

Ghosts in the Kitchen

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**30 September to
13 December 2025**



**Blacktown
Arts**



GHOSTS IN THE KITCHEN

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Ghosts in the Kitchen is a group exhibition by Australian First Nations artists, framing food practices through the lens of the Indigenous Gothic. Indigenous Gothic is a decolonial artistic and literary approach that reclaims the colonial Gothic genre, allowing First Nations peoples to confront and discuss the enduring traumas of colonialism.

For First Nations peoples, food is deeply connected to culture and Country, extending far beyond the act of eating to encompass memory, identity and kinship. The gathering, preparation and sharing of food are embedded within complex, holistic Indigenous knowledge systems that reflect the living archives of cultural memory, history and ancestral presence.

However, colonisation disrupted these foodways through forced displacement, missionisation and the introduction of imported food systems. Cultural meals were replaced with government rations - white flour, white sugar and tea- while the plantation and agricultural economies global trade introduced tinned meat and rice in place of reef fish and taro.

Through the Indigenous Gothic lens, food becomes a site of haunting where ghosts are reframed to reveal an enduring presence of Indigenous knowledge in the face of attempted erasure.

Featuring works by Kerry Klimm, Bernard Singleton Jnr, Simone Arnol, Elisa Jane Carmichael, Nicholas Currie, Penny Evans, James Ahmat Snr, Dylan Bolger, Jacqueline Jacky, Steven Russell, Kristine Stewart, and the Bankstown Koori Elders Group, the exhibition foregrounds the trauma of colonial food systems while illuminating the powerful resurgence of First Nations food sovereignty today.

Here, the gothic is not confined to grief or loss; it is a living force where ancestral practices re-emerge in kitchens, gardens and community. The ghosts you meet here are not lost, they are a reawakening of cultural practice, memory and ancestors.

- Rebecca Ray

Kerry Klimm

Spill the tea on the colony

2025

mixed media assemblage installation

Courtesy of the artist

Gugu Yelanji and Koko Lama Lama woman, Kerry Klimm explores themes of memory, family and identity through her installation works influenced by her mother and aunties sense of style and love of Op shopping. *Spill the tea on the colony*, 2025 recreates the kitchen table and transforms a familiar domestic space into a site of political discourse and cultural reflection.

Throughout the installation, black tea plays a significant role and for Klimm, comes to symbolise Black love, joy and rage. Black tea and sugar were introduced to Aboriginal Australia through European colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries and were distributed to Indigenous communities as part of the ration systems. Rather than simply adopting these items, Aboriginal people integrated tea and sugar into daily life, often forming complex relationships with them.

Here, Klimm reclaims both the domestic setting and cups of tea as places of strength, storytelling and resistance, where conversations about race, gender and intergenerational trauma unfold. This installation celebrates her family's history of sitting down over tea and biscuits but adds stark reminders of the racist world outside the security of the family home. The kitchen table becomes both a literal and symbolic platform for reclaiming voice and asserting cultural continuity, while the shared culture of drinking tea asks visitors to think critically about its history and place in contemporary society.

Penny Evans

Grandmother's Mark/Little Bulga

2023

white stoneware, iron oxide, pooling glaze, underglaze, sgraffito

Courtesy of artist

Available for sale

In *Grandmother's Mark/Little Bulga*, 2023 Gamilaraay artist Penny Evans merges ancestral memory with ecological symbolism to reflect on survival, resistance and cultural erasure. The central motif - a striking cruciform mark - echoes the 'X' used by Evans' Great Grandmother to sign colonial documents, a mark of imposed illiteracy and disempowerment.

This form also invokes the Bulga, a resilient native amphibian known for its remarkable strategy of survival. As drought descends, Bulga buries itself deep in the mud encased in a self-made cocoon. In this suspended state, it waits for the healing rains and emerges later with a cruciform body.

Through this work, Evans draws a powerful parallel between the Bulga's instinctive adaptation and the endurance of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and connection to Country - buried, enshrined and waiting for revival. Bulga is not just a symbol - it is kin, a seasonal indicator, the return of water, life and abundance. Encased in ceramic, the form becomes both a vessel and a warning, drawing attention to disrupted ecologies and cultural continuities alike.

Elisa Jane Carmichael

Gulayi #1

2023

Ungaire

Courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

Available for sale

Carrying Fish Trap

2018

Ghost net, synthetic fibre, raffia, yarn, wool, cane, wire, fish scales

Courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

Available for sale

Carrying Fish Trap 2

2019

Ghost net, synthetic fibre, raffia, yarn, wool, cane, wire, fish scales

Courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

Available for sale

Mangrove bark vessel 2

2022

Mangrove bark dyed cotton, oyster shells and ungaire

Courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

Available for sale

Elisa Jane Carmichael is a descendent of the Ngugi people, who along with the Nunukul and Gorenpul peoples, are the traditional owners of Quandamooka Country – the lands and waters in and around Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and Mulgumpin (Moreton Island) in south-east Queensland. As an artist, her practice draws on Ancestral knowledge, matrilineal connections, memories of place and relationships with Country.

Her innovative fibre-based works present contemporary adaptations of traditional weaving techniques, which Carmichael and her family have been instrumental in reviving. Suspended in the space, Carmichael has created contemporary versions of fish traps as sculptural representations of ocean waves in motion. The materials, such as the intricate hand stitched fish scales and reclaimed ghost nets further represent the significant relationships that Quandamooka peoples have to saltwater Country.

Similarly, gulayi, a Quandamooka women's bag, uses a highly distinctive loop and diagonal knot style made from ungaire (freshwater swamp reeds) that has been regenerated by Carmichael's matrilineal line and passed down. For millennia, gulayi were used to gather shellfish from the shorelines of the island and highlights the abundance of freshwater and saltwater food sources. As a means to revive, celebrate and preserve weaving practices, these fibre works are a reconnection with Ancestral traditions that inherently speak to the importance of caring for culture and Country.

James Ahmat Snr*Untitled*

2025

pearlshell

Courtesy of the artist

Available for sale

This suite of carved pearl shell from Badu Island by James Ahmat Snr reflects the deep spiritual and cultural relationships people from the Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait Islands) maintain with the sea. For Islanders, pearl shells are powerful cultural objects that carry meanings of identity, history and ancestral connection to saltwater Country.

Pearl shells also speak to a broader historical narrative. From the late 19th century, the Zenadth Kes became a centre for the global pearl shell industry. Islanders were both skilled divers and labourers often working under harsh and often exploitative conditions. While the industry brought economic change, it also left a legacy of resilience and adaptation.

At the same time, the ocean remained a vital source of cultural knowledges, including food sources such as turtle, dugong, fish and shellfish. James Ahmat Snr's intricate carving transforms the shells from not just a food source but rather into ornaments of memory that bridges cultural knowledges, craftsmanship and the lived impacts of colonial industries. Its shimmer recalls both the beauty of the sea and the complexities of history embedded within it.

Bankstown Koori Elders Group*Ghost Gum Dreaming*

2019

Glazed ceramic

Courtesy of Blacktown City Art Collection

The Bankstown Koori Elders Group first came together in 2004 at the Condell Park Community Centre in Bankstown. Since its inception, this space alongside the Bankstown Art Centre, has served as both a meeting place and a hub for collaborative art-making. Over the years, Campbelltown TAFE and Bankstown City Council have supported the collective through exposure to different artistic disciplines, with long-lasting mentorships by artists Walter Auer and Diamando Koutsellis. Since 2011 the group has enjoyed working with clay as a material and methodology to reconnect with people, culture and land.

The Bankstown Koori Elders Group includes elders from Bankstown and beyond. The group comprises of around fourteen Elders who live in the area, but represent various language groups from across Australia. The enduring strength of the Bankstown Koori Elders Group lies in its shared dedication to culture, creativity, and community.

"Our group is a circle of very special and close friends and our unity and sense of family stems from reconnecting with our Aboriginal identity."

Bernard Singleton

GALGA MILAY-DJADA Spear & Spear thrower (set)

2025

Tree sapling, Cooktown ironwood/gum tree wood, string, resin

Courtesy of the artist and Chapman & Bailey

Bernard Singleton is an Umpila, Djabugay/Yirrgay man raised in Cape York Peninsula. His practice is focused on crafting traditional hunting weapons, tools and objects which are heavily based on his father's 30-year work as an archaeological relic's ranger.

GALGA MILAY-DJADA Spear & Spear thrower, 2025 has been meticulously crafted through generations of cultural knowledge that are more than just the act of fishing for mullet and mud crab but rather embody the teachings and laws of Country. Together, galka (spear) and milay (spear thrower) reveal the deep interdependence between food, place and identity.

Made from hardwood, the galka undergoes a process of cutting, stripping and firing that teaches its maker patience, precision and respect. Similarly, the milay is made measured to the body with the extension of the arm allowing for greater length and power. Fishing with these tools is not just about feeding the body, but maintaining cultural practices, observing the tides and reading the signs written across Country. For Singleton, each cast is both an offering and an inheritance- binding the present to the Old People who walked the shorelines from the first sunrise.

"Through the process of making a spear or shaping the figure of a spirit, I connect with my Ancestors and they help bring my work to life."

Simone Arnol

We couldn't get food...You know what we used to live on over there, sweet potatoes... sweet potato one meal... sweet potato another meal: Sweet potato for breakfast, we eat sweet potato until we look like one from a recording of Granny Tottie (1985)

2023

digital print, edition 1/6

You know, most of us went crazy, we boiled paw paw to keep ourselves alive. The staff didn't care if we lived or died. That's how it was. We went to church every morning but had nothing much to eat. (Reflections in Yarrabah)

2023

digital print, edition 1/6

General Rules # 15. All meals to be taken at the proper time late comers to go without, unless with a reasonable excuse for being late from the 1899 Yarrabah Rules and Regulations

2023

digital print, edition 1/6

SeeRED series

Courtesy of the artist

This suite of photographic portraiture by Gunggandji artist Simone Arnol is part of the 2023 *SeeRED* series that draws upon her great-grandmother's, Tottie Joinbee, oral history accounts, Kathleen Denigan's 2008 book, *Reflections in Yarrabah* and the 1899 *Yarrabah Rules and Regulations* handbook to recreate memories and significant events in Tottie's life at the Yarrabah Mission.

Located in coastal Far North Queensland, Yarrabah is a vibrant, cultural place, widely acknowledged as the largest Aboriginal community in Australia. Yet, like much of colonised Australia, Yarrabah holds a complex and tumultuous history of violent displacement and cultural suppression due to missionisation. Operated by the Anglican Church, Yarrabah Mission was established in 1892 under the authority of Ernest Gribble. As heard through Granny Tottie's accounts, the residents at Yarrabah were treated as prisoners under disciplinary punishment tactics that resulted in slave labour, famine and disease.

Within Arnol's portraits, vibrant red sweet potatoes are held in the hands of a young Aboriginal girl. Food scarcity was a significant issue at Yarrabah with sweet potatoes being one of the only food sources available. Starvation and malnutrition were common. Here, Arnol has reimagined her great grandmother's experience, the girl is curled in fetal position, red spills across the floor.

A politically motivated and emotionally driven series, Arnol's photographic portraits actively reinstate the record, exposing the absences of these interconnected legacies and experiences of collective cultural trauma within contemporary society. By honouring storytelling, the works create a visual narrative of Aboriginal history that respectfully depicts the people of Yarrabah, while revealing the ongoing strength and commitment to cultural survival that has been generationally passed down.

Steven Russel and Kristine Stewart

Eel Traps

2015

Lomandra grass, running postman vine, red hot poker plant

Courtesy of Blacktown City Art Collection

Artists, weavers and cultural practitioners, Steven Russell and Kristine Stewart each created an eel trap as a permanent gift to the Dharug people. Originally exhibited at the *Blacktown Native Institution Corroboree* in November 2015, the traps were suspended above the archaeological remains of the former schoolhouse; a powerful gesture of cultural remembrance and reconnection. The Blacktown Native Institution was a residential school for Aboriginal and Maori children that operated 1823 – 1829. Originally located at Parramatta and later moved to Blacktown, it is among the first known sites where Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents and institutionalised – a practice that continued in Australia until the 1970s.

The eel traps hold space and pay respect to the site prior to the traumas of colonisation. A creek once ran through this site which was central to Dharug life, ceremony, and sustenance. Though the creek no longer flows, its memory and stories of place remain strong among Dharug people.

Russell and Stewart have a longstanding relationship with the Blacktown area, leading weaving workshops and fostering cultural exchange through their work. The two eel traps take different approaches; Russell's woven from local Lomandra grass in a traditional style, whilst Stewart uses

contemporary techniques with native and introduced plants. Together, the eel traps reflect a dialogue between past and present, and between cultures.

By gifting these works to the Dharug community, the artists honour the Dharug custodianship of the Blacktown Native Institution site and reaffirm the ongoing strength and continuity of culture.

Dylan Bolger

One Hundred from Leaf SZN series

(2021–24)

Paint pen on plywood

Courtesy of the artist

Available for sale

Adapted from the one-hundredth and final work in his series, *Leaf SZN 2021–24*, culminates Maiawali, Karuwali, Pitta-Pitta and Gomeroi artist Dylan Bolger's extensive studies of the macaranga leaf from 2021–2024. The macaranga plant plays an important role in First Nations cultural practices with the stripped bark fibre used to make string and the timber used to make spears for fishing. Additionally, the plant is recognised as a pioneer species, meaning it is one of the first to repopulate and breathe new life into areas that have suffered environmental devastation.

This large scale, multipaned work serves as a visual metaphor, embodying the repopulation and regenerative qualities to mirror the resilience and dynamism of Country. Rendered here, the macaranga symbolises ongoing resistance and strength of First Nations people, who continue to thrive amidst the enduring legacies of colonisation. Bolger's work serves as a powerful reminder of the vitality and cultural resilience of Indigenous communities.

Jacqueline Jacky

That Place They Had (Part 1)

2022

Screen-print, watercolour monotype, string, Keen's curry, turmeric on calico

Courtesy of Blacktown City Art Collection

Jacqueline Jacky is a proud Gamilaroi and Dunghutti woman, born and raised in Sydney. *That Place They Had (Part 1)* 2022, was conceived and created on the lands of the Gadigal and Bidjigal peoples of the Eora Nation.

Jacky's practice explores her Aboriginal identity through the lens of intergenerational storytelling, drawing deeply from the lived experiences and oral histories shared by her mother, Vicki Rose Winters Green. This work is grounded in the personal and collective narratives of the women in the artist's family, shaped through the use of family archives and photographs. Here, Jacky appropriates the archive to create a sense of renewal and reclamation.

Through these stories and journeys, alongside the nuanced choice of materials, the work reflects the complex intersections of beauty and trauma that define many Aboriginal women's experiences; legacies profoundly marked by the ongoing impacts of colonial and white Australian histories.

"It's very unsettling to fight for your identity in your own country, but my mother, her mother, my sister, and all other Indigenous people, will persevere; we will not give up, we'll always stand strong. I reflect on the celebration of Blacktown City's diversity through memories of growing up in the western suburbs which harbours a diversity of communities which made me feel at home as a young child."

Nicholas Currie

Curry Wall

2024

Site specific installation, Keens Curry Powder

Courtesy of the artist

In *Curry Wall* 2024, Mununjali artist Nicholas Currie smears Keen's curry powder across the exhibition space- a pungent gesture that binds name, identity, memory and lineage. The smell resonates, the colour stains, the materials transformed into an imprint of presence.

A product of British colonial trade, Keen's Curry Powder reflects the global movement of spices throughout the British Empire. Introduced to Australia by an English settler in the 1840s, the curry powder became a popular spice in settler kitchens and later found its way into Aboriginal communities through the mission era as government-issued rations. Its presence in First Nations recipes transformed it from a colonial commodity into a symbol of adaptation and cultural resilience.

Embodying the concept of hauntology, the powder acts as a material ghost and a spectral residue of displacement, cultural survival and ongoing Indigenous presence. The work invites viewers to reflect on the legacies of colonialism and the resilience of Indigenous peoples.
