



Untitled, giran

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Abstract:	<p>Understanding wind is an important part of understanding country. Winds bring change, knowledge and emotions. Connected to the winds are budyaan, or the birds, who know the winds best. This visual essay traces the development of Wiradjuri dhawura gulbanha (Wiradjuri wind philosophy) a project conceived with Dr Uncle Stan Grant AM, a senior Wiradjuri elder and knowledge holder. Throughout this essay Wiradjuri is used rather than Indigenous or Aboriginal, as the project is based on specific Wiradjuri culture, knowledge, and language, to which the author belongs.</p> <p>In order to represent the winds the project required thousands of feathers, which were provided with a public call out. The aim of this call out was, in addition to collecting feathers, to stimulate people to show yindyamarra (respect) and engage with their local environment, take note of the birds that inhabit parks in cities and towns, and learn to move slowly through country by engaging with country.</p> <p>The final work, untitled (giran) 2018, is a major installation with soundscape shown at the 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.</p> <p>This essay, in the form of photographs and extended caption, shows how Wiradjuri gulbanha (Wiradjuri philosophy) can benefit all members of the community.</p>

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Giran

The installation *untitled (giran)* was exhibited at the 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. It consists of 1742 small sculptures embodying six different types of everyday tools used to eat, sustain, hunt, hold, prepare and protect. Each group of objects is made of a different material, and together they reveal the relations with and knowledge of country and environment. They are bagaay, a emu eggshell spoon; galigal, a stone knife; bingal, a bone awl; bindu-gaany a freshwater mussel scraper; dhala-ny, a wood spear point; and waybarra, a woven sedge item. These tools hover on a 25meter long curved wall with a 48-channel soundscape that included Wiradjuri language, winds and birds. Each sculpture has feathers bound to it with wayu (string): together they flock across the wall like a murmuration of birds specking to the giran.

In Wiradjuri culture giran is about knowledge, change and cycles. Things are shifting in Australia, as Aboriginal communities around the country are waking up old knowledge. For instance this is evident in the many language revitalization projects that affect not just Aboriginal people, but the wider community. This project is a collaboration with Dr Uncle Stan Grant Senior AM, and it is about this wind of change, and about making people more aware of culture and their environment. It takes the shape of a murmuration of birds that wraps itself up in an infinity loop. Like a murmuration it is about a collective awareness and operating as one to look after country. While working with elders the key principle of yindyamarra is a constant. While it is translated as 'respect' in English, its means to go slow, take your time, be patient, and to understand one's relationships between people, things and place. Respect and going slowly and thinking about connections are central to the methodology of this project.

The making process of giran reflects these ideas. Each object in each stage of the process was made in collaboration with others, from the conceptualisation of the work in dialogue with Wiradjuri Elders, to those who helped collecting materials, the Aunties who contributed to make the wagu (string) that ties objects and feathers, family members who helped to make the objects, and the hundreds of people who across Australia collected and sent boxes of feathers through a general call-out organised by Kaldor Public Art Projects.

The call-out invited people to slow down, to pay attention and learn about their environment. And feathers did arrive over a period of many months, in boxes and envelopes, often with messages on the effects of collecting feathers on slowing down and pausing to listen and understand country. At regular intervals Kaldor Public Art Projects website also hosted blog posts dedicated to specific birds and their role in Wiradjuri culture:

A key part of collecting feathers is the opportunity to get out into local parks and open spaces, and to learn more about the birds in your neighbourhood and what they can tell you about your environment. Over the coming weeks I'm going to post several short stories about birds, touching on their importance, the issues they face and what we can learn from them. There are a lot of fantastic sources of information. One website I use to help identify birds is: <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net>

Let's start with the basics. In Australia there are more than 800 bird species. Over 370 species are endemic to Australia, which means they occur here and nowhere else. Some endemic Australian birds include the highly elusive and endangered night parrot (*Pezoporus occidentalis*), the well-known crested pigeon (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) and our national symbol, the emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*). Habitat destruction and introduced predators mean that we have lost over 24 bird species since colonisation, and today more than 100 bird species are critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable. Some scientists say 1 in 5 Australian birds are in trouble. Birds play a vital part in the world and we need to look after them. Habitats must be protected – a plus for both the birds and us – particularly when planning new urban areas. Parks should be designated

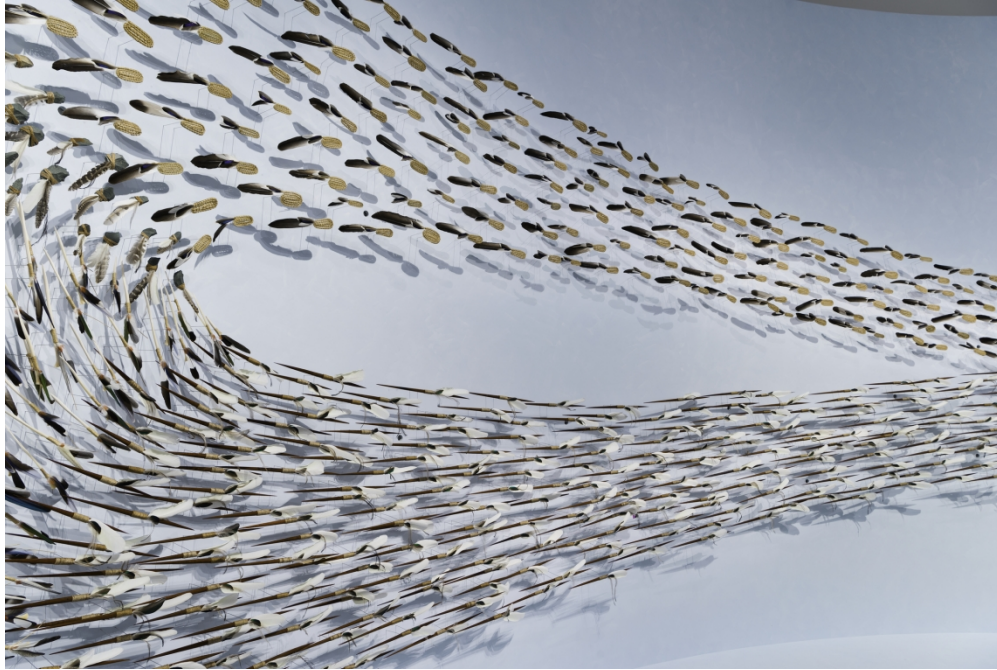
for birds and people alike, wildlife corridors should be in place, and we can encourage birds in our garden with the right plants. (Jones, 2018)

This making process follows the methodology of the bowerbird (the male bird of the species collects bits of plants, sticks, moss, flowers and found objects to make bowers and impress female birds). A concept first coined by Yorta Yorta artist Lin Onus (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1994: 118) this process brings together fragments of knowledge, recovers knowledge that was thought lost, and generates new collectives. This is important in the context of colonisation of south-east Australia, and the consequent fragmentation of culture, which leads to this ‘bowerbird’ practice. It can be summed up as: finding things here and there in museums and libraries; going back to community looking in language and talking to Uncles and Aunties; going out to the bush to think about things, such as when birds drop their feathers, or when it is best to access mussel shells in relation to the water flow of the river, until historical knowledge comes back together.

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Jonathan Jones / Kamilaroi/Wiradjuri people / Australia b.1978

Dr Uncle Stan Grant Sr AM / Cultural advisor and speaker of recorded Wiradjuri / Australia b.1940
untitled (giran) 2018

Bindu-gaany (freshwater mussel shell), gabudha (rush), gawurra (feathers), marrung dinawan (emu egg),
walung (stone), wambuwung dhabal (kangaroo bone), wayu (string), wiiny (wood) on wire pins, 48-channel
soundscape, eucalyptus oil

1742 pieces (comprising 291 Bindu-gaany; 290 Galigal; 292 Bagaay; 291 Dhalany; 280 Bingal; 298
Waybarra): installed dimensions variable

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