

PetaJoysolo@320.mp3

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Inner West Library Speaker series and our art series. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Gadigal and Wongal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging. For this series, we have asked three local artists to choose an item from the art book collection and talk about their choice and how it relates to their practice. This is the second podcast in the series and is related directly to the Art Book collection at Marrickville Library. Marrickville Library holds an impressive and historic art book collection, ranging from Indigenous art to the Impressionists and beyond. And now we will be joined by Peta-Joy Williams. Peta-Joy Williams is a Wiradjuri woman born in Sydney. She uses traditional techniques and form to share and promote her culture. Her mediums range from painting, weaving, print design to cultural awareness workshops. The sharing of culture is very important to Peta-Joy, and she's currently teaching Wiradjuri at the Eora College. In 2012, she founded the Wiradjuri Ways in which she created pieces for sports items and fashion. Peta-Joy has shown her works at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-op.

[00:01:18] Acknowledgement of country in Wiradjuri language

[00:01:47] Thank you so much, Peta-Joy, can you talk a little bit about your practice and your influences?

[00:01:53] I've been doing it for as long as I can remember, and so I started off just as a painter using acrylics. I know a lot of people don't like acrylics, but I really enjoy the textures and in detail I can produce with acrylic paint and fine brush. And so my process is as I like, I'm a conceptionist. I like to have a story or a reason to paint. I can't just do it just for the sake of making a pretty picture. At some point early influences from books that I'd read as children or as a child. I just love to use lots of bright colours and sort of steer away from the stereotype that Aboriginal art is all about dots.

[00:02:38] Yes. So that brings me to my next question. The library has a large collection of art books. What drove you to select your title?

[00:02:45] I chose the story of The Colours of Australia by Bronwyn Bancroft. The reason I chose that is because it reminded me of when I was a little girl, a book that I was given for as an award in NAIDOC week called Stradbroke Dreaming, which was also illustrated by Bronwyn. So I grew up admiring her work and I sort of first seen that book when I was working in a school. And the children at the school when I was teaching language recreated the pages in that book and they were put up around the school and it was just such a beautiful thing.

[00:03:23] And for me as an artist, I grew up admiring Bron because she was a fair skinned Aboriginal woman who painted in these extraordinary bright colours, which really appealed to me being a fair skinned Aboriginal person myself and being a woman, I felt that I could relate with her. So I grew up kind of following her in the sort of late 80s, early 90s, collecting all the books or anything that had her in it. Years later, after completing my art qualification, my Diploma of Fine Arts, at the Eora Centre at the same time, I was invited to be in an exhibition at Boomalli Arts and my painting was hung next to one of her paintings, which for me was like mind blowing because I didn't actually know her personally. I never actually met her face to face, but I'd grown up admiring her for so long. She actually walked up to me and introduced herself and commented on my work. And I actually was probably one of the first times in my life got a little bit starstruck and my partner at the time said talk to her so I talked to her and I was like, no, no, no, I can't talk to her.

[00:04:36] She's like way out of my league and you know all of those things, which was just bizarre. I which was just bizarre. I was like, I can't even explain the way it felt. Months later, she actually called me up and I thought I was being pranked. And she was like, I just want to know if you're still creating art you're really talented. I really want to see more of your work. It's time you pull your finger out and get some more art done and bring it in so we can put it on exhibition. So that was kind of the driving force. So this is going to run when it has gone from being a person that I admired to now the person that kind of cracks the whip a little bit and encourages me to paint and create. And she was actually the person that pushed me to have my first solo show. And every now and again, she kind of checks in on me and sort of gives me that little energy boost that I need as an artist to sort of keep going and that reassurance that we all have a little bit of self doubt.

[00:05:37] So that's kind of in a roundabout way, while I chose that book, is the personal connection that I have to the writer and the artist of that book and all of those feelings that I had being able to tell those stories to the children that I used to teach when they recreated those paintings. For me, it's a little bit of nostalgia. I know most most people have probably chosen adult books or books that are aimed for their age parameters. But for me, it was about the nostalgia of the art of that book.

[00:06:11] That's wonderful. What a great mentor note, I know right? Yeah.

[00:06:15] And what about your childhood? Were you, like, very keen on art and of drawing or painting at early age?

[00:06:23] Yeah, look, it was something that I was raised by my grandmother and I was very fortunate enough to grow up understanding my culture. My great grandmother was alive until I was 20 and she used to tell me stories when I was a little girl, but that when she was a little girl.

[00:06:42] So I had an understanding of of.

[00:06:47] That as a young person, my mom was quite talented in the sense of doing fantasy art and drawing fairies and all of those kind of beautiful things. I always sort of said to my mama, can you draw this so I can cover it and I'm going to be an artist one day? And she said to me, well, you need to learn to draw yourself if that's what you're going to do. So I started drawing myself. Even she she told me a story about when I was in the womb that I sort of put my hands up and waved my fingers and the pediatrician or the doctor at the time and said, oh, she's either going to be a pianist or an artist. She's got these beautiful long fingers. I think I was just born to be an artist, if you can say that. But yes. So from a really young age, I was sort of looking at books and Aboriginal art and drawing with textures and mimicking what I seen. As I got older and went on to high school, I started picking out the paint brushes and painting animals and what the animals might look like on the inside. I had a really great Aboriginal education officer or assistant, whatever it was at the time when I was at Matrville Aunty Betty Stuart. And sadly, she's no longer with us, but she really sort of seen something in me artistically and kind of really pushed my boundaries and told me about some

sacred things that I could learn about and sort of constant that knowledge to me, which is something that I love and cherish and carry with me for the rest of my life. So from a really young age, I can't even tell you when I first picked up a paintbrush or started drawing, it was just something that I've always done.

[00:08:28] So something that's some innate in some ways.

[00:08:31] And it yeah. So the thing is, this belief is that you're born with your ancestors' knowledge. So maybe that that's the case for me is like I just was born to be an artist and that was the path that I was meant to be on.

[00:08:49] Like even my grandmother sort of encouraged me to study at the Eora Centre when I was still in high school. So from year 11, I did a program where I did printmaking at your instead of one of the units that I was supposed to do at school and at the time was called JSST, which was joint, secondary, tertiary something. So I went on to do that course, which was sort of my pathway into going on to do Aboriginal art, culture practices, etc. then to go on to get my diploma. I became a part of that college for a really long time and then coming full circle, ended up being an art teacher there and a printmaking teacher there. So for me, it's about that sort of circle and giving back what I've been giving and sharing my knowledge in my current role. Now, as a cultural mentor, I often use art as a form of communication to my clients or who I like to refer to as my kids. Some of them are now going on and on following my footsteps at Eora and studying Aboriginal art and culture there. So for me, that's probably one of the most rewarding things as an artist is being able to give back and mentor young people into doing what I do artistic.

[00:10:12] So that brings me to my next question. What drives you as an artist and what would you say to young Aboriginal people starting out?

[00:10:20] Don't buy into the stereotype that your art has to look a certain way to be authentic. You, as an artist makes you an Aboriginal artist. If you're an Aboriginal person and you're an artist, you don't have to be painting dots or you don't have to be painting x ray or crosshatch or any of those things to be an artist. What makes you an Aboriginal artist is your identity, not the stereotype of what people think you should be painting. So stay true to yourself. Go with what's inside your ancestors, knowing who

you are, and they will guide you in the right direction. So don't don't sort of compromise your values because people think that you should do things in a particular way.

[00:11:06] Great. Your work Spiral of Darkness, which is actually part of the Invisible Show. Can you talk about that work. And what inspired you?

[00:11:16] Oh, that one that painting was actually really hard to get out.

[00:11:23] So it was something that I had to sort of strike really quickly to do. And it talks about my own struggle with mental health. Basically, I had to put myself into the headspace of when I am feeling in that dark place and think about that spiral that I'm well aware of that I get myself into. So I wrote those words, so basically the process for that was getting myself into that place, writing it on the canvas really quickly and then not looking at it, and I actually haven't been able to read what's on that canvas since because I I don't want to go down that pathway, if that makes sense.

[00:12:13] So I've had people read it and say that it explains exactly how they feel when they go into that spiral. And I kind of hit the nail on the head. So it was it was very different to my normal process. Normally I come up with a concept and then I run with that concept. And as I'm working on the piece, that concept grows and it connects to the story. Whereas this one was kind of like, just get it done quick, get it over with that Band-Aid off, and then go and see the psychologist headspace.

[00:12:48] So do you feel that art is a way of dealing with trauma?

[00:12:52] Oh, definitely. Definitely. As a young person growing up, my mother was an addict, so I went through a lot in the time that I did live with her.

[00:13:06] There was a lot of times most of the time I was living with my grandmother. But on the odd times that I did live with my mom, they weren't always nice times for me. Sometimes little things trigger those memories and they can set you off. So I've sort of been in and out of therapy my whole life. When I was quite young, my grandmother took me to see a counsellor and to me, I didn't realize that my life was different to every other person that I went to school with. So I didn't know I had a problem until it was sort of I started seeing a counsellor. But as I've gotten older, I've found that I can bury myself in

my art. For me now one of the new mediums that I've been working with for about six years is weaving I can use that as therapy for me now.

[00:13:59] And I find that's something that I can kind of do to zone out and just not feel anything or think of anything. It's kind of meditative, if that makes sense..

[00:14:11] Do you do you run weaving workshops? Yeah, I do.

[00:14:14] So I actually just recently for NAIDOC, ran a workshop at Broadway Shopping Centre, and it was just simply as something simple as making it bangle with a group of people. And every person that participated in the workshop spoke about how relaxed they felt. Those kinds of things are important, and it's also about cultural sharing and understanding of where these traditions have come from. So for me, I acknowledged that I was taught by Wiradjuri elder Auntie Lorraine Tye and she shared that knowledge with me. And now I'm sharing that knowledge with those people. It's all about that full circle kind of giving and taking and sharing and receiving kind of thing.

[00:15:01] That's great. My final question to you is, what are you reading or listening or watching at the moment?

[00:15:07] I will say reading. I'm actually between two books because on my. My attention hasn't been great because lately I've had a lot going on in my world, so I'm actually in between two books. I'm reading a book by a friend of mine named Monica Tan called Strange Country, and it's about this first generation Australian. So she's of Asian heritage and her travels through Australia and the racism and sexism that she copped and the journey that she went on.

[00:15:42] It's beautifully written. And then the other book that I'm sort of also in the middle of is Dark Emu by Uncle Bruce Pascoe, which is a book that regardless of whether you believe he's Aboriginal or not, every Australian should read.

[00:15:59] Right. So when he talked about when your mum was pregnant with you and they noticed your fingers, that's a really interesting kind of concept isn't it?

[00:16:08] It yeah, I was just like there's not a lot of things that sort of sticking with you. But that was something that I remember my mum saying to me as a young girl, you know, the the doctor said you would either be an artist or a pianist because you had these beautiful long fingers and it came up on the ultrasound. You kind of waved and everyone is saying how long your fingers lit up.

[00:16:34] So that's great. Thanks very much for your time, Peta-Joy. No problem. Thank you for having me.

[00:16:41] Thank you so much for listening. And please come and visit Marrickville Library to explore the amazing art collection and also the online resources. And don't forget to look out for upcoming digital content to for the Inner West Library What's on and social media channels. Thank you.