



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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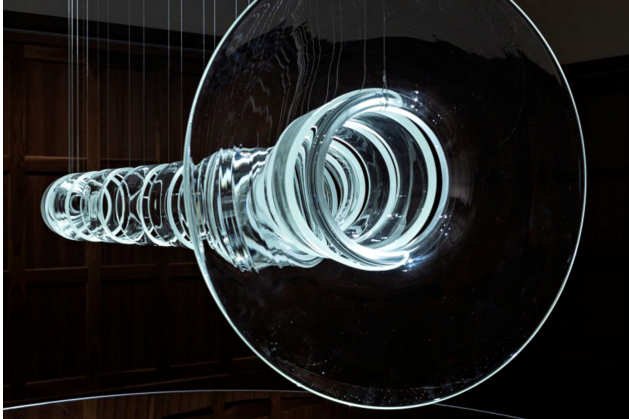
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Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 25 June – 3 October 2021 | FREE



Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories is the first major retrospective of Melbourne-based artist and designer, Maree Clarke, who is a Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung woman. Clarke is a pivotal figure in the reclamation of south-east Australian Aboriginal art and cultural practices and has a passion for reviving and sharing elements of Aboriginal culture that were lost – or lying dormant – as a consequence of colonisation.

Covering more than three decades of artistic output, the exhibition traverses Clarke's multidisciplinary practice across photography, printmaking, sculpture, jewellery, video, glass and more. Documenting Clarke's life as told through her art, the exhibition includes rarely-seen black-and-white photographs that bring to life key figures and events in Melbourne during the 1990s, through to her most accomplished and critically-acclaimed work of recent years, including major mixed media installations, contemporary jewellery incorporating kangaroo-teeth, river reed and echidna quills, through to lenticular prints and photographic holograms.

Reflecting Clarke's continuing desire to affirm and reconnect with her cultural heritage, the exhibition displays her contemporary artworks alongside key loans of historical material from Museum Victoria, highlighting her deep engagement with and reverence for the customary ceremonies, rituals, objects and language of her ancestors.

A central feature of the exhibition is Clarke's dramatic glass eel traps, *Ancestral Memory I & II*, 2019. Taking formal reference from traditional woven eel traps, these suspended sculptures simultaneously evoke the ancient and the contemporary, highlighting Clarke's unique ability to bring tradition into the present. Conical in shape, the traps were designed to capture river eels, which swam into the opening and then became lodged in the narrow tip.

Also on display is a large-scale, 60-pelt possum-skin cloak by Clarke, commissioned especially for this exhibition by the NGV. The work draws on Clarke's deep cultural knowledge amassed through the state-wide possum-skin cloak reclamation project with fellow Koorie artists, including Vicki Couzens, Lee Darroch and Treahna Hamm. By meticulously researching traditional designs and the practice of cloak making, Clarke and her fellow artists helped to revive this important garment making skills, producing the first possum-skin cloaks in Victoria for the first time in over 150 years. Clarke's never-before-seen contemporary cloak is displayed alongside an incredibly rare historical example, illuminating the synergies between past and present, as well as the rigour that underpins Clarke's creative process.

A further highlight is Clarke's monumental photographic series, *Ritual and Ceremony*, 2013, which comprises 84 portraits of prominent Aboriginal community figures painted with white ochre. The dress and markings reference the mourning practices of Aboriginal people along the Murray/Darling rivers, but also each individual's personal experiences of loss of land, language and culture, having each shared with Clarke their own stories of sorrow and mourning during the making of their portrait.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, said: 'Maree has been a practising artist living and working in Melbourne for the last three decades. This exhibition not only explores Clarke's extraordinary career, but it also strongly attests to the power of cultural reclamation. As the first living artist

to exhibit at NGV with ancestral ties to the Country on which the Gallery stands, this exhibition is a momentous milestone in the NGV's history.'

Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from 25 June to 3 October 2021. Entry is free. For further details, please visit the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Maree Clarke was born in Swan Hill and lived for a time on Balranald Mission and Munatunga Mission, Robinvale, before settling in Mildura. She is connected to the traditional lands of the Mutti Mutti, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta and Boonwurrung peoples. In 1988 Clarke established an outlet for local and national Aboriginal art through the Mildura Aboriginal Cooperative, which that enabled artists and other community members to learn and sell their works within an Aboriginal community organisation. During this period Maree Clarke also worked on developing her jewellery designs. By the early 1990s, Clarke was an important figure in the Victorian Aboriginal art scene, involved in introducing curating the diverse talents of Indigenous artists from around the state, and in 1994, Clarke became the first Koorie Arts Officer at the City of Port Phillip, Melbourne. In 1996, Clarke initiated, co-coordinated and co-curated the We Iri We Homeborn – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Festival, renowned for including the largest collection of south-east Australian Aboriginal works of art featured in a single exhibition. During the late 1990s Clarke's own art practice continued to develop, marked by her exploration of her family's designs, markings and totems. Between 2004 and 2009 Clarke studied and completed a Master of Arts at RMIT University, Melbourne.

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Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories is made possible by the generous support of Principal Partner Deakin University.

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IMAGES: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fwizih37r447bji/AADUf1A7XJIAFiVD5N06oT_sa?dl=0

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IMAGE CAPTION:

Maree Clarke

Mutti Mutti/Wamba Wamba/Yorta Yorta/Boonwurrung born 1961

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

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Photo: Christian Capurro