



**Wam Wardanup**

*Strangers on the Shore*







Lea Taylor, *Yigan-tjoo- Do Not Disturb*, 2022, courtesy and copyright of the artist



Seal Skin courtesy and copyright of the WA Museum

## WAM WARDANUP - STRANGERS ON THE SHORE

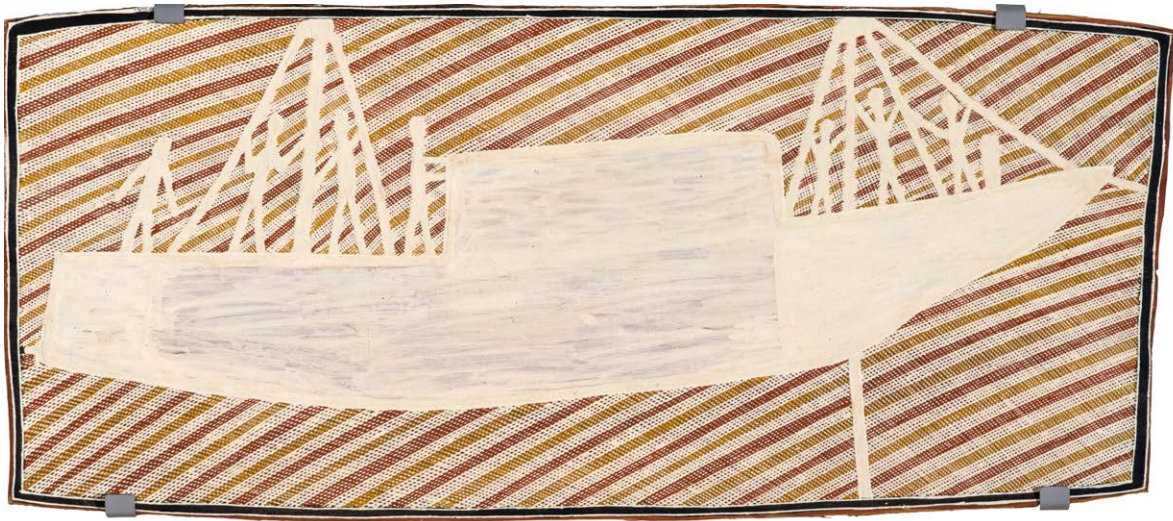
*Wam Wardanup - Strangers on the Shore*, is an exhibition which responds to the WA Maritime Museum Archive of the same name. The artworks presented examine cross-cultural encounters along the vast longitudinal arch of the Western Australian coastline, positioning the ocean and the point at which it reaches the land as a charged space ripe for artistic interrogation. The artists' tackle this space through diverse mediums and from multiple cultural perspectives, sensitively embracing the call for rapid change in the conceptualisation of historical texts particular to the current age of the 'archival turn' and truth-telling.

Within this coastal space, being or perceiving another as a stranger or 'other' is necessarily transient. Anyone who is unfamiliar is a stranger at first sight and once contact is made this state can readily dissolve from the unfamiliar to the familiar as humans engage one another across cultural and linguistic divides. There is a seldom used Greek term, *euxenia*, described as 'high regard for the stranger' or extending hospitality. Many instances of cross-cultural encounter on the West Coast were of mutual curiosity, care

and hospitality, as much as they were of misunderstanding, violence and discord.

The WA Maritime Museum database is 'an electronic database containing all known European and Asian shipwrecks around Western Australia's coastline where survivors have had Indigenous social contact' and an initial research point for many of the artists. The database includes information and artefacts that have been collected from the 1600s onwards, including oral histories, facts and legends, some supported by letters and artworks, including for example, First Nation depictions of Macassan (Sulawesi) 'prau' boats drawn on coastal rock formations, representations of items of trade including axes and knives, heroic shipwreck rescues where inter-cultural encounter is affirmative and life-saving and early exchange with Chinese traders. Through interrogating this archive and the many stories of shipwreck, survival and cross-cultural encounter, the artists engage in a critique of colonialism, shine a light onto and question accepted histories, acknowledge truths and imagine other possibilities. This exhibition asks that





Bulun Bulun, Johnny\_Murrkundja, *Manikay Cycle - Visiting Groups to Arnhem Land*, 1993, copyright of the artist's estate

we re-visit these histories and try to better understand shared moments of our collective history and how they inform myth-making and the ongoing re-shaping of human identity.

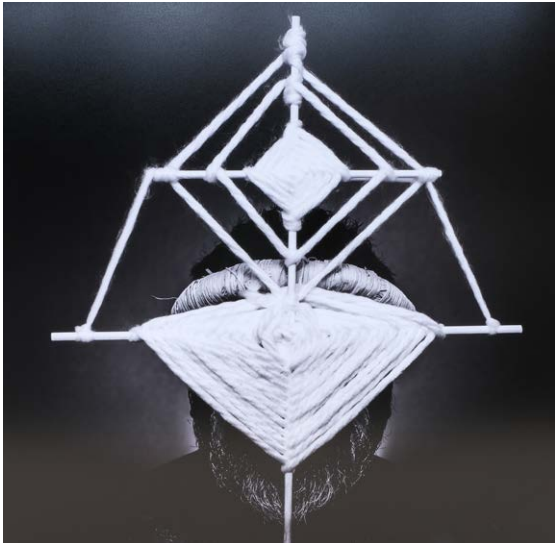
The exhibition is a critique as much as it marks steps towards *doyntj doyntj koorliny* – (going along together) *danjoo koorliny* (walking together), with *koorndarn* – (respect), listening (nih), mutual acknowledgement and a sharing of stories. Both indigenous and non-indigenous artists unpack the idea of a stranger/s on the shore, as a complex and layered idea, open to multiple interpretations. Historically, there has been devastating damage caused because of perceived ‘mutual strangeness’ across cultures on the West Coast, because of ignorance and the emphasis on differences rather than similarity and connection across humanity. It is damage that takes a great deal of time and a great deal of effort by a great many people to heal. The idea of the stranger can present the opportunity for such healing to occur, the opportunity to shift the narrative towards familiarity, through the re-presentation of existing stories

and the creation of new cultural forms that move us towards imagining a shared history and shared language.

Cultural exchange is a process that has been occurring for centuries, not just in the form of material culture, but in syncretic religion, eclectic philosophies, languages, stories, music and, of course, people. The ocean has invited journeys from time immemorial, its very nature as a fluid body linking cultures creates a necessary unfolding of hybridity that would be unimaginable to halt and impossible to turn back. In the process of hybridised cultural materials forming, some things may be lost, but so too, have wonderful things been formed via cultural collision, indicating that no single culture is pure, ‘fixed’ or atrophying, rather we are in a constant state of becoming.

Margo Neale, who is the Senior Indigenous Curator and advisor to the director of the National Museum of Australia describes how:

*...the concept of first knowledges has the ability to*



Michael Jalaru Torres, *Kardiya Dreaming*, 2018, copyright of the artist

*'expand your world view to encompass limitless other possibilities, including ways in which you can learn from the Aboriginal archive of knowledge embodied in country. In combination with the Western Archive, this knowledge creates a third archive, available to all!'*  
(Neale, G. 2020)

*Strangers on the Shore* works within the space of such a 'third' archive. It explores the meeting between knowledges, as much as the space where the ocean meets the shore. Fringes, edges, liminal zones, are always dynamic spaces open to possibilities, to new conversations, and new meanings and together the artworks within the show become a part of a bigger, necessary and ongoing conversation.

By Kelsey Ashe, Sandra Harben and Laetitia Wilson



Kelsey Ashe, Sandra Harben, *Wam Wardanup doyntj doyntj koorliny (Strangers on the Shore going along together)* (detail), 2022, courtesy and copyright of the artist



## ARTISTS

Kelsey Ashe with Sandra Harben, Johnny Bulun Bulun, Sandra Hill, Jo Darbyshire with Cherish Marrington and David Cherrin, Laurel Nannup, Anna Nazzari, Lea Taylor and Michael Jalaru Torres.

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**Ngala kaaditj Noongar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja.**  
*We acknowledge the Noongar people as the original custodians of this land.*

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artists

Inside cover image: Anna Nazzari, The Governor, 2022, copyright of the artist, photo  
Michelle Becker

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