

# MARADHAL WAYBARRA

## PAST WOVEN



**Peta-Joy Williams is a Wiradjuri woman, born in Sydney. With her feet firmly in both cultures, the inland fresh water and the coastal salt water, Peta-Joy finds an affinity with both and finds inspiration from unique elements of the two diverse nations. Peta-Joy is a visual artist and Wiradjuri language teacher. Through both she strives to restore and pass on culture.**

First Nations of NSW have been weaving for tens of thousands of years. Weaving provides a powerful metaphor for how government and community can weave Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and

doing together with Western knowledge fibres to ensure that policies, programs, and services are co-owned and co-produced by communities. Working from this inspiration Peta-Joy's woven object represents the bringing together of these threads to produce a way forward that possesses the strength derived when both cultural integrity and public confidence are achieved.

Peta-Joy says: In the lead up to the creation of this object, I envisioned a completely different shape and style than what was intended. As I started the basket the object took shape, it took on a life of its own.

Initially the piece was to be a basket with a larger base with the sides coming up slowly and gently but it didn't happen. I unpicked the piece three times to try and get it to go to where it was believed it should originally go, however it has its own spirit and it's decided that it's got its own self-determination and it's going to go straight up and grow into its own shape. It didn't matter how much I tried to fight it, it was just going to continue to go straight up. Self-determination! The basket has its own spirit and was determined to be its own shape, rather than the original intended basket shape it now is more representative of a cocoon shape, giving it an idea of new beginnings or rebirth.

I also imagined it would be really neat and refined, reflecting my weaving style. It's now like this, but more organic with fibres extending and fraying and the weaving loose and open. For me this represents that the coming together of Aboriginal and Western ways is not neat and tidy and that this doesn't mean that a beautiful object is not the result, rather a different object that has its own beauty.

It was important to me that I worked on both my Countries and so visited Wiradjuri Country in the early days of what ended up being a four-week project from start to finish. Interestingly, it was during the two days I spent weaving by the Wambool (the Macquarie river) that the object started to resist its intended basket shape.

I used three different fibres in weaving. Raffia which is an imported grass that comes from Africa, and Gymea Lily

leaves and Lomandra, both native to Australia and found around the Sydney area where I collected them. The stem of the Gymea Lily was traditionally used as a fishing spear in the local Sydney area as it would float to the surface, and the leaves were often used for cooking by wrapping the food in the green leaf, and placed in earth ovens. Lomandra is an all-round food source, the seeds were used for baking bread. We Aboriginal peoples are the oldest bread makers in the world, the white part of the grass could be chewed as a source of water or hydration, and the leaves were often woven in different styles depending on the needs of the user. Lomandra these days is planted all over Sydney by the councils as it's a hardy and strong grass that is very hard to kill.

I started weaving with Raffia, slowly weaving in a small bit of Gymea Lily leaf. This stage is representative of non-Aboriginal people telling Aboriginal people what they want or how they have to be to get it. It's about control. As the basket grows bigger across the base I started to use more and more of the Gymea Lily so it's sort of us taking precedence, the Voice of Aboriginal people is starting to get louder. As the sides start to build up I introduced Lomandra – our voices are starting to be heard and the basket is starting to grow upwards, at this stage it is Lomandra that holds the object together. I added the Dinawan (Emu) feathers on top to represent our ancestors and knowledge keepers, who would dance in feathers and share the knowledge. Our knowledge is held within these feathers which will protect what we put inside the object.