

Black Bamboo: Contemporary Furniture Design From Mer, Torres Strait

13 September 2019 – 5 April 2020 | NGV Australia | Free



Black Bamboo: Contemporary Furniture Design From Mer, Torres Strait combines traditional craft and collaborative contemporary design in a display of bamboo furniture designed by artists from the Island of Mer at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from 13 September 2019 – 5 April 2020.

Also known as Murray Island, Mer is one of the most eastern islands in the Torres Strait and is home to a native species of bamboo, known in Meriam language as marep, and colloquially in English as black bamboo.

The display tells a unique story about life in the Torres Strait by reimagining cultural stories in

contemporary furniture designs through the use of native bamboo.

The furniture collection includes four large cabinets inspired by traditional Meriam dance masks: *Arti* shares the story of an octopus figure who symbolises harmony among the eight tribes of Mer, *Koki* represents the North-Westerly wind that blows through the Torres Strait, *Gepi* pays homage to the relationship Meriam people have with the sardine and the sea, and *Ebur Peris Peris* symbolises Deumer the Torres Strait pigeon.

Combining traditional bamboo construction and up-cycled materials, two seating designs, *Sik Utem*, *daybed* and *Amirr Bau Chair*, *arm chair*, are accompanied by vividly painted cushions made from hessian bags representing the traditional trade relationships between Torres Strait Islanders and people from Papua New Guinea.

The NGV display marks the conclusion of a series of designer-maker workshops held with a collective of eighteen artists on Mer, known affectionately as the Marep Pamle, or bamboo family.

In 2017 the Meriam Community invited the NGV, Cairns Art Gallery (CAG) and Gab Titui Cultural Centre (GTCC) to partner on the development and delivery of a bamboo workshop to facilitate skills training for artists and young members of the Meriam Community in both designing and making contemporary bamboo furniture.

Supported by the Mer Gedkem Le (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC the planning of the three-week workshop evolved in collaboration with Elders and local artists. The Marep Pamle artist collective worked with Melbourne furniture designer and craftsman Damien Wright alongside teams from the NGV, CAG and GTCC.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, National Gallery of Victoria said, 'The NGV is delighted to be a part of this very significant project and share the display of artists-designers from Mer.'

Mr Napau Pedro Stephen AM, Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) said, 'The TSRA is proud to be involved in this partnership which has created an exciting opportunity for inter-generational collaboration and provided important skills training for artists and young members of the Meriam Community.'

Artists from the Mer Community taking part in the collaborative project included: James Blanco, Kalina Day, Helen Dick, Dulcie Gibas, Bobby Kaigey Sr, Mary Kaigey, Robert Meddy Kaigey, Helen Mabo, Alick Passi,



MEDIA RELEASE

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Andrew Passi Sr, Andrew Passi Jr, Nellie Passi, Taukie Passi, Zane Sailor, Clay Sambo, John Tabo, Sabu Tabo, and Reteah Tapim.

Black Bamboo: Contemporary Furniture Design from Mer, Torres Strait is a shared initiative between the National Gallery of Victoria, Cairns Art Gallery and Gab Titui Cultural Centre. Supported by The Mer Gedkem Le (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC the collection premiered at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair in July 2019.

Black Bamboo: Contemporary Furniture Design from Mer will be on display from 13 September 2019 – 5 April 2020 at NGV Australia, corner Flinders and Russel streets, Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia. Information are available from the NGV website NGV.MELBOURNE.

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Images: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0lq5595wh7qj7vg/AAA42fx6mi6k0azCW6YaN5Mea?dl=0>

Video: <https://vimeo.com/350854435/9a7d3c55c0>

IMAGE CAPTION

Marep Pamle artists (from top left) Kalina Day, Nellie Passi, Mary Kaigey, Helen Mabo, Helen Dick, Dulcie Anne Gibas, and Reteah Tapim

Mas, cushions

jute, fabric paint, corn fibre, thread

Photography courtesy NGV

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