[Sydney, 11 May 2018] Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (through their C3West Program) and Blacktown Council’s Blacktown Arts, have this morning announced Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks), an arts project of national significance set to honour and acknowledge a symbolic Aboriginal site in Sydney’s western suburbs.

The initiative sees new commissions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists Tony Albert, Sharyn Egan and Moogahlin Performing Arts, to work with members of the local Aboriginal communities on the creation of artworks and installations, to be revealed at a free public event on Saturday, June 9 2018.

As part of their work the artists will address issues associated with the history of the site, as the former home of the Blacktown Native Institution, established in 1823, one of the earliest known examples of the institutional removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

A key element of Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks) will be bringing the artists together with local communities, to develop work which celebrates the continuum of Aboriginal culture and honours the site as a living memorial to Australia’s Stolen Generations.

At the intersection of two major traffic arteries in Sydney’s west, just metres from the M7 flyover, lies a vast undeveloped green space. Completely lacking in signage, markers or any clues to its purpose, this 1.5 square kilometres of unkempt grassland, traversed by a small creek, appears completely unremarkable. The only structure, a fenced, locked area with an official “No Trespassing” sign, enclosing a small section of land deemed unsafe due to soil contamination, circa 2004. Nearby, a collection of wooden footings suggest a building, long gone.

Few of the thousands of commuters who pass the space on a daily basis would guess that it is in fact a place of unique historical, social and archeological importance: awarded New South Wales Heritage Listing status in 2011, and recognised as a historic landmark of national significance.

Evidence of the earliest attempts to Christianise and Europeanise Aboriginal children in the early 1800s, the site was once home to the Blacktown Native Institution: a residential school established by Macquarie’s Colonial Administration to facilitate the “education” of young Aboriginal and Maori children who had been removed from their families. Camps quickly grew around the institution’s boundaries as families moved to be near their children, and it is from these informal settlements that the surrounding area became known as the Black’s Town.
The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage notes: “The Blacktown Native Institution site is valued by the contemporary Aboriginal community and the wider Australian community as a landmark in the history of cross-cultural engagement in Australia. For Aboriginal people in particular, it represents a key historical site symbolising dispossession and child removal.” For local Aboriginal communities, it is also a place for current day ceremony, storytelling and education.

Ngara – Nguwangga Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks) is the third iteration of the Blacktown Native Institution Project, established to honour and acknowledge the Blacktown Native Institution site, and the aspirations of the local Aboriginal communities to garner deserved national and international recognition.

The project brings fresh ideas and energy from leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists Tony Albert, Sharyn Egan and Moogahlin Performing Arts, informing new community collaborations that aim to bring the spirit and culture of the site to life, and imagine a future for this important landmark:

- **Queensland artist Tony Albert** is well known for his innovative approach to collaboration with children and young people. For *Ngara – Nguwangga Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks)*, he has worked alongside local Darug woman Julie Bukari Webb and ten local youngsters and their families to create *Gubangala Gumadangyiningi* (Lets honour his/her spirit), a reimagining and honouring of ten of the children who originally lived at the Institution. A suite of objects created by Albert and his young collaborators will be utilised in a ceremony to reach across time to heal and share positive memories. Visitors will be encouraged to gift a memory to the reimagined children by describing their gift on paper embedded with vegetation. The paper will be buried onsite and will help to heal the area and build a new and positive future.

- **Perth-based artist Sharyn Egan**’s work is informed by her personal experience of loss and displacement as a member of the Stolen Generations, and centres around sharing the medium of weaving with communities during the exchange of stories and experiences. The Blacktown project sees her working with the Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation and local weavers to create a sculptural installation of seven large-scale flannel flowers made of colourful marine rope. Native to the local area, this delicate flower will be transformed into a monumental memorial to the Institution’s residents, as a semi-permanent installation at the Blacktown Native Institution site.

- **Sydney's Moogahlin Performing Arts** brings their expertise as storytellers and deep knowledge and experience of local community to this event, with *manuwi jam ya murong (footprints in the sand)*. This celebratory work honours local people who have grown up in Blacktown, with the creation of a large scale installation of the Darug totem – the long necked turtle, in collaboration with local community elders, kids and families. On Saturday, June 9 the totem will come to life as the grounds for an evening of dance performance, whilst the installation of traditional gunyas or shelters will allow visitors to experience a moment of private contemplation in this uniquely sacred space.
MCA Director Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE says, “The Blacktown Native Institution Project demonstrates the need to celebrate living Aboriginal culture, while not forgetting the atrocities of colonisation. This long-term project brings artists together with community to remember the site’s history and to create a future for this important place.”

“On Saturday 9 June, we come together for Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks), to celebrate the site’s importance both as a place of ceremony and culture for the Darug people and as the location of the Blacktown Native Institution. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike are invited to experience major new commissions responding to the site, including monumental sculpture, interactive artworks and large-scale performance, each made in collaboration with the local community.”

Blacktown Mayor, Stephen Bali, adds, “I am proud that Blacktown is home to one of the largest urban Aboriginal populations in Australia. The Blacktown Native Institution is a significant part of Blacktown’s identity – and the identity of this nation. While acknowledging past wrongs, through this project we also aim to celebrate the Darug peoples’ continuing cultural practices and connection to this place.”

“Our arts centre has a long history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, and our communities deserve to work with artists of international stature such as Tony Albert, Sharyn Egan and Moogahlin Performing Arts. We hope that this collaboration will shine a light on the important history of the Blacktown Native Institution site and the arts and cultural practices of Blacktown’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

In addition to the public event, the project will see a major update to the Blacktown Native Institution Project website in September 2018, to facilitate ongoing national and international celebration of living Aboriginal cultures, centred around the history and significance of the Blacktown Native Institution and the land it was built on. Visit bniproject.com.

For full event details, access information and updates, please visit bniproject.com.

Everyone’s invited to join in the free celebration at Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks) from 4pm to 8pm on Saturday, June 9 2018, at the Blacktown Native Institution site, corner Richmond Road and Rooty Hill Rd North, Oakhurst, NSW. Entry is free entry and on-site parking is available (entry from Richmond Rd).

In case of inclement weather, the event will be held at Blacktown Arts Centre, 78 Flushcombe Rd, Blacktown.

Dropbox with high-resolution media images: click here.
C3WEST ARTS PROJECT TO HONOUR AND ACKNOWLEDGE SYMBOLIC ABORIGINAL SITE IN SYDNEY’S WEST

ABOUT

Key project partners

The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) and its C3West program

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) is Australia's leading museum dedicated to exhibiting, collecting and interpreting the work of today's living artists. Located on one of the world’s most spectacular sites on the edge of Sydney Harbour, the MCA presents a diverse program of exhibitions and special events onsite, and also curates touring exhibitions and community-led projects. C3West, one of its key programs, is predicated on the belief that artists can bring unique value to situations beyond the gallery context. Through careful brokerage processes, C3West creates contexts in which artists work strategically with arts partners, businesses and non-arts government organisations across Greater Sydney, aligning corporate social investment strategies with community development. C3West has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. It is supported by the Crown Resorts Foundation, Packer Family Foundation and Space.

Blacktown City Council, Blacktown Arts, Western Sydney

Blacktown Arts is a recognised leader in the development of contemporary arts in Australia, presenting an award-winning curated program of exhibitions, performances, workshops, residencies and events. The organisation is committed to exploring dynamic, culturally diverse work that reflects Blacktown, its history and its communities. Blacktown Arts places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities at the heart of its program to develop new work drawing on issues of local and global significance. The Blacktown Arts Aboriginal Arts Program is supported by Crown Resorts Foundation and Packer Family Foundation. The Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre is an initiative of Blacktown City Council and is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW. Blacktown City Council is a local government area in western Sydney, approximately 35 kilometres west of the Sydney central business district, in the state of New South Wales, Australia. The City has a population of 336,962 making it the second most populous LGA in Sydney, and is home to the second largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia, with 9,527 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making up 2.8% of all residents.

The Blacktown Native Institution Site

The Blacktown Native Institution was a residential school for young Aboriginal and Maori children, established by Governor Macquarie’s colonial administration. The Blacktown Institution originally opened in Parramatta in 1815, and was moved to Blacktown in 1823. The Blacktown Institution operated for six years, until 1829. One of the first known sites where Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and institutionalised, it is recognised by local Aboriginal communities as a profound symbol of race relations and cross-cultural interaction in Australia.

Following closure of the Institution in 1829, the Blacktown Native Institution site continued to be utilised as a working property throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1924 the former Institution house was destroyed by fire. A fibro farm house replaced the old house and this in turn was demolished in 1985. Post-1985 activities at the Blacktown Native Institution site have included clearance of vegetation, piping of the creek, construction of a sewer and the construction of an open drain running north to south through the site.

Adjacent to the Blacktown Native Institution site is the location of the Australia's first Aboriginal land grant, in 1816.

The Blacktown Native Institution site is located in Darug country, on the corner of Richmond Road and Rooty Hill Road North Oakhurst in outer Sydney, New South Wales, part of the Blacktown local government area.

A comprehensive history of the site can be found on the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage website as well as on the Dictionary of Sydney website.
ARTIST BIOS AND STATEMENTS

Tony Albert, Queensland

A Kuku Yalanji man from north-east Queensland, Tony Albert, works across drawing, painting, photography and installation. A founding member of the Queensland Indigenous art collective proppaNOW, Albert has exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the Musée d’Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France (2014); Singapore Art Museum (2013); National Museum of China, Beijing (2013); and Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel (2011). He was also included in the 10th Havana Biennial, Cuba (2009) and Dark Heart, the 2014 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art. His commissioned artwork for the Hyde Park War Memorial in Sydney commemorating Indigenous soldiers, YININMADYEMI Thou didst let fall, was unveiled on Anzac Day in 2015. His major exhibition Visible will be on display at QAGOMA 2 June – 7 October 2018.

Artist statement:

“My project is about healing the site. I’m working with community member Julie Jones and ten local children and their families to reimagine ten of the children originally at the Institution. People will be encouraged to gift a memory to the reimagined children by writing it down on paper embedded with vegetation. The paper will be buried onsite and will heal the area. The objects I am making with the children can also possibly have a presence inside institutions, museums or galleries around Australia and the world. Great memories can be gifted and brought back to Country for the purpose of healing the site.”

Sharyn Egan, Perth

Sharyn Egan is a Nyoongar woman living and working in Perth. She is a painter, natural fibre weaver and sculptor whose work is informed by experiences of loss and displacement shared by many Aboriginal people. Her recent exhibitions include When the Sky Fell, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, 2017, and Open House: Third Tamworth Textile Triennale, 2017. Her major public artworks include a land art collaboration with Elaine Cocherty for South Perth, 2017, and woven playscapes for Perth Stadium, 2018.

Artist statement:

“I’m a Nyoongar woman from Perth, Western Australia. Being involved in the Blacktown Native Institution Project is quite special for me as I’m from the Stolen Generation as well. I’m working on flowers, as flowers are used for all occasions, sad, happy, joyous – it seems to cover all the emotions that are involved in this project. I’m using marine rope – it lasts for years and keeps its colour. I’m working with the community on them. I’m going to do them on a large scale so they can bring a bit of notice to the site where the Institution was.”

Moogahlin Performing Arts, Sydney

Moogahlin Performing Arts Incorporated was formed in Redfern NSW in November 2007, in honour of the late Kevin Smith, and in memory of the founding members of Black Theatre. The company aims to create and tell community-based stories, develop a comprehensive youth theatre and produce distinctive, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary performance works. Moogahlin’s recent projects include Broken Glass, co-produced with Blacktown Arts for Sydney Festival 2018, and Fire Bucket presented at Sydney Festival 2017. The organisation is led by co-Artistic Directors Frederick Copperwaite, Lily Shearer and Liza-Mare Syron.

Artist statement (by Frederick Copperthwaite):

“We thought about what life was like before invasion and wanted to celebrate that life, rather than respond to European intervention through the Blacktown Native Institution. Working with kids, elders and families, along with a number of dance groups, we are creating a performance that celebrates the community that’s there now as well as the historical, traditional community. There will also be gunyas, shelters where people lived, allowing for moments of private contemplation. We want it to be a celebratory work that engages as many people from Western Sydney as possible.”
ABOUT

The Blacktown Native Institution Project

Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara (Listen, hear, think – The Place Speaks) is the third iteration of the Blacktown Native Institution Project, founded by the MCA and Blacktown Arts in 2014.

The initiative grew from a 2013 Blacktown Arts exhibition, The Native Institute Project, conceived by Andrea James and co-curated by Brook Andrew and Paul Howard and featuring works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists Daniel Boyd, Robyn Caughlan, Karla Dickens, rea, Leanne Tobin, and Jason Wing.

In 2014, Blacktown Arts joined forces with the MCA, through their C3West Program and Urban Growth NSW, to further develop the initiative, in collaboration with the community and local artists.

This partnership ran throughout 2014 and 2015, bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists Darren Bell, Karla Dickens, Steven Russell, Kristine Stewart and Leanne Tobin together with local community members and leaders across a number of fields, including historians, designers, and academics.

Outcomes of the 2014 project included:

- The creation of temporary public artworks on the site of the Blacktown Native Institution, launched at a Corroboree event in November 2015;
- The creation of a Blacktown Native Institution Project website, as a keeping place for personal stories, histories, and archival material about the Blacktown Native Institution;
- Creative contribution to the master plan for future permanent usage of the Blacktown Native Institution site.

The Blacktown Native Institution Project is a collaboration between the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (through their C3West Program) and Blacktown Arts, an initiative of Blacktown City Council. The project is supported by UrbanGrowth NSW, and media partners Gadigal Information Service and Koori Radio.

C3 West and Blacktown Arts acknowledge that this project is conducted on Darug land, and wish to pay their respects to elders past, present and future. They thank the Darug people and their ancestors for welcoming community members, artists and organising partners to this important place, and acknowledge the generosity of the individuals within the Darug and broader community, whose participation and sharing has made this project possible. Blacktown Arts’ is committed to working with Darug and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the future of this site.