



Aunt Cheryl Penrith with her Daughter in law and Granddaughter - Jackie Cooper - The Wired Lab

Waybali murru giilanggalang Wiradjuridya ngurambambangga

WEAVING GRASS STORIES ON WIRADJURI COUNTRY



Native Grass Curtains - Photo Sara Johnston

In 2017, a series of workshops were initiated by The Wired Lab for the 'Waybali Murruway – Weaving Paths' project. The project is a collaboration between the communities of Mitta Mitta, Mutta Mutta (Muttama), Brungle, Ngurrungera (Narrandera), Wagga Wagga, and Gudhamangdhuray (Cootamundra), with a fundamental grounding in caring for Country (Ngurambang).

Over five years, the project has connected people across four generations, and has been led by The Wired Lab with contributions from Elders including Uncle Stan Grant Snr OAM and Aunty Cheryl Penrith, Board Member and Community Liaison at the Wired Lab.

“...a Wiradjuri value of respect, care and to go slow and be considerate of each other and our surroundings”

Aunty Cheryl Penrith grew up in the community of Brungle. Located between Tumut and Gundagai, Brungle had a population of just 146 people in the 2021 Census. Brungle is home to a large population of Wiradjuri people, forming a tight-knit community in the village.

The project is an expression of 'Yindyamarra', “...a Wiradjuri value of respect, care and to go slow and be considerate of each other and our surroundings”, says Aunty Cheryl, “Uncle Stan Grant blesses us with our Wiradjuri name for the project, and I acknowledge the contribution of all the Elders in each of the communities that were part of the project.”

“The exhibition is a significant expression of the regenerative power of regularly gathering on Country and coming together”

“The 'Waybali Murruway – Weaving Paths' exhibition is a significant expression of the regenerative power of regularly gathering on Country and coming together in a yarning (weaving) circle.” – Melanie Evans, Curator & Lead Artist; and Harriet Goodall, Co Curator & Lead Artist



Corrugated Iron Shields - Photo Sara Johnston



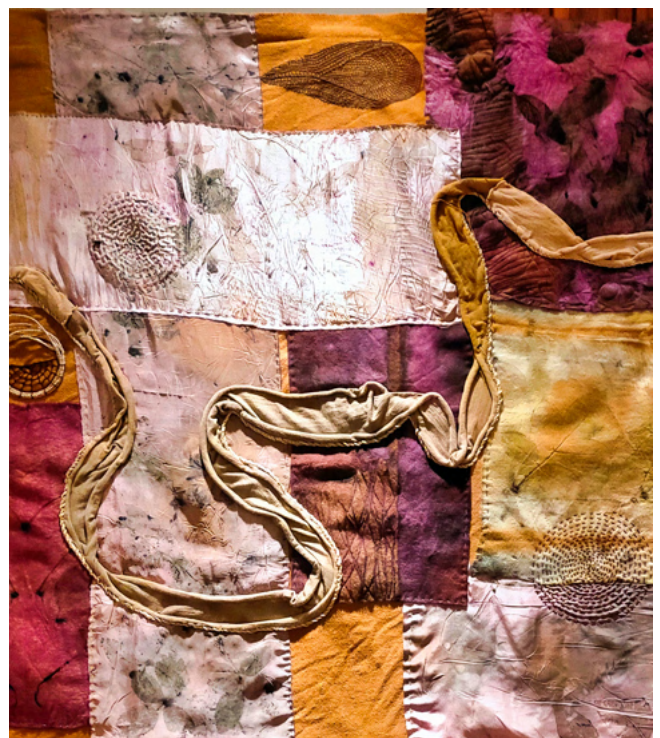
Giilang of Brungle Community Rug - Photo Sara Johnston

Weaving is a traditional art practiced by many Aboriginal people, often as a group activity known as a Yarning Circle. Weaving was an activity that brought people together, “it was when we would get together, not feel so isolated and alone, and instead more connected” says Aunty Cheryl. Yarning Circles are a long-lived cultural practice continuing today, but recent events have proved challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on movement and social contact interrupted these activities, and the loss of time to connect was deeply felt by many in the community.

The project has enabled the communities involved to awaken those connections to each other and to Country. Aunty Cheryl notes that although many people were weavers, often they would use synthetic materials like nylon or non-native materials like raffia. Workshops and excursions imparted cultural knowledge of identifying local native grasses, rushes and reeds and how to grow, harvest, store and prepare them. Aunty Cheryl says, “It involves a lot of preparation to wet the grass, split it down the middle, it’s harder on the hands. But it’s a more mindful process”.

Other processes learned by participants included bush dyeing techniques, tanning kangaroo hide, and making glue using kangaroo dung and *Xanthorrhoea* sap. Opened by Laura McBride, Director First Nations of the Australian Museum, in September 2022, the Waybali Murruway exhibition is on display at the Museum of the Riverina until November 20, 2022.

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Ngurambang Community Rug - Photo Sara Johnston



The Hill Narrandera Community Rug Detail Goanna - Photo Sara Johnston

The artworks displayed in the exhibition are diverse, including: grass curtains; silk scarves dyed with bush dye, woven baskets, dilly bags, dried flower arrangements, examples of rope and twine made with native grasses, jewellery, samples of native plants, shields made of corrugated iron and decorated with woven objects and wire, and rugs/blankets embroidered and adorned with the most beautiful naturally dyed materials, found objects and powerful symbols of community and Country.

The blankets were buried before being embroidered and appliqued, to take on the colours of Country, 'Ngurambang' in the local Wiradjuri language. Each one represents an incredible cultural legacy, having been created by several generations. The artistry in each blanket represents a deep and enduring connection to Country and the animals, plants and humans sustained by it.

The use of natural dyes amplifies the impact of the artworks, with vibrant colours highlighting the ephemeral beauty of the bush – grasses and plants gathered during different seasons, temperatures, and weather, produce different results. No two pieces can be the same.

In the centre of the exhibition are a series of fish traps leading to a video display, featuring interviews and footage of many participants, including Auntie Cheryl's son and grandchildren. Didactic panels and photographs featuring the communities involved in the project highlight the intergenerational benefits and connections.

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“The 'Waybali Murruway – Weaving Paths' exhibition contains much more than cultural objects; it is also about incredible people who have shared a cultural journey imbued with both individual and collective self-determination...We are incredibly proud of this project; we look forward to its continuing pathways and profound legacies for years to come.” – Auntie Cheryl Penrith and Sarah Last, Artistic Director & CEO, The Wired Lab

Since its inception the Waybali Murruway project has enjoyed support from various sources such as local farmers and community organisations, along with funding from Create NSW, Australia Council for the Arts, the Federal Government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program and Local Land Services. Plans are currently underway to extend the Waybali Murruway project in the communities involved thus far, and to tour the exhibition nationally.

More information can be found here:
<https://wiredlab.org/waybali-murruway/>