

WALK THE RIVER



**Gunditjmara Elder
Uncle Jim Berg**

2-19 June: 2022

Blak Dot Gallery is honoured to be hosting:

Walk The River

**A personal collection of scar tree images, stories,
and poems by Uncle Jim Berg**

About the Exhibition

Reconciliation Victoria invites you to come Walk the River, guided by the words of Uncle Jim Berg.

We are delighted to present this immersive exhibition, designed to transport you deep into Country. Walk amongst the trees and along the river steeped in story and history.

As you walk, take in the collection of beautiful scar tree photographs by Uncle Jim Berg. Be guided by his words, telling the stories of this land, the people who have walked here and the stories of these significant trees.

'Take the memory of these scarred trees with you forever and share their story' – Uncle Jim Berg.

Acknowledgement of Country

Reconciliation Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria, and recognises First Peoples continuing connection to lands, waters, and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present who carry the memories, traditions, cultures, and aspirations of First Peoples, and who forge the path ahead for emerging leaders.

We dedicate ourselves to working respectfully with and being guided by First Peoples, and to listen and amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in all areas of work.

About us

Reconciliation Victoria is the state-wide body promoting reconciliation across Victoria. We promote deeper understanding, respect, and justice for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Reconciliation Victoria's vision is a Victorian identity that reflects our true history, promotes and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, equity and self-determination.

**Blak Dot Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work,
live and create: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.**



Uncle Jim Berg

Uncle Jim Berg is a renowned and respected Elder of the Gunditjmara People of South-West Victoria. Uncle Jim was the founder of the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc and was involved in the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal service. He was a leading figure in a legal battle that resulted in the Aboriginal ancestral remains held by the University of Melbourne and the Museum of Victoria being returned to Country.

Uncle Jim is the co-author of the *Power and the Passion: Our Ancestors Return Home* and has been a Justice of the Peace for nearly 50 years. Uncle Jim was the inaugural Chair of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and served as a Council member for 12 years.

Uncle Jim is an esteemed member of the Reconciliation Victoria Cultural Council, who guide the work and strategic direction of Reconciliation Victoria.

We thank Uncle Jim for his kindness, generosity and wisdom.



Uncle Jim Berg
Gunditjmara Elder



Silent Witness

A Window To The Past

**This display of scarred Trees is dedicated to the
Traditional Owners of Wotjobaluk Country
and in particular, to the memory of
Patrick Kennedy**

Come with me on a journey to Wotjobaluk Country. I would like to share with you some glimpses of the Trees of this Country. As far as I know, there is no other area in the whole of Australia that you would be able to find so many scarred trees so close together.

You will hear the People of the Land speak through their Trees. They tell of what they had, seen through the eyes of the Trees.

Trees were the supermarkets of the Land. They provided food, shelter, transport, medicines, tools and weapons. These scarred Trees are a testimonial to the skills of the People, who harvested the canoes, coolamons and shields without taking the life of the Tree.

The scarred Trees are a witness to a way of life, and freedom for the People to roam at will throughout their own Country.

I feel deeply emotionally stirred and saddened that what we can see of this way of life and identity, with the traditions of language, customs, beliefs and culture, were not able to be passed down through the generations. The Government policies and mission life all played a part and yet, some of the government policies and missions may have saved us from total extinction.

These scarred Trees are a reminder of the past, and they are linked to all Trees. Take the memory of these scarred Trees with you forever. Share their story with your Family.

Take too this gift(cont. next page)



By Jim Berg
Gunditjmara Elder





Hug A Tree

Close your eyes and hug a tree
The heart beats you hear
Is your heart beat

And the

Heart beat of the tree

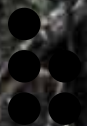
For a brief moment you and
The Tree are One

In time, you , the Tree
And I will become as One
As we return to our

Spiritual Mother The Land

Close your eyes and hug a Tree

By Jim Berg
Gunditjmara Elder

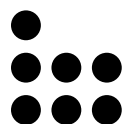


What are Scar trees?

As described by Uncle Jim, scar trees provide an incredible window to the past. A scar tree demonstrates not only incredible skill of the First Peoples of this land but also their continuous care and connection to Country. The scars were formed by cutting the bark a particular way that would preserve the life of the tree. This bark would then be made into canoes, coolamons, shields or shelters.

The scar trees featured in this collection are found on Wotjobaluk Country but there are scar trees found all over Victoria, wherever there are mature native trees, especially box and red gum. They often occur along major rivers, around lakes and on flood plains.

Scar trees are culturally significant for First Peoples, as they provide an important link to culture and to the past.





Listen To The Wind

Listen to the wind
Said a voice within

As I sat beneath the
The gum trees
And
The Darken sky

As I listen and looked
The wind
Moved the clouds
And
Revealed the light
And
Removed the shadows
Within
And then as I sat, looked

And listened

The wind moved over
The sea
And created
White capped tipped waves

That roll over and onto
The sandy beach

As the wind soars up through
The branches and leaves
Of the trees

It carries birds and butterflies
In its wake
And carries them high into the now
Cloudless blue sky

Where they spread their wings
And drift and glide in the
Wake of the wind.

The grasses as they bend and sway
Are whispering and making
Rustle sounds
Drop their seeds
That is carried by the wind

To create new life
In the womb of our
Spiritual Mother the Land.

By Jim Berg
Gunditjmara Elder



Spirits Of The Land

Sunbeams are filtered through
The raindrops
As they fall into the forest
And onto the Land

The rain brings forth
New life and refreshes
The old

Breath clean fresh air
And smell

The scents and aroma of the

Forest gum leaves
Ferns
Grasses
Animals
Wild flowers

The Land

Birds singing
Fills the air

Leeches under foot

As we walk hand in hand
Through this
Rain drenched Forest
And Land

My Soulmate and Me
Are
Received
Welcomed
And we are embraced by
The
Spirits Of The Land



By Jim Berg
Gunditjmara Elder





Dedicated to the Magical Djirri Djirri Dancers

Clap-Sticks playing musical sounds
Singing in Language fills the air.

The Djirri Djirri dancers hand in hand
Form a circle on the Cultural Carpet
Laid on the ground.

Each dancer with a small bunch of gum leaves in their hands
And as they dance
They raise the gum leaves waist high.

The gum tree branches then become
The Wings of an Eagle
That lifts the Dancers high into the Sky
Above Mother Earth
Into the Clouds.

With the sound
Of the music of Clap-Sticks
And the songs sung in Language
No other sound is heard.
And as we look in awe
Tears fill our eyes
Our hearts are pounding with Love
And Respect
Knowing that Koorie Culture is Alive
And safe in these hands.

The sound of the music and Clap-Sticks
And songs sung in Language
And Didgeridoo
Fill the Cave of Bunjilaka
And wrap everyone there in a Cocoon
That is filled with Love, Respect
And a better understanding
Of each other.

**For the Magical Djirri Djirri Dancers, who made the Scarred Trees
Exhibition Come Alive on the Night of the Launch**



Acknowledgements

Museums Victoria

We would like to thank Museums Victoria for their partnership and support with this exhibition. Part of this exhibition was originally commissioned from Silent Witness: A Window to the Past that was developed by Uncle Jim Berg and Museums Victoria, with soundscapes by Martin Friedel.

Blak Dot Gallery

Thank you to Kimba Thompson and the Blak Dot Gallery for bringing this exhibition to life and providing a space for people to come on this journey with Uncle Jim.

Thank you Jake Treacy from Incinerator Gallery for your support.

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY:



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Moreland City Council



33 Saxon St., Brunswick(via Dawson St.)
www.blakdot.com.au | info@blakdot.com.au
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