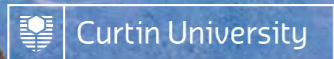




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INDIGENOUS ART
CASE STUDY



INDIGENOUS ART

ICRAR's Indigenous art projects have put the work of WA artists on gallery walls in Berlin, Brussels, Cape Town, Genoa, Manchester, The Hague and Washington DC. It's just one of the ways the Centre works to support local communities, and has seen Aboriginal culture—arguably that of the world's first astronomers—showcased on the global stage.

Long before the Greeks stared at the heavens and found Orion and Scorpius, Aboriginal Australians looked to the Milky Way and saw an Emu stretched across the night sky. This Emu has featured in Aboriginal storytelling for thousands of years, with many different language groups having their own version. Unlike the western constellations, which focus on stars, Aboriginal interpretations of the night sky sometimes incorporate the dark patches between stars.

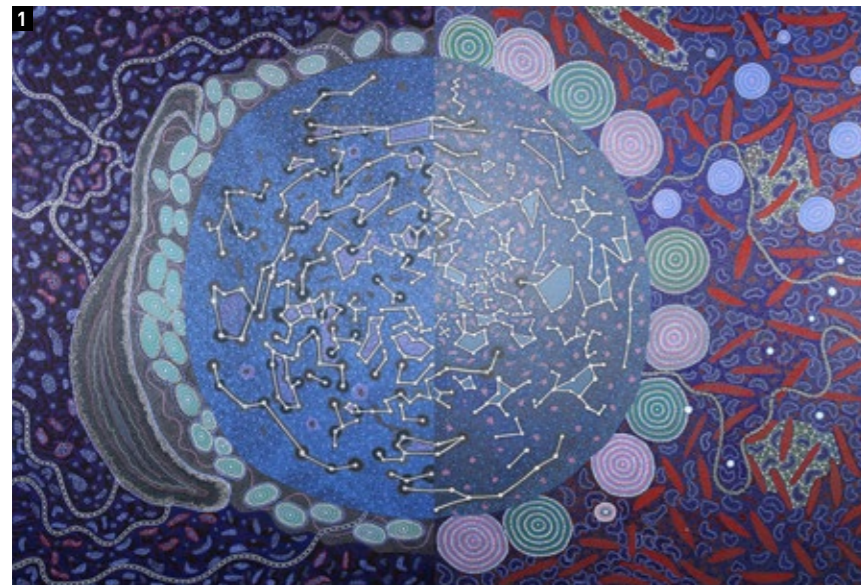
ICRAR has helped preserve Indigenous views of the heavens and bring them to the world through a unique collaboration with Yamaji Art in Geraldton. This partnership has seen Australian artists and ICRAR astrophysicists come together to explore different understandings of the night sky and the Universe.

The artists and astronomers first participated in a series of group activities to mark the International Year of Astronomy in 2009,

including a visit to the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory—the future home of the SKA—and the Murchison Widefield Array telescope. They shared stories about the landscape and the artists painted interpretations of their experiences. Over 100 paintings were produced, typically in the 'dot art' style.

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The result was *Ilgarijiri – Things Belonging to the Sky*, an exhibition featuring a range of original artworks by more than 30 Indigenous artists from



WA's Mid West. It aimed to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia through the night sky, a sight shared by all people on Earth.

Ilgarijiri – Things Belonging to the Sky has toured Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Europe and the US, even featuring at the European Parliament in Brussels. The successful exhibition has been viewed by thousands of people and generated wide acclaim for the opportunities it provided for the artists to gain exposure for their work. Well over half of the paintings in the exhibition were sold to buyers around Australia and the world and the artists continue to be inspired by their experiences in the Murchison.

ICRAR deputy executive director and the project co-instigator Professor Steven Tingay said the *Ilgarijiri* project was a two-way learning process for both the artists and the astronomers. "They walked their land with us and shared their perspectives on the night sky," he said. "In return, we showed them new views of the sky through binoculars and telescopes and talked about the SKA project and what we hope to achieve."

Professor Tingay said the discussions were eye opening for the scientists. "Astronomy's study of black holes, dark energy

and dark matter is relatively new, but we realised that Aboriginal people had been relating to the dark spaces in the sky for a very long time," he said. "It was incredibly inspiring."

The Shared Sky exhibition has travelled through five continents to celebrate these two ancient cultures and raise awareness of the SKA project.

ICRAR researchers once again joined Yamaji artists from WA's Mid West in 2014 for the Shared Sky project, a celebration of Indigenous Australian and African art. The astronomers and artists gathered under a starry night sky at the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory to share their perspectives on constellations and stars. A similar cultural exchange also took part in South Africa, where the other half of the SKA is set to be built.

These ancient stories inspired the Indigenous artists to explore their relationship to the sky through paintings, collages, sculptural installations and emu egg carvings. Together with South African artists, they created an international touring exhibition of astronomy

artworks from the SKA telescope sites in Africa and Australia. The Shared Sky exhibition has travelled through five continents to celebrate these two ancient cultures and raise awareness of the SKA project.

Australian SKA Office communications manager Jerry Skinner, who helped bring together artists and astrophysicists for Shared Sky, said the exhibition celebrated ancient wisdom and modern astronomy in two continents. "The night sky has been a source of profound inspiration for Indigenous Australian and African artists for thousands of years," he said. "This project is a great way to celebrate the relationship between these ancient traditions and modern science on both sides of the Indian Ocean. ICRAR's researchers are really embracing reconciliation and unity through the shared night sky."

Professor Tingay said it was wonderful to be able to bring the Indigenous stories of the night sky to an international audience and showcase the outstanding talents of the artists. "Our collaboration with Yamaji Art allows us to connect the ancient with the present," he said. "We have learnt an enormous amount from each other, and I think we are showing how science can drive activities that work towards reconciliation in interesting ways."

Cover
Artist: Margaret Whitehurst
Title: Sun Shining on the Seven Sisters
Story: When the Sun rises, the seven sisters disappear from our view but they are still there and the Sun is shining on them. So they can shine brightly at night.

1 'Ilgali Inyayimanha' (which translates as 'Shared Sky') by a collaboration of Yamaji artists.

2 'Hydra' by Nerolie Blurton.

3 'Venus' by Kevin Merritt.

4 Left Centre Yamaji artists collaborating on 'Ilgali Inyayimanha' (which translates as 'Shared Sky').

5 Observers admiring 'Origin of Death' by the First People Artists of the Bethesda ArtsCentre at the Shared Sky opening in 2014.

6 Artists and astronomers visiting the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory.

