

Graduate Art Show Catalogue
Griffith University Art Gallery
Brisbane, 2012

Carol McGregor

WINNER GAS Award

Undergraduate (BoVA CAIA)
Wathaurung descent, Victoria
journey cloak
2012
recycled boards, acrylics, seeds
250 x 450 x 1cm

Carol McGregor is an artist of Wathaurung descent whose current practice explores 'estranged artifacts', drawing on traditional Indigenous rituals and motifs and rearticulating these through new mediums.¹ McGregor's works resemble historical artifacts frequently associated in Western culture with an 'authentic' Aboriginal identity, however they contradict the relegation of Indigenous cultural life to the past that this classification implies. Resisting reductive, homogenising categorisations of 'traditional' or 'contemporary' Indigenous art, McGregor's work instead brings together materials and customs, demonstrating their continued significance in the formation and expression of collective and individual identities.

journey cloak consists of multiple composite construction boards covered with paint and seeds. Referencing Indigenous possum skin cloaks, a tradition 'where panels were added on from childhood and you were most often buried in your cloak', this work similarly functions as a record of McGregor's experiences.² As the artist states, 'personal patterning on each panel frames my life journey',³ connecting her reflections on the cultural past with the particular landscapes, people and memories that comprise the artist's autobiography as she navigates it in the present. Making the work involved a gradual process of discovery and experimentation with recycled boards, found rather than bought commercially, of different shapes and material structures. She states:

With the symbolic re-emergence of the possum skin cloak, significant expression of Indigenous identity is revealed, potentially emplacing people in their culture and on their land. Replacing the possum skins with composite construction boards and unindigenous seeds mimics the colonisation process of Australia.³

By colliding pre-colonisation tradition with materials associated with the enforced estrangement of Indigenous peoples from land and customs, McGregor's cloak enacts a dialogue between past and present. Charting the journey of Indigenous peoples alongside her own life story, the work in these ways is 'reigniting a resilient identity'⁴ through the contemporary restaging of cultural ritual. In this way, the work demonstrates how Indigenous culture is not static or extinguishable. Rather, it exists in a state of constant and dynamic flux—narratives from the past always enfolded in the making of identity in the present, and contemporary cultural expressions able to continue and expand cultural lineages.

Nicola Scott, 2012

1 Artist statement, 2012

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Correspondence with the artist 2012