in external NAIDOC events to all staff.	Annually (July 2025, 2026)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group Leadership Group RAP Working Group

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Above: *Ceremony* Opening Weekend, Hayley Miller Baker's mist in Fiona Hall *Fern Garden*, 2022
Right: detail of Alick Tipoti in the studio, mask making, Badhu Island in the Zenadth Kes/Torres Straits



Case study: exhibition

*Judy Watson & Helen Johnson:
the red thread of history, loose ends*



Judy Watson, Waanyi people, *heartstring (kudulu walkurji)*, 2021, commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2020–21 © Judy Watson/Copyright Agency, 2024

Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: the red thread of history, loose ends

The exhibition *Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: the red thread of history, loose ends* presented work by two artists from two generations with two perspectives to create a dialogue on the roles of women in contemporary and colonial Australia.

Watson is a Waanyi woman, based on Jagera/Yuggera and Turrbal Country of Meanjin/Brisbane, and Johnson, a second-generation immigrant of Anglo descent based in Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Country in Naarm/Melbourne. Each developed new works that explore complex and varied perspectives on colonisation, with an emphasis on the experience of women. For Watson and Johnson, the hope is this collaboration will start conversations, prompting people to encounter subjects from different perspectives.

Watson says of the work, ‘there are parallels in the way that Helen and I look at history and try to deal with it as artists, and to bring it into our current perspectives as women and mothers, living in Australia with the burden of what happened on this continent in terms of colonisation. It’s a historicising of fact and research, but there’s a tender stamp of femininity too, which is very powerful. Subtle, but powerful.’

Johnson says the two artists, ‘have such different subject positions, but with the commonality of womanhood. I was thinking about the work that can be done from these perspectives and what happens when they meet. I feel like colonial Australia and contemporary Australia are one and the same thing – this is part of the continuity that runs through this exhibition and is alluded to in the title, *The red thread of history*.’

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Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: the red thread of history, loose ends (continued)

The exhibition was attended by approximately 16,000 visitors at the National Gallery between February and June 2022. Public activation of the exhibition occurred on site and online throughout the exhibition. Exhibition curators Jaklyn Babington, Tina Baum, Gulumirgin (Larrakia)/Wardaman/Karajarri peoples, and Elspeth Pitt engaged with Watson and Johnson through a series of artist interviews and talks, while Elspeth Pitt and Cara Kirkwood, Mandandanji and Mithaka woman, Head of First Nations Engagement, co-hosted an online artist in-conversation. The exhibition was also celebrated during the Know My Name closing party on 3 June 2022, attended by 340 people. Media opportunities focused on the exhibition coinciding with the opening of the *4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony*, curated by Hetti Perkins, Arrernte and Kalkadoon peoples,

Senior Curator-at-large and Kelli Cole, Warumungu/Luitja peoples, Curator, Special Projects, First Nations Art.

Beyond its onsite presentation at the National Gallery, this Balnaves Contemporary Project toured to Monash University Museum (MUMA) of Art in late 2022 and to Lake Macquarie yapang in 2023 where it was enjoyed by 8372 visitors. Public programs at MUMA included a talk with both Watson and Johnson in conversation with Tina Baum, Senior Curator of First Nations Art.

[*Judy Watson & Helen Johnson: the red thread of history, loose ends*](#) is a Know My Name project and part of The Balnaves Contemporary Series.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived on the continent of Australia since time immemorial. Their art and cultural traditions are among the most enduring in human history and among the most exciting in contemporary society. The Gallery is custodian of the world's largest and most outstanding collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as well as being the workplace of 383 people, including 10 First Nations staff. We need to provide pathways and opportunities for our First Nations staff and grow the cultural capability of all our staff to seek out and embed First Nations perspectives in our corporate activities. We need to be creative and wise, and to support First Nations staff by ensuring a culturally safe and dynamic work environment.

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Action 3.1

Improve employment outcomes by increasing recruitment, retention and professional development opportunities for First Nations staff.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
3.1.1 Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professionals development opportunities.	Review annually (July 2025, 2026)	Head of Human Resources	Senior Management Group Leadership Group
3.1.2 Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on our recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	March 2025	Head of Human Resources	First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
3.1.3 Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	January 2026	Head of Human Resources	First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
3.1.4 Advertise job vacancies to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.	January 2026	Head of Human Resources	Senior Management Group Leadership Group

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
3.1.5 Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to participation and improve opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our workplace.	Review annually (December, 2024, 2025)	Head of Human Resources	First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy
3.1.6 Increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in our workplace.	July 2026	Head of Human Resources	First Nations Engagement Manager Manager, People Services Manager, People Strategy Senior Management Group Leadership Group

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**Action 3.2
Support First Nations leadership.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
3.2.1 Maximise the expertise and perspective of our First Nations employees to embed First Nations perspectives, knowledges and culture throughout the National Gallery’s business.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager Head of Governance Senior Management Group Leadership Group
3.2.2 Deliver the Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Leadership and Fellowship Programs to continue the Gallery’s commitment to developing and elevating First Nations leadership nationally and internationally.	December 2024 December 2025	Deputy Director	Indigenous Leadership Coordinator Head of Partnerships

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Action 3.3

Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
3.3.1 Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy.	September 2025	Head of Legal & Procurement	Procurement Manager Legal Manager
3.3.2 Investigate Supply Nation membership.	December 2024	Head of Legal & Procurement	Procurement Manager Chief Operating Officer
3.3.3 Raise staff awareness of opportunities for the procurement goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business and staff.	December 2024	Head of Legal & Procurement	Senior Management Group Leadership Group
3.3.4 Review and update procurement practices to remove barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.	Review annually (July 2025, 2026)	Head of Legal & Procurement	Procurement Manager
3.3.5 Develop commercial Relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.	Review annually (August 2025, 2026)	Head of Legal & Procurement	Senior Management Group Leadership Group Head of Commercial Operations

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Above: Vincent Namatjira, Western Aranda people, *Displaced*, 2021, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased in celebration of the National Gallery of Australia's 40th anniversary, 2022 © Vincent Namatjira/Copyright Agency, 2024
Right: Portrait of Dylan River, Kaytetye people, in Mparntwe/Alice Springs, 2021



Case study: sharing art

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre



Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre was one of the first venues to submit an expression of interest in the Gallery's new program, Sharing the National Collection, which sends works of art to venues across the country on long-term loan as part of Australia's Cultural Policy *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*. The Centre received four video works by First Nations artists for the exhibition *Ngurra Bayala (Country speaks)* which opened on 15 December 2023 for a two-year loan.

Dharug artist and curator Leanne Tobin selected works from the collection for the exhibition, which celebrates the video work of seven female First Nations artists. Collection artists are Megan Cope, a Quandamooka woman; Fiona Foley, a Badtjala woman; Julie Gough, a Trawlwoolway woman, and r e a, of the Gamilaraay/Wailwan/Biripi peoples. These works are supplemented by three works by Blue Mountains practitioners: Aunty Sharyn Halls, Gundungurra people, (with Craig Bender and Vera Hong); Jo Clancy, Wiradjuri people, (with Sue Healey) and Leanne Tobin.

Consultation between artist and the Gallery team ensured the presentation of these loaned works respectfully reflected the artists intent.

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Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (continued)

The resulting exhibition opening and Community event included a Welcome to Country, afternoon tea and dance performances. The promotion of First Nations women artists from a variety of language groups gave the exhibition a local and national focus. Artist Julie Gough attended the opening event from her home in lutruwita/Tasmania and met with the curator Leanne Tobin and other local First Nations artists.

Reflecting on the works she selected, Tobin said, 'it's the truth telling of stories of place. It's the artists telling personal accounts from Ngurra, from Country... the artists' own stories. Hopefully the selection encourages people to come into the gallery. And hopefully, they leave with some kind of insight',

Rilka Oakley, Artistic Program Leader, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre said 'the opportunity to be part of the National Gallery of Australia's Sharing the National Collection [program] has enabled us to connect with nationally significant First Nations work and bring that work to our audiences. This opportunity has meant we now have seven contemporary First Nations videos on exhibition alongside our permanent world heritage display.'

r e a, Gamilaraay/Wailwan/Biripi peoples, *Poles Apart 2*, 2009, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2010



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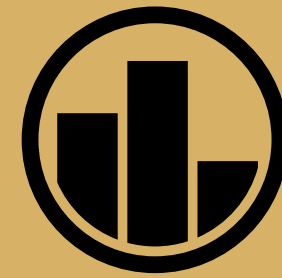
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The National Gallery Director and Senior Management Group are responsible for the implementation of the RAP, supported by the RAP Champion and the First Nations Engagement Manager. The RAP Working Group, chaired by the RAP Champion, will monitor progress of the RAP and provide updates to senior management, staff and the Council. The RAP Working Group comprises a cross section of staff and levels from across the Gallery and First Nations staff, including the First Nations Engagement Manager and several First Nations team members from the Artistic Programs portfolio. The Terms of Reference state that at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff member must be present when the RAP Working Group consents to any major decisions. The First Nations Advisory Group may also be involved in advising on various actions under this RAP as required.

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Action 4.1

Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RAP Working Group) to drive governance of the RAP.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
4.1.1 Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RAP Working Group.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager
4.1.2 Ensure RAP Working Group members represent the breadth and depth of the organisation and include representation from SMG and First Nations team members.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	First Nations Engagement Manager RAP Working Group
4.1.3 Establish and apply Terms of Reference for the RAP Working Group.	Review annually (May 2025, 2026)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Head of Governance
4.1.4 Convene RAP Working Group at least four times a year to monitor, review and update the RAP.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group
4.1.5 Ensure the First Nations Advisory Group is informed and updated on key actions within the RAP.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	First Nations Engagement Manager	Chair of RAP Working Group Head of Governance

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Action 4.2

Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of the RAP commitments.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
4.2.1 Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	Review annually (February 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Chief Finance Officer Senior Management Group
4.2.2 Engage senior leaders and other staff in the delivery of RAP commitments.	Bi-monthly (2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group
4.2.3 Define and maintain appropriate systems and capability to track, measure, and report on RAP commitments.	Review annually (June 2025, 2026)	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group
4.2.4 Appoint and maintain an internal RAP Champion from senior management.	September 2024	Chair of RAP Working Group	Senior Management Group

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Action 4.3

Build accountability through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
4.3.1 Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	Review annually (September 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group Senior Management Group
4.3.2 Report RAP progress to all staff and Council quarterly.	February, April, August, December 2024, 2025, 2026	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group Senior Management Group
4.3.3 Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	February 2025	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group
4.3.4 Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence	Review annually (June 2025, 2026)	RAP Coordinator	Chair of RAP Working Group

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Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
4.3.5 Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Survey.	Review annually (August 2025, 2026)	RAP Coordinator	Chair of RAP Working Group
4.3.6 Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings annually.	Review annually (December 2024, 2025)	Chair of RAP Working Group	RAP Working Group Senior Management Group First Nations Engagement Manager Head of Communications
4.3.7 Submit a traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of this RAP.	March 2026	RAP Coordinator	Chair of RAP Working Group

Action 4.4
Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.

Deliverable	Timeline	Lead	Support
4.4.1 Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	February 2026	RAP Coordinator	Chair of RAP Working Group First Nations Engagement Manager RAP Working Group

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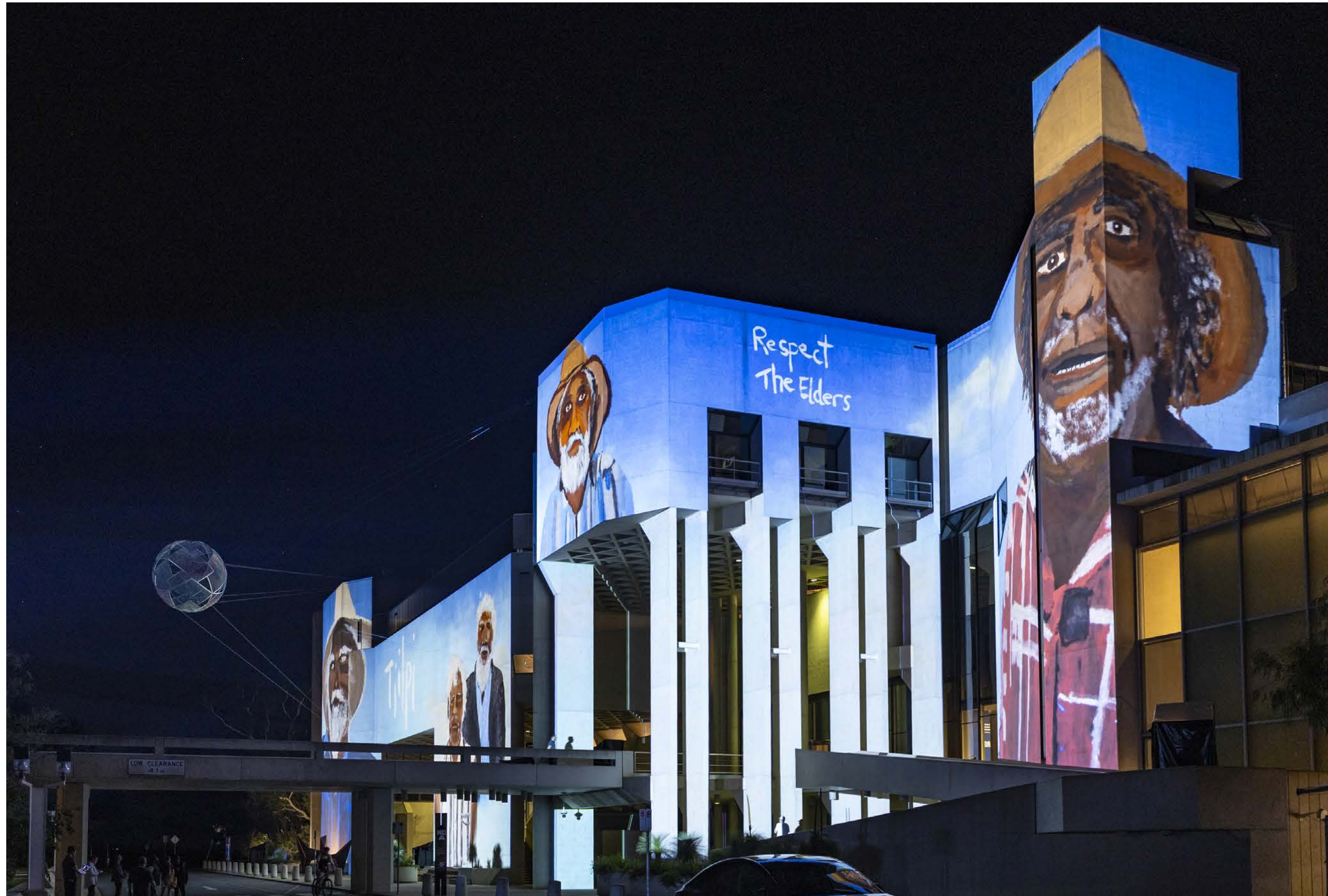
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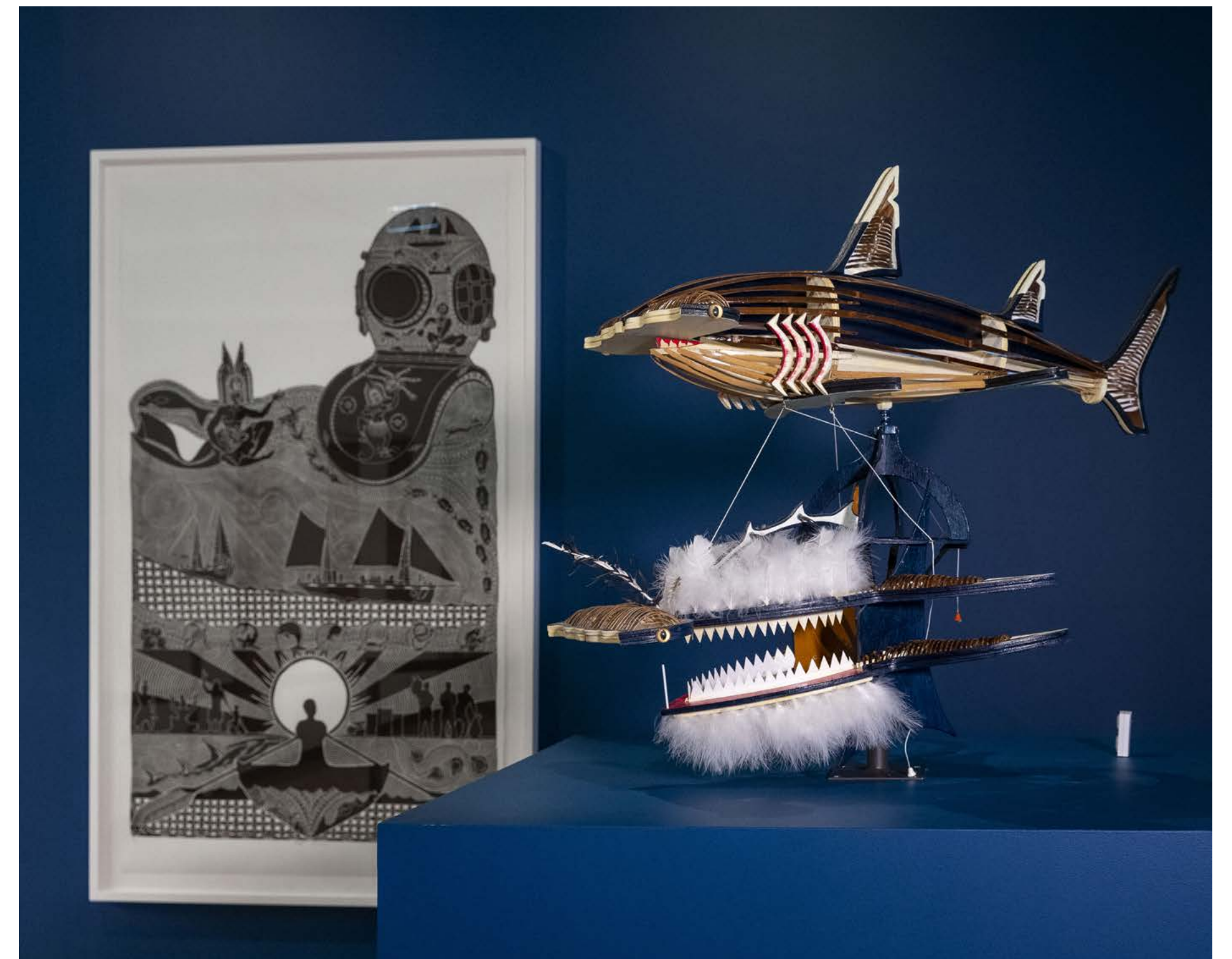
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Above: installation view of Enlighten Festival Vincent Namatjira, *Indigenous All Stars*, 2024, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, 2024

Right: installation view Laurie Nona, Badulgal/Maluylgal peoples, *Badhu Harbourka*, 2016, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2017 in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum with Ken Thaiday Snr., Meriam Mer people, *Hammerhead shark mask*, 1997, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 1997



Case study: learning

Art Through Culture



Vincent Namatjira in *Vincent Namatjira: Australia in colour* All Stars Studio

Art Through Culture

The Art Through Culture program prioritises First Nations perspectives. It preferences the voices and art of First Nations people and embeds First Nations cultural practices as diverse and distinct since the first sunrise. The program was developed by and in collaboration with First Nations educators and artists and centres fundamental cultural learning principles internally and externally across all the Gallery's audience platforms, onsite, online and on tour.

The program was piloted in November 2020 in partnership with the ACT Education Directorate's First Nations Learning Unit with First Nations students invited from the ACT region. A week-long series of workshops with First Nations educators and Elders reached 103 First Nations participants and successfully demonstrated program suitability for a broader student body.

In 2021, the Gallery received a generous five-year pledge from a private donor to support the development and delivery of the program. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 during this period, on-demand programs for primary and secondary students were successfully delivered alongside professional learning for educators.

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Art Through Culture (continued)

Five values-based principles of best practice and engagement guide Art Through Culture as well as our broader learning programs:

1. Celebrate living cultures
2. Embrace artist diversity
3. Centre First Nations voices
4. Spark curiosity and connections
5. Shape transformative learning.

In 2022, the Gallery’s Learning portfolio of 28 staff (including full-time, part-time and casual) were trained in the Art Ways Principles. In 2023, the Education team implemented the expectation that every program must include First Nations work. Since then, a further 75 volunteer guides have undertaken training to equip them to use the five Art Through Culture principles to incorporate First Nations work in school and public tours.

Since the pilot, 6,600 students and their teachers have participated in an Art Through Culture program and a further 250 teachers have participated in Art Through Culture professional development training.

A teacher from the Canberra Grammar School wrote ‘Thank you to NGA Education staff for a very successful visit. From my first enquiry, NGA was very keen to engage with us in planning an experience that was aimed specifically at our current unit of work “Knowledge and First Nations Societies” for the IB Diploma Theory of Knowledge course. Our students were engaged and had positive feedback and it was great that many of them chose their learning from the NGA experience as the basis for their assessment for this unit. I look forward to more learning experiences for students at the NGA.’

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**We need to be creative and wise,
and to support First Nations staff
by ensuring a culturally safe and
dynamic work environment.**

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For enquiries regarding the National Gallery of Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan, please email governance@nga.gov.au

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Cover: Maireener shells collected on Flinders Island

Following page: installation view, Robert Fielding, Western Arrernte and Yankunytjatjara peoples, *Holden On*, 2021–22, commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra for the *4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony*, image courtesy and © the artist

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