

Numbene's Ngurra

Myarn Alden

'Numbene's Ngurra' tells the story of my journey through the waterways as a dolphin (my totem animal). The waterways are mapped out from my birthing land, Hornsby in New South Wales, and my Tribal land (Kija and Juru) the Fitzroy River in Western Australia. Hornsby is a significant location that I wanted to intertwine with Fitzroy River as these are two locations that have had a great impact on my life and the person I am today.

The different shades of green dots represent the green forest that surrounds Hawkesbury River, and the range of red and brown dots represent the red dirt that is well-known on my tribal land. I sourced Ochre from my home in Darwin from the cliffs at the beach, as I was taught by my great-grandmother who expressed the importance of using ochre when doing dot painting, as it adds to the meaning behind the story I am telling. My great-grandmother was also the woman who taught and inspired me to pursue dot painting, I looked up to her as an artist and my greatest role model in life. Ochre not only adds a specific type of texture, but it adds to the authenticity of the several dots representing land. The story behind my totem animal was an encounter my mother had with a school of dolphins who came up to her and she went home that day and found out she was pregnant with me. In my culture totem animals are considered like a reincarnation, so when you die you come back as your given animal.

Initially, I knew early on in this process that I wanted to reflect on my cultural heritage and my story. I started this piece of artwork by first selecting which two locations are most significant to me, followed by mapping out the rivers, creeks, and waterways that surrounded Hornsby and Fitzroy. I wanted to display this on a large scale on two different canvases but connect the different waterways through a channel that leads to the same spot as the other. This was quite hard to achieve as I had to think about my placement of each location on the canvas, which I sketched out with a lead pencil. To make the desired coloured paint I wanted, I had to grind up my ochre with a hammer, then turn into powder. This was very time-consuming, as I needed a lot of ochre for such a large scale and range of different colours. To make the ochre mix I combined Ochre powder, acrylic paint, PVA glue (to help the ochre stick to the canvas) and flow brush formula (which helps the consistency of the paint). In my folio, I did a range of different dot paintings to build up my technique and explore different colours, dot sizes and patterns using different tones of green and red which I had created. Although my great-grandmother is most influential in the development of the techniques used in my work, I was also inspired by a visit to the Art Gallery of South Australia and in particular the large scale, vibrantly coloured works of Zaccharia Fielding. His contemporary application of traditional painting methods really appealed to me, as well as the stories he told referring to his cultural heritage and identity. I was further influenced by the work of Ingrid Calame, a contemporary artist whose mapping works used a variety of pattern and colour, layered upon one another to depict typical aerial views of maps, connecting both humans with the natural world.

Spirituality is something that is significant within my heritage, which I will continue to live through as it brings hope and will continue to pass down the historical stories to generations. I was taught to take pride in my Aboriginal culture and to be able to tell

stories of the land I have walked on. I aimed to tell a meaningful story through ochre, dots, and canvas that was related to my history and my family. Being so young it is hard to tell stories of my life and what I have done on the land, so I live through the stories that I have been told by my great-grandmother. My great-grandmother (Kumputu) worked on missions for milk, butter, flour, and tea, which is very disheartening, and I want to continue to raise awareness of the mistreatment my people have experienced and how it is still impacting today's society.

The story behind my painting is about Numbene (my skin name) swimming through the ocean, creeks, and rivers of my birthing land and my tribal land. I wanted to bring these two waterways together to symbolise two different heritages coming together, My mum originating from Fitzroy Crossing coming from her Aboriginal heritage, and my father who lives in Sydney who comes from a European background. My intentions were to highlight the importance of reconciling between the Aboriginal people and the European people. In 1788 on the 26th of January was when the European settlement happened in New South Wales on my birthing land, which caused a lot of cultural traumas that negatively impacted the Aboriginal communities immensely. Resulting in intergenerational trauma that continues to affect Aboriginal communities to this day. I have been educated on the pain it has caused my ancestors and my family. Therefore, I wanted to represent my dad's people coming from a European background and my mother's people of an Aboriginal background, coming together in one waterway and bringing life to Numbene who desperately wants to heal the wounded land that the European settlers had on Australia.

My artistic expression is portrayed through the layers of dots that surround the waterways with the bold colours representing the different locations, the desert and the forest. I successfully used ochre to bolster the visual narrative, therefore viewers could interpret the hardships that were faced on this land. Entrenched in spirituality, this piece echoes the wisdom of my heritage, channelling stories across generations and raising awareness about the lasting scars of historical mistreatment. It was also aesthetically pleasing to watch my dots come to life on a larger scale and to watch the colours tie together.

Ultimately, I have managed to create an interactive piece of artwork in which viewers are invited to touch the ochre that represents the scarred land of the Australian Indigenous people.