

Erub's connection to 'The Coming of the Light'

In 1871, the people of Erub made a decision that forever influenced the character of the Torres Strait. One hundred and forty-one years ago, a group of Melanesian Islander Christian teachers came by boat from Lifou New Caledonia to spread the word of God. Erub leaders accepted Christianity, changing the Torres Strait forever; this event is known and celebrated as 'The Coming of the Light'. Many of the missionaries stayed, their bloodlines blending forever with Erubam le.

In a parallel journey to their forefathers, a group of trainee priests from Lifou journeyed to Erub in October 2011. They wanted to know what had happened to their ancestors and to connect with any descendants. Their visit was potent, connecting long lost relatives from two Pacific Island communities. The people of Lifou extended an invitation to the people of Erub to visit, reconnect and stand on the land - to commemorate the departure of the first ship carrying islander missionary teachers so long ago.

Torres Strait stories, song and dance are powerful - like the waves, tide and wind that surround their island homes. Today, the lines and rhythm of stories, song and dance are told in many ways. Erub Erwer Meta Art Centre has evolved to provide a space for the development of Erubian arts practice. The Centre helps build social, economic and cultural strength for arts workers and fosters pride between community members.

Erub artists, many of whom are mature women are forging a new path of recognition for themselves and their community. This often overlooked group has been at the forefront of the Centre's development. Their constantly evolving art practice is collaborative, supportive of each other and works to tell and share their stories as women and as Islanders.

Prior to the 2011 visit by the Lifou Islanders, Erub artists had begun a research project to inform a new body of work. They decided to look inwardly to their early documented history, to discover the rich cultural significance of body ornamentation and decoration by researching items recorded in early photographs and artefacts held in museums and private collections. This historical research inspired new works in charcoal.

Of the first charcoal drawings, Diane Moon (curator of Indigenous fibre at the Queensland Art Gallery) stated: 'The artists' mastery of

the charcoal medium is evident in their works which feature bold areas of velvety black and contrasting fine details.'

This series of work created new possibilities, because of the deeper historical and personal research undertaken and shared between the artists.

Florence Gutchen senior artist said. 'The research has raised my awareness level and confidence. We come back alive through our artwork now - it is time now for a revival.'

Racy Oui-Pitt another female artist spoke of a profound change in her arts practice. 'I see things more clearly now, and it makes me look around at the things in nature. I see potential in all things now. Ideas come more easily to me and I am able to express them better.'

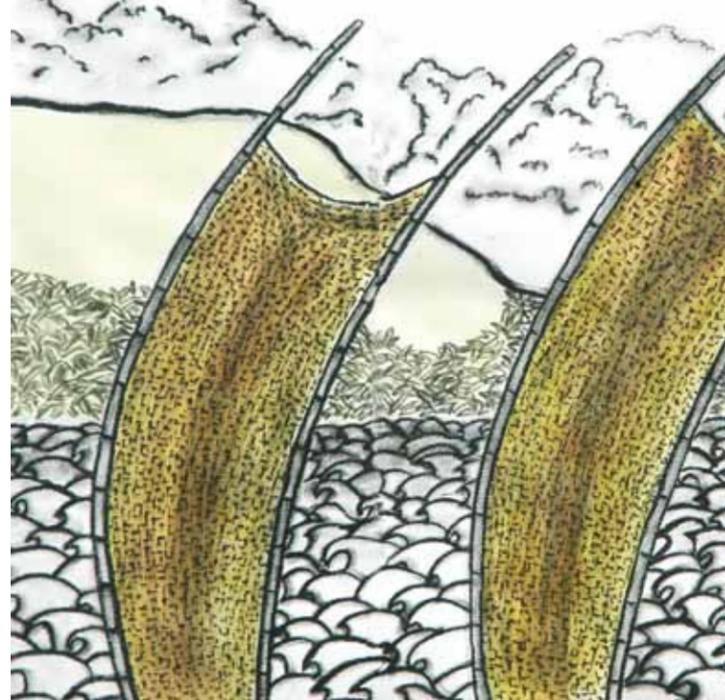
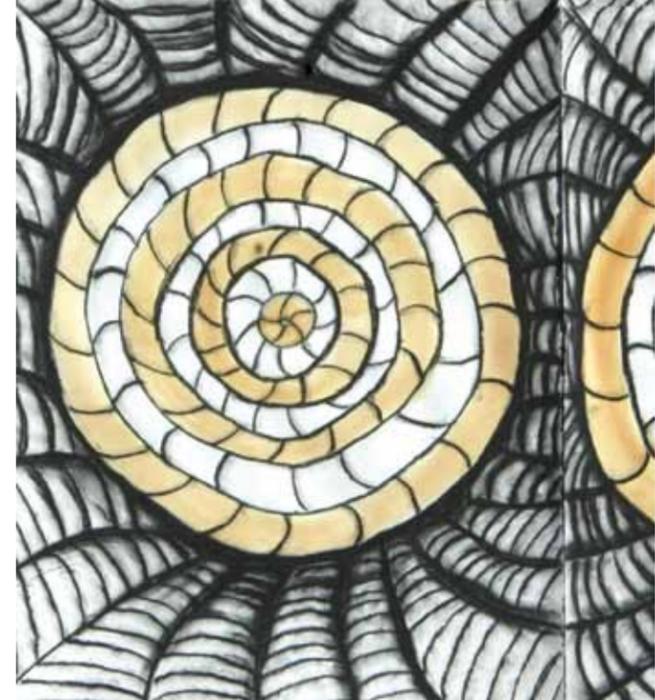
Kapua Gutchen Snr Cultural Elder of Erub found deep personal value through research. 'I notice things that might have significance - like your eyes are tuned in now.'

Sea Journeys - our home our people - is an early phase in an Erub Erwer Meta Art Centre project, researching and investigating family connections to the Pacific. In this exhibition, artists discuss common trends around their people and surroundings. Through their vibrant, large scale charcoal works and figurative wood-fired ceramics, they make reference to textiles, weaving, costume, body decoration and modern and traditional sea craft from past to present.

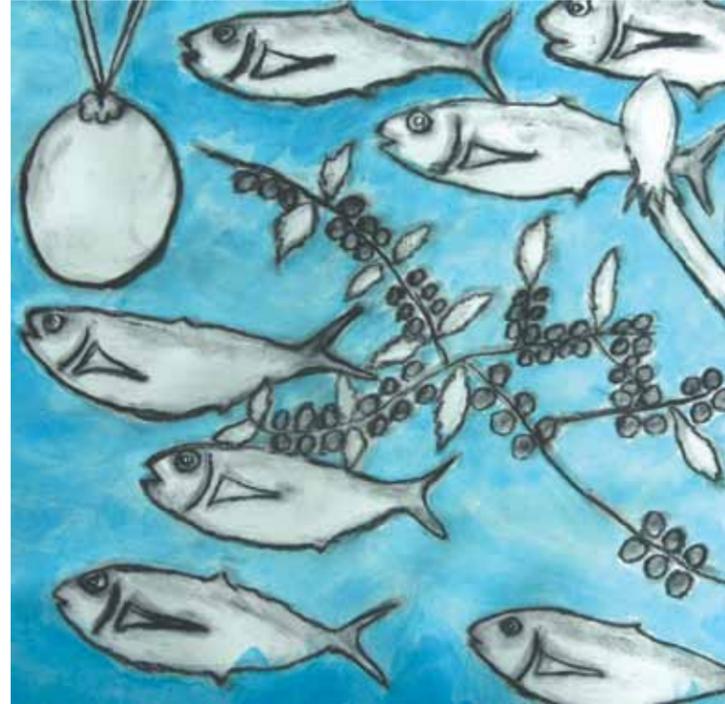
The artists are keen to develop new work around 'The Coming of the Light' to share with future generations. A return visit to New Caledonia by the artists (planned for 2013) will inform this new research based work. By completing this circle there will be no start, no finish just a continued connectedness of family and culture across Pacific Island communities.

Sea Journeys is a long term project with many opportunities to enable people to tell all the stories associated with the legacy of the Coming of the Light. For more information please contact Erub Erwer Meta Art Centre.

Lynnette Griffiths 2012



Details of Charcoal and watercolour drawings Above, left to right: Alida by Racy Oui-Pitt, Karr Lar Kubkub by Emma Gela, Spiral in the sand by Maryann Bourne, Emerel Moderr Podagad Tumge by Kapua Gutchen Below, left to right: Sereb Sereb Nar by Jimmy Thaiday, Dibi Dibi by Florence Gutchen, Mother of the Sand by Ellarose Savage, Lubabud by Sedey Stephen.



Sea Journeys

our home our people

ERUB ERWER META

A group exhibition

Maryann Bourne
Emma Gela
Florence Gutchen
Kapua Gutchen
Fred Kiwat
Franklin Mye

Nancy Naawi
Racy Oui-Pitt
Ellarose Savage
Sedey Stephen
Jimmy Thaiday
Sweeney Thaiday

We want our community to have a strong Erubam le identity. Our centre works to revitalise our traditional culture and promote it to the world.

Showing at Langford 120 Gallery,
120 Langford Street, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051

p: +61 3 9328 8658 e: langford120@gmail.com

8 September - 6 October 2012



Above left to right: Ares le, artist collaboration, Au Kosker, artist collaboration, wood-fired Kebika legiz by Erub artists



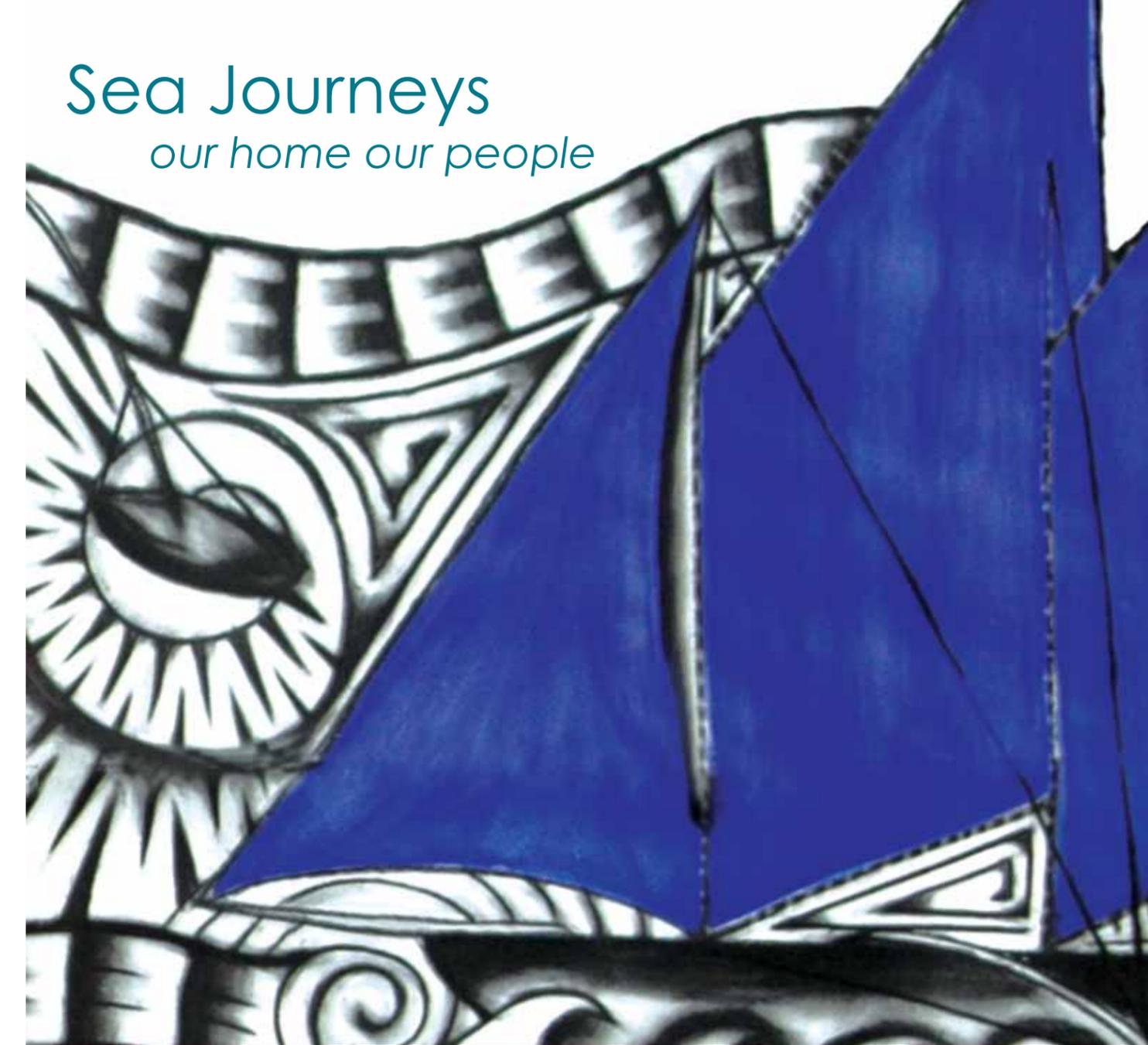
Above left to right: Maryann Bourne, Jimmy Thaiday, Ellarose Savage, Florence Gutchen.
Bottom row: Racy Oui-Pitt, Nancy Naawi, Emma Gela, Kapua Gutchen



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