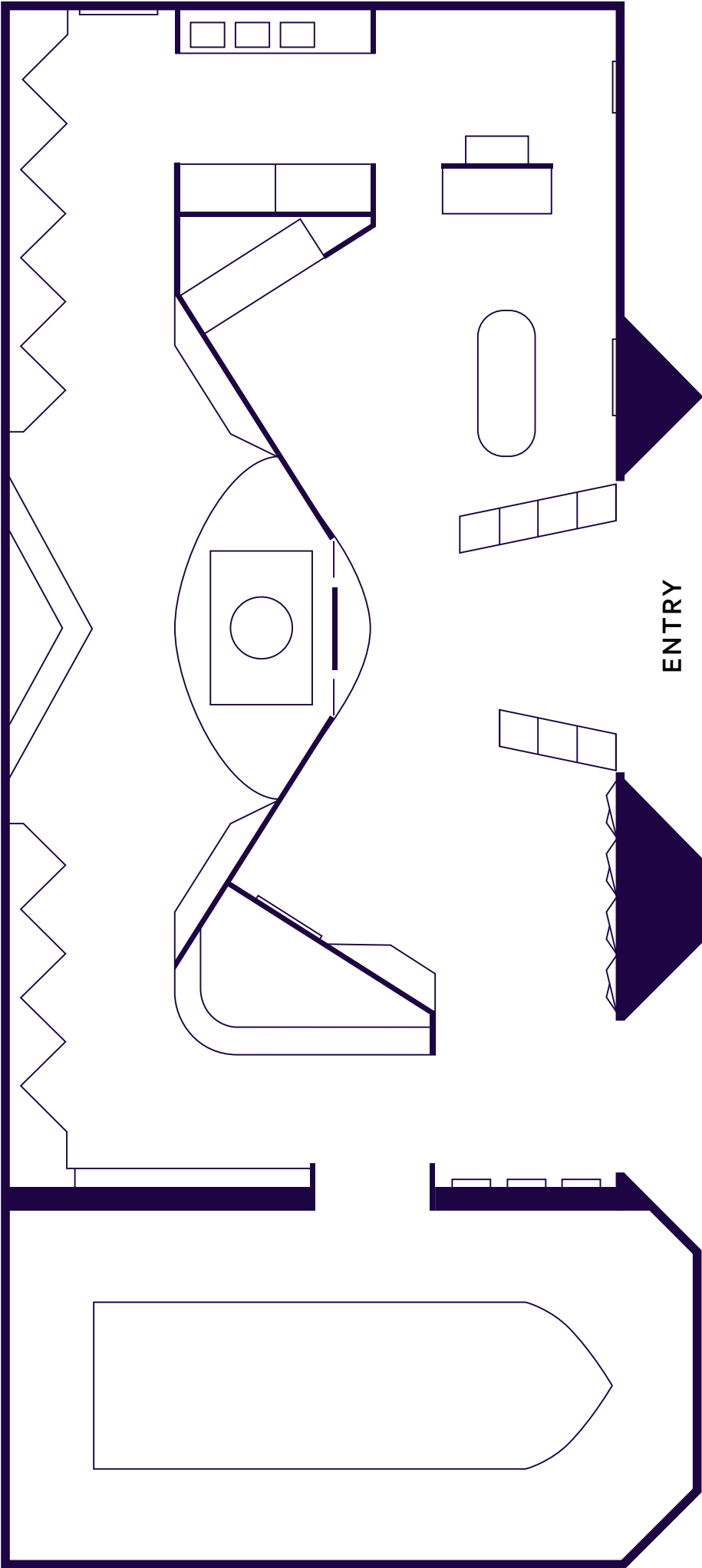


**SAY** AUSTRALIAN  
SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS  
**OUR NAME**

**LARGE PRINT BOOK**



ENTRY

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Queensland Museum acknowledges the First Peoples – the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and sky where we live and work. We honour their unbroken connection to Country, culture, and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We recognise our shared history and commit to embedding First Nations voices in Queensland’s continuing story.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDER COMMUNITY

Queensland Museum extends respect to Elders of the Australian South Sea Islander community who have made significant contributions to our community's cultural fabric and worked hard to increase awareness and visibility of Australian South Sea Islander histories, heritage and experiences.



# CULTURAL WARNING

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Australian South Sea Islander visitors are advised that this display contains images and voices of people who have passed.

We also advise that any racist and derogatory language contained in the display is 'of its time' and does not reflect the contemporary views of Queensland Museum. We have preserved this as part of our commitment to truth and reconciliation and to help our audiences understand both past and ongoing experiences of Australian First Nations people.

Ahwong

Bellear

Aivey

Bickey

Ambertal

Boah

Ambrum

Boar

Ambryn

Bobongie

Andrew

Bonwo

Andrews

Booka

Appo

Bowda

Appoo

Boycon

Arrow

Brown

Backo

Buckue

Baggow

Bugby

Bandler

Buxton

Barrett

Byquar

Battangeerae

Carter

Cassady

Fatnowna

Chadburn

Fay

Changito

Fewquandie

Choppy

Giblit

Cole

Gorman

Cora

Green

Corowa

Harold

Darr

Henaway

Davis

Itong

Dodd

Ivy

Dorman

Johnson

Dunbar

Kia

Edmund

Kissier

Eggmolesse

Lena

Enares

Leo

Lingwood

Mooney

Long

Morgan

Mackie

Morton

Malamoo

Motto

Malayta

Mount

Managoli

Mussing

Manaway

Mye

Manfrey

Nagas

Mann

Nahow

May

Nauta

Mendo

Neary

Meninga

Nowadrom

Merrypor

Nuggin

Miller

Oba

Minniecon

Obah

Ober

Saylor

Paama

Sendy

Parsons

Sickett

Parter

Silva

Penola

Sirris

Pentecost

Slabb

Perandis

Sleda

Power

Slockee

Quakawoot

Solomon

Querro

Spiro

Redman

Summers

Robert

Sussyer

Rotumah

Sutherland

Sabbo

Tallis

Santo

Talonga

Tambo

Tomarra

Tammock

Tonga

Tanna

Tongoa

Tannasse

Toogooloo

Tanner

Treive

Tarare

Trevy

Tass

Tuku

Taiters

Tye

Tareeala

Upkett

Tatow

Ve a Ve a

Telford

Venno

Thorpe

Viti

Tikaro

Walters

Toar

Warcon

Togo

Warkill

**Warrie**

**Womal**

**Wasi**

**Womboo**

**Watego**

**Wovat**

**Wesser**

**Yasserie**

**Wetea**

**Yasso**

**Weyman**

**Yatta**

**Williams**

**Yettica**

**Willie**

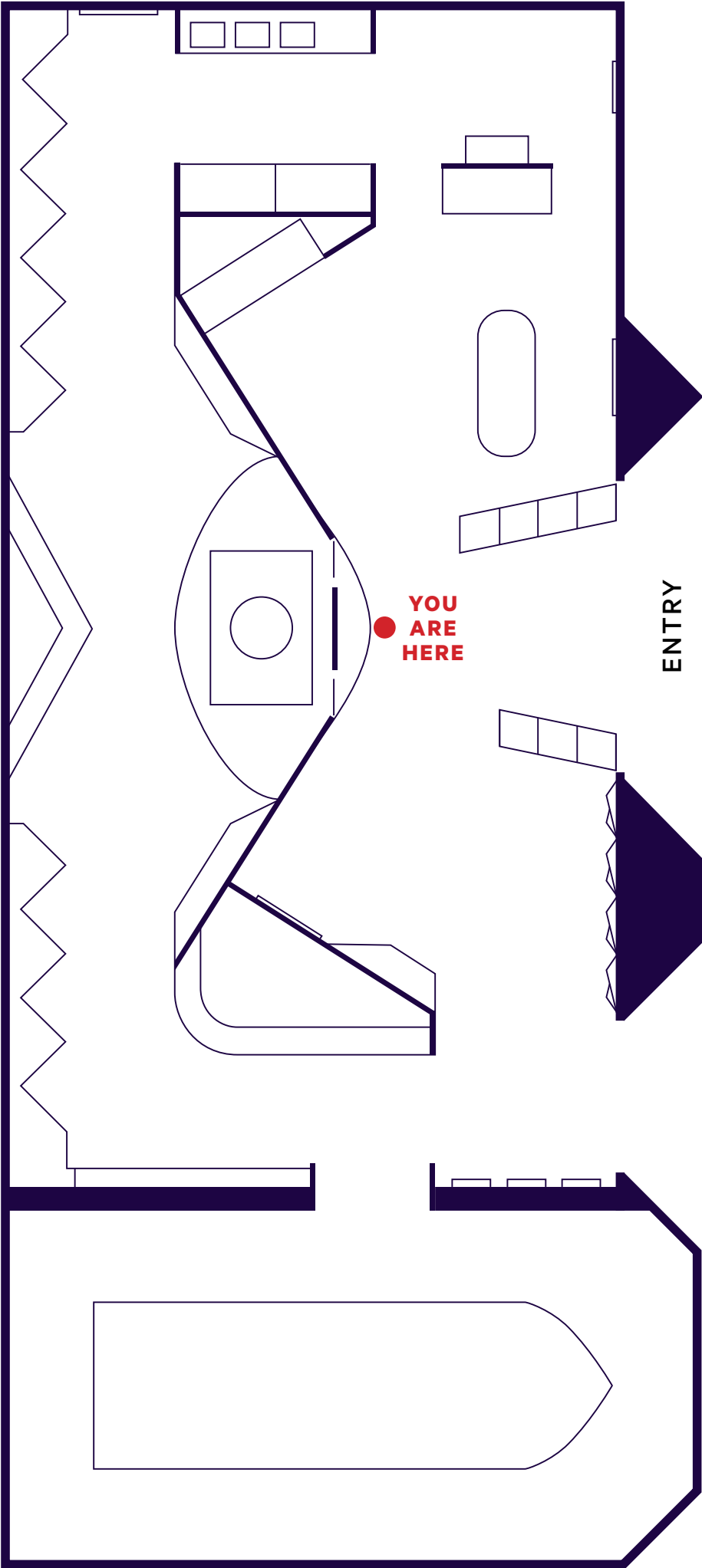
**Youse**

**Wogas**

**Yow-Yeh**

**Family names connect us and create pathways from the past to the present.**

**We acknowledge the names lost over time.**







# SAY OUR NAME AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS

The story of Australian South Sea Islanders is entangled in a fragmented history. While our experiences are intricately woven into the tapestry of this country's diverse cultural landscape, this part of Australia's story remains relatively unknown. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Recognition for Australian South Sea Islanders, *Say Our Name* weaves together pieces of our community's tumultuous history and shows how, in its aftermath, a new community was born.

Take a moment to be a part of history and *Say Our Name – Australian South Sea Islanders*.

# WE, SOUTH SEA PEOPLE

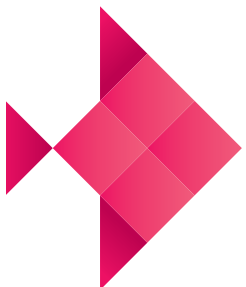


*We, South Sea People, welcome you to meet some of our community today.*

Imelda Miller, Curator, 2024

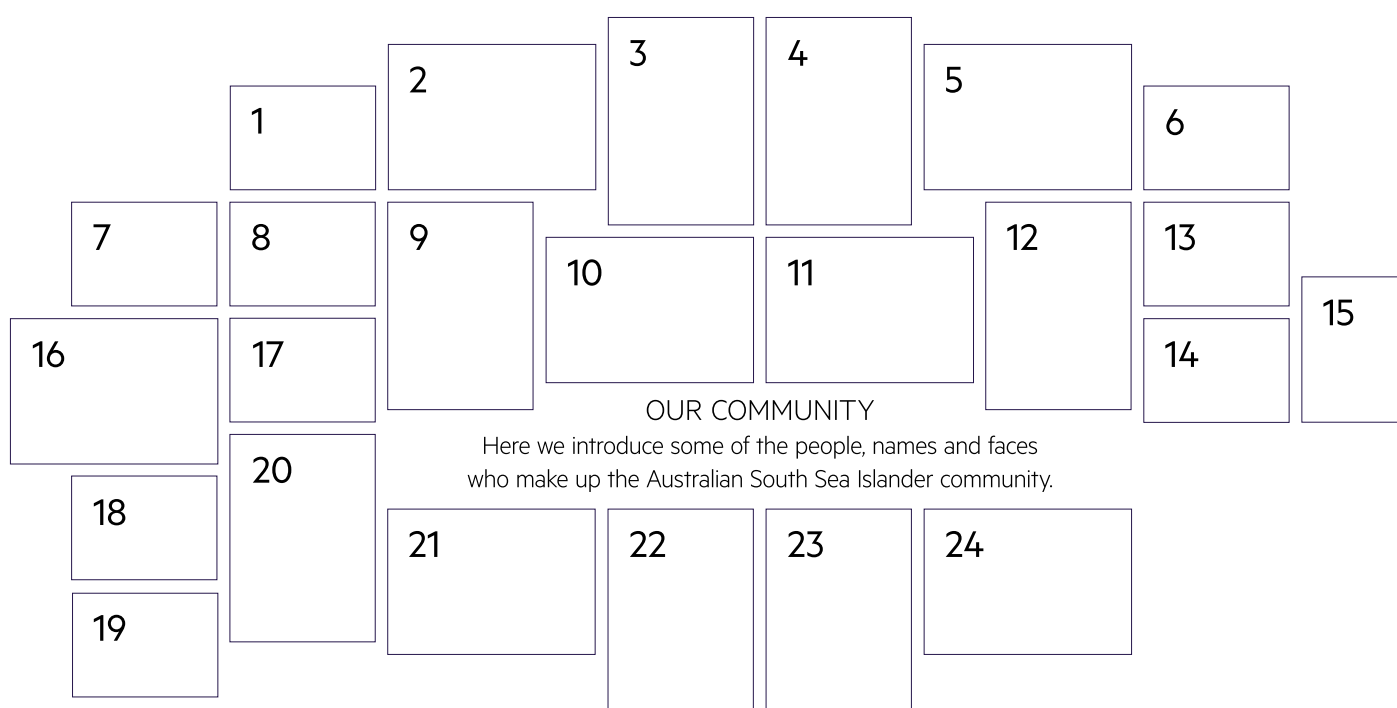
Strength and resilience are words we use to describe ourselves and we, Australian South Sea Islanders – or South Sea People – truly embody these qualities. Our community descends from South Sea Islanders blackbirded, coerced, taken and recruited into forced and unforced labour on Queensland’s sugar and cotton plantations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This dark history involves the controlled movement of people, exploitation, and discrimination. Once called ‘the forgotten people’ and seen as marginalised, Australian South Sea Islanders have a unique cultural identity and are a proud community who are still here today.

Strength and resilience indeed.



# OUR COMMUNITY

Here we introduce some of the people, names and faces who make up the Australian South Sea Islander community.



## 1. **Jamie Veava, Leading Senior Constable Brisbane, 2019**

Photographer LaVonne Bobongie.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## 2. **Beverly Cole, Burdekin Community, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER SARAH SCRAGG.

**3. Uncle Doug Mooney at Bakers Creek, Mackay, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER SARAH SCRAGG.

**4. Starrett Vea Vea, President Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER SARAH SCRAGG.

**5. Alton Budd, Cecil Parter, and Robert Cole, Brisbane Community Workshop, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER PETER WALLIS.

**6. Rowena Trevie, Mal Meninga, Warren (Joe) Leo OAM, Belinda Arrow at the Queensland Government Australian South Sea Islander Recognition, Brisbane, 2000**

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.

**7. Abraham and Theresa (Coote Tanna) Saylor's family at the Gardens in Halifax**

IMAGE COURTESY OF DITA SOUTHWOOD.

**8. Queensland State Government Recognition of Australian South Sea Islanders, Brisbane, 7 Sep 2000**

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.

**9. Doris Leo at Warcon family reunion, 2023**

PHOTOGRAPHER IMELDA MILLER.

**10. Sonia and her mother Maureen Minniecon looking at their family story in the exhibition *I've Been Working on the Railway*, 2011**

IMAGE COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND MUSEUM RAIL WORKSHOPS.

**11. Javina, Nathaniel and Karneesha Warkill, Brisbane Community Workshop, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER PETER WALLIS.

**12. Tomasina Bickey, Research Assistant - Archaeology, collections and Australian South Sea Islander lived identities project, 2024**

ROCKHAMPTON. PHOTOGRAPHER GERALDINE MATE.

**13. Warren (Joe) Leo OAM at Joskeleigh, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

**14. Winifred Boah, Colin Andrews and Christine Andrews at Parliament House, Canberra in 1994**

IMAGE COURTESY OF SCOTT BOAH.

**15. Lloyd Willie with ancestor trade box, Rockhampton, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **16. Kanaka Proud Cup Rockhampton Team, 2017**

IMAGE COURTESY OF MARION HEALY.

## **17. Pioneer Football side that won the Mirani Rugby League Premiership, Mackay, 1949**

IMAGE COURTESY OF IMELDA MILLER.

## **18. Cedric Andrews at old Homebush Mission Hall, Mackay, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **19. Charmaine Miller, General Manager MY105 Radio, Mackay**

PHOTOGRAPHER LAVONNE BOBONGIE.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **20. Lynne Backo, Burdekin Community, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER SARAH SCRAGG.

## **21. Kayleen Butler, producer of the acclaimed Goalpost, Pictures production "*Black Snow*" 2022, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER MARY-ANN SHAPCOTT.

## **22. John Williams working for Mackay Sugar, Mackay, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers.

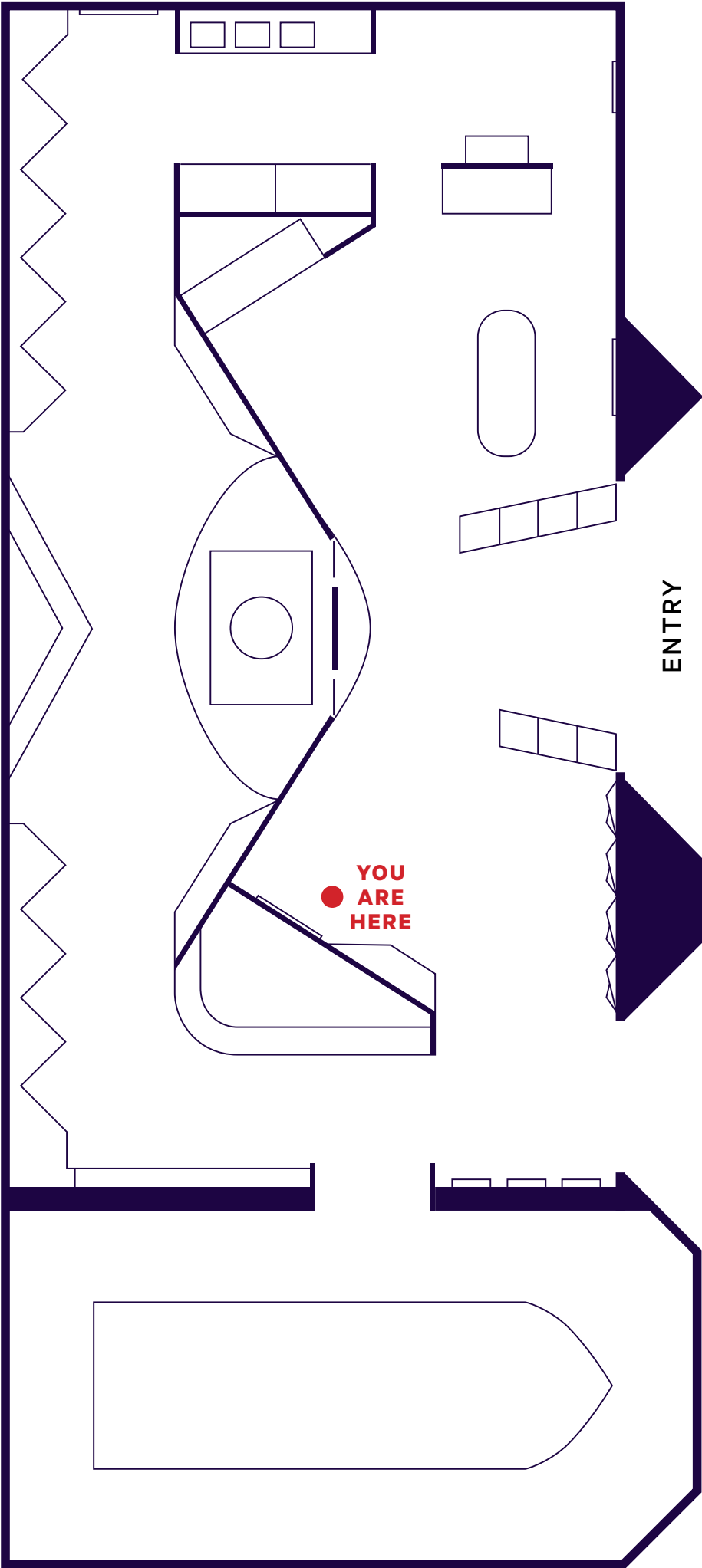
JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **23. Tracey Vea Vea, Burdekin Australian South Sea Islander Community, 2024**

PHOTOGRAPHER SARAH SCRAGG.

## **24. Kanaka Proud Cup Mackay Team, 2017**

IMAGE COURTESY OF MARION HEALY.



**YOU  
ARE  
HERE**

**ENTRY**



## **Recognise, Reflect and Rise**

Digital story

Duration: 7 minutes 45 seconds

Interviewees: Alton Budd, Robert Mann,  
and Imelda Miller

Interviewer: Olivia Robinson

Filmmaker: Sarah Scragg Productions

What impact has national recognition had for Australian South Sea Islanders and the broader Australian community since 1994? This digital story is a conversation that reflects on the meaning of recognition through three thoughtful perspectives that take us on a journey to understand cultural experiences, motivations, and aspirations across different generations. They remind us to keep living today, hold the past close and strengthen our identity for a brighter future.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **Australian South Sea Islander Recognition Ceremony Cassette**

Duration: 10 minutes

QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM2620119

# RECOGNITION

What does recognition mean to marginalised groups whose stories are unknown or silenced?

Recognition by government and the wider Australian community can be an acknowledgement of past injustices and a commitment to shared responsibility and understanding.

The Commonwealth Government acknowledged Australian South Sea Islanders as a distinct cultural group in 1994 followed soon after in 2000 by the Queensland Government with bipartisan support.

These actions acknowledged publicly the discrimination and exploitation experienced by the community across generations.

Thirty years on from national recognition, we ask 'did formal recognition make a difference to the lives of Australian South Sea Islanders?'

# STATE RECOGNITION

Queensland has the largest population of Australian South Sea Islanders. On 7 September 2000, a special ceremony was held in the grounds of Queensland Parliament House attended by community leaders and members who had fought many years for recognition. Each person received a Statement of Recognition, the first written acknowledgment of their enduring contribution to Queensland.



**Australian South Sea Islanders attend the Queensland Government's Australian South Sea Islander Recognition Ceremony, 2000**

Photographer Imelda Miller

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. EH7863

# FEDERAL RECOGNITION

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August every year, the anniversary of federal recognition, Australian South Sea Islanders celebrate Recognition Day – our day to unite and to remember the past, celebrate our rich and vibrant culture and look to the future.

Australian South Sea Islanders, are the descendants of South Sea Islanders who were exempt from deportation enforced in the early 1900s.



**Representatives of the Australian South Sea Islander community attending the announcement of Recognition at Federal Parliament, 25 August 1994**

Photograph courtesy of Doris Leo

**In the House of Representatives on Thursday 25 August 1994, Attorney General Mr Lavarch tabled:**

*'In the formal statement I am tabling today, the Commonwealth Government recognises Australian-born South Sea Islanders as a distinct ethnic group in Australia with its own history and culture. The report (A Call for Recognition) concludes that Australian South Sea Islanders are a unique minority group and have been severely disadvantaged through racial discrimination. Yet until now they have not even been formally recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Australia. In other words, they have not existed officially. Perhaps this is the greatest insult that can be paid to any ethnic group. More than an insult, this deflates a community's self-esteem. It also threatens the collective heritage of Australian born South Sea Islanders.'*

# WHERE WE ARE

We are all just visitors here. In Australia, our stories, histories and experiences are sitting on the lands and waterways of First Nations People.

Family and community are integral to Australian South Sea Islander identity. Living within tightly knit family networks along the eastern coastline of Queensland and parts of New South Wales, people historically shared resources such as gardens, fresh water, fish, childcare and homes. Today, each community has its own unique characteristics shaped by location, history and local families. Many people have also reconnected with their ancestral islands, strengthening familial bonds.

Australian South Sea Islanders are not indigenous to Australia. Our relationship with First Nations People of Australia is complex, intertwined and multifaceted, and is influenced by historical interactions, colonisation, displacement and shared experiences of marginalisation.



Cairns  
Innisfail

Townsville

Ayr  
Bowen

Mackay

Rockhampton

Bundaberg

Sunshine Coast  
Brisbane

## **Uncle Doug's Cast net**

*“This net was owned by Rudy Sabbo and made by Frank Sam 60 years ago. It was made to catch large mullet and barramundi. The old South Sea Islanders would sew nets like this, over cups of tea and damper and a few roly smokes, during the ‘slack’ season after the cane cutting.”*

Uncle Doug Mooney, 2024

## **Uncle Doug Mooney**

### **Welcome to Our Community**

Filmmaker: Sarah Scragg

Duration: 4 minutes

‘Australian South Sea Islanders’, ‘South Sea People’, ‘Kanaka Proud’ – these are all names our community have (re)claimed to describe ourselves. Take a moment to sit and listen to Uncle Doug as welcomes you into our community and this exhibiton.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM.



# WEARING IDENTITY

Australian South Sea Islanders cherish deep connections with extended family and the wider South Sea community across Australia, reaching to home islands in the Pacific. These relationships embody community values such as respect for Elders, family traditions, cultural obligations and social responsibilities.

Family pride shines at community gatherings such as birthdays, weddings and funerals as well as social and cultural events such as Recognition Day, festivals, and sporting events like the Kanaka Cup. Symbols like the cane knife pay homage to the resilience of South Sea Islander cane cutters who endured hardships and sacrifices to provide a better future for their families.



## **1. 150 years anniversary shirt**

This Australian South Sea Islander shirt commemorates 150 years since the first arrival of South Sea Islanders into Queensland via British mariner and 'blackbirder' Robert Towns on the Don Juan in 1863.

Courtesy of Robert and Zebadee Mann

## **2. Ada Miller's family reunion shirt**

Courtesy of Tomasina Bickey

## **3. Warkill family reunion shirt**

Courtesy of Tomasina Bickey

## **4. Tambo family reunion shirt**

Courtesy of Chris and Des Tambo

## **5. Burdekin South Sea Islander community shirt**

Courtesy of Tracey Veava

**6. Australian South Sea Islander Recognition shirt from Rockhampton**

Courtesy of Tomasina Bickey

**7. Charles and Nora Malamoo descendant's shirt**

Courtesy of Jacque Efimenko

**8. Kanaka Cup shirt**

Courtesy of Moira Davis

Above image: Community members Simone Togo-Brisby, Robert Cole, Zebedee Mann, Debbie de Bree, and Jasmine Togo-Brisby wear their South Sea shirts with pride.

**This commemorative hat and shirt celebrate 150 years of the Australian South Sea Islander community, 2017, Yuwi Country (Mackay)**

Donated by Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. ID540150, E40929

**Commemorative cane knife, marking the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australian South Sea Islander history. Bundaberg, 2013**

COURTESY OF WARREN AND AGNES QUAKAWOOT, BRISBANE



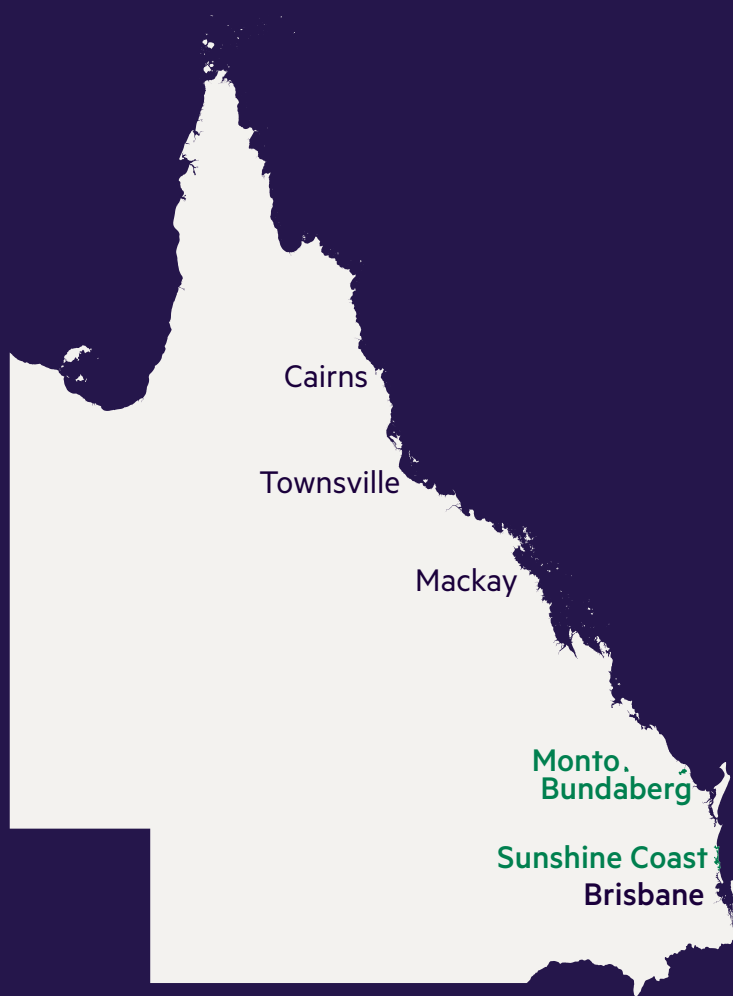
# MAL MENINGA

Malcolm (Mal) Meninga AM and his brother Geoffrey Meninga are proud Australian South Sea Islanders. Their great-grandfather came from Tanna Island in Vanuatu, coming to Australia to find a better life in the cane fields. Mal and Geoffrey were born and raised in Queensland, growing up in the country towns across the state.

One of Australia's most lauded rugby league players, Mal Meninga's playing career spanned 15 years and included 32 State of Origin contests, and four Kangaroo tours, representing and captaining Australia.

Mal attributes his leadership on the field and in the community to the family values he learned at home and to the resilience and leadership inherited from his South Sea Islander forebearers.

**Portrait of Malcolm 'Mal' Meninga AM, provided by Mal Meninga**



**Mal Meninga and his brother Geoffrey share their family story and talk about their Australian South Sea Islander heritage, 2013**

Duration: 8 minutes 20 seconds

Interviewer: Imelda Miller

Filmmaker: Smoke Creative

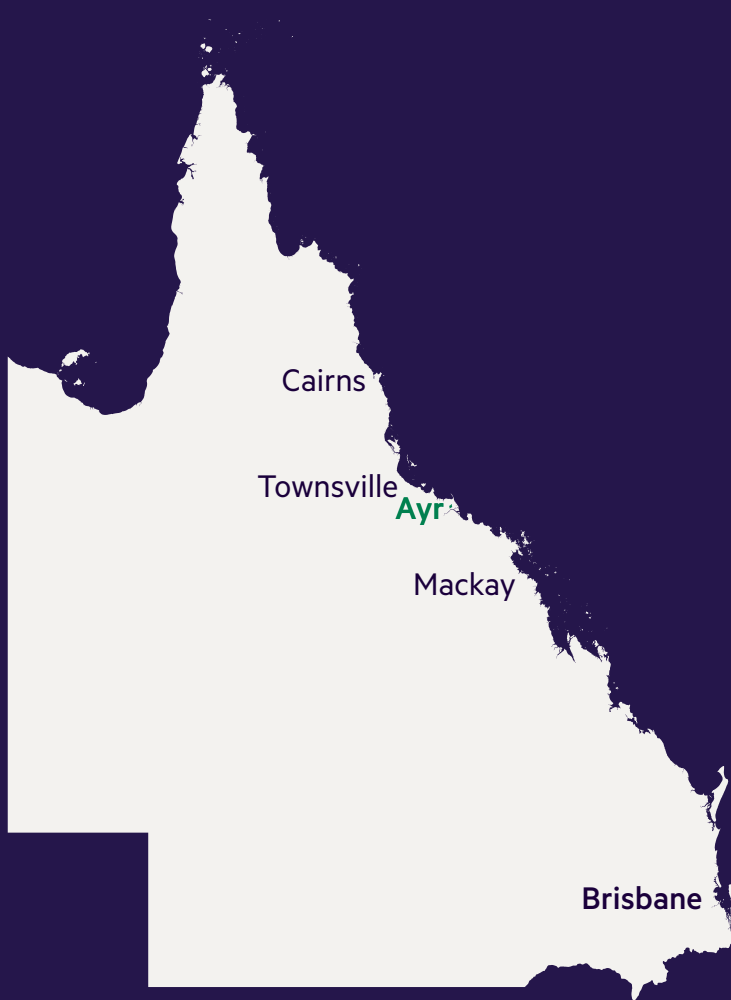


# AYR COMMUNITY

## **Remembering Plantation Creek, Burdekin Region**

Across the lands and waterways of the Juru and Bindal people is a place where the Burdekin South Sea Islander community call home. Places such as Seaforth, Rita Island, Jarvisfield, and Plantation Creek hold memories and meaning for the community both near and far away. People grew up here, some came for holidays with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and others came to work.

**Plantation Creek, Ayr, 2024. Photographer Sarah Scragg**



## **Remembering Plantation Creek: Ayr, Queensland, 2024**

Duration: 8 minutes 10 seconds

Interviewer: Imelda Miller

Filmmaker: Sarah Scragg

This story has been developed with the assistance of the Burdekin Australian South Sea Islander community.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

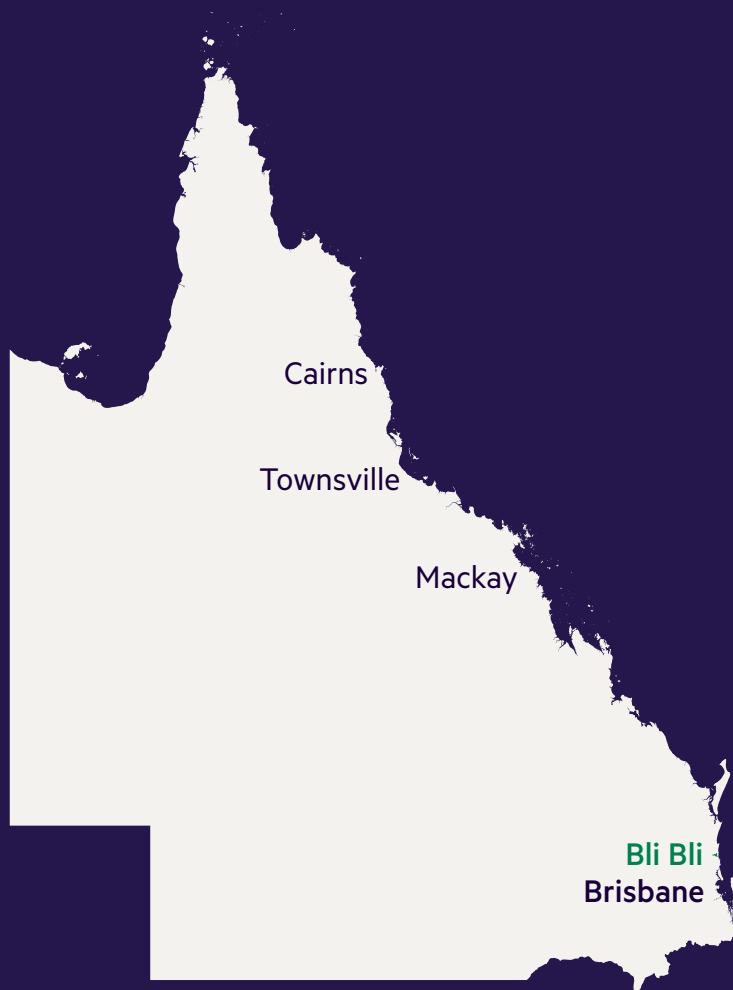


# THE OLD PLACE – LOT 71

The Old Place, located at Lot 71 on the Maroochy River at Bli Bli, has been a cherished home for Australian South Sea Islanders since the late 1800s. It was a residence, holiday spot and social hub for families and South Sea Islander plantation labourers transiting Queensland's coast. Today, community members are rekindling their connection to the land recalling childhood memories of fishing, living, and family times.

**The landing point for Lot 71 on the Maroochy River at Bli Bli. Photographer Imelda Miller**





## **The Old Place: Lot 71, Bli Bli, Queensland, 2019**

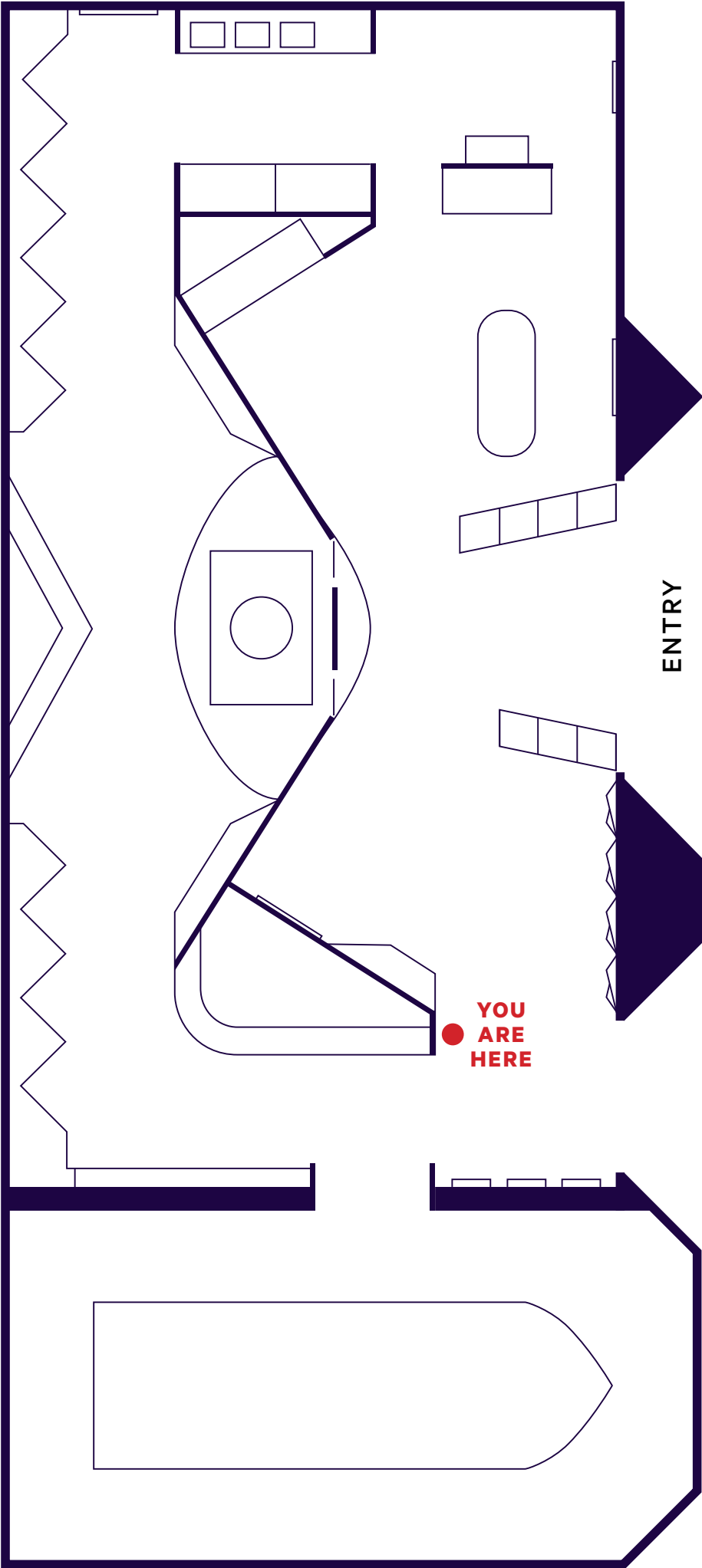
Duration: 11 mins 16 secs

Interview with Fran Byquar, Don Fewquandie, Michael Fewquandie, and Gary Graham

Interviewer: Olivia Robinson

Producer: Chris Peckham, Source Media

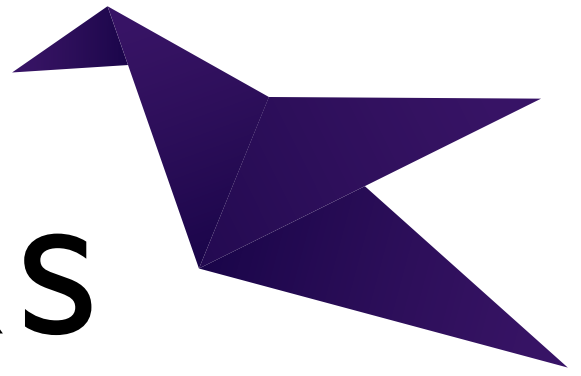
This story has been developed with assistance from the Descendants of Australian South Sea Islanders (DASSI) Association Inc.



ENTRY

YOU  
ARE  
HERE

# OUR ANCESTORS



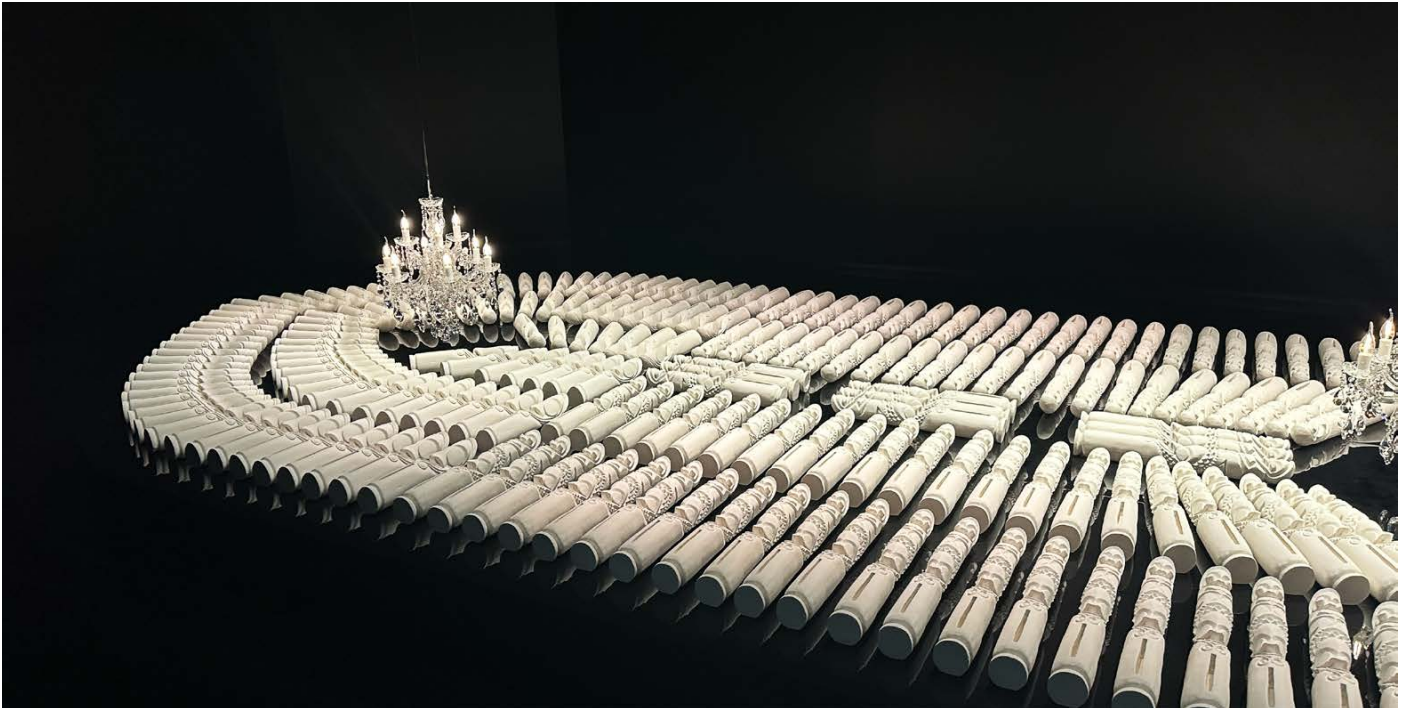
Today we continue to reclaim our ancestor stories one by one. Although many of their names remain unknown, we still remember them.

Each person left behind their home, family, tradition and island way of life. However, these cultural foundations would be helpful in this new place.

In the wake of our Ancestors' water journeys are stories that connect us across islands, oceans, and time.

In Australia, many of our ancestors' customs and ceremonies, traditionally passed down orally, have been lost to time.





# Jasmine Togo-Brisby

## *Can you see us now, 2024*

### **Plaster casts**

ON LOAN FROM THE ARTIST.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby addresses cultural tourism, rupture and hybridity through appropriating souvenirs from her ancestral homelands of Vanuatu. She employs miniatures which mimic custom 'tamtam' slit drums that tower over 3 metres tall. Embodied and carved with ancient ancestral knowledge and gathered to form village orchestras which materialise ancestors' voices.

Iconic symbols of Vanuatu visual culture and identity the tamtam is miniaturised and muted to cater for the tourism

industry. Togo-Brisby moulds from her own tamtam collection then casts in plaster to create new hybrid forms, then laid in the formation of bodies in slave ships. She interweaves her family's experience of enslavement into domestic servitude for the Wunderlich's, a family renowned for their company 'Wunderlich Ceilings'. In using plaster casts, Togo-Brisby claims their material legacy as her own cultural medium.

## **The Artist**

Jasmine Togo-Brisby is a fourth-generation Australian South Sea Islander artist who is currently based in Meanjin/ Brisbane. Her great-great-grandparents were taken from Vanuatu as children during the Pacific slave trade and made to work in Australia. Togo-Brisby explores this dark history, and its contemporary impacts on the community today, through photography, filmmaking and sculpture.



# Darren Blackman

## ***Stolen (Yellow version), 2023***

### **Smoking jacket, sustainable cotton**

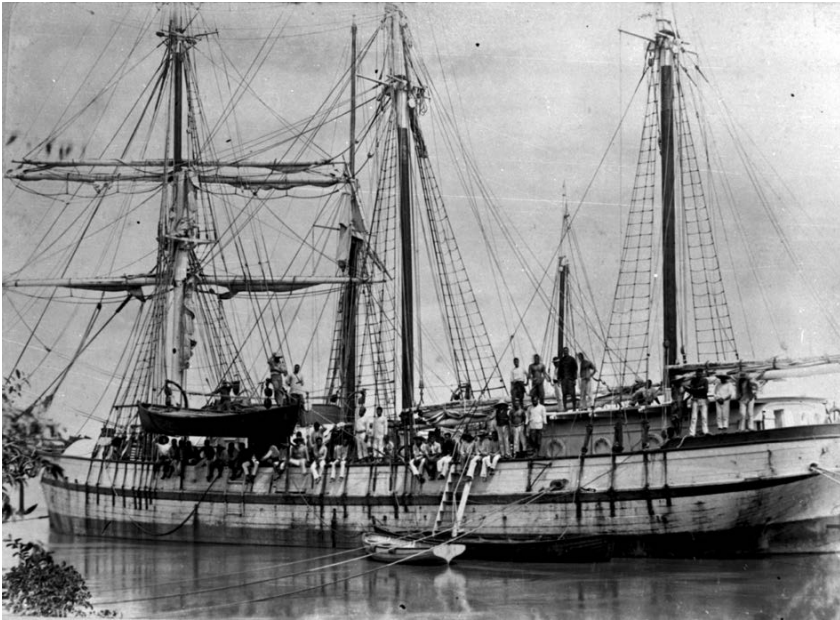
QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. ID535598

My grandfather was born in a cane field on the Sunshine Coast. His father was just a youth taken from Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, while his mother, as a teenager, was snatched from the ocean, swimming off the reef while her family watched from the shore. Both stolen and brought to Bunda (Bundaberg), the country of my paternal grandmother's people, to labour on stolen land. History, written through a lens of entitlement does not value evidence that contradicts a narrative of settler conquest. Blackbirding, as it was commonly known, was a form of government endorsed

piracy, kidnapping and human trafficking of children and adults. Two Queensland cities, Townsville and Mackay, are named after men directly involved in the blackbirding trade whose kanaka (Melanesian) labour supported the sugar industry. This smoking robe represents the opulence of those in power who created policy and controlled the blackbirding and sugar trade. The text 'Stolen', derives from an original work on canvas. From a distance it resembles a repeated pattern on yellowy, golden fabric wrapping those entitled enough to afford; in others, trauma and oppression.

## **The Artist**

Darren Blackman is a Gooreng Gooreng/Gangulu First Nations man from his paternal heritage. Maternally his ancestry and cultural links derive from the Northern Islands of Vanuatu – Espiritu Santo, Pentecost, Malo and Obah islands – where his great grandparents were stolen from, to work as indentured labour on sugar cane plantations in Southeast Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Blackman is a multidisciplinary visual and musical artist. Visually his works are bold, dynamic and thoughtfully active. Predominantly text work, he responds to the Western construct that has oppressed both sides of his ancestral lineage by disassembling colonial ideology. Blackman values the importance of language culturally and observes the manner in how the English language is delivered subversively by people of influence. Via the use of text, he plays and purposely butchers the King's language, claiming it as his own by pushing the subjectivity of words.



## **South Sea Islanders on a sailing ship at Bundaberg**

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LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.  
NEGATIVE NO. 2246

# **WATER JOURNEYS**

Stories of our water journeys live above and below the ocean waves – entangled with the boats, crew and cargo. And yet missing are the stories of our people as cargo.

For some South Sea Islanders, these journeys were forced and traumatic. In the early years, people were coerced, kidnapped and deceived onto boats in a practice known as ‘blackbirding’. For more than 40 years, big wooden ships with large canvas sails regularly carried away South Sea Islanders.

These boats came to be symbolic of power – vessels of stories, harbouring the devastation of forceable relocation, colonial trade and power imbalance.





**Mabel Edmunds with one of her art works, date unknown**

IMAGE COURTESY OF ROBERT MANN

## MABEL EDMUND

Born in 1930, in Rockhampton on Darumbal Country, Mabel Edmund emerged as a trailblazer within the South Sea Islander and Aboriginal communities. Mabel became the first Aboriginal and South Sea Islander woman elected to local government, a testament to her determination and leadership. Mabel made a significant impact on her community and beyond.

Her literary talents were showcased in her memoir, *No Regrets*, which earned recognition in the David Unaipon Award for emerging Indigenous authors.

In addition to her achievements in literature and politics, Mabel was also a gifted artist, finding inspiration in nature. Her paintings, which reflected her profound connection to the environment, were exhibited in galleries across Australia, leaving a lasting impression on all who encountered them.

Throughout her life, Mabel remained a highly esteemed member of the South Sea Islander community, embodying strength, creativity and a commitment to making a difference.

# SYMBOLS OF POWER

Exploring the artistic depiction of ships and how they are portrayed offers intriguing insights into differences between colonial and community perspectives; between contemporary and historical views.



**W.E. Bell**

Oil on paper painting, depicting Sailing Ship 'Io', c. 1890

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H12675





## Mabel Edmund

Acrylic on canvas painting, depicting a blackbirding ship and animals from Darumbal country, date unknown

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.  
QE12749

## Outrigger Canoe

Made by Ancestors

This model of an outrigger canoe is decorated with bonito and geometric shapes. Made of light timber, coconut fibre and black pigment it features many of the decorations used in canoes from Temotu in the Solomon Islands. It was donated to the museum in 1885.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E4353





## **Decorated Canoe Paddle, c. 1884**

Made by Ancestors

The illustrations on this paddle from Santa Ana, Solomon Islands, tell a detailed story of the maker's experiences. On one side we see depictions of five different vessels, the other side features people with food and guns, which appear to symbolise exchange. Collected by C F Browne

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E4353



## **Canoe Baler**

Made by Ancestors

This canoe baler came from Torba Province in Vanuatu. Hand carved from wood, it was collected by C.F. Browne, a Government Agent on labour trade vessels.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5780



## Canoe Prow ornament

Made by Ancestors

Made between 1850 and 1899, this canoe prow ornament represents a human head, shoulders and arms. Made from wood with black pigment and nautilus shell, the decorations represent face painting motifs worn by individuals from the western Solomon Islands. The ornament was collected by Peter Tornaros, a recruiter on labour trade vessels, from 1893 to 1913.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E581

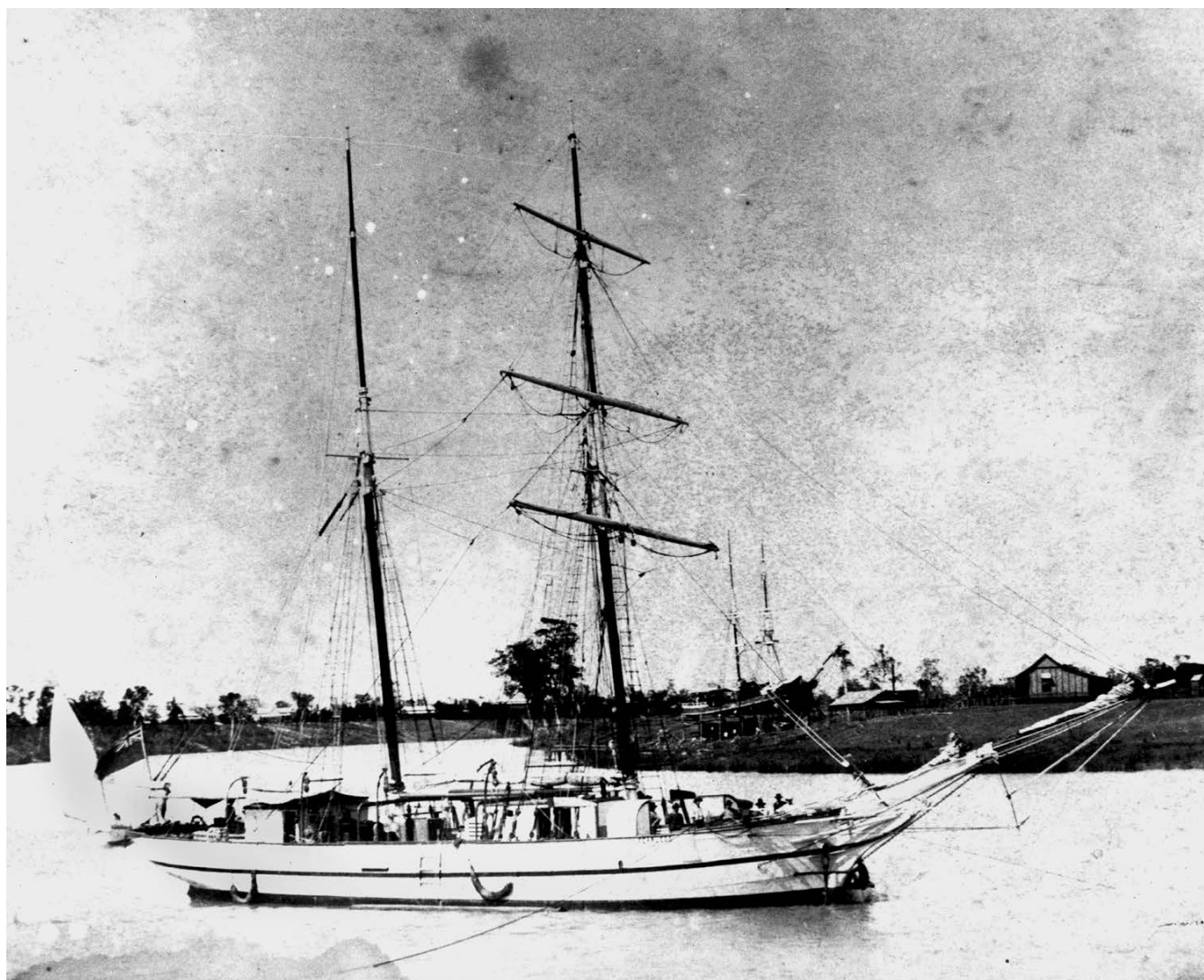
# UNDER THE WAVES

Fragments of our past live under the waves.

Located 30 nautical miles (55 kms) off Townsville on Myrmidon Reef, *Foam* is a unique shipwreck with a rare history.

In 1893, *Foam* departed Dungeness for the Solomon Islands carrying the captain, a government agent, eight European crew, six South Sea Islander crew and 84 South Sea Islanders returning home from years of work in the cane fields. All were rescued, however the ship was wrecked.

Can you imagine losing everything in an instant, including your freedom to return home? That's exactly what happened to the 84 South Sea Islander survivors on the *Foam*, who ended up in Mackay at Ashburton Plantation for another three years.



## ***Fearless***

The *Foam*, like the *Fearless* pictured here, was a two masted schooner.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 37721



## **1. Concretion of armbands and sauce bottle from the wreck of the *Foam***

Artefacts from the wreck include trade items to be used to entice workers. Included here are examples of items, possibly belonging to South Sea Islanders and items used by the crew and Government Agent. This concretion of coral, armbands and glass fragments is a typical part of shipwrecks on the reef, formed by the chemical reaction of the wreck itself and components in the water.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3502

## **2. Pipes from the wreck of the *Foam***

European manufactured pipes of varying types were found on *Foam*. Tobacco and smoking pipes were in high demand as trade commodities between labour trade vessels and South Sea Islanders.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3509, MA3310, MA3373

## **3. Armbands from the wreck of the *Foam***

These armbands were made in Europe (some specifically from Germany and Austria) to replicate Islander shell armbands. Shell armbands had various uses across the south Pacific. The armbands from *Foam* are unique as the patterns are vastly different from traditional armbands.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3500, MA3504, MA3508

#### **4. Trade beads, buttons and a shell disc from the wreck of the *Foam***

Glass beads were used extensively as trade items by South Sea Islanders. Although worn down by a century of underwater erosion, these beads are likely some of the valued belongings of the South Sea Islanders lost when *Foam* wrecked.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3307, MA3354, MA3529, MA3520

#### **5. Glass bottles from the wreck of the *Foam***

Surprisingly, glass bottles and fragments often survive well on reef top shipwrecks like *Foam*. Those found at this wreck present a range of uses and style from medicinal, to food storage and serving. It is hard to know for sure if they were carried as trade items or part of the South Sea Islander's earnings.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3314 MA 3315 MA3321 MA3322 MA3302

#### **6. Axe concretion and handle from the wreck of the *Foam***

The shape and style of the concreted axe heads indicates that they are shingling hatchets (to split shingles and put them on a roof). The large quantity found on *Foam* suggests that these were carried for trade.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. MA3500, MA3504, MA3508

# ROUTES TO OUR ROOTS

Each of us has contributed our unique experiences, traditions, languages and religions to Australia, enriching its diversity. But what if your language or traditions are discouraged?

While we don't know who these artisans were, these beautiful objects encapsulate the skill and culture of our ancestors and embody relationships, power, connection and loss.

The objects were collected from across the western Pacific between 1863 and 1904 by colonial representatives connected to the labour trade.

## **1. Woven Kiribati Body Armour, c. 1886–1905**

Made by Ancestors

Collected by W E Parry-Okeden, Police Commissioner

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5679

## **2. Personal adornment, Kiribati, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

3 strands of shells plaited together. Collected by  
Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5652

## **3. Bark hoop adornment, Kiribati, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Personal adornment, bark hoop, wrapped with twisted  
coconut fibre twine which has been regularly threaded  
through a row of 43 shells.

Collected by Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5653.1

## **4. Waist ornament, Kiribati, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5676

**5. Pig tusk arm ornament Worn by Ancestors,  
Vanuatu, c. 1883**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Government Agent Christopher Mills

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E6762.1-2

**6. Armlet, Malaita, Solomon Islands, pre-1895**

Made by Ancestor

Armlet, ABEGWARO, spondylus shell beads and black beads on string base.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E4312

**7. Armband, Solomon Islands, c. 1893–1902**

Made by Ancestor

Armband made from Tridacna gigas (giant clam shell).  
Collected by Peter Tornaros

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E546.2

**8. Comb, Malaita, Solomon Islands, c. 1886–1905**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by W E Parry-Okeden, Police Commissioner

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E1229

## **9. Comb, Malaita, Solomon Islands, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Comb made from black treefern core wood, red, yellow, black plaited design on handle.

Collected by Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E10082

## **10. Comb, Torres Group, Vanuatu, c. 1881–1884**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by C F Browne

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E4321

## **11. Fish hook, Malaita, Solomon Islands, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Fish hook made from pearlshell shank, turtleshell hook, red, blue and white glass trade beads and shell disc lure.

Collected by W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E9222, E9225, E9229

## **12. Kiribati fighting poles, 1884–1906**

Made by Ancestor

This group of fighting implements come from Kiribati.

Made of wood and shark's teeth reveal the skill and knowledge of the people who made them. Collected by Captain Robert Pearn

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E10519, E10520, E10521

### **13. Arrows from Bougainville, c. 1883–1884**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Neil McNeil who was connected to the ship, *Hopeful*.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E9822.2-4

### **14. Shield of woven cane, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, c. 1893-1902**

Made by Ancestor

Decorated with black pigment to form frigate bird design. Collected by Peter Tornaros

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E601

### **15. Shield, Solomon Islands, c. 1900**

Made by Ancestor

This shield in the middle shows the decorated woven front. This was given to a farmer in Childers by a Solomon Islands man, working in the area.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E16168

### **16. Shield, Solomon Islands, c. 1900**

Made by Ancestor

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E16169

## **17. Axe, Solomon Islands, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

This is a Solomon Islands axe from San Cristobal made from traded steel blade, wood haft, upper portion inlaid with geometric shaped nautilus shell cutouts set in black parinarium paste.

Collected by W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E310

## **18. Axe, Vanuatu, c. 1884–1906**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Captain Robert Pearn

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E10500

## **19. Steel blade axe, Vanuatu, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by W E Parry-Okeden, Police Commissioner

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E1062

## **20. Club, Loyalty Islands, 1884**

Made by Ancestor

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E4545



## **21. Club, Kiribati, c. 1885–1910**

Made by Ancestor

Collection was connected to Henry St George Caulfield,  
Polynesian Immigration Inspector.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E3396

## **22. Club, Solomon Islands, c. 1886–1906**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by W E Parry-Okeden,  
Police Commissioner

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E1023

## **23. Pots, Wusi village, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, c. 1885**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Captain J B Robertson

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5506, E5507, E5508

## **24. Woven Basket, Solomon Islands, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E11386

## **25. Woven Basket, Solomon Islands, c. 1893–1902**

Made by Ancestor

Collected by Peter Tornaros

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E605.2

## **26. Bag, Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, c. 1883–1900**

Made by Ancestor

This woven bag, made on Pentecost Island using plaited pandanus leaves, would have been used for carrying and storage.

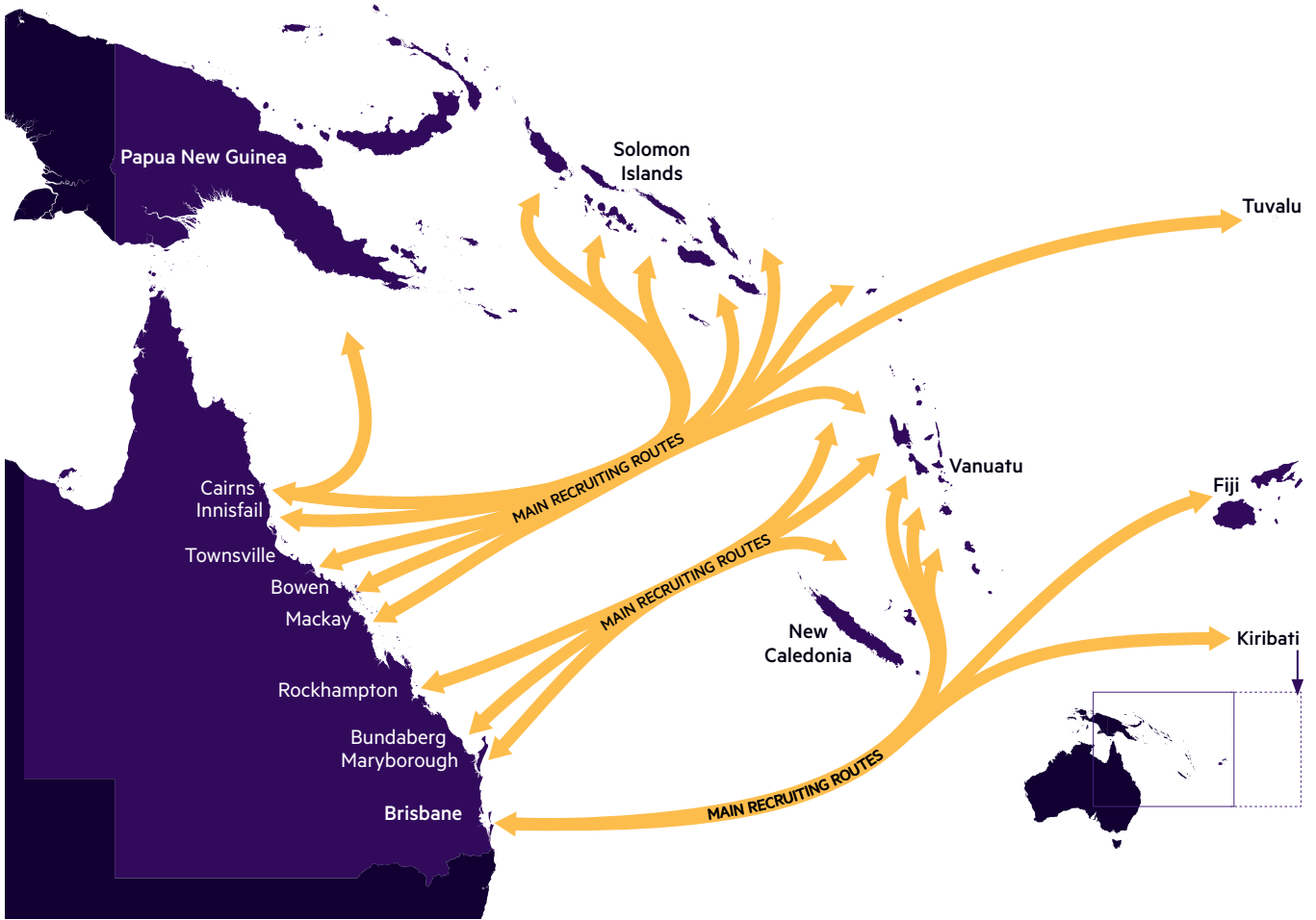
Collected by Captain W H Lawrence

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E5617

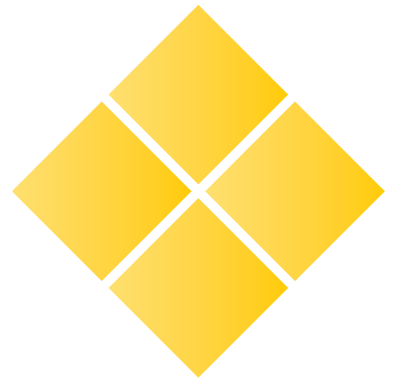
# COLONIAL LABOUR TRADE ROUTES

People came from across the islands of the Pacific as part of the labour trade. From Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia in the west, from Papua New Guinea in the north, and from Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu, further across the ocean. The early days of the Pacific Island labour trade were marked with kidnapping and violence.

Later, with subsequent regulation, others chose to journey to Australia. Over nearly four decades, more than 60,000 people made the journey, with many eventually returning to their islands at the end of their indenture.



# SWEET AS SUGAR



How do we begin to share our complex stories of South Sea Islanders and sugar?

In 1863, ships started bringing people from the Pacific to newly-established sugar plantations in Queensland. Part of a colonial pursuit of wealth through sugar production, the islands of the Pacific became a source of labour, and Islanders were exploited as commodities in the global plantation economy.

South Sea Islanders gained reputations for hard work and resilience, doing work that others couldn't or wouldn't. Life in colonial times was anything but sweet as sugar. Now we reclaim those plantation days, telling our truths of the past.



# GLOBAL CONTEXT

The movement of people from the Pacific must be considered in terms of history of global forced labour during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Beginning in the 1700s, the African slave trade saw the relocation of millions of people across the Atlantic and Indian oceans. With the abolition of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, indentured labour from Asia and the Pacific became a new source of cheap workers. Whether on Caribbean plantations, Fijian mills, or Queensland's sugar fields, the history of human movement for the cultivation of commodities like sugar, tea and tobacco is recognised as part of a global plantation economy – colloquially called the 'Plantocene'.

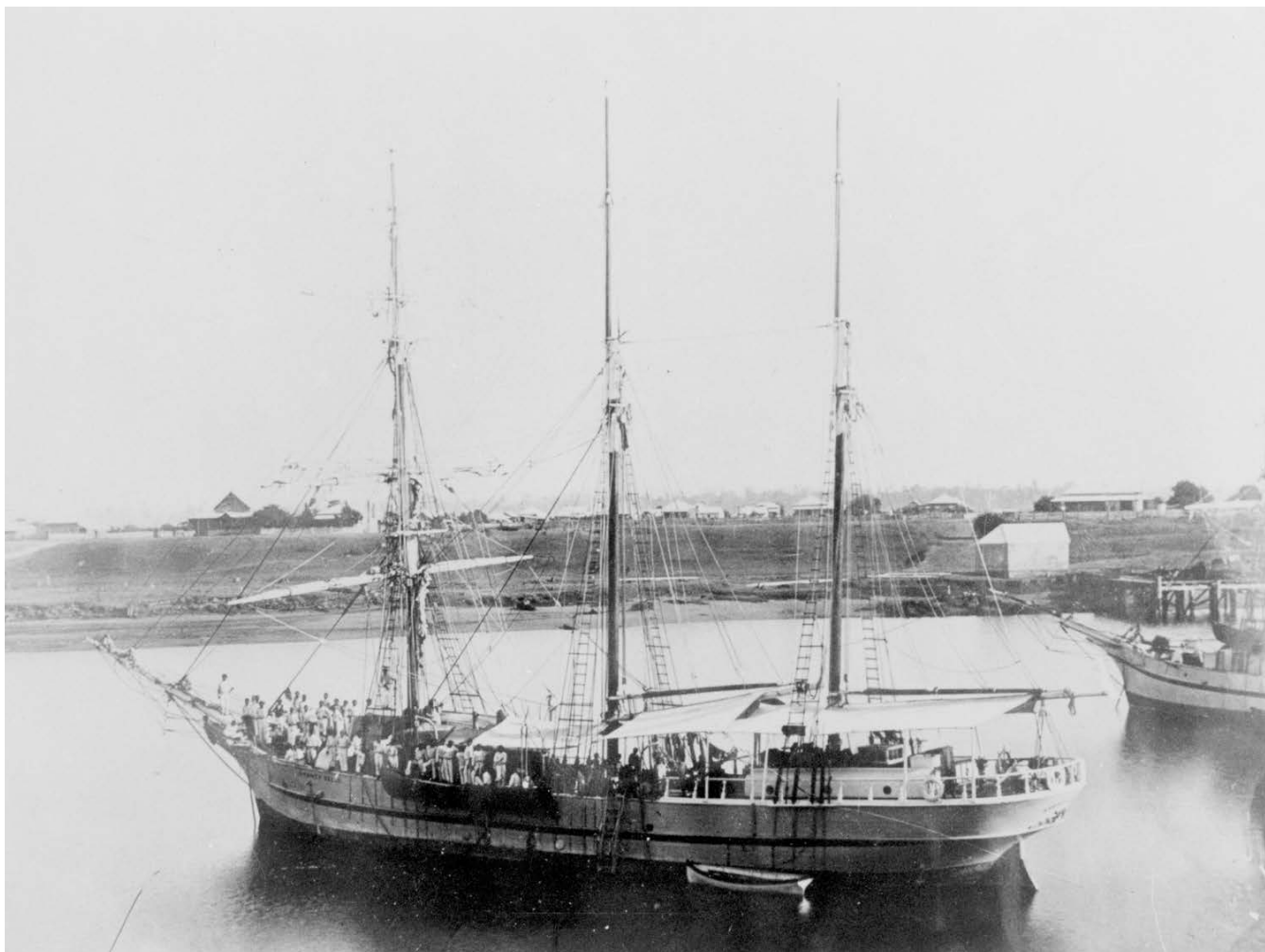
In Australia the labour trade was another facet of colonialism. At a time when colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders were entrenched, First Nations people were being forcibly removed from their traditional lands, gazetted instead as resources for pastoralism. Pacific people were similarly treated as a resource for feeding the global appetite for sugar.



## **South Sea Islanders cutting cane in the Bundaberg district, c. 1906**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. APO-032-0001-0018  
COLOURISED IMAGE COPY OF ORIGINAL POSTCARD

The name Kanaka is drawn from the Hawaiian language but was used often derogatively to describe South Sea Island labourers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today communities are reclaiming the term as an emic confirmation of cultural identity.



**Schooner used to transport South Sea Islanders  
to Queensland, c. 1890s**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. NEGATIVE NO. 157992



**Mifala saot solwota pipol**

We South Sea people

**Yu blong wea**

Where are you from

**Mi no lukum yu longtame**

Long time no see

**Wan tokok i neba nuf**

One language is never enough

**Mi glad tumas blong mitim yu**

Pleased to meet you

**Ol tugeta**

All together

**Halo**

Hello

**Welkam**

Welcome

**Lukim yu**

See you later

**Tangkyu tumas**

Thankyou very much

## **Bislama Words**

Growing out of traditional language, Bislama, a pidgin English developed by South Sea Islanders, became the language used, taking the place of island language and eventually dissociating many from their mother-tongue.

## ***Sugar, 2013***

Digital Story

Duration: 15 minutes

Interviewer: Ruth McDougall

Filmmaker: Ben Wickes

Find out how, from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, South Sea People were once again working in the cane fields, harvesting sugar. Doug Mooney, Neville Thomas and John Williams share their experiences cutting cane in the 1960s.

COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY | GALLERY OF MODERN ART. © QAGOMA

# RECLAIMING THE PLANTATION

When we look at images of verdant cane fields, whether historical photographs, paintings or contemporary images, the plantation view is powerful. Although firmly rooted in global plantation history, the sugar industry maintains contemporary significance to successive generations of Australian South Sea Islanders.

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onward, we resumed toiling in the cane fields, reclaiming our heritage and asserting ownership over our stories as a rejection of the colonial practice of seeing people as commodities. Today images of cane fields – historic or modern – speak to the intertwined histories of Australian South Sea Islanders.



**Uncle Denis Bobongie, in sugar cane field,  
Mackay, Queensland, 2019**

Photographer LaVonne Bobongie

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 31842-0001-0002



**Sugar cane plantation in Mackay,  
Queensland, c. 1874**

Photographer Richard Daintree

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. IMAGE NO. H26828



## **Sugar cane plantation in Hambledon, north Queensland, c. 1891**

Photographer Unknown

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 367015

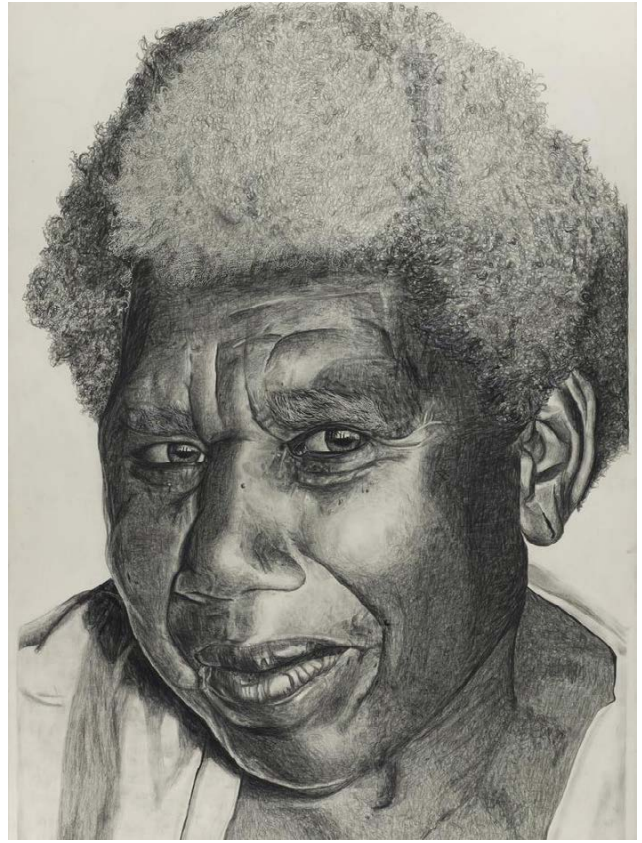
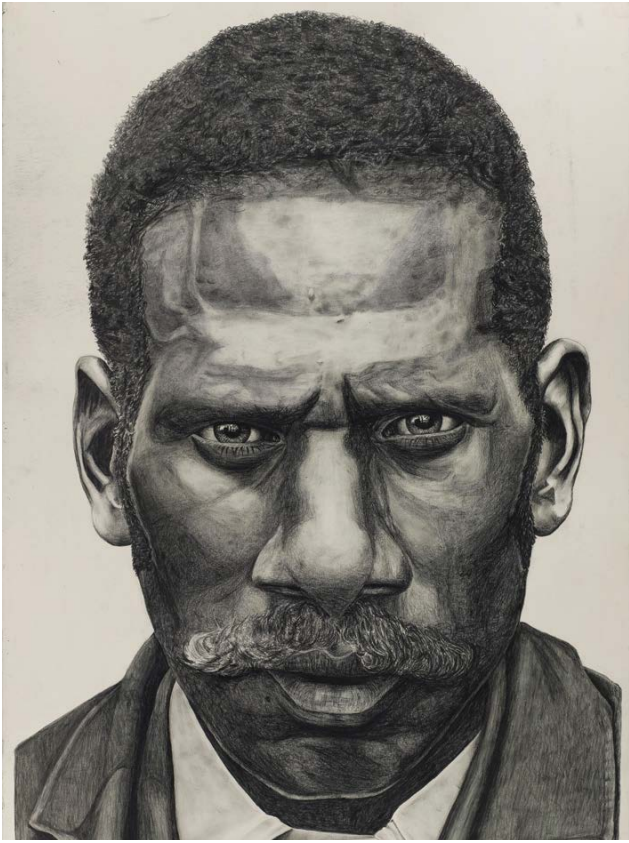


## **Sugar cane plantation near Cairns, Queensland, c. 1900**

Photographer Unknown

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H49088





# Dylan Mooney

## *Stop and Stare series, 2019*

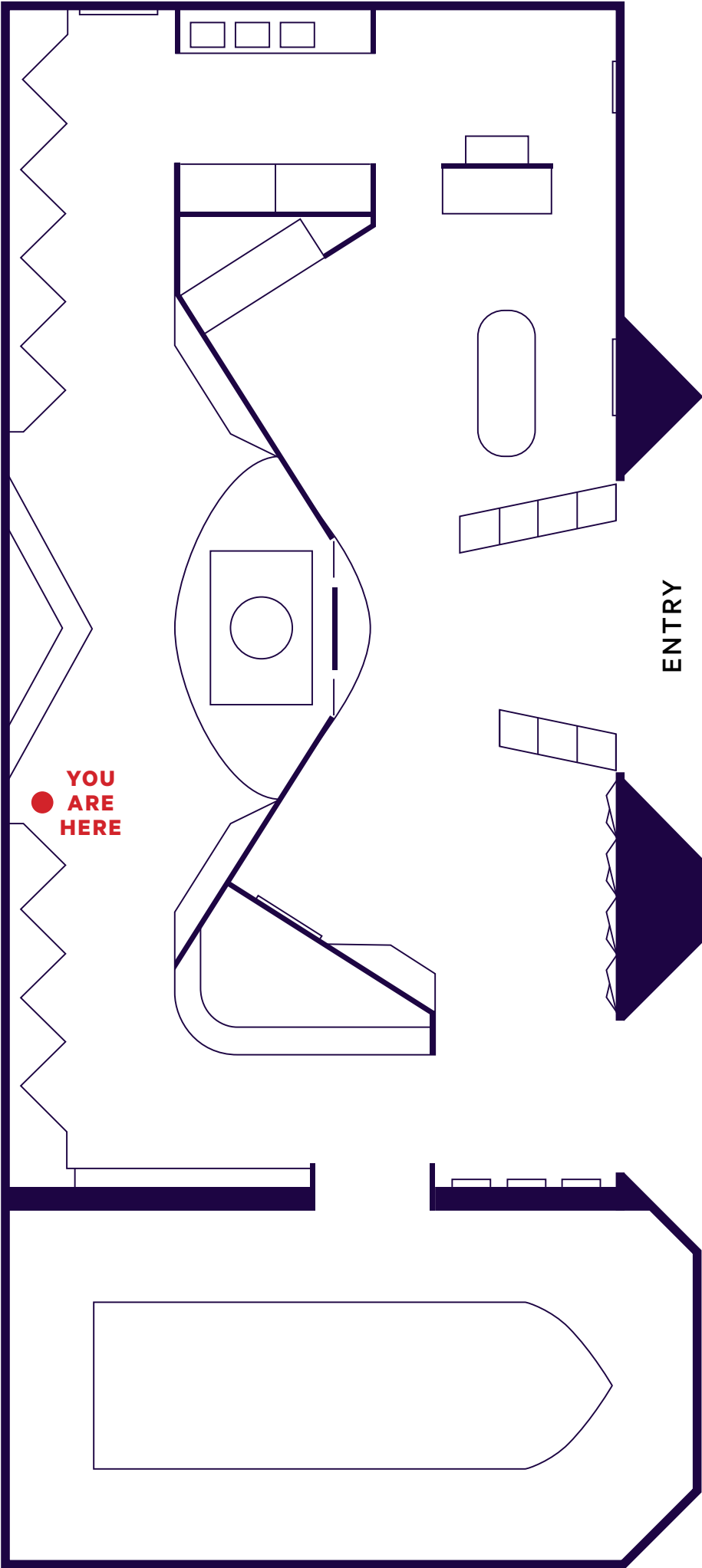
Two pencil portraits

COURTESY OF STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND

I sourced two images: one of my great-great-grandmother, Fanny Togo, who was taken from Santo Island of Vanuatu and brought to Tweed Heads, and one of a South Sea Islander man from Mackay. Each came from a different place: one from my family collection, the other from the State Library of Queensland collection. What became particularly interesting to me as I gazed at these images were the connections I made as I stared into the subjects' eyes. I grew up hearing stories about the first generation of

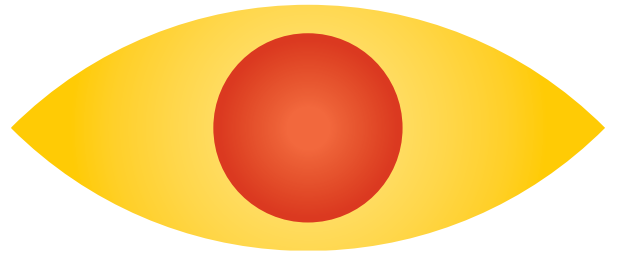
South Sea Islanders and, as I got older, I started looking at the history of blackbirding and I grew to comprehend that this is my family's history and it is a part of my own story.

By taking the time to look at these archival photographs of our people who were taken from their homes in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and other Pacific Islands, I began to understand how they got to be here, in this country and to comprehend the trajectory of this slave labour and how it drove the sugar industry.





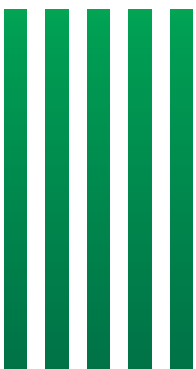
# IN SIGHT



Colonial Queensland exerted power and control over South Sea Islanders - from the clothing worn to where people lived and how they were documented.

This happened here in Queensland, in places we all know, from north to south – Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, the Sunshine Coast, Cairns and the Burdekin. The story of human exploitation and discrimination on the plantation was not hidden. It occurred within sight of employers, policymakers, and ordinary people.

Our story is now in full view. Everyday objects show our community beyond the labour provided and give new insight into our lived experience under colonial control.



# South Sea Islanders in a colonial context

From the 1860s onward, South Sea Islander men, women and children led lives controlled at every turn – by plantation owners, company overseers, colonial government policies, missionary groups and colonial social norms. However, amidst these constraints, community resilience was strengthened by cultural values.

These enduring influences are evident in the belongings people kept, whether everyday household items, sugar cane tools, or in the continued use of traditional items in a new place.



**South Sea Islander cane workers on a plantation owned by Robert Towns, near Townsville, c. 1868**

South Sea Islanders working in Queensland sometimes brought things like weapons and hunting tools from home or made them here, drawing on cultural knowledge from their homelands.

- 1. Handle of a New Hebrides club, found in Ayr**
- 2. Knuckle dusters made by South Sea Islanders in Queensland**
- 3. South Sea Islander style arrows, collected in Bundaberg in the 1890s**

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.  
QE3228, QE218.1-3, E187.3,8, E609.1

# Trade Boxes

Trade boxes often held everyday domestic items like candles, lanterns, kerosene, matches, buckets, cookware, tinned food and medicines. Other commodities such as blankets, tobacco, beads, guns and steel tools and implements were keenly sought for returning to home islands.

Made of timber or galvanised metal and usually adorned with locks, trade boxes were highly valued and represented the material gain from years of labour under indenture.



## **Trade box Rockhampton, Queensland, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers

This photograph shows a Trade Box and contents, a family heirloom belonging to Lloyd Willie of Rockhampton.

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QUEENSLAND.

IMAGE NO. 99183803719402061

18<sup>th</sup> Sept 1897

David Donald Esq  
Lawsville

Dear Sir,

Three Japanese & three  
Kaukas left for Electric Light for  
Lawsville homeward bound last Saturday.  
The steamer has unfortunately got beached  
& will not get out till Sunday or  
Monday. The six men have returned  
to the plantation, leaving their boxes  
on board and we hope you will see that  
they are kept in a safe place on arrival  
of steamer in Lawsville.

The Japs will remain here till the departure  
of the next Japanese steamer.

The Kaukas we cannot state definitely  
until we get your reply to our wire of the 15<sup>th</sup> inst.  
which we now confirm.

"Light still at mouth of Creek. No chance getting out  
till Sunday. Any use Polynesian & Japs proceeding  
Lawsville now. Our reply."

Yours faithfully

Drysdale B. S. 56  
per Douglas Brown

## Letter, 1897

Correspondence from Pioneer Mill at Brandon regarding trade boxes for South Sea Islanders returning to their home islands.

# Commodity and Companies

For 19<sup>th</sup> colonial leaders, sugar was a path to wealth – an integral part of the global trade network.

Initially, plantations were established by powerful colonial figures who saw cheap labour provided by black-birding as an economic necessity, fitting an established racial hierarchy.

By the 1880s, the industry had shifted towards centralised mills. Corporations like the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company purchased small privately owned plantations to grow and process cane in central mills. Some farms were leased back to local growers who employed South Sea Islander, Asian and European labourers.



## **South Sea Islander labourers feeding cane through rollers, Alexandra Mill, Mackay, c. 1868**

As well as working in the cane fields, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, large numbers of South Sea Islanders were also employed to work in sugar mills.

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND  
IMAGE NO. QMC02414

Everyday items like Reckitt's Blue, pipes, tobacco and flour were allocated to indentured workers as part of the payment system.

- 1. Reckitt's Blue bags**
- 2. Mass-produced clay pipes**
- 3. Typical standard issue blanket**

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.  
H14070, H13794, H13795, H31087



## **Set of four kitchen cannisters with international caricatures**

One of the outcomes of colonial capitalism was the view that national identities were based on the resources they offered. These identities, born out of the plantation as a site of labour and production, were spread through caricatures such as those depicted here.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H50730

## **Bronze Medal awarded by North Queensland Pastoral and Agricultural Association, 1885**

Production was feted in Queensland – the ‘resource’ colony. Agricultural shows promoted the “successes” of activities like growing sugar cane. While landowners were celebrated for innovation and expertise, there was little recognition for those who worked the land on their behalf.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H15484

## **Sugar Bag printed with CSR logo**

Colonial Sugar Refining Company Ltd (CSR) was established in the 1850s and began operating in Queensland in the 1870s. Key to their profitability was the use of indentured labour. This approach situated CSR as part of the colonial enterprise.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H15484

# Manufacturing

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, goods as well as people were traversing vast distances. In the sugar industry, this included the global movement of knowledge and technology, massive machinery, and the products of sugar mills.

Extract of Drawing Ledger from the records of Records of Mirrlees Watson & Co Ltd, sugar machine manufacturers, Glasgow, Scotland, 1863–1970

COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW, ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTION GB248 UGD 118-2-7-10

231							231						
Sugar Plants with							Vacuum Pans						
Drawing	Job	Engin.	Mill	Part.	ESTATE	WHERE	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	DATE				
5282	212/79			S. W. McFarlane (Consignment)		Hondolulu	Argt of Vac Pan Plant	Pan 6'-0" dia	Mill 24" x 14 1/2"	1879			
5376				M. J. F. W.		do	do	do	10 Ton Plant				
5385				do		do	do	do	5 Ton Plant				
5391	1436/79	1168	1225	M. Heredia y Hernandez		Malaga	Mill Engine & Gearing with Clarifiers	Engine 20" x 14 1/2"	28" x 5 1/2"				
5400				M. J. F. W.		Hondolulu	Vac Pan Plant	do	6 Ton Plant				
5402				do		do	do	do	(Standard) in Iron Building				
5445	542/79			C. B. Chalmers	Penang	Fiji	Alteration on General Argt for Job 212/79	Pan 6'-0" dia	24" x 14 1/2"				
5446				Brissonau Freres	Central Usine	Botto Brie	Argt of Vac Pan Plant						
5454				M. J. F. W.		do	Standard Argt with Triple Effl & Char House		26" x 5 1/2"				
5540				J. E. Moss	Anna Regina	Komerana	Block Plan of Building						
5554				M. J. F. W.		do	Standard Argt of Vac Pan Plant in Iron Building		30" x 66"	1880			
5608	542/79			do Chalmers	Penang	Fiji	Argt of Vac. Pan Plant	6'-0" dia	24" x 14 1/2"				
5640				S. Young	Victoria	Penang	Block Plan						
5673	222/80			R. J. Jeffray	Palms	Queensland	do						
5772				M <sup>rs</sup> Prindle Shaw & Co		do	Argt of Vac. Pan Refining Plant	10 Ton Plant					
5783	222/80			R. J. Jeffray	Palms	Queensland	Block Plan		30" x 66"				
5819				do	do	do	Argt of Vac. Pan Plant		30" x 66"				
5832 1/2				M. J. F. W.		do	do		24" x 14 1/2"				
5836	120/80			Col. Sug. Ref. Co	Richmond Mills	N. S. W.	Block Argt		32" x 60"				
5854	538/80			do	Nausori	Fiji	Argt of Vac. Pans, Triple Effl etc	9'-0" x 7'-6" dia					
5859				do	do	do	Block Plan	9'-0" x 7'-6" dia					
6096	17/81			R. Crau & Co	Bundaberg Ref	Queensland	Argt of Refining Plant			1881			
6102				do	do	do	do						
6104	770/80			do	do	do	do						
6192	538/80			Leon Agostini	St. Augustin	Trinidad	do						
6352	634/81			F. Parbury & Co	Nausori	Fiji	Argt of Triple Effl Supply Tanks (part Argt of Plant)						
6655	144/81			Col. Sug. Ref. Co	Victoria	Queensland	Block Plan of Building & Machinery						
6730	629/81			do	Hornbush	do	Argt of Vac. Pan Plant	7'-6" x 9'-0" dia					
6738	563/81			S. Staines	do	do	do		6'-0" dia				
6801	135/82			Shieldon & Cruzer	Rubyana	do	do		5'-0" dia x 6'-9" 20" x				
6811	115/82			Sharpe, Fletcher & Co	Lancaster	Fiji	do		8'-0" dia	38" x			
6848	730/81			J. B. Lewis	Farleigh	Queensland	Block Plan of		8'-0" dia	38" x			
6897	149/82			E. M. Long	La Habana	do	do		6'-6" dia	26" x			
6900	52/81			Swallow & Ariel	do	do	Argt of Vac. Pan Plant		7'-6" dia				
7066	115/82			Col. Sug. Ref. Co	Victoria	Queensland	do		7'-6" dia x 9'-0"				
7098	135/82			J. B. Lewis	Farleigh	do	do		8'-0" dia	38" x 66"			
				Sharpe, Fletcher & Co	Lancaster	Fiji	do		8'-0" dia	38" x 72"			
							do		with Refinery				

# PEOPLE'S LIVES

South Sea people lived and worked on plantations and nearby mills, located where work and domestic lives could be monitored and controlled.

At other times, South Sea Islanders were set apart, out of sight, keeping everyday living conditions hidden. This separation however allowed people to make some of their own choices drawing on traditional practices, including clothing, growing their own produce, catching fish, and practising religion.

Over time, the diverse South Sea cultures developed and formed communities that still continue today.

Despite the often-absent names, these labourers were people, not resources. Each have histories that are not recorded. Perhaps they took pride in their work, laughed with their children, sang together, celebrated family milestones, and slept with the creak of hut roofs above their heads.



### **A South Sea Islander woman plants sugar cane in a Queensland field, c. 1897**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 142325



### **A South Sea Islander labourer stands in the sugar cane fields at Bingera, Queensland, c. 1898**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 142325



**A South Sea Islander boy has his photo taken at Innisfail, Queensland, c. 1902**

Photographer  
William Pettigrew Wilson

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 128209



**A South Sea Islander labourer, his bride and their wedding party pose for a photo, Mackay District, Queensland, c. 1890**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 37936



**South Sea Islanders gather for a garden party near Mackay, Queensland, c. 1890s**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 172501



**South Sea Islander women work  
in the cane fields, Hambledon  
Mill, Queensland, c. 1891**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 172501



**‘A day off from the cane fields’:  
South Sea Islander labourers  
gather around a drum outside  
a hut in Innisfail, Queensland,  
c. 1902**

Photographer  
William Pettigrew Wilson

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 128864

Cane work tools barely changed over nearly a century – until the advent of mechanised harvesters. Sometimes made with whatever material was available, other times changed to suit personal taste, these tools speak to the back-breaking labour of planting, cutting and stripping sugar cane to supply the mills.

**This cane knife was owned by Colin Quakawoot from Erakala, Queensland**

**This cane stripper was used on a cane farm on the Sunshine Coast.**

**Hessian sugar bags were everyday items in sugar mills and domestic homes.**

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION.  
E16946, H27725, H26109





## **South Sea Islander labourers stand alongside horse-drawn wagons loaded with sugar cane, Mackay region, c. 1890**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.  
IMAGE NO. QMC01788

### **Sugar Cane cart**

The horse drawn wagon symbolised the wealth that came from sugar, the exploitation of colonial policies and, at the same time, the strength and endeavour of sugar workers. Imagine loading thousands of cubic metres of sugar cane onto these carts.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. H45400





QUEENSLAND MUSEUM, PETER WADDINGTON

# Luther Cora

## ***Double Edged Blade – Blessing or Curse, 2024***

### **Three-dimensional sculpture, cane knives**

ON LOAN FROM THE ARTIST

*Double Edged Blade – Blessing or Curse* aims to explore the complex history and identity of Australian South Sea Islanders. The centrepiece of the installation consists of cane knives, each adorned with family names and traditional style artwork, suspended from a leaf representing fruit trees.

The traditional artwork on the cane knives represents the vibrant culture that emerged from the hardships of slavery. It highlights how the cane knife, once a tool of oppression, has now become an integral part of the community's culture and identity. This transformation prompts contemplation on whether our history is a blessing or a curse.

The leaf from which the cane knives hang, symbolises the fruit trees that hold significant meaning within the Luther's family. Each fruit tree marking where a South Sea Islanders had been buried. The abundance of fruit trees on their land at Forest Hill, Tweed Valley, serves as a poignant reminder of the lives and legacies of those who came before them.

Double Edged Blade – Blessing or Curse encourages viewers to engage in a deep and introspective dialogue about the historical legacy of Australian South Sea Islanders, the resilience of their culture, and the ongoing quest for identity and belonging.

## **The Artist**

Luther Cora is a contemporary artist who hails from the rich cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal and Australian South Sea Islander heritage. With a diverse range of artistic skills, Luther works across various mediums including photography, painting, and sculpture just to name a few. However, it is in the realm of portrait photography where Luther has dedicated the past few years, focusing on honing his craft and capturing the essence of his subjects.

Through his art, Luther's love for culture, family, family stories, family history, and faith shines through. His work serves as a reflection of his deep appreciation for his roots and the importance of preserving and sharing these narratives. Luther's artistic expressions are a testament to his passion for capturing the beauty and diversity of his heritage, while also conveying the profound connections that bind us all.

# POWER AND CONTROL

Island labourers worked for minimum wage, under almost constant surveillance by overseers and plantation owners, receiving accommodation, meals, clothing, medical care and paid return voyages. However, in some cases, wages were withheld until the end of the indenture period.

The practices of the Caribbean plantations could be seen in the use of overseers.

Initially, limited regulations led to South Sea Islanders enduring poor conditions, resulting in high mortality rates due to illness and injury.

Overseers, reminiscent of those from the slave fields of the Caribbean, controlled work in the cane fields.



**South Sea Islanders outside a plantation building, Townsville, Queensland, c. 1870**

Photographer Richard Daintree

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 189099



**A group of Australian South Sea Islander women work on a sugar cane plantation near Cairns, Queensland, c. 1895**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 63220



**South Sea Islander canecutters  
work along the lower section of  
the Herbert River, Queensland,  
c. 1878**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 100731



**South Sea Islander labourers  
plant sugar cane at a plantation  
in Mackay in the 1870s**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 21683



**South Sea Islanders with two  
overseers, in front of hut,  
Burrum Park, Queensland  
c. 1883–1940**

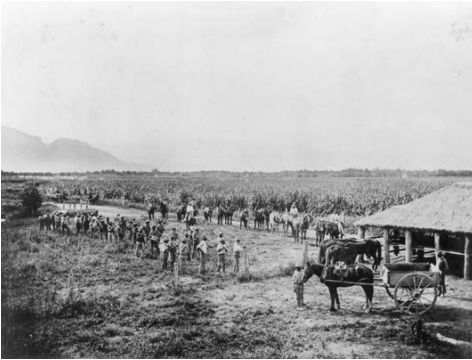
Photographer R. Trevor, Childers

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. QE14404



**South Sea Islander labourers  
hoe a field at Herbert River,  
Queensland c. 1902**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 16956



**South Sea Islander labourers  
gather together on a plantation  
in Halifax, Queensland, c. 1895**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 18057



# THE MATERIALITY OF THE PLANTATION

It's hard to imagine everything that moved across the globe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

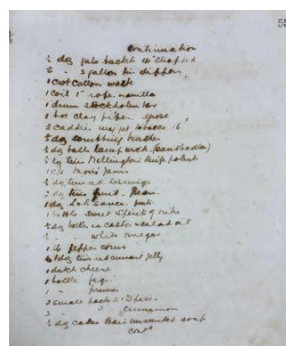
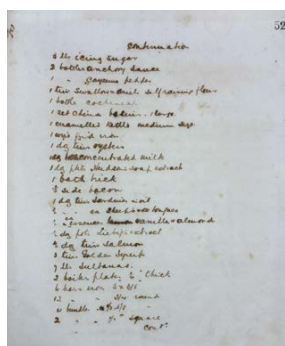
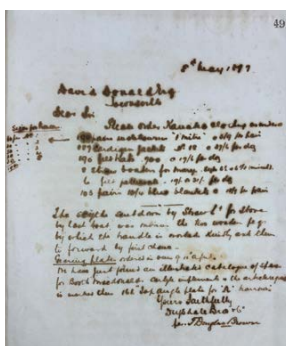
The movement of people that came with the labour trade saw tens of thousands of men, women and children creating displaced or diasporic communities.

At the same time, everything from buttons to beam engines, woollen blankets to Worcestershire Sauce, were shipped to Queensland to supply sugar plantations, while sugar made the return journey.

This correspondence list of supplies ordered from Pioneer Mill near Ayr shows the kinds of food and everyday supplies used on a plantation.

See if you can find the clay pipes, clothing, tobacco and tea that were not only staples but also regulated supplies under legislation.

COURTESY JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY





# DOCUMENTS OF DOMINATION

From the 1860s, in addition to the rigid controls of the plantation, South Sea Islanders had their lives heavily regulated by various laws. These regulations governed their employment terms, where they could go and what they could and could not possess. The documents presented here, which many did not have access to, highlight the pervasive control exerted over peoples' lives.

## 1868 Polynesian Labourers Act (Queensland)

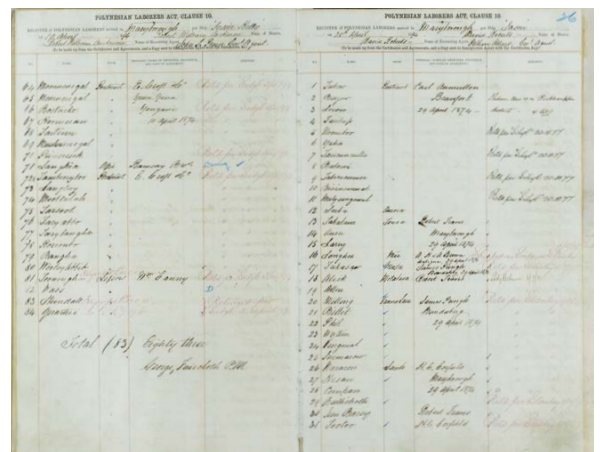
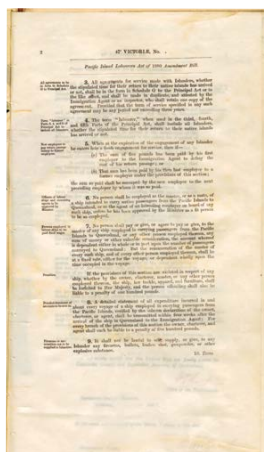
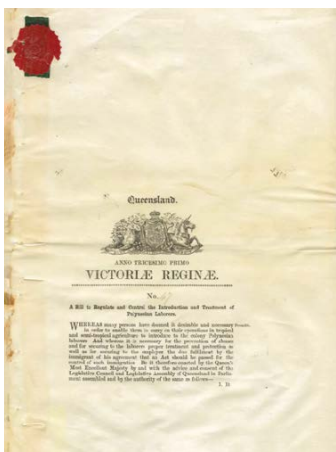
COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM1543615

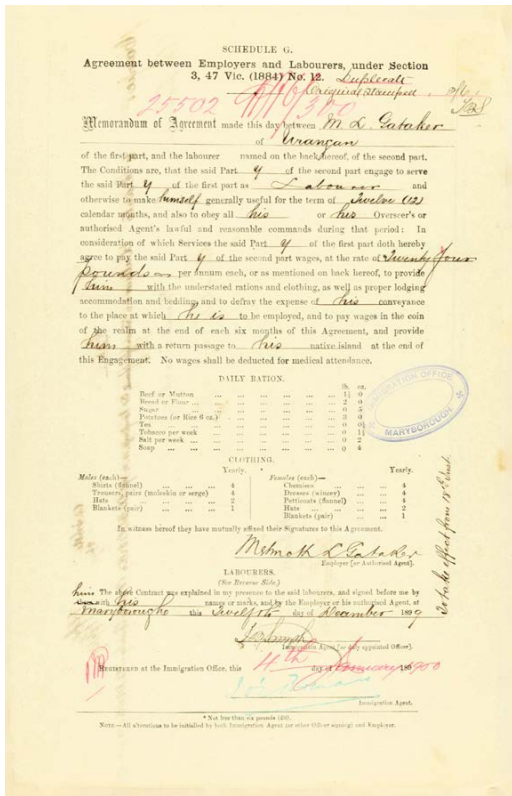
## Register of Arrivals of Pacific Islanders to the Port of Maryborough, 1874

COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM18829

## 1884 Pacific Islands Labourers Amendment Act (Queensland)

COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. SRS 1296/1/17





# EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE

From 1863 onwards, the Queensland Government gradually implemented controls for indentured labour. Legislation issued guidelines covering everything from pay and contract length, clothes and food supplied and conditions for returning to home islands.

Form D from Polynesian Labourers Act, denoting payment conditions and supplies.

COURTESY OF QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES ITM18831

**1862 Coolie Act (Queensland)**

**1864 Sugar and Coffee Regulations (Queensland)**

**1867 Aliens Act (Queensland)**

**1868 Polynesian Labourers Act (Queensland)**

**1877 Polynesian Labourers Act Amendment Bill (Queensland)**

**1880 Pacific Islanders Labourers Act (Queensland)**

**1884 Pacific Island Labourers Amendment Act (Queensland)**

**1884 Sugar Works Guarantee Act (Queensland)**

**1885 Central Mill Act (Queensland)**

**1892 Pacific Islanders Extension Act (Queensland)**

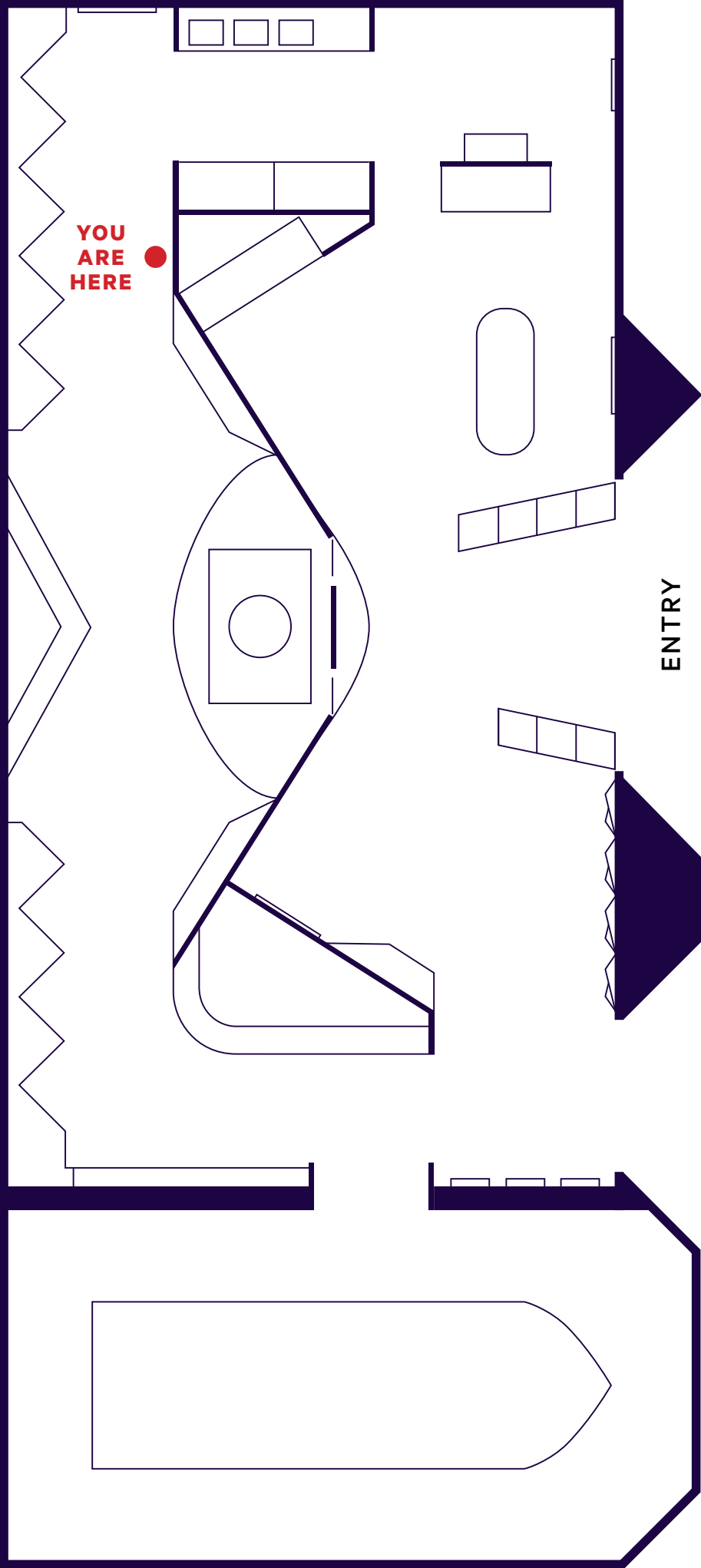
**1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act (Queensland)**

**1901 Pacific Island Labourers Act (Commonwealth)**

**1901 Immigration Restriction Act (Commonwealth)**

**1906 Pacific Island Labourers Amendment Act**

From 1863 onwards, the Queensland Government gradually implemented controls to exploit indentured labourers. Legislation issued guidelines covering everything from pay and contract length, clothes and food supplied and conditions for returning to home islands.



**YOU  
ARE  
HERE**

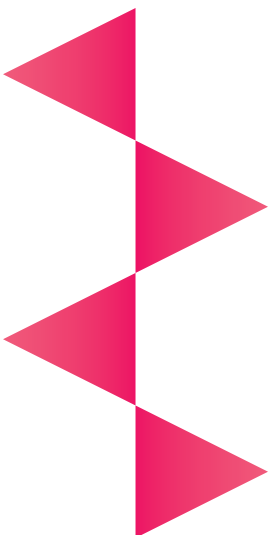
**ENTRY**

# STAY OR GO



The 1901 Federation of Australia marked a pivotal moment for South Sea Islanders. Queensland and five other states formed the Commonwealth of Australia, a constitutional monarchy under British rule.

The Immigration Restriction Act, passed in December 1901, enforced the White Australia Policy, limiting immigration to ‘whites only,’ mainly from Britain, and excluding non-white migrants. This policy led to the forced removal of South Sea Islanders, the largest deportation in Australia’s history. Through adversity and activism, our Australian South Sea Islander identity began to emerge.





# WHITE AUSTRALIA POLICY

The White Australia Policy was a racist national strategy operational from 1901 until the Anti-Discrimination Act was enacted in 1975. It enabled Australia to define itself as a flourishing new nation ripe for hard-working and skilled white labour, with a growing population of British and European heritage.

Early legislation gave power to immigration officers to insist non-European migrants sit a 50-word dictation test in any European language, later changing to be any language, chosen by the officer. Significant numbers of migrants were denied entry to Australia based on this test or simply did not apply. Exemptions were possible but rare. By the 1950s,

this requirement was dropped due to Australia's declining population growth and, by 1966, immigration was based on skills rather than race.

For First Nations peoples and South Sea Islanders, the policy enforced discriminatory laws. One of these, the Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901, ended indentured labour and mandated the deportation of non-Europeans.

### **Portrait of a South Sea Islander known as Sam**

Photographer Donald George Marquis

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 18050

### **Portrait of two South Sea Islander women, 1901**

PHOTOGRAPHER D MACFARLANE

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 178343

# The Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901

Around 10,000 South Sea Islander indentured servants worked in Queensland and northern New South Wales in 1901. The Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1901 prohibited new indenture agreements from March 1904. By the end of 1906, all existing agreements were invalid.

The Act ended nearly 40 years of South Sea Islander labour and meant immediate deportation for many families settled in Queensland. It was criticised as inhumane and unjust by the Queensland Government, dignitaries, religious groups, and South Sea Islanders themselves, leading to a Royal Commission into deportation in 1906.

## **Pacific Island Labourers Act, 1901**

An Act to provide for the Regulation, Restriction, and Prohibition of the Introduction of Labourers from the Pacific Islands and for other purposes.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA. A1559, 1901/16

## ***A White Australia, 1901***

*A White Australia: The Kanaka labour question: sugar growing in Queensland: The part played by the Black Man: A Herald Investigation*

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. RBJ 331.629597 WHI



# VOICES OF DISSENT

Returning home was difficult and dangerous for many South Sea Islanders. While some willingly returned to their home islands, many preferred not to, having lived away for decades, taking up successive contracts and embracing Christianity and customs in contrast to traditional life and beliefs. Some had intermarried into other cultural groups and started families, and their children had been born and educated in Queensland. Their way of life, social connections, and even diet had changed.

From 1901, South Sea Islander communities in Mackay, Rockhampton and Bundaberg lobbied the government to overturn deportation orders or grant more exemptions from the Act. The Queensland Kanaka Mission and others, both in Queensland and abroad, supported dissenters, creating significant opposition to the government's actions.

In 1902, over 3,000 South Sea Islanders petitioned King Edward VII arguing against forced deportation. While the petition was largely ignored, it demonstrated that South Sea Islanders were politically attuned and could mobilise themselves.



## **South Sea Islander children at Innisfail, Queensland, c. 1902–1905**

Photographer William Pettigrew Wilson

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 128207

## **An English Church Mission to South Sea Islanders in Nambour, Queensland, 1906**

Photographer A W Newbery

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 23832

## **Quote from Children's petition, 1903**

PREPRODUCTION QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM861835

**We therefore appeal to you, that representations be made to the proper authorities, that separation of families may not take place, and that all our parents may be permitted to live in this the country of our birth.**



## **Queensland Kanaka Mission textbook, Bundaberg, 1903**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. RBJ 268.4 TEX

## **Postcard of South Sea Islander girl holding flowers**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. POSTCARD COLLECTION NO. 1900–2013

## **Postcard of South Sea Islander plantation workers**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. POSTCARD COLLECTION NO. 1900–2013

## **Nambour petition, 1903**

The Nambour petition addresses the disparity in sugar cane payment, urging that the petition be sent to “Big Master to you”.

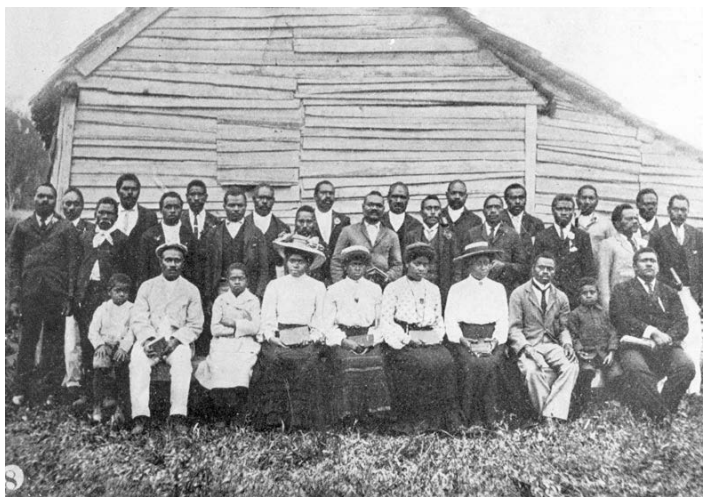
Correspondence and associated papers relating to Pacific Island Labourers and deportation, and effects on the sugar industry. The list includes names of persons requesting exemption, and regarding wages.

ON LOAN FROM THE COLLECTION HELD AT QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM861835

# QUEENSLAND ROYAL COMMISSION

In 1906, the Queensland Government established a Royal Commission to investigate the deportation of South Sea Islanders and its impact on the sugar industry. Over 300 witnesses, including South Sea Islanders, government representatives, missionaries, plantation and mill owners, and other stakeholders provided testimony from various corners of Queensland. These first-hand accounts offer invaluable perspectives on individual cases, daily operations, and the complexity of the situation in Queensland at the time.

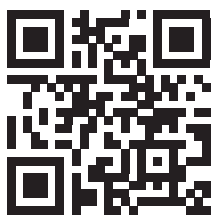
The sugar industry was considered vital to Queensland's economy, but the new wave of Australian nationalism embodied as the White Australia Policy meant a shift to white-only labour, raising concerns about increased costs affecting the industry's viability.



## **Members of the South Sea Island Mission in the Nambour district, Queensland, 1906**

Photographer A W Newbery

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 23822



Explore first-hand accounts of life in 1906, through the testimonies given at the Royal Commission.

## **Royal Commission Report, 1906**

Brisbane, Government Printer

Report of the Royal Commission including minutes of proceedings, minutes of evidence taken before the commission, and appendices.

ON LOAN FROM JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY,  
STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. Q 338.17361 QUE

# Kyra Mancktelow

## *Hard Work (sugar) Garment, 2024*

**Unique state prints on 350gsm Hahnemuhle paper**

ON LOAN FROM THE ARTIST

This printed garment investigates long-lasting legacies of colonialism that encapsulates invisible codes of incarceration. This allows us to ask questions such as how we remember and acknowledge the South Sea Islander presence within Queensland's landscape and the sugar industry.

The fabric used to create this Hard Work (sugar) Garment is Tarleton which traditionally is used to remove coloured ink from the etching plate—dichotomously this acts as a metaphor of scratching away cultural ways and identity.

My hope is to draw upon the strength of our South Sea Islander ways and cultural identity by interrupting the colonial narrative by replacing the western tools with traditional objects from the museum collection.

## **The Artist**

Kyra Mancktelow's multidisciplinary practice investigates legacies of colonialism, posing important questions such as how we remember and acknowledge Australian histories.

A Quandamooka artist, Kyra has links to the Mardigan people of Cunnamulla and South Sea Islanders from Vanuatu. Kyra's practice includes printmaking, ceramics, and sculpture – each applying a unique and distinct aesthetic. Kyra works with various materials to share her rich heritage, stories, and traditions to educate audiences and strengthen her connection to Country and culture. Her printmaking explores intergenerational trauma.



# DEPORTATION CORRESPONDENCE

Deportation ceased in mid-1908 with 1654 South Sea Islanders officially allowed to remain. The figure was likely higher and from this group extensive family and community networks were nurtured to form the many Australian South Sea Islander communities across Queensland today.

## The Pacific Islanders Association

The Pacific Islanders Association was formed in 1901 to oppose deportation. In 1906, it submitted a petition to Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, signed by 426 people from Mackay, Proserpine and Ayr, advocating for all South Sea Islanders to remain in Queensland.

Henry Tonga (Tongoa), the Chairperson, boldly testified, citing Islanders' belief that leasing of farmland would avoid deportation. Henry, who arrived from the New Hebrides as a child in 1884, presented an articulate letter expressing the Association's position.

# **To the Members, Sugar Commission**

*Sirs, – We ask you to leave all the ‘boys’ who want to stop in Queensland alone. Some of the ‘boys’ have got ground, and houses, and horses, and drays and ploughs, and plenty of other things, and they have spent all their money and a lot they have borrowed from their mates, in buying these things, and building houses and fences and doing work. Many them are married, and have wives, and children born in Queensland, and they don’t want the children to go back to islands, because they think a lot would die because of the tucker and way of living at the islands are not the same as in Queensland. Also the children learn in Queensland, but do not at the islands. Some men are married to women from other islands, and it would not be safe for either to go to the other’s place; and what about the children if they separate?*

*Plenty men came to Queensland because of trouble at home, and if they went back they would be killed, and so they are frightened to go. And plenty of men who have been away for ten years or more (some twenty, and some thirty) have been forgotten by all their people at home and would be all the same newchums. No one would care for them if they went back; they would have to buy everything fresh, and begin all new; no one to help them, and most of their old friends dead or gone away. The white men asked us to come to this country and work for them, and the Government asked us to come, and said they would look out for us if we came, and we came and trusted to the white men, and now if he does*

*not want us any more all right, but he should let us alone; we don't want to do him any harm, we only say don't drive us away. Plenty who don't care will go home themselves, but please don't drive away those who want to stop; you brought us here, we did not come ourselves.*

*We give you the names of some of our people who are married and living in Mackay with the names of their wives, and how many children they have. You will see that some of them are married to women of different islands to themselves.*

*For Pacific Islanders' Association,  
Henry Tongoa, Chairman  
Mackay, 17 April, 1906*

## **Pacific Island Labourers' Act 1880 Amendment Act of 1884 Certificate of Exemption 1884**

Certificate of Exemption, 1884 for Tolomack or Maggie aged 20.

ON LOAN FROM JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. OM79-13/4

## **Australian South Sea Islanders at the Dillybar settlement near Nambour, Queensland, 1906**

Image appeared in The Queenslander, 10 November 1906

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 23817

## **Letter from the Chairman of the Sugar Industry Labour Commission, 1906**

This letter from the Chairman of the Sugar Industry Labour Commission requests information in relation to the farm leases of 93 Pacific Islanders in the Mackay district. It includes a list of South Sea Islanders first and last names and the location of their farms.

ON LOAN FROM THE COLLECTION HELD AT QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM1238617

## **Letter from the Chairman of the Sugar Industry Labour Commission, 1906**

This letter from the Chairman of the Sugar Industry Labour Commission requests information in relation to the farm leases of 93 Pacific Islanders in the Mackay district. It includes a list of South Sea Islanders first and last names and the location of their farms.

ON LOAN FROM THE COLLECTION HELD AT QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM1238617

## ***Kanakas – deportation of, Melbourne, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1906***

Copy of correspondence between the Prime Minister and the Premier of Queensland (23rd July to 3rd August 1906) and Departmental memorandum.

ON LOAN FROM JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

## **South Sea Islanders are searched by police for ammunition and firearms before deportation from Cairns, Queensland, 1906**

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. NEGATIVE NO. 70056

# POWER AND CONTROL

Island labourers worked for minimum wage, under almost constant surveillance by overseers and plantation owners, receiving accommodation, meals, clothing, medical care and paid return voyages. However, in some cases, wages were withheld until the end of the indenture period.

The practices of the Caribbean plantations could be seen in the use of overseers.

Initially, limited regulations led to South Sea Islanders enduring poor conditions, resulting in high mortality rates due to illness and injury.

## **Petition sent to the Governor of Queensland**

This petition was sent to the Governor of Queensland from solicitors in Cairns representing South Sea Islanders. Note the places where there are marks against labourers' names in lieu of signatures.

ON LOAN FROM THE COLLECTION HELD AT QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM1238605

## ***Takin-we-her* Passbook, 1883–1922**

### ***Takin-we-her* Certificate of Exemption**

Reproduction of *Takin-we-her* hand-mark signature on back of Certificate of Exemption

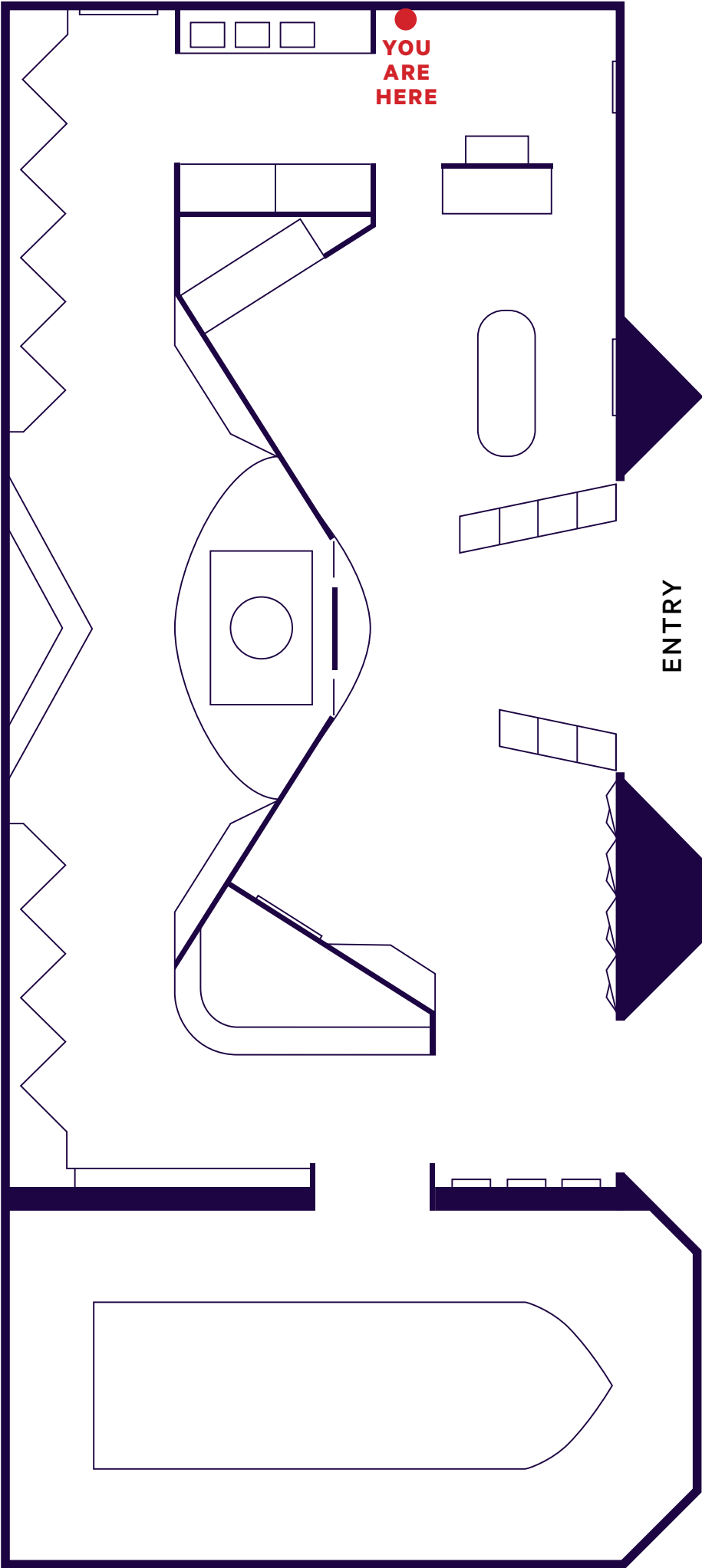
ON LOAN FROM JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. OM79-17/28

## **Register of Pacific Island labourers, c. 1865–1904**

ON LOAN FROM THE COLLECTION HELD AT QUEENSLAND STATE ARCHIVES. ITM18598

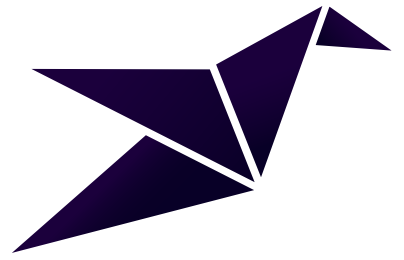
## **Views of Townsville and Herbert River photograph album, 1874–1882**

ON LOAN FROM JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. APO-22





# SERIES OF FRAGMENTS



For too long our stories have been told by others.

To reclaim our past, we are exploring libraries, archives, museum collections and places in and beyond the plantation. Through documents, photographs and objects in collections, and archaeological excavations and mapping, we uncover and piece together our stories and shared experiences.

In these fragments we are reclaiming our stories.



# RECLAIMING PLACES

Sometimes when you visit places from the past, it can feel as if only memories remain. But when we look closely, we may uncover small fragments – an old fruit tree, broken crockery, a vine-covered wall.

These fragments enable archaeologists, botanists and soil scientists to reveal stories about the past and help communities to reconnect with places – places that might otherwise have disappeared.

From 2019 to 2023, Queensland Museum staff, university researchers and the Australian South Sea Islander community have worked as a team to reveal the past through these material fragments.

## **Chris and Des Tambo visit the excavation at Pioneer Mill, Bandon, 2022**

PHOTOGRAPH IMELDA MILLER

## **Adele Zubrzycka, Andrew Fairbairn and Zia Youse look for traces of plants in a soil sample from Pioneer Mill, 2023**

PHOTO COURTESY ADELE ZUBRZYCKA

## **Professor Thomas Baumgartl, Federation University, undertakes a soil survey at the Malamoo family hut in 2023**

PHOTOGRAPH GERALDINE MATE

## **Ayr Community Elders visit the archaeological excavations at Pioneer Mill, Brandon**

PHOTO COURTESY OF ADELE ZUBRZYCKA

## **Adele Zubrzycka and Juanita Henaway artefact recording at Pioneer Mill, Brandon, 2022**

PHOTOGRAPH IMELDA MILLER

## **Tomasina Bickey, Monica Leo and Vicky Leo at a community workshop at Joskeleigh, March 2023**

PHOTOGRAPH GERALDINE MATE

## **Rockhampton and Joskeleigh community members share a meal following a tour of culturally significant places around Rockhampton, March 2023**

PHOTO GERALDINE MATE

## **Bev Cole and Tracey Veava looking at artefacts during excavations at Pioneer Mill, 2022**

PHOTOGRAPH IMELDA MILLER

## **Shaylene Beer, Eddie Cole and Tracey Veava look at historical photos during a community visit to the archaeological excavations at Pioneer Mill, Brandon, 2022**

PHOTOGRAPH GERALDINE MATE

# Pioneer Mill

Pioneer Mill, near Brandon in the Burdekin district, has employed South Sea Islanders spanning 130 years.

Recent excavations in 2022 unearthed artefacts in the spot where South Sea Islander huts were believed to have been situated. These excavations uncovered fragments of everyday life in the past.

Burdekin community members visited the excavations, forging emotional and tangible connections to their ancestors and reclaiming a piece of their South Sea Islander heritage.



# Artefacts from excavation in 2022 at Pioneer Mill, near Brandon, North Queensland

- 1. Beads**
- 2. Buttons from clothing**
- 3. Pipe fragments**
- 4. Fragment of teapot**
- 5. Ceramic fragments of toothpaste jar**
- 6. Fragments of glass from lamp chimney**
- 7. Fragment of milk glass used in a domestic lamp**
- 8. Fragment of Stoneware storage jar**
- 9. Fragments of ceramic cup and saucer**

COURTESY OF ADELE ZUBRZYCKA, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND,  
AND THE BURDEKIN AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDER COMMUNITY

# Joskeleigh

For the Malamoo family, their old hut at Joskeleigh holds cherished memories of their grandparents, Charles and Nora Malamoo. Family stories tell of pride in the garden and its amazing mulberries and watermelons. Soil analysis undertaken in 2023 reveals Mr Malamoo's deep understanding of the landscape and his ability to make the most of what was available. His knowledge of soil improvement and placement of the garden contributed to the family's prosperity.

This analysis also exposes the paucity of the soil that the South Sea community settled on in Joskeleigh.





## **Old house belonging to the Malamoo family at Joskeleigh, Queensland, 2000**

PHOTOGRAPHER BRIAN ROGERS. JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF  
QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 28873-0001-0138



# OUR VOICES OUR MEMORIES

Explore some of the places and stories that are important for communities across Queensland. Discover shared memories about life in regional Queensland, life beyond sugar.

**Heritage-listed stone wall built by South Sea Islanders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at Bargara near Bundaberg, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers

JOHN OXLEY LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND. IMAGE NO. 28873-0001-0188



# Joella Warkill

***Tuta, 2024***

**Spoken Word**

**Written and performed by Joella Warkill**

**Filmmaker: Indie Media House**

**Duration: 4 minutes 45 seconds**

SUPPORTED BY QUEENSLAND MUSEUM

In this piece of poetry Joella tells the story of her maternal grandmother, her 'Tuta'. Her 'Tuta' is a first generation Australian South Sea Islander woman who lives to pass on the stories of her time as a young woman working throughout Queensland and experiencing survival through the employment of European families. Here, poetry interferes with cultural taboos and creates a safe space between a grandmother and her granddaughter. In this poem, you're hearing intergenerational learning, healing and growing.

## **The Artist**

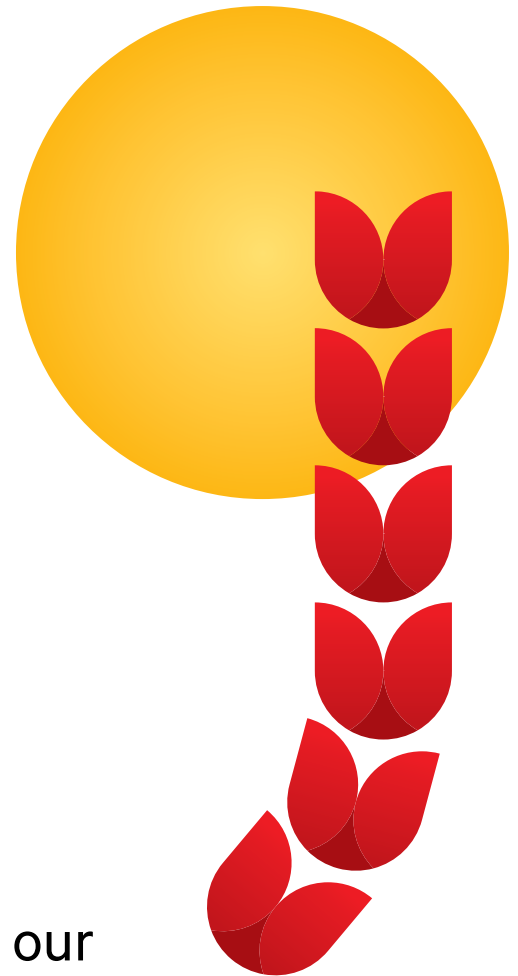
Joella Warkill is a proud South Sea Islander and First Nations woman. Joella's great grandparents were taken from Pentecost Island and Ambrym Island in Vanuatu as kids. Born and raised on Darumbal country, Joella has connections to Kanaka Town in Rockhampton and Joskeleigh, and her mob are the Yidinji people from Far North Queensland through her maternal grandfather.

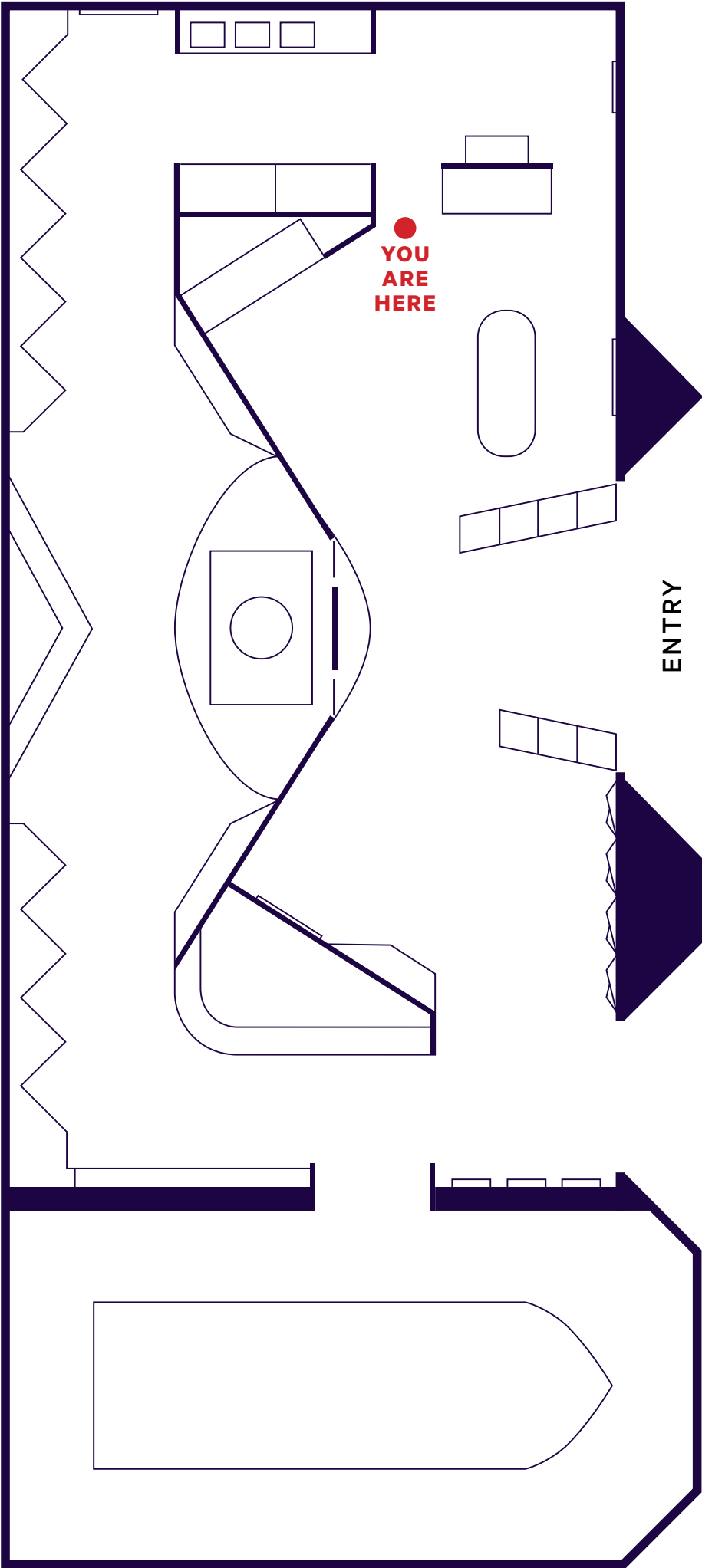
Joella's poetry has allowed her to take up spaces including Queensland Museum, Institute of Modern Art, a Parliamentary Hearing, 2018 Commonwealth Games whilst being published online in SBS, Fern Collective and Hey Neighbour. Further accomplishments include completing her Bachelor of Human Services/Bachelor of Creative Industries (majoring in Creative Writing) in 2023. She is passionate about using poetry as a medium to continue telling the stories of those who come before her.

# STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

We all move across lands and waterways, carrying our histories with us, both tangible and intangible. We express our experiences and emotions through words, songs and art to understand our identities and place in the world.

Despite fragmented histories and intergenerational trauma, Australian South Sea Islanders create spaces in our homes and communities to preserve our stories. By blending old and new – practices and experiences – we strengthen connections to family, cultural identity, ancestors and island roots.





●  
YOU  
ARE  
HERE

ENTRY

# MEANING IN OUR MATERIAL CONNECTIONS

With few physical markers in the landscape, our material culture becomes significant. Layers of meaning are generated when objects are interwoven with special people, in everyday activities or at special events.

When stories are imbued in objects, our voices and our memories can be seen, making visible links to our identity.

We are doing things the South Sea way. These objects speak our stories – they remind us of where we have come from, express our cultural identity today and create markers for our future.



## **Hessian bag headstone cover**

A project undertaken by the Mackay community identified 114 previously un-marked South Sea Islanders graves at the Mackay cemetery.

For the unveiling of the new markers at a ceremony in 2017, the graves were decorated with a designed cover showing a motif of a South Sea Islander labourer printed on hessian.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E40830

## **Mat made in Mota Lava, Banks Group, Vanuatu, c. 1995**

Artist Krishna Nahow was given this mat when she visited Vanuatu as a “Kin and Custom” trip to renew her connections to her island family.

The gift of the mat represents continuity of the practice of gift giving, interwoven with an emphasis on religion.

Krishna is an Australian South Sea Islander, from Bowen and she is of Banks Group, Vanuatu descent. She visited in July 1995 to renew her family’s connection with their islands of origin from which her ancestors were “blackbirded” during the labour trade.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E18212

## ***History of Kanaka Town, published 1998***

Australian South Sea Islander communities are today writing our own histories. This book, *History of Kanaka Town*, edited

by Lloyd Willie, was researched, written and printed by the Kanaka Town Reunion Committee of Rockhampton in 1998.

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## **Ambrym-style wooden club**

In January 1879, Wommilly gave this carved club to Queensland Museum. Attributed directly to him, rather than to a man of European origin, this donation is unique at that time.

Wommilly's gift raises a number of questions. Who was Wommilly, and where did he work? How did he create such influence that he was able to donate to a colonial institution? Why did he feel this piece of his cultural heritage should rest in a museum?

Through Wommilly's club, another fragment in our past is gradually coming to light.

QUEENSLAND MUSEUM COLLECTION. E6970

## **Cane Knife trophy for the Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association**

Greg Davis made this cane knife in 2017. It was designed as an award for MADASSIA. Greg chose the cane knife as a tool symbolic of the South Sea community, known as hard working cane cutters.

For Greg, the creation of this cane knife trophy is a way for him to pay respect to the Elders who went before and to

recognise the hard work they endured to make a better life for future generations.

It is the association of an everyday object with a long history that makes the connection between our history and our identity today.

COURTESY OF GREG DAVIS

## Mother Hubbard dress

Kaylene Butler sees this dress as an instrument of telling our story and creating conversations all over the world.

Kaylene was the producer of the acclaimed Goalpost Pictures production “Black Snow”, a mainstream feature drama that centred on an Australian South Sea Islander community in the 1990s.

“I wore this [dress] in the production and also the dress travelled abroad when I visited my Island homeland Tanna. Taking a step back into time where my great great grandfather, Paramount Chief lasul of the Nematautu was taken. The dress was well received, I wore it like my family wore theirs to church. Chief Jeffrey Lauha asked for the story of blackbirding to be shared all over the world.”

For Kaylene, both the film and the dress speak to her values around authenticity, truth telling, responsibility, accountability and respect.

COURTESY OF KAYLENE BUTLER



# Dylan Mooney

## *Through the flames we rise, 2024*

### **Pencil and Charcoal**

LOAN FROM ARTIST

Early sugar production required a large workforce that was both affordable and accessible, so Queensland plantation owners suggested using 'coloured' labour. This meant using workers from the South Sea Islands instead of white Australians or Europeans. South Sea Islanders could be employed very cheaply, and some people believed that white Australians were not suited to hard work in Queensland's tropical climate. Growing up on Yuwiburra country (Mackay) with a familiar landscape of sugar mills with bellowing smoke and sugarcane fields as far as the eye can see, I think about our history, as well as the hard work and struggles of our community. In this work I insert our South Sea People into this landscape to draw focus to the workers and family names who worked in these sugar mills.

### **The Artist**

Dylan Mooney is a proud Yuwi, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander man from Mackay in North Queensland, working across painting, printmaking, digital illustration and drawing.

Influenced by history, culture and family, Dylan responds to community stories, current affairs and social media. Armed with a rich cultural upbringing, Dylan now translates the knowledge and stories passed down to him through art.

Dylan is among artists who are rethinking digital technologies and artistic practices to consider contemporary issues around identity, desire and representation. Interested in the ways in which we can reframe the conversation around some of the voices that have been left out, the artist has made an important body of work that embodies a shift in representation of queer love among people of colour.

# ISLAND CONNECTIONS

Today, our community continues to make the journey to our ancestral home islands, seeking to reconcile with the past, establish a tangible bond with our roots and reunite with family. We remember these journeys by bringing back ‘pieces of place’, which serve to reaffirm the notions of place, belonging and connection to our home islands.

## **1. Sarong depicting the islands of Vanuatu**

COURTESY OF IMELDA MILLER

## **2. Sarong depicting the Solomon Islands**

COURTESY OF MOIRA DAVIS

## **3. Sarong depicting the islands of New Caledonia**

COURTESY OF ROBERT AND ZEBEDEE MANN

## **4. Bead necklace**

COURTESY OF ROBERT AND ZEBEDEE MANN

## **5. Tam Tam from Ambrym**

COURTESY OF ROBERT AND ZEBEDEE MANN

## **6. Bead and shell necklace**

COURTESY OF CHRISTINA TOGO

## **7. Hair Comb and feather hair decorations**

COURTESY OF CHRISTINA TOGO

## **8. Hat from Gaua Island in Vanuatu**

COURTESY OF ROBERT AND ZEBEDEE MANN

## **9. Solomon Islands skirt and top and shell necklace**

COURTESY OF MOIRA DAVIS

## **10. Solomon Islands football jersey**

COURTESY OF GREG DAVIS

## **11. Woven ribbon necklace from Vanuatu**

COURTESY OF IMELDA MILLER

## **12. Purse from Vanuatu, woven with palm fronds**

COURTESY OF IMELDA MILLER

## **13. Bible written in Bislama, from Vanuatu**

COURTESY OF MOIRA DAVIS

## **14. Woven mat from Vanuatu**

COURTESY OF MOIRA DAVIS



# REMEMBERING TODAY

Australian South Sea Islanders are a part of a vibrant and enduring culture. For a time after deportation, though, our community was invisible. Although difficult at times, many people found employment across diverse industries, including domestic services, agriculture, maritime work, mining, railroad construction, education, health and government. Their efforts paved the way for a brighter future for the next generation. Today, our community still pride themselves on upholding the values instilled by previous generations – hard work, respect, and honesty.

**A Bible lays open on the pulpit inside the South Sea Islander Church in Bundaberg, Queensland, 2000**

Photographer Brian Rogers

# CREATING NEW TRADITIONS

As our families and communities grow so do our traditions. From flowers, shells, photographs and gardens to recipes, clothing, fishing, cooking, and music, these all reflect who we are today. Australian South Sea Islanders continue to add their personal narratives to a history spanning 160 years, including reconnecting with ancestral homes, creating new community traditions, and preserving the past for future generations.

## **Art from the Heart: Australian South Sea Islander Artists**

Digital Story

Duration: 13 minutes 20 seconds

Interviewees: Darren Blackman, Luther Cora, Kyra Mancktelow, Dylan Mooney, Jasmine Togo-Brisby and Joella Warkill

Interviewer: Olivia Robinson

Filmmaker: Judy Yeh

*Art from the Heart* is a conversation with six artists who celebrate culture, identity and community within their various arts practices. The artists share personal insights into their Australian South Sea Islander heritage and how

these experiences not only inform their artwork but come with a deep sense of respect and responsibility to create stronger foundations for the next generation.

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**Rest under our Mango Tree**

**Strong like a trunk**

**Leaves fall**

**Branches remain strong**

Queensland Museum extends respect and gratitude to the Australian South Sea Islander community for sharing their stories with us.

Queensland Museum acknowledges our partner State Library of Queensland, support from Queensland State Archives, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, National Archives of Australia, and the Australian Research Council for funding the project – Archaeology, collections and Australian South Sea Islander lived identities.

Share your photographs

#SayOurNameQM

#ASSI30Years



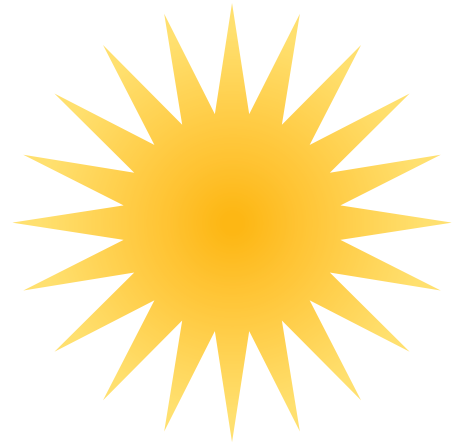
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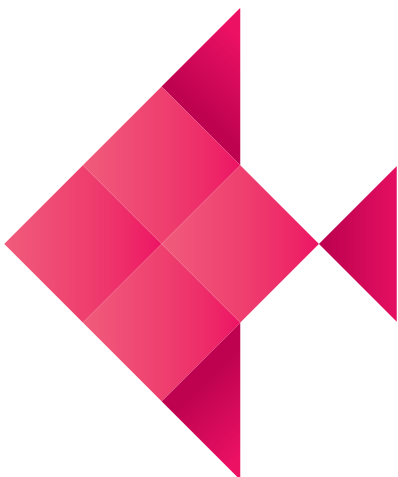
# SAY OUR NAME



With a story of exploitation, resilience, unity, and activism stretching back 160 years, the Australian South Sea Islander identity connects and empowers.

Reaching 30 years since national recognition triggers reflection and refocus for the community. It is also an opportunity for educating and sharing our unique story, intrinsically interwoven in the history of Queensland, the global sugar plantations, regional communities, and national identity.

Blackbirding brought our people to these shores. Today we celebrate our difference as Australian South Sea Islanders. As Australians, we can all embrace diversity.



TAKE A MOMENT.

SAY OUR NAME.

AUSTRALIAN SOUTH

SEA ISLANDER.



