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Fredericks, Bronwyn L. (1997) *land home place belong* - Pamela Croft.

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land home place belong. Pamela Croft

In Pamela Croft's work I hear, see, feel and sense the importance of tradition, recognition of ancestors, respect for uniqueness in spiritual expression, facilitation of an understanding within the contexts of history and culture, a sense of place, connections to family and community, commitment to educational and social transformation that recognizes and empowers the inherent strength of Aboriginal peoples and cultures and the challenges to non-Aboriginal people to truly listen and absorb in order to move to a place of understanding of the Aboriginal world...

The ideal purpose of education is to attain knowledge, seek truth, wisdom, completeness and life as seen by self and others. Story is one of the unique ways of Aboriginal education in both teaching and learning. It is in the story that there is made a place for honouring of self, family, community, place, nature and spirituality. In this exhibition Pamela Croft has revealed many things about her own story, her own journeying and the journey of many other Aboriginal peoples. She has then set each idea, concept and event in contexts that are based on history, place, environment and process which intertwine within one larger story of this country and humanity.

Aboriginal learning is generally tied to a place environmentally, socially and spiritually. Indigenous teaching and learning are intertwined with the daily lives of the teacher and the learner. Pamela is both her own teacher and her own learner, she learns from the environment, other people, her community and her culture. She has defined history and place in terms to create a place for learning and for the individuals who participate in this exhibition. Thus her words as you enter, "Listen, listen with your ears, listen with your eyes, listen with your body, listen with your spirit, listen".

Over the past two hundred years the changes to this country have been dramatic and traumatic for both land and peoples. When the colonizers first came they saw Australia as the wilderness, as an obstacle to overcome through the settling of land and utilization of the resources. For many colonists Aboriginal people were also resources that could be terminated, cleared away, exploited physically, psychologically and sexually, 'taught' by religion, 'civilised'.

Pamela's work captures some of these historical processes and her experiences of the processes in her works "*Sister's of Mercy...I was taken in for care and protection...abused*", *Sacrificial love passion; To the Father "Mr Paget", the son, 'Pamela' and the Holy Spirit 'Jesus/God/Spirit', and The British Erriccson "we are indeed a civilizing race...when we came here, the Aborigines covered these wide plains in thousands. Where are they today? We have 'civilised' them-they are dead*".

Sacrificial love passion with the religious books, an angel and a matchbox displaying a woman depicting beauty, symbolizes the introduction of religion and concepts of angelic behaviour for Christ, drugs (initially opium) and sex. This piece is about sexual exploitation and violence, the

introduction of religion and drugs of dependence and the hypocrisy of a 'civilising' race of people in this country, on these lands.

Other boxes such as "*We saw something up there-it like a white man!, love lies bleeding, hunted and gathered, Our Creator-Whiteman's devil, Sorry business and Monopoly game used to win the primitive*" are all messages of a past that have a twist in interpretation. For example, *Our Creator-Whiteman's devil* includes representation of the snake: to many Aboriginal people may represent the creator, the keeper of special and sacred places and to non-Aboriginal people it may represent part of the story of Adam and Eve, of Christianity or something cold and may be something feared.

Some of the other works share with me wonderful feelings of strength and cultural continuity and Pamela's sense of connection to her past, present and future where ever she may be. Works such as *The strength of heritage passed down through cultural memory genetics, Ochre pit...our spirit, our essence, our life blood, My treasures, Wunndurra 'warrior' red dog dreaming, Us 2 living in Paris* and *Protect the spirit with colour. 'Adivasi' country and Ancestral spirit beings*. They all generate a sense of place.

Place in an Aboriginal context has meaning and can be interpreted in relationship to everything else in the environment and the people. Aboriginal people engage their respective environment and become participants with everything in that environment. The environment of place is not something that is separate from Aboriginal life, but it is more the context, part of the set of relationships that connects everything. All is then surrounded with respect and sacredness of place and everything in that place.

The sense of relatedness to place comes from a much deeper sense than an intellectual understanding. It is part of life itself. If you look at Pamela's work carefully in its entirety, if you listen to it, there are connections within each piece and then from one piece to the next. They map out a series of relationships that show Pamela, her thinking patterns, her sense of place, connection to that place or topic, her past, and present and the natural environment. From an Aboriginal perspective you learn to recognize the connections between relationships and the tracks of the process. The process and the relationships are often far more important as evident in Pamela's work which demonstrate process and a set of relationships including physical, psychological, social, spiritual and metaphysical.

In some of the work in this exhibition Pamela has mapped by using travelling lines and other symbols, in other work she leaves you to interpret yourself or involves you in the process. This can be seen by the use of the smoking area to cleanse you making you ready to absorb her message and the lounge area she has created with a mat that you must walk on in order to sit down. The mat is made from objects collected from the beach, where Woppaburra (Keppel Islands) waters meet Darumbal (Capricorn Coast) lands and show the destruction, domination and colonization of the waters and lands, Country.

Other images of Woppaburra and Darumbal Country abound. For me these images show how Aboriginal peoples who have been dominated, traumatized and oppressed still have the capacity to create conditions favourable to their continuation and survival. The geography of the land went together and goes together with song, language, story, art and knowledge. The stars, rivers, lakes, waterways, animals, air, ocean and spirits of a place, of a geography,

worked y and survival and sustainability. The geography, the stories were important and are important to Aboriginal peoples as people of place, of Country and are deemed sacred.

Look now at *Eagle rock and fish traps* (Figure 1) *Long Beach* (Figure 2), *Darumbal/Woppaburra Country*, *Us mob at Joskeleigh, hunting and gathering*, *Eagle rock and fish traps* along with *Lost Identity*, *Beach Birds*, *Gone Fishing*, *Water dreaming story*, *Global beaches* (Figure 3), *Lost City*, *Nourlangie*, *Stories mapped in the land, enter my being. I digest, I digest* and the *Land is our life, it holds our laws and our spirits: it holds their bones and ours*.



Figure 1. Pamela Croft. 1996. *Eagle rock and fish traps*, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 2. Pamela Croft. 1996. *Long Beach*. Acrylic on Canvas attached to driftwood.

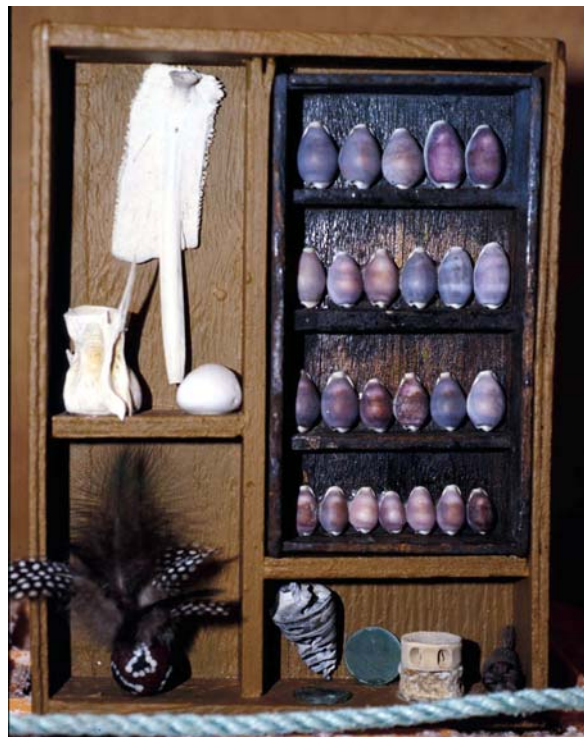


Figure 3. Pamela Croft. 1996. *Global beaches*. Assemblage, found objects.

What do you see?

Eagle rock and fish traps (Figure 1) tells me about Country, land, particular features, connections to tradition along with the now.

In all of the works the concepts of 'land home place belong' and interconnected and intertwined through Pamela's work as are the materials she has used. This is the title of the exhibition and the name of one of the artworks featured in this exhibition (Figure 4). The twisted and tangled ropes, wire, plant materials, discarded feathers, echidna quills and the remains of animals, reminders of life and death and all that is sacred. This exhibition of 'and home place belong' has elements of ceremony in that there is initiation, purification, death and rebirth. There is no doubt that through the stories Pamela tells in her artwork she herself has gone through a deep process which in a metaphoric sense, is about life, death and rebirth.



Figure 4. Pamela Croft. 1996. land home place belong, acrylic on canvas.

When one remembers, one re-knows and reclaims part of one's life. Pamela has remembered part of her life and the lives of many Aboriginal people. She has shared some of her story and the stories of other peoples, relationships, concepts of home, places and placement, environment, nature and land.

As you leave and glance at the fireplace Pamela prepared for you, ask yourself did you listen, and hear, see, feel and sense the stories and messages she shared with you.

Bronwyn Fredericks
Rockhampton

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