



Barangaroo



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MEDIA RELEASE

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First Public Artwork revealed on Sydney Harbour at Barangaroo

A magnificent public artwork standing 22 metres tall at the southern gateway to Barangaroo was unveiled to the community today, marking the beginning of a series of public artworks that will be introduced to Sydney's cultural landscape under the Barangaroo Public Art and Cultural Plan¹.

Created by two of Australia's leading Indigenous artists, local Bidjigal elder and senior artist Esme Timbery and Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones, **shell wall** is a vertical series of larger-than-life aluminium shell panels fixed to the Alexander building's façade, that represents an enduring connection to Country and the site's significant Indigenous and maritime history.

Speaking at the launch to more than 100 people from the arts and Indigenous community, Chair of the Lendlease Art Advisory Panel, Simon Mordant AM, said the artwork launches a journey of artistic discovery for visitors to Barangaroo: "The Barangaroo precinct is set to become a vibrant extension of Sydney's cultural ribbon, and **shell wall** is a stunning example of the wide range of public art, interpretive elements, and cultural and civic events which will be admired, debated and appreciated by Sydneysiders and tourists for many years to come."

The artwork is based on generations of Bidjigal knowledge, passed on to Esme Timbery and her family through her maternal line. It celebrates the culturally significant shell-making tradition that is unique to the Sydney Aboriginal community of La Perouse, and the female artists from this seaside community whom have been creating beautiful shell work for generations. This work is a continuation of this traditional knowledge, referencing the beauty and importance of Sydney's foreshore and its oyster encrusted foreshore during the colony's establishment in Sydney.

Curator Emily McDaniel said the art is specific to Sydney and could not be placed anywhere else in the world: "As we admire this artwork, we are reminded that we are situated alongside one of the most beautiful and naturally abundant harbours in the world, and that despite the ever-changing skyline of Sydney city, we are all standing on Eora country."

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Footnote 1. The Barangaroo Public Art and Cultural Plan was formally adopted by the NSW Government in July 2015, and has emerged from a unique partnership between the Barangaroo Delivery Authority and Lendlease Corporation. The Barangaroo Art and Cultural Plan is the result of several years of consultation and engagement by the Barangaroo Delivery Authority and Lendlease with the art community, and reflects the exciting artistic opportunities presented by a site of Barangaroo's scale.

Further information

- Learn about the Public Art and Cultural Plan for Barangaroo [[hyperlink](#)]
- Download Barangaroo Infographic Map [[hyperlink](#)]
- The Barangaroo Delivery Authority's Public Art and Cultural Panel, chaired by Gabrielle Trainor, was established to guide the strategic planning and delivery of public art and cultural initiatives across the precinct. It has worked in partnership with the Lendlease Art Advisory Panel, chaired by Simon Mordant AM.

Media contacts

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

ESME TIMBERY

Born 1931, Bidjigal artist and elder Esme Timbery comes from a long line of shell workers from the Aboriginal reserve of La Perouse in Sydney, Australia's oldest urban Aboriginal community. The Timbery family have always been an important part of Sydney's cultural life. The Timbery name has been recorded since the early 1800s and Aunty Esme's great-grandmother was 'Queen' Emma Timbery, an important community leader and renowned shell-worker. Like most shell artists, Aunty Esme and her late sister Rose Timbery learnt shell work as young girls from their mothers, grandmothers and aunts by first sorting the shells by type, size and colour. In the 1940s they joined the shell-working network and started selling their work. Often sculpted out of cardboard, the forms are covered in material and shelled, then topped with glitter. The designs and patterns created from different types of shells and their layout are inherited, with individual family styles recognised and understood. Aunty Esme is known for her shelled boxes, ornamental booties or small slippers, frames and the recurring subject of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Her shell work has been exhibited throughout Australia and is held in the collections of the National Museum of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Museum of Contemporary Art and the Newcastle Art Gallery. In 2007, Aunty Esme was the subject of the documentary *She sells sea shells*, and in 2005 was awarded the inaugural Parliament of New South Wales Aboriginal Art Prize.

JONATHAN JONES

Sydney-based Aboriginal artist Jonathan Jones, a member of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations of south-east Australia, works across a range of mediums, from printmaking and drawing to sculpture and film. He creates site-specific installations and interventions into space that use light, subtle shadow and the repetition of shape and materiality to explore Indigenous practices, relationships and ideas. Jones often works with everyday materials, such as fluorescent lights and blue tarpaulin, recycled and repurposed to explore relationships between community and the individual, the personal and public, historical and contemporary. He has worked on several major public art commissions, including the Commonwealth Parliament Offices in Sydney and Wagga Wagga Regional Airport. In past projects Jones has sought to represent both the traditional and contemporary by working with the particular site's historical usage and current vision. Often perceived as oppositional, these two frameworks are in fact linked, sharing commonalities and connections; Jones's artworks serve to honour both contexts. At the heart of Jones's practice is the act of collaborating, and many projects have seen him work in conjunction with other artists and communities to develop outcomes that acknowledge local knowledge systems to connect the site with local concerns. Jones has exhibited both nationally and internationally: in Australia at Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and overseas at the Palazzo delle Papesse Contemporary Art Centre, Siena, Italy, and Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Canada, among others. In 2014, Jones was awarded Kaldor Public Art Projects' Your Very Good Idea.

Q&A WITH WIRADJURI/KAMILAROI ARTIST JONATHAN JONES

What was the creative process behind this artwork?

“This proposal has developed in dialogue between local Bidjigal elder and senior artist Aunty Esme Timbery and Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones. Both artists bring a wealth of experience, skills and accomplishments to the potential project, having previously worked together. This proposal is based on research and an engaged response to the site's layered history, which includes the culture of the traditional owners, the Gadigal/Eora people, overlaid with the more radical changes brought about by the contemporary city of Sydney. These histories are continuous and integrated, seen in the traditional Eora tracks and pathways that form the foundation for the communication lines and transportation networks of the modern city”.

What significance does this artwork hold for you personally?

“This artwork celebrates the culturally significant shell-making tradition that is unique to the Sydney Aboriginal community of La Perouse. Women artists from this seaside community have been creating beautiful shell work for generations. The work of Queen Emma Timbery, an important community leader and Aunty Esme Timbery's great-grandmother, was exhibited and collected in London in 1910. Shell art embodies local traditional knowledge with artists harvesting particular shells at specific beaches and bays during different seasons and environmental events”.

Esme Timbery continues this important practice. Learning shell work as young girl from her mother, grandmother and aunts, Esme started her career in the 1940s, completing her first piece, a small shell brooch. With its rosettes of shells, shell wall 2015 references Esme's first work and includes shells local to Sydney – the long and narrow ‘beachies’, round ‘limpets’, oval ‘fingernails’, small ‘fans’ and delicate ‘starries’.”

What legacy do you hope the artwork will leave at Barangaroo?

The production of this contemporary shell work is based on traditional knowledge and the maintenance of age-old cultural practices where shells were used for decoration. Collecting shells relies on ancestral knowledge and an intimate link to country, with knowing where and when to collect being handed down over generations. This work will hopefully create a locally relevant icon that will come to define the space and people's understanding of the Barangaroo site”.

How many hours/days did the artwork take to create, from start to finish?

“The artwork is based on generations of Bidjigal knowledge, passed on to Esme Timbery and her family through her maternal line. Esme Timbery and Jonathan Jones have collaborated on many projects and exhibitions for the past fifteen years. With this particular artwork, Esme and Jonathan worked on the concept and initial design over the months of May to July 2015, based on a proposal developed and submitted in 2014. The artists continued refining the design and its details until installation in December 2015. The work was manufactured by DCG Design, Melbourne, over four months in July–December 2015.”

