

*Garra*

SAY SPEAK TELL

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery 2009



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## YARRA

Say who you Are : Speak of your Journey : Tell of our Culture

*Yarra* is an exploration of Aboriginal culture by storytelling and sharing knowledge through artworks that honour Indigenous families and ancestry.

Although Indigenous culture in the Riverina region was decimated in the 19th century, the artists in *Yarra* can be seen as part of a retrieval and revival of cultural traditions manifested in new media and in a contemporary context. Treahna Hamm states:

Art...supports dialogue and helps people to heal, by creating bonds between individuals and communities, through the linking of identity, land, people and places. Telling our stories and making our art regenerates the past, the present and the future.

Indigenous culture in the Riverina continues to be rich and full of stories that can be told through art. The *Yarra* artists' connections to culture were never lost and continue to evolve.

This exhibition was curated by Melanie Evans under the guidance of Cath Bowdler, Linda Elliott and the Wiradjuri Elders and the Wagga Indigenous Community.



## WESLEY MORGAN



Wesley Morgan

*Platypus on grassy banks of the lagoon 2007*

acrylic on canvas, 42 x 49 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Wesley Morgan is perhaps less well known than the other artists in *Yarra*, however he is a committed artist who is making his mark in the Riverina region. Wesley is a Wiradjuri artist who was born in Narrandera in 1985. He started painting from a very early age and was inspired by stories narrated by family members. Wesley has been painting these stories since childhood and has developed a number of styles - from the detailed optically vibrating works featuring goannas and other creatures, to the more spare invocations of stories which feature a skeletal Mallee tree surrounded by totemic ancestors and Wiradjuri symbols.

As well as painting on canvas, Wesley also paints on other objects such as the didgeridoo. Wesley Morgan is gaining recognition in the Riverina and further afield. He won the Indigenous art prize at the Spirit of the Land Festival in Lockhart in 2008 and his work is included in a number of private collections.

## TREAHNA HAMM

Treahna Hamm, a possum skin cloak maker, printmaker, sculptor, weaver and painter was born in 1965 in Melbourne and grew up at Yarrawonga near her ancestral lands on the Murray River, Victoria. Although disconnected from her mother and culture, she never denied her identity and heritage. Hamm has maintained strong connections to her environment and incorporates Yorta Yorta stories into her work.

Hamm has been creating and exhibiting art since 1982 when she began Art and Design at Wangaratta TAFE. She continued her education at Charles Sturt University (CSU) Wagga Wagga, where between 1984 and 2000 she completed a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), a Diploma of Education and a Masters of Visual Arts. Hamm's work is held in a number of international, national, state and university collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia, Koorie Heritage Trust, Print Council of Australia, National Museum of Ethnology in Japan, and Queensland University of Technology.

Hamm's works, *Brmah nurrtja biganga* (Barmah Forest possum skin cloak) 2005, *Yakapna yenbena dungenja biganga* (Family ancestor strong flight possum cloak) 2007 and a woven grass sculpture, *Yabby*, 2005 were included in *Culture Warriors*, the first National Indigenous Art Triennial at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra in 2007. The designs on the inside of the cloaks bear a striking resemblance to the iconography of place that Hamm developed in her printmaking practice. *Riverina Landscape*, 1999 a hand coloured etching, features the Murray River snaking its way through country animated with spiritual life and Ancestral stories. It is country viewed from above, in which organic plant forms and symbols reveal a palimpsest of Yorta Yorta history embedded within it.



Treahna Hamm  
*Who's Talking* 1997  
 hand-colored etching  
 5 x 45 cm  
 courtesy of the artist



## H. J. WEDGE



H.J. Wedge

*Destruction of Life* 1996

acrylic on paper

51 x 40.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and  
the Charles Sturt University  
Collection

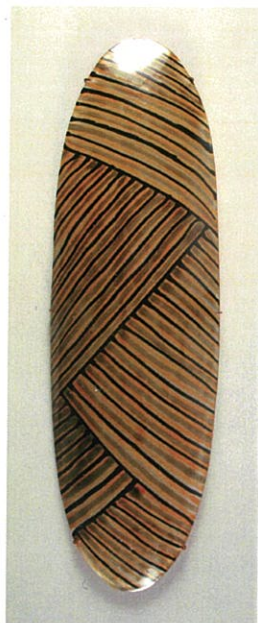
H.J. Wedge, of the Wiradjuri Nation, was born on Erambie Mission, Cowra. Wedge's work as a contemporary urban artist uses bright and vibrant colours with images drawn from his dreams and rich Aboriginal culture. His images also comment on and confront the viewer with many political and personal issues that Aboriginal people face living in Australia.

Wedge trained at the Eora Centre TAFE, Redfern, initially using photography then painting as a medium to convey his message. The annual Eora Student Art Exhibitions led to increasing recognition for H.J. Wedge's work. He accepted invitations to exhibit at Coe-ee Gallery and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative and his work was acquired by the National Gallery of Australia and Flinders University.

In October 1991 Wedge held a joint exhibition with Ian W Abdulla at Boomalli and in 1992, a solo exhibition at Tandanya in Adelaide. *Wiradjuri Spirit Man* was the first exhibition Boomalli held at their new premises in June 1993. Wedge was then invited to participate in *Australian Perspecta* in 1993 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, after which he undertook an artist's residency there. He has exhibited widely since and was most recently represented in *Culture Warriors* at the National Gallery of Australia in 2007.

The painting *Destruction of Life*, 1996 draws on Wedge's distinctive style to depict conflict between Euro-Australians and Indigenous Australians. Wedge explicitly depicts the impact of these battles on native animals and an unborn Wiradjuri spirit figure. The central spirit figure can be seen as a metaphor for generations of Indigenous Australians and their culture, or the destruction of a sense of security and comfort of earlier times, as depicted by the embrace of a mother's womb.

# Robert M. MURRAY



**Robert Murray**

*My Country* series 2008  
kiln formed glass coolamons  
60 x 20 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Glass  
Mob Studio

Robert Murray is a Wiradjuri man who has been working in glass for 3 years. He was born in 1983 and lives in Albury. He works at the Glass Mob studios using kiln-formed glass and high grade glass enamels. He is passionate about working in this medium and depicts bush tucker found in and along the Murray River, such as *binduugayn* (river mussels) and *narbang*, the fish traps used to catch them. He also depicts traditional Wiradjuri stories including those of Biame, the creation spirit and designs used on traditional Wiradjuri message sticks. One of the stories that most inspires Robert Murray is that of 'How the birds got their feathers' as told by the late Ces Grant, a Wiradjuri Elder.

Robert has participated in 13 exhibitions since he has been working in glass, including shows at Japingka Gallery, Fremantle, the Glass Artists' Gallery in Sydney, Hogarth Gallery and SOFA Chicago. His work is held in the National Art Glass Collection, Wagga Wagga, the Kluge/Ruhe Collection, Virginia, USA and Indigenous Mental Health Canberra.

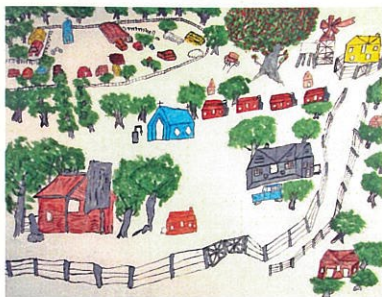
In 2008 Wagga Wagga Art Gallery commissioned Robert Murray to create a series of glass coolamons to enhance the National Art Glass Collection with work by a local Indigenous artist. These coolamons featured the abstract, linear designs based on message sticks that once travelled through country.

*My Country* is the design Robert has chosen and finds appropriate to exhibit in *Yarra*. Each piece is inspired by a place called Mungabareena in Wiradjuri Country. This is a traditional ceremonial and gathering place and is also the starting point of many of the local dreamtime stories associated with the Murray River.

# Roy K. KENNEDY

Roy Kennedy was born in 1934. He grew up on Police Paddock Mission near Griffith which is in Wiradjuri country. Like many Indigenous people Roy moved from the confines of rural NSW to Sydney, where he studied at the Eora Centre TAFE in Redfern.

Roy Kennedy is a painter as well as a printmaker and his subject matter is drawn from memory and personal experiences from his childhood growing up on the Mission. He is most well known for creating delicate and finely wrought etchings depicting the regimented mission buildings, farm animals, vegetation and his



**Roy Kennedy**  
*In Days Gone By 2002*  
 51 x 65 cm  
 acrylic and pencil on canvas  
 Courtesy of Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery

countrymen, often set along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River.

However there is also a political aspect to many of these works and the stories depicted. Some works speak of loss and a history of struggle as well as pride about culture. Roy Kennedy's etching *My mission as I liked it* illustrates his experiences of mission life where, to his mind, Aboriginal people were corralled and kept out of the way of white society. *Crucifixion* suggests a menacing tone rather than one of redemption. Many works also represent a reclamation of stories, of voice, of languages and memories, expressing a revival of traditions that are still alive despite over two centuries of dispossession.

## THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery would sincerely like to thank all the artists in Yarra for sharing their culture. Wagga Wagga Art Gallery would also especially like to acknowledge and thank Melanie Evans for her work in co-curating this exhibition and liaising with the artists.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the generosity and support of the following individuals and institutions:

Thomas A. Middlemost, Art Curator, Charles Sturt University -  
 Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi - Steve Fox, Mogo Raw Art and Blues - Eldridge  
 Group, Australia - Paul and Summer Sanders, The Glass Mob, Albury -  
 Kathleen Bowmer



Front Image:  
**Treahna Hamm**  
*Riverina Landscape 1999*  
 hand coloured etching  
 64 x 69.5 cm  
 Margaret Carnegie Print Collection,  
 Wagga Wagga Art Gallery