

MEDIA RELEASE

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Truth-telling exhibition sheds light on Indigenous women's domestic servitude

Histories of domestic service inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls in White Australia are at the centre of a powerful new exhibition *Sovereign Sisters: domestic work*, presented at Flinders University Museum of Art (FUMA) for the Art Gallery of South Australia's Tarnanthi Festival.

Under oppressive so-called 'protection' policies that spanned from the colonial era through to the mid-20th century, the practise of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls from their families and communities across Australia resulted in them being forced to serve as cleaners, cooks, nannies and wet nurses in private homes.

Curated by Mirning artist and Flinders University academic Ali Gumillya Baker with Madeline Reece, Exhibitions and Public Programs Manager at FUMA, *Sovereign Sisters: domestic work* presents these important national stories through the work of Indigenous artists and from Indigenous perspectives, shedding light on collective narratives that have been widely ignored by non-Indigenous Australia.

Developed around FUMA's historical collection of hand embroidered textiles from the Hermannsburg Mission, *Sovereign Sisters* brings these and other visual materials together with the research and practice of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander artists and academics – including Flinders University’s Natalie Harkin, Simone Ulalka Tur, Faye Rosas Blanch and Ali Gumillya Baker.

The exhibition unearths heartbreaking personal narratives that trace the lived experiences of domestic servitude and provide perspective on how these realities continue to impact many families and communities today.

In bringing together historical and contemporary artworks alongside archival material, the exhibition highlights Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ ongoing struggle for truth-telling and justice, and it adds to the record of Indigenous voices of resistance to the silencing and oppressive ideas of colonialism

“It contributes to understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s labour histories, the intergenerational injustices of stolen wages, and the nation’s unfinished business regarding reparation,” says Ali Gumillya Baker.

“*Sovereign sisters: domestic work* represents some of the most important Indigenous voices of our country. Their work demonstrates that Indigenous peoples are giants of our histories; we are central in our bodies on our countries and in our intergenerational responsibilities, and our loving relationality and stories of place. Our histories are not exclusive. We can all share in these insights,” she says.

This exhibiton is presented in association with *APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA* curated by Dr Natalie Harkin at Vitalstatistix as part of the Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art hosted by the Art Gallery of South Australia, and speaks to the aims and ambitions of Flinders University’s Reconciliation Action Plan.

Sovereign Sisters: domestic work will be formally launched at 5pm on Thursday 21 October in the FUMA Gallery at Flinders University’s Bedford Park campus by Nici Cumpston, Artistic Director of Tarnanthi and the Art Gallery of South Australia’s Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art.

The exhibition is on display from 11 October 2021 until 8 April 2022 with a period of closure over the festive season from 20 December 2021 until 10 January 2022.

FUMA is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm and until 7pm Thursdays. It is closed weekends and public holidays. The gallery is located on the ground floor Social Sciences North building, Humanities Rd (adjacent carpark 5).

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Media images and captions

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3c0wsbosqgtabni/AAAI6enJuaSe54Uut1CGpKeva?dl=0>

FUMA

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY
MUSEUM OF ART

AGSA tarnanthi

VITALSTATISTIX

BHP

U A M A

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA



Image: r e a, Gamilaraay, Wailwan and Biripi people, *Iron* from the series *Look Who's Calling The Kettle Black*, 1992, digital dye sublimation print, On loan from the artist, © r e a, 2021