



ARTICLE

The Powerhouse & Blak Collections: Sitting with Trouble and Standing Up for Truth

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Abstract

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration came to the Powerhouse Museum in late 2019 and has underpinned sincere positive transformation of collection care standards ever since. Enacting its commitments allowed unprecedented Indigenous accesses and advances through the historic Powerhouse Collection Digitisation and Relocation Project, which further informed the founding of the Powerhouse First Nations Directorate in 2021. Since then, many profound improvements are being enabled by fulfilling the assertions and commitments offered in the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. This article is presented as a firsthand account of how it has informed positive developments in documentation, storage, handling and access as well as towards correct recognitions, protocol adherences and approaches to acquisition all of which affirm the rights of Indigenous people over their cultural heritage that the Powerhouse is safeguarding.

Keywords: *Museum; archive; decolonise; Blak; Indigenous*

I'd like to share a *yarn*¹ with you about Australia's largest museum group, the Powerhouse.² It's a story about growing capacity to care for Indigenous collections and how deeply the *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*³ has informed this in recent years.⁴ I'm *yarning* because I'm *Blak*⁵ Australian and raised to share truthfully on what I know with those who have ears to hear. The verb 'yarn' means simply to 'talk', while colloquially 'yarn' and 'yarning' are now synonymous with having a 'chat' or 'conversation'. Yet it's imperative to know that *yarning* as *honest talk for ready listening* has held critical significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years before endorsement in academia as a credible methodology for respectful and reliable information sharing.⁶ Shay reminds us that '*yarning is much more than conversation; yarning can be formal or informal discussions that honour and recognise the importance of story in knowledge exchange*',⁷ while Lin, Green and Bessarab significantly point out that '*Information is embedded within the story or yarn being told, with the onus on the listener or receiver of the yarn to hear and make meaning of the information being imparted*'.⁸ I yarn here as an assertion of my Blakness and to honour the responsibility this carries to communicate about important matters from a place of experience at the right time. So, here we

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are. There will be poetry. I paper-yarn for reflection in many hands, hearts and minds beyond us, beyond here and beyond now.

'Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart'

- William Wordsworth

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration [*hereafter 'the Declaration'*] has itself arisen from yarnning among Indigenous leaders and archival experts across time and territory. It is their honest yarns accumulated in the rot of a shared vulnerability to dispossession, assimilation and genocide which have refined into resounding assertions and commitments for global memory institutions to fulfill.⁹ As *Collections Coordinator, First Nations* at the Powerhouse (since 2020), I am employed by the New South Wales Government to maintain accurate records and representations of individual and collective cultural histories. I have inherited a practical paper in the Declaration to do this role well. Yet, as a Blak public servant further obliged by cultural responsibility, liable for overcoming colonial narratives *and* safeguarding cultural memory in '*a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter*',¹⁰ I must recognise this Declaration as a sacred revelation and empowering paper-yarn accomplished with the breathings of many Indigenous hearts. The story of how it was introduced and still informs progressive reimagination of collection care at Powerhouse really is a *proppa*¹¹ big yarn for the books.¹² I hope it earns foxing and old-paper scent as it ferments and distils in service of collected cultural memories across time and territory, too.

*'God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine –
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget'*¹³

The Blak story

Like all colonial ventures, the Powerhouse historically benefited from extracting and exhibiting the resource, knowledge and cultural expressions of Australia's First Peoples.¹⁴ Thankfully, this has improved towards more ethical engagement since being founded as *The Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum of New South Wales* in 1880.¹⁵ Our beginning had everything to do with a lust to permanently possess the objects and materials accumulated for the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879–1880, including the earliest plunder of Blak belongings from the first years of British colonisation on these unceded lands. Despite the entire original collection being destroyed in the infamous *Garden Palace Fire of 1882*,¹⁶ the museum began re-collecting with fervour,¹⁷ reaching a critical peak of acquisitions in preparation for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria in 1897. The institute now known as Powerhouse has operated continually for almost 150 years across several incarnations and sites, but always favouring industry, applied science and technology through the colonisers lens.

It was not until the mid-1980's that a Blakfulla was formally engaged to liaise and assist in curation for the '*Australian Communities*' gallery and public events for the 1988 opening of the '*Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences – Powerhouse Museum*' at Ultimo.¹⁸ Dr. Peter Yanada McKenzie¹⁹ was bought in to consult and connect museum curators with his own La Perouse Aboriginal community in an effort to ensure genuine representation.²⁰ It takes many more years until a full-time Blak curator was appointed '*to liaise with and represent the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*'.²¹ This yarn **must** acknowledge the caretaking

and development of the collection, programming and educational capacity achieved by those who've come before us at Powerhouse. Cultural leaders like Dr. McKenzie, along with *Curator of Koori History & Culture*, Dr. James Wilson-Miller²²; *Assistant Curator*, Dr. Fabri Blacklock²³; *Indigenous Project Officer*, Graham Mooney²⁴ and *Education Manager*, Steve Miller²⁵ contributed many decades of combined service between mid-1980 and 2013 ensuring Blak history and culture did not remain on 'the unacknowledged frontiers of public memory'.²⁶ *The Dreaming*²⁷ they injected here as an enduring sense of cultural purpose was remarkable for that period. Most especially when we consider the *cultural load*²⁸ they undoubtedly carried before the groundbreaking *ATSILIRN Protocols* were first available to guide the sector 'in appropriate ways to interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the communities which the organisations serve, and to handle materials with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content' (1995)²⁹ and even longer before the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*³⁰ was announced (2007) and began seeping into the broader socio-political consciousness. As Blak Australian museum workers they sure were sitting with trouble and standing up for truth when ethical engagements between institutions of memory and *Blakfullas*³¹ were more than unfamiliar. Powerhouse archives reveal how deeply they fostered our earliest relationships. Their caring and cultural knowing is proven in the significant belongings they revealed, acquired and protected into the calibre of Blak Knowledge Keepers engaged for public programs and revolutionary publications such as *Bayagul: contemporary Indigenous communication*³² and *Sharing a Wailwan Story*.³³ So much of our present work is informed by their toil affirming that 'to challenge colonial ideologies in the archival setting is an endeavour of generations'.³⁴ It certainly does take time, and willing people afforded the opportunity to engage and build upon the learnings of others. I'm very gratefully one such person afforded this opportunity via a chance to dance at Powerhouse over 10 years ago. It all started with a cuppa and a yarn.

Uncle Fulla, Good Fulla

The appointment of Uncle Marcus Hughes as *Indigenous Programs Producer* in 2015 was the next milestone in Powerhouse's capacity to care, and where the Declaration and I specifically enter the Powerhouse Dreaming.³⁵ Uncle Marcus softened museum authority structures over cups of tea and unhurried yarning with community, staff and executives. He re-established an 'ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration' which had been resting since Dr. James Wilson-Miller retired in 2013.³⁶ Significantly, Uncle Marcus shared the Declaration with people in power and gave it to those deserving empowerment too. Far from 'only' producing public programs, Uncle Marcus made Powerhouse feel safe and exciting for emerging and established Blak artists, academics, activists and audiences to start coming back. Our institutional archive shows that not since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games had so much thinking and resource been put towards amplifying Indigeneity as it was again from 2015. Over the next 5 years, Uncle Marcus' responsibilities evolved as he ignited a dynamic network of Blakfullas across the museum. It's beautiful to grasp now that he was future proofing Powerhouse Indigenous collections purely by warranting their loving care, and that he did it without ever being in a 'collection' or 'curatorial' specific role.

We know what we know, in the way that we know it (and that's what it's all about....)

In reflecting on the statement that 'traditional Indigenous knowledge models are built on ideas of space, community, spirituality and ecology',³⁷ I recall Uncle Marcus programming famous Aboriginal Elder, actor and activist Uncle Jack Charles³⁸ to lead tours through *the International Sherlock Holmes exhibition* in 2017.³⁹ Uncle Jack was known fondly as 'Robin Hood of the Streets' and he yarned those tours through his own *Cleverman* and cat burglar knowing.⁴⁰

He bonded the Blak with the unBlak by sassily wrapping the supernatural in the pragmatism of survival at all costs. He was teaching Australian social history and Aboriginal cultural heritage at the same fabulous time! This was an *a-ha!* moment for me. Until then, I thought museum tours were serious events speaking only to facts and data. It was charmingly obvious in realising Uncle Jack *was himself* the source of facts presented and could therefore yarn them his way. He had knowing talk and I found new ears to hear. The daring of that program, which elevated his cultural knowledge and lived experience to the same status and intelligence ascribed to Sherlock Holmes resonated deeply across my varied positionality from audience member to fellow Blak performer engaged with the museum. Initially, I delivered workshops and performed at museum events with fellow creative practitioners. We danced and sang for the Powerhouse *Reconciliation Action Plan* and *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Properties Protocols* and *Elders Residencies* that Uncle Marcus launched.⁴¹ Later I assisted him to produce an *Indigenous Science Symposium*⁴² while he initiated annual smoking ceremonies to cleanse the museum site, collection stores and staff. Uncle Marcus also ensured that *Acknowledgments of Country*⁴³ began to be spoken, published and displayed throughout Powerhouse which proudly continues today.

I appreciate now in a way that wasn't possible then, that as more Blak people and practices were re-connecting with Powerhouse, our potential to overcome penal impositions on Country and consciousness were being revealed. I've needed this time to grow the inner-sector eyes and ears to discern how imperative our creative engagement with collected memory really is to overcoming systemic oppressions on our past, present & future histories. I just felt back then being a Blakfulla at Powerhouse felt right, good and fair and so I kept coming and dancing and yarning. I'd performed in many public cultural institutions across Australia and abroad before Powerhouse. But I'd always been an Aboriginal object on show and I knew it. Dancing here was different because we were invited by an Elder we trusted, and for reasons beyond the curious adoration of strangers. We were performing ceremony *for* the Ancestors and community connected to the museum. This distinction in performance sense-ability is what responsive assertion of cultural memory looks and feels like, and it made me want to stay here and get to work for my people.⁴⁴

I honestly thought back in my first days at Powerhouse that Uncle Marcus had just convinced the museum to let Blakfullas be Blakfullas, which is no different than enacting the commitments of the Declaration when I really think about it. I see now that he was sowing institutional seeds of change into soils tilled before him, and he could only do that because the season for change was upon Powerhouse through the efforts of so many before and alongside him in that work. I am reminded that none of this work occurs in a vacuum. He, like countless other Indigenous leaders around the world and across institutions are proving that it is empowered people who make progressive changes, not papers alone. Only through enacting the Declaration over a number of years have I come to fathom that Uncle Marcus was supporting us to embody self-determination, to assert our Knowledge Authorities and get due access to our collected past. In doing so, he provided a profound opportunity to develop our sense of response-ability towards safeguarding collected heritages, and furthermore, to be acknowledged for it professionally. He was working to have all of this recognised at departmental and executive levels while simultaneously awakening them in our individual spirits. Uncle Marcus reflected '*first they come in as visitor services officers and develop a rapid sense of ownership, which gave them the confidence and skills to want to do more ... It is finding the leverage point where those young ones could be responsible for the knowledge, with integrity and authority*'.⁴⁵ That's some hefty business right there. Uncle Marcus Hughes and the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration triggered a *Deadly Blakout*⁴⁶ at Powerhouse. Lest we forget.

A paper in time (saves 9)

The announcement of the Declaration on 25 October 2019 was more than timely. I believe it was Ancestor guided because Powerhouse was set to commence audits for its historic *Collection Relocation and Digitisation Project* (CDRP)⁴⁷ in early 2020. Every article of material and every record of its half-a-million objects was to be examined. All aspects of registration, documentation, conservation, digitisation, physical labelling, licencing, access, handling and storage were to be assessed and treated, prior to relocation at a new purpose-built storage site at Castle Hill.⁴⁸ The Declaration's announcement and availability to implement as the international standard for Indigenous caring in the public archive was a guided blessing for two vital reasons: Firstly, because there was now quite the deadly *mob*⁴⁹ of blakfullas in genuine relationship with the museum who could reasonably be asked to attempt this '*once in-a-generation opportunity to transform and renew one of Australia's oldest and most important cultural institutions*'.⁵⁰ And secondly because with Declaration in hand Uncle Marcus could build the Blak assessment team and determine its foci, methods and goals on its assertions – that Indigenous peoples *do* know and have *the right to know* our cultures; and to *own* them; and that we *may seek, reclaim, speak* and be *acknowledged* for what is ours; and that we can *spend time* with and *maintain authority* over our collected past in our own *self-determined* ways. Never before had Powerhouse gathered a large team of Blakfullas from diverse cultural and social understandings to sit in the stores full-time, in self-determined visitation to triage cultural caring like they would be for the CDRP. No doubt it was a big shift for Powerhouse to hand over control so completely to non-curatorial, non-registration, non-conservation and wholly non-collections experienced staff. It was for me too when asked to interview for an assessor's role. I replied to Uncle Marcus at the time '*but I don't know anything about auditing museum collections*'. With a thoughtful nod he softly replied, '*the most important thing is that you know how to sit with these belongings and listen*'.⁵¹ I trusted the authority of his knowing and further agreed to lead a team of 8 Blak assessors for a proposed 6-month project starting May, 2020.⁵²

Paper holds weight

This team had weavers, singers, ex-park rangers. We had children of curators and activists. We had assessors who hailed from city, bush, Torres Strait, and South Sea Islands. We had some who knew everything about fashion, politics, football and art; others who knew traditional business, Lore and story, some who'd been to University, others who'd not used a computer that much. We had all come into the museum from different paths – as performers, visitors' services officers, event programmers, artists and educators. Before the CDRP, none of us had ever considered being allowed unsupervised in the collection stores or electronic record management system. Nor did we anticipate the potency of knowing in our blood and bones, or the ways this would prove so demonstrably pertinent. All of us held story that guided us as we sat with belongings to discern their materiality and all that came with them in spirit. This is why this yarn is so important for me to share at this time: the Declaration held real weight for 8 scared blakfullas in a basement packed with bad memories. It became a rock for us to cling to and a ticket to ride that we waved often. Mercifully, it was clear our team had eyes and ears for the Ancestors anchored to their belongings here. We discovered real fast what Yorta Yorta woman Kimberley Moulton meant when she wrote '*cultural belongings, whether old or new, are constantly awake, and recharged when they have community with them. There is a reciprocal channel that is opened when community connect*'.⁵³ This channel helped us manage institutional expectations, outdated opinions and assumptions which initially supposed we would assess around 600 or so objects and would finish in 6 months.

Our audit revealed more than 5,000 culturally relevant materials beyond more than 1,000 produced by Blak makers for Blak purposes. All we gathered needed sincere improvement to the attention they were receiving. The Declaration presented fundamental considerations and sector languages which helped in negotiating improvements for not only cultural belongings but for representations and appropriations too. For example, we could now explain in proppa museum lingo that a homogenised likeness of an Aboriginal warrior depicted on grandmother's silver teaspoon is an outdated racist representation; and furthermore, we had the authority to remove it from the website where it was squatting as hero shot for Aboriginal Australia since the 1950's.

I'll see your PhD and raise you this paper

I believe wholeheartedly that our assessments over 2 years could not possibly have revealed so much additional material, or bought such initial improvement to their understanding if we didn't have Blak people ethically engaged and holding the Declaration in willing hands *before* the audit commenced. Indeed, this is the entire point of this yarn. Our whole team had established commitment to the museum through our trust in Uncle Marcus; trust built from longstanding relations well prior to any of us coming to Powerhouse; and years engaged with the museum before we ventured into the collection stores. We agreed to sit with the trouble because when Uncle said we were ready and right for the job, we soon proved ourselves to be. This exemplifies what trusting in cultural Knowledge Authorities can achieve for Indigenous people and for institutions alike. Uncle Marcus reflected on this later when discussing leadership in the museum *'we just need to change the way we look at education qualification, or wisdom, and how that is built into our position descriptions... It needs to be about EQ not IQ'*.⁵⁴

In my experience, the real power of the Declaration is its capability to support radical transformation of the way things have 'always been done' in the archive. This is because it is thoroughly fair in its line of reasoning and proposals for action. Certainly, any human with a beating heart and a coherent brain must see it declares nothing more than the birthright of Indigenous people to own what they own; to know what they know; and to be who they are with self-determined authority and without interference from colonial systems of oppression and obfuscation ultimately set up by murderers, thieves and liars. I hereby assert in this yarn that *all people everywhere* deserve their history. Whether it's a history worthy of remembrance is an entirely other matter, and in no way undermines ultimate sovereign authority to know and deal with it self-determinedly. The Declaration makes this deservedness abundantly clear. It undeniably promotes rationality and equity in very manageable terms. Referring to it to justify a courtesy as modest as giving a person, place, or object their actual name back worked marvellously during our early days auditing collection. This was because we weren't archaeologists or anthropologists with PhD papers proposing the documentation, storage, or handling amendment. We weren't curators or archival specialists either which made some museum people nervous and that's fair enough, given what a colonised professional conditioning can do for trusting Black people who looked like us mob. We were a team of Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders from incredibly diverse backgrounds. But by the Ancestors we knew what we knew, even when we didn't necessarily understand it, we knew it and the Declaration supported that. We knew what we didn't know too. This gradually grew our resolve, and with time the broader museum staff witnessed the changes in pace and tone we were bringing. Uncle Marcus reckoned *'while this mob have no tertiary training, they have deep cultural connection to this business, and for that reason they have the intelligence to do the important work the museum wants them to do'*.⁵⁵ Trust was built across team disciplines as staff and assessors shared their museum knowing generously with us, too. The Declaration gave

our team certainty when having yarns with them, and permitted us to wait for correct cultural guidance. Most importantly we found that the Declaration gave Powerhouse patience to pause while we located and implemented proppa standards in the ways that our cultural guidance demanded.

Didgeri-don't

From the outset, we worked to find appropriate descriptions to establish an acceptable documentation standard. We sought Knowledge Authorities to guide us on languages and protocols. Privileging their advice thoroughly was the first step in making positive changes. Whether a traditional cultural belonging, an outright appropriation or racist representation, everything we uncovered needed careful contextual understanding. I should point out that some objects and materials had not been visited for over 30 years when we started the CDRP. Certainly, many others and their records had remained untouched, unseen, and unheard for far longer. There were several unknowns in the confrontation of challenging materials simply because the collection wasn't allowed comprehensive Blak oversight for so long. We accepted this both as our responsibility and great privilege to discover and start caring properly. We held each other through it. There were many tears as our assessments revealed how cold and unconvincingly our old people were regarded historically in this institution and beyond. No matter how much I'd danced upstairs, nothing could have prepared me for those first encounters in the Ultimo collection basement. Particularly when it came to discovering Ancestors held hostage in the earliest Australian colonial photography.⁵⁶

It was so exceedingly difficult to witness those fellow human beings – sometimes from our own traditional territories – our *actual* mob – posed unnaturally with belongings evidently not their own. So many Ancestors un-named, propped-up on chopped-down tree stumps. Sometimes captured in confidential business or sacred ceremony where their posture alone let me know their Country. How commonly our exquisite technologies and their purpose described wholly incorrect and regularly offensive.

Take for example a traditional Aboriginal woodwind instrument which originated in the Northern extremes of this continent. It is referred to variously by the many communities across that vast region in the language names distinct to each, such as *mako*, *yidaki*, *djibohi* and *riktakki*, among others. Since colonisation, the instrument has become *colloquially* known as a '*didgeridoo*' (didjeridu) and is easily recognised as a symbol of Blak Australia. While this can be seen as helping to strengthen identity, it contributes more to the misconception that all Aboriginal communities made and played this instrument and even worse, that everyone called it a '*didgeridoo*.' The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies explains:

'The didjeridu is for many Australians an iconic symbol of Aboriginal Australia. However, the word didjeridu isn't an Aboriginal one. It was coined by anthropologist Herbert Basedow in the 1920s who likened the word to the sound of it being played'.⁵⁷

To continue to forefront this word is grotesquely improper, and we as a Blak collections team no longer privilege it (or any other colonial words or their sneaky arrangements) which reinforce coloniser control. We gorged on the insight offered by Franks, Galassi and Thorpe where they showed us how the words we are using to describe our people, places and practices could either get us out of trouble or dig us deeper into it.⁵⁸ We began to challenge the Powerhouse system of recording and disseminating our truths by amplifying traditional languages when they were known. As a result, object records which once sustained the fat lie of '*didgeridoo*' have had correct language names and communities of origin reinstated, i.e.,

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'). We discovered that it is counter-intuitive to remove imposed names entirely as they are most often the term used in current research and reclamation efforts. We must also allow it to remain because we agree also that if institutions of memory don't tell the whole truth about the power imbalances of the colonial past, then they will only continue to serve and condone the atrocities those imbalances caused.⁵⁹ As current caretakers of the Powerhouse collection, we accept we must never be in the business of destroying the intact truth of the past, no matter how difficult it is to sit with, lest we never learn from it at all.

We found quickly the vast majority of legacy records stated so casually '*artist unknown*', '*native tool or weapon*', '*Australian aborigine*' or '*date unknown*'. This dismissal of Blak fact assumed and denied so many crucial details, and implied there is no way to find out who made them; where they came from; when they were made; or what they were made for – which is exactly the point of consolidated colonial memory keeping: to induce collective amnesia and affirm the invaders status as ultimate authority over all. Silence has been a hand-picked tool of serious harm in colonial record-keeping as Booker and Sentence explain '*it is not only what is written that wounds. The silences in records and archives claw just as deep*'.⁶⁰ We know it's no accident that the 'Indigenous artist' was so often 'unknown'. They were deliberately omitted because the collector and/or the institution didn't consider the maker, community or even the region of origin important enough to record. This is an outrageous omission of vital data for an institution purportedly existing for rigorous scientific enquiry and '*of interest and lasting service to the mass population*' and so we know this institution and the mob who sent them to build it were lying about their intentions from the start.⁶¹ Such dismissal of fact also results from earlier museum staff simply not having the eyes or ears they needed. This is for so many reasons – many of which are not those people's actual fault being subject to the empire themselves, plus it wasn't their Blak business anyway, so they had no hope. So, after biggest yarns our team began updating records to '*maker not recorded*', '*date not recorded*' or more accurately to '*Aboriginal fishing spear*' instead of '*native tool*' or '*artist unknown*'. This documentation standard has evolved again in more recent times to '*Ancestor not yet recorded*'. This was inspired by the *Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges*.⁶² and is our way of staying connected, and respectful to Ancestors and aspirational that they will 1 day be acknowledged fairly (See Figure 1).

BEFORE CDRP (Pre-2020)

Didgeridoo, aboriginal, wooden, artist unknown, Australia, Oceania

AFTER CDRP (2020-2021)

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'), wood, decorated, maker not recorded, East Arnhem land, Northern Territory, Australia, date of production not recorded, acquired 1997

POST 2022: With guidance from the Indigenous Knowledge Attribution Toolkit (IKAT)

Yidaki ('didgeridoo'), wood, ochre, decorated, Ancestor not yet recorded, East Arnhem land, Northern Territory, Australia, date of production not yet recorded, acquired 1997

Figure 1. Example of Indigenous collections documentation standards improvement 2020–2026, Powerhouse, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Minding business⁶³

Our next step was to devise processes to assist in upholding cultural authorities. We created a system of physical and digital labelling to help recognise where cultural protocols may be necessary for access, handling and storage. Throughout the CDRP there was a genuine fear from many well-meaning museum professionals who wanted to ‘do the right thing’. This did, however, promote a lot of fear mongering among them and scared us a fair bit too. Our team could all intuit consequences of stepping outside the bounds of our own cultural authority even when there were no words to describe them. We had to dispel fear and increase caring in ways that were practical and so, our *Cultural Protocol Labels* came to be. They were designed to help museum staff avoid cultural safety hazards such as exposure to materials they aren’t prepared, qualified or authorised to witness; or to touch or speak about. They also indicate where, and to whom the responsibility of care should fall in upholding applicable cultural protocols. Importantly, they protect Blak staff from inadvertently assuming proximity or control over what is not their cultural *Business* and empower non-Indigenous staff to take up the responsibility of care where it is appropriate for them to do so.

We worked as a team to conceive the system while assessor Jeremy Ambrum took the lead on design. We took time to yarn up with management and broader assessment teams about what cultural hazards are, and what can cause them before implementing. We’ve found these labels one of our most valuable assets in bridging gaps of understanding in the roles that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff can play in collection care because they help to dispel fear and ease worry for everyone equally. They’re now applied generously to physical tags, shelving, storage containers and as icons in the electronic record management system. With *Cultural Protocol Labels* all Powerhouse staff can see if an object or record attracts regulations before putting themselves, colleagues, Ancestors or communities in harm’s way (See Figure 2).

Presently *restricted* materials will mostly indicate sacred, ceremonial or *sorry business* and can also include images or references to Indigenous people who are or may be deceased.⁶⁴ Sometimes where an object or record can cause sadness or distress, it will be restricted until adequate measures of care can be applied. All *restricted* materials at Powerhouse may only be accessed with the explicit permission of the *Collections Manager, First Nations* under guidance of Traditional owners. Where unrestricted objects and materials are labelled *Men’s or*

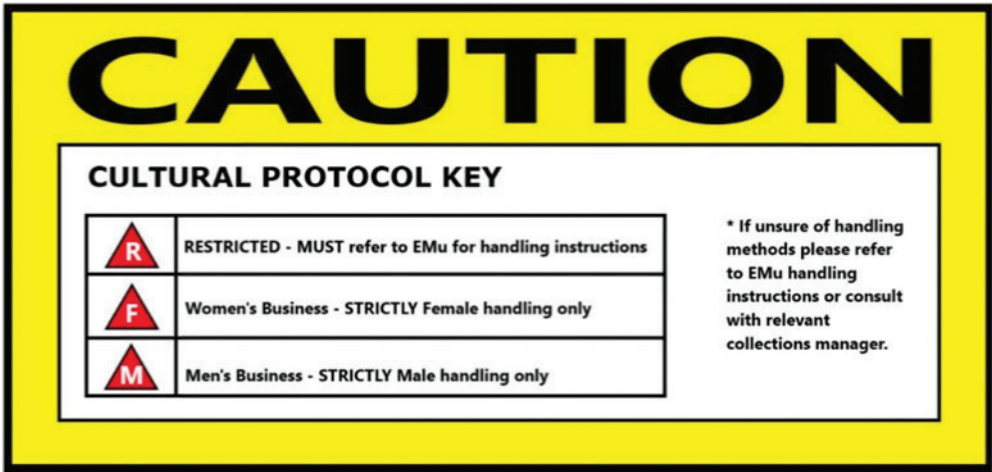


Figure 2. Cultural Protocol Label Key, designed Jeremy Ambrum, Indigenous Assessments Team, collection digitisation and relocation project, Powerhouse Museum, 2020.

Women's Business, the responsibility of care falls correspondingly for all collection caretakers. It is affirming to see non-Indigenous staff embrace caring in ways that decided by original owners, and the shared responsibility to uphold them continues to strengthen ties and trust across collection departments.

Our primary results from the CDRP came from fore fronting traditional languages, knowledges and authorities as encouraged by the Declaration. And, as it was guiding our work over 2 years its ethos was imbedding in Powerhouse perception and process as 'the way we do things now'. This meant our museum was ready to establish its First Nations Directorate in 2021.⁶⁵ The Ancestors blessed us with deady archival decolonist Nathan mudyi Sentance as our inaugural *Collections Manager, First Nations* in 2022.⁶⁶ Like so many Indigenous sector workers, he was initially afforded the opportunity to interrogate the archive as a young Blakfulla with no prior experience, and has since gone on to serve Country, community and culture far and wide for the better part of two decades. He was mentored in conditions that empowered him to know whose truth he was telling and now he is supporting his team here to do the same. Since coming to Powerhouse, Nathan has led the *right-to-reply* in profoundly moving ways.⁶⁷ He has helped us re-imagine how we can hold, protect, produce, and preserve cultural memories instead of continuing to extract them. Nathan is watering generational seeds and making us bloom. He said to me recently '*well, if a museum is a memory house, we can just help make new and better memories, you know?*'⁶⁸ The season for fruitful harvest is here indeed.

Paper is an era-plane when you know how to work it

With Nathan's experience to guide us we are better positioned to assert the *Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights (ICIP)* of communities globally.⁶⁹ We've begun by ensuring uncomplicated accesses to all that Powerhouse holds of Indigenous histories and heritage. We make it our business to keep searching and connecting with international archives for what has been forgotten. We yarn hard to establish correct ownerships. Importantly, we invite Traditional Owners to spend time with their Ancestors without lust for anything back. We are nurturing new relationships through a growing network of artists, families and communities from several Indigenous territories and varied interrupted pasts and who are equally committed to this healing. We have been gifted much about what we are really safeguarding and how to go about it more respectfully. Our work is ongoing, but we aim to restore rightful authorities across all aspects of decision making and to realise more complete and accurate names and narratives associated with communities of origin as our next vital steps.

Providing opportunity for critical encounters which *fundamentally enable love, care and dignity to be returned to people's Ancestors*⁷⁰ is our life-breath in a complete resuscitation of purpose. We are turning away from an *object-based* view and towards a *relationship-based* view. A way of seeing Indigenous collection as a dynamic nexus of interconnecting relationships between Knowledges and their Custodians spanning the entire globe.⁷¹ Critical encounters are achieved here through timely, private and uncomplicated access permissions for Indigenous visitors and ensure formalised and long-term engagements for research fellowships,⁷² photographic,⁷³ choreographic, musical and new media commissions⁷⁴ and opportunities to present and publish. All of this is achieved because we have self-determined authority in the Powerhouse First Nations Directorate to let Blakfullas be Blakfullas across all aspects of our decision making.

Institutional activations which are Indigenous led are providing ample evidence that healing can occur when we creatively kick down the doors, fling back the drawers and shine the light

of true knowing into memory houses erected by conquerors. We have grown in our capacity to care through programs which support revolutionary artists like Yuki Kihara to expose colonial memory-keeping practices and inspire better ways forward. Her *Vārchive*⁷⁵ within *Paradise Camp*⁷⁶ provided an institutional wake-up for Powerhouse by allowing hope into some really dark histories held captive here. Her work allowed us to address significant shortcomings in our representations of her Samoan and Fa‘afāfine cultures in our collection, and blessed us with new ways of connecting with Pasifika communities, academics and artists through her museum activations, including *Talanoa Forum*,⁷⁷ *UpLate: BERTHA*⁷⁸ & *Queering the Climate*⁷⁹ events.

We’re blessed to have been visited in the last 2 years by Knowledge Keepers from North and South Pacific traditional territories including Aotearoa, Alaska, Canada, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati, and visitors from Argentina and Nepal. Our work is reaching out in extraordinary ways. To yarn them all here outweighs the bounds of this present article, but I wish to especially acknowledge the significant visitations we’ve received from Dr. Ngarino Ellis (*Ngapuhi, Ngati Porou, Aotearoa*), Maarama Jo Kamira (*Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri, Nga Puhi, Ngati Whakaue, Aotearoa*), Dr. Mique’l Dangeli (*Ts’msyen Nation, Alaska*) and Master Simone Sevudredre (*iTaukei, Fiji*) (See Figure 4). These Knowledge Keepers have each deeply informed our capability to care that deserve sharing in detail and in collaboration with them when the time is right. I can however share briefly about a *Critical Encounter*⁸⁰ which revealed record number A5610, acquired in 1969; and only ever described since then as ‘*Pair of Indian (Nainiamo) moccasins ornamented with coloured glass beads. Made from bear skin*’.⁸¹ These precious belongings received love and caring through visitation from Dr. Mique’l Dangeli in 2023 (See Figure 3).

Mique’l has eyes to see they’ve been danced in.⁸² The amount of hard work and resource to lovingly craft them tells us they were made especially for their original owner. Given the timing of acquisition, there is every likelihood they were removed from their community without a fair deal even if they traded or sold to a collector. Survival is a peculiar thing when your very personhood fluctuates between illegal, exotic and dangerous and where even your ideas and attire become a commodity to acquire by any means. As a cultural dancer myself, I know this all too well. These Snuneymuxw moccasins have a people and a purpose that Dr. Dangeli is working with us to understand and care better for. She sang for their Ancestors when she was here. I visit and say *yaama* often.⁸³ I really hope they get to dance again. No protocol labels yet, just love. Their record currently reads:



Figure 3. Powerhouse museum object A5610 | Image: Powerhouse.



Figure 4. Dr. Mique'l Dangeli and the author visiting with Snuneymuxw First Nation moccasins, Powerhouse Castle Hill, July 2023.

‘Moccasins (pair), bear skin / glass, by Nanaimo people (Snuneymuxw First Nation), Vancouver Island, Canada, British Columbia, date of production not recorded, acquired 1969’.

Beyond improvements to how we describe, store and access collections, we are in a position to shape formal agreements on a case-by-case basis and in deep collaboration. We confirm and record cultural rights, protocols and recognitions to be upheld in perpetuity. The Powerhouse *Deed of Deposit*⁸⁴ is an alternate acquisition mechanism which dedicates resources to safeguard Indigenous materials without the museum ever taking legal ownership over them. In addition, we have developed *Cultural Care Agreements* that are better suited towards safeguarding ICIP where the rightsholder is transferring legal title, yet where ICIP rights must remain. For these circumstances, we can draw up a *Cultural Care Agreement* to record a successor to ICIP rights and indicate associated protocols. We find recording this especially relevant to protecting digital and other intangible properties coming into the collection, and they have assisted us to protect the ICIP of Indigenous researchers within broader collaborative

research projects which have outputs that could be further archived under institutional activity, such as we discovered through the recent Australian Research Council Project *Curating Museum Collections for Climate Change Mitigation*.⁸⁵ Two new media works were commissioned and acquired throughout this project. ‘*Yamandirra*’ is a dance ceremony on film created by Wiradjuri choreographer Jo Clancy, and ‘*Ngarrama Tide*’ is a sound and visual sculpture by Awabakal musician and composer Meeghan Oliver. These works represent our first two wholly self-determined Indigenous Australian song and dance artworks acquired as ‘collected ceremonies’ and required cultural care agreements to protect them.

The *Cultural Care Agreement* originated in early 2025 when we acquired ‘*Ngabu*’ by La Perouse artist and Dharawal woman Aunty Lola Ryan (See Figure 5).⁸⁶ Aunty Lola was only a young girl when she came with her Mum and Aunty Mavis to deliver workshops for the 1988 grand-opening of the Powerhouse Ultimo site, but she remembers the excitement of having her community and shell working featured so strongly. Acquiring ‘*Ngabu*’ to join the exquisite La Perouse shellworks acquired by Dr. McKenzie in 1988⁸⁷ (See Figure 6) is a profound and moving opportunity to showcase her radical development of the form and to nourish our relationship with her important lineage of makers. Its acquisition allows us to reimagine logistics for storing contemporary cultural works that are monumental in size, made from temporary materials and contain complicated co-designed intangible properties and collaborations with non-Indigenous makers who also hold IP rights. We were able to ensure multiple contributors’ rights and heartfelt wishes were protected in this case, and this was achieved because we could set our own timelines for patient yarning with all parties. Aunty Lola was happy to donate ‘*Ngabu*’ to our collection, but it was imperative to ensure her original commissioning agency and collaborators felt the same, and that her ICIP rights would be maintained into the future as confidently as we could provide for technical schematics or fabricators notes through standard IP protections provided by law. A *Cultural Care Agreement* now protects ‘*Ngabu*’, ‘*Yamandirra*’ and ‘*Ngarrama Tide*’ in perpetuity.

Resting thoughts...

What began as a document shared by Uncle Marcus Hughes has transformed collection caring at Powerhouse. It has become lived practice for me also. Our museum now boasts a First Nations Directorate of 10 staff. We are proud of many thousands of corrected records, fairer and fitting acquisition mechanisms, evocative opportunities for critical encounters, correct recognitions and collaborative research with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Three lessons guide our ongoing work:

Paper holds real potential when it validates Indigenous knowledge: The Declaration affirmed that our embodied knowing, cultural protocols, and lived experience have equal standing with western academic credentials and could contribute profoundly to the development of contemporary museological standards. This gave our institution trust in our abilities and our abilities earned more trust.

Transformation requires structural and cultural change: We may have created Cultural Protocol Labels and documentation standards for our collection, but real growth in the museums capacity to care arose through yarning, tears, and a real willingness to sit with trouble rather than rush past it. Genuine changes must be allowed unhurried time to ferment, refine and re-align in the consciousness of the entire institutional operation. All good yarns will linger. What is unnecessary will fall away.

Sovereignty over consistency must guide collection care: A Yidaki record that differs from a Rirtakki record isn’t inconsistent – it’s accurate. Precision requires honouring specificity. Sometimes poetry works, sometimes it doesn’t. Language really matters.



Figure 5. Installation, 'Ngabu', comprising decorative panels and AR design, metal / wood / plastic / digital, concept and design by Aunty Lola Ryan, further designed with Joey Ruigrok van der Weven, fabricated by Pink Cactus, AR design by EyeJack, curated and produced by City People, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 2025 | Image: Powerhouse.



Figure 6. Object No. 86/1786-2: Model, 'Sydney Harbour Bridge', shell / fabric, made by Mavis Longbottom and Lola Delia Ryan, La Pouse, New South Wales, Australia, 1986 | Image: Powerhouse Museum.

Museological standards for Indigenous collections must not be measured for their consistency to format, but for how well they set the historical record straight, affirm real ownership and prioritise Indigenous knowledge authorities. Our primary operating principles are predicated on returning authority back to its rightful place so we can be directed in correct caring. After all, we museum workers are caretakers, not cops. What authority do we really have if it hasn't been conferred on us, by rightful owners in the first place? Evaluating our work with a philosophical yardstick of 'sovereignty over consistency' has helped honour the spirit of letting Indigenous communities own, speak and affirm their actuality among machines, labels and shelving. We encourage institutions globally to take on board the words of our Inaugural Director of First Nations, Emily McDaniel when she said '*collections should reflect the relationships we hold*' when confronting their own collecting pasts and improving their current practices.⁸⁸ Earlier this year Nathan wrote '*challenging oppressive structures is what we need to do to assist positive social change*'.⁸⁹ I couldn't agree more. How we continue to overcome and eventually dismantle the crushing structures inherent within memory institutions will determine what society all our descendants will inherit. I wasn't teasing about being a public servant. I ask you – what other service to the public is more important in a memory institution than making sure every community gets their chance to remember, and be remembered precisely? The truth is hard for a reason. Nobody ever grew from a comfort pain.

For other memory institutions which continue to hold onto Indigenous memories and materials we encourage you to consider the Declaration as conversation, not a checklist. It is a paper-yarn that requires dialog with souls who are willing to be more than an ally, but an accomplice in making public archives truthful about who really owns the past.⁹⁰ It's vital to look honestly at who holds authority over Indigenous materials and memories in colonially introduced archival spaces. Build genuine relationships based on the commitments within the Declaration before asking Indigenous communities to labour in service of sorrows they didn't start. Trust must be earned with community because so much has been stolen and lied about.

Our work evolves as we find Ancestors like Adnyamathanha and Yunkuntjara man Uncle William Austin Snr. who remained un-acknowledged here and at other international archives such as the *International Society for Meteoritics and Planetary Sciences* who originally based their records on sub-par findings presented as stone-cold facts by Powerhouse a century or more ago.⁹¹ It is our solemn duty to correct the records of other institutions who have based their authority on Powerhouse information too.

We are still learning the ways and the right protocols, but we do it now with Indigenous Cultural Authorities, Indigenous scholarship and especially the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration continuing as our guides. This paper-yarn is my offering to the ongoing labour of cleaning up the colonial record once and for all. May it help others sit with their troubles and stand up for their truths, lest they forget them forever.

Acknowledgements

This article was written on the unceded sovereign lands of the Dharug nation where the Emu Queen Marayong belongs. I acknowledge this sacred territory and the Dharug people who have cared for it since their first sunrise.

Positionality statement

I trust in transparency, so it is important to share my positionality. I am a performer and performance theorist by trade. My work in the public archive is deeply informed by three decades defining on stage and page why we behave as we do when others are watching or not. I reject notions of neutrality for those of us working to uncover, correct and safeguard Indigenous heritage held in colonial institutions. I embrace individual truth-telling in service of a more complete human story. I recognise embodied knowledge as an asset in reclaiming hidden human histories and for protecting pathways back to authentic sources of knowing.

Notes on contributor

Tammi Gissell is a long-time horizon hunter descended from Murruwarri & Wiradjuri peoples in north western NSW, Australia. She is a freshwater woman from stone Country with cultural responsibility to the Baaka River and Mt. Gundabooka. Since 2020, she's applied her understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems to the development of culturally appropriate caring as collections coordinator, First Nations at the Powerhouse, Sydney. Tammi has previously written for the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), QLD Art Gallery of Modern Art, Australian New Zealand Arts Journal, Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities, Critical Path Institute, Performance Paradigm and Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum.

Notes

1. J H Simpson, 'Yarn as a Verb Meaning "Talk" in Australian English Varieties', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2025, pp. 30–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07268602.2025.2554125>.
2. 'Powerhouse is the largest museum group in Australia. Based in Sydney, New South Wales, it sits at the intersection of the arts, design, science and technology and plays a critical role in engaging communities with contemporary ideas and issues. It is custodian to more than half a million objects of national and international significance and is considered one of the finest and most diverse collections in Australia'. Source <https://powerhouse.com.au/about>.
3. International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*, 2019, available at <https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/Tandanya-Adelaide-Declaration.pdf>, accessed 12 November 2025.
4. For more on confronting Powerhouse's institutional past see <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/right-of-reply>.

5. 'Blak' is used by some Indigenous Australians to reclaim once derogatory uses and stereotypes associated with the word black. It can be traced back to artist Destiny Deacon and her exhibition *Blakness: Blak City Culture*, 1994. See also Jack Latimore, *Blak, Black, Blackfulla: Language Is Important, but It Can Be Tricky*, Sydney Morning Herald, August 30, 2021, available at <https://www.smh.com.au/national/blak-black-black-fulla-language-is-important-but-it-can-be-tricky-20210826-p58lzg.html>, accessed 3 November 2025.
6. D Bessarab and B Ng'andu, 'Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research', *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcis.v3i1.57>.
7. M Shay, 'Extending the Yarning Yarn: Collaborative Yarning Methodology for Ethical Indigenous Education Research', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 50, 2021, pp. 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.25>.
8. I Lin, C Green and D Bessarab, "'Yarn with Me": Applying Clinical Yarning to Improve Clinician–Patient Communication in Aboriginal Health Care', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, vol. 22, 2016, pp. 377–382. <https://doi.org/10.1071/PY16051>.
9. International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group, *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration*, International Council on Archives, Canberra, 2019, p. 1.
10. Ibid, 2019, p. 2.
11. *Yurirka: Proppa Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples*, University of South Australia, 2021. This policy document reflects that 'Aboriginal Peoples historically have fashioned their own style of English which is a decolonising act; hence "proppa" and not "proper" is used throughout'. See https://unisa.edu.au/SysSiteAssets/about-unisa/aboriginal-engagement/pdfs/als_engagementprotocolsdoc_21_web.pdf.
12. The expression '*for the books*' originally alluded to the record books kept for sports but was soon applied to other endeavours, Colloquial; c. 1900 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/one-for-the-books>.
13. Excerpt from '*Recessional*' composed by Rudyard Kipling for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, 1897.
14. For more on the historical extraction of Indigenous resource and knowledge at Powerhouse see <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/eucalyptusdom> and <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-regional-networks>.
15. For more on the founding of *The Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum of New South Wales*, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-garden-palace>, accessed 10 December 2025.
16. For more on the Garden Palace fire, 22 September 1882, see also <https://australian.museum/about/history/two-museums-and-a-garden-palace/>.
17. For more on rebuilding the Powerhouse collection after 1882 see <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/the-holding-pen> and <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/garden-palace/fire>.
18. For more on the opening of the Powerhouse Ultimo opening see 'Transforming the Tramsheds, Powerhouse Stage 1 and the Harwood Building', available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/historic-powerhouse-ultimo-stage-one>, accessed 10 December 2025.
19. Dr. Peter Yanada McKenzie is an Eora and Anaiwan man from the La Perouse Aboriginal community in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. He was consultant and assistant curator for the '*Australian Communities*' gallery of the March 1988 opening exhibitions of the Powerhouse Ultimo site.
20. M Nugent, 'National Museum Australia, reCollections', in *Displaying the Decorative: An Exhibition History of La Perouse Aboriginal Women's Shellwork*, vol. 7, no. 2, available at https://reCollections.nma.gov.au/issues/volume_7_number_2/papers/displaying_the_decorative, accessed 10 December 2025.
21. Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, *Annual Report 1996/1997*, p. 14, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/the-act#annual-reports>, accessed 7 November 2025.
22. James Wilson-Miller is from the Gringai clan of the Wonnarua Nation in the Hunter Valley, NSW. He worked as the Curator of Koori History and Culture at the Powerhouse between 1996 and 2013.
23. Dr. Fabri Blacklock is a Nucoorilma, Ngarabal and Biripi woman who worked as the Assistant Curator of Koori History and Culture at the Powerhouse Museum from 1999 to 2008.
24. Graham Mooney is an Aboriginal and South Sea Islander who joined the Powerhouse in 1994 as an Aboriginal Project Officer. See Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, *Annual Report 1993/1994*, p. 62.
25. Steve Miller is a Wiradjuri man and previous researcher, writer, curator, project officer and education manager at Powerhouse between 1998 and 2004.
26. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, 2019, *Preamble*, p. 1.
27. *The Dreaming* is a dynamic temporal order where all that has been, is being and is to be, exists together. Passed through storytelling, the Dreaming reminds us how we are connected to Country and each other. By knowing our Dreaming, we can know the right ways to live and act. See also "'Dreamtime" and "The

- Dreaming” – An Introduction’, *The Conversation*, Christine Judith Nicholls, 2014, available at <https://the-conversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>, accessed 19 October 2025.
28. ‘According to Diversity Council Australia, cultural load is the (often invisible) additional workload borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people’. Source: <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/cultural-load-its-real-thing>.
29. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network Inc, *ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*, 1995 and 2012, available at <https://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php>, accessed 5 December 2025.
30. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, available at https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf, accessed 15 October 2025.
31. Jack Latimore, ‘Blak, Black, Blackfulla: Language Is Important, but It Can be Tricky’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 30, 2021.
32. Steve Miller (Stephen Mark James), 1957 and James Wilson-Miller and Fabri Blacklock, 1976, *Bayagul: Contemporary Indigenous Communication / Steve Miller; with Fabri Blacklock and James Wilson-Miller*, Powerhouse Publishing, Sydney, 2002.
33. Steve Miller (Stephen Mark James) 1957 and Tamsin Donaldson and Powerhouse Museum, *Sharing a Wailwan Story [Electronic Resource]: Education Kit / Written by Steve Miller; with Additional Material from Tamsin Donaldson [et al.]*, Ultimo, N.S.W: Powerhouse Museum, 1999, available at http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/publications/wailwan_education_notes.pdf, accessed 22 January 2026.
34. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, *Themes and Commitments for Immediate Action*, 2019, p. 2.
35. Uncle Marcus Hughes is a descendant of the Mununjali peoples of the Yugambah nation in the Beaudesert area of Queensland, Australia. He held roles of *Indigenous Programs Producer* and *Head of Indigenous Engagement and Strategy* at Powerhouse between 2015 and 2020.
36. Ibid, Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, 2019, p. 2.
37. Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, *Knowledge Authorities*, 2019, p. 3, 1(c).
38. Uncle Jack Charles (1943–2022) belonged to the Bunurong, Wiradjuri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Woiwurrung, and Yorta Yorta peoples. He was a celebrated actor, artist, activist, cultural leader and public figure.
39. *The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2 June – 8 October 2017, available at <https://artsreview.com.au/the-international-exhibition-of-sherlock-holmes/>, accessed 5 January 2026.
40. A *Cleverman* in Traditional Aboriginal society is one who can traverse both the physical and the spiritual world. They are a conduit between here and the Dreaming; and because of this are considered to have supernatural powers. Roles and responsibilities of the *Cleverman* vary between communities and are mostly kept secret. See <https://aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/news/personal-stories-clever-man>.
41. For more on the Powerhouse RAP Plan, ICIP Protocols and Elders Residency see <https://mgns.w.org.au/articles/maas-reconciliation-action-plan/>.
42. Melinda Jane Lewis, *Reflections on the Indigenous Science Symposium, Sydney 2016*, The University of Sydney, 5 September 2016, available at <https://educational-innovation.sydney.edu.au/teaching@sydney/reflections-indigenous-science-symposium-sydney-2016/>, accessed 12 January 2026.
43. *Acknowledgement of Country* is an opportunity to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their traditional territories, referred to as *Country*. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/acknowledgement-of-country-and-welcome-to-country/>.
44. Tammi Gissell, *Steps for the Stolen: Performance as an Assertion of Cultural Memory*, Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2024, pp. 34–45.
45. M Hughes, *How Social Justice and a Pandemic Are Shaping Museum Leadership*, G Fairly (ed.), Arts Hub, 2021, available at <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/opinions-analysis/how-social-justice-and-a-pandemic-are-shaping-museum-leadership-262765-2371225/>, accessed 1 February 2026.
46. In Aboriginal slang, ‘Deadly’ is a term of admiration; while a ‘Blakout’ denotes a large scale gathering, event, experience or movement which highlights Blak excellence.
47. For more on the Powerhouse *Collection Relocation and Digitisation Project*, see Council of Australasian Museum Directors, *MAAS Launches Powerhouse Digitisation*, available at <https://camd.org.au/maas-launches-powerhouse-digitisation/>, accessed 18 November 2025.

48. Powerhouse Castle Hill, *A Storehouse for the Powerhouse Collection Supporting Research and Conservation, Presenting Exhibitions and Programs*, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/visit/castle-hill>, accessed 3 February 2026.
49. 'Mob' is a colloquial term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country. It is used to connect and identify who an Aboriginal person is and where they are from. 'Mob' can represent a family group, clan group or wider Aboriginal community group. See also <https://www.welcometocountry.com/blogs/news/understanding-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-slang-words-a-guide-to-common-words-and-terms-1>.
50. NSW Government Response, *Final Report of the Select Committee on the Government's Management of the Powerhouse and Other Museums and Cultural Projects in New South Wales*, 2022, p. 1.
51. Personal Conversation, *Uncle Marcus Hughes and Tammi Gissell*, Powerhouse Ultimo, Sydney, 2020.
52. Powerhouse CDRP Indigenous Assessment Team: Tammi Gissell, Scott Campbell, Jeremy Ambrum, Madeline Poll, Madika Penrith, Jakaya Dunn-Dixon, Charleen Williams, Ellison Shaw.
53. Kimberly Moulton, 'I Can Still Hear them Calling: Echoes of My Ancestors', *Sovereign Words Journal*, 2019, pp. 197–214, p. 210.
54. Ibid, M Hughes, in G Fairly, 2021.
55. Ibid, M Hughes, in G Fairly, 2021.
56. Powerhouse holds the largest collection of original glass plate negatives of Indigenous Australians in the *Tyrrell Collection*: approx. 2900 photographs by Australian studio Kerry & Co. (Powerhouse object no: 85/1284) and approx. 1300 glass plates by the Sydney based photographer Henry King (Powerhouse object no: 85/1285).
57. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies / didjeridu, August 2024, available at <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/didjeridu>, accessed 3 November 2025.
58. Franks, Galassi, Thorpe, Papers of the 2nd European Conference on Literature and Librarianship: Exploring Power: Aboriginal Artefacts and Records in Australian Libraries and Archives, 2015, pp. 51–65, p. 52.
59. Georgia Slattery, 'Decolonizing the Museum: Improving Transparency of Colonial Era Art in Museum Collections', *William & Mary Law Review Online*, vol. 66, 2025, Article 5, p. 127, available at <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmlronline/vol66/iss1/5>.
60. Lauren Booker and Nathan Mudyi Sentance, *We Are Not Numbers: Sonic and Poetic Refusals of Pseudoscience in the Archive*, History Australia, 10 February 2026, p.2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2026.2624732>.
61. *The Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum Annual Report*, 1881. See also <https://powerhouse.com.au/the-act>.
62. Further Documentation standards informed by Indigenous Archives Collective; S Faulkhead, K Thorpe, N Sentance, L Booker and R Barrowcliffe, *Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges*, Indigenous Archives Collective and the UTS Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, 2023, available at <https://www.caval.edu.au/referencing-toolkit/>, accessed 11 January 2026.
63. 'Business' is used to describe specific cultural roles, responsibilities, and knowledges within Indigenous Australian cultures. Cultural business is determined by a number of factors including gender, kinship ties, Lore, initiation and ancestral rights, among others. Indigenous people are beholden to the responsibility of care for all that is determined their Business; and they must avoid all that is not their Business under strict cultural protocol. General terms are *Men's Business*, *Women's Business*, *Secret Business* and *Sorry Business*.
64. 'Sorry Business' broadly refers to customary mourning practices of Indigenous Australians. It commences at end-of-life stages and continues following the death of a family or Community member. There are strict protocols that surround *Sorry Business* that are unique to each Language group and community.
65. Powerhouse First Nations Directorate, formed May 2021, Inaugural Director, Emily McDaniel appointed August 2021, see <https://powerhouse.com.au/first-nations>.
66. Nathan mudyi Sentance is a Wiradjuri man from the Mowgee clan, near Mudgee in central-western NSW. A librarian originally by trade he is a recognised thought leader and archival decolonist, celebrated cultural provocateur and collections specialist, as well as an author, award winning poet and performing artist. See also <https://archivaldecolonist.org/about/>.
67. For more on Nathan's initiatives on the *Right to Reply* at Powerhouse see <https://powerhouse.com.au/right-of-reply-photography-commission>.
68. Personal conversation, Nathan Mudyi Sentance and Tammi Gissell, Powerhouse Castle Hill, First Nations Collections, 2025.
69. '(ICIP) refers to Indigenous peoples' rights to their cultural heritage based on the fundamental right to self-determination. Cultural heritage includes all aspects of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, resources

- and knowledge systems developed by Indigenous people as part of their Indigenous identity'. <https://www.terrijanke.com.au/icip> see also <https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/protecting-first-nations-traditional-knowledge-and-traditional-cultural-expressions>.
70. K Thorpe, 'Returning Love to Ancestors Captured in the Archives: Indigenous Wellbeing, Sovereignty and Archival Sovereignty', *Archival Science*, vol. 24, 2024, pp. 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-024-09440-2>.
 71. For more on Powerhouse *Relationship Based Collection* approaches see Sentance, Poll and Gissell, *Being Collected Lecture*, Chau Chak Museum, University of Sydney, December 2024. With full lecture here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfuUBiWjXlo&t=106s>.
 72. For more on recent First Nations Research Fellowships at Powerhouse see <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-024-09440-2>.
 73. For more on Powerhouse First Nations photography commission see <https://powerhouse.com.au/right-of-reply-photography-commission>.
 74. For more on Powerhouse First Nations 'generations' musical fellowship see <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/sollyy-generations-fellow>.
 75. NM Sentance, M Poll and T Gissell, 'The Vārchive Revolution: The Imperative for Indigenous Truth-Telling and Redefining Heritage Preservation', *Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2023, pp. 235–246. See also <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/varchive>.
 76. Yuki Kihara, *Paradise Camp*, Powerhouse Museum, March–December 2023, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/paradise-camp>, accessed 1 December 2025.
 77. To hear all speakers from Yuki Kihara, *Talanoa Forum*, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/talanoa-forum-moana-rising>, accessed 3 December 2025.
 78. *Powerhouse Late: BERTHA*, Harold Samu, 24 August 2023, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/program/powerhouse-late-bertha>, accessed 3 December 2025.
 79. To hear all the speakers from Yuki Kihara *Queering the Climate* talks: <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/queering-climate>.
 80. M Dangeli and T Gissell, 'Groundswell in the Gallery: North and South Pacific Indigenous Dance in Confluence', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2023, pp. 174–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2023.2272874>.
 81. Powerhouse Object A5610, Moccasins (pair), bear skin / glass, by Nanaimo people (Snuneymuxw First Nation), Vancouver Island, Canada, British Colombia, date of production not recorded, acquired 1969, <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/183786>.
 82. Dr. Mique'l Dangeli is a dancer, choreographer, curator and activist of the Ts'msyen Nation of Metlakatla, Alaska. She is a member of the Laxgyiik (eagle clan) and carries the name Sm Łoodm 'Nüüsm (most highly respected).
 83. *Yaama* is the traditional language word for 'hello' in the Gamilaroi language from Northern New South Wales.
 84. For more on the *Deed of Deposit* see 'Indigenous Knowledges in Powerhouse Custodianship', by Uncle Marcus Hughes, Lucy Clark, Tammi Gissell, Nathan Mudyi Sentance, *The Indigenous Right of Reply to Archives*, 1st ed., Routledge, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003481225>. See also <https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/gail-mabo>.
 85. LP200100103 Australian Research Council Project, *Curating Museum Collections for Climate Change Mitigation*, available at <https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/NCGP/Web/Grant/Grant/LP200100103>.
 86. Phoebe Blogg, 'Powerhouse Museum Acquires "Ngabu" Creation by Auntie Lola Ryan', *National Indigenous Times*, 6 May 2025, available at <https://nit.com.au/06-05-2025/17771/powerhouse-museum-acquires-ngabu-creation-by-auntie-lola-ryan-into-its-collection>, accessed 27 November 2025. See also <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/create-nsw/news/stories/ngabu>, accessed 27 November 2025.
 87. Powerhouse Object No. 86/1786-2: Model, 'Sydney Harbour Bridge', shell / fabric, made by Mavis Longbottom and Lola Delia Ryan, La Pouse, New South Wales, Australia, 1986. <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/61038>.
 88. Emily McDaniel, *Wiradjuri Woman*, Inaugural Director, First Nations, Powerhouse, 2021, available at <https://powerhouse.com.au/first-nations>, accessed 8 January 2026.
 89. Nathan mudyi Sentance, April 2025, <https://archivaldecolonist.org/>.
 90. Comment 'I'm not sure if its allies we need, or.....more like accomplices' spoken by Joel Sherwood-Spring, during Panel talk 'who owns the past?' with Tammi Gissell and Damien Webb, *Death of a memorial critical forum*, 25 October 2025, University of Technology Sydney, curated by Nathan mudyi Sentance.

91. *International Society for Meteoritics and Planetary Sciences*, Meteoritical Bulletin Database, *Lake Labyrinth Meteorite*, <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/meteor/metbull.php?code=12444>. See also Powerhouse Object No. H10277 *Meteorite Fragment Found at Lake Labyrinth*, 1924, <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/232113>. A full lecture on achieving his due acknowledgement after 100 years can be viewed here as part of the *Being Collected* Lecture series at Chau Chak Museum, Sydney University, December 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfuUBiWjXlo&t=106s>.

