

JIRDNI/jirdi/ n.



SONJA HODGE

8-25 JULY: 2021

JIRNDI /jirdi/ n.

Leaf; leafy branch, bush (in sense of leafy branch).



Image: Maree Clarke, 1991

We are honoured to be hosting Sonja Hodge's long-awaited solo exhibition JIRNDI at Blak Dot Gallery for NAIDOC week 2021 themed Healing Country. Jirndi is a Lardil word for leaf/leafy branch, which is a prevalent symbol used throughout Sonja's artwork. The leaves reflect the growing journey of identity through reconnecting with family members and the importance of caring for, and healing, Country.

Sonja expresses her identity as a Lardil and Yangkaal woman through her strong designs of wreaths, leaves, waterways and figures, which speaks to her Aboriginality and the pride she feels for the resilience of her people.

Sonja is a Mildura-based artist and printmaker born in Meekatharra WA in 1969. Sonja grew up in Perth, WA and moved to Melbourne in 1990. After working and studying in Melbourne she relocated to Mildura in 1996. Sonja has a studio space at The Art Vault where she works in the areas of printmaking, painting, silversmithing and multi-media work where she explores her connection with culture, family, friends and the world around her.

During the 90s, Sonja worked on many public art projects and exhibitions around the City of Melbourne, including the Swanston Street Walk Public Art Project and Can't See For Lookin'. Throughout her career, Sonja has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions, such as Shiny Shiny Blak Bling and Tribal Expressions, with the Melbourne Fringe Festival, the Koorie Heritage Trust, Alcaston Gallery, Wartook Studio Gallery and The Art Vault. She has also worked in various arts sectors in curating and collections, which has guided her journey into branching into working full-time as an artist.

Sonja's printmaking journey began with the encouragement from Bill Young and Anita Lawrence, who suggested her painting designs would translate into the intricacy of Lino printing. In 2012, she undertook an Indigenous Visual Arts Residency, funded by Regional Arts Victoria at The Art Vault to work alongside artist Ros Atkins and Master Printmaker Peter Lancaster, to develop her practice into incorporating multi block and reduction Lino printing and Lithography. Currently, Sonja sits on the Board at Arts Mildura.

JIRNDI is a culmination of Sonja's extensive artistic practice, which includes her beginnings in painting to her expansion into printmaking. Since the 80s, her contribution to the presence of Aboriginal women's art in contemporary spaces, and in education, in South-East Australia is reflected in her passion for supporting emerging and mid-career regional artists. Sonja's creative journey has shaped not only her skills in the arts but also as a Blak woman in so-called Australia.

Blak Dot Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, live and create: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.





collaborative process

Often, I get asked “why not create your own prints?”, to which I reply that the collaborative process between printer and artist is a creative journey in itself.

To share a journey with the artist can be an exhilarating and rewarding experience. Offering advice on the effects of drawing materials, possible colour options and choosing an image that has possibilities as a lithograph.

My opportunity to work with Sonja had me jumping because I could see possibilities in her work that would translate well into a fine art lithograph.

Sometimes not all boxes are ticked during a collaboration, there can be the odd stumbling blocks along the way, this was not the case with Sonja.

I sensed from the start it was going to be a balanced journey, Sonja responded to my suggestions and had no problem understanding possibilities in the new process and started drawing on a large lithographic stone without hesitation.

After discussing colours, Sonja then went on to draw up colour separations again without hesitation. The end results were outstanding and another rewarding creative journey for me.

Peter Lancaster
Master Lithographer, Lancaster Press

connections

When writing about a visual artist it is often difficult to know what you can add to their story that their artwork is not already telling and showing you. Sonja's work is a bold celebration of beauty and joy, shadowed with difficult and sad times – a reflection of the complexity of the lives of herself, her family, and her Ancestors who continue to walk with her on her journey.

For as long as I have known Sonja and became sisters in the 1990s, her work continues to tell her stories whilst illuminating the connections between Country and its people – they belong together and need to be as one for the survival and continued health of both. It is a beautiful symmetry that Sonja's solo exhibition 'Jirndi: Leaf; leafy branch, bush (in sense of leafy branch)' is happening for NAIDOC week where the theme is 'Heal Country!'.

To add to the light of Sonja's life and beauty is knowing that her daughter Maya is an assistant curator on this exhibition and that her son Indi is there beside her every step. I hope that all who visit this exhibition will enjoy and learn from Sonja's work and practice that she has developed over more than 30 years.

Dr. Shannon Faulkhead
Head, First Peoples Department, Museums Victoria



Buddah, 2021
Hand coloured Linocut



design and creating beautiful pieces

I met Sonja in the early 1990's, we started hanging out and working together nearly every day we covered a lot of ground in those early days, from making jewellery, we would design and create beautiful pieces of jewellery from timber my brother Pete would cut, to drilling hundreds of bottlebrush and acacia seeds.

We worked on many public art commissions, one of our favourite commissions was the painted poles in the City Square, we would talk to hundreds of people every day some even telling us we were vandals.

Working as a cadet photographer I asked Sonja if she would like to come along on some of our trips photographing community. Our first photographic exhibition of black and white photos was at the Victorian Women's Trust.

We later worked on We Iri We Homeborn the first Visual Arts Festival that focused on Southeast Aboriginal Artists, putting Victorian Aboriginal Art on the map.

Sonja is an amazing designer/printmaker that is evident in her lino prints. I absolutely love her ochre prints. They're like honouring country and I feel honoured to have worked with her in the early days which set the foundation for her incredible work today.

I am so proud of my sister-in-law Sonja Hodge. I know it wasn't easy for Sonja after my brother Pete passed. But she raised two beautiful young powerful kids, Indi and Maya as a single parent and continued to practice her other passion. ART!

Maree Clarke

Buddah, 2018
Linocut with had detail



quandongs

I peel and peel quandongs in my mothers garden.

The ice in my water melts slowly onto the hot surface of our scuffed wooden table. I watch as the light gently slides across the shed wall telling me the time is slowly moving on by.

As I peel the quandongs black gunk sticks to my fingernails and scatters across my lap.

I want to dry my quandongs in the sizzling Mildura afternoon heat

To let the skin glisten like blood-red tree sap.

I want the fruit to curl in the exquisite sun

I want the skins to cook so I can breathe it deep into my lungs.

We reach up high to pick and pick the quandongs.

I remember when I was a little girl hiding amongst the salt bush watching my mother and aunties pick and pick quandongs.

In the sweltering sun they gathered the fruit in time with the honeyeaters song.

I sit and softly wash the fruit. Trying to get the infestation out.

Trying to stop the invasion of bugs that chew and chew until the fruit is rotten to the core.

My bare back hot from the stern eye of the sun and my tired feet flat against the concrete floor.

Peeling back time as I sit with my mother.

Picking and picking quandongs along the long winding river of this Country's spine.

Keeping a loving eye on the seasons and the scar tree filled with native bees.

We walk mother and daughter along the banks of the river and the dense curtain of river-reeds.

I pull the seeds from the quandongs and pile them in bowls on our kitchen table. Sometimes I still find them hidden in the shadows of my pockets.

They overflow in our home and rest in the coolomon sitting beneath our living room mantel.

I want to boil the fruit in brown sugar and let it slowly turn into soft sunset silken syrup.

The colour of the rolling sand dunes.

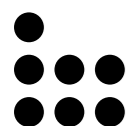
and the Country that nourished me

As I sit and peel and peel quandongs.

In my mothers garden.



The Wreath, 2014
Multi block linocut





female figure

Sonja Hodge's female figures have been my emblem for womanhood. Unapologetic in how they take up space. Centred. Powerful. Black. They dance across orange skies. Fish grazing their limbs. A consistent presence in my life. Doodles on the kitchen table of my childhood, grew into women on gallery walls. My most prized possession is a female figure Sonja painted for my 21st birthday. My rite of passage. I always hang her by the door. A protective figure. She tells visitors of my power, born from the women who raised me.

Jirra Lulla Harvey
Managing Director, Kalinya

Big Tiddah, 2021
Hand coloured linocut

Acknowledgements

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Jirra Lulla Harvey

Thank you

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**HEAL
COUNTRY!**
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