

Australian Aboriginal Cultures News - Level 1

Australia's Aboriginal people belong to one of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Over thousands of years they have successfully adapted to a changing environment. They have developed a unique way of life; a deep spiritual attachment to their country, a strong sense of community, and an ability to draw upon their traditions and respond to change in creative and innovative ways.

The **Regional Focus Displays** form a spine that curves around the ground floor of the gallery including Kakadu, the Kimberley, Western Cape York and Tiwi Islands.



Technologies used by Aboriginal people are located along the walls of the gallery. Important **themes** are represented in focus displays around the gallery and include Aboriginal art and the Dreaming, Play and the Web of Relatedness.

The **Speaking Land computer touch screens** are located in the gallery. They feature over eighty storylines comprised of artefacts, photographs, films, artworks, maps and extracts from the collector journals. The content is divided into **Surveys and Regions** and then broken down into themes eg. Play or Art.

Archival film screens are found throughout the displays. They show films from the museum archives. Some of these films show Aboriginal people in their communities across Australia. They often reveal aspects of their traditional lifestyles.

The **contemporary Voice film screens** that are located at the introduction to each Regional display, show Aboriginal people who live in these regions, telling their own stories about their histories and culture today.

Low light levels in the gallery mean you will need some time to allow your eyes to adjust when you enter. **Fragile canoes, paintings, sculptures and shields** are on display so please move carefully, and look at them but don't touch them.



Regions - Level 1

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

The museum selected the following four regions to display on the Level 1: The Kimberley, Tiwi Islands, Kakadu and Western Cape York.



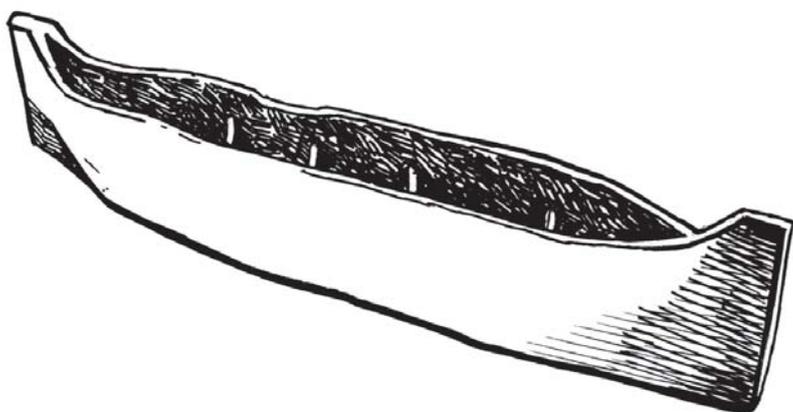
Did you know ?

.....Before the impact of European settlement in Australia, there were about 300 distinct Aboriginal language groups. Today, Aboriginal communities exist throughout Australia, including the tropical, desert and temperate regions.

Kakadu

Lying between the Adelaide River immediately east of Darwin, and across to the bastions of the Arnhem Land escarpment are the great plains of the Northern Territory. It is a riverine region of low-lying seasonal wetlands cut by the river systems. Climatically there are six recognised seasons dominated by the summer 'Wet' with its monsoonal thunderstorms and deluges which quickly flood the rivers and overflow into the lowlands to form vast wetlands. As the years progress the waters gradually recede, allowing the Aboriginal people to exploit the rich flora and faunal communities associated with the waterways and swamps.

Within rock shelters of the Arnhem escarpment and its outliers, part of which lie within Kakadu National Park, are found some of Australia's most spectacular rock art. The rock art sequences in this region are regarded as evidence of the longest, continuous art tradition in existence.

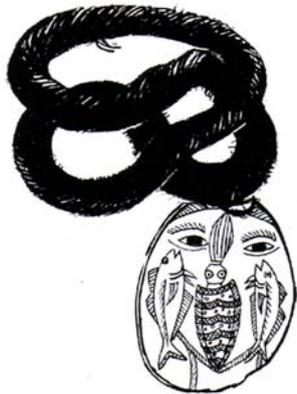




Regions - Level 1

Tiwi Islands

The Tiwi people on Melville and Bathurst Islands have largely lived in isolation, separated from mainland because of the rise in sea level about 4 000 years ago. Tiwi culture has become distinct in many ways from mainland Aboriginal cultures. Tiwi objects include many ornaments and carved items, but they do not use spearthrowers or boomerangs.

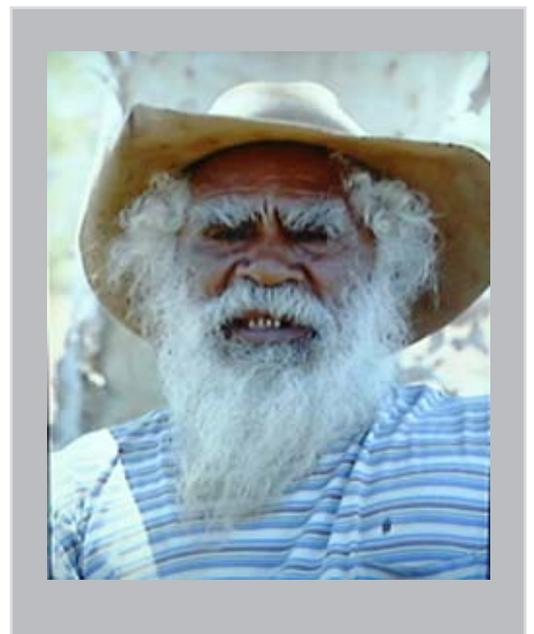


Western Cape York

The people of western Cape York Peninsula relied on shell and bone for tool-making rather than stone. Their religious beliefs show some influences of Melanesian cultures from the Torres Straits and Papua New Guinea. One of the largest groups are the Wik, who became a focus of national and international attention during the late 1990's Native Title movement. One of the main Dreamings of western Cape York celebrates the journeys of Cult Heroes. Ceremonies re-enact their journeys to and from the islands in the Torres Strait. The strong influence of Islander cultures can be seen in the wooden sculptures and other artefacts from this region.

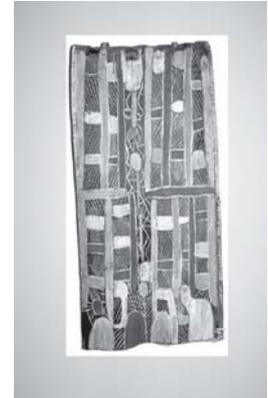
Kimberley

The Kimberley is a rugged area located between a sea rich in resources and the Great Sandy Desert. The peoples of the Kimberley have had contact with people from nearby parts of Asia, long before they met Europeans. The coastal and inland groups were very different, but linked through trade. The art of the Kimberley region is distinctive for geometric designs and unique spirit figures such as Wandjina, their Rainbow Serpent and the Lightning Ancestors. The rock shelters and painting sites are still visited by owners of these Dreaming places.



Bark Painting

Bark paintings provide a record of Aboriginal beliefs, cultures and everyday life. Some contain images of past visitors, such as the Macassans (from Indonesia). Since the 1970s, vinyl paints and pigments have introduced a new palette of colours.



Rock Art

Aboriginal rock art occurs across Australia, wherever suitable rock surfaces exist. These ancient paintings and engravings provide a glimpse into the distant lives of the artists, their communities and even long-extinct animals such as giant emus, kangaroos and the Tasmanian Tiger. Some rock art is believed to be at least 30 000 years old.

Desert Carvings

Western Desert and Arrernte people have traded their wooden carvings for European goods since the 1920s. Known as 'punu', the carvings often relate to the European presence on their lands. Before ready access to metal tools and the growth of tourist industry, only men carved wood. Their works usually featured their Dreaming Ancestors, and the reptiles, birds and mammals that live in the desert. More recently women have begun carving wooden figures and decorating them with designs burnt in using hot wire.



Technology - Level 1

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery



Shell Objects

Possessing great spiritual power and natural beauty, shell ornaments were highly prized status symbols within Aboriginal societies and were important trade items. In the desert, people believed that pearl shells held the 'essence' of rain, which was also found in rainbows. After Europeans arrived, shell necklaces became 'mission' and tourist crafts.

Feathered Items

Feathers featured in ceremonies across Aboriginal Australia. Some performers became an incarnation of various Bird Ancestors by wearing feathers applied directly to the skin, threaded in the hair, or mounted in headdresses. Feathers also feature in ceremonial wands, poles and fly switches.



Tin Masks

The large tin masks were discovered by NB Tindale in 1953 at Port Hedland in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. They had been discarded several years before, after a large public ceremony. They feature both introduced and traditional materials and design.

Yuendumu Doors

The Yuendumu Doors were painted by senior Warlpiri men at Yuendumu Primary School in 1983. This placed their sacred Dreaming design into a public space for the first time. By the time the South Australian Museum acquired the doors in 1996, Warlpiri art was known worldwide. The doors on display will be changed over time beginning with the painting of the Possum and Native Cat Dreamings.

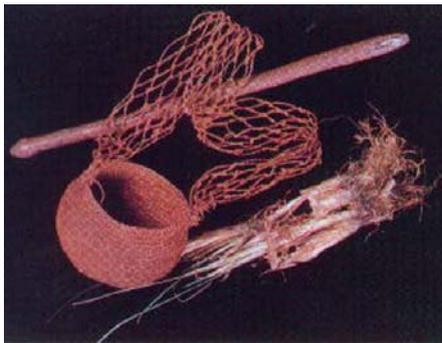


Technology- Level 1

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

Boomerangs

For thousands of years, Aboriginal people across Australia have used boomerangs. They vary in form, use and meaning depending on local conditions. They range from commonly recognised returning types to curved fighting sticks that were never thrown. The use of boomerangs included fishing, hunting, fighting, playing and for ceremony. In addition to the wall displays of boomerangs and a boomerang map of Australia, pull-out drawers feature surveys of boomerangs from the Flinders Ranges and painted boomerangs. A corner unit examines the flight of the boomerang.

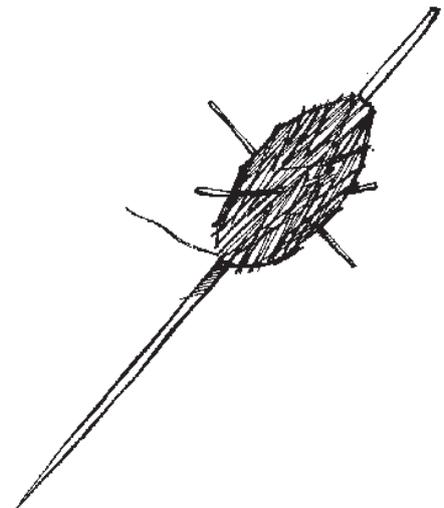
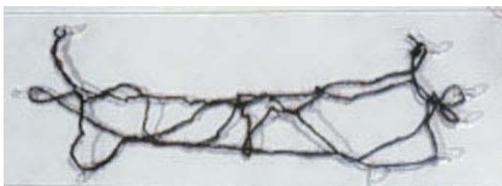


Baskets

Aboriginal people, who lived in areas rich in sources of vegetable fibre, made baskets for carrying and holding things. Being light and strong, baskets had advantages over containers made from wood. This display features baskets from South Eastern Australia, Queensland, and the top end. Aboriginal people who live in these areas today continue to make basketry for exhibitions and sale.

String

An intimate knowledge of natural fibres in local environments ensured the development of a dynamic string making tradition across Aboriginal Australia. Aboriginal people used fibres from plants, animal fur and human hair to make ropes and string. This required innovative technologies that are still being used in Aboriginal communities today.





Technology - Level 1

Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery

Play

Lightening the serious mood of the gallery, this module introduces the theme of play and fun as an integral part of human culture. It also makes students aware that this aspect of Aboriginal life also has its serious dimension to do with re-shaping and adjusting social reality. It takes students into a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and its links with other cultures.



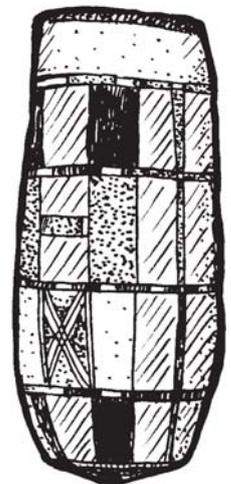
Aesthetics

In the past, Aboriginal art and design formed an integral part of ceremonial and daily life for Aboriginal people across Australia. Today it is the original aesthetic that pervades the material culture and art of each region across Australia. Identifiable motifs and designs and the underlying dynamic of the Dreaming characterise the Aboriginal aesthetic from each region.

Tunga - Bark Container

From Bathurst and Melville Islands, these containers refer to the complex relationship between Tiwi people and their Dreaming Ancestors, and places associated with them.

They feature the dramatic, highly abstract and heavily in-filled design characteristic of Tiwi art. Known as tunga, these buckets were used to give payment to the performers at the end of funeral ceremonies.



South Australian Museum

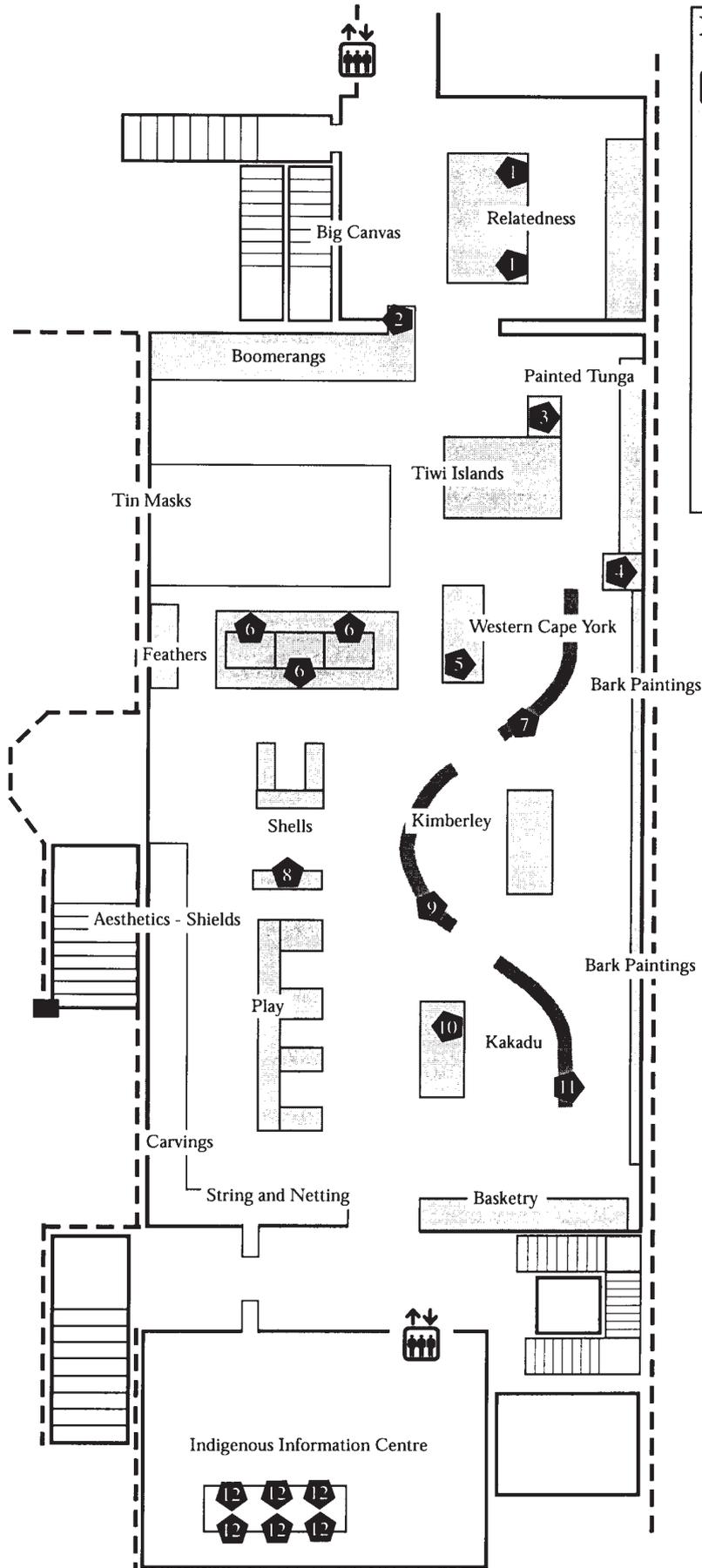
Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery Guide

www.samuseum.sa.gov.au

Open 10am to 5pm every day, except Christmas Day and Good Friday.



Level 1



Key



Lifts



Audio Visual

- 1 Relatedness
- 2 Boomerangs
- 3 Tiwi Islands (Contemporary Voice)
- 4 Bark/rock art
- 5 Western Cape York
- 6 Speaking Land interactive
- 7 Western Cape York (Contemporary Voice)
- 8 Play
- 9 Kimberley (Contemporary Voice)
- 10 Kakadu
- 11 Kakadu (Contemporary Voice)
- 12 Indigenous Information Centre Interactives

