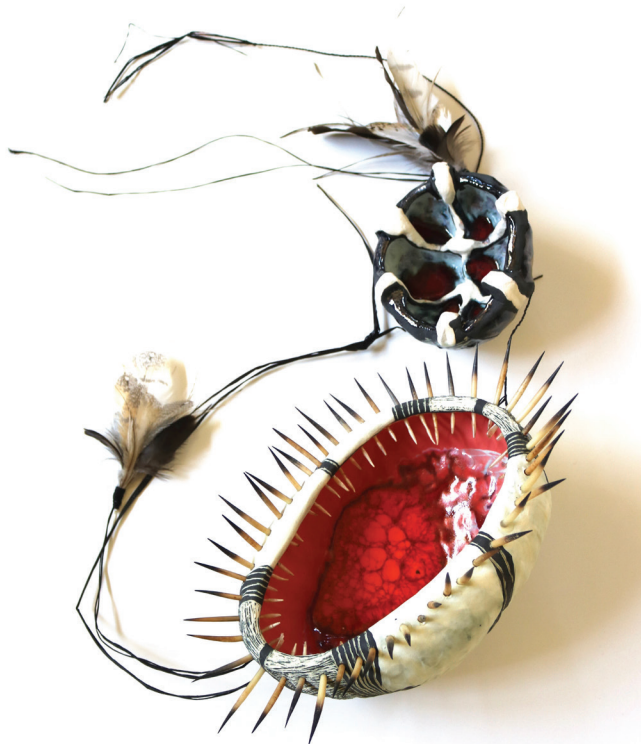




LISMORE
REGIONAL GALLERY



PENNY EVANS
DEATH TO A STEREOTYPE



PENNY EVANS *DEATH TO A STEREOTYPE*

Our sacred environment, our Gomeri homelands (North West NSW), have been desecrated and exploited over and over again. We are under threat from CSG and coal companies, causing untold damage to the Great Artesian Basin – the largest aquifer in the world. We also have the prospect of a nuclear waste dump on Ngemba/Muruwari/Yuwaalaraay country around Brewarrina. Alongside these environmental nightmares is the trauma of our sacred waterholes, creeks and rivers. Massive amounts of water continue to be illegally syphoned off into huge dams. Land



clearing for agricultural purposes including cotton farming is an ongoing violation, with the NSW state government relaxing laws around clearing.

2017 was an important year for me as I connected back to the land of my Ancestors in a much more profound way, as I walked, sat and contemplated on country. The spirit of our country is stronger than the devastation. My work is becoming about waterholes as I physically explore them, talk out loud to my Ancestors and follow

our ancient Songlines coming to understand our star maps, wells and the magnitude of the Great Artesian Basin and what lies beneath it. I touch the rich Banuwa (black soils) of Northern Gomeri country. In September 2017 I attended our Yinarr (women's) gathering at Boobera Lagoon which is the resting place of the Rainbow Serpent and a very sacred place. 50 of us Gomeri yinarr gathered over a weekend to share stories, culture, reconnect and heal (the first such gathering of its kind since colonisation).

In my *Death to a Stereotype* and *Trophy Wife* series I'm using mid-century domestic kitsch objects which often depicted Aboriginal people in a grotesque and stylised manner. I collect these objects which are the 'domestic front' of racism in Australia. They've been quietly adorning walls and coffee tables of our homes throughout the last century and into the present, their messages actively negative in all their racially stylised glory. They reinforce attitudes and perceptions that Aboriginal people have been trying to escape from for over two centuries. For me, they were a reference point for my identity growing up because all others had been erased by our Western education system and broader societal colonising structures. The attitudes that these objects depict are still very strong in the Australian population and this is why the desecration of our land continues.

Out of Sight, Out of mind... Greetings from remote NSW Communities is a large charm bracelet/necklace, an offering, made of small feet (replicas I've cast of souvenir style ceramic feet made at Studio Anna mid-century and sold from regional holiday destinations). The 40 disembodied feet reference the macabre practice of collecting body parts and phrenology. They are etched with the names of our reserves, missions and stations in NSW. These places are euphemistically named 'communities' and are what exist now in place of missions and reserves, that remnants of the surviving Aboriginal tribes were herded onto under the Protection Act 1907. These sites are on 'remote' communities, fringe dwelling settlements that sit outside of our country towns. The feet hang from rusty chains to symbolise the

fact that many Aboriginal people living regionally and remotely in NSW are still, metaphorically, in chains, because of strangulating structural racism manifest in chronic environmental degradation.

Alongside my ceramic work dealing with mid-century kitsch objects, I have been producing another body of ceramic pieces consisting of *Dhinawan gawu* (emu egg) forms, and what I call 'thunder eggs', 'estuarine creatures' and 'waterhole spirit' forms. The exteriors of the eggs are heavily carved with concentric diamond patterns and other linear/lineal patternings. The carved designs reference the connection and power of these traditional designs/symbols but do not depict important and secret/sacred Gomeri cultural knowledges. The insides of the eggs are filled with red and orange pooling glazes (like rich yokes representing the fecund nature of our ancient culture). Handmade string with emu feather flowers attached to the pinched vessels create moving limbs and have an animated quality.

Two *Yinarr Jalia* (female trees – Gomeri/Bundjalung), coil built earthenware works, sit at the edges of the *Gawu* installation, which are strewn like sperma/egg/volcanic matter. The Yinarr have Giinbay, small freshwater mussel shaped ceramic pieces 'growing' from their headdress and sit on the edges of the 'waterhole' – floor installation of *Gawu*. The edges of waterhole areas on country are where our birthing grounds are. Freshwater mussels were once abundant in our vast networks of rivers and creeks on Gomeri country and have the potential for their populations to regenerate if the desecration of our environment stops. The *Stereotype* pieces which take the cultural forms of coolamons and shields adorn the walls surrounding the floor installation of *Gawu*. Some are decorated with plastic flowers which have funerary connotations directly referencing the practice of elaborate grave decoration at Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery. The flowers also symbolise growth and awakening.

The installation engages with the Indigenous mourning and mortuary associations of the diamond symbols to put the stereotypes to bed, whilst simultaneously celebrating our



cultural reawakening and the renaissance of the South-Eastern Australian ancient cultures. The very act of making is performative and very much related to my identity and personal experience of decolonisation and reindulturation, which has underpinned my whole practice over 30 years.

This installation is active and reflective of deep personal processes.

I am in awe of my old people who travelled long distances and survived in temperatures ranging from below zero to 45°C. They not only survived, but flourished, for millennia. Resilient. Resurgent. Rebirthing.

Penny Evans, 2018



front cover:
Take me home 2018, earthenware, glazes, emu feathers, string

images inside left to right:
Gawu 2018, earthenware, sgraffito, slips, pooling glaze, glaze, string, feathers, echidna quill

Death to a Stereotype 2017, earthenware, sgraffito, echidna quill, plastic flowers

Vale 2018, earthenware, glaze, plastic flowers

Out of Sight, Out of Mind... Greetings from remote NSW Communities (detail) 2015, slipcasting, sgraffito, cotton, wood, chain. On loan from Grafton Regional Gallery

this page, top to bottom:
Women's Business 2017, slabs, underglaze, sgraffito, glaze

Yinarr Jalia 2018, coiled, pinched, white raku, slips, glaze, pooling glazes, raffia

back cover:
My Ancestral Waterhole 2018, Northern Gomeri/Gamilaraay/Kamilaroi Country

all images courtesy the artist, © Penny Evans



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body,





images and text are copyright of the artist, the writer, photographer and Lismore Regional Gallery. All rights reserved. Except under the conditions described in the Australian Copyright Act 1968 and subsequent amendments, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, duplicating or otherwise without the permission of the copyright owners.



LISMORE
REGIONAL GALLERY



Create NSW
Arts, Screen & Culture