



ANCESTRAL MEMORY



The University of Melbourne has a rich and diverse history as a significant civic institution within the City of Melbourne and the nation of Australia. Nowhere is this history more apparent than in the Old Quadrangle, the oldest and perhaps most loved building on the Parkville campus, where the foundation stone of the University was laid by the Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, Sir Charles Hotham, in July 1854.

But there is a deeper history in this place that extends far beyond the University activity that began here 165 years ago. As a newcomer to Australia, I have been hungry to learn as much as possible about the Indigenous peoples who, for more than 60,000 years, have walked the lands upon which the University now stands.

Last year I was honoured to be the first Vice-Chancellor welcomed by the Indigenous Elders of each of the lands on which the University's campuses are located: Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung. This was a particularly moving experience as I commenced my time here in Melbourne, and it began for me a journey in understanding how our mission as a university connects to the voices and values of these lands and peoples from the time of Bunjil the eagle, creator of the Kulin Nation.

In Indigenous artist and exhibition curator Maree Clarke and Indigenous architect Jefa Greenaway, I am delighted that we have two important contemporary voices contributing so much to this exhibition and to the life of the University.

It is fitting that *Ancestral Memory*, presented here in the new Treasury exhibition space, should tell the stories of Indigenous lives as they have been lived in Kulin Nation Country for hundreds of generations. It is imperative that our university community engages with this history, so that together we can grow in understanding Indigenous knowledge and its important role in this place.

**Professor Duncan Maskell**  
Vice-Chancellor





## THE WATER STORY

*A conversation between Jefa Greenaway and Samantha Comte*

Jefa Greenaway is currently working on the design and implementation of the University of Melbourne's New Student Precinct. His extensive research into the story of water on the lands of the Kulin Nation, where the University's Parkville campus is located, has been integral to the development of *Ancestral Memory*. This inaugural project in the Treasury exhibition space acknowledges the Indigenous heritage of this land and celebrates the continuation of culture through a major new commission and exhibition curated by Mutti Mutti, Wemba Wemba, Yorta Yorta and Boonwurrung woman Maree Clarke. Focusing on the regeneration of cultural practices as a means through which to encourage greater awareness of Indigenous culture, the project presents Maree Clarke's work alongside that of artists Connie Hart, Edith Terrick and Patrick Bellamy.

**SC: How did the story of water emerge during your research for the New Student Precinct on the Parkville campus?**

JG: We know that the Parkville campus is located on the lands of the Kulin Nation, so the starting point was really to engage with key Indigenous stakeholders, including traditional owners and community representatives of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung language groups, and really start to understand their perspectives and some of the oral and anecdotal narratives that reside in place. The next step was to look at some of the archives the University holds, particularly the Map Collection, and understand that this place is actually an important place—there are still remnants here of connection through time, particularly to pre-contact. What transpired from this research was that the story of water has always been, and continues to be, very important to this place. It is a story that traverses the campus.

**SC: Can you still see evidence of water on the campus? And how did your research into the University's cultural collections contribute to your findings?**

JG: On the northern end of the campus, adjacent to the cricket ground, is a group of river red gum trees. Importantly, when we hear about a river red gum, that tells us there was a watercourse coming through the University. There are four river gums that are believed to predate the settlement of Melbourne. They are estimated to be somewhere in the order of 300–400 years old, so that is very much a pre-contact story.

We can also see [from early maps] that in the centre [of the University], there was a swampy area, probably a billabong, as well as a watercourse that traversed diagonally through the site. Adjacent to Grattan Street is Bouverie Street. Maps indicate that this street used to be known as Bouverie Creek. This tells us that the water story that exists on this site is tens of thousands of years old. There are also photographs in the University Archives of an ornamental lake in front of the Old Quad, where the Concrete Lawn is now located. This also tells us that there would have been a billabong in that location.

**SC: Did the water determine/affect the building of the University?**

JG: It did affect the orientation of elements on the site. The first major building was the Old Quad. It was to align with a public square on Grattan Street, which is now known as University Square, but, in fact, it had to shift slightly to accommodate that wet, marshy area. What tends to happen when we start to build in particular areas is that we find the path of least resistance. If it's a wet area, it's not very good for footings, so you shift the building a little bit to accommodate that. These buildings become really important parts of that story.



Robert Russell, *Map showing the site of Melbourne and the position of the huts and building previous to the foundation of the township by Sir Richard Bourke 1837*

**SC:** I have also heard the fascinating story of the eels on campus and their extraordinary adaptation and resilience over time.

**JG:** Through a series of conversations and anecdotal information, we uncovered an eel migration route that still traverses the University campus. That has piqued a lot of interest and generated a lot of conversations, particularly with traditional owner groups and the Indigenous cohort of students and staff.

The eels continue to swim through the stormwater pipes of the University. They rear their heads up in some of the ponds and stormwater grates that exist on the campus. For me, the metaphor of the eel is quite powerful. It is a story that connects over time and place because what it talks to is the notion of resilience—resilience of Indigenous people, after 240 years, and their commitment to showcasing culture and connecting and maintaining relationships to country.

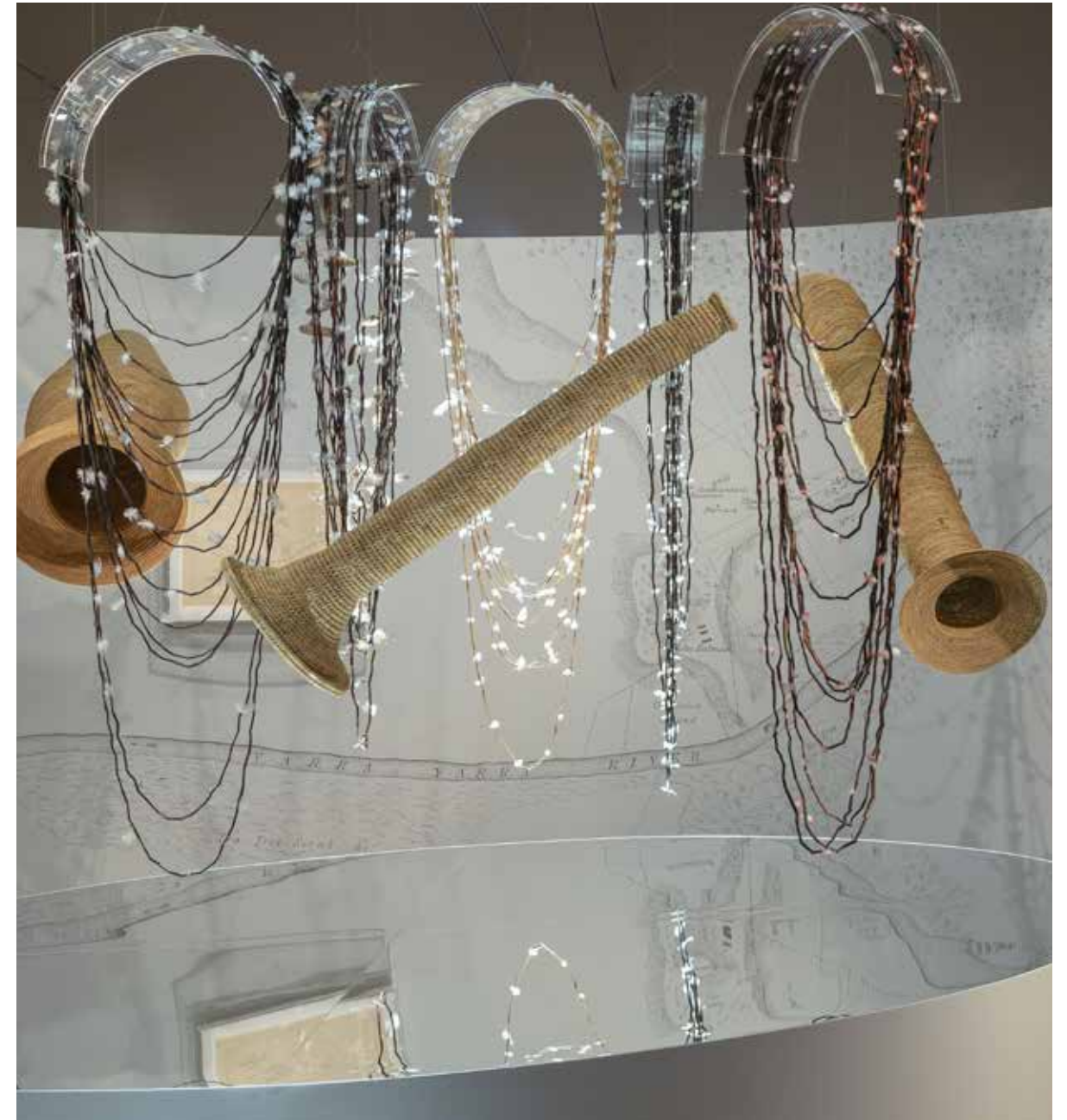
It also has a bigger story that speaks internationally. Not only do the eels transmogrify when they move from salt water to fresh water and back again, their migration patterns also connect in a global sense. This eel story connects to a water story which cuts across Country, so, for instance, here we are on Kulin Nation Country, but there are strong stories around eel migration down Portland way, on Gunditjmara Country. Water stories and water bodies connect through time and Country. So that's a powerful metaphor. But then when we start to broaden that out, we start to see that the migration of the eel connects to New Zealand, across to South America, through Asia and Oceania and back to Australia again.

**SC:** The water story and, in particular, the story of the eels connect communities across Victoria and around the world?

**JG:** Yes, so when we understand that the University is a diaspora of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the story connects to international students, of which we have a large cohort. This is a story which can resonate with anybody. The eel migration enables us to have a sense of pride, to celebrate connection to the oldest continuing culture in the world. It provides an opportunity to celebrate Indigenous culture and to showcase Indigenous culture as part of our everyday experience.

Jefa Greenaway is a descendant of the Wailwan and Kamilaroi peoples of north-west New South Wales. He is an architect, interior designer, academic, director of Greenaway Architects and Chair of Indigenous Architecture + Design Victoria (IADV). IADV is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support and advice regarding all aspects of architecture related to Aboriginal people in Victoria, including encouraging mainstream architects to be more engaged with Indigenous culture.

Samantha Comte is Curator/Exhibitions Coordinator at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne.







## MAREE CLARKE: GLASS EEL TRAP AND RIVER REED NECKLACES

Maree Clarke (Mutti Mutti/Wemba Wemba/Yorta Yorta/Boonwurrung) is a renowned cultural 'revivifier'. Since the 1990s, she has been actively involved in reclaiming the visual/material culture of her Ancestors and rethinking this in line with her lived experiences as a contemporary south-east Australian Aboriginal artist. This process is deeply linked to her continuing connections to Country and kin.

In *Ancestral Memory*, Clarke's dramatic glass eel trap shares the Old Quad's Treasury space with three woven eel traps. Created by master weavers—the late Connie Hart (Gunditjmara), and Edith Terrick (Gunnai/Kurnai/Bidawal) with Patrick Bellamy—these woven works are highly indicative of connections to place. The distinctive patterns and methods of weaving identify the items as belonging to specific families/language groups, while the grasses and flax used associate the woven objects with the lands/regions they emerge from. All reveal Indigenous knowledge systems embedded in time and place—systems which have adapted and continue to change following colonial interventions yet offer ways of knowing and caring for the land and environment practised since time immemorial.

Similarly, Clarke's new work reveals these continuing connections. The glass eel trap, while powerfully contemporary, remains culturally specific. It challenges the viewer to think about what was here before the Old Quad building. Until recently, this building, as a place of Western learning, concealed the ancient knowledge systems of the Wurundjeri people, who benefited from the annual migration of eels to the waterways that continue to flow beneath the surface of today's University.<sup>1</sup>

Like the eel trap, Clarke's revitalised renditions of river reed necklaces (known as *Tarr-goorn* in Boonwurrung/Woiwurrung languages)<sup>2</sup> are enlarged to reveal the resilience of south-east Australian Aboriginal culture. They directly relate to traditions of welcoming visitors to Country.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that Clarke's Boonwurrung Ancestors were involved in making necklaces as body adornments, giving them to visiting Wurundjeri neighbours and others as signs of goodwill. Through trial and error (and perhaps a good dose of Ancestral memory), Maree Clarke has revived the process of necklace making. With her family, she collects reeds from the Maribyrnong River, cutting them to size, boiling them and then dyeing them in large pots in her backyard. The coloured reeds are then given an additional creative flourish, becoming supersized necklaces embedded with an array of found bird feathers.

Here, Clarke's necklaces, along with the eel trap, invite visitors to engage with the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples on whose Country the University's many campuses reside. As a more recently established knowledge centre, the University is well placed to embrace 'Indigenous ways of knowing'—knowledge systems transmitted across hundreds of generations for more than 60,000 years.

1. Billibellary's Walk [https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/2062487/Bilibellarys-Walk-Jan-2013.pdf](https://murrupbarak.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2062487/Bilibellarys-Walk-Jan-2013.pdf).

2. Museums Victoria Collections online, <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/229894>.

3. *Colonial Afterlives*, exhibition catalogue, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, 2015.







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**Maree Clarke**  
Mutti Mutti/Wemba Wemba/  
Yorta Yorta/Boonwurrung,  
south-east Australia  
born Swan Hill, Victoria, 1961;  
lives and works in Melbourne

*River reed necklace with  
cockatoo feathers* 2014  
river reed, waxed thread  
and cockatoo feathers  
480 cm long  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

*River reed necklace with galah  
feathers* 2014  
river reed, waxed thread  
and galah feathers  
480 cm long  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

*River reed necklace with  
parrot feathers* 2014  
river reed, waxed thread  
and galah feathers  
480 cm long  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

*River reed necklace with  
feathers* 2017  
plain and dyed river reed,  
parrot, cockatoo and galah  
feathers, twine  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

*River reed necklace with  
feathers* 2017  
plain and dyed river reed,  
parrot, cockatoo and galah  
feathers, twine  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

*Ancestral Memory* 2019  
glass, steel  
dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Vivien Anderson Gallery,  
Melbourne

**Connie Hart**  
Gunditjmara  
born Little Dunmore, near  
Lake Condah Mission, south-  
west Victoria 1917; died 1993

*Eel trap* 1988  
puung'ort grass  
49 x 128.7 x 55.9 cm  
Collection of Koorie  
Heritage Trust, Melbourne

*Eel trap* c. 1994  
natural fibres  
39 cm x 197 x 43 cm  
Collection of Koorie  
Heritage Trust, Melbourne

**Robert Russell**  
(1808–1900)

*Map showing the site of  
Melbourne and the position  
of the huts and building previous  
to the foundation of the township  
by Sir Richard Bourke* 1837

Surveyed & drawn by  
Robert Russell  
Published in Melbourne:  
reproduced with permission  
of The Surveyor General,  
Department of Property and  
Services Division of Survey  
and Mapping, c. 1986  
University of Melbourne  
Maps Collection: Rare and  
Historical Maps

**Edith Terrick**  
Gunnai/Kurnai/Bidawal  
born 1936

**Patrick Bellamy**

*Eel trap* 1994  
natural fibres  
43 x 154 x 47 cm  
Collection of Koorie  
Heritage Trust, Melbourne

## Ancestral Memory

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Photograph: Maree Clarke

Inside cover: Robert Russell, *Map showing the  
site of Melbourne and the position of the huts  
and building previous to the foundation of the  
township by Sir Richard Bourke 1837*

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