‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’

(stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)

A project submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Vicki Louise Couzens

School of Education
College of Design & Social Context
RMIT University
November 2009
‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Contents

Language Notes 5
Research Question 6
Rationale 7
Introduction 8
Language Map 10

maarngat tyamanyoongako ba yakeenako 11
(Aboriginal knowing and learning)

Methodology: dadirri (deep listening) 12
Methodology: wangan ngootyoong (listen good) 13
wangan ngootyoong: birrarung wilam 17
Rover Thomas: an example of deep listening 19
wangan ngootyoong: kooramook yakeen 20
ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo (I come from) 24

ngalam meen (ancestors): identity 25

Weetpurpoin (great great grandmother) 27
ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo (I come from) 31
yaruun tarneen parpur and kaawirn kuunawarn 35
koorrorkee ngapoon ngalam meen moorraka 37
(grandmothers, grandfathers, ancestors burial place)

meerreeng (land): identity 40

ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo (I come from) 40
Possum skin cloaks: designs and landscape 52
borraknawa: unseen 54
Fresh n Salty 63
kuuloorr woorrkngan (lavastone birthplace) 67
marree - stones 69

woorroong (language): identity 71

Language, the voice of the Land 79
Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination 80

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 3
woorroong (language): ngarrakeetoong  
ngarrakeetoong (family): identity
ngathook mangnooroo watanoo (I come from)  
thanampool kooramook, gunya-winyarr  
(women’s possum cloak)  
women’s work

Conclusion

General Glossary
Glossary: Names of places along the  
Hopkins River at Warrnambool
Glossary: Family/Relationship Terms
Bibliography
List of Illustrations
Curriculum Vitae: Vicki Couzens
Acknowledgements
Appendix 1:  
Possum Skin Cloaks: Strengthening Communities,  
Strengthening Collections

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)  
couzens 4
Language Note

It should be noted that there is extensive use of Keerray Woorroong language throughout this document. Some words and headings have translations but most of the text not immediately followed by an English translation. Capitals are not used for my language words. This a personal choice. Where capitals are used in the text it is to emphasise or identify to the reader, in an English grammatical context, that the word may be for example a proper noun ie: Country, as is Australia in English.

Background

Aboriginal languages are oral languages. Prior to Europeans arriving, our languages were not written down. Our languages are the Voice of the Land, with each language belonging uniquely to the Country it comes from.

Keerray Woorroong is a revival language. There are no living fluent speakers. This means our community is using remnant community knowledge, historical records and two audio records to revive our language. The Keerray Woorroong language has been retrieved from those historical and community sources and published in the Dictionary of Keerraywoorroong and Related Dialects (see Bibliography). My father, Ivan Couzens, achieved his vision of retrieving and reviving our language working with the linguist Sharnthi Krishna-Pillay on the preparation of this Dictionary.

The Keerray Woorroong language used in this document is taken from that source.

Rationale for the way language is presented

I have chosen to present my language throughout this document as part of the text without giving an immediate English translation to follow. This gives the reader an opportunity to read the word/s and understand the meaning through the context of the story.

It also gives the reader an opportunity to employ, in part, the Aboriginal methodology of deep listening through discernment, intuitiveness and tracking or reading signposts, using all of the senses not just what is seen with the eye.

The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom are gifts that are earned and given to us by our Ancestors and Elders. I invite/challenge the reader, through wangan ngootyoong (respect), to experience this document.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Research Question

“ In what ways can my work through art, language and community development contribute to the reclamation, regeneration and revitalisation of our Aboriginal identity and culture?’”

Culture is the framework through which we connect to our Country, our Belonging. It defines and makes us who we are. Our language, stories, songs, dance, artefacts, cultural knowledge and practices demonstrate our continuing connections. Land, language and identity are fundamental to our Being. To know who you are, and where you come from, is to know your Place.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Rationale

*Painting is our Foundation. White man calls it art ... We are painting, as we have always done, to demonstrate our continuing link to our Country and the rights and responsibilities we have to it. We paint to show the rest of the world that we own this Country and the Land owns us. Our painting is a political act.*

Galarrwuy Yunupingu (in Isaacs, 1999)

Through life experiences I have acquired knowledge and come to know myself more. My spiritual understandings, perceptions and learning have deepened. This project is a culmination of a lifetime of experiences; a focusing of attention to contemplate and consider.

The research project reflects my expanding consciousness and deepening awareness of the significance of identity as central to an individual’s sense of self and belonging in their group/community/tribe.

In this ongoing process of ‘the getting of wisdom’, my deepening understanding and insights into the importance of identity, have honed and fine-tuned the underpinning, pivotal force that drives the direction of my work. My profound knowing of this informs all that I do.

The work I have carried out is about sharing these understandings and creating opportunities for experiences which can evoke this ‘knowing’ in others. As Aboriginal people, knowing who we are and our sense of belonging are of primary importance to each individual, to the community/clan/tribe and to the future survival of our Peoples.

*Aboriginal law never change
Old People tell us,
“You got to keep it.”
*It always stays.*

Bill Neidjie, 2005
Introduction

In my research project I have explored the idea of cultural identity and belonging to Country. I have strengthened Indigenous identity, belonging and cultural practices through story-telling and creative expression.

The starting point of my exploration was my own cultural identity and an examination of how this relates to my family’s cultural identity. Who are we, the Couzens clan? How is our identity and sense of belonging connected to landscape and Country? In my research, I have explored our spiritual connection to Country and the notion of belonging and place. I have understood more about these intangible things, the unseen. I explored how connection to Country, belonging and identity are expressed innately through language, story, song, and dance.

Language, story, song, and dance resonate with Country and place. The voice of the Land is heard in our language and songs, our stories are the body of the Land and the rhythm and heartbeat of the Land is felt in the dance.

The works developed in my research depict this exploration of the links between song, dance, words and intonation, resonance and vibration.

Therefore, in this research report, I discuss the way the reclamation, regeneration and revitalisation of Aboriginal cultural practices and knowledge through the arts, language and community development have influenced and reinforced my knowledge and connection to my Aboriginal identity and culture (especially as a Keerray Woorroong woman from the southwest of Victoria).

Firstly, I introduce the methodological concept of dadirri, deep listening, and explore how this idea informed my art practice for a number of works for the ‘deep listening’ project. These included a series of spiral artworks, public art installations and possum skin cloaks.

Secondly, I present a section on Identity, exploring identity through ancestors, land, language and family. I use my study of the Keerray Woorroong language and related dialects to emphasise the continuing connections we have to our homelands and kin. This includes my poetry and stories, as well as speeches I have given at art launches that are written in language. I also explore this in

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
relation to my own family history and incorporate oral histories that I have heard and collected from my Elders, including my father Ivan Couzens, about significant events and important sites. Many of these stories have inspired the works which contribute to the identity/land sections including acrylic on canvas representations of Country.

In this section on identity, I then discuss my inspirations for the Unseen project and present my accompanying artwork. These are a series of works which reveal the ‘Unseen’ nature of our history since colonisation. I also explore my connections to Country through the Fresh n Salty sculptural work located near Heywood in the Western District. These have been inspired by my Ancestors’ eel traps and stone houses. I present personal statements and my own poetry (in language) which reinforce my connection to Country as it relates to these artworks.

The final segment in the identity section presents the involvement of family and community in the rejuvenation of ceremonial dances to celebrate significant community events, in particular the exhibition openings to the possum skin cloak projects as well as the Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination 2007. I then conclude with a presentation of the significance of my family to my identity and provide a detailed list of words in language that connect me to my kin and where I come from.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
This map shows where language groups across Victoria are situated.

The Keerray Woorroong and related dialects are in the south west coastal area of the State.

Keerray Woorroong is our family’s first language group. It is closely related to 6 other dialects including Peek Woorroong, Koorn Kopan Noot, Wooloowoorroong, Kee Woorroong and Dharwurd Woorroong. These seven language groups comprise the tribal group who is collectively known as the Gunditjmara.

Djargurd Woorroong, to the east around Camperdown, and Gadubanud in the Otways are also closely related language groups.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
maarngat tyamanyoongako
ba yakeenako
(Aboriginal knowing and learning)

The Indigenous Deep Listening Project

A partnership between Silkat, the Indigenous Community and the Education Sector generating mutual understanding, respect and creativity.

"Wangan Nganyoonng"  
(waam-aan nggootch-oong)  
Deep Listening by Vicki Couzens

"Deep Listening through coming together in our hearts and spirit, travelling that road together and sensing the fabric of our interconnectedness." Inspired by the words of Miriam-Rose Ungunmarr in 'Dadimi - A Reflection'.

Fig 3. Copy of Cover of Silcar Deep Listening Project

'meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt' (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Methodology: dadirri (deep listening)
Dadirri is a word from the language of the Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly River area of the Northern Territory. Ngangi means word or sound. Kuri means water and kurr means deep. Deep water sound or sounds of the deep, also explains the word Dadirri – inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Dadirri can only be experienced over a period of time in the practice or activity. 

When I experience dadirri I am made whole again (Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann).

I first heard of dadirri as a concept and methodology in 2006. I was moved by the words of Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, for those words resonated deeply within me. At that time I realised I had found the words to articulate my own ways of being, thinking and doing.

For many years during my life I was aware of the ways I would think and act in my life and in my work. My father told me as a young woman in my twenties, he said Sometimes you have to wait, listen to people and let them feel that they own it, you sometimes have to wait….. (Ivan Couzens, circa 1980s).

Gradually over the years this awareness grew. I learned to listen, to hear peoples’ stories and I learned to wait. The awareness is a living and growing process through which we attain learning and knowledge. This brings responsibility. Again, through dadirri, you learn about responsibility and how to be and act.

I became very aware of how I was being, how I was going about my work, how I was thinking, yet I had never articulated this process as clearly to myself or to others. I had spoken of being guided by the Old People; of listening to my spirit and with my heart. And so dadirri brought a clarity to my awareness which was empowering in an unexpected way by giving a sense of validation that until then I had not realised was lacking. It was a strengthening and enlightening experience.

'meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt' (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
I learned more about dadirri as a methodology through reading works by Professor Judy Atkinson, Director of the Gnibi College of Indigenous Peoples at Southern Cross University in Lismore, NSW. Atkinson runs workshops that use narration, art, dance, music, symbols, ritual, drama, bodywork and group work to take participants through a healing process. (See Atkinson, Judy, 2002, *Trauma’s Trails. Recreating Songlines: the Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia*, Spinifex Press.)

**Methodology: wangan ngootyoong (listen good)**
The term wangan ngootyoong from my Language, in literal translation means to hear/listen good. As with the term dadirri, it has layers of deeper meaning. I have taken this term to use its most meaningful way as my methodology.

The works in Figures 4-6 came about from my involvement in the Silcar Deep Listening Project with the Koori Cohort at RMIT University. I was commissioned to do three designs to represent deep listening. I did four designs and one was selected for use as the symbol for the Project.

I have used the spiral symbol in my works as a common feature in all of the designs to represent our personal sacred place, *the deep inner spring that resides in us all* (Ungunmerr-Baumann).

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
There is, perhaps, nothing that looms so large in the human psyche as a symbol. They inform - in a quiet and often unseen way - the structure of every aspect of our lives: the political and economic, the social and cultural, the personal and spiritual. (The Awakening - www.jonathonart.com).

The visual language of symbols is an ancient tradition used by cultures around the world as a means of interpreting and representing our understandings of the world in which we live. The spiral symbol used in my works is one of the oldest known across cultures around the world. The visual motif of the spiral is one of the oldest and most enigmatic sacred images known. It is, in fact, among the very earliest examples of human creative expression, first appearing some 24,000 years ago. (The Awakening - www.jonathonart.com).

It is an alluringly simple symbol with many layers of meaning and representation. Depictions of the spiral in visual communication sees it representing concepts and objects ranging from the seemingly mundane through to the sacred - the natural cycle of all things in our known universe - star systems, orbits, vortex, weather and seasonal cycles, whirllywinds, water flows, spirit or life force, the seed, the unfurling new growth - the never ending birth, life, death, rebirth cycle and so on.

Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist, said that the spiral is an archetypal symbol that represents cosmic force .... It has been associated with the cycles of time, the seasons, the cycle of birth, growth, death, and then rebirth. The cycles of time and nature are the cycles of life.

Some consider the spiral a symbol of the spiritual journey. It is also considered to represent the evolutionary process of learning and growing. To walk and then stand in the center of a spiral or labyrinth has been a psycho-spiritual exercise for centering the consciousness. (www.zenzibar.com/cosmicspiral).
There is another ancient symbol as old in the human imagination as the spiral: the serpent. And like the sacred images of the Goddess and the spiral, the serpent has found its way into every spiritual tradition in the world.

The symbolism of the serpent operates at several levels, but perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the snake to ancient peoples was its curious ability to shed its skin. From the dried and cracking grey husk of its former self, the snake emerges moist, colorful, youthful, revived ... regenerated. It is known that on certain occasions the emerging snake will actually consume the skin he leaves behind - it is an excellent source of protein. What an extraordinary image that is: the old and withered is transformed into the young and vigorous by the act of consuming itself. This image is known as the Ouroboros - the self-consuming serpent.

In this way the serpent is exactly akin to Life itself: lives perpetually come into being, they consume and are eventually consumed, and from this process of consumption new lives come again into being. Nature regenerates itself by a perpetual act of self-consumption. So the serpent is a symbol of the primal, regenerating energy of nature; a suggestion of the sex and violence nature requires for such regeneration; a reminder of our own instinctual need to participate in this Eternal Ritual of regeneration.

(The Awakening - www.jonathonart.com).

The serpent is a powerful and sacred image represented in a spiral form in many cultures. Again, it relates to regeneration or the continuing of the birth, life, death, rebirth cycle, connectedness to spirit and the deep inner spring that resides in us all. (Ungunmerr-Baumann).

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
maarngat tyamanyoongako ba yakeenako
(Aboriginal knowing and learning)

wangan ngootyoong 2
(deep listening series 1,2,3,4)
Fig 6

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
wangan ngootyoong: birrarung wilam (camp by the river of mists)
This Project was undertaken in collaboration with Treahna Hamm and Lee Darroch. We were commissioned to create a common ground commemorative place to celebrate all of Aboriginal Victoria. The cultural and artistic concept included nine elements around the central idea of camp and family. The campsite, with bronze cast water containers is representative of home, hearth, family and the women - keepers of the kinship laws. Spears and shields represent the men who are the hunters and protectors of family. Message sticks invite and welcome visitors to the site, as per our cultural protocols.

Ancestor Stones surround a corroborree/ceremony area, standing as sentinels in watchful guardianship, engraved with depictions of the Ancestor creator beings. Stainless steel possum skin cloaks hang on the wall of the ArtPlay building with designs etched into each panel - touch the panels and you hear stories and songs as told by Aboriginal people from all 38 language groups of Victoria. A one hundred metre long cast iron eel path - a male and female eel entwined, sinuously winds its way through the site. Eel, kuuyang, swim from their home waters, the rivers and lakes of coastal Victoria, to spawn in the Coral Sea and then return to live and grow in the homewaters of their ancestors. As with Aboriginal people, they are innately connected to their Country, their place of belonging.

The final element of birrarung wilam was the ‘calling up ceremony’. This was held with all Victorian language groups represented by Elders and community representatives wearing possum skin cloaks as they gathered to inter objects into the campsite mound and perform a ceremony which activated the site, creating a new and special ceremonial site which represents and celebrates all of Aboriginal Victoria.

There is no signage to inform the visitor. We chose to use our way of knowing and being as the way for those who enter the space to experience birrarung wilam, to listen with their spirit and to see, with their hearts, our stories.
Fig 7
Spears and Shields
Birrarung Wilam
2006-2007

Fig 8
Vicki Lee and Treahna
Ancestor Stones
Birrarung Wilam
2006-2007

Fig 9
Eel Path
Birrarung Wilam
2006-2007

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Rover Thomas: an example of deep listening

The Kurrr Kurrr was ‘found’ by Rover Thomas in 1975 ..... It came to him in his dreams over a period of time. As he shared his knowledge he had gained in this way, its significance was recognised. Out of his sharing emerged the community celebration the Kurrr Kurrr....

The ‘finding’ of the Kurrr Kurrr is noteworthy in itself. In explaining to non-Indigenous people, Rover was always quick to aver that he hadn’t ‘made up’ or composed it; that he wasn’t a liar; and that the Kurrr Kurrr was ‘true’. Within the Indigenous world in which he lived, no such reassurance was necessary. His claims were accepted as self-evidently true. Two aspects of traditional epistemology - what (we) might characterise as the traditional philosophy of knowledge and knowledge acquisition- are especially significant in this respect. the first is belief that all that is really important, including knowledge itself, derives from the Dreaming. The second is that the Dreaming is a continuing process, not a process at an end but one linking past and present and involving living people in its continuance. (Dr Will Christensen in Thomas 2003).

The acquisition of knowledge by way of dreams is a phenomenon that is well known and widely accepted in Aboriginal cultures across Australia, and indeed around the world. Rover Thomas’ experience in ‘finding’ the kurrrirr kurrirr is an extant example of our Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning.

Noongar Elder, Vilma Webb or Wonidgie (Speaker of the Dead), says of the Spirit Journey ...dreaming, go on a journey in dreamtime, a chance to look into the future. The Old People would travel this way often and advise the rest of the tribe, as a visionary of the tribe... (McConchie 2003).
maarngat tyamanyoongako ba yakeenako
(Aboriginal knowing and learning)

Photo National Museum of Australia - ‘Wrapped in a Possum Skin Cloak’ Fig 10

wangan ngootyoong: kooramook yakeen
Below is a quote from a paper I co-presented at the Museum Australia Conference in 2009 where I speak of the first visit to Melbourne Museum where I viewed the Lake Condah Possum skin cloak and was given the dream to regenerate possum skin cloaks.

*Our story began ten years ago. The Old People sent this story to us. We heard them speak through our hearts to our spirits. They told us what to do, they are still telling us what to do. Their message, our story, is to return the cloaks to our People, to reclaim, regenerate, revitalise and remember. To remember what those cloaks mean to us and tell the stories of our People and Country.*

Vicki Couzens, 2009 Museums Australia Conference, Newcastle

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Possum skin cloaks were a vital part of Aboriginal peoples lives in pre-European times. Cloaks were used in daily activity, to keep warm, to sleep in and carry our babies. We were buried in our cloaks - wrapped in our Country. To make a cloak was a very labour intensive and time consuming process. The skins were gathered, stretched and cured, incised with designs and sewn together with kangaroo sinew; some cloaks were comprised of 50 or more skins. The decorations on the skins depicted aspects of clan and Country affiliations. Since the coming of the whiteman through the dispossession of Country and the colonial practice of cultural genocide, the making and wearing of cloaks had become a practice of the past. (see Reynolds, H, 'An Indelible Stain' p21)

The creation of possum skin cloaks to represent each of the language groups of Victoria will become part of an ongoing cycle. The possum skin cloak has been chosen as an important and collective symbol of our culture.

‘koorrookee kooramook’
biganga - keeping
tradition Melbourne Museum 2006-07 Fig 11
photo Melbourne Museum

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Background
In the collection at Melbourne Museum there are two cloaks; the Lake Condah cloak of the Gunditjmara and the Maiden’s Punt cloak of the Yorta Yorta people. In 1999, after viewing these cloaks, a vision, a dream, was given from the Old People to produce replicas of the cloaks.

This dream became a long and profound spiritual, cultural journey. Our kooramook yakeen continues. With each passing year, as our continuing journey unfolds, I realise the significance of that experience. As we embarked on the first part of the journey we learned much about the making of the cloaks and, more importantly, about the cultural significance of cloaks, the designs incised into the skins, the cultural knowledge held in the stories. From this the dream expanded as I became aware that we had to share this knowledge and the experiences; they belonged back with the People.

I began community workshops with communities in my Country and then the Commonwealth Games became part of the journey. The Commonwealth Games gave rise to the opportunity to work with all the language groups and tribes across the State of Victoria. I was commissioned to be the Artistic Director for this Project which saw a team of us, including other artists Lee Darroch and Treahna Hamm work across the State. We worked with local artists, community and Traditional Owner groups to create possum skin cloaks which were worn in the Opening Ceremony of the Commonwealth Games. This Project sparked a major cultural phenomenon, a renaissance of an almost lost cultural practice. The cultural regeneration continues from this time. It was and is about deep listening - with our heart, with our spirit.
All the mobs at workshop for Commonwealth Games Possum Project 2006
Photo VL Couzens  Fig 12

Note: There is now a range of information available on our Possum Cloak Story, particularly Reynolds, A 2005, ‘Wrapped in a Possum Skin Cloak’, National Museum Press. The endnotes in this publication will give the reader further references to follow up.
ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo
(I come from)

belonging.............

woorrkgnan....................birthplace
family......................ngarrakeetoong

dream....................yakeen

bone......................pakayn
blood......................keerray
..............................keerreek

meerreng......................land
lavastone....................kuuloorr

tell story.....................lakan
woorroong.............language

kuuyang.............................eel

ancestors...............alam meen
home...............worn

ngathook mangnoorroo
watanoo..............................................
..................................................
...................... .....  .. .

VL Couzens c 2009 (This work was written for this thesis)

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
This section introduces my family, my grandparents, aunties and uncles. Through the family photos and writings I attempt to give the reader a sense of the power of my identity and connection to my Ancestors, and through our family, our shared blood and our stories how we are connected to our Country.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Fig 13. Panmure Football Club  Fig 14. Ford on Hopkins River  Fig 15. Ivan Couzens

Fig 16. Georgina Winters at Childer’s Cove  Fig 17. Hopkins River, Framlingham

Fig 18. Jack Wyselaskie  Fig 19. Nicholas Couzens’ car at beach

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Ngalam meen (ancestors)  
Identity

Ngathook mangnooroo watanoo....
Ngarrakeetoong - ngathook ngarra mangnooroo watanoo, ngathook woontha mangoorroo watanoo........

Fig 25. Nellie Cain - Weetpurpoin

(Warrnambool Historical Society)

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Weetpurpoin, also known as Nellie Cain, is my great great grandmother. She was born circa 1820s. She grew up and lived through the turmoil that followed the arrival of the white man to Gunditjmara Meerreng (Gunditjmara Country) in the late 1830s.

Weetpurpoin grew up and lived around the Port Fairy and Warrnambool districts all her life. She married Minimalk (Barney), who may have belonged to the Djargurd Wurrong from around Camperdown area (including a large part of the lake and craters in the surrounding country). Minimalk is also recorded as belonging to the Keerray Woorroong language group whose lands covered from the east bank of the Hopkins River, east of Warrnambool, bordering on Mount Emu Creek in the north and east, Derrinallum due north through to their easterly boundary along the Gellibrand River in the south, along and across part of the Otways and in between Terang and Camperdown. Minimalk/Barney and Weetpurpoin had five children Jessie, Harriet, Frank, Maryann and Willie. Four of these children survived to adulthood and went on to have families of their own.

Weetpurpoin went on to marry Jim Cain.

Our leenyarr is Harriet.
Fig 26. Sacred Tree
Photo: Rod Hagan

This is the Law, the Old Ones, the Dreaming Ancestors have given to the women; to keep the families strong; to keep the bloodlines and kinship properly.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
pakarr yayawan (early spring .. the time between) 1820 something .......... the exact day and date unrecorded.
A ngeelam (an infant) is born, her woorrkngan (birthplace) is at tarree nung (shady, safe place by the creek).
Her ngeerrang (mother) is sheltered in the warmth and protection of the sacred tree.
She squats, straining, pushing; compulsive, convulsive contractions, her body shudders.
koorrookee leerpeen (grandmothers sing).

ngowata ngowata koornong poopoop
come, come little baby
ngowata ngowata
come come to us
ngathoongan ngarrakeetong
we are your family
wayapawan ngeerrang-an
wayapawan koorrookee-an
meet your mothers
meet your grandmothers
koornong poopoop,
ngyoorn ngyoorn
do not cry, we keep you safe
ngowata ngowata koornong poopoop
(vlcouzens (c) 2009)

The birthing song of welcome, for the new one coming. To keep her safe from the moorrop (bad spirit), to sing the safe arrival of her spirit, into her new koong (body).
Weetpurpoin softly whimper, small sounds. Staring wide eyed at her koorrookee (grandmothers) and the other ngeerrang (mothers) of her clan gazing back at her. She nuzzles for her ngeerrang ngapang (mother’s breast) searching, seeking nourishment, comfort ..........
ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo....
ngarrakeetoong - ngathook ngarra mangnoorroo watanoo, ngathook woontha mangoorroo watanoo.........

leenyarr - great grandmother Harriet
Harriet Blair, Harriet Draper, Harriet Allan, Harriet Couzens and finally Harriet Wyselaskie. Leenyarr Harriet Wyselaskie is buried at Framlingham Aboriginal Cemetery with her second and last husband Jack (John) Wyselaskie. They are buried in a double grave adjacent to the Couzens/Clarke plot.

Harriet was born in Camperdown in 1857. She lived with her mother, Weetpurpoin, her father, Barney Minimalk, and her siblings as they moved around the district. Great great grandmother Nellie did not frequent the mission stations and never lived on one permanently. So Harriet’s early life, in particular, was spent moving where her parents needed to go. They spent a lot of time at the Allan’s station along the Hopkins River close to the tuuram maree at Allansford. The brothers John and William Allan were local landowners who gave the local mobs a place to stay and assisted with rations and support from the Government in the early days.

Leenyarr (paternal great grandmother) Harriet married James Couzens circa 1870 and they had one daughter Sarah. Sarah died when she was eight years old in 1880. This is our family oral history and this is from where we carry the name - Couzens. Leenyarr Harriet, after she became a widow, had three more children; Leempeen (paternal aunt) Hester born in 1892, Kooparr (paternal uncle) John Couzens born in 1895, and lastly kookoon (paternal grandfather) Nicholas Couzens in 1902.

Leenyarr Harriet worked throughout her life, picking hops at Timboon and other seasonal work. She also, along with many of other women on the missions, wove traditional baskets to sell. Below is one such basket made by the women of Framlingham around 1910. This was given back to me by Ros Aitken whose grandmother bought it from the women from Framlingham. Leenyarr Harriet ended up living out her years on Framlingham Aboriginal Settlement. She married Jack Wyselaksie in the early 1920s and passed away in 1926.

Fig 27
Basket from Framlingham c 1910 Photo Vicki Couzens. Given to Vicki by Ros Aitken.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
ngapoon - great grandfather Zellanach - James Couzens
James Couzens and John Couzens were two famous cricketing brothers who were part of the Aboriginal cricket team of the 1860s which toured England. They both were present at the Mt Rouse Aboriginal station and later moved to Framlingham. James and John originated from Mosquito Plains in South Australia.

![Aboriginal Cricket Team 1867](image)

Fig. 28 Aboriginal Cricket Team 1867 (Mulvaney D J, 1967, *Cricket Walkabout - the Australian Aboriginal Cricketers on Tour 1867-8*, Melbourne University Press.)

My Mother, Joy Agnes Bolden was born in Warrnambool in 1940 to Doris Nellie Bolden nee Brebner., and Joseph Charles Bolden. Mum was third eldest of six siblings.

My Mother’s Mother’s people all hail from Scotland. The Brebner family line stretches back to the 1100s in Scotland coming under the Farquharson clan. The Brebners originated from the town of Brabant in Belgium and migrated to Scotland and settled in Glenmuich, north-east of Aberdeen, near Balmoral Castle. The Brebners were, historically, employed as yeoman at the castle. They came to Australia in the late 1800s.

Mums father’s mother was Janet Liddle from Glasgow and she married Joseph Bolden, of English background. We know very little about Janet, however we know that the Bolden family/s settled around Warrnambool in the early settlement days, holding several large pastoral runs in and near Warrnambool township.

"meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt" (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Fig 29. Family Photo taken at my parents’ wedding 1957
Photo: Ralph Illidge

I to r standing kooparr Gordon, Noel, Hansen (Rocky) leempeen Kathleen, peepay (father) Ivan, kooparr Grattan (George), Stanley, leempeen Zelda
Seated frontl leenyarr Georgina, kookoon Nicholas

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Leenyarr Ellen Winters, my paternal great grandmother, came from the Lake Condah mission, her mother’s mother’s mother was from around Coleraine and Cavendish along the Wannon river in the north west of Gunditjmara Country. Leenyarr, grandmother, Georgina (Jean) Couzens nee Winters was born in Stawell on February 23 1905. Her mother was great grandmother Ellen Winters. Nan’s biological father is not known outside our family oral history either. Great grandmother Ellen Winters had three children, Kathleen, Thomas and Georgina before she married Fleetwood Clarke. Ellen and Fleetwood went to have a further nine or ten children.

Leenyarr Georgina (Jean) met and married kookoon Nicholas Couzens in 1920. They lived on the Framlingham mission and later moved off and lived and worked around the district at various farms and quarries. Leenyarr Georgina also made baskets to sell to support her family. It is through leenyarr Georgina that we have rights to Country in the western parts of Gunditjmara Country.

"meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt" (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
yaruun tarneen parpuur and kaawirn kuunawarn (figs. 30 and 31) both belonged to the Keerray Woorroong language group.

yaruun tarneen parpuur was from the moperer gundidj clan from around woolsthorpe.
kaawrn kuunawarn was headman of the kuunawarn gundidj who inhabited the area around Lake Connewarre near Mortlake.

Both became primary informants to Dawson of Kangatong station near Hawkesdale. Dawson and his daughter Isabella recorded our language, stories and customs (see Dawson, 1881).
Fig. 32. koorrookee ngapoon ngalam meen moorraka (grandmothers, grandfathers, ancestors burial place)
Acrylic, pencil on paper on canvas 2003
Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Our Ancestors, Ngalam Meen, are who we are and where we come from, so we honour and remember them.
V Couzens, 2009

The artwork on page 37 (Fig. 32) honours our Ancestors and is a depiction of the return of Ancestral Remains which were interred in the Framlingham Mission Cemetery in late 2003. A ceremony was held for the interment and the whole community was involved.

The day was very special, a sacred act as we reverently placed our Old People in Country, back where they belong.

Ceremony, the use of fire, smoke, song and language was a reclaiming of our heritage and identity; a connecting with our Ancestors, our sense of place and who we are.

We lay to rest our ancestors of the gadubanud, gulidjan, djargurd wurrung, kirrae wurrong, dharwurd wurrung ba djab wurrung ngarraketoong, yoowatay-toota-ngan ngathoongan. ngatanwarr worrn meerreeng teenay ngathoong-ningan. mayapa-nawarr ngootyoong thoowoong karrweeyn, teen meerreng moorraka-n ngeeye alam meen. Friday 7th November 2003
Yakeen ngaken ngootooowan.

This land has been cleansed and prepared through ceremony for the reburial of our ancestors Friday 7th November 2003
see you in the Dreaming.

Written, translated and spoken by Vicki Couzens at the Reburial Ceremony 2003

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)

cozens 38
I feel it with my body,
with my blood.
feeling all these trees,
all this country.
when the wind blows you can feel it.
same for country,
you feel it.
you can look.
but feeling....
that make you.

Bill Neidjie, 2005
Acknowledgement and speech delivered at the launch of ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo .... (I come from)
a family exhibition at Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum, 2008

(My works shown on pages 41-51 were part of this exhibition.)

ngatanwarr, mangnoorroo watnoo keerray woorroong gunditjmara meerreeng ngathoongan. mayapa wangan ngoottyoon wanyoo Kulin ba Boon Wurrung wanyoo Keerray Woorroong alam meen, koorrookee ba ngapoon.

mangnoorroo watanoo bareedy ngathoongan
mangnoorroo watanoo nguurnduuc ngathoongan
mangnoorroo watanoo weeyn ngathoongan
mangnoorroo watanoo meerreeng ngathoongan
ngeeye keerreek, ngeeye pakayn teenay meerreeng
(we come from the water,
we come from the air,
we come from the fire,
we come from the land
our blood and bones are in the land.)

we honour our ancestors and all those who have gone before us so we may be who we are today.

special thanks to all my family who have contributed to this exhibition, to Bunjilaka for this great opportunity to show ‘who we are and where we come from’ and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-op for the loan of works.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
**tuuram maree (Fig. 33)**

My great grandmother was from out Tuuram Rocks. Dad took me down there when I was a young fella. Pointed out a lot of sites and things down there, now its all just farm land, of course, ploughed under and all that sort of thing....Yes it is. It was a very important place because that’s where the salt water and the fresh water met. Dad took me down there. We were walking across all the stones, and you could see the eels...... He showed us those and you know, said this is where your grandmother used to live.... the real main sites where lots of people camp(ed) would be Tuuram and Childers Cove.

Yes it was interesting. He was going to camp down there the night. He took us to Tuuram and we got down there and it was just evening, the sun was practically going down, he said, “This is where we camp.” We were there an hour or more, looking at different areas.... then he said “Oh, we’re going home.” I said “Aren’t we camping?” “Not tonight,” he said. You know I often wondered why he said that. (Ivan Couzens).
This is about the tuuram maree (stones) where the fresh water meets the salt water in the Hopkins river. Our grandfather told my father of the Old People camping there, fishing and eeling. It is a special site to the keerray woorroong and peek wurrong peoples as it is to our family.
Deen Maar (Fig. 34)

On the coast across from Deen Maar there is a haunted cave called Tarn Weerreeng. There is a spirit path between the land and Deen Maar. When someone passes away the body is wrapped in grass and put in the burial place. When grass is found at the mouth of the cave the People know that the Pooyeet Pooyeet Tyeepeety has taken the body and its belongings through Tarn Weerreeng to Deen Maar and carried the person’s spirit to the skies. If the People see a meteor or shooting star at the same time they know that fire had been taken up with the spirit. If there is fresh grass found near Tarn Weerreeng without a proper funeral having taken place it means that someone was killed and none of the People will go near until the grass decays or is removed by the ‘clever’ man of our Tribe.

I’ve had an experience I often relate to people, when I went to the Crags the first time. It’s a very spiritual place. I had a feeling that I could feel the spiritual feeling of the place and yet I don’t know if I was supposed to be there. So I sat for I don’t know how long, it might have been an hour or so, I got up and came away. So every time we go down there it is a different feeling. (Ivan Couzens, 2005).

NB: The Crags is the shoreline facing Deen Maar near where many people were laid in waiting to be taken by the ‘spirit’ road to Deen Maar.
meerreeng (land) identity

Fig 34. deen maar Vicki Couzens (c) 2009

Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
In our family we have a strong connection to the Arts. My grandfather, Nicholas Couzens, was an exceptional artist, painting portraits, nudes and landscapes. We believe he worked primarily in oils in the early to mid 1900s in and around Port Campbell, Peterborough area. Uncle Stan Couzens became well-known in his later years, continuing artefact making and taking up painting after his retirement. Aunty Zelda was a basketweaver extraordinaire. Several of us in the following generations, including Gavin Couzens and Bronwyn Razem and many of our children, are also practicing artists.

A legacy for the future – to know who you are and where you come from.

...he also took me down to Childer's Cove, along the cliff there and pointed out areas there. I went there just the other day with a couple of the grandkids and I wouldn't have a clue where he pointed these sites out, obviously all the vegetation had changed. (Ivan Couzens, 2005).
Fig 35. ngarring nguyun (childer’s cove) Vicki Couzens
Acrylic on canvas 2007

My grandfather used to take Dad and his brothers and sisters to camp here where the Old People camped before. Pop also painted many of his landscapes in this area.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 46
Keilambete keeleengk has healing powers. The Old People would bring people to soak in the lake and be cleansed and healed. Fossils and shark’s teeth have been found in this lake.
Fig 37. oorate therrang derrgonnernut  Vicki Couzens
Acrylic on canvas  2007

This work is about the 3 Sisters – the place of many stones and kangaroos. It is part of the western boundary of the Nguurad Gundidj people who lived in and around Mt Noorat (nguurad).

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Mt Leura and Sugarloaf in Camperdown. The Djargurd Wurrong peoples lived in and around this Country. Our great grandmother was born in Camperdown in 1857.

Bullen Merri and Wombeetch Puyuut are two of the traditional owners from this Country when my grandmother was born. One of the lakes is named for Bullen Merri. Ngotuk means my lake.
Fig 39.  warerungwongwong (moonlight head)  Vicki Couzens
Acrylic on canvas  2007

Three women guard and protect the moonlight head – precious coloured stones are found here. It is a special women’s site.

I first visited this place when I was ten years old after bothering my parents for weeks to take me there.
meerreeng (land) identity

fig 40. pawan kuuloorr Vicki Couzens
Acrylic on canvas 2007

Volcanoes of the Keerray Woorroong, Djargurd Wurrong and Gulidjan Country.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 51
Possum skin cloaks: designs and landscape

The visual language of the markings on possum skin rugs directly connects us to Country: they depict who we are and where we come from.

Figure 41 on page 53 shows a line drawing of the Lake Condah possum skin cloak held in the Melbourne Museum. This cloak has been the catalyst for our kooramook yakeen (see pages 20-23).

Figures 42 and 42 on page 53 come from the book, *Wrapped in a Possum Skin Cloak* (Reynolds, 2005), and clearly show the synergy of designs and landscape. In figure 42, the symbol on the right is a drawing of Lake Condah and the photo background shows Lake Condah when it is full of water. Figure 43 shows the correlation between the symbols on the cloak and the camp ovens and sleeping pits observed in the 1840s by George Augustus Robinson.

The meaning of these symbols and others became apparent during the making of a possum skin cloak for the National Museum of Australia (see Reynolds, 2005). It was very much a direct experience similar to the experience described by Rover Thomas (see page 19) in that cultural knowledge is acquired in our consciousness through osmosis or as if by way of a dream. The Dreaming of knowledge continued throughout our possum skin cloak-making journey and is still ongoing in the work we continue today.
meerreeng (land)  identity

Fig. 41. Drawing of Lake Condah possum skin cloak (X16275 Museum Victoria)

Fig 42. (From Reynolds, 2005)  Fig 43. (From Reynolds, 2005)

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
This body of work was created from participating in a project titled ‘Walk’ in 2007. This Project was developed by Carmel Wallace and Ilka White and was toured by NETS Victoria (National Exhibition Touring Support) in 11 galleries across Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia.

‘Walk’ artists were Peter Corbett, Nicky Hepburn, Brian Lawrence, Jan Learmonth, Carmel Wallace, Ilka White, John Wolseley and myself. All artists had some connection to the south west districts of Victoria and worked in different media from drawing, jewellery, sound and film, sculpture, painting, printmaking and textiles.

The concept of ‘Walk’ developed from conversations between Carmel and Ilka as they were walking one day along a section of the Great South West Walk, a community-developed walking track traversing the country from Portland through the Glenelg National Park into South Australia and along the coast returning to Portland.

Carmel and Ilka, in their own practice, gather inspiration from spending time in the natural environment and conceived of developing this project as an opportunity for other artists to do the same. Along with this was the intent to raise awareness and bring a message to the wider community through the works produced by the artists, of ‘caring for country’, of being aware and developing a sense of belonging. It could be said that Australians are essentially a displaced people and as such often feel a lack of personal integration into the landscape they occupy. Such alienation makes destructive processes more likely. (Wallace, 2007).

It is from my experience through the ‘Walk’ Project that I developed the ‘unseen’ body of work.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 54
‘unseen’

....learning the landscape of my Grandmother’s Country.
it is about ‘wangan ngootyoong’ - respect
 - deep and respectful listening to
Country.
it is about the teaching I was given as I walked upon the Land
treading in the footsteps of our
Ancestors
in my work the ‘unseen’ is
revealed.
the ‘unseen’ of the
past
feeling, hearing our Old People through the veils of time;
‘unseen’ of the future
how will the Country
be, feel and look;
the ‘unseen’ of the earth energies and spirits of the Land.

We, the Aboriginal peoples, creatures, plants and Spirits of this Country
are the ‘unseen’
by many.
On this journey, walking my Grandmother’s Country,
my Ancestors
my Old People walked with and beside me,
showing the Spirit of Country.
through their blessing and knowledge
I attempt to reveal
some of which is

‘unseen’

Vicki Couzens (c) 2007
The red tailed black cockatoo is one moiety of the Gunditjmara. It is rare and endangered (‘unseen’) as its habitat has been destroyed from colonisation and clearing of land for farms.
The white cockatoo is the other moiety of the Gunditjmara. The sulphur crested white cockatoo mates for life. Its cry is heard across our Country.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Un-acknowledged, the burial places and massacres sites of our families and Ancestors. ‘unseen’

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
These are our camps where our families gathered. The campsites and middens are hidden by the overlays of ‘development’, hidden beneath the paddocks (ploughed in) and hidden in ignorance of Aboriginal culture and lifestyle.
Fig. 48 kapang (spotted quoll)   Vicki Couzens  2007
Copperplate etching 3/25
Photo: Terence Bogue

Spotted quolls are identified individually by their unique pattern of spots/markings on their backs.
Rare and endangered, the spotted quoll are rarely seen.
Yams and baskets, the yam is a staple food gathered by the women, no longer growing in the bush naturally. 'unseen'
meereng leerpeen (earth song) Vicki Couzens 2007

This work is about the landscape and the changes in it as you traverse the Country. It is also about the ‘unseen’, what is above and below the surface, in a literal and metaphorical way, relating the ‘unseen’ to the spiritual. It is coloured with hues from the land and waters. Text is hidden in the layers looking like markings of ancient tribal symbols but in fact are the names of the 54 clans of the Gunditjmarra Dharwurd Wurrong language group.

Land, language and identity are a central focus of this painting. In the nexus between land and language past and present are linked. Rhythmic sequences made of colours and markings anchored in the specifics of place, convey a sense of land as ancestral body. Traversing the land, in the songlines and dreamings .... Singing the land .... each in a different language .... and painting the land, with its invisible stories and histories, pervasive through the now. (Martina Copley, Curator ‘Walk’ 2007).
meerreeng (land) identity

Fig 51. Fresh n Salty

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)

Photo: Jo Grant
Fresh n Salty 2007

Fresh n Salty was a collaborative work with Portland environmental artist, Carmel Wallace. It was a statewide project initiated and managed by Regional Arts Victoria. Jo Grant was the Regional Arts Development Officer for the South West who managed and co-ordinated the Project in our region. The project was partnered by Windamara Aboriginal Corporation in Heywood and the regional Catchment Management Authority.

The site at Kurtonitj, outside Heywood, was an old farm, partially cleared. The local Traditional Owner group has acquired the property and agreed for us to do the project here.

The Project was about interpreting water use and issues in our region. As the artists, we had to develop a concept and design taking into account community views and concerns. This occurred by way of consultation with the local Traditional Owner group, an open day and presentation to the wider community.

To undertake the work, we engaged local drystone stonewall expert Alistair Tune. As part of the Project we employed three young Aboriginal people to work on the construction of the artwork. It was constructed over 5 weeks with our team working 3-4 days a week. During construction a workshop was offered to interested people in the region. Six participants were selected and attended for one day working with Alistair to construct a section of the work.
The Gunditjmara people, my grandmother’s People, used drystone techniques to construct stone hut villages and sophisticated drystone aquaculture systems in the creeks, rivers and lakes of our Country. These architectural and engineering structures were developed over thousands of years. It was a great ritual time when the clans would gather to harvest the eels.

With European invasion the settlers brought their skills in drystone walling and much of the countryside is laced with drystone wall fences and other structures such as sheep dips.

The Country around this area, near Heywood in the Western Districts, is stony rises country, seasonal swamps and marshes within the lava flows across the region.

This work evolved from the landscape and environment we lived in and knew. It draws on both ancient Gunditjmara cultural knowledge and practices and on recent European history and heritage.

The shape of the work, from an aerial view, is based on the shape of traditional eel baskets that were placed in weirs in creeks to catch eels. It is a large spiral shape winding down around a large mound of stones that was already present from clearing for the farm.

There are then two short stone walls and a triangular piece on the ground. Offset to the side is another short wall and large round circular piece, again on the ground. The circular piece serves as a fireplace for events and ceremonies. Drystone walling was used to construct the work, again drawing on the skills and knowledge of both cultures. The young people working with us gained new skills, the opportunity to learn more about their own culture and connect with the Country at the site we were working on. The community were engaged and a vital part of the project. Place and our Old People were honoured through ceremony.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
meerreeng (land) identity

Figs 52 & 53. Fresh n Salty 2007
Family and community involved in the construction of this work.
Photos: Jo Grant

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)

couzens 66
kuuloorr woorrkngan (lavastone birthplace)

Fig 54. Crew building kuuloorr woorrkngan on site at Kurtonitj, Lake Condah. This was then exhibited at Linden Gallery, St Kilda, in 2007. Photo: V Couzens
kuuloorr woorrkngan (lavastone birthplace)

kuuloorr woorrkngan is ..... belonging to the land of my ancestors;
being of the earth;
custodian/carer of Country;

kuuloorr woorrkngan (see Fig. 54) references our eel/fish traps and stone worn/houses made from kuuloorr and built on the lava flows from the volcanoes which cover our Country. It also refers to the European stone walls used to fence the land during the colonisation period. kuuloorr woorrkngan was created blending both traditional Aboriginal knowledge and contemporary European drystone walling knowledge and craftsmanship (many thanks to Alistair Tune, stonewaller).

kuuloorr woorrkngan is constructed from basalt, the kuuloorr/lavastone from my Grandmother’s Country. Kuuloorr is from the womb of our Mother, the Earth. My People have lived in this Country from the beginning of time, our Country has kept us and nourished us and we, in return, look after our places and the creatures. This is our responsibility given to us by our Ancestors.

The spiral shape alludes to the eternal birth, life, death and rebirth cosmology of Aboriginal spiritual life. Literally, it reflects the flow of water and the constructed eel and fish trap channels and the houses that sheltered us. In the spaces, wood and grass are woven, literally depicting the wooden weirs which secured the grass woven eel and fish baskets. Metaphorically, they evoke the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. Respect and balance are the keys to survival and harmony.

The stones are raw and powerful bringing ancient ambience, strength and longevity to the urban setting (installed at Linden Gallery in St Kilda). Unrefined living energy direct from the Earth unsettles the rhythms of city life, calling upon the onlooker to reconnect with nature.
marree – stones

The stones are strength, stability and longevity
Stones hold our Earth together
Stones hold and support us
Stones keep our stories and
our Spirits safe

Stones speak to each other, passing on messages
Whispering secrets of the Ancient Ones.

Stones are healing
Stones unseen.

marree peeneeyt, peeneeyt maleeyeeto
marree mana ngeeye meerreeng ngarratkeetoong
marree mana ngathoongan
maree nganto pay ngeeyee leerpeen ba
ngeeye moorroop ngootyoonooyt

marree laka maar, wooka meetako yakeen teertpa leerpeen
wanyoo alam meen

marree ngootyoong
marree yoolooween

V L Couzens © 2001
Translation © 2007

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
My body is of the earth, the stone, rocks .... that is who I am. The heartbeat of the stones resonates with my Spirit. I feel the Country in my bones, in my blood; I hear the Country in my pulse; I see the Country with my heart ...... the Old People greet us; welcome us and watch us as we move through the Land.

Vicki Couzens, 2007
each man he stay,
stay on his own country.
He can’t move his country so he stay there,
stay with his language.
language is different,
like skin.
skin can be different,
but blood same.

Bill Neidjie, 2005
woorroong (language) identity

Fig. 55 thangang poonart (Hopkins Falls) (from Krishna-Pillay, 1996)

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Land and language are inextricably linked. Language is directly connected to place, through the mimicry of animals and nature in dance; the visual language in body art, motifs and symbols in stone etchings, sand paintings, and ceremonial ornaments; music, sound and vocalisation; and the naming and relationship of all things, embodying the interconnectedness of our existence.

From the Creation times all things came into being, the creatures, the people and our Mother Earth. As the Ancestor Beings lived, loved, fought and died, they created all the features of the natural world and the rules and laws for living. Their actions were transformed into landscape, into the rivers, lakes and billabongs, the hills, mountain ridges and valleys, the sand-hills and plains, the caves and rock shelters. These places hold the stories of the Ancestors’ Dreamings and are handed down through the generations in songs, stories, ceremony, ritual and dance.

We are born of the spirit of our Country. It is where we are conceived from, it is our home, and it is where we belong. The responsibility and obligation to look after the homelands of our family clan group is a birthright handed down through bloodlines from generation to generation. Totemic relationships with birds and animals connect us to both the physical world and the spiritual world and underpin a reciprocal obligation to care for each other and for the natural environment. In this way our culture and language relate to and are embedded in the Land. Our language is the voice of the Land.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
woorroong (language)        identity

pookkarr leerpeen (river song)
these are the names we have for the Hopkins River, the western boundary of
the Keerray Woorroong homelands

tangang puunhort
murri-murrkii buurkrrakil

booroinyel-o
bura
moyjl
pang
tonedidjerer

tuuram

winburren
alloburng
lapeezy parreeyt
lapeezy
lapeet

mopor
pannitarngite
perrennarrerwarrer
porronedernite
porry
warerangjele
woerrer
worjghome
worrocubberin
yeddy yerrin
pookarr
wirpneung
baller baller cort
poonoong poonoong

V L Couzens © 2006
woorroong (language) identity

peeneeyt thanambool women’s and girl’s dance group

Established in 2000 by Vicki Couzens, Jarrah Bundle, Yaraan Bundle, Marlee Bundle and Kirrae Bundle.

Fig 56. leempeen (grandaughter) Indi with ngart (daughter) Yaraan preparing to dance at Tarerer Festival 2007.
Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 75
karman kanoo meerreeng
leerpeen kanoo meerreeng
karweeyn kanoo meerreeng, nganto pay yakeen peeneeyt,
nganto pay Marr peeneeyt.

Paint up Country
Sing up Country
Dance up Country
Keep the Dreaming strong
Keep the People strong

(c) VL Couzens 2004
Fig 57. Kuuyang Maar dance group dancing for ‘from the sea’ project with Jill Orr. Photo: Jill Orr

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Fig 58. Jarrah and Yaraan Bundle, Project ‘From the Sea’ in collaboration with Jill Orr, Artist, 2005.
Photo: Jill Orr

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)

'meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt' (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination 2007

In March 2007, an historic milestone was celebrated by the Gunditjmara, my People. After a 10-year legal negotiation, our Native Title Consent Determination was handed down by Justice French at a special sitting of the Federal Court of Australia, on Country at Budj Bim (Mt Eccles) in the western districts of Victoria.

*The Gunditjmara land justice story tells us of two important events from recent decades; the precedence of the groundbreaking Onus (and Frankland) vs. Alcoa case before the High Court of Australia in the early 1980s and the Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination by the Federal Court of Australia in 2007...* (Damein Bell in Weir, 2009).

I was invited by the Elders to write and read out an Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country as part of the day’s Proceedings. These are the words on the next page.
Acknowledgement

mayapa wangan ngootyoong wanyoo Pernmeeyal, Alam Meen
make/pay respects for the the Great Spirit, Ancestors

koorrookee, ngapoon manganooroo watanoon Gunditjmara
grandmothers, grandfathers from the Gunditjmara

ngatanwarr wooka ngootoowan ngathoo-ngat mangnooroo
welcome to you (all) ( i give)

watanoo Gunditjmara koorrookee, ngapoon ba ngarrakeetoong
from the Gunditjmara grandmothers, grandfathers and families

teen ngeeye meerreeng
here is our Country

makatepa ngootyoong nanoong wanyoo Gunditjmara
today is a good day for the Gunditjmara

ngeeye meerreeng peeneeyt teenay
our country is strong here

laka meerreeng
talk the country

leerpeen meerreeng
sing the country

karweeyn meerreeng
dance the country

yana poorrpap meerreeng
travel through the country

mayapa meerreeng peeneeyt
make the country strong

mayapa maar peeneeyt
make the people strong

Acknowledgement read out at the
Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination
March 2007
Written and spoken by Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 81
woorroong language ngarrakeetoong family

‘ngathook mangnooroo watanoo......
(I come from)
ngathook mangnooroo watanoo
meerreeeng
meerreeeng
meerreeeng
ngathook managnooroo watanoo
alam meen
ngarrakeetoong
koorrookee
leenyarr
ngeerrang
peepay
wanoong ngeerrang
leempeen
ngameen
kooparr
kakay
wartee
ngart
koopang
warrangyarr
warrangngat
malang
nganap
koorroyarr
napyarrl
leenyarr
kookoonyarr
koorrook
ngapoon
ngalooyarr
teerrayarreneeengyarr
karreen
ngaloonyarr
malat

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Strong People, Strong Culture, Strong Country.

In speaking our language we awaken the Spirit, 

the land resonates in response.

In our dancing, in singing our songs and 
telling our stories we make ourselves stronger and 
then the Land is strengthened.

When the Land is strong so are the People.

Vicki Couzens, 2007
Fig 60.

Robert Charles Bundle

October 1961, Bega NSW

Father’s people - Bidjera - Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland

Mother’s people - Geringa/Yuin, South Coast NSW

Husband, friend, grandfather of our family clan

Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Jarrah (Couzens) Bundle 23 August 1983
with son
Ethan River Bundle-Bell 16 February 2007

Fig 61. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Indie Yaraan Bundle-Bell 10 April 2005

Fig 62. Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Fig 63. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Yaraan Pamela (Couzens) Bundle 21 March 1985 with son

Keanu Lien Neave Bundle 22 September 2009

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Marlee Georgina (Couzens) Bundle (with second son Rickey Robert) 10 December 1986
Fig 64. Photo: Wayne Quilliam

Jerome Amos (Bundle) Atkinson 30 October 2004
Fig 65. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Rickey Robert (Bundle) Atkinson 13 October 2006
Fig 66. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Munnah Ivan Mervyn (Bundle) Atkinson 25 September 2008
Fig 67. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Saphire Rain (Bundle) Atkinson 13 August 2010
Fig 68. Photo: Vicki Couzens
Niyoka Joy (Couzens) Bundle 28 September 1988

Fig 69. Photo: Vicki Couzens

Kirrae Jean (Couzens) Bundle 20 March 1992 (with nephew)

Fig 70. Photo: Vicki Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)  couzens 88
ngarrakeetoong identity

Fig 71. thanampool kooramook, gunya-winyar (women’s possum cloak). Photo: Lee Darroch

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
thanampool kooramook, gunya-winyar (women’s possum cloak)

Interpretation of Cloak made by Lee Darroch and Vicki Couzens 2008 (fig 71.)

Women are the keepers of women’s business, repositories of vast knowledge and learning. It is our life’s work to care for our families, to contribute to our communities and keep our culture strong for the generations to come.

In this work, the markings and symbols have layers of meaning and degrees of knowledge as does the journey of a woman’s life; we move from daughter/young woman, to mother and grandmother – wise woman. We learn as we grow and our knowledge and wisdom deepens with time and experience.

This cloak is about all of that – ‘women’s business’.

The Spiral is the universal symbol of birth, life, death and rebirth. It is who we are and where we come from – our Mother, the earth, our Country.

Women keep the power of creation and so, the spiral in this work.

The arms or tendrils that come from the spiral represent our bloodlines. Women are the keepers of kinship and family knowledge and stories. The tendrils are also representative of our life’s journey.

On another level the tendrils emulate the veins in our bodies that carry our blood as the rivers carry water, the lifeblood of the land.

The other markings are about all parts of our lives, the daily gathering of food to feed our families; our stories and our ceremonies in our spiritual life. They are about life and birth and death. Women’s Business!

Vicki Couzens  Lee Darroch  © 2008
Women’s work

we keep the home and hearth
we gather the food
we grow the young children
we grow the young women
we are the keepers of the kinship law
we dance and sing our stories
so the next generations know
who they are and where they come from

Vicki Couzens, 2008
Conclusion

Our culture is the longest surviving culture on planet Earth.

Our Culture is unique. Aboriginal Culture is founded in a fundamental belief or knowing of place and belonging. This profound spirituality arises from an innate connectedness to Creation; the Dreaming, the beginning of all things; from the Earth, our Mother.

With the coming of the whiteman our way of Being was threatened. The systematic genocide of our people, forced from our homelands, our Country; lives lost in battles and massacres; forcibly moved onto mission stations enduring the restrictive practices imposed by the Government policies and administration: the missionaries ‘benevolence’; removal of children, dividing of families, the scrutiny and control of our daily lives - all these have conspired to deny us our Identity.

No more were we allowed to sing our songs, speak our languages and conduct our ceremonies. Ceremonies of honour and renewal, perfectly in tune with and resonating with Country, the natural environment and the People. These customs and knowledge have been denied to us through the inhumane, oppressive practices of the colonisers.

Our identity has been fragmented - missing pieces, gaping wounds, in the body of our cultural knowledge, traditions and practices. Yet we have survived, each generation/family reclaiming, regenerating and remembering more of this disjointed knowledge we have cherished and nurtured through the generations.

In these times through the work of those who have gone before us, we have regained the freedom, our birthright to reclaim, regenerate, revitalise and remember who we are and where we come from.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
my children got to hang onto this story ....

our story is in the Land. it is written in those sacred places.

my children will look after those places, that’s the Law.

Bill Neidjie, 2005
General Glossary

B
ba And
bareedy Water
boorraknawa Unseen, no
bullen-merri Lake in crater at Mt Leura

D
deen Here, this
Djargurd Wurrong Language group

G
Gunditjmara Name of tribal group

K
kaawirn kuunawarn Hissing Swan, head man of Guunaward Gunditj clan
kaltyarr ngart Eldest daughter
kanoo Up
kapang Spotted quoll
karman Paint, to
karweeyn Ceremony
keeleengk Lake
keerray Blood
Keerray Woorroong Language group
keerreek Blood, red
keilambete keeleengk Lake Keilambete
kookoon Paternal grandfather
koong Body
kooparr Paternal uncle
koornong Little
kooramook Possum, possum skin cloak
koorrookee Maternal grandmother
kuulorr-kuulorr Volcano, two volcanoes
kuuyang Eel

L
laka Speak
lakan To tell, story
leehura-leehura kang Mt Leura, Camperdown
leempeen Paternal aunty/other mother
leempeeyt Camp place
leenyarr Paternal grandmother
leerpeen To sing, song

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)  couzens 94
M
maar  People
makatepa  Today
maleeyeeto  Long time ago
mana  Hold, or keep to
mangnoorroo watanoo  Come from, belong to
marree  Stone (basalt), stone lava
mayapa  Make, do
mayapa-nawarr  Make, pay, give (inclusive plural)
meerreng  Country
meetako  On, passing on
meerta  Stand, stand up
moorraka (n)  Grave, burial place
moorrrong  Yam
moorroop  Spirit/good/bad
moortpa  Cook, to
maargat tyamanyoongako ba yakeenako  Aboriginal (Gunditjmara) Knowing and learning/dreaming

N
nanoong  Day
ngaken  To see
ngalam meen  Ancestors
ngalookngart  Third born daughter
nganto pay  Keep, to
ngapang  Breast
ngarra  Who
ngarrakeetoong  Family, large group of people
ngatanwarr  Greeting of welcome, to all
ngathook  I, first person
ngathoongan  We (inclusive)
ngarring nguyen  Childers Cove
ngayook  Sulphur crested white cockatoo
ngeelam  Infant
ngeerrang  Mother
ngeeye  Our
ngoongala  They
ngootoowan  You (all, inclusive)
ngootyoong  Good, healthy, (him or her)
ngootyoonooyt  Safe
ngowata  Come, to come to
nguurnduuc  air, wind, breath
ngyoorn  Cry, sorrow

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)  couzens 95
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>O</strong></th>
<th>Place of many stones/kangaroos - locality named the Sisters in the Country of the Nguurad Gunditj clan of the Keerray Woorroong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
<td>Early spring... the time between Second born daughter Bone Burn, cook, heat Father wangan ngootyoong Strong Red tailed black cockatoo River Bite Baby Fourth born daughter Ancestor Spirits Go, travel across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T</strong></td>
<td>Proud flesh sacred cave site in Guditjmara Country Waterhole covered in leaves Freshwater mussel In, into Here, this Youngest daughter Whisper Woman Belonging to the woman Tooth, teeth To smoke, smoke Squaring skins for rugs To rest, Fresh water stones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt" (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wangan ngootyoong</td>
<td>Respect, deep listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanyoo</td>
<td>For, of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warerungwongwong</td>
<td>Moonlight head, the three spirit women who guard this place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watanoo</td>
<td>Coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wayapawan</td>
<td>To meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weeyn</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weeweeyt weeweeyt ngothuk</td>
<td>Name of place at Mt Leura, translation unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wombeetch puyuut</td>
<td>Name of man from Djargurd Wurrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wooka</td>
<td>Give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woontha</td>
<td>Where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worn</td>
<td>House, hut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woorrn</td>
<td>Variant of worn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woorrkngan</td>
<td>Birthplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woorroong</td>
<td>Tongue/language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yakeen</td>
<td>Dream, dreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yana</td>
<td>Go, to go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaruun tarneen parpuur</td>
<td>Victorious, senior woman of the keerray wurrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaweetj</td>
<td>Cooking basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoolooween</td>
<td>Lie concealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoowata</td>
<td>To sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary: Names of Places along the Hopkins River at Warrnambool (in geographical order along river)

- tangang puungoort
- murri-murrkrii buurkrrakil
- booroinyel-o
- bura
- moyjil
- pang
- tonedidjerer
- tuuram
- winburren
- alloburng
- lapeeyt parreeyt
- lapeeyt
- lapeet
- mopor
- pannitarngite
- perrenarrerwarrer
- porronedernite
- porry
- warerangjele
- woerrer
- worjghome
- worrocubberrin
- yeddy yerrin
- pookarr
- wirpneung
- baller baller cort
- poonoong poonoong
- taree nung

is a waterhole just north of rosebrook (near Port Fairy) on the banks of the moyne river - part of the pyupgkil gundidj clan territory

‘meerta peeneeht, yana peeneeht, tanam peeneeht’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 98
Glossary: Family/Relationship Terms

kakay    Elder sister or cousin, mother’s sister’s daughters
karreens Daughter in law, son’s wife (female speaking)
kookoonyarr Granddaughter, son’s daughter (male speaking)
kooparr    Paternal uncle
koopang Son or nephew, brother’s son (male speaking)
koorookee Paternal grandmother
koorroyok Grandson, daughter’s sons (female speaking)
koorroyarr Granddaughter, daughter’s daughter (female speaking)
leempeen    Paternal aunt
leenyarr Granddaughter, son’s daughter (male speaking)
ngelarr    Mother
malang Wife, general
malat Sister in law, brother’s wife (male speaking)
naparr Granddaughter, daughter’s daughter (male speaking)
galooyarr Mother in law, wife’s mother
galoonyarr Daughter in law, son’s wife (male speaking)
gameen Maternal uncle
nganap Husband
ngoon Grandfather, maternal
ngoon Grandson, daughter’s son (male speaking)
ngart Daughter
peeneeangyarr Sister in law, youngest brother’s wife (male speaking)
peepay Father
terrayarr Sister in law (male speaking)
wanoong ngeerrang Other mother/aunty
warrangyarr Niece, sister’s daughters (male speaking)
warrangngat Nephew, sister’s sons (female speaking)
warteek Brother, elder cousin, father’s brother’s sons

Glossary of Aboriginal Language words from other Language Groups

dadirri hear/listen good/quiet contemplation Ngangikurungkurr
gunya winyarr womens possum skin cloaks Yorta Yorta
birrarung wilam camp by the river of mists Wurundjeri

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 99
Bibliography


Community Connections, Warrnambool, publication of community stories, ‘Our Stories’. 2005 Couzens, Ivan, 2005

Dawson, James, 1881, *Australian Aborigines: The Languages and Customs of Several Tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia*, George Robertson, Melbourne (also facsimile edition, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981).


‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)


Smith, Linda Tuhiwahi, 1999, *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin NZ.

Thomas, Rover, 2003, *Rover Thomas I Want to Paint*, Heytesbury Pty Ltd T/as Holmes A Court Gallery, East Perth, WA.


Weir, Jessica, 2009, *The Gunditjmara Land Justice Story*, Monograph Series AIATSIS, Nativel Title Research Unit; no 1/2009

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiral
www.jonathonart/com/awak-l.html
www.zenzibar.com/cosmicspiral/cosmicspiral.htm

Family oral history sources: Ivan Couzens and Zelda Couzens

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
List of Illustrations

Family/ancestors montage of photos, V Couzens 2007 Cover
Line drawing of Lake Condah possum skin cloak by Charles Mountford (South Australian Museum) Cover

Fig 1 Smoking Ceremony, Port Fair, 2007 6
Fig 2 Language Map, Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages 10
Fig 3 wangan ngootyoong 1 - V Couzens 11
Fig 4 wangan ngootyoong 3 - V Couzens 13
Fig 5 wangan ngootyoong 4 - V Couzens 13
Fig 6 wangan ngootyoong 2 - V Couzens 16
Fig 7 Spears and Shields, birrarung wilam 18
Fig 8 Ancestor Stones, birrarung wilam 18
Fig 9 Eel Path, birrarung wilam - Ponch Hawkes 18
Fig 10 Lake Condah Possum Skin Cloak- National Museum of Australia 20
Fig 11 koorrookee kooramook - David Loram 21
Fig 12 Commonwealth Games possum skin cloak workshop - V Couzens 23
Fig 13 Panmure Football Club, family photo 25
Fig 14 Ford on Hopkins River, Framlingham - family photo 25
Fig 15 Ivan Couzens bike riding race, family photo 25
Fig 16 Georgina Winters at Childers Cove, family photo 25
Fig 17 Hopkins River at Framlingham, family photo 25
Fig 18 Jack Wyselaskie 25
Fig 19 Nicholas Couzens’ car at beach, family photo 25
Fig 20 Couzens siblings and cousin Frances Hutchins 26
Fig 21 Farm house, Panmure 26
Fig 22 Truck loaded with wood, woodcutting Framlingham 26
Fig 23 Gethan Clarke and Rocky Couzens 26
Fig 24 Nicholas Couzens with cow 26
Fig 25 Nellie Cain, Weetpurpoin - Warrnambool Historical Society 27
Fig 26 Birthing Tree - Rod Hagan 29
Fig 27 Basket - V Couzens 31
Fig 28 Aboriginal Cricket Team (Mulvaney, 1967) 32
Fig 29 Family portrait - Ralph Illidge 33
Fig 30 yaruun tarneen parpuur - Warrnambool Historical Society 35
Fig 31 kaawirn kuunawarn - Warrnambool Historical Society 36
Fig 32 koorrookee ngapoon ngalam meen woorrkgnan moorraka-V Couzens 37
Fig 33 tuuram meree - V Couzens 42
Fig 34 deen maar - V Couzens 44
Fig 35 ngarring nguyun - V Couzens 46
Fig 36 keilambete keeleengk - V Couzens 47
Fig 37 oorate therrang derngonnerrut - V Couzens 48

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 102
Fig 38  leehura-leehura kang: thanampooleearr - V Couzens 49
Fig 39  warerungwongwong - V Couzens 50
Fig 40  pawan kuuloorr - V Couzens 51
Fig 41  Line drawing of Lake Condah possum skin cloak - South Australian Museum - Charles Mountford 53
Fig 42  Lake Condah symbol from Wrapped in a Possum Skin Cloak, National Museum of Australia; 53
and copy of drawing from Robinson Journals 1841 (Clark, 1998)
Fig 43  ponponpoorramook - Terence Bogue 56
Fig 44  ngayook leerpeen - Terence Bogue 57
Fig 45  ngoongala yoolooween - Terence Bogue 58
Fig 46  mootpa leempeeyt - Terence Bogue 59
Fig 47  kapang - Terence Bogue 60
Fig 48  moorrnong yaweetj - Terence Bogue 61
Fig 49  meerrenooy yaweetj - Wayne Quilliam 62
Fig 50  Fresh n Salty - Jo Grant 66
Fig 51  Family n friends working on Fresh n Salty - Jo Grant 66
Fig 52  Yaraan working on Fresh n Salty - Jo Grant 66
Fig 53  Working on Kuuloor Woortkgnan - V Couzens 67
Fig 54  Hopkins Falls - Dictionary of Keerray Woorroong 72
Fig 55  Gunditjmara Karweeyn performance for ‘From the Sea’ - Jill Orr 76
Fig 56  Jarrah & Yaraan Bundle - From the Sea’ - Jill Orr 77
Fig 57  Jarrah, Yaraan & Kirrae Bundle ‘Tooloyn Koorttakay’ Launch National Museum of Australia 78
Fig 58  Rob Bundle - V Couzens 84
Fig 59  Indie Bundle Bell and Ethan Bundle Bell - V Couzens 85
Fig 60  Keanu Neave Bundle - V Couzens 85
Fig 61  Marlee Bundle holding Rickey Robert 87
Fig 62  Jerome Atkinson 87
Fig 63  Rickey Robert Atkinson 87
Fig 64  Munnah Atkinson 87
Fig 65  Saphire Bundle Atkinson 87
Fig 66  Niyoka Bundle 88
Fig 67  Kirrae Bundle Couzens holding nephew, Keanu 88
Fig 68  'thanampool koorramook, gunya winyarr' cloak - Lee Darroch 89
Fig 69  Vicki Couzens in front of paintings - Andy 108

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 103
Curriculum Vitae: Vicki Couzens 2009

Commissioned works

2009 Pt Cook Public Art Project
2009 Frankston City Council Indigenous Boardwalk Project
2008 Festival of Pacific Arts (FOPA) American Samoa, July-Aug Artist Residency
2008/9 Lights in Winter Project, Federation Square, Melbourne, stone installation fireplace.
2008 Art at the Heart RAA Conference, Alice Springs – imagine alice – ephemeral installation ‘white broken promises black compromise’
2007 Light in Winter Project, Federation Square, Melbourne, stone installation fireplace.
2007 Fresh n Salty Project, Regional Arts Victoria, stone installation collaboration with Carmel Wallace
2005-6 ‘birrarung wilam’ Common Ground Commemorative Place Public Art Project, working as Artistic Director in partnership with Lee Darroch and Treahna Hamm, commissioned by Melbourne City Council and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
2005-6 Possum Skin Cloak project Opening Ceremony Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games – Artistic Director for statewide project
2004 Public Records Office foyer artwork
2002 ‘melbourne dreaming’ Indigenous Reconciliation Tram, Department of IIRD. Commissioned artist to do a design to the theme of ‘melbourne dreaming’ for Tram
2002 Bunjilaka Welcome Rug – ‘poorrpa karweeyn’. Commissioned to create a design for a Welcome Rug for the foyer/reception area of Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum
2002 Royal Womens Hospital Indigenous Womens Health Business Unit Art Project – acrylic on canvas work to the theme of ‘Celebrating Community’

Selected Collections

National Gallery of Victoria Museum Victoria Koorie Heritage Trust
National Gallery of Australia National Museum of Australia Melbourne City Council
Warrnambool Art Gallery Aboriginal Affairs Victoria

Shortlisted Public Art Projects

- 2009 Stanley St Public Art Project, Yarra City Council
- 2007 Woolsthorpe Public Art Project
- 2006 Wyndham Civic Square Public Art Project
- 2005 Northcote Civic Square Public Art Project
- 2004 Yarra Precinct Pedestrian Link Public Art Project

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
## Selected exhibitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition Title</th>
<th>Location Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>‘Deadly Designs’, Aunty Joyce Johnson Gallery, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>‘PaRing Gallery’ exhibition, Rialto building foyer, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘PaRing Gallery’ exhibition, KPMG building foyer, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘nga woka, woka nganin – I am the land the land is me’ Birrarung Gallery, Bunjilaka Centre, Melbourne Museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘deep listening’, Aunty Joyce Johnston Gallery, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne – Silcar Deep Listening Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo…. (I come from...), Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum, July-October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘yinalung yenu – womens work’, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>‘ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo…’, Hissing Swan Gallery, Port Fairy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-09</td>
<td>‘walk’ touring exhibition, NETS Victoria – Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>‘ngurrumban’, Linden Gallery, St Kilda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>‘ngathook mangnoorroo watanoo….’, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>‘biganga – keeping tradition’, Melbourne Museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>‘gunya winyarr’, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>22nd Telstra Art Awards, Museum and Art Gallery of NT, Darwin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>‘survey – recent works by artists connected to South Western Victoria’, Warrnambool Art Gallery, Warrnambool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>‘blood country’, World Expo, Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>‘Mission Life in the Limelight’, Koorie Heritage Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>‘Urbaninity’ – Birrarung gallery – Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>‘tooloyin koortakay- squaring skins for rugs’, First Peoples gallery, National Museum of Australia, Canberra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>‘Awakenings – conversations with our Ancestors’, Te Nuhi – the park gallery, Auckland – New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>‘Awakenings – conversations with our Ancestors’, Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>‘Prints from Aboriginal Victoria’ - Birrarung Gallery, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre, Melbourne Museum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17th National Telstra Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander Art Awards Museum &amp; Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)  

couzens 105
Festivals


Bunyip and Billabong Festival 1996 - Nowa Nowa, Vict. Face painting, market stall and percussion and theatre performance with ‘Earth Tribe’.

Paynesville Jazz Festival 1996 - Paynesville, Vict. Improvisation percussion with ‘Earth Tribe’.

Birralee Childrens Festival 1996/7 - Shepparton Vict. Cultural art workshops, percussion performance with ‘Earth Tribe’.


We Iri We Homeborn Festival 1999 - ‘Open Stage’ Kulin Chillin’ Club, National Theatre, St. Kilda.


Yeperenye Federation Festival 2001 - Alice Springs. Managed and performed with ‘Peenyeet Thanambool’ (Strong Women) Dance and Cultural Group representing Gunditjmara and Victoria.

Federation Festival 2001 Street Parade - Melbourne. Created sculptures and participated in Parade.

Spirit of the Sea Festival 2002 - Warrnambool. Indigenous face and body art workshops

Wunta Festival 2002 - Warrnambool. Indigenous face and body art workshops.

Tarerer Festival 2002 - Killarney. Indigenous face and body art workshops.

Tarerer Festival 2007 - Killarney

Community Involvement

Peeneeyt Thanambool/Gunditjmara Karweeyn dance and cultural group, Warrnambool

South West Aboriginal Languages Committee member, Warrnambool and SW region

Community member of Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative

Council Member on Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (recently resigned)

Committee Member Warrnambool City Council City Art Advisory Committee

Artist Statement

Vicki Couzens is a Keerray Woorroong woman from the Western Districts of Victoria.

Vicki says "My work is inspired by my culture. It is my passion for the reclamation, regeneration and revitalisation of our cultural heritage knowledge and practices that drives me and informs the work that I do.

The images and installations I create are drawn from the teachings of our Ancestors, Old People and Elders who guide me through my life.

Land, language and identity are who we are..... through the use of language, stories and image our culture is made stronger, our connections are made stronger, we are made stronger.”
Biographical Information of Vicki Couzens

I am a Keerray Woorroong woman from the Western Districts of Victoria. I have a partner, five wonderful daughters and eight grandchildren. In late 1999 we returned to my birthplace, my home Country - Warrnambool, after living in East Gippsland for the previous ten years.

Art has been an integral part of my life but, until about 15 years ago, I was more of a spectator than a participant. Although, during my teens and early twenties I made sporadic ventures into the Arts, it wasn’t until my early 30s that I began working seriously exhibiting and performing.

In my family we have a strong connection to the Arts. My grandfather, Nicholas Couzens, was an exceptional artist, painting portraits, nudes and landscapes. I believe he worked primarily in oils in the early to mid 1900s in and around the Port Campbell to Peterborough area. Uncle Stan Couzens became well-known in his later years, taking up painting after his retirement. Aunty Zelda Couzens was a basketweaver extraordinaire. Several of my cousins and their children are also practising artists.

My own children have all participated in arts programs/festivals and are artists in their own right. It is very interesting and exciting having so many of the family working in the arts. We recently had our collective family exhibition at Melbourne Museum showcasing works from four generations of family artists.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 107
Acknowledgements

‘mayapa wangan ngooyoong wanyoo pernmeeyal,
alam meen, koorrookee, ngapoon ngathoongat’

It is a cultural imperative that I honour and pay my respects to the Great Spirit, our Ancestors, our Old People, our Elders, family, community and all those who have gone before us. Without them we are nothing.

My gratitude and love first and foremost to my family. My Mum who I miss everyday, for my Dad, his wisdom and guidance, my partner Rob, my daughters Jarrah, Yaraan, Marlee, Niyoka and Kirrae, their families, our grandchildren, Tooran, Jerome, Indie, Rickey Robert, Ethan, Munnah, Keanu and Saphire Rain. for the love and purpose they give me; this is for you.

Many thanks to the untold numbers of people who have touched my life in large and small ways.

My friends, their children and grandchildren, who are family to me - you know who you are; those that have given me encouragement and inspiration over my life; those who have brought me learning; thank you.

To Olivia Guntarik my supervisor, many thanks for your understanding, advice, support and hands on help; it has been invaluable and very much appreciated (finally we have made it!)

Rebecca Hill, my second supervisor your support and feedback has been insightful and gently reassuring and I am looking forward to continuing on in my PhD project.
To Laura Brearley and the Koori Cohort and friends, a great concept and one that I am proud to be part of, thank you all.

Christina Eira for your friendship and patience.

Chris Keeler, a great editor and dear friend, thanks Chris!

Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and the Koori Heritage Trust, staff and co-workers for your support.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Our family history, our stories, our innate spirituality and way of being; of ‘deep listening’, tell us who we are and where we come from as the legacy of our Old People lives on through us.

Fig 72. Vicki Couzens in koorrookee kooramook in front of two paintings from a series koorrookee, ngapoon’(left) woorrkngan, moorraka (right).
Photo: Andy

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)
Appendix 1

*Possum Skin Cloaks: Strengthening Communities, Strengthening Collections (excerpt by Vicki Couzens)*

**Acknowledgement of Country**
Ngatanwarr wooka ngootoowan ngathoongan

mayapa Wangan ngootyoong wanyoo Awabakal

alam meen, koorrookee ngapoon mangnooroo

watanoo nggeeye alam meen lee Amanda ba ngathook.

Thank yous
Mayapa Wangan ngootyoong wanyoo James Wilson-Miller, Pat Sabine, Bill Storer ba ngarrakeetoong

**Story**
ngathook leenyoong Vicki Couzens Keerray Woorroong Gunditjmara.

ngatanwarr wooka ngootoowan ngathoongat.

Koorramook yakeen – koorramook yana-an – koorramook poorrpa – laka meerreng laka maar

Wunta yananooroo ngathoongan? Wunta nggeeye ngaken-an? Where are we going? What is our vision?

Our story began ten years ago. The Old People sent this story to us. We heard them speak through our hearts to our spirits. They told us what to do, they are still telling us what to do.

Their message, our story, is to return the cloaks to our People, to reclaim, regenerate, revitalise and remember. To remember what those cloaks mean to us and tell the stories of our People and Country.

You have heard how we made our first cloaks, the first part of the story. We were given the responsibility and obligation to share that knowledge, the skills and the stories. This opportunity came with the Commonwealth Games where we worked with 35 language groups across the state of Victoria. The cloaks have been reinstated in their rightful place in our community cultural life – being worn in ceremony, used at funerals, weddings, naming days and other community events.

‘meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt’ (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong) couzens 111
The Old People continue to paint the picture of our story and lead us where we need to go.

For these reasons we continue to work in possum skin cloaks.

So began our journey…….

As the Old People have told us, as our journey unfolds, we are taking cloak-making, and all that it embraces, out to communities, providing our experience to reconnect and support those communities with their stories, their cloaks, some of which are held in museums around the world.

Our story grows as we move forward on this journey. We continue our research, seeking out more and more information and stories on possum cloaks. We have developed a plan to share our story around the world by way of:

- Publishing one or two books;
- Hosting an international gathering on cloaks; talking about cultural reclamation and regeneration through museums and collections;
- An international touring exhibition featuring community stories

These are the next parts of our journey.

Lee, Amanda and myself continue walking our koorramook yakeen together.