

Posthumous works by Kym Wanganeen

Unfinished Business

with Charmaine Wilson & Ben McKeown & Rob Gerrie

21st June - 3rd August
2019

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

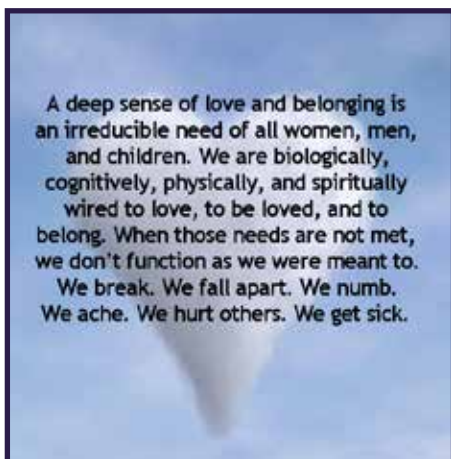
Posthumous works by Kym Wanganeen

Art Exhibition...the basis and journey story?

This art exhibition was never meant to be delivered under the title 'Unfinished Business'.

It should be presented by the creator of the artwork Aboriginal artist Kym Wanganeen. The title Unfinished Business was chosen to reflect what we were dealing with, namely unfinished work started but not able to be completed by Kym. I reflected on the many discussions Kym and I shared during the creation of this artwork and why it was so important this story to be told through his art. From these discussions I considered naming the exhibition:

'I matter and I have the right to belong' with the bi-line **'and no-one is going to tell me otherwise'**. For this artwork is about who we are and where we come from and having a sense of belonging, feeling like you are part of the collective, feeling wanted, feeling safe and feeling loved.



Culturally, family and community are everything and the sense of belonging is vital to one's existence and wellbeing. To feel like you don't fit in, that by simply being you and not conforming to the expectations of the collective generates internal dialogue telling you; 'That's right, you don't belong'...a heavy burden to bear.

I could also have called this exhibition **'Reject me not'** with the bi-line **'growing up black and gay'**. For this art work is also about the impact of colonisation/invasion and the influence of western religion on Aboriginal culture and spirituality and how that translates to being rejected for

who one is and who one loves.

This exhibition echoes the importance of land, culture and family and why standing up for these rights in your own country, on your land, the land and country of your ancestors is important. The fight is as important today as it was for our parents, grandparents and great grandparents, which in itself is still unfinished business.

This exhibition is about walking and navigating both worlds black and white and about knowing oneself and having a sense of identity, owning it and feeling proud Being Kym's sidekick in life, as with previous art works, I was his silent co-collaborator on this project.

Reflecting thought the title would respectfully encapsulate Kym's original intention for creating this artwork and acknowledge the current reality of why the exhibition is being delivered posthumously on behalf of Kym. 'Although the title chosen is right for this event, I know Kym would have chosen an appropriate title befitting his artwork and the exhibition, but not without adding an element of excitement to it'.

I believe Kym would have named his exhibition something like: **'A sense of belonging, the right to belong ...being black, gay and fabulous'**.

'Unfinished Business' - is first and foremost a celebration of the passion, creative mind and talent of Aboriginal activist and sometimes artist Kym Wanganeen, a one of a kind and larger than life character who reluctantly and shyly carried the mantle of cultural leader (an Elder) and LGBTIQ advocate. As an Aboriginal activist, campaigner, leader and mentor it was Kym's want to guide reforms aimed at improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ people, their families and their communities.



LOVE, BELONGING &
CONNECTION ARE THE
UNIVERSAL SOURCES OF
TRUE WELL-BEING


'Unfinished Business' is also a posthumous art exhibition being delivered in honour of and as an act of love by Kym's family. The artwork and exhibition is the first to be delivered under these circumstances and arriving at this point was no easy journey and respect is given to all who contributed and helped the family to realise this event.

It was Kym's dream to create an artwork that encapsulated the reality of his life journey and share reflections on his culture, his country and what he actively stood for as a proud and out Aboriginal gay man.

It was always Kym's intention this artwork be presented here at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute. He wanted to highlight the intersection of Aboriginal identity, sexuality, gender and identity, belonging and disconnection and the impact colonisation has on the social & emotional well-being of many Aboriginal LGBTIQ people, their families and communities.

As a result of realising the exhibition on behalf of Kym, I hope that we acknowledge the creativity, intellect and passion evident in his artwork. But more importantly that we reflect on the messages contained within and leave the event with an essence of the art resonating in our hearts, mind and spirit, thus creating change increasing our desire to genuinely connect and care about each other. Sadly Kym is not here to realise his dream or enjoy the acknowledgement, impact and celebration of his art. And those who knew Kym understood his favourite element was the 'art of celebration'. The exhibition also features two contributing artists Ben McKeown and long-time friend, confidant and brother and Charmaine Wilson, a friend and sister, who asks us to remember who we are and where we come from and to access our culture and spirituality, our country and family as avenues of true healing in times of grief and loss.

A journey of loss to realising the exhibition:



Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.

-Brene Brown

Passion for what inspires us abounds and we are all motivated to pursue our interests. Many artistic types channel their energy into creating something, be it through music, dance, and performance or written and visual art. In essence all forms are just a vehicle for sharing a story and with story-telling, one way of passing on important cultural information from one generation to the next, something that has occurred for thousands of years.

For the ambitious artist this passion develops into an art project, one we start in earnest and don't often consider the possibility of not being around to see through to completion. On that unenviable day when final decisions are made on furniture and effects, being asked by family and friends helping with this unenviable task was a reoccurring question: 'What do you want me to do with this?'

You see, they were unaware the individual items in question were actually pieces which once assembled would form part of the collective artwork presented in this exhibition. And although my mind and heart was given over to sorry business, when asked the question and looking at each item & remembering its journey story, without pause I was saying 'Let's keep that one'. Overshadowed by intense grief and loss, somewhere from deep within I knew the artwork now more than ever, needed to be shared. And one day, I would find strength to realise Kym's dream.

In considering exhibiting the artwork, many questions swirled in my mind regarding the meaning and purpose of presenting this work. I kept asking myself 'Why is this important?'

I reflected on our many conversations leading up to and in the early days of developing the artwork, and the stories which inspired and propelled Kym.

These are weaved into each element of his artwork which incorporates a number of themes Colonisation, dispossession and how imposed western dogma and doctrine forever dismembering a well-functioning society that had strong family and community connections, a secure sense of belonging and self-worth and providing a place and role for life is still evident and impacts the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people today.

Belonging and the impact of colonisation on not belonging; how this is amplified at the intersection of cultural, sexual & gender identity.

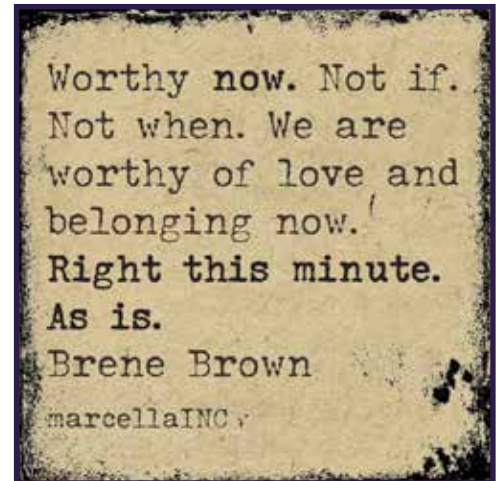
Rights and Freedoms - the right to exist and live with freedom to express yourself and love who you love equally without fear. And the ongoing right to fight for these freedoms.

This exhibition is for all who feels misplaced or who struggle to make sense of their place in the world, for anyone who questions their value and worth, as we are all worthy. It is for family members who understand the need to provide a solid foundation & who validate their own, speaking goodness into their sons and daughters, nieces, nephews and grannies and in doing so help to build strong and resilient children, who will grow into capable and resilient young adults.

And lastly, this exhibition is to honour an Aboriginal leader, cultural & LGBTIQ activist and sometimes artist Kym Michael Wanganeen, a family member and friend, of many present at the exhibition, who could say during his time on earth, Kym left an indelible mark...and some would say yes; a fabulously indelible mark.

Footnote: At the time of my writing this contribution to the exhibition catalogue, I was reminded in one report the number of Aboriginal community members lost due to suicide. It indicated 56 Aboriginal lives lost nationally to suicide since beginning 2019 (1 Jan - 6 May 2019). One life lost is too many, this is a national issue and government on both sides needs to be accountable and act.

I am reminded of, and acknowledge and pay my respects to those who have walked before us, our cultural ancestors and Aboriginal family members and friends who navigated the cultural, social and sexual politics of our Aboriginal and LGBTIQ communities and who proudly walked with and fought for their own or a family members Aboriginal, cultural, gender and sexuality rights.



Rob Gerrie
Curator / Artist

Charmaine Wilson



Charmaine Wilson is a female painter from Riverland country, part of Ngarrindjeri community in South Australia. The combination of vivid colours, highly detailed works and high-level composition have led to widespread appreciation of her art. Her paintings often describe Aboriginal healing and the importance of community connection.

Charmaine Wilson inspiration comes from the land and environment, utilising vibrant colours on canvas which is a characteristic of her paintings and has become her signature in the art world.

Ben McKeown



Ben McKeown is an award winning contemporary Indigenous artist of Wirangu & Kurna and non-Indigenous ancestries. His Mums family from Penong and his dad descended of Rathoola and George Solomon as well as Maria Welch and Sam Stubbs, Maria was the sister to Ityamai-itpina (King Rodney).

McKeown was born in the Adelaide Hills and spent his early childhood in Adelaide and York Peninsula, his dad's job in the army meant the family moved a lot and McKeown ended up in Melbourne where he has lived for the past 20 years.

He has studied at and graduated valedictorian from the Victorian college of the arts in 2012 with a Master of fine art. He also has a Master of visual art and a Graduate diploma of visual arts also at the Victorian college of the arts.

Rob Gerrie



Unfinished Business Art Exhibition curator and artist co-contributor.

Born & raised on Yorke Peninsula

Family /community Point Pearce (Narrunga/Adjahdurah nations)

Rainbow Serpent

Charmaine Wilson
1200 x 300cm



The rainbow serpent reminds me to be comfortable sitting in my silence. To sit until I hear nothing but my own heart beating. When I hear nothing else, I know the Rainbow Serpent will come close to me and bless me with her breath.

Her breath will give me the wisdom to overcome and the energy to heal. This painting is a reminder to embrace your silence. For that is where your ability to heal sits.

Community Healing

Charmaine Wilson
900 x 600cm



Healing together as a community provides us with the strength to walk the path of grief. Community makes sure that on the bad days, if I fall, there is always someone there to help me stand again. Community, individual but all joined by one heart.

Collective Healing

Charmaine Wilson
900 x 600cm



Collective healing, is sitting together, eating together, sharing stories together, and sharing warmth while we walk the path of healing together.

It is the passing of healing energy through each circle of grief to heal the individual, which in turn heals the community.

Bush Medicine

Charmaine Wilson
1200 x 300cm



The red section represents bush medicine from desert country, where the red dirt lives.

The yellow section represents bush medicine from the plains and hills country, where the grassy meadows and tall grass lives.

The blue section represents bush medicine from the rivers and ocean country, where the fresh and salt water lives. Bush medicine is healing from the land and country to which our spirits belong. My spirit belongs to river country (blue), where does your spirit belong?

5 stages of grief

Healing through loss, means moving through the five stages of grief. The stages are often responses to strong feelings that do not have any time limits on them. Each person is individual and will work through the stages differently to the next person.

A person may go through denial, hit acceptance and the next day be right back at denial again. Grief is circular, and everyone will move in and out of each stage multiple times until one day they don't.

The grief of losing someone we loved is never forgotten, we just find a way to live with the loss.

Denial

300 x 300mm

Thoughts are scattered, and we struggle to understand and believe what has happened. The turmoil in the mind, the confusion, the disbelief and the shock.



Anger

300 x 300mm

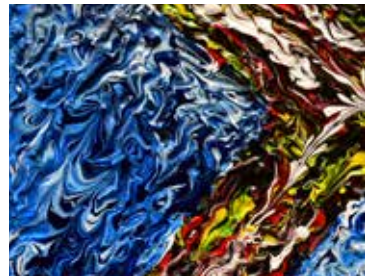
Underneath the anger there is pain, underneath the pain there is love. The anger is an indication that you loved deeply and lost profoundly.



Bargaining

300 x 300mm

We would give anything to have one more moment. What if.... If only....



Depression

300 x 300mm

Black dog barks at the door. We withdraw from life, we sit in the fog of intense sadness...sometimes we don't come out of the fog... sometimes we do....



Acceptance

300 x 300mm

We accept they are gone, but we are not 'all right' or 'ok'. We accept the reality that the one we loved is physically gone, and it is permanent.



Untitled (portrait in cityscape)

Ben McKeown
oil on canvas
76 x 121cm



Fare thee well

Ben McKeown
acrylic on canvas
50 x 30cm



untitled, (rebuilding)

Ben McKeown
Acrylic on canvas
45 x 76cm



See you next Tuesday

Ben McKeown
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 30cm



Purple Mano

Ben McKeown

Acrylic on canvas

50 x 30cm



untitled (xo) Triptych

Ben McKeown

acrylic on canvas

122 x 31cm



Defiled

Kym Wanganeen
600 x 500mm
(POA)



Deviant

Kym Wanganeen
400cm x 300mm
(On Loan)



Bedside Table - Rainbow

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(Not for Sale)



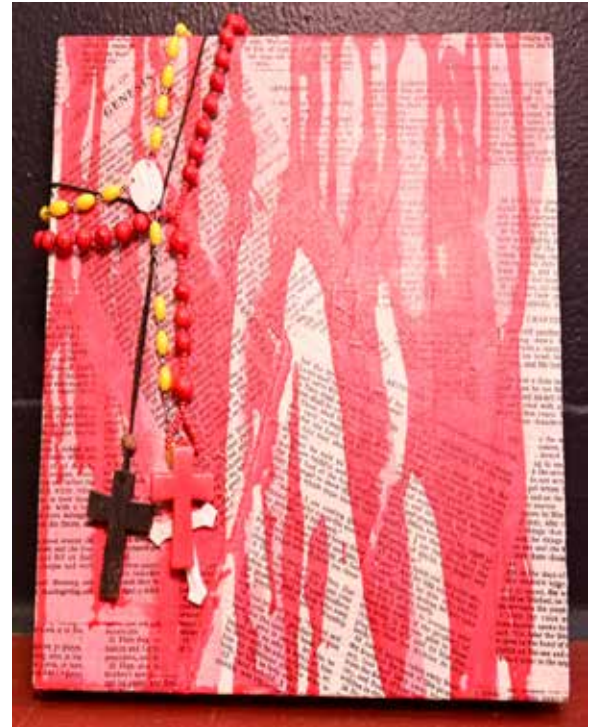
‘Icons’

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(Not for Sale)



Scripture and Rosary

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(Not for Sale)



Bedside Lamp - rainbow

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(Not for Sale)



Standard Lamp and Shade (lounge)

Aboriginal design and rainbow
Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(POA)



Wooden Chair (lounge)

Aboriginal design and rainbow
Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(Not for Sale)



Placard - Black Lives Matter

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(sale)



Placard - Love is Love

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(POA)



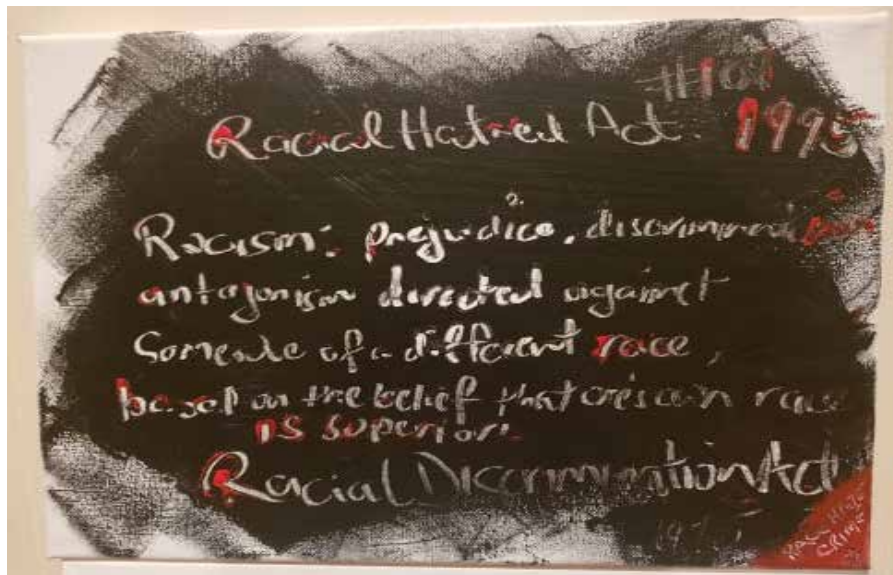
Placard - Equality

Kym Wanganeen / Rob Gerrie
(POA)



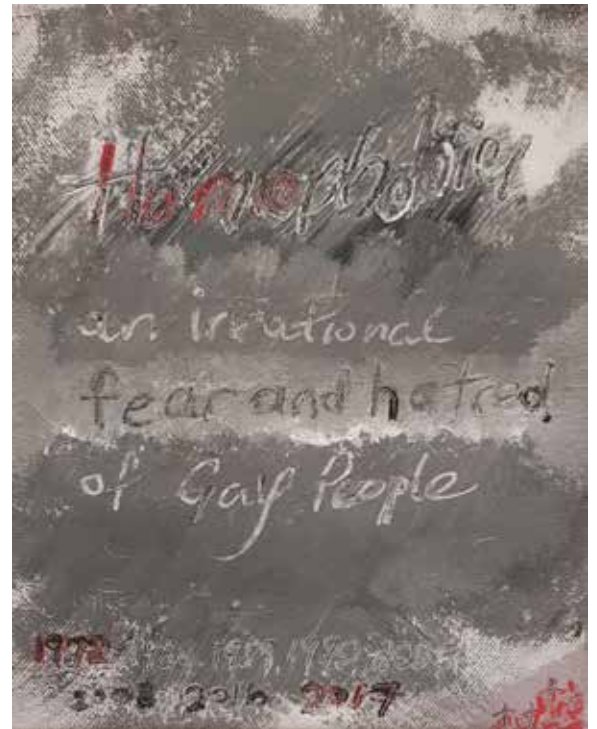
Placard - Racism

Rob Gerrie
400 x 300mm
(POA)



Homophobia

Rob Gerrie
200 x 250mm
(POA)



Invasion (small)

Assimilation, erosion -
slow and deliberate movement across the land
180 x 120mm
(POA)



Love Heart

Rob Gerrie
200 x 200mm
(POA)



Invasion (large)

slow erosion of environment, land and culture
Rob Gerrie
400 x 300mm
(POA)



Aboriginal Flag Coffee Table

Kym Wanganeen
(Not for Sale)



Together

Rob Gerrie
100 x 100mm
(POA)





If you need to speak to someone after viewing this exhibition please contact your nearest Aboriginal health service or talk to family / friends

Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (ANTAC)

Email: antac@antac.org.au

tel: +61 8 8355 0135

Website:

13 11 14

Lifeline Australia

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days a week

Website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au>

TWO WAYS / A Dualistic System

21ST June - 3rd August 2019

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