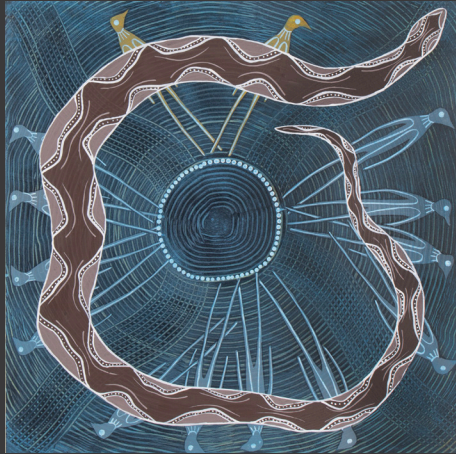


# BARRY Story Country: Uncle Jim Ridgeway



19 October - 8 December 2024

*We remember and respect the Ancestors who cared for and nurtured this Country. It is in their footsteps that we travel these lands and waters. Lake Macquarie City Council acknowledges the Awabakal people and Elders past, present and future.*

## Foreword

*BARRAY Story Country* is an exhibition of recently acquired artwork by the late Uncle Jim Ridgeway. These works spanning from 1999 – 2004 were acquired from Monty Mills who represented Uncle Jim for many years through his former gallery on Hunter Street, Newcastle.

This significant body of artworks is an exciting addition to the Visual Arts Collection managed by the Museum of Art and Culture yapang (MAC yapang). The acquisition represents the importance of local civic collections of art and how they serve as important keeping places for work that belongs to a community – for the future preservation, research, representation and potential for storytelling. The important work of Uncle Jim as a man is reflected in this exhibition in many ways; his deep contribution to MAC yapang through the Aboriginal Reference Group; the ability for sharing culture to effect positive change within a community; the gift of stories being documented through visual form for future generations and the physicality of work to inspire deeper connection to place.

Uncle Jim Ridgeway contributed to several important projects, that supported community renewal, education and placemaking: *The Meeting Place* (2003), *Awabakal Dreaming* (2001), *Songlines Now!* (2003), and *Old stories through new eyes* (2005).

In 2023, the collection of work by Uncle Jim Ridgeway grew from the existing holding of 2 artworks to 40, through major acquisition purchase driven by MAC yapang. This collection by Uncle Jim has been hung in this exhibition almost in its entirety. This is presentation of Uncle Jim's work at MAC yapang follows on from his rich exhibition history with the Museum in exhibitions:

*A Tribute: Uncle Jim Ridgeway Djirang Birrbay, Warrimay guri-guba Djarii* (A proud Birrbay, Warrimay man from Taree), a gallery curated solo exhibition, 5 December 2014 - 1 February 2015

*Lore and Order*, a gallery project curated by the late Donna Biles Fernando under the auspices of the Aboriginal Reference Group, 4 September 2015 – 11 October 2015

*Water Stories*, a gallery curated group show, 8 February – 24 March 2013

*Beyond the Dot: 12 Years of Indigenous programming*, a group show curated by the late Donna Biles Fernando, 10 February 2012 - 25 March 2012

*Art out of water: the fish of art*, a group show curated by Brett Adlington and Meryl Ryan, 27 November 2009 – 31 January 2010

*Quiet Waters*, a group show curated by Diana Robson and Brett Adlington, 2 November 2007 – 3 February 2008

*Passage*, a group show curated by Brook Andrew, 10 September – 24 October 2004

*Satisfaction*, a group show curated by Gillian McCracken, 19 September – 10 November 2002

*Of this time: contemporary Aboriginal artists working in the Hunter*, a gallery project curated by Dawn Townsend, supported by Arts NSW 13 April – 21 May 2000

*BARRAY Story Country: Uncle Jim Ridgeway* has been curated by proud Wiradjuri and Wongibong woman Renae Lamb, who undertook a yapang Arts Placement in 2024. This placement program is designed as a pathway for First Nations creatives into the arts - combining professional development with a presentation outcome in an area of interest or research. Thank you to Renae for her time and diligence during her placement at MAC yapang and

bringing this body of work together in a way that pays deep respect to the stories retold by Uncle Jim of Barray (Country). These works of art are now held in situ - in this place in Booragul that was shaped in culture and physicality by the same man who collected these old stories over his lifetime, and continues to share these with all of us through his art.



Image: Uncle Jim playing at a local club (detail) c.1981. coloured photograph. original 29 x 21.5cm. Collection Uncle Jim and Auntie Louise Ridgeway. Courtesy the artist's estate

*His ability to translate storytelling into visual masterpieces was nothing short of magical, creating moments that we would cherish long after the brushstrokes dried. – Monty Mills 2024*

# Exhibited works

*Kangaroo Dreaming* 1999  
acrylic on canvas  
770 x 1170 mm

*Snake Dreaming* 2000  
acrylic on canvas  
845 x 1180 mm

*Muk-kun* 2001  
hand-coiled terracotta with  
underglazes  
270 x 230 mm diam.

*Naroota Kow-Waa* 2001  
acrylic on canvas  
960 x 1230 mm framed

*Barramundi and Turtle* 2002  
hand-coiled pottery  
270 x 207 mm diam.

*Kooyuk* 2002  
hand-coiled white earthenware  
clay with underglazes  
310 x 207 mm diam.

*Hunters* 2002  
handcoiled incised pottery with  
glazes  
100 x 280 mm diam.

*Kooyuk* 2002  
hand-coiled white earthenware  
clay with underglazes  
230 x 216.5 mm diam.

*Kangaroo Spirit* 2002  
hand-coiled pottery  
300 x 254.7 mm diam.

*Snake Dreaming* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
620 x 800 mm

*Clever Fella's* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
580 x 900 mm

*Messenger Bird* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
755 x 980 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 1*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 2*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 3*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 4*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 5*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 6*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
750 x 750 mm

*A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 7*  
2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 1750 mm

*Bunyip Story* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 600 mm

*Burracan Nuts* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 600 mm

*When the Moon Cried* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
600 x 900 mm

*Bora Grounds* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 600 mm

*Mother's Country* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
450 x 600 mm

*Purraimaibarn* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 600 mm

*Burial Sites* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
600 x 900 mm

*Eaglehawk Spirit* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
600 x 900 mm

*Gathering Gobra* 2002  
ochres on canvas  
900 x 600 mm

*Toomulla (A Creek)* 2002  
hand-coiled earthenware  
500 x 286 mm diam.

*Galah* 2002  
hand-coiled terracotta with  
underglazes  
330 x 222.9 mm diam.

*Kangaroo* 2002  
hand-coiled terracotta with  
underglazes  
100 x 280 mm diam.

*Goanna* 2002  
hand-coiled pottery  
350 x 238.8 mm diam.

*Gone Fishing* 2003  
ochres on canvas  
450 x 600 mm

*A Message About Truth* 2003  
ochres on canvas  
450 x 600 mm

*Keeper of the Water Spirit People*  
2003  
ochres on canvas  
600 x 600 mm

*Naroota Kow-Waa* 2003  
acrylic on canvas  
600 x 600 mm

*Mukkun (Muk-kun) Lizard* 2004  
hand-coiled earthenware  
580 x 270.7 mm diam.

*My Country* 2004  
hand-coiled earthenware  
500 x 254.7 mm diam.

# Uncle Jim

RENAE LAMB

Uncle Jim Ridgeway's life story is a rich tapestry of resilience, transformation, and love, reflecting the diverse experiences that shaped him both as an artist and as a person. His artistic journey began in the humble surroundings of Newcastle, where he was astonished to experience a life free from the racism he had known. As his wife, Louise, recalls, Jim felt he had "died and gone to heaven," relishing the freedom to be himself in public spaces—something that had eluded him for so long.

At the young age of 14, Jim bravely left school to join the circus as a boxer, showcasing his tenacity and love for challenge. Boxing in Jimmy Sharman's Boxing Tent, he shared the stage with legends like Dave Sands and Greg McNamara, honing not only his skills but also his craftsmanship in performance, which would later translate into his art. Jim's magnetic personality caught the attention of Louise when he was just 19, despite his reputation as "Mr. Cool," a

second-in-command in the notorious motorbike gang, the Dirty Dozen. Their love story blossomed, leading to the joy of raising four boys—Anthony, Matthew, Andrew, and Timothy—each carrying forward the legacy of a devoted father who valued family deeply.

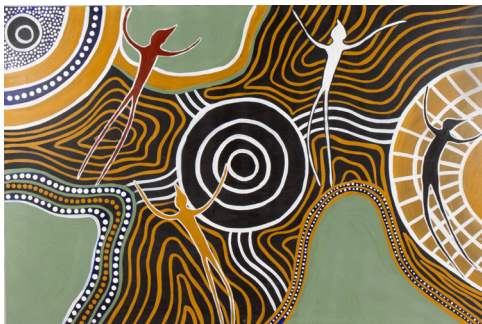
In a groundbreaking stride, Jim became the first Indigenous Australian employed as a prison guard in New South Wales.



Yet, this experience brought him dismay as he faced the stark reality of the over-representation of Indigenous inmates—an experience that ultimately compelled him to leave that role and seek a path that would honour his peoples' stories and heritage.

Jim's profound experiences informed his transition from a life of boxing and music into the realm of art, where he became a respected figure in the Aboriginal community through his paintings and ceramics. His artistic journey not only embraced his own cultural identity but also drew attention to the stories of others, championing the importance of preservation and recognition for Indigenous culture.

Uncle Jim Ridgeway's life encapsulates the spirit of resilience and the commitment to storytelling through art. His legacies are not just found in the works he created, but in the profound impact he had on those around him, inspiring future generations to embrace their identities and share their stories.



Images:

Page 5: *The hunters and gatherers (eagle)* 2002. stoneware, oxides 9.1 x 29.5cm diam.

Page 6: *The hunters and gatherers (fish)* 2005. stoneware, oxides 51.0 x 30.cm diam.

Page 7: *When the Moon Cried* 2002. ochres on canvas 600 x 900 mm

Page 8: *Snake Dreaming* 2000. acrylic on canvas (detail) 845 x 1180 mm

Page 9: *A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 2* 2002. ochres on canvas 750 x 750 mm

Page 10: *A Walk With The Spirit Hero's 4* 2002. ochres on canvas 750 x 750 mm





# Awabakal Dreaming

*Awabakal Dreaming* was a cultural partnership project resulting from the desire of the Aboriginal Reference Group and local Aboriginal community to pay tribute to the Awabakal people by celebrating their ‘water place’ stories. The mosaic comprises symbols of the local environment and Creation Beings such as Biame, Biraban and Kow-wah.

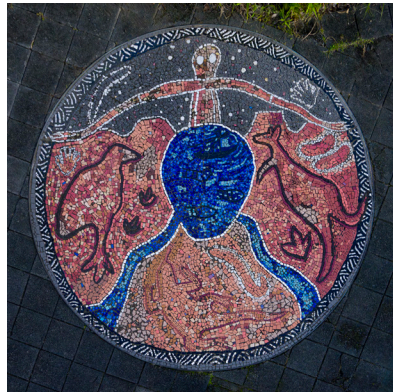
Uncle Jim Ridgeway collaborated with artists Uncle Douglas Archibald and Paul Maher along with members of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community. The process involved two sessions of interactive and recorded storytelling by the late and much respected Elders Uncle Cyril Archibald and Uncle Ken McBride, joined by other community members.

The stories told in these sessions were used as a basis for the design, along with the artists’ research. It was agreed that stylistically the group would steer away from the Western notion of perspective and the Indigenous dot-painting styles that emanate from the desert areas, in favour of a design that better reflected the

‘local’, such as petroglyphs (rock carvings).

The mosaic was created from January to July 2001 and is positioned at the entrance to MAC yapang. It is currently protected to enable the Awaba House reconstruction and will be a feature of the new courtyard landscaping.

This project was coordinated by Susan Ryman with installation support from Mark Johnson and assistance by the Australia Council for the Arts (now Creative Australia), Community Partnership Program.



# The MAC yapang Aboriginal Reference Group

More than 20 years ago, Uncle Jim Ridgeway walked into what was then Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery and asked, “Where is all the [local] Aboriginal art?”.

This question sparked a conversation that resulted in the formation of the Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) in early 2000. Uncle Jim as one of the founding members, alongside Uncle Douglas Archibald, Aunty Selena Archibald and the late Donna Biles Fernando.

The ARG develops exhibitions and cultural programs including the first exhibition of local work: *Of this Time: Aboriginal artists working in the Hunter* (2000) and the ground breaking *yapang marruma : making our way (stories of the Stolen)* in 2009.

Uncle Jim was passionate about sharing culture with young people, devoting time and energy to ARG schools projects such as *Songlines Now!* (2003) and *Old Stories Through New Eyes* (2005).

The ARG were instrumental in developing the ‘yapang Consultation, Governance

and Programming Framework’ in 2018-2020, with the core principles of: self-determination, authenticity, integrity and truth-telling and collaboration, consultation and consent.

‘yapang’ is an Awabakal word that represents a journey and a pathway an speaks to the ongoing commitment to exhibit, support, develop and promote Aboriginal art in partnership with the Aboriginal community.



Image: Artists Paul Maher, Jim Ridgeway and Douglas Archibald with the design for *Awabakal Dreaming*  
Opposite image: *Awabakal Dreaming* 2001 mosaic  
2210 mm diam.



## Art Museum Team

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Operations Coordinator

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Kat Valentine

Art museum technicians

Dai Cameron  
Tom Zagami  
Marlene Houston  
Aaron Crowe

Sign painter

Alisha Milajew -  
Ink & Snow

Thanks to our team of casual staff and volunteers.

Opposite image: *Bora Grounds* 2000. ochres on canvas (detail)  
900 x 600 mm

Cover image: *Keeper of the Water Spirit People* 2003. ochres on  
canvas 600 x 600 mm



# Museum of Art and Culture Lake Macquarie, yapang

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