Bangawarra Naa

Ways of making and seeing

Creative Aboriginal knowledges

An interpretation and reflection of traditional Dharug Aboriginal Australian creative psychological healing practices

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and exhibition is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed)

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PERSONAL NOTE

Embarking on this research four years ago my goals were to demonstate that creativity in making and seeing, Bangawarra naa, has the potential to make a positive contribution to Aboriginal emotional, social and mental health. This investigation affirms through a heuristic inquiriy and narrative portrayal the value of traditional creative knowledge. Within this dissertation both visual form and written analogies demonstate that making is of scientific knowledge and seeing is a psychological process that remains valid within the realms of contemporary theories and practices.

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VISUAL CREATIVE WORKS BY LIZ CAMERON

The collection of sketches, paintings and photographs

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ABSTRACT

Bangawarrara naa

Ways of making and seeing through creative Aboriginal knowledges.

Translation: 'Bangawarra' is an Australian Aboriginal Dharug word meaning ways of doing or making, 'naa' refers to deep and multiple ways of seeing.

A culmination of life's work as a practicing Dharug Artist within the realms of psychological creativity processes in traditional healing practices.

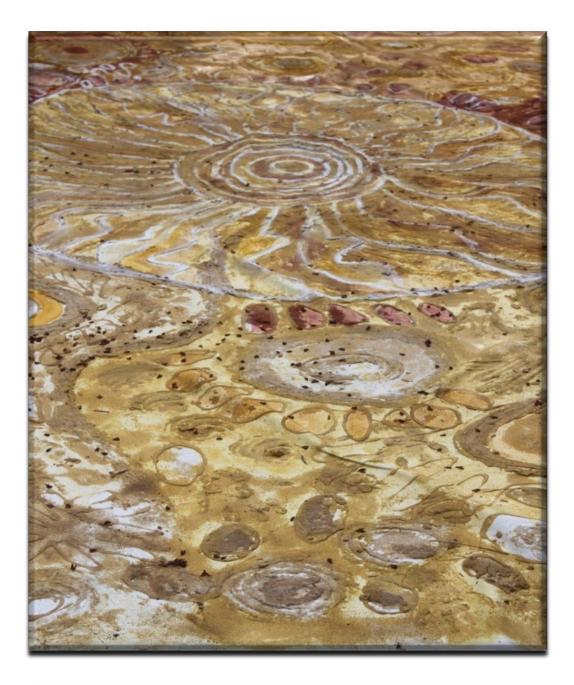


Fig: 1

Title: Fingerprints left on the earth

Descriptive storyline: Visual spirituality is a web of cultural knowledges, entwined within all living things. The land represents pathways travelled by ancestors, who left symbols of profound cultural importance.

This dissertation, investigates explores, analyses and illustrates Australian Aboriginal creative healing practices from a Dharug standpoint. The term Dharug refers to an Aboriginal Nation surrounding the North West region of Sydney, and focuses on the Murramurra clan group of the Hawkesbury River. Unlike other Indigenous worldwide populations, Aboriginal Nations purposely consisted of small groups based on the lores of Ancestral philosophies that place importance to natural harmonious lifestyles. Underlying theories of small group structures within many Aboriginal Nations is founded on the principles in sustainable living where our natural environmental are maintained, balanced and protected by not overburdening valuable resources. As such, small communities often consisted of ten to thirty peoples, living in harmonies relationships with all living things.

Within this dissertation expertise lies within Dharug Murramurra communal knowledge systems of psychological creativity within traditional healing. From this perspective, I argue that creativity within healing has the capacity to communicate cultural meaning and spiritual messages in addressing physical, emotional and social health through a restorative holistic framework. This dissertation defines the importance of creativity or ways of making (Bangawarra) and the need to revitalise traditional healing practices in addressing the ongoing inequities of loss, grief and trauma since colonisation within Australia.

Within this research I examine and demonstrate that visual creativity within traditional Dharug healing practices are expressions of both cultural and spiritual significance, rather than being categorised under western theories of art. I therefore propose to debunk the myths that spiritual visual makings are more than just a physical projection by exposing creative processes that illustrate healing.

As Dharug philosophies base knowledge through evolving processes, I highlight the importance of therapeutic approaches within making and seeing as having relevance in contemporary society.

Methodologies used within this dissertation are consistent to Aboriginal epistemologies where narrative and visual content exudes traditional knowledge. Visual content refers to transgenerational cultural knowledges that consider sensory input and the deep relationships within all living things. Visual knowledge illustrates cultural and spiritual values through the exchange of the Maker and the viewer. The maker is the narrator, whilst the viewer observes, analyses and interprets information. Cultural knowledge as a psychological process incorporates holistically guided reflections that considers all aspects of life and is central to health and wellbeing.

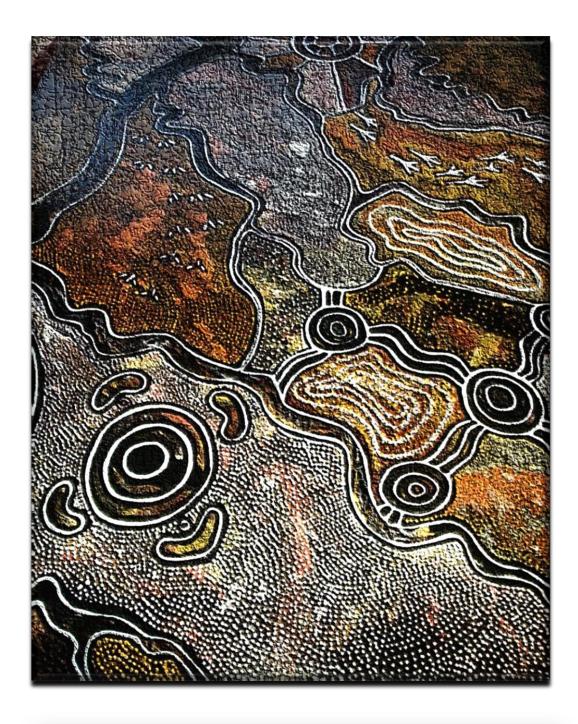


Fig: 2

Title: Dharug Country

Descriptive storyline: A rich cultural system of visual knowledges imbedded within ancestral pathways, a thriving ecosystem where relationships are based on all living things.

Personal note

This research grew out of my concern of the lack of understandings regarding the value of traditional Aboriginal creative making within healing. Unresolved historical transgenerational trauma continues to impact on Aboriginal health and wellbeing, with many culturally inappropriate programs acting as band aid effects with short term solutions.

I argue that healing associated with internal pain and suffering requires a comprehensive holistic approach that is inclusive of cultural and spiritual dynamics of individuals. Within this dissertation I highlight Dharug traditional practices as an example of culturally appropriate care as a way to address trauma.

By acknowledging past trauma associated with colonisation and present distress associated with situational circumstances, addressing internalised pain and suffering of Aboriginal Australian people's needs more attention. I argue that creativity within the realms of traditional healing is reactive and responsive process in dealing with unresolved internalised feelings and emotions that are often difficult to express. From a Dharug standpoint, I present how visual imagery has the capacity to communicate feeling where words may fail.

Background note:

Whilst working as a student nurse in the early 1980's, I could not comprehend the importance placed on what I term as aesthetical hospital care. I continually questioned the importance of patients being showered and dressed so early in the mornings to only sit in a room a deprivation of sensory isolation with nothing to do but wait. Waiting was a focused activity that dictated the lives of patients; dependant on health care professional timeframes and family visitation restrictions, yet was an interpretation of healing. But I witnessed numerous patients sitting in complete isolation disconnected from the internal and external worlds. Environmental monotony created a self-absorbed patient focusing entirely on their illness or pain that often led to a sense of disgruntlement.

I personally struggled with this type of care system as it greatly conflicted to Dharug traditional health practices. In elaborating further, simply focusing on the physical aspects of health conflicted with holistic understandings of Aboriginal philosophies to healing. Therefore I ethically struggled to justify my position as a health care professional.

Once completing my nursing, I undertook a Diploma in Diversional Therapy that offered a more social and emotional response to aspects of care. I later completed various Aboriginal specific courses in the Northern Territory including Tracey Waterman's Psychological Youth Assessment Tool. In 2008 I completed Post Graduate studies in Indigenous Social Health at Macquarie University and worked for many years as an Aboriginal Counsellor.

As an Aboriginal counsellor, I listened to many personal stories of social injustices, spiritual conflicts and cultural struggles that presented as internal disharmonies. Consulting sessions involved listening to interpretations of feelings often through metaphoric analogies in life experiences.

Many of these stories had similarities but there was no ethically sound pathway to retell personal storylines as a way of connecting to others. My strong desire was to share intimate storylines but place value and respect to original experiences. I began to paint personal narrative experiences as a way of placing importance on each story through a respectful process. Some of these paintings have been shared as they do not identify the individual, others have remained restricted.

As one of the few Aboriginal Counsellors in Australia, it is imperative to highlight the need for culturally validated understandings in working with Aboriginal peoples. Considering the vast contrasts in Aboriginal cultural and spiritual perceptions, this dissertation offers one understanding in comprehending and appreciating knowledge within healing.

This is where my journey begins.



Fig 3: Come, walk with me