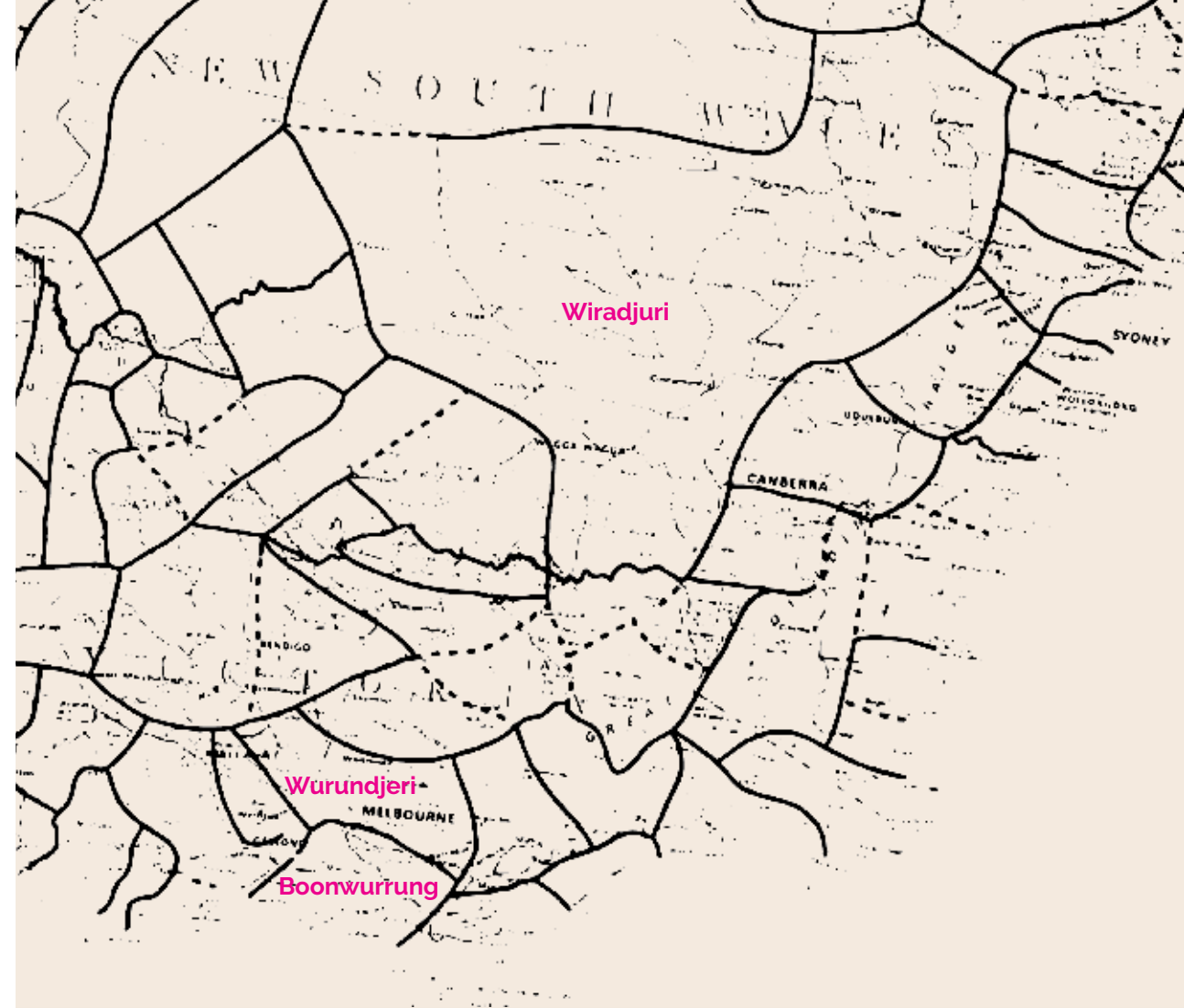




Designing with Indigenous Nations Studio



RMIT University acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional owners of the land on which the University stands. RMIT University respectfully recognises Elders both past and present.

The Wiradjuri studio visits and cultural activities featured throughout this publication occur on Wiradjuri country and also on Wurundjeri / Boonwurrung Kulin country. The activities on Kulin country commenced following the sovereign to sovereign conduct of Wiradjuri Elder Aunty Lorraine Tye from Wagga Wagga, who met with Wurundjeri / Boonwurrung Elders on Kulin country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are, and have always been sovereign with distinct language, laws, culture, knowledge and governing systems long before colonisation. Sovereignty is a significant premise for Indigenous peoples who have never ceded their land, rights or identity to any other sovereign. This is the foundation for Indigenous recognition and self-determination, to build mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For non-Indigenous people, understanding the conditions of being in a sovereign relationship begins with knowing Indigenous sovereignty as the basis of the relationship itself.

Wambool

Macquarie

Murrumbidjeri

Murrumbidgee

Kalare

Lachlan

Wiradjuri country is one of the largest Indigenous Nations on the Australian eastern seaboard, extending from the Great Dividing Range, bordered by the Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers in the state of New South Wales.



Designing through respectful sovereign encounters

It's not you – it's me ... and you.

This publication captures moments from a series of studios over three years (2015-2017) in the communication design program. The studio, *Designing with Indigenous Nations through respectful sovereign encounters*, was led by Peter West and Yoko Akama. This course was a learning opportunity to engage and re-think our relationships with Indigenous Nations through design.

The students are a mix of second and third year undergraduates taught in a vertical integration, who have elected this studio as part of their 24 credit point (or major) study. Most of the students are Australian and a handful of international students (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Singapore, Pakistan, Thailand), which is a typical cohort in most design programs. Each studio ran over fourteen weeks at RMIT Melbourne city campus, on Wurundjeri / Boonwurrung land of the Kulin Nation.

Every year we ran this studio, our own pedagogical approaches shifted significantly to encounter complex issues together and foreground our awareness, connection and relationship. This sensitivity and conscious raising forms a major part of this studio's experience and learning. For many students, this is their first opportunity to work alongside Indigenous people. Students enter the course with a great deal of enthusiasm but also apprehension. *Will I ask a dumb question? Will I offend someone?* These are common concerns and speak to deficits in knowledge and a quiet knowing of the issues and tensions that exist in Australia.

We are all making small, often awkward steps to build relationships with Indigenous people by navigating what it means to let go of inaccurate knowledge, guilt and fear of 'saying the wrong thing'. These are tentative steps towards strengthening the relationship itself, shifting attention from Indigenous 'content' or 'knowledge' and developing self-awareness in how one participates in building a new relationship.

The studio also scaffolded learning about design. Through talks, tours and feedback by many practitioners, researchers and Indigenous and Wiradjuri guests, the students were guided to learn how they, as a designer, can potentially play a role and responding to Indigenous self-determination. We enter the relationship with an understanding of what design might support or provide, but this is quickly challenged as design actions are shifted and refocused in response to deeper understandings of Indigenous sovereignty.

At the start of this semester I elected to do Designing with Indigenous Nations studio ... because I wanted to learn more about Indigenous cultures all around Australia, as well as cultures close to my home. I have always been interested in learning about Indigenous cultures, especially Indigenous art. I ended up learning so much more about myself, which I hadn't expected.

Nicole Newman



Top: Peter West and Mark McMillan
Bottom: Yoko Akama and Peter West
Photos by Chris Marmo

Integrating teaching with research

The studio leads, Peter West and Yoko Akama are design researchers at RMIT University. We are exploring how designing together can create mutually respectful meeting place of sovereigns.¹ This exploration is a way to acknowledge and draw upon multiple lineage of design, thus expressing different sovereignties, even though the dominant design references a Euro-Western heritage. Our research takes a pluriversal (rather than universal) view of design by critiquing the dominant colonial and globalized heritage to expose the mechanics of such structures as part of design education.

We work with a team of Wiradjuri researchers (Prof. Mark McMillan, Dr Faye McMillan), and together we are designing various mechanisms for catalysing and sustaining Indigenous self-determination. This team works closely with Elders and many members of the Wiradjuri Nation to design a range of digital and creative materials as a participatory and methodological inquiry to mediate and manifest lawful relations among and between Wiradjuri and non-Indigenous people.

The doctoral practice-based research by Peter West significantly informs our work. His PhD explores an emerging 'settler sovereign' design practice that is dependent on and relational to an Indigenous sovereign invitation, and situates his practice in response. This Indigenous sovereign invitation becomes the basis of respecting knowledge and place, and agreement to the ongoing responsibility of knowing and acting upon its conditions.

This research context, aims and methodological exploration percolate through our design studio where both research and teaching mutually informs one another.

1. See published works:

Akama, Y., Evans, D., Keen, S., McMillan, F., McMillan, M., & West, P. (2017). Designing digital and creative scaffolds to strengthen Indigenous nations: being Wiradjuri by practising sovereignty. *Digital Creativity*, 28(1).

West, P., Akama, Y., & McMillan, M. (2016). 'I was worried about insulting Indigenous communities with my designs': shifting from fear to recognition to create a meeting place of sovereigns. In conference proceedings of ACUADS. Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Reading the Standing Rock document was so insightful in telling us to just observe, follow and listen. If we observe, we will learn how we should behave, and then it's ok not to know everything. In fact we should practice being ok with not knowing. It made a lot of sense to me and helped me to relax into my learning.

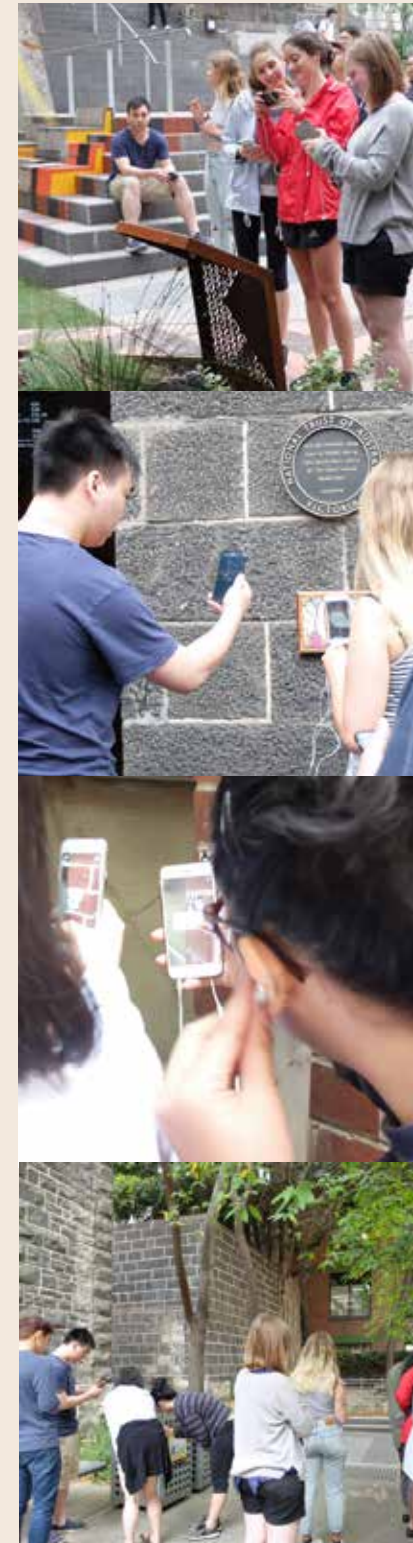
Elana Berton

Finding home: getting to know you and your place

How do we guide students to take baby-steps into knowing themselves and the kind of relationship they'd like to build with Indigenous Nations? How do we step into this space, not from a place of deficit and fear, but motivated by curiosity for learning or building a different kind of relationship? How do we explore our relationship with another sovereign (for example, a classmate) or a Wiradjuri person? What is sovereignty and how do we feel sovereign? Can we explore this through our own identity, culture and history, to recognise its importance in shaping who we are, like connection, safety, comfort, belonging, home, family, food, place, culture, language? Why is this important as a designer, as an Australian or as a resident living in Australia?

In the first phase of the course we 'locate' ourselves on Wurundjeri / Boonwurrung land. Learning more about the place we are on and share, is a significant starting point and brings immediate relevance, as it's contextualised here at RMIT, our surrounding suburbs, where we grew up and where home is. Learning more about Wurundjeri / Boonwurrung land (Kulin Nation) is enabled by many existing design scaffolds; through exhibitions, digital multimedia markers, signage and cultural markers. In the first few weeks we visited and experienced many of these.

Clearly, design has a role in how the broader public engage with this knowledge. For students, it is an important moment to reflect upon what it means to discover that they are surrounded by and living in Indigenous histories, and contemporary Indigenous perspectives. This knowledge forever changes the relationship to one of 'sharing' and a responsibility to develop approaches that respect and recognize ontological boundaries.



Cultural Walk and Standing Rock

Dr Olivia Guntarik is a new media lecturer and explores co-creative place-making in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT. She led a *Cultural Walk* around RMIT Campus (photos on left) and took students to sites of historical and cultural significance to access sensorial layers through mobile media and digital storytelling.

Through this, the students were encouraged to look more carefully at their environment, spot hidden signs and discover the stories through their mobile app. Students shared thoughts and concerns with their classmates in response to statements from reading the *Standing Rock*² (quotes below) that resonated with how they felt:

"While you are expected to keep indigenous people in the center, it's not your job to make up for all the past devastation by yourself"

"But you do have the opportunity to start creating a new legacy"

"Impact is more important than intention"

"When you are with Indigenous people, listen more than you speak"

These led to discussions about 'white guilt' and how some students are dealing with it and 'not taking it personally' but we also discussed the responsibilities we must take to act upon this consciousness. One student shared their thoughts of how we treat our ageing citizens and the lack of respect of those we owe our existence to. We talked about the importance of acknowledging where we come from (heritage and geography) and the values we carry from these places, family histories and cultures we've grown up in.

With all the places we visited and the people we listened to I began to understand what it means ... This allowed me to accept my sovereignty.

Nicole Newman

2. Standing Rock: <http://www.standingrocksolidaritynetwork.org/>

Learning about Indigenous Nations in the southeast

At the start of semester, the students visited the *First People's* exhibition at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum, guided by its Manager and Bundjalung/Yorta Yorta man, John Patten. In this exhibition, First Peoples Yulendj Group of Elders and Victorian Aboriginal community share their knowledge, stories, culture, objects and images to celebrate Koorie identity. The students also visited the *Sovereignty* exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Arts (ACCA), curated by Paola Balla and Max Delany. This showcased contemporary art of First Nation peoples of Southeast Australia alongside keynote historical works, and helped students understand culturally-diverse stories of self-determination, sovereignty and resistance.

Many students liked the artwork and artefacts because they identified with the creativity, which also made them admire the techniques of their making, their power and their beauty. Some were impressed by oral history, how long it has been passed down and how it has been remembered. Others learnt about the significance of certain marks, like the diamond and diagonal shapes that repeat across ceremonial artefacts, which were then expressed in different mediums by the contemporary artists. Others resonated with stories of connecting with nature because they feel very distant from it.

One international student related sovereignty to knowing her identity, which was largely informed by her family and Thai culture. This then led some Australian students to share how they felt they didn't have a strong culture or a way to know where they're from.

The meaning of sovereignty to me is everything around. It's about where I came from, culture, art, a story from generation to generation, my belief, even respect for water and land. I can relate because I can relate it back to myself and to what my parents and grandparents have taught me.

Amarat Boonsoong

Hearing from Victorian Indigenous artists has helped me to find a link between my sovereignty and Indigenous culture and sovereignty.

Samantha Xiaotian Sun

Hearing the term 'Victorian Aboriginal' was completely new to me, and learning of all the differences between Nation's traditions completely changed my perspective I felt so stupid for thinking of all of them as the same, but it also made my curiosity grow. ... hearing the First People's exhibition got a design award mainly due to the process they went through really surprised me. Design is so commonly judged on the end product, but hearing that the process is so valued made me rethink my relationship with design and culture ... This idea about designing with them, not for them really excites me, because that means a two-way conversation develops and mutual learning can occur.

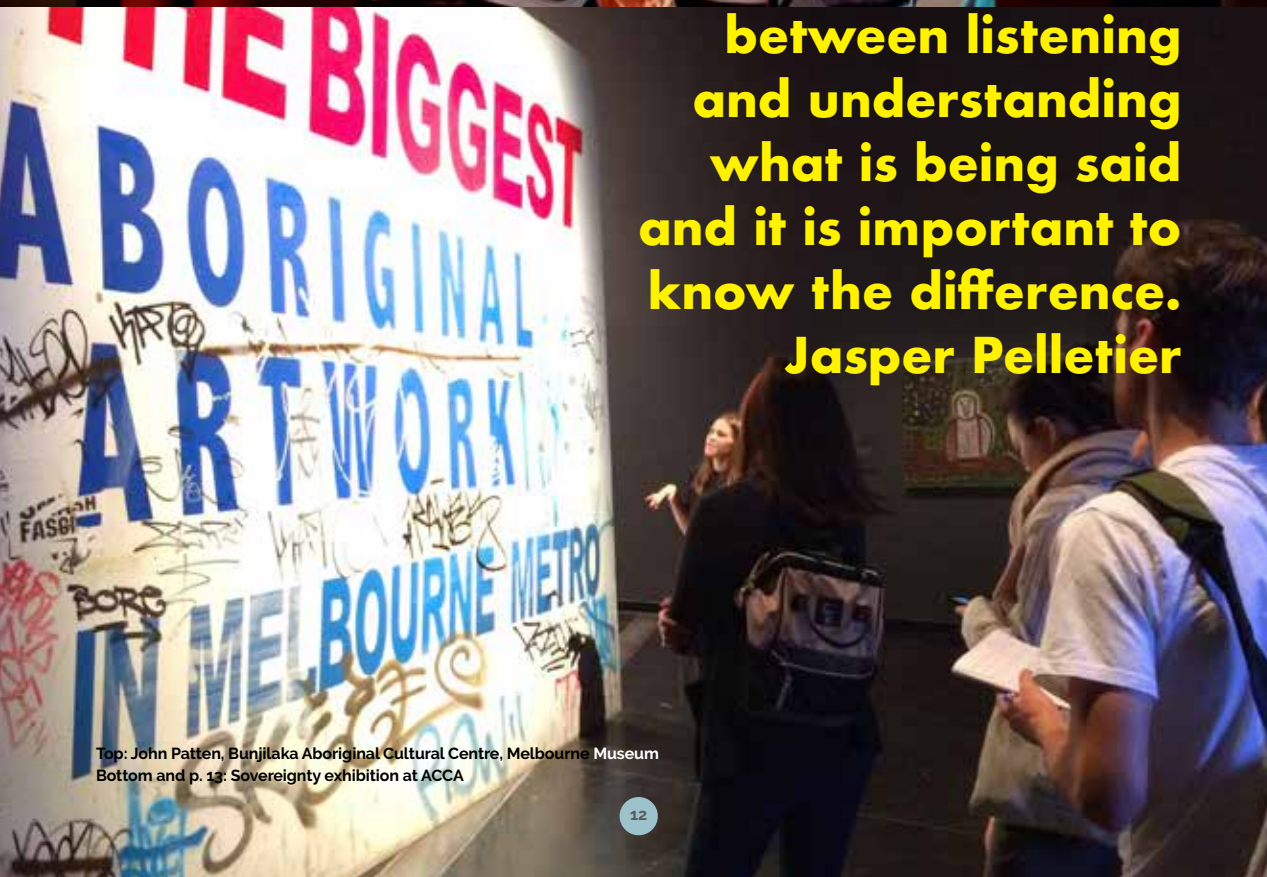
Elana Berton



Top • Bottom: First People's exhibition at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum

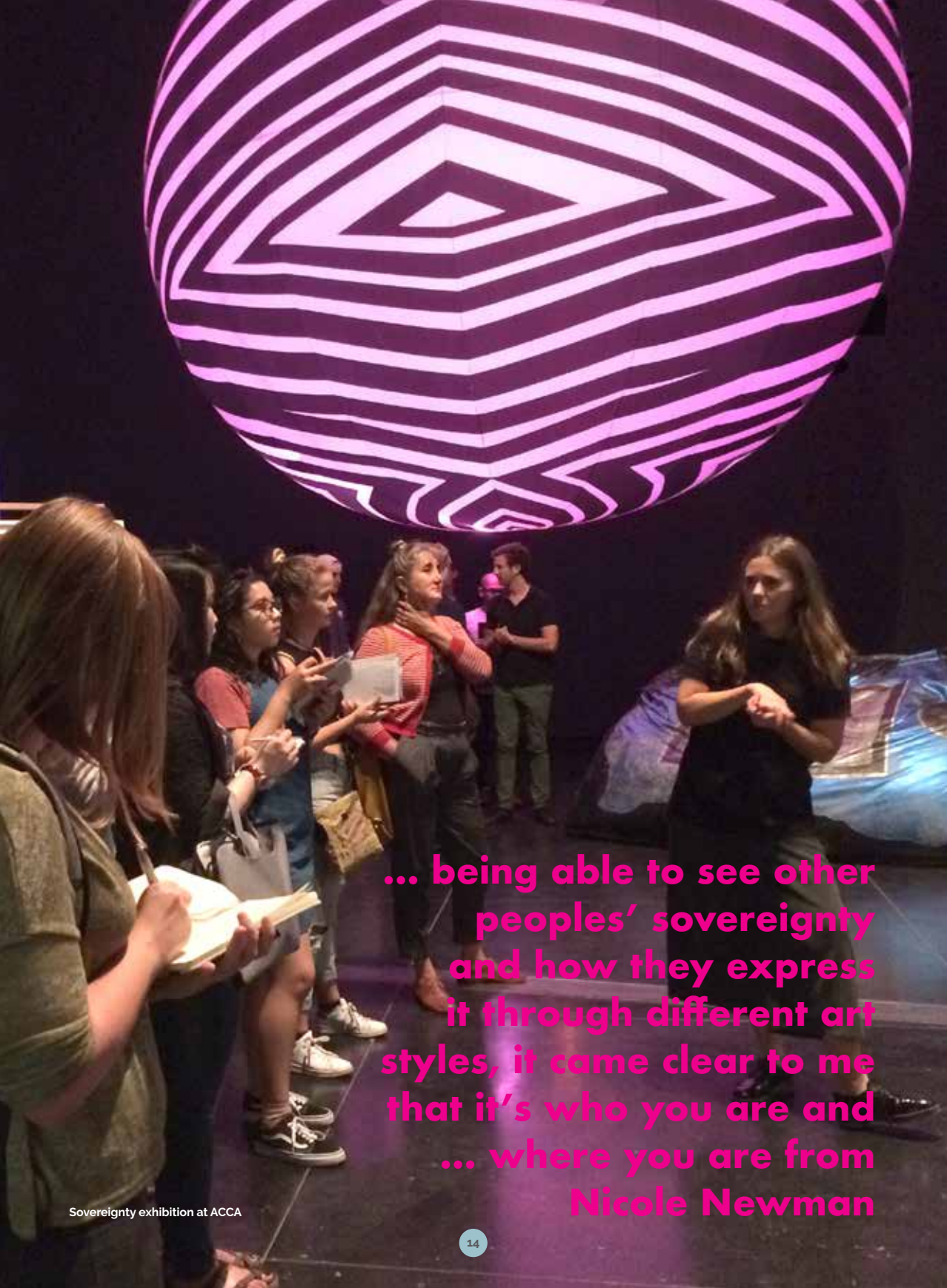


**There is a difference
between listening
and understanding
what is being said
and it is important to
know the difference.
Jasper Pelletier**



Top: John Patten, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum
Bottom and p. 13: Sovereignty exhibition at ACCA





... being able to see other peoples' sovereignty and how they express it through different art styles, it came clear to me that it's who you are and ... where you are from
Nicole Newman

When sovereignty came up, I will be honest and say I didn't know what it was exactly. Because of this, I found it quite hard to discover my own sovereignty, but with being able to see other peoples' sovereignty and how they express it through different art styles, it came clear to me that it's who you are and within that where you are from ... I believe my own sovereignty is more about who I am than where I am from, and this is because I sadly don't have much of a culture or tradition in my family ... It has been alarming to realize how little unique culture and tradition I have in my life and because of this, I wish to be more true to what I believe in and to be proud of it as well.

Nicole Newman

At each visit, the students were asked to find and identify what they related to or resonated with the most in terms of their own sovereignty. These visits were also overlaid with class exercises that asked them to bring an image or an object to represent their sense of home, sharing, family or community. Everybody brought something. The international students brought items that drew upon ritual or traditions and stories that accompanied them. This helped them step further into thinking about their own sovereignty, like passing on stories; inter-generational relationships; respect given to mothers and Elders; care for non-human beings; connection to place, land, nature; childhood memories and nostalgia; and even how we might express our political views like human rights, gender equality, vegetarianism and organic food movements. We witnessed connections emerging across the group. Such conversations also strengthened as students got to know each other.

It seems to be the easiest of all, but my biggest challenge was that I had to relearn the language I used when referring to the many Indigenous cultures. It was like remolding something that has been taught to me incorrectly since primary school. Only now did I find out proper terminology, specifics and information that would help to shape my language.

Being careful with the use of language is very essential, especially in this case as it's a sensitive topic. It has a very strong impact; it can be misunderstood and may have the ability to offend someone. When using the correct language you are showing your respect.

Jordan Schembri

Most of the students looked inspired and excited by the exhibits, especially at ACCA. I noticed the layering of their knowledge and confidence through repeated information that were given by different people. They noticed the way artists are powerfully expressing their sovereignty, responding to past incidents, and showing their continued respect for nature and cultural practices.

Yoko Akama (Lecturer)

Beyond cultural appropriation

Being visually cued, many students elected this studio because of their interest, curiosity and a desire to learn more about 'Indigenous cultures', art and image making. Some said they wanted to 'work with dream time imagery' or to 'know more about symbols and paintings'. Even though these dimensions were clearly an enticing visual touchstone and an entry point into their learning, we were also concerned about this narrow focus on imagery alone that turns cultures into 'objects' of curiosity and exoticism of the 'other'. This is a common, fraught relationship in communication design. There is a tendency in design that assumes that culture is reducible to the visual and symbolic. According to a doctoral design researcher, Ahmed Ansari, this can lead to 'perpetuating an exoticization and fetishization of the culture and produce every more "novelty" products for easy consumption by a primarily white market'³. Engagement with 'Indigenous imagery' can often be limited to 'graphical depictions' or guidelines for cultural appropriateness, indicating a critical deficiency in design, rife with fear, guilt and ignorance. A prominent design scholar, Dr Russell Kennedy remarks that, for many designers afraid of cultural appropriation, there is a 'self-regulated "apartheid in design" that further widens the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture'⁴. We observe that this issue is further compounded by the dominance of seeing design-as-problem-solving that places people into categories of a commissioning client or a passive audience where the communication 'problem' is located somewhere in-between for a designer to resolve.

Such discussions were prompted when students were asked to find examples of cultural appropriation (see right). This activity revealed how prevalent it was in popular culture, and also how design was contributing to its pervasiveness.

It caused me to question my previous schooling, and the stereotypes I did not even know I was a slave to. As the foundations of my previous knowledge were upheaved, I began to realise the gravity of the situation. I was living in ignorance, a tourist in my own country and a stranger to its history.

Jacinta Oakley

Students were willing to discuss each others examples and speak in general / thematic language. Some people think it's just ok to use culture to be funny and when they think it's time to celebrate. It's not yours to use to celebrate with.

Peter West (Lecturer)

3. Ansari, A. (2017). The Work of Design in the Age of Cultural Simulation, or, Decoloniality as Empty Signifier in Design. *Medium*, para 12. from <https://medium.com/@aansari86/the-symbolic-is-just-a-symptom-of-the-real-or-decoloniality-as-empty-signifier-in-design-60ba646d89eg>

4. Kennedy, R. (2007). Apartheid in design: Challenging the Too Hard Basket. *Around the Globe*, 3(3), 8–13. p. 9



Robert gave me a massive hug, in the way you would hug a friend when we said goodbye

Georgia Maclaren

Engaging with Wiradjuri Nation citizens

Over the three years, many Wiradjuri Nation citizens shaped and participated in this studio, providing a significant experience and opportunity in building relationships through talking and connecting.

Aunty Lorraine Tye, Wiradjuri Elder and master weaver, and Linda Elliott, an artist and curator of Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, taught students weaving and its importance in connecting, talking and renewing culture. Aunty Lorraine's visit was a sovereign invitation to our studio group to be in relation with Wiradjuri Nation. Aunty Lorraine also spoke of her family and the significance of Wiradjuri weaving practice.

Subsequent Wiradjuri guests provided the group with an opportunity to rethink how they could design 'with' rather than 'for' the Wiradjuri Nation. Rob Henderson, a prominent Brisbane-based artist and Hannah Donnelly, a writer, DJ and creator of Sovereign Trax, shared their art and media practices. Other Melbourne-based Wiradjuri friends like Tom Munro-Harrison, Emily Munro-Harrison, Bev Munro-Harrison, Todd Fernando and Dean Heta visited the studio frequently to see the students' work in progress and gave insightful feedback.

As we moved through the semester, concerns arose around misrepresentation and the ease of slipping into cultural tropes. To design appropriately requires a shift in emphasis, for the students to challenge design practices and to locate themselves in the design, to bring in their experiences and understanding of Australia; making the design process and outcome representative of a balanced, mutual relationship. Not to speak on behalf of Wiradjuri people but be in respectful relation with Wiradjuri through designing.

Weaving was a notable and memorable part of my time in this studio, as I have a huge background in hand crafting items, from origami to prop making pop culture items. It was a great session to be able to learn and produce an item from an important cultural practice. I drew strength from the stories that was present in the history album that Aunty Lorraine's craftsmanship produced. That item displayed not only her crafting knowledge, but her historical background.

Daniel Pang

Sharing those stories has encouraged me to be more aware, more confident and comfortable to share my story too. A Wiradjuri Elder, Aunty Lorraine Tye shared stories and images from her Sovereignty craft book, which she has made for her grandchildren. This was a very touching moment for me, I felt her tension of leaving a story behind for the next generation. Which reminds me not to forget my roots. As my grandparents always tell me, wherever we are, we need to know our Thai culture, to remember our tradition and to be graceful and thankful of what we have been through since we were young.

Amarat Boonsoong



Aunty Lorraine Tye (middle) teaching weaving to Rachel



Dabaamalang Waybarra Miya Sovereign Weaving 2016

The *Sovereign Weaving* event was led and organized by Aunty Lorraine Tye to bring weavers across the vast Wiradjuri Country to gather on Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, one of the major urban centres of Wiradjuri Nation. This event provided a meeting of sovereigns to practice lawful relations, and the act and outcome of weaving to be considered as an embodied artefact of healing, connection and sovereignty. Aunty Lorraine Tye also invited our students to design a Message Tree for this event.

Mia Dunne, Rachel King and Signe Stjarnqvist took up this invitation to create a mechanism for reflective and asynchronous 'dialogue' by penning one's thoughts on a paper leaf and leaving it on the 'tree' (see sketch above). This was assembled on site before the event. The strings were dyed using native bark and leaves and hung on local red gum. The paper leaves with messages were added by Wiradjuri participants over the three days, echoing renewal and growth (see left image).



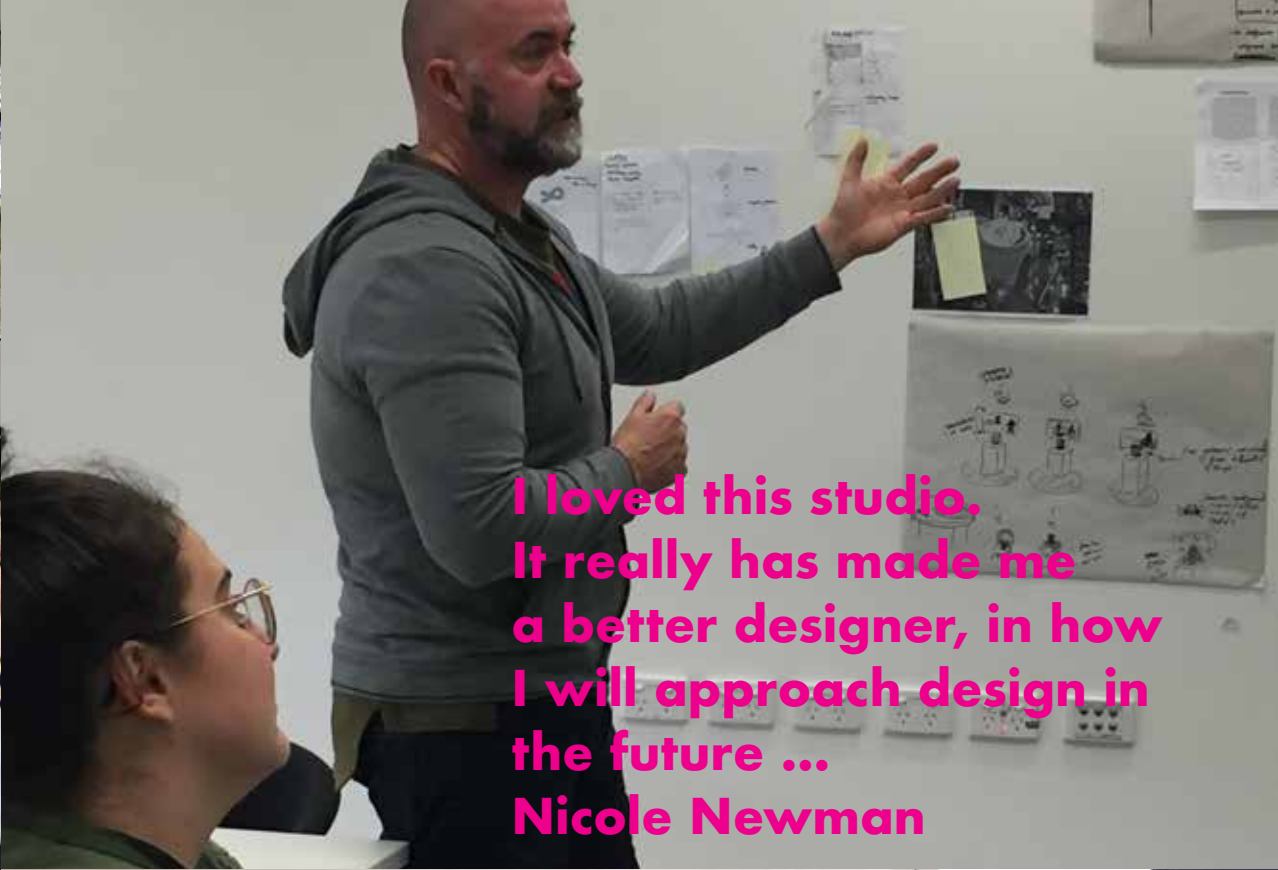
Top: Aunty Lorraine Tye and Linda Elliott
Bottom: Rob Henderson

**He [Rob] told us to
never hesitate to create.
Lucas Lit Shien Loo**



*Great to hear Hannah speak about her work and practice. She has a particular felt / emotive connection to sovereignty - placing 'never ceded' throughout her art and identity of place. The aspect of engagement should resonate with the students - it did with me. I had heard 'salt bush' before but heard it differently the second time.
Peter West*

Hannah Donnelly



**I loved this studio.
It really has made me
a better designer, in how
I will approach design in
the future ...
Nicole Newman**



p. 24: Aunty Lorraine Tye and Linda Elliott



p. 25: Peter West (Top) and Hannah Donnelly



Wiradjuri in Melbourne Melbourne Museum 2016

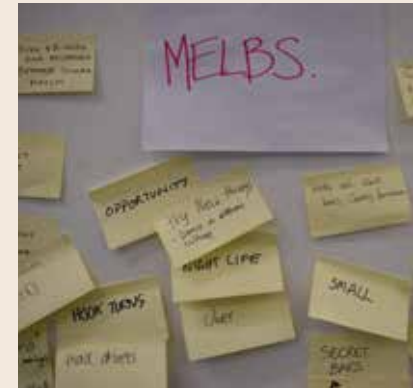


Wiradjuri in Melbourne 2016/2017

The *Wiradjuri in Melbourne* event was an opportunity for Wiradjuri people living 'off country' in Melbourne, to gather and connect with each other. This event was also presented to the design students as a moment for them to express their sovereignty in relation to Wiradjuri sovereignty.

The students were invited to design invitations and posters for *Wiradjuri in Melbourne 2016*. This event, held at Melbourne Museum, was the first attempt to find and invite Wiradjuri people, anecdotally known, living in and around Melbourne, to gather as a cultural group (see p. 26-27). The next *Wiradjuri in Melbourne 2017* was held at RMIT Design Hub (see p. 40-43) where students also designed an artefact in relation to the many sovereign expressions from Wiradjuri guests throughout the semester. This was also an opportunity for students to learn about sovereign to sovereign protocols which enable a cultural gathering of Wiradjuri citizens on Wurndjeri / Boonwurrung land. For Indigenous people, sovereignty is an everyday way of being. For many students, this was a start to consider sovereignty as a way of knowing and 'belonging' to place.

Students designed by drawing upon their own cultural knowledge, family histories, place, home, daily practices, and personal narratives. These enabled the students to place themselves in dialogue with the attendees of the event. This notion of being in dialogue means we were asking the students to communicate through design as a sovereign person, and bring themselves into ways they felt resonant and confident in evoking notions of place to connect, gather, belong and being 'home' (Melbourne). In many cases these artefacts became invitation to Wiradjuri guests to participate in the narrative directly by listening, playing, drawing, or taking the items home. It was an opportunity to engage through design and attract a lively response.



Frequent visits by a variety of young, Wiradjuri guests like Hannah Donnelly and Tom Munro-Harrison further emphasized an informal invitation and develop a rapport in the process of building relationships. Each Wiradjuri guest brought a unique perspective on what it means to be Wiradjuri and gather 'off Country'. Each Wiradjuri persons' experience became an invitation to listen and attend to information differently. *Where do I come in? What am I being asked to provide? How do I find my place alongside this?*

Many students spoke of Wiradjuri guests' visits as a turning point in their understanding. Their presence and informal dialogue in class was critical in enabling the students to understand the tenuous notions of 'off Country' citizenship, as one that can be delegitimised and an identity still undergoing discovery. The visitors emphasized the importance for their communication designs to assure Wiradjuri people that this event was a safe and legitimate space, which welcomed all levels of Wiradjuri experience and knowledge.

My favorite part was breaking down 'Sovereignty', finding all of our own deeper and personal meanings when we think of the word (see left photos). We showed drawings and notes of our bedrooms, our gardens, our favorite foods, our shared city of Melbourne, what we like to do on our time off... It very much reiterated that we are all so similar as human beings, we just have our own quirks that make us different. It also gave me a new appreciation for what I have in my life, as it's easy to take such things for granted.

Jordan Schembri

The invitation and posters designed by students were sent through the *Wiradjuri in Melbourne* social media networks and personal contacts, hand-delivered to Koorie organisations. These were received with strong enthusiasm.



*You are communicating **with**, not **for** Wiradjuri. You are engaging in a conversation, and there is no need to be fearful ... communicate with us, as we are here, now, in the studio in Melbourne. We're not in lap laps with spears. We're as Melbs as you are.*

Mark McMillan (Wiradjuri)

I was also inspired by our classmates' design expressions that were indeed very abundant and creative. Especially at the Wiradjuri in Melbourne event, the work exhibited amazed me and I was truly impressed by our improvements. I found that it was much easier if I am passionate about what I do.

Thus placing yourself, with your interests in your design is crucial. What kind of design resonates with an audience? One that truly conveys you and your passions.

The knowledge of "sovereignty" enables me to have better design expressions. This course taught me to develop my own design language by exploring my sovereignty. Throughout the whole course, the word "sovereignty" has always been brought up and emphasized. I reviewed my identity and the relation between things I love and myself.

Rachel Lee Pui Man



BUDYAAN OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER!

Wiradjuri people, living in and around Melbourne, come and join your mob to **gather, meet and be Wiradjuri!**

The event will feature the work of RMIT Communication Design students, as sovereign expressions in response to Wiradjuri sovereignty. Curated by Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly.

When: Friday 19th of May 2017 from 4.00 pm

Where: RMIT Building 100, Level 10, corner of Victoria and Swanston St, Melbourne

Hosted by: Wiradjuri man, Professor Mark McMillan
Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor
Indigenous Engagement and Education



RSVP Bev Munro: beverleyamunro@bigpond.com

Speak your Words.

Wiradjuri people, living in and around Melbourne, you're invited to come and join your mob to gather, meet and be Wiradjuri.

The event will feature the work of RMIT Communication Design students, as sovereign expressions in response to Wiradjuri sovereignty. Curated by Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly.

yarrandha
ngiyang

When Friday 19th May
From 4 pm

Where RMIT Building 11, Level B,
Corner of Franklin and LaTrobe St,
Melbourne, Victoria.

RSVP Bev Munro
beverleyamunro@bigpond.com

Hosted by Wiradjuri man, Professor Mark McMillan,
Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Engagement and Education.



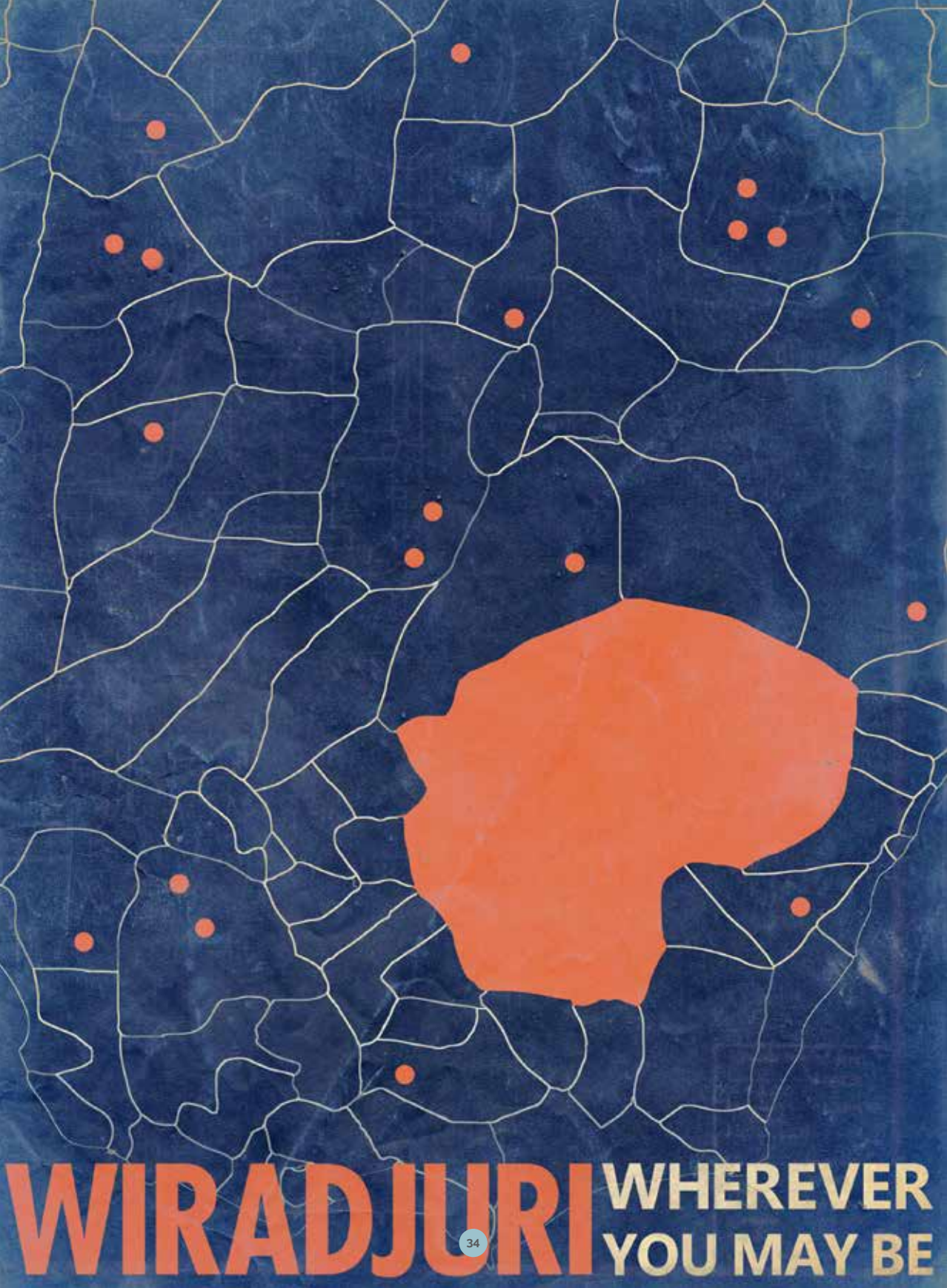
The thing that had shocked me the most was how much of my knowledge was wrong. This made finding out the truth much more interesting as it forced me to question a lot of what I had thought of as fact. This has also given me a passion to teach people the truth.

The biggest challenge for me was discovering what my sovereignty could mean. I had never considered my sovereignty before and it took me a while to get my head around it and for me to understand the meaning of it. With all the places we visited and the people we listened to I began to understand what it means and how important it is. When we were asked to find our own sovereignty, I struggled even more as, I don't have a huge cultural background or have many traditions. I believed I didn't have a language of sovereignty but as I listened more and thought more about who I was, I was able to find my own expression through design. It was different from others but I feel like it is different for everyone.

Nicole Newman

My invite idea for the Wiradjuri in Melbourne event involved stenciling and spray painting handwritten Wiradjuri language - "Yarrandha Ngiyang" which translates to "Speak your words," on the walls of Melbourne's Hosier Lane. Production for this project landed me on Hosier Lane, where I have met a number people; from a man who threatened to knock my spray can out of my hand to meeting and getting to know a Wiradjuri man from Warragul, which was a strange coincidence. The simple act of marking Wiradjuri language on the heavily populated Hosier Lane gave me the chance to explain to those curious, what the stenciled type translated to and what I was doing. The task strangely gave me a number of stories to tell to friends, as well as made me a story teller.

Daniel Pang



WIRADJURI WHEREVER
YOU MAY BE

34



p. 34: Jay Larbalestier / p. 35: Hana Nadira

NGURAM-BANG^(HOME)

mine, yours, and ours.

Wiradjuri people, living in and around Melbourne, you're invited to come and join your mob to gather, meet and be Wiradjuri.

The event will feature the work of RMIT Communication Design students, as sovereign expressions in response to Wiradjuri sovereignty. Curated by Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly.

Hosted by Wiradjuri man, Prof. Mark McMillan, Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Engagement and Education.

RSVP by - Bev Munro
beverleyamunro@bigpond.com

FRIDAY, 19 MAY 2017
FROM 4PM

RMIT BUILDING 11, LEVEL B
Corner of Franklin and La Trobe St,
Melbourne, VIC



35

WHERE WE CONNECT.



Rachel Pui Man Lee

36

6 animal vocabularies were presented in 7 different languages,

dominantly wiradjuri language, which is educational.

MELBOURNE x WIRADJURI

Wiradjuri people, living in and around Melbourne, you're invited to leave a footprint on this path with us and join your mob to gather, meet and be Wiradjuri.

The event will feature the work of RMIT Communication Design students, as sovereign expressions in response to Wiradjuri sovereignty. Curated by Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly.

From 4.00pm.

Friday 19th May
level B, Building 11, RMIT
Corner of Franklin and
LaTrobe St, Melbourne VIC

Hosted by Wiradjuri man,
Professor Mark McMillan, Deputy
Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous
Engagement and Education.

RSVP - Bev Munro | bevedevamunro@bigpond.com

37

Lucas Jit Shien Loo

WIRADJURI PEOPLE, LIVING IN AND AROUND MELBOURNE,
YOU'RE INVITED TO COME AND JOIN **YOUR MOB** TO GATHER.
MEET AND BE WIRADJURI.

THE EVENT WILL FEATURE THE WORK OF RMIT COMMUNICATION DESIGN STUDENTS,
AS SOVEREIGN EXPRESSIONS IN RESPONSE TO WIRADJURI SOVEREIGNTY.

Curated by Wiradjuri artist Hannah Donnelly

WHEN Friday 19th May from 4.00 pm

WHERE RMIT Building 11, Level B. Corner of Franklin and LaTrobe St, Melbourne

HOSTED BY

Wiradjuri man, Professor Mark McMillan,
Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor,
Indigenous Engagement and Education

RSVP to Bev Munro
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BE WIRADJURI, BE PROUD.

BE YOU





**We really only scratch the surface
of the deeply set foundations of the
land we build and live our lives on.
Jasper Pelletier**



I ended up learning so much more about myself, which I hadn't expected
Nicole Newman





Wiradjuri in Melbourne RMIT Design Hub 2017



The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of paper. The paper features large, bold, stylized letters in yellow, orange, and pink. The letters are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, abstract design. The hand is visible on the right side of the page, holding the paper. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic.

Studio Knowledge Objects

The students were asked to document aspects of the studio as a way to capture key learning moments and journey of transformation, including their feelings, thoughts and confusion. This is called a 'Studio Knowledge Object' (SKO). The SKO was explained to them as a sharable artefact designed to become a valuable resource for fellow and future design students to have in learning how to become a designer who is in a sovereign relationship with Indigenous sovereigns. The students highlighted significant engagements and reflection of their experience, which are reflected in the quotes that appear throughout this publication. Most importantly, the selection of artefacts here over 2016 and 2017 celebrates the way the students had begun to develop relationships with Indigenous people.



**NO
OFFENCE
BUT...**

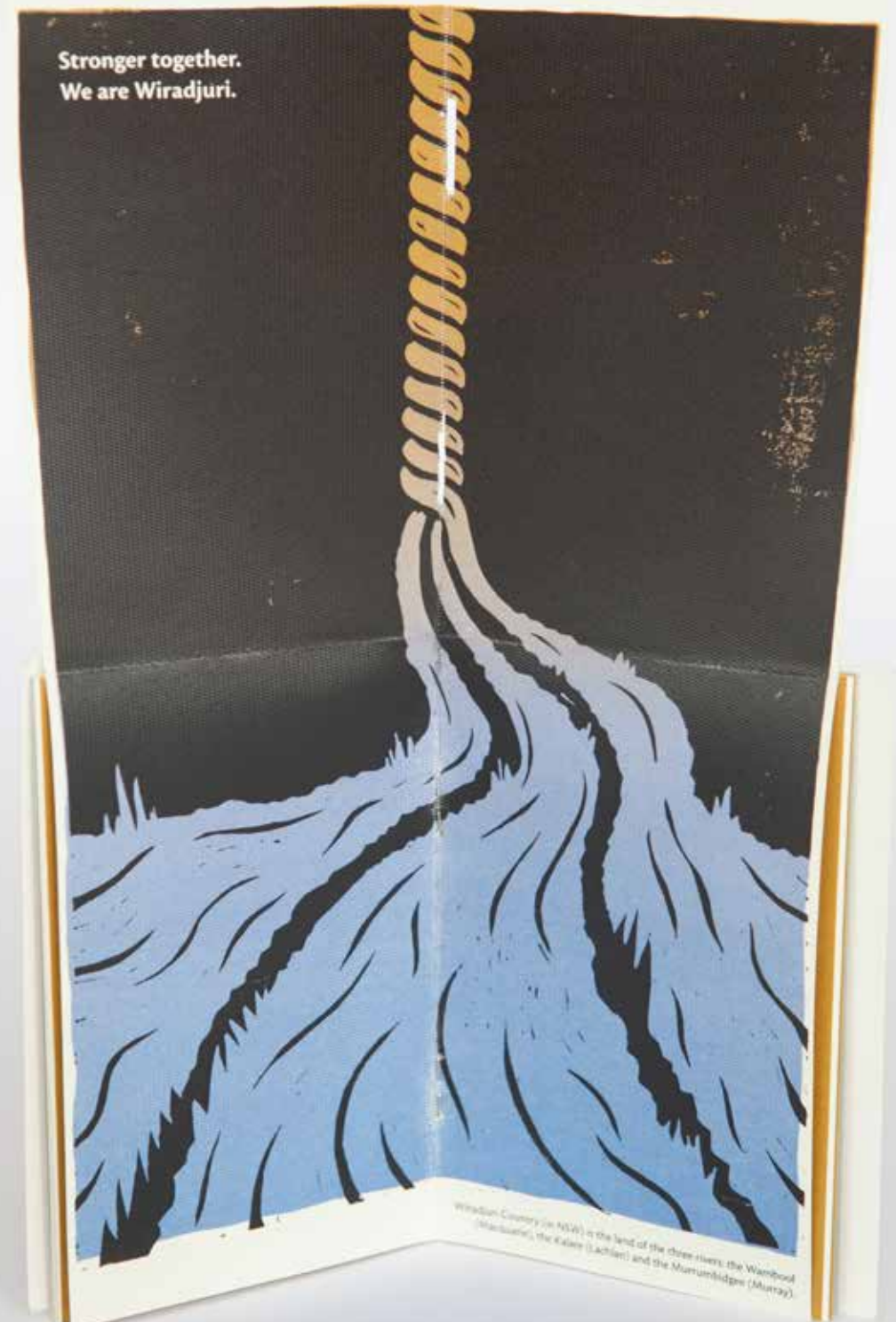
“IT’S A GOOD DO

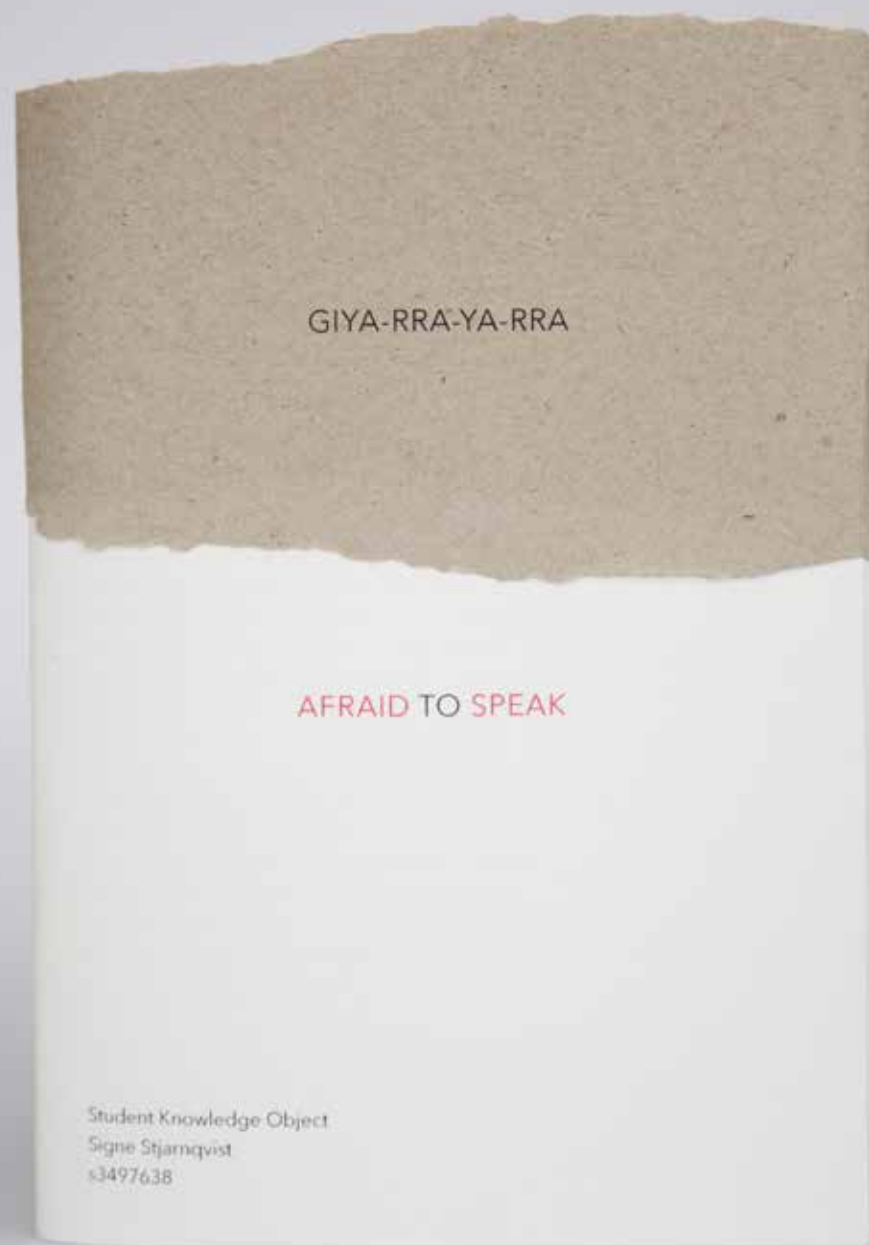
“YOU’RE DESIGNING

WITH US.”

Jack O’Sullivan

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prepare to be uncomfortable
& confused ... but most of all
prepare to be enlightened
& inspired.

The consequences of craving comfort

My name is Elana and my sovereignty is embedded strongly within my childhood memories, my family, my Italian heritage and my passion for environmental sustainability. This is a brief discussion on what I have discovered from this Indigenous nations journey....

Human beings are comfort creatures. We like patterns and we crave predictability. This unfortunately creates an innate fear of the unknown.

At the beginning of this semester I distinctly felt a sense of awkwardness and fear around the studio of Designing with Indigenous Nations. Amazingly Peter and Yoko immediately facilitated a safe space for us to air these concerns and vulnerabilities. This was a key step to help us open up and relax into this topic with an open mind.

Once we started learning about the history of the local Indigenous, Wurundjeri people; through guest speakers, museum exhibitions and class discussions, I quickly started to feel much more knowledgeable and had the confidence to discuss issues in and away from class.

What surprised me the most was the distinct feelings of anger and annoyance that brewed alongside these learnings. How could I have been so naive about the country I grew up in? How could there be so many things to re-learn, that were fed to us throughout our whole schooling life? How could

our education system fail so badly at teaching our generations about their own country's rich history?

I started to see the issue of racism present itself, stemming around these major faults in our education system. It just makes so much sense that racism exists, simply due to there being a lack of knowledge.

Having a basic knowledge and understanding of different cultures, history and traditions, weaves a safety net of predictability, that we as humans crave.

“Why couldn’t we then use the study of sovereignty, as a catalyst to curb racism?”

It all starts with allowing us to discover our own sovereignty and self identity. But this starts by recognising the identity and sovereignty of Indigenous Nations. After these have been established, only then, can the parallels be drawn.

It is these parallels that I have come to realise are the crux of truly creating empathy for another human being.

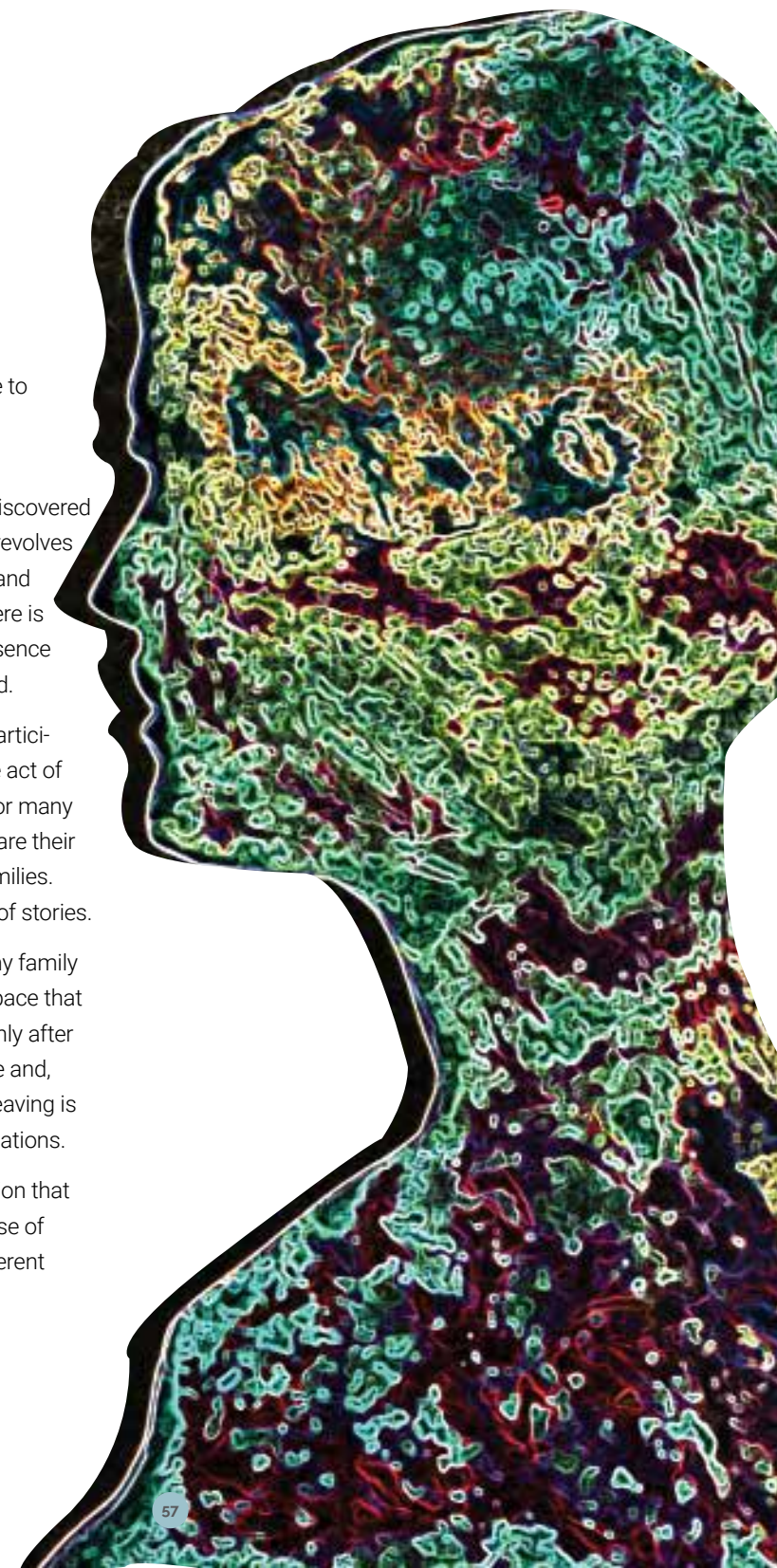
For example; during my journey, I discovered that a large part of my sovereignty revolves around a respect for local produce and home cooking. Within my family there is so much knowledge and social presence passed down, on the subject of food.

During the weaving workshop we participated in, it became obvious that the act of weaving created this same space for many Indigenous Nations. They would share their knowledge down generations of families. Hours of weaving makes for hours of stories.

Cooking and eating together with my family manifests that same story telling space that weaving circles create. But it was only after this realisation, that it clicked for me and, I could then empathise with why weaving is so important to many Indigenous Nations.

It is these little moments of realisation that we all need, in order to create a sense of empathy for a culture that is so different to our own.

Elana Berton





STRANGERS BECOME FRIENDS

I have always lived in Melbourne but my family is all from Ballarat. I love design but my real passion lies in photography, a skill that my grandfather has taught me, and inspired me to love.

“You have the opportunity to start creating a new legacy”⁵

Georgia Maclaren

At first I was only listening and trying to understand the stories and histories of Indigenous people. But a friendship is not only forged on listening, you must also share and engage. A moment of friendship came in the meeting of Wiradjuri man Robert Henderson, an Indigenous artist who came to speak to our class. Robert spoke about the reasons he waited until later in life to follow his passion for painting and the amazing work he does with incarcerated Indigenous artists. I had many questions for him and much to share. The consolidation moment for me was as I left the class, Robert gave me a massive hug, in the way you would hug a friend.

I took up the opportunity to further my friendship with Wiradjuri people in sharing my own expression of sovereignty in the end of class exhibition at the Wiradjuri in Melbourne event. My expression of sovereignty explores myself as the family storyteller and collector of old things. One of the most fulfilling parts of the exhibition was through the conversations I had with different Wiradjuri people. I had the opportunity to share my photography and stories and I got such an insanely positive reaction from everyone I spoke with, it was so fulfilling.

Bumping into someone . . . by accident and striking up a conversation. How do two perfect strangers become friends?

In the beginning I was a stranger, disconnected from Indigenous people, when I bumped into Designing with Indigenous Nations Studio. At first, I was full of concerns for a personal lack of knowledge, or a racist pre-existing knowledge and how that may affect my relationship with this stranger. And further, I was feeling a deep white guilt and worry of how to be respectful and sensitive. But it wasn't long before this stranger set my mind at ease. “While you are expected to keep indigenous people in the centre, it's not your job to make up for past devastations by yourself”.⁵

⁵. Standing Rock: <http://www.standingrocksolidaritynetwork.org/>



LUCAS LOO JIT SHIEN

Hannah Donnelly | Wiradjuri artist

Home by Lucas Loo

Be Yourself

Male
Malaysian Chinese
Graphic designer
Music lover
Later

Home is where you feel loved. An instrumental music video written and composed by myself about my expression of home and sovereignty.

Everyone has their own way to express themselves and mine is music. I found myself most comfortable to present my stories and background through rhythms, therefore it was my solution to the final brief.

'Home' is a song that consists of Chinese cultural elements and was composed predominantly with Chinese traditional musical instruments.

As a Chinese descendant, it is a pleasure to share our culture with others.

In the video, you will have a peek at my home and country, this was the visual I had playing during the creation of this song. The visual completes how you experience the song.

The Wiradjuri in Melbourne event and exhibition was a great opportunity to present our sovereign art piece. Hannah Donnelly said at the event, "I like your song, I can tell it is you." I felt truly grateful and satisfied; it was unforgettable.

Music is infectious and appealing. I believe you would understand me better through my songs than reading this.

Beginning

I was completely lost at the beginning of this studio. Simply because I had no interest in it and didn't know what this class was about. After a failure from my first assignment due to several absences, Peter and Yoko talked to me personally and then I realized the problem and gained more interest in this class. Biggest struggle for me was to understand about sovereignty and learning how to express mine from art. Which is also what I learnt the most.

Meeting Wiradjuri

Apart from understanding my own sovereignty, the greatest thing about this studio was to meet with Wiradjuri people and artists.

Every meeting was precious and inspiring especially with one of our guests Robert Henderson. I was inspired by the way he makes art. He told us to never hesitate to create, as he does when painting; with feeling and without boundaries and that was what I attempted in making my music.

I am glad that Peter and Yoko took their time and talked and guided me when I was lost. I really appreciate their words and efforts that built my confidence in this studio and on my work. I feel really grateful while looking back at my work, progresses and improvements. Sincerely thanks to Peter, Yoko and Wiradjuri guests.

Words to future students,
"Don't judge a book by its cover."

Sally-Forth Heaney-Garzoli:
A Student Knowledge Object



NGURAM-BANG

Sovereignty, a home, a place of
acceptance, belonging and comfort.

Sovereignty;
[sov-rin-tee]
A home, a place of acceptance,
belonging and comfort.

Home / sovereignty, for me is ever
changing and ever-growing.

This semester we have been looking at
sovereignty, Indigenous sovereignty, and
that relation to our own.

Growing up as I did in the heart of
Wiradjuri country, as part of a family
with long and close relationships within
the Indigenous community this course
really resonated with me. As a young
artist and designer I worry about cultural
appropriation and naively misusing
Indigenous cultural motifs out of
ignorance. I do want to make work that
is inspired by the worlds' diversity and
I absolutely want to make work that is
respectful of cultures other than my own.

Australia has a shameful history of
treatment of Indigenous people and track
record of misrepresenting Indigenous
cultures in media and art. I think young
designers have a duty to learn more
about the worlds oldest living culture,
its practices, art forms, stories and
traditions. Courses like this one are vital
if we want to see designers create and
communicate ideas in ways that are

sensitive and empowering, not patronising
or disrespectful.

This class has allowed me to explore
my own sense of sovereignty and to form
new connections, and understandings
of Indigenous histories, cultures, beliefs
and practices. In many ways the past
semester has consolidated and confirmed
the feelings and beliefs I have always had.
But, it also challenged me.

The class made me realise that many
of the experiences I took for granted;
growing up in a town with a strong and
visible Wiradjuri culture. I realise now
that having parents who worked with the
Wiradjuri community in Griffith (My mum
and dad worked in the arts, youth and
community cultural development sector)
gave me a view of the world that not
everyone has.

Most importantly this class forced me
to think about and re-evaluate my
approach to design, giving me the
chance to question the representation
of Indigenous cultures. This can only
help to make me a better designer and
a more sensitive person.

Hana Nadira

Coming into the very first class of this studio I have no clue about Indigenous Nations in Australia. It is a fairly intense subject area that I have never touched on before as a designer and as an international student.

I did not know what to expect and I was afraid of what's to come. In previous years of my study as a designer, I've involved my culture, Indonesian culture, in my designs. Culture is a very broad topic for me and especially as Indonesia itself has a great deal of different cultural backgrounds for every province.

Cultural appropriation is a challenge in this studio, as there is a lack of understanding and knowledge about one's culture, which leads to stereotyping or inappropriate use of the cultural assets. From this studio, I've learnt that to avoid cultural appropriation, we have to have an in-depth understanding and knowledge on what we are designing.

Knowing our own sovereignty is a really important aspect of the design process.

By knowing and opening up to our own sovereignty we could then relate that and connect our sovereignty with other's, thus, knowing what's appropriate and what's not.

Unlike any other studio, I've never felt more attached to my classmates, teachers, as well as our guests that came in to share their own stories. I felt that our exchanges and sharing of each of our sovereignties and knowledge have created a bond, a strong relationship and an understanding of who we are. We relate and connect more to each other and that creates respect in itself.

GRAP2641 - Indigenous Nation

★ METROPOLITAN SYDNEY

- ↳ WHERE MOST INDIGENEOUS PEOPLE LIVE.
- ↳ ROMANTISIZED CULTURE (THE IMAGE THAT WE HAVE)
 - LIVING IN THE BUSH, HUNTING, ETC.
 - NORTHERN TERRITORY.

[STEREOTYPE]

★ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

- ↳ KULIN NATION → 'WHITE GUILT'; SHARING LAND.

★ CONCERNS / WORRIES WORDING ON CULTURE:

- LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ⇒ VULNERABILITY
- MISCONCEPTION
- CULTURAL APPROPRIATION
- 'RACIST' → STEREOTYPING.

BRIEF 1 → 4 MIN. VIDEO (RESPONSE)

- SOVEREIGNTY
 - ↳ WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL HOME.
 - ↳ CONNECTION TO GROUP OF PEOPLE.
- ↳ ME AS THE SUBJECT ⇒ RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIGENEOUS NATION & PEOPLE.

★ "HOW DO WE SHARE THIS PLACE?"

- NOT JUST LAW.
- RELATIONSHIP BTWN INDIGENEOUS & ≠ INDIGENEOUS.
- ↳ WAY OF KNOWING THE FUTURE.
 - ↳ SHIFTING A PIVOT [NEWER GENERATIONS].
- ↳ LOCATING MY OWN SOVEREIGNTY.
 - NOT SUPPORT BUT WORK WITH INDIGENEOUS PEOPLE.
- ★ ⇒ CLIENT RELATIONSHIP ≠ IN RELATIONSHIP.

★ INTER-CONNECTEDNESS.

- ★ BE SPECIFIC OF WHO YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.
 - e.g. WIRADJURI / KULIN NATION / WIRANDJURI.
 - AVOID "THEM" / "THEY"
 - ↳ LUMPING TOGETHER.
- USE INDIGENEOUS rather than ABORIGINAL.
- BE SPECIFIC ⇒ ACKNOWLEDGE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EACH NATIONS.

- ★ AVOID PORTRAYAL OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE:
 - NAKED, HUNTING, BODY PAINT, ETC.

BRIEF 2 → EVENT INVITATION.

- GATHERING OF WIRADJURI PEOPLE LIVING "OFF-COUNTRY"
 - ↳ i.e. IN MELB OR AROUND.

- TO GATHER, TALK, RECONNECT WITH EACH OTHER.

- ★ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING → NOT JUST WIRADJURI.

"OFF-COUNTRY" → SOMETIMES PROBLEMATIC.

- ↳ STOLEN LAND → POLICY CREATES DISCONNECTION.
- ↳ PURPOSE: TO RECONNECT WHAT BEING WIRADJURI MEANS.

↳ EXPRESSION OF SOVEREIGNTIES.

- DOESN'T DEPEND ON / BY LIVING ON-COUNTRY.
- ↳ ROOTS.

★ OUR DESIGN FIRM HAS BUILT A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIGENEOUS NATIONS. WE OFTEN DO COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH INDIGENEOUS ARTISTS IN MELBOURNE TO ACKNOWLEDGE & INFORM THE PEOPLE OF THE EXISTENCE OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE AROUND US & ITS BEAUTY.

DESIGN FIRM
BLURB

my class notes

Building Connections & Relationships

Our
weaving circle

me
holding my
weaved basket

At the end of my learning in this studio, I've become more aware and respectful towards others as well as the place (Country) that I've been welcomed in and I feel that history needs to always be acknowledged and appreciated.

Hana Nadira

Thank you to Wiradjuri and many Indigenous Nation citizens who generously gave input and participated in the studio.

Studio guests:

Aunty Lorraine Tye, Professor Mark McMillan, Hannah Donnelly, Rob Henderson, Bev Munro-Harrison, Tom Munro-Harrison, Emily Munro-Harrison, Todd Fernando, Dean Heta, Linda Elliott, Olivia Guntarik, Bec Nally

Photos and text: Peter West and Yoko Akama

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NB: The graphical interpretation on p. 1 references Norman Tindale's map of Aboriginal group boundaries at the time of European contact. The map was published in 1974, but he began this work 50 years earlier during the 1920s where the popular view saw Aboriginal groups having no fixed territories. In this regard, the map became a critical document in Australia's history – no part of the country was 'terra nullius' (empty land).
<http://ourlanguages.org.au>

