

# Torres Strait Island stories and messages connecting culture, the ocean and conservation

creative collaborations, exhibitions, research & education



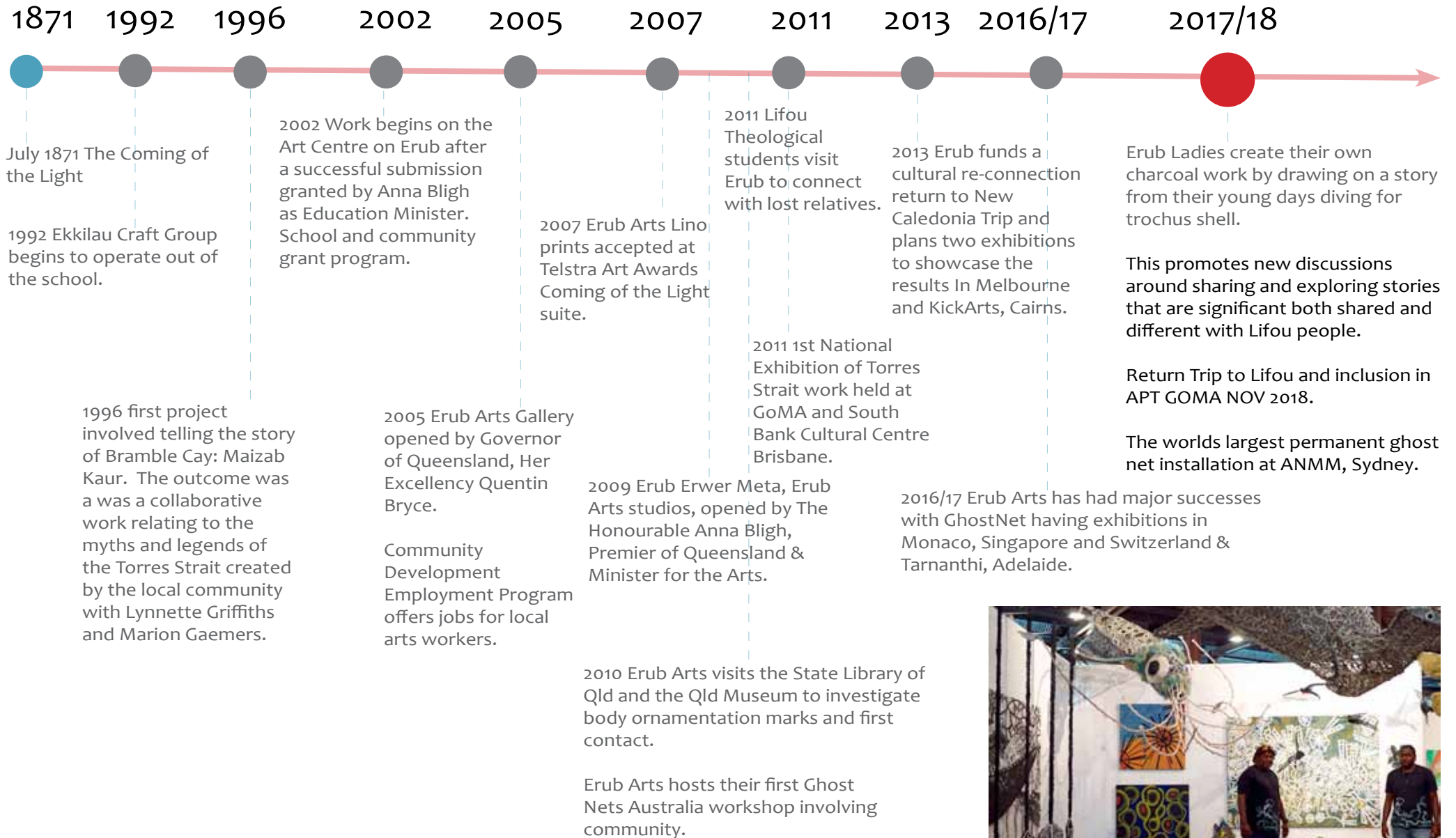
Above: *Ghost Nets of the Ocean* by Erub Arts, at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Image Lynnette Griffiths

ERUB ARTS  
TORRES STRAIT



*Merad Turtle on Seu Cay, Erub in the background*

## Erub Historical Time Line - showing selected milestones and events



Jimmy J Thaiday and Jimmy K Thaiday in the Erub stand at CIAF 2018.

## Erub Arts – timeline

- 1992  
Ekkilau Craft Group begins to operate out of the school.
- 1995-6  
First project involved telling the story of Bramble Cay: Mazab Kaur. The outcome was a collaborative work relating to the myths and legends of the Torres Strait created by the local community with Lynnette Griffiths and Marion Gaemers.
- 2001  
National Gallery of Victoria acquires Mazab Kaur, a collaborative work made by Ekkilau Craft Group in 1995-6.  
TAFE adult education certificate programs for ceramics, printmaking, linoprinting initiated at Darnley Island State School.
- 2002  
Work begins on the art centre on Erub after a successful submission to Queensland Minister for Education and the Arts.
- 2005  
Erub Arts Gallery opened by Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce.  
Community Development Employment Program offers jobs for local artists.
- 2007  
Erub Arts lino prints, Coming of the Light, accepted in the Telstra Art Awards.
- 2009  
Erub Art Centre, opened by The Honourable Anna Bligh, Premier of Queensland & Minister for the Arts.
- 2010  
Erub Arts undertakes research at the State Library of Queensland and the Queensland Museum to investigate body ornamentation marks and first contact.  
Erub Arts hosts their first Ghost Net Australia workshop involving community.
- 2011  
Erub Arts Auka Legiz (Big People) in Torres Strait Islands, Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, State Library of Queensland, Queensland Museum & Queensland Performing Arts Centre.  
Lifou Theological students from New Caledonia visit Erub to connect with lost relatives.
- 2013  
Ghost net exhibition, Cooroy Butter Factory, in conjunction with workshop and installation, Floating Land festival, Lake Cootharaba.  
Erub Arts funds Sea Journeys, a cultural re-connection trip to New Caledonia.  
Erub Arts holds two exhibitions to showcase the results in Melbourne at Langford 120 and in Cairns at Kick Arts.
- 2014  
Erub Arts has its first commercial ghost net exhibition, Aquarium, Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney.
- 2015  
Erub Arts has its first international exhibition, Our Land Our Sea – An Ocean Away in Singapore at ReDot Gallery.
- 2016  
Erub Arts features in TABA NABA at the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco.  
Solwata, 20th Sydney Biennale, acquired by Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- 2017  
Au Karem Ira Lamer Lu: Ghost Nets of the Ocean at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore – Opened by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Singapore.  
Erub Ladies create their own charcoal work by drawing on a story from their young days diving for trochus shell.  
The Boomerang Effect, Museum Ethnographic, Geneva.  
Art Aborigine Pierre Arnault Foundation, Crans Montanna, Switzerland.  
Ailan Baumer, textile exhibition, ANU School of Arts Gallery.  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority – major commission.
- 2018  
Australian National Maritime Museum acquires and installs Au Karem Ira Lamer Lu: Ghost nets of the ocean, 2018.  
Ghost net commissions go on exhibition at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology, Canada.  
Gazir Lagoon Installation for Cairns Performing Arts Centre.  
Sea Journeys - people without borders, Asia Pacific Triennial, QAG/GOMA.

## Awards

Erub Arts won Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) Premier's Award for Excellence (2018).

Jimmy K Thaiday was the overall winner of the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award (2018).

Jimmy J Thaiday won the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award for three-dimensional work (2018).

Nancy Kiwat was the runner-up of the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award (2015).

Nancy Naawi was the overall winner of the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award (2012).



Winning Gab Titui entry by Jimmy Kenny Thaiday 2018.



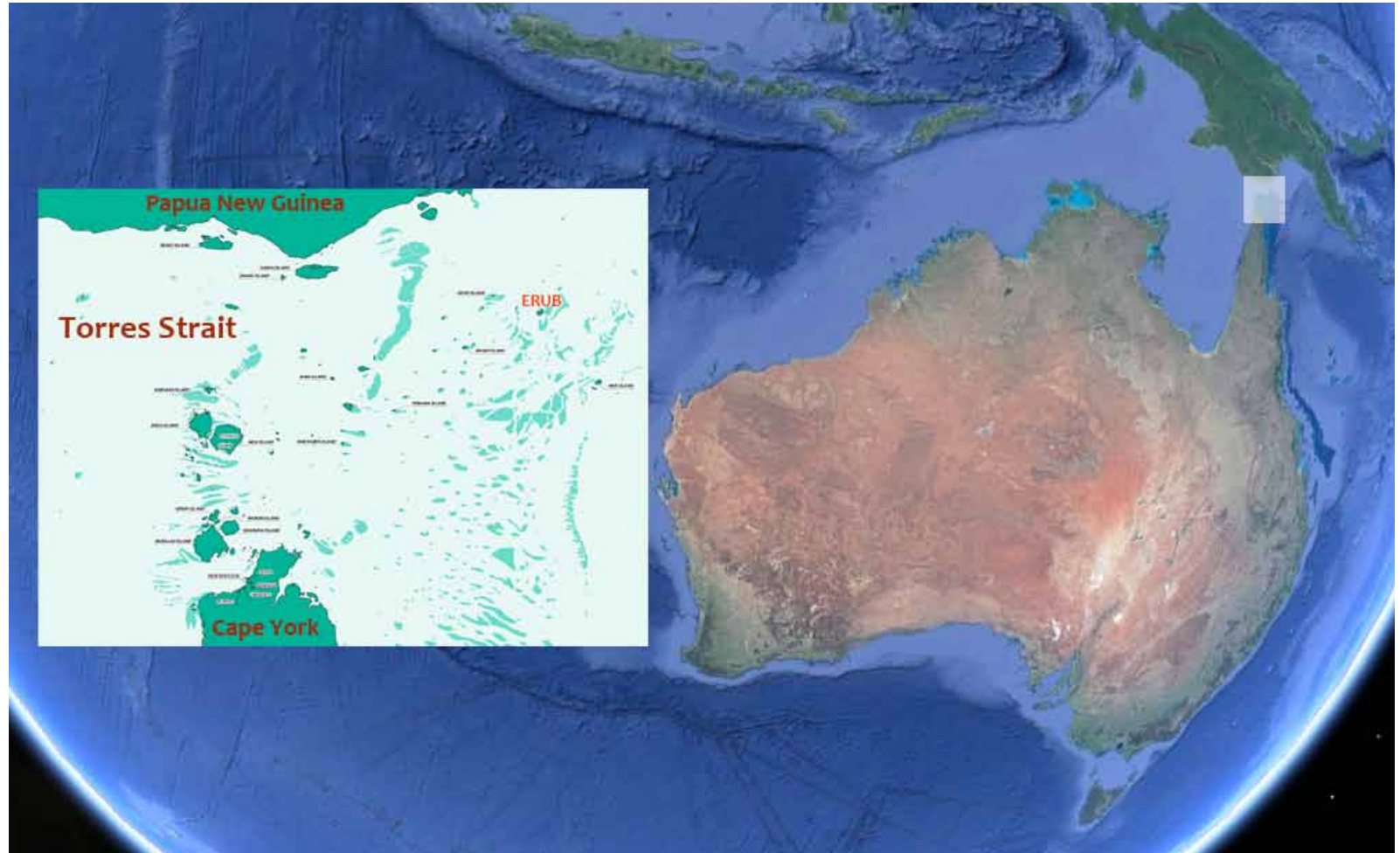
Jimmy J Thaiday at CIAF 2018 in front of the Paddles, Premier's Award winner.

## Erub an island in the Torres Strait

Erub (Darnley Island) is the most north-eastern of the Torres Strait Islands, and home to approximately 400 Erubam le (Erub people) whose seafaring heritage has traditions of elaborately decorated canoes, carved stone, intricate dance costumes, and weaponry. Stories of creation and significant community events are passed down through song, dance and adornment – keeping cultural traditions and practices vibrantly and dynamically alive.

At the heart of Torres Strait spiritual life is the belief that islands, sea and sky and all of nature possesses a soul or spirit. Knowledge of sacred relationships is maintained in contemporary art practices and is vital to artists as they explore place and identity.

Material artefacts relating to Torres Strait culture were collected by anthropologists, missionaries and teachers at the time of first contact and during subsequent periods, now much of it resides in museum collections overseas. Being able to view, research and document these artefacts is vital to the regeneration of cultural stories and practices in the Torres Strait.



Above left to right: Erub Dancers at GOMA 2011. Approaching Erub by air. Ellarose Savage, Ethel Charlie and Emma Gela with ghost net turtles.

## Erub Arts

Our vision at Erub Arts is to maintain a strong Erubian identity and to promote our culture in a contemporary way through art. Erub artists are from four tribal groups and draw artistic inspiration from their identity and connection to their totems through both traditional and contemporary stories about their land, sea and family connections.

Historically, Erub relied on strong trade links and relationships with the people of Papua New Guinea and south to Cape York. Today, Erub Arts creative practice continues to evolve at a contemporary level by its willingness to collaborate with outside artists and celebrate cross cultural exchange. In a broader capacity, museums, government bodies and commercial galleries in Australia and overseas have partnered with Erub Arts to create vibrant exhibitions and public programs that are based on cultural, religious and family research and are linked with ongoing educational opportunities for all ages. Erub Arts showcases works that use traditional and modern mediums, and are informed by historical stories from pre-contact, first contact and missionary contact, alongside contemporary stories about living culture, the land, sea and sky.



Erub community blessing of the ghost net dinghy *Loyalty* 2014.



Commission for Cairns Performing Art Centre, *Gazir Lagoon* Hanging on the Art Centre studio building 2018.

## Erub Arts

Erub Arts presents a unique model of community arts practice. Erub Arts has grown from modest beginnings as Ekkilau a women's craft group utilising a school classroom. Initiated by local resident and former principal of the Darnley Island State School, Diann Lui, the program has developed over many years with the support of co-founder and long term artistic director, Lynnette Griffiths. The original dream was to create a viable arts practice on the island – one that might provide meaningful work and productive cultural engagement for island families. Over time, with generous support from public and private sources, the group built an intergenerational learning space with specialist arts facilities, which employed arts experts and acquired specialist equipment. In the early 2000s the present centre was constructed and in 2008, the art centre became an Indigenous corporation and established itself independently of the school.

Erub Arts has developed an Indigenous/non-Indigenous model of practice where creation, exhibition, research and education are intertwined activities. Creation takes place in Erub Arts studios with groups of artists working collaboratively toward specific outcomes. Erub Arts exhibitions are the result of on-going collection-based research about culture, religion and the environment. The exhibitions reflect views from the Torres Strait about important global issues. All Erub Arts activities are built around education – for ourselves, for our children and for the wider world – about who we are and where we stand in the cultural, natural and spiritual world. Erub Arts aims to be a sustainable business, and is delivering positive financial, social, educational and community outcomes.



Community involved in photo shoot - Monaco project 2016.

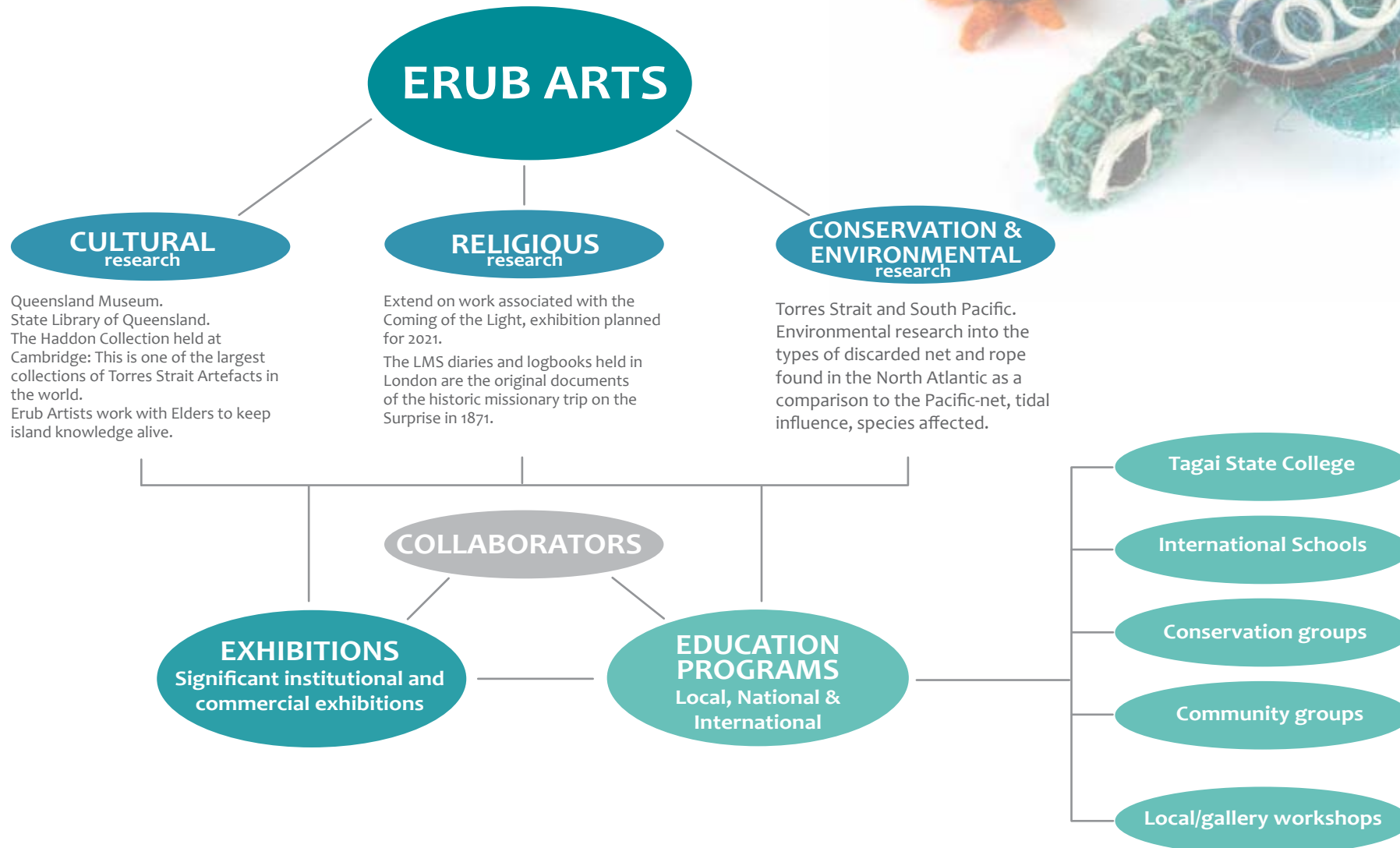
Erub (Darnley Island) is a one-hour plane flight from the tip of Cape York.





## Research and Art Practice Model

Erub Arts has always prided itself on producing work that is themed and is the product of authentic research and investigation. The researched works produced by Erub Arts fall largely into three categories and are enriched by a process of collaboration with others in cross cultural exchanges.



## The Art of Ghost Net

Re-purposing an environmental problem, Erub Arts has been working with ghost net since 2010. From a practical beginning with largely utilitarian objects such as bags, Erub Arts is now recognised for large scale collaborative installations featuring marine animals that are found on the reefs and in the deep water which surrounds Erub.

Ghost net sculptures from Erub Arts and their collaborators are currently in national and international touring shows. Works are in the following major collections:

*Australian Museum, Sydney*  
*Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney*  
*Australian National University, Canberra*  
*Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney*  
*Berengere Primat Collection, Switzerland*  
*Cairns Art Gallery, Cairns*  
*Ethnographic Museum of Geneva, Switzerland*  
*Melbourne Museum, Melbourne*  
*Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Canada*  
*National Gallery of Australia, Canberra*  
*National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne*  
*National Museum of Australia, Canberra*  
*Parliament House, Canberra*  
*Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane*  
*State Library of Queensland, Brisbane*  
*University of Cambridge Museum, England*

*Sardines* by Lynnette Griffiths hang with  
*Weres (fish scoop)* by Erub Arts Collaboration  
at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore 2017.



## The Art of Ghost Net

Erub Arts has built an international reputation with ghost net and this part of the business continues to grow as the collaborative Indigenous / non-indigenous ghost net movement escalates in momentum. As an Australian leader in this art form, Erub Arts and collaborators have generated major international and national exhibitions with:

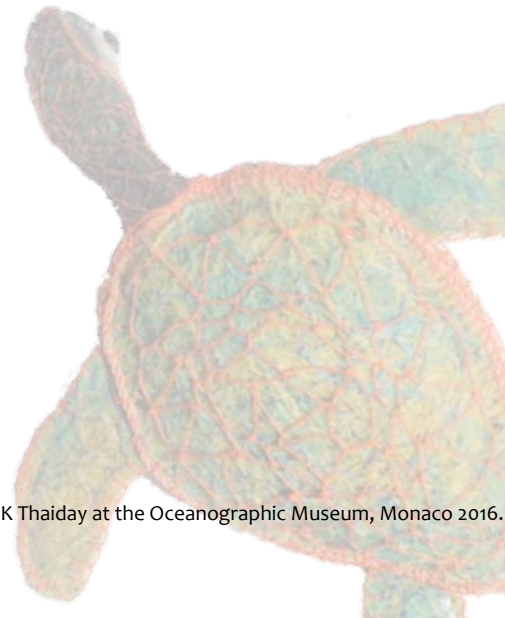
TABA NABA. At the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco in 2016.

Au Karem Ira Lamar Lu: Ghost Nets of the Ocean at Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum – opened as a cultural diplomacy project by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Singapore in 2017.

TARNANTHI in the Art Gallery of South Australia, 2017.

Au Karem Ira Lamar Lu: Ghost Nets of the Ocean, Australian National Maritime Museum permanent installation for their new foyer 2018.

Over the next three years, Erub Arts plans to build on the success of recent years with ongoing commitment to create new works and programs that build and attract global audiences and buyers.



Lavinia Ketchell and Jimmy K Thaiday at the Oceanographic Museum, Monaco 2016.



## Ghost Net: a global problem

90% of the marine debris entering the coastal regions of northern Australia is of a fishing nature and originates from all parts of South East Asia. The ghost nets (abandoned fishing nets) drift aimlessly indiscriminately killing as they travel with the ocean currents.

80% of this catch is marine turtles. The collection and disposal of ghost net has also become a huge logistical problem as the areas of Australia that are affected are sparsely inhabited by Indigenous people living in communities.

The Ghost Net Movement world wide is rapidly expanding, striving to generate awareness, recycling and sustainability options that will rid the world's oceans of ghost net.

As global solutions to this problem are developed, Erub Arts has the capacity to plan and engage with conservation groups, museums and collectors on a world stage.



Erub ladies re-enacting a ghost net catch.



Maps and images from the Ghost Net Australia website.



## Rescue Tiny Turtles - a successful education model

Rescue Tiny Turtles was a successful education project developed by Lynnette Griffiths using a collaborative cross-cultural approach to engage children and young people. The outcome of this exhibition was a parallel exhibition within a designated space at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore. This project and subsequent exhibition raised awareness around the environmental problem of ghost nets, while delivering a rare opportunity to engage with remote indigenous communities through live in-time video links sponsored by the National Museum of Australia.

The Rescue Tiny Turtles project gave participants the option to:

- Engage individuals via social media
- Engage children through hands-on experiential learning
- Engage individuals and educators through teach the teacher model workshops
- Collaborate on a cultural and environmental exchange with a diverse group of people
- Exhibit together in a global context

Erub Arts works with school children each week, during their language and culture program, teaching a range of techniques including ghost net. The school values the learning that takes place between adults and students, and looks forward to the relationships that Rescue Tiny Turtles fosters with children internationally.



Over 800 tiny turtles made by students from eight schools in Singapore and Australia.

Torres Strait school participant, Lilly See Kee, with Prime Ministers Lee and Turnbull at the children's installation, Singapore 2017.



## Erub Artists

The immediacy and directness of the Erub artists' approach to materials and work is both refreshing and invigorating. We are currently producing work that is distinct, relevant and shines with the authenticity of our island home.

Ethel Charlie	Robert Oui
Solomon Charlie	Racy Oui-Pitt
Emma Gela	Ellarose Savage
Florence Gutchen	Jimmy J Thaiday
Lavinia Ketchell	Jimmy K Thaiday
Nancy Naawi	

Ellarose Savage, Florence Gutchen and Racy Oui-Pitt have collaborated a number of times with Marion Gaemers and Lynnette Griffiths, most recently on a 17 metre ghost net commission *Solwata* for the Sydney Biennale, purchased through a donation by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Ellarose Savage's ghost net sculpture *Turtle* was featured on the commemorative Collections Australia postage stamps issued by Australia Post in 2012. *Turtle* is held in the collection of the Australian Museum, Sydney.

Jimmy J Thaiday has been collected by the National Gallery of Victoria and recently commissioned to produce ghost net birds by the Australian Museum, Sydney and won the 3D category at Gab Titui Art Awards 2018.

Jimmy K Thaiday has worked closely with Brian Robinson, exhibiting at the Museum of Australian Democracy (Canberra) and has works in the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), and in 2018, was the overall winner of the Gab Titui Indigenous Art Award.

Erub artists with *Illum*, Giant Squid.







Erub Arts from left to right: Jimmy K Thaiday, Jimmy J Thaiday, Diann Lui, Ellarose Savage, Ethel Charlie, Lorenzo Ketchell, Racy Oui-Pitt, Lynnette Griffiths, Solomon Charlie, Florence Gutchen, Nancy Naawi, Emma Gela, Lavinia Ketchell.



## Ghost Net Collaborator - Artist Lynnette Griffiths

Artist and Artistic director, Lynnette Griffiths established the first art course at the Thursday Island TAFE in 1992, nurturing the talents of Alick Tipoti, Fred Biara the late Ceferino Sabatino and Glen Mackie. Her commitment to furthering the professional profile of Ekkilau and then Erub Arts and artists has remained steadfast over 25 years. Teaching and working alongside the artists has enabled Lynnette to keep developing her own skills, while her extensive knowledge and respect for traditional Torres Strait culture continues to expand.

### Recent exhibitions

Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney 2018  
TARNANTHI, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide 2017  
Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore 2017  
Sculpture Botanica, Cairns 2016  
Oceanographic Museum, Monaco 2016  
20th Biennale, Sydney 2016  
ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore 2015  
Strand Ephemera, Townsville 2015  
Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney 2014



Lynnette with her sardines on Ibukijima, Japan's largest sardine producing island.



Above, *Sardines* suspended in the ANMM installation with Erub's *Weres* (fish scoop) and coral by Marion Gaemers. Below: Mackerel, Sardines, Trevally and Mullet.



## Ghost Net Collaborator Artist Marion Gaemers

Primarily a fibre artist, Gaemers has been contributing to North Queensland's cultural life since 1988. As a basket maker working with women's groups, she upholds traditional techniques using plant fibre and more recently has introduced manufactured waste into her sculptural forms. Exhibiting at regional, national and international levels Gaemers shares her skills freely within the makers circle tradition.

### Recent Exhibitions

Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney 2018  
TARNANTHI, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2017  
Strand Ephemera, Townsville 2017  
Asian Civisions Museum, Singapore 2017  
Sculpture by the Sea, Sydney 2016  
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20th Biennale, Sydney 2016  
ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore 2015  
Strand Ephmera, Townsville 2015  
Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney 2014



Marion Gaemers sharing ideas with people at Sculpture by the Sea 2016.





Above: coral suspended in the ANMM installation with yellow snapper by Lynnette Griffiths, Ghost net and beach rubbish. Below: coral forms positioned with turtles and fish in collaborations.



## Research and Collaboration Coming of the Light project Lifou

Through research and discussion over the years, Erub artists have expressed an ongoing interest in tracing their family trees, their Pacific connections and the sea journeys that have brought the people of their Island and the Torres Strait together over time.

In October 2011, a group of trainee priests from Lifou in New Caledonia fundraised and came to Erub to discover what had happened to some of the descendants from those missionary ships that sailed so long ago. At the same time, Erub artists were working on drawings that related to their own island identity. <https://www.sbs.com.au/programs/video/11789891967/Keepers-of-the-Light>

In 2013, the Erub Artists made a return voyage to Lifou to reconnect with lost families. These reconnections were recorded in charcoal on large sheets of paper. They were, in fact, a record of first mark making between these people since 1871.

The opportunity to explore this reconnection of family presented itself again in 2018, and the artists of Erub and the people of Lifou again documented their stories of identity, family, sea journeys and reconnection as large format drawings on paper. By visiting London, a deeper understanding of family and those first travels will be gained.



Historic All Saints Church Day on Erub demonstrates the strength and importance of church life on Erub.



The collaborative drawing begins on Lifou 2018  
Artistic director Lynnette Griffiths, Lead artist Jimmy K Thaiday.



Detail of the Sea Journeys: people without borders collaborative drawing that forms a 15m charcoal wave, to be exhibited at APT GOMA 2018 - 2019.

Previous Exhibition - Monaco 2016



Images of the installation and suspended ghost net animals at Monaco, images Jacques Tomasini.



## Previous Exhibition - Geneva 2017

Museum of Ethnographic, Geneva MEG. The exhibition space and delivering a talk and workshops.





## Previous Exhibition - Singapore 2017

A white cubed reef, multiple reflections and amazing wall shadows set the mood at the Asian Civilisations Museum.



# Previous Exhibition - TARNANTHI, Adelaide 2017

Installation in the foyer and studio learning space at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

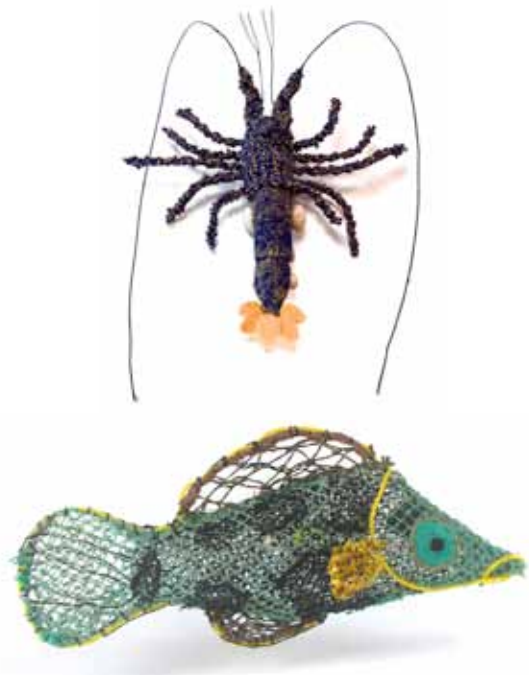


## Exhibition - Sydney 2018

Images of the installation and suspended ghost net animals at Australian National Maritime Museum.



Ghost net creatures



## Art Centre Coordination Team

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All images by Lynnette Griffiths and Erub Arts unless otherwise stated

Patrolling the ocean. Squid by Florence Gutchen.





*Garden Ladies*, 2012:

A ghost net and fabric interpretation of the artists mothers and aunts as they returned from their gardens together. From left to right works by Emma Gela, Florence Gutchen, Racy Oui-Pitt and Nancy Naawi



*Thank you*



Erub Arts is supported through the Australian Government's Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program, Arts Queensland and the Torres strait Regional Authority