Declaration

Title: Maree Clarke: Reflections on Creative Practice, Place & Identity

Candidate's name: Maree Clarke

Name of School: School of Education RMIT University

Date submitted: November 2009

Declaration by the

Candidate:

I certify that:

This thesis is entirely my own work, and due acknowledgement have been made where appropriate. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the thesis is the result of work, which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party has been acknowledged.

Candidate's signature:

Maree Clarke:

Reflections on Creative Practice, Place & Identity

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Maree Clarke
Master of Arts (Education)
School of Education
Design & Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University Melbourne

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Project Proposal

Title

Maree Clarke: Reflections on Creative Practice, Place & Identity

Summary - Artist Bio

I am a practicing artist and also the Senior Curator and Exhibitions Manager at the Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne. I exhibit widely across a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture and traditional jewellery making. While I have had no formal training as an artist, everything I know has been taught to me by my brother who has since passed away. Quite often when I'm painting I think about my younger brother because he was the one that started me off painting.

I collect materials from places I have a blood connection to. Whether this is the skin of a carpet snake or the feathers of a black cockatoo, I need to go upcountry to get the material. When I visit country, the places I go to I always have a connection to otherwise they have no relevance. I am always thinking about country and family with every painting that I do. I'm from up around the Murray area, which is fairly hot, deserty country and the beautiful colours up that way inspire me. The artwork I produce incorporates paintings on canvas using acrylic paints that consist of rich, earthy colours. I also gather and use a lot of natural material, such as gumnuts, bottlebrush, acacia, and any other natural material I can find. I also combine natural fibres, such as string and sinew, to make some of my sculptural pieces. In my jewellery designs I combine a lot of natural things.

Most of my work is based on collaborative practice because the significance of passing on cultural knowledge is important to me. The practice of sharing knowledge and working collaboratively is an inherent part of how I work. I like my family to be around when I'm working so that I can pass that knowledge on.

My work experience has included working as an Aboriginal educator in Mildura for about nine and a half years. At the time, a job came up at the Mildura Aboriginal Art Co-op to set up an art and craft shop in the main street. I had never painted before, but my younger brother was a fantastic

painter and dancer. I remembered the first pair of earrings I made. I must have wiped the design off about 15 times. I just wasn't happy with them and then I finally finished this one pair of earrings, which I think sold for about \$15 or \$20. This was in 1987/88. I went on to make a pure white quill necklace which is now in the Museum of Victoria. I have made two black quilled necklaces since then and a whole range of different jewellery out of wood and natural material like the gumnut.

From painting tiny bits of jewellery, I went on to paint the first green and gold tram for the Koorie Heritage Trust in 1988. That was supposed to be on the tracks for a couple of months advertising the new Koorie Heritage Trust (then called the Koorie Cultural Centre). I went on to paint large scale billboards and public arts projects.

Brief Description

The Significance of Totem

Totems govern life in Koori tribal language groups. For example, they dictate who you can talk to and marry, and govern rights for making art, including men's business and women's business. This translates as 'Lore' in Koori culture. *Lore* is a Koori term meaning a way of being that encompasses kinship systems, responsibilities, and beliefs, as they interconnect with a particular area of country.

I am connected to the Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Mutti Mutti and Boonurong people through my heritage. My connection to these four language groups provides the framework for my arts practice research project.

Totems are an important component of my work. I've never seen information collated anywhere about the totems of Victoria. I don't even know all of the totems from my own tribe. I would like to gather as much information as I can, and give that to my nieces and nephews. I know there are a lot of other kids out there who have no idea, so it might give them a little bit of grounding, a little bit of something to hold on to from their own country.

In the past, when the Museum acquired Aboriginal artefacts, they sometimes didn't record all of the details. This meant that there was then a break in the knowledge. We have our own collection of artefacts at the Koorie Heritage Trust, but we don't have that layer of information about what the designs were about.

I think it would be very empowering to know all of the totems, including the male and the female totems.

The totems aren't necessarily in the designs on the shields and artefacts.

They are generally designs relating to those different areas. Gunnai/Kurnai

can be quite different to Latje Latje, for example. Some of the designs on the banners may represent the totems. It's like having an artist's interpretation. You wouldn't necessarily have a blue wren on a shield, but you could have markings of a blue wren.

I am interested in both male and female totems. Sometimes people overlook the female totem and focus only on the male totem. I've been told that they exist, it's just a matter of finding them. If you look at the Gunnai totem, it's a Booran (pelican) which is huge, but the female totem is the blue wren, which is really tiny. That's the only one that I've seen with a female totem. I would like to find out about other tribes and what their female totems are.

Research Question

What has been my experience of identity development as an Indigenous South Eastern Australian artist?

Methodology

The methodological approach I take is a combination of Historical Research (Black & MacRaild 2000; Tierney 2000; Hodder 2000) and the Indigenous approach to research of Dadirri (Atkinson 2001). Miriam Rose Ungummer describes Dadirri as an inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness which recognises the deep spring that is inside us (Ungummer 2000). This combination of methodologies has allowed me to undertake historical research from an Indigenous perspective which recognises and respects multiple voices and stances in a culturally sensitive way, using conversation, story-telling and deep listening as the basis for data gathering.

This project draws on and integrates resources which currently exist in a number of different forms and locations. To gather data for my research, I looked at historical documents and made field trips to country. The collected data included geographical locations, landscapes of area, designs, totems and stories. I sourced historical documents from the Rare Book Collection at the Koorie Heritage Trust. The Trust keeps a comprehensive collection of rare books and documents.

My work was also drawn from many different stories passed onto me by elders and other people in my family. In the last trip I did to Balranald, we lived on the mission down by the river and my aunt, my mum's first cousin, took us out to the mission and started telling us stories from around that area. She now thinks we're of age now where she can pass on certain stories. I'll go up again and hear more of those stories and come back and start making some work.

This process of returning to country to hear the stories is in line with the practice of deep and respectful listening inherent in *Dadirri*, which underpins my research. The concept *Dadirri* appears in many Aboriginal languages and describes a process of listening deeply in ways which build community. As a research methodology, Deep Listening offers an approach which facilitates cultural awareness and enables cross-cultural knowledge transference. It is the process not just of listening to the elders, but looking at country and seeing what is there. It's something you do unconsciously.

As part of my research project, I have had the opportunity to participate in Deep Listening events, collaborating in artistic improvisations across different art forms. In 2008, I attended a conference in Banff in Canada with members of the Koori Cohort and met with many First Nations people in Canada. In this cross-cultural exchange opportunity I participated in performances that enabled me as an artist to paint my response to research methodologies (in particular Deep Listening). These performances worked to strengthen cultural awareness and built cross-cultural relationships to produce a range of creative works.

Deep Listening

Blackfellas have been doing it for hundreds and hundreds of generations Deep Listening is what we are doing here

Just listening to each other

Listening to the country

Listening to each other

And understanding each other's journey.

Our performances show Deep Listening in the most amazing way
We had audiences in tears and we cried too
It was moving
It is powerful

In this urban environment we're still doing it
We'll continue to do it
And we'll keep passing that on to our kids
That's what it's about

Continuing culture
We practice it every day
We don't have to talk about it
We just do it

Rationale for Project

The rationale of the project is aligned with the vision of the Koorie Heritage Trust, where I work as the Senior Curatorial and Exhibitions Manager. The outcomes of this project are a gift to future generations, as well as to the current mob. It demonstrates a commitment to protecting, preserving and promoting the living culture of the Indigenous peoples of Southeast Australia. It provides a resource for Victorian artists and members of the Koorie community to learn about, recognise and value the rich cultural heritage of Victorian designs.

This research is important because it has not been done before and it needs to be done. The further down the track we get, the less information there is out there.

My Development as an Artist

During the 1990s, I worked to document the work of contemporary Southeastern Australian Indigenous artists. During this period, I worked for the City of Port Phillip as their first Indigenous Arts Officer. This work involved travelling around Victoria to collect the work of Aboriginal artists from different communities. These works were eventually exhibited in a series of five large exhibitions and represented the first public exhibition of Southeastern Indigenous artists works in Australia. The collection of works by these artists demonstrated the ways in which Southeastern Indigenous art is distinct to artwork produced in other parts of Australia, such as the Top End and Central Desert art. It reflected the existence of a strong and established Koori cultural identity and art making practice in the late 1990s. This whole period of my life was documented on film along with a series of interviews with the artists involved in the exhibition.

The period of the 1990s was important to me and my research because it highlighted the fact there was a unique and diverse Koori arts practice in existence. My work during the time was about bringing Koori art to the forefront of public awareness, because Aboriginal art from the Top End tended to be privileged and more recognised in the public arts domain. Koori arts practice was not getting any recognition and there was the misconception that Koori art did not exist, which translated to this idea that Koori people also did not exist in Victoria.

This was an important period for me for other reasons related to my own experience and development as an artist. I began painting in the late 1980s, a decade before I started collecting the work of Aboriginal artists around Victoria. I came to recognise just how significant the work of Victorian Aboriginal artists was in helping to develop and influence my own identity as a Koori artist. I also became much more interested in the idea of totem and the significance of this within my own family language group.

Projects

My visual art practice has included developing a large body of creative works as part of my Masters research. I have been involved in several exhibitions, including two in 2008, which were connected to my research project. This included the exhibition, *Ng woka, woka nganin: I am the Land and the Land is Me* (Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum from 24 October – 30 November, 2008) and the *Gulpa ngawul* exhibition (Koorie Heritage Trust December 2008).

I made a kangaroo tooth necklace for the exhibition *Ng woka, woka nganin: I am the Land and the Land is Me*. The exhibition showcased a range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks from Victorian women artists, including myself (Mutti Mutti/Wamba Wamba/Yorta Yorta/Boonurong), Debra Couzens (Keeray Wurrong/Gunditjmara), Vicki Couzens (Keeray Wurrong/Gunditjmara) and Lee Darroch (Yorta Yorta/Trawlwoolway/Mutti Mutti).

For this exhibition, I made a series of necklaces and headpieces. The exhibition was based on our connection to country and to each other as Aboriginal women. It demonstrated cultural continuity and the ways we continue our cultural traditions of making kangaroo tooth necklaces and headpieces – artefacts that have not been made for more than 200 years. This exhibition represented a reinterpretation of traditional art-making practices within the Koorie community.

Other work I have produced as part of my research includes a series of five shields; two were based on a river theme and three were based on my interpretation of Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba and Mutti Mutti. One looked like a basket weaving deign and there was another based on Mutti Mutti with kangaroo skin fur across the front and another one was a huge diamond shaped on the shield – strong and striking and just using the ochre colours. Even though I use acrylic painting on canvas, I also do a lot of work on the

canoe shape or the shield shape. This shape can be interpreted as a shield, the canoe, a water carrier or a baby carrier. It's a really nice shape to work with other than a rectangle or square canvas.

Conclusion

This study has been interested in the ways contemporary cultural knowledge and practices of Koori people from Southeastern Australia continue to thrive, develop and strengthen. These artists' works have influenced me in significant ways in my own practice. My work demonstrates the ways in which Koori cultural identity and arts practice is distinct to Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia. When people think of Aboriginal art, they think of Top End and Central Desert art. People have often not heard of Victorian Aboriginal art. They often look at the dot paintings and Top End art. My work in the past of bringing the different works around Victoria together was to showcase Victorian regional artists. They were given an opportunity to exhibit their work. It was about breaking down stereotypes. The work of these artists helped to significantly influence my own thinking and arts practice. There are many photographers and artists who use different forms, contemporary forms. While this might not look like Aboriginal art, if you read the stories behind them, they are inherently Aboriginal. Many people think there are no Aboriginal people left in Victoria, that our cultural practices have gone. My work has been about shifting these perceptions and demonstrating our deep and continuing relationship to totem and country.

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Appendix

Curriculum Vitae

Maree Clarke

Selected projects

Postal Address

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Telephone

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Employment			
2010	Invited to New Zealand with Vicki Couzens for the 4TH WĀNANGA		
	OF INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTISTS ROTORUA – NEW ZEALAND		
2009	Frankston Foreshore Public Art Project Kangaroo Apple with Vicki		
	Couzens		
2009	Possum Skin Cloak Workshop - Lake Macquarie Art Gallery NSW with		
	Lee Darroch		
2009	Public Art Project-Growling Grassland Frog Eggs-Point Cook with Vicki		
	Couzens		
2009	Invited by Monash City Council to tender for a Public Art Commission with		
	Vicki Couzens		
2009	Invited by City of Maribyrong to tender for a Public Art Commission with		
	Vicki Couzens		
2008	Cultural exchange-Canada		
2008	Cloak making with Lee Darroch at the Pacific Arts Festival-America		
	Samoa		
2001	Senior Curator/Curator/Practicing Artist		
-present	Koorie Heritage Trust		
	In my role as Exhibition Manager/Curator at the Koorie Heritage Trust I		
	manage and organise the exhibition programs for our 4 Galleries,		
	manage travelling exhibitions, organise artworks for the Sydney and		

"SCAR a Stolen Vision" 1 of 6 artists involved in the creation of 30 poles ranging from 4 – 7 metres installed into the City Square Melbourne.	s stagirl Productions		
1 of 6 artists involved in the creation of 30 poles	s		
	S		
"SCAR a Stolen Vision"			
"OOAD O. I. N. I. II			
Koorie Heritage Trust	City of Melbourne		
-May Immigration Museum			
Co-curated the Exhibition "Lost & Found"			
Project Co-ordinator with the Brotherhood of St	t Laurence Frankston		
Parliament House with Kimba Thompson	Melbourne)	
Co-curated the Exhibition "Urbaninity #1"	·		
	•		
ŭ	oorie Heritage Trust		
Cultural Exchange Exhibition with			
·			
Artists with the Moomba Festival at Art Play			
	gan Evans		
Co-curated the Exhibition Black on White			
Melbourne Fringe with Kimba Thompson, Ricardo Idagi & Bernardo			
,			
Board Game for Aboriginal Catholic Ministry			
new building.	elbourne		
1 of three artists who designed 2000 x 1800mm glass panels for Oxfam's			
overseas. London, Paris, Berlin, Eutrek, Milan,	LA & New York		
showcasing Aboriginal Business with Aboriginal Tourism Australia			
1 of 47 Aboriginal delegation to travel to Europe			
·	·		
·			
an exhibition will be developed for 2008			
	Galleries for Koorie artists to exhibit. As a practicing artist I constantly have works of be jewellery, paintings or an installation or jotting. Art workshop with Koorie Women with Cancer an exhibition will be developed for 2008. Invited to South Africa as part of Craft Victoria's Counihan Gallery. Old Messages New Med 1 of 47 Aboriginal delegation to travel to Europe showcasing Aboriginal Business with Aboriginal overseas. London, Paris, Berlin, Eutrek, Milan, 1 of three artists who designed 2000 x 1800mm new building. Board Game for Aboriginal Catholic Ministry 'SOIL' installation at the Treasury Building as publication of the Exhibition Black on White Centre of Contemporary Photography with Med Artists with the Moomba Festival at Art Play Awakening' Conservations with our Ancest Cultural Exchange Exhibition with 'Koorie and Maori Women Koorie and Maorie Andreas Andr	As a practicing artist I constantly have works on the go at home weath be jewellery, paintings or an installation or jotting down ideas for project that workshop with Koorie Women with Cancer Hepburn Springs an exhibition will be developed for 2008 Invited to South Africa as part of Craft Victoria's The South Project Counihan Gallery Old Messages New Media Brunswick 1 of 47 Aboriginal delegation to travel to Europe and the USA as part showcasing Aboriginal Business with Aboriginal Tourism Australia overseas. London, Paris, Berlin, Eutrek, Milan, LA & New York 1 of three artists who designed 2000 x 1800mm glass panels for Oxfanew building. Melbourne Board Game for Aboriginal Catholic Ministry 'SOIL' installation at the Treasury Building as part of Melbourne Fringe with Kimba Thompson, Ricardo Idagi & Bernardo Co-curated the Exhibition Black on White Centre of Contemporary Photography with Megan Evans Artists with the Moomba Festival at Art Play Awakening' Conservations with our Ancestors Cultural Exchange Exhibition with 'Koorie and Maori Women Koorie Heritage Trust Exhibited in the NAIDOC Exhibition at the Incinerator Footscray Co-curated the Exhibition "Urbaninity #1' Parliament House with Kimba Thompson Melbourne Project Co-ordinator with the Brotherhood of St Laurence Frankston Co-curated the Exhibition "Lost & Found' Immigration Museum	

Jun-Aug	A series of 6 exhibitions at the Adult Multicultural Educatio	n Service				
Ü	Melbourne city, Preston, Box Hill, Springvale, St Albans ar	nd Footscray				
	Also as part of the AMES 50 th Birthday Celebrations I coo	-				
	artists of other cultures to come together to paint a tram					
2001	Artists and Curator of 'The Other View of Another View"					
		Melbourne				
2001	Designed 3 Mosaic Poles for the Christian Brothers					
	Garden	Parkville				
2001 Relief	work and Artist at a Koorie Women's Refuge for Domestic	Violence and				
relief work at a Homeless Women's Hostel Melbourne						
1999-2000	Koorie Support Teacher	Mildura				
	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE					
2000	Designed and installed 'Scar' fountain for					
	Preston Community Arts Centre	Preston				
1994-1998	Koorie Arts Officer	St Kilda				
	City of Port Phillip					
1992	Course Co-ordinator	St Kilda				
	Feelen Boordup					
	Ngwala Wilumbong					
1992	Koorie Liaison Officer	Melbourne				
	Adult Community & Further Education					
1989-1991	Trainee Photographer	Thornbury				
	Aborigines Advancement League					
1988	Painted Tram	Melbourne				
	Koorie Heritage Trust					
1987-1988	Manager	Mildura				
	Kiah Krafts Aboriginal Retail Shop					
1996	Projects Co-ordinator and Curator of five major exhibition through the					
City of Port Phillip under the umbrella title "We Iri We Homebor						
	incorporating NAIDOC Week Exhibitions and a concert at the Great Hall					
	at the National Gallery of Victoria					

OTHER PROJECTS

Reconciliation Art Project

Koorie Cultural Arts Advisor

Principal Artist – Fiona Foley

City of Melbourne

Consultation with LEAP Team

Design for a mosaic project with the Living Museum of the West

12sq metres

Painted 3 tram poles in the City Square

Melbourne City Council

International Indigenous People's Education Ceremony

Commissioned to make a ceremonial belt

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association

Designed, built and painted a wooden barrier for an Indigenous garden

St Kilda City Council

Designed, built and painted 11 snakes/serpents made from railway sleepers ranging

from 3 – 5 metres installed into 40 metres of footpath

Box Hill City Council

Painted Billboard 6 x 12 metres

Melbourne City Council

Designed two book covers for

Catholic Education Aboriginal Perspectives Education Resource Book

Melbourne

Fire Sculpture

Cape Conran

Design Workshop with Gippsland Artists

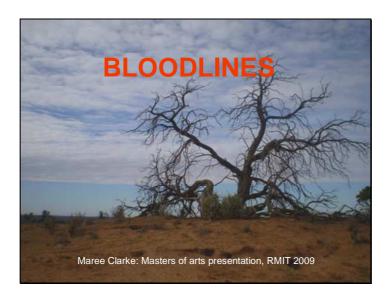
Gippsland Aboriginal Artists Co-operative

Raymond Island

Palimpsest #1 #2 #3

Mildura

List of Illustrations



















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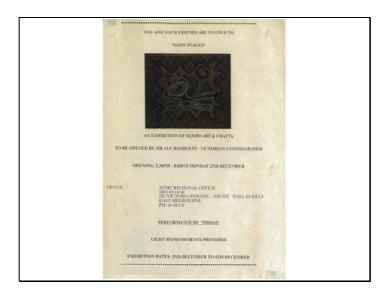


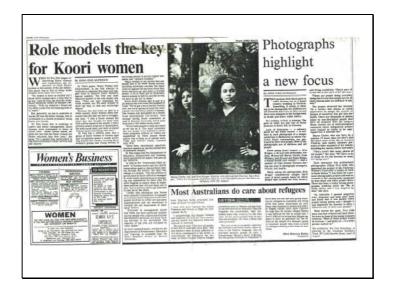


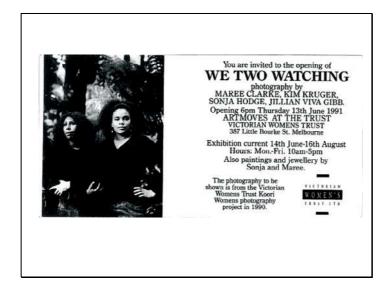


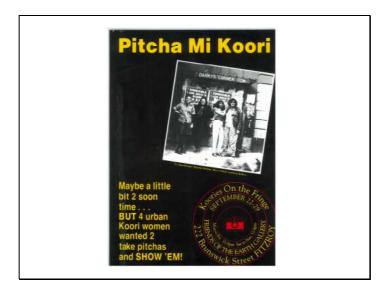
Acacia seed necklace Acacia seed and echidna quill necklace Gum nuts









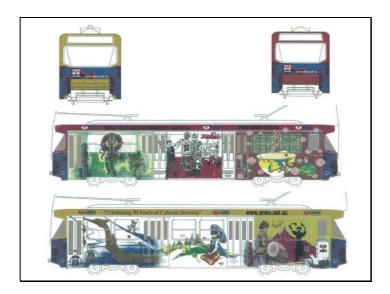


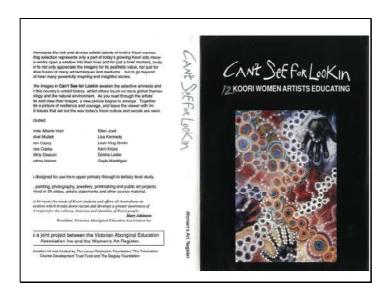








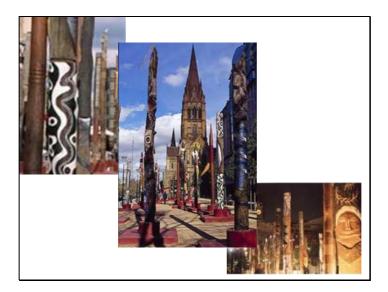


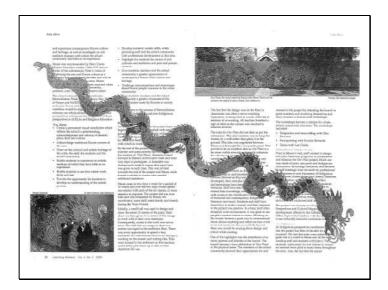








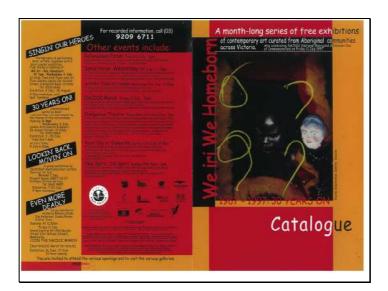


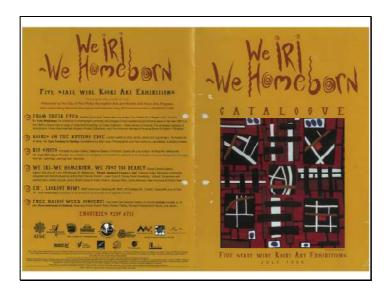


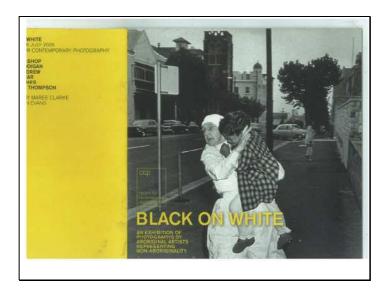


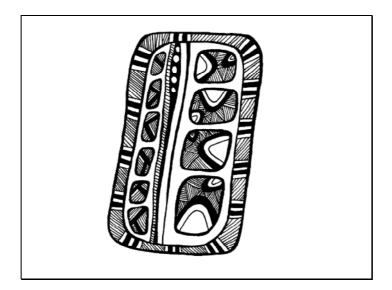


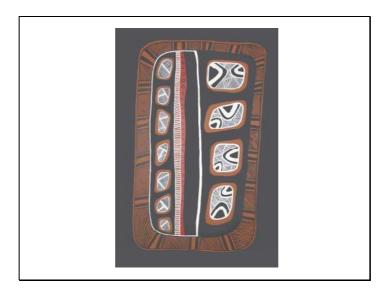


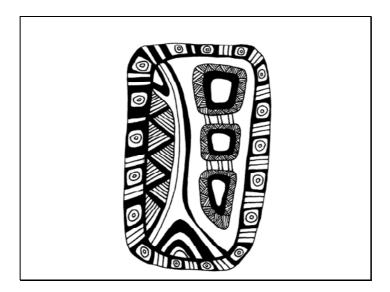


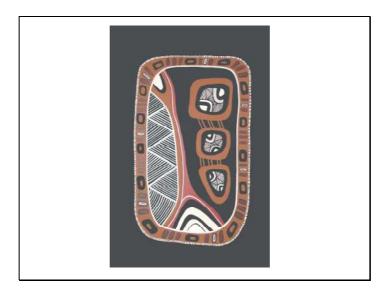






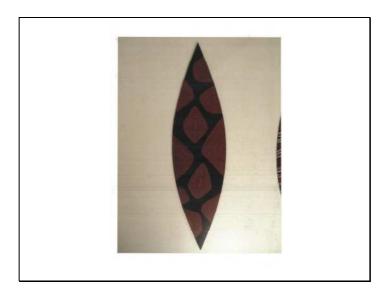




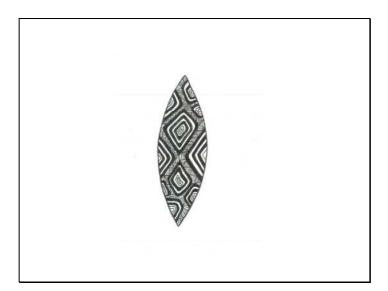




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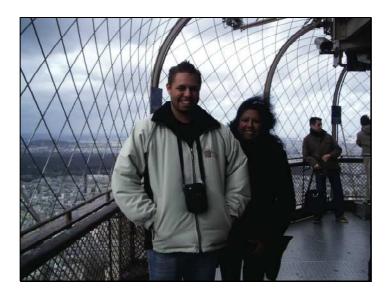
















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