

ANKAAA

Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists
Working together to keep art, country and culture strong



Harvesting Traditional Knowledge

A two-way learning project by the Association of
Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists





ANKAAA Harvesting Traditional Knowledge Project

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Introduction

Harvesting Traditional Knowledge is a two-way learning platform that brings Indigenous traditional knowledge masters together with conservators from Australian cultural institutions to share different approaches to caring for cultural material.

Key project partners were Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, the Mulka Project and the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne.

Cover: Dyeing pandanus.

Left: Materials used for making the traditional Tiwi Mara'wi dress.





WORKSHOPS

ANKAAA delivered the project as four workshops held at remote Aboriginal community Art Centres in Northern Australia over 2013-14.

Workshop 1

The first workshop was hosted by Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land, NT in May 2013. It brought together 13 conservators from significant museums and galleries across Australia and over 30 Aboriginal artists from Art Centres in Arnhem Land. Together, they shared their knowledge on the harvesting, production and conservation of cultural objects made from barks, pandanus, dyes and ochres.



A highlight of this workshop was a trip out bush in North East Arnhem Land, where traditional masters showed how bark is stripped off a tree and prepared as a canvas for bark paintings. ANKAAA Chairman, Djambawa Marawili AM and Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre Chairman, Yinimala Gumana took leading roles in this.

This page: ANKAAA Chairman Djambawa Marawili AM explains the process of stripping bark for use as a surface for painting on. Conservators from some of Australia's major museums and arts institutions participate in the first stages of cutting the bark for removal.

Previous page: Senior artist Yinimala Gumana (Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre) demonstrates bark painting techniques to Kerry Head (Art Gallery of NSW), Carolyn McLennan (independent conservator) and Erica McCreedy (North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance).







Above: Arts worker, DJ Marika heating bark to flatten it, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre. Glen Namundja, traditional knowledge holder, Injalak Arts, Gunbalanya, West Arnhem Land, looks on (far left).

Left: Max Gumana from Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre (left of tree) demonstrates how bark stripping is done in North East Arnhem Land with the assistance of Stanley Taylor from Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA. Indigenous arts workers from different regions of northern NT and WA, and conservators from key Australian museums and arts institutions watch, and later participate in transforming the bark into a surface to paint on.





Left: Freshly harvested mulmu roots used to make a dye to colour pandanus fibre.

Above: Preparing the roots for boiling to make the dye. L-R: Kerry Head (Art Gallery of NSW), Lucy Malirrimurruwuy (traditional knowledge master, Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts), Carolyn McLennan (independent conservator), Robyn Sloggett and Vanessa Kowalski (Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne).





Workshop 2

The second workshop took place in September 2013 and was hosted by Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA.

The workshop brought together senior artists from the Kimberley region and 10 conservators from Australia's key cultural institutions to share knowledge about a range of Kimberley materials, such as boab fibre, pearl shell, boab nut carvings, ochre, sap, kangaroo sinew, spinifex gum, as well as boomerang and spear making.

At least 30 Indigenous artists from the Kimberley region, together with several artists from the NT, participated in the workshop. As conservators and artists had expressed an interest in digital archiving and learning how to preserve community collections, a plenary session on community collections was also held.

Left: Senior cultural knowledge holder Sam Lovell (Bunuba Nykina Elder) impressed participants with his in-depth knowledge of traditional skills and materials, as well as Western botanical information.







This page: Sophie Parker (Conservator, Artlab Australia) learning about boab nut carving from artist Ashley Oobagooma. Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA.

Previous page: Kirsty Burgu, Chairperson and artist at Mowanjum Arts and Culture (left) demonstrates the process of preparing paints from natural ochres. Melanie Forward from Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (right) experiments with the various colours while Agnes Armstrong, artist and Director at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra, WA looks on. Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA.





Above and right: Traditional knowledge master, Janet Oobagooma explains how yellow, white, red and black ochre is collected and prepared during a trip from Mowanjum Arts and Culture to an ochre pit nearby.







Workshop 3

A third mini-workshop was held at the ANKAAA Annual conference at Mt. Bundy Station in November 2013.

Led by master string makers Regina Wilson (Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti), Lily Roy (Milingimbi Art and Culture) and Judy Manany (Elcho Island Art and Craft), the workshop brought together artists, two conservation professionals, a local ethnobotanist and an anthropologist.

Approximately 30 artists and arts workers participated in the workshop.

Left: Twining pandanus.



Above: Pandanus, stripped and dyed with natural pigments, drying in the sun.

Right: Expert weaver and artist, Regina Wilson (Durrmu Arts) leads the string-making workshop.







Workshop 4

A fourth mini-workshop with a focus on digital archiving and community collections was held for Tiwi artists in May 2014 at Jilamara Arts and Craft on Melville Island, NT.

Community collections are a priority for Aboriginal Art Centres, as most communities wish to preserve the traditional knowledge associated with art works and artefacts produced. This knowledge relates to skills associated with the science of organic and inorganic materials as well as cultural stories.

Jilamara Arts and Craft houses an impressive community collection in the Mulluwurri Museum.

The workshop focused on three topics: the revival of traditional pandanus skirt weaving, the repatriation of collections from the National Museum of Australia, and cleaning art works and preparing them for storage. 30 Indigenous artists and 2 conservators participated in the workshop.



This page: Andy Greenslade (Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs, National Museum of Australia) sharing basic techniques for cleaning artefacts in the Mulluwurri Museum with Indigenous artists Jedda Puruntatameri (Munupi Arts, Tiwi Islands), Janice Murray (Jilamara Arts and Craft), Rhoda Hammer and Miriam Charlie (Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, NT), Aileen Puruntatameri (Jilamara Arts and Craft), and seated, Violet Hammer (Waralungku Arts).

Previous page: Senior artists and traditional knowledge holders, Aileen and Rachel Puruntatameri sharing knowledge with conservator, Carolyn McLennan.







FILMING

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Indigenous film crew, the Mulka Project produced a one-hour documentary about the Harvesting Traditional Knowledge project. The film shows the demonstration and sharing of traditional practices between senior knowledge holders from the Arnhem Land and Kimberley regions of the NT and WA — including bark and ochre harvesting, spear and boomerang making, and the gathering and production of natural fibres for woven crafts and tools such as fine paint brushes.

Conservation scientists from major museums and arts institutions in Australia, where many important cultural artworks and objects are kept, joined the knowledge exchange to explain and explore current conservation and restoration techniques.

Left: Mulka Project camera-man documenting the action.



Harvesting Traditional Knowledge

A Digital Archiving and Keeping Place Project

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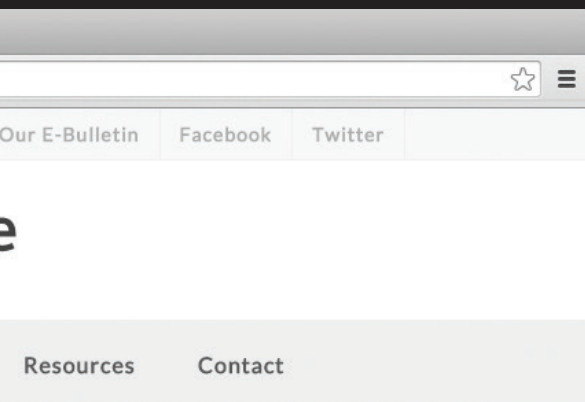
In The Media

Arnhem Land Workshop



The first workshop was hosted by Buku Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land in May 2013. It brought together 13 conservators from significant museums and galleries across Australia and over 30 Aboriginal artists from Art Centres in Arnhem Land.





WEBSITE

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The Harvesting Traditional Knowledge project has been widely covered in Australian media, and has inspired a number of scientific research projects.

As a result of many requests, ANKAAA has launched a website to give our active network a platform to continue to share knowledge.

ANKAAA hopes that the project and on-going conversations and collaborations will contribute to an increase in quality of products, and also provide a deeper engagement of artists and arts workers from Northern Australia in determining how Indigenous cultural materials are cared for, understood and represented in museums and galleries across Australia and internationally.

htk.ankaaa.org.au



For a preview of the Harvesting Traditional Knowledge documentary, visit the website:
www.htk.ankaaa.org.au

If you would like to host a screening or purchase your own copy on DVD contact:
info@ankaaa.org.au

JOIN THE NETWORK

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The Harvesting Traditional Knowledge project has connected over 120 artists and arts workers from remote Indigenous Art Centres in the Tiwi Islands, Darwin/Katherine, Arnhem Land and Kimberley regions (an area spanning 1,000,000 km² and over 40 language groups) with each other and with 24 professionals from 14 of Australia's most important museums and galleries.

This has resulted in a strong network of people sharing knowledge about the material science of cultural objects; how they are made, what they mean to the artists and their communities, and how to best care for them and make them to a high quality standard.

If you would like to get involved or host a screening of the documentary, contact info@ankaaa.org.au



Above: Kangaroo tail sinew for spear-making. Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA.

Participating Art Centres*

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala, NT
Mowanjum Arts and Culture, Derby, WA
Jilamara Arts and Craft, Melville Island, NT
Milingimbi Art and Culture, Milingimbi, NT
Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, NT
Elcho Island Arts, Elcho Island, NT

*(*Only Art Centres that hosted or contributed to workshops are listed. Artists and arts workers from 48 Art Centres spanning four regions serviced by ANKAAA participated in the workshops.)*

Participating Cultural Institutions

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Artlab Australia, Adelaide
Australian Museum, Sydney
Australian National University, Canberra
Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Museums Victoria, Melbourne
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
National Library of Australia, Canberra
National Museum of Australia, Canberra
North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), Darwin
Sisters of St John of God Heritage Centre, Broome

Project Advisory Committee

Djambawa Marawili AM, ANKAAA Chairman
Christina Davidson, CEO, ANKAAA
Yinimala Gumana, Chairman, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre
Will Stubbs, Coordinator, Buku Larrnggay-Mulka Art Centre
Robyn Sloggett, Associate Professor, Director, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, University of Melbourne
Sam Johnston, Director and Senior Research Fellow United Nations Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) Traditional Knowledge Initiative (UNU TK Initiative), Darwin
Andzrej Janczewski, agi NOWE, Art Restoration Services, Cairns



The project is part of the Inspiring Australia Initiative and is funded over two years (2013-14) by the Australian Government Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. It builds on ANKAAA's Digital Archiving and Keeping Place Support Program funded through the Australia Council for the Arts.

This project would not have been possible without the generous operational support of the Ministry for the Arts, the Australia Council for the Arts and the Northern Territory Government.