

GAMARAGAL COUNTRY
BERRY & HOLDSWORTH STREETS, ST LEONARDS

wsp

CONNECTION TO
COUNTRY PRINCIPLES





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Research by Sian Hromek (Yuin), WSP. Sian specialises in variety of fields relating to Aboriginal Country and landscape design, including Cultural Land Management Practices such as cultural burning, and how these practices might inform built outcomes and inform engagement strategies.

Please note:
In order to highlight the use of Aboriginal Design Principles, this document may contain examples from other Aboriginal Countries.

Warning:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this document may contain reference to or images of deceased persons.

Front cover: View of Sydney from St Leonards, 1851 C. Martens

*This document acknowledges the elders, past and present, of the **Gamaragal People** as the traditional custodians of the land and its knowledge*

“Warami wellamabamiyui, yura.”

It is good to see you all, people.

Indigenous Specialist Services

Indigenous design statement

Indigenous peoples and the built environment have had a problematic relationship as settlements, roads, and railways often cut through and disrupt the connection between people and Country.

Our projects change the environment in significant, and often positive ways, yet Aboriginal people often ask the following question::

“How are you going to leave my Country better than what it was before?”

How can we reconnect the relationship between Country and people? Projects offer an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the Aboriginal Country, Culture and people of the land on where the project is located.

Through the project's design elements and our place-based landscape interventions (architecture, infrastructure, art and the like), **we can acknowledge Country** and reveal the site's latent Aboriginal history.

This document describes the principles we use as a starting point to engage with Aboriginal people and Country. While more consultation and permission must be sought from the local elders, the ideas set out in this document should be seen as an introduction to the engagement process.



Distant view of Sydney from the lighthouse at South Head New South Wales, by Joseph Lycett. Source: State Library of New South Wales

Aboriginal Design Principles

Aboriginal design principles

Aboriginal led/ Aboriginal people (designers, elder and community members) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous design elements.

Community involvement/ The local Aboriginal communities to be engaged in this process; can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?

Appropriate use of Aboriginal design/ All Aboriginal design elements must be approved by consulted Indigenous elders and community members. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used on the project.

Design approach

Image - Signage/surface treatment/ walls/art/ Signage tells the Country and its people's story. Surface treatments use local Aboriginal design knowledge, commissioned from artists, or urban designers who engage with community for approval.

Space - Indigenous space/ landscaping/ Aboriginal Space. A space or landscape where Aboriginal culture can be celebrated, including cultural land-management practices, firestick farming, daisy yam propagation, and the like

Language - Using language in the built environment to use it and keep it alive.

Country focused design

Overall, Aboriginal Australia has a simple but quite different hierarchy when it comes to their connection to nature. It is best contrasted against human-focused design, depicted below.

How might this shift or enhance current practices?

**Country, over
Community, over
Individual**

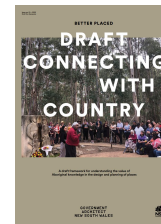


Country focused design

This document aims to

1. Provide further cultural context and competency for anyone with interest in the Berry Holdsworth St Leonards development.
2. Propose principles that align with important guidelines, such as the Connecting to Country Guidelines by the NSW Government Architects Office, The International Indigenous Design Charters Principles, and the 3 tenors of the Reconciliation Australia of Respect, Relationships and Participation.
3. Consider high level concepts for how project might engage and co-design with Aboriginal people.

This document has been produced with information sourced from publicly available desktop research on Country, people and culture and will develop / change based upon on-going consultation with Aboriginal people with connections to the area.





Boromedegal

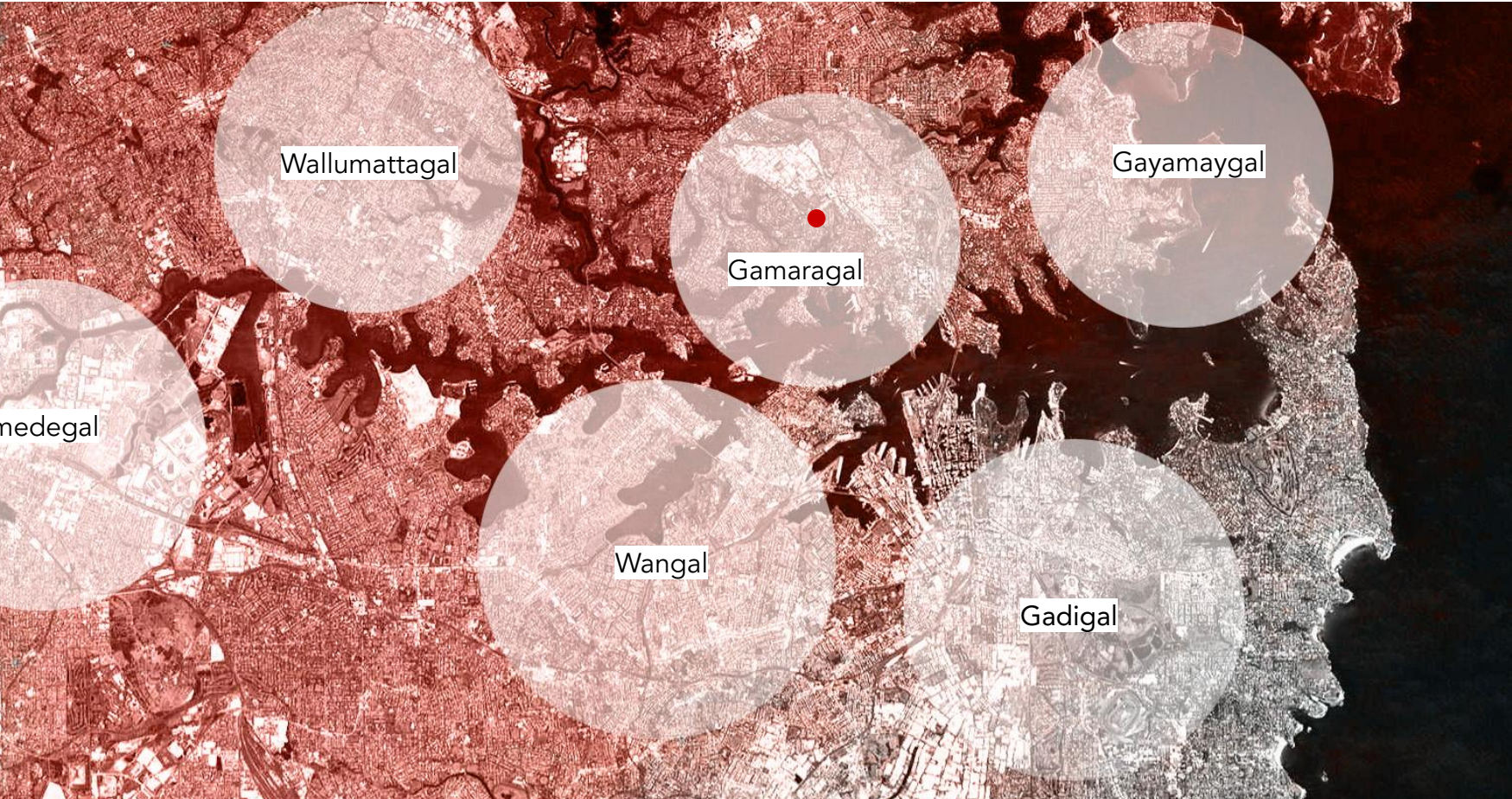
Wallumattagal

Gamaragal

Gayamaygal

Wangal

Gadigal



Some of the Darug language groups within the eastern Sydney region. Image by Michael Hromek.

● Project Location

Country

Language Groups

The Country of the Sydney basin is traditionally inhabited by people of several language groups, including Darug (Dharug) and Dharawal (Tharawal). Within these three language groups there are at least 36 groups.³

Each group is distinguished from other groups by different designs and decorations on tools and weapons, unique body decorations – for example painted designs worn during ceremonies, also the cicatrices (scarification) formed during initiation rites. Some groups also had distinctive hairstyles.⁴

The original inhabitants of coastal Sydney suffered from the trauma of occupation and the severing of their spiritual bonds to Country. Within two years of settlement, kinship ties in the area were damaged, more than half the population died from smallpox.⁵

Salt Water Country

The area has bountiful water resources with easy access to the harbour for bark canoes. The main food source is from the harbour with men making spears and wooden tools. Women are the masters of the canoe or **Nawi**, they made and used fishing lines and fish hooks and would cook fish on a small fire built on an ochre clay base on the canoe floor.⁶

Watkin Tench observed that they possessed the best fishing grounds in Port Jackson. Sea urchins, shellfish and other foodstuff were thrown into the water to attract fish. Shell middens can still be seen in several Sydney locations providing a record of countless meals, showing the type of food that was eaten and the places where feasts were held.⁶

At the time of colonisation coastal groups used stone as implements less often than those on the Cumberland Plain, and bone or shell was used in its place for items such as spear barbs, adzes and scrapers.



*Bannelang [Bennelong] meeting the Governor by appointment after he was wounded by Will [Nille?] ma ring in September 1790.
Source: Natural History Museum (London)*

Gamaragal Country

Gamaragal Country

Governor Arthur Phillip noted that the Gamaragal people occupied 'the northwest side of Port Jackson'. Their Country is now thought to extend from Cremorne in the east, to Woodford Bay in the west, and probably to Middle Harbour which forms a natural boundary to the north.⁷

Carbon dating of archaeological material shows that people have lived in this area for at least 5,800 years.⁸

Country changed by rising Sea Water

During the last ice age about 12,000 years ago, sea levels were around 100 metres below their current level and the eastern coastline of this continent was about 25 to 30 kilometres further east.⁹

As ice caps melted the river valleys filled up with sea water as sea levels rose and the lower-middle slopes of the ancient valleys were slowly inundated.⁹

The sea eventually flooded the area that is now Port Jackson and food resources for Cammeraygal people would have changed dramatically.⁹

As the sea level stabilised about 8000 to 6000 years ago, it provided a rich maritime resource economy to Cammeraygal people until after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788.⁹



North View of Sydney New South Wales, 1822 by Joseph Lycett, State Library of New South Wales

Gamaragal People

Gamaragal People

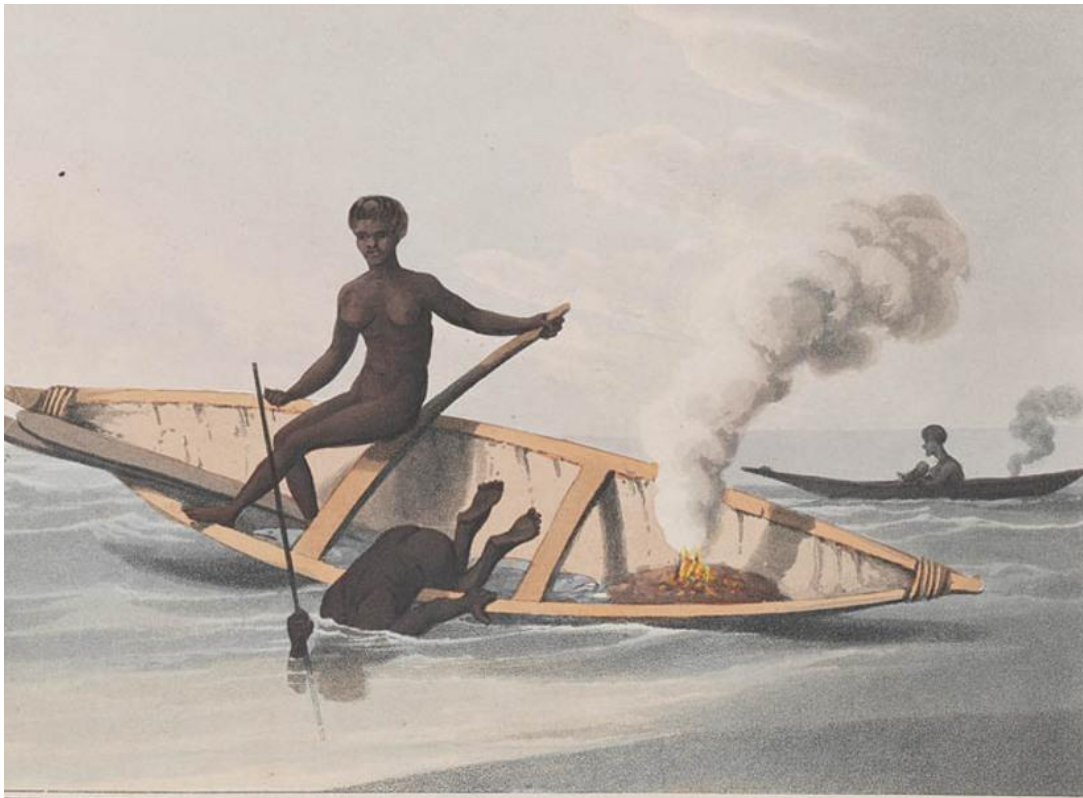
Early colonists noted that Gamaragal people were 'robust and muscular' people, and the men presided over the initiation of young males from other Sydney area groups.¹⁰

There are approximately 1,000 identified Gamaragal sites in the Warringah, Willoughby, Lane Cove and North Sydney Council areas. These sites include middens, rock engravings, axe grinding grooves, carved trees, fish traps and stone arrangements.¹⁰

Balls Head has some of the most significant remaining Gamaragal sites in North Sydney. The Australian Museum investigated a rock shelter at Balls Head in 1964 and 1971 where the skeleton of a female was uncovered. A small tooth with traces of vegetable gum found near the skeleton suggests that the woman had adorned her hair or wore a necklace.¹⁰

Food remains from a midden consisted almost entirely of shellfish. The main species were the rock oyster, the hairy mussel and the Sydney cockle and mud oyster, both of which are now virtually extinct in Port Jackson. Their presence confirms the importance of the harbour as a source of food. The study concluded that the site had been used by women, who gathered shellfish, and men, who made and repaired implements.¹⁰

The group of pictographs or rock engravings at Balls Head, featuring a shoal of fish, human figures and a large marine creature, is further testimony to the cultural significance of the harbour.¹⁰



Fishing No 1, Foreign field sports, fisheries, sporting anecdotes from drawings by Messrs. Howitt, Atkinson, Clark, Manskirch, State Library of New South Wales

Gamaragal Culture

Barangaroo, a Gamaragal Woman

Barangaroo was a Gamaragal woman, and was a prominent figure in Sydney's early history. Having survived the smallpox epidemic of 1789 that killed her first husband, and it is believed more than half of Sydney's Aboriginal population¹¹, she was *'one of a reduced number of women who had the knowledge of laws, teaching and women's rituals and she exercised this authority over younger women'*.¹²

The first written account of her in 1790 described Barangaroo as being in her early 40s, worldly, wise and freer of spirit than the settlers expected of a woman - at least the English women of the time.¹¹ The colonists observed her to be a determined and persuasive character. On one occasion, she refused to go to Sydney Cove to visit the governor with Bennelong, who went anyway. In a fit of rage, Barangaroo broke one of his fishing spears.¹¹

In another incident, a convict was being flogged for stealing hunting and fishing gear from her group. Barangaroo threatened the executioner with a flogging of his own.¹¹

Barangaroo also refused to wear European clothes or drink their wine and was one of only a few women who had a pierced septum (nose). When she did visit the colony with Bennelong she was 'dressed up' with a bone through her nose and painted herself with white clay- a proud statement of her spirituality and culture.¹¹

In 1791, Barangaroo died shortly after giving birth to Bennelong's child. After a traditional cremation ceremony with her fishing gear, Bennelong spread his wife's ashes in present day Circular Quay.¹¹

Fisher Women

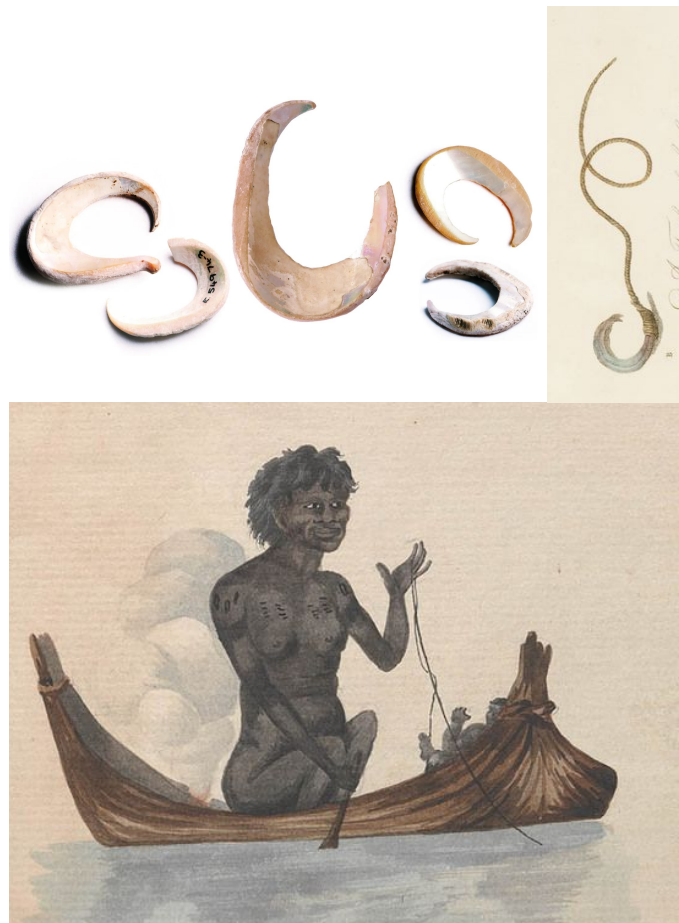
Barangaroo was a powerful woman, her power came from her role as a hunter and provider. She provided the group with fish caught in and around the harbour, using a bark canoe known as a Nawi.¹¹

Unlike the settlers, Barangaroo would only ever catch enough fish for her people's immediate needs. When she witnessed settlers catch about 4,000 salmon- more fish than they could possibly eat- she was outraged. This fiercely independent woman perhaps could see the demise of her traditional way of life.¹¹

Fish is a staple food for people along the coast and harbour. Women made their fishing lines (carr-e-jun) by twisting together two strands of fibre from kurrajong trees, cabbage trees or flax plants. Sometimes animal fur or grass was used.⁶

The distinctively crescent-shaped fish hooks, called burra or bara, are honed from the broadest part of the turban shell. The pearly reflection of the hook would have acted as a lure. The skill of the women in catching the fish and navigating the changeable harbour conditions in their modest Nawi was also greatly admired.⁶

Their skills are described in detail in journals and captured through multiple watercolours. These artworks show fisherwomen in Nawi with fires going, fishing, minding and feeding their small children.⁶



Above left: Bara, or fish-hooks, made from turban shell. Image: Paul Ovenden, Australian Museum.
Above right: Fish hooks of NSW, detail from plate in John White's Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales, 1790. Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (MRB/Q991/2A2)
Below: Aboriginal woman with her baby, in a canoe fishing with a line, c1805. Image: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW (PXB 513)

Cultural Heritage of the Greater Sydney Region

Middens

These are mounds of shell built up over hundreds or thousands of years as a result of countless meals. They primarily contain mature species of edible shellfish species. They might also contain bird and animal teeth and bones, campfire charcoal and stone tools.¹¹

Rock Shelters – “giba gunyahs”

These are places where the Cammeraygal people would have taken shelter. This would have been a warm place to eat, sleep, repair or fashion tools and, we can imagine, talk of stories and exploits. Artefacts such as stone tools may be found in the rock shelters.¹¹



Middens are remnants of feasts and gatherings, they are time capsules that show what types of food were collected and eaten

Painting and Stencils

Stencils are produced by mixing ochre in the mouth with other material into a wet paste and spraying it over the object to be stencilled. Often we find stencilled hands and tools represented in rock shelters. Other forms of artwork include ochre painting as well as charcoal drawings and etchings.¹¹

Grinding Grooves

These are grooves resulting from the production or sharpening and maintenance of an edge ground tool such as a stone axe. These sites are usually located near a water source, like a water hole.¹¹

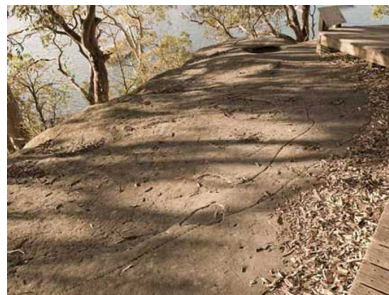


Waterhole and grinding grooves at Balls Head. Photo by Danièle Hromek

Engravings

Engravings were made by drilling or pecking a series of holes in the rock which were then connected to form a line. An accepted understanding of these engravings is that they are the product of sacred ceremonies and were periodically re-engraved as part of ongoing ritual and to pass on knowledge and stories.

Shields were coated with white pipeclay and often painted with a red vertical line crossed by one or two horizontal lines.¹²



Engravings of a sea creature at Berry Island Reserve, Wollstonecraft. Photo: <https://www.visitsydneyaustralia.com.au/>

Scar Trees

These trees are evidence of bark and wood being removed for shields, shelters, coolamons and canoes. They are rare in the Sydney region and can be divided into three categories:

- Bark removal for use eg. coolamons (water / grain containers) and canoes.
- Wood removal for use eg. boomerangs and digging sticks
- Evidence of climbing footholds eg. hunting possum and 'sugar bag' (honey)

The tree was not killed by these methods and therefore scarring is evident.¹³

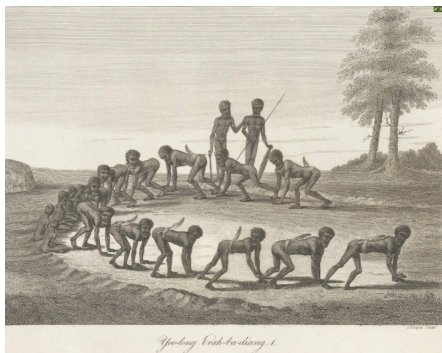


Scar trees are rare in the Sydney region

Cultural Places of the Sydney region

Meeting places: places where different groups of Aboriginal people met to trade and partake on corroborees together. In the Sydney region, such corroborees are known to have taken place near Hyde Park and The Domain near the CBD.¹³

Bora or Ceremonial Ground
Bora grounds are Aboriginal ceremonial places. These are where initiation ceremonies are performed and are often meeting places as well. A bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks, and connected by a pathway.



Corroboree at Hyde Park, Yoo-long Erah-ba-di-ang. I Engraving by James Neagle after Thomas Watling, 1798.

Sacred places: are areas set aside for religious ceremonies, initiations etc. Very little evidence of the use of such sites remain, the major tell-tale signs being the arrangement of stones in patterns or formations.

Most sacred sites were located on hilltops which offered panoramic views of the groups lands. A prerequisite for such sites was a large slab of flat rock upon which engravings recording tribal history and culture could be made.¹³



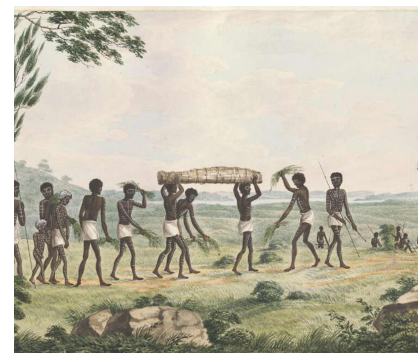
Rock engravings at Ben Buckler, North Bondi.

Economic places: Generally campsites which show evidence of occupation. Often close to or within rock overhangs and caves used to give shelter, evidences of occupation include middens (piles of discarded shells at feasting sites), fish traps, scarred trees, cooking mounds, wells, watering holes (often depressions carved into flat rock surfaces used to catch the water), remnants of discarded tools, quarries and axe sharpening grooves.¹³



Water well at Balls Head. Photo: Danièle Hromek⁶

Burial places: Senior members of a group were buried or cremated at sacred sites from which their spirits were freed to travel skyward. Other family members were buried within their area, often near campsites, in caves and beside middens. Often such sites were marked by earth mounds, stone arrangements and carved trees.¹³



An Aboriginal funeral by Joseph Lycett, National Library of Australia nla.obj-138501624

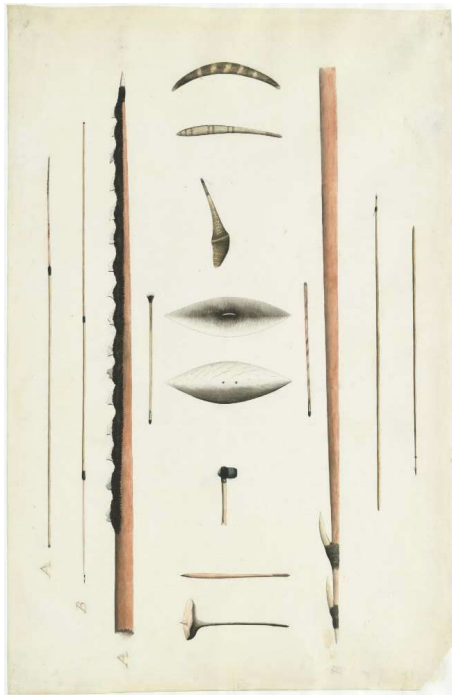
Design

Fishing Culture in Design

The distinctively crescent-shaped fish hooks, called **burra** or **bara**, are honed from the broadest part of the turban shell. The pearly reflection of the hook would have acted as a lure.

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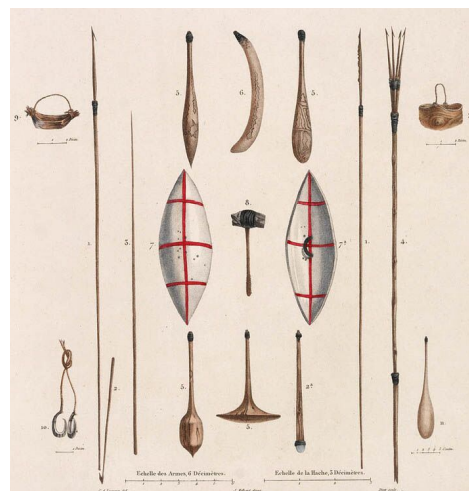


> Fish hooks of NSW, detail of plate from John White's Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales 1790. Image: Mitchell Library. State Library of NSW.

< Aboriginal hunting implements and weapons, Port Jackson Painter, active 1788-1792 National Library of Australia.



^ Necklace worn by females, Fibre cord necklace made of reed pieces (*Phragmites australis*), Port Jackson, c1860s, British Museum.



^ Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Indigenous Weapons - Sydney Region (1802-04)*, Australian Museum.

Gamaragal Key Issues

Ground disturbance

For Aboriginal people the ground plane is important and should not be disturbed too much or else you change the ecosystem.

Any construction should have as minimal disturbance to the ground as possible.

Important viewpoints

Elevated spaces provide a good place to look at Country.

How might the design cater for any important views points of Gamaragal Country?

Celebrate Country

The project has the potential to celebrate Gamaragal Country and culture.

Can the project provide a space to celebrate this important Country?

Tell our stories.

There are many stories that emerge and belong to Country. When appropriate some stories are able to be shared to encourage community engagement with the places where they live, work and play.

How might we tell the stories of this Country and it's First Peoples?

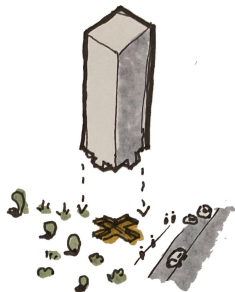
Connecting the Building to Country

Connecting the site to Country

Sydney has always been an important place of gathering for Aboriginal people, overlooking two waterways and old tracks that went west and south.

How might we honour Country and ensure it's dignity is still intact after the project?

Any new building should Honour Country and the culture associated with this land through tangible and intangible outcomes



Connect the building to Country

Open up the site

Ensuring the building is open, accessible, and to provide access for people.

How might we bring people closer to the site, make them stay longer, and learn a bit about Aboriginal culture?



Connect people to the site

Celebrate Country

This precinct will be a threshold to the city for many students who come from a long way away and are here to stay on Aboriginal land and learn.

Can the project provide a space to celebrate this important gateway to Country and have elements of education and teaching about Aboriginal values?



Connect the building to local Design

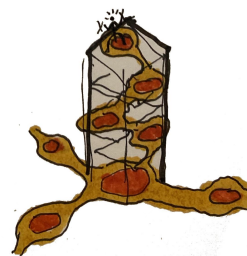


Invite Country into the building

Tell our stories.

Sydney was a place of ceremony, lore, and settlement. There are many latent stories associated with this place waiting to be told through place based interventions.

How might we tell the stories of this Country and it's first peoples in the design of this building? What are the appropriate stories / themes to tell?



Connect the building to Culture

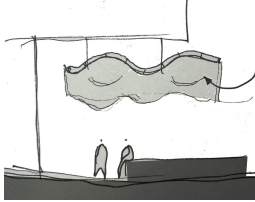
Potential use of Aboriginal design

Aims of the project:

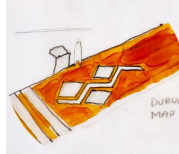
- Tell the story of St Leonards, and of the Gamaragal People.
- Incorporate native and endemic plant species through the space.
- Create opportunities for the installation of Aboriginal Art through the space.



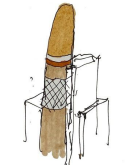
1. Entry statement,
significant site marker
sculpture referencing
Gamaragal Design.



2. An iconic sculpture /
element to mark
important gateway or
zone.



3. The ground plane.
Landscaping and
Pathways with local
Aboriginal patterns in
coloured asphalt.



4. Sculptural,
message sticks,
landscape
communicating
stories and design.



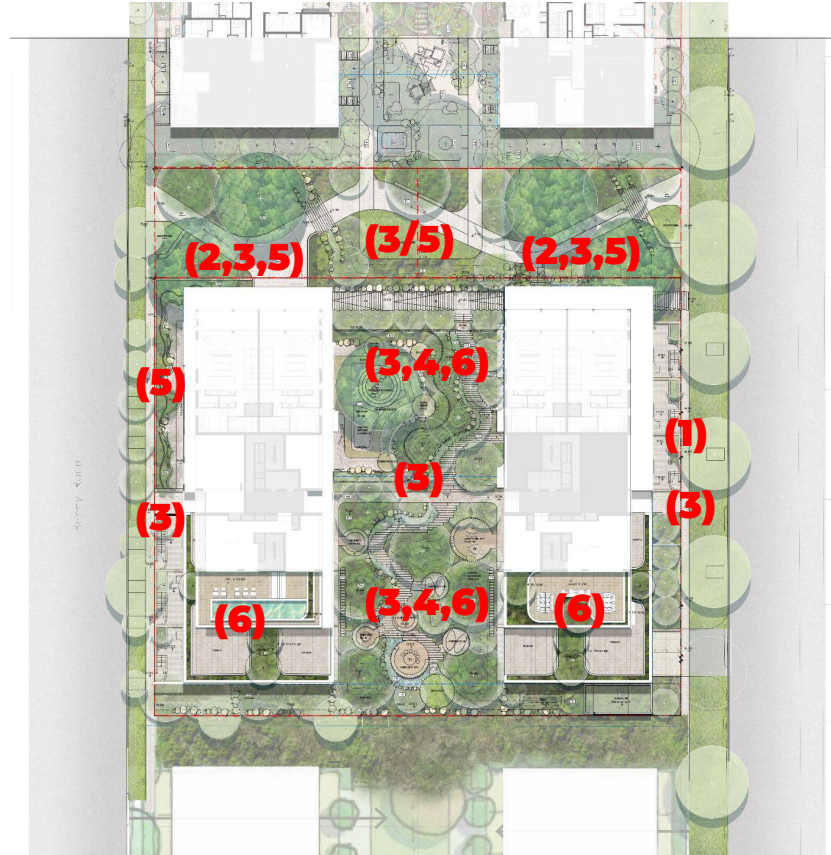
5. Wall treatment, anti
throw screens,
abutments, noise
walls etc



6. Resting / yarning
place Gamaragal
design treatment in
pavement, seating,
landscape art.

7. Language and naming

Can the building
represent Gamaragal
culture through
appropriate language
shared through
consultation?

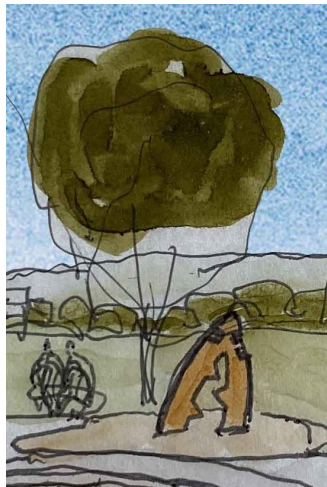


1. Entry Statement

Sculptural and mural can be combined



Tell a story at important thresholds



Storytelling and wayfinding devices help connect people and orientate them to Gamaragal Country and the stories and history that came before.



A space to celebrate culture, such as a viewing, yarnning or sitting place with references to local design



2. Iconic Statement

Soffit art can stand out as a significant contribution to Aboriginal design.

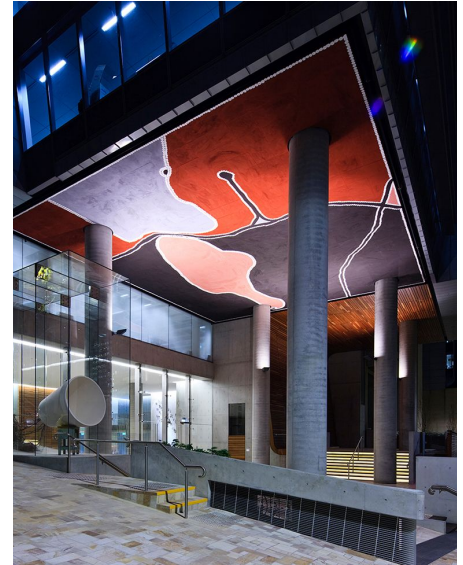
The below concept takes inspiration from the 7 season of this Country, with the red gum leaves, yellow wattles and glue fig tree fruit. The eel, an important totem, is a reference to air intact requirements, perhaps an art opportunity?



Concept of St Leonards vaulted ceiling artwork



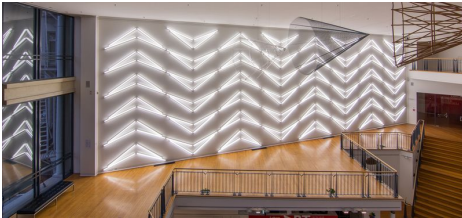
Burwood Brickworks, Mandy Nicholson artist



Coca Cola Place North Sydney

2. Contemporary Aboriginal Art

Examples used in this photomontage art by
Aboriginal artists Jonathan Jones and Daniel
Boyd



3. Ground plane

Thresholds can be celebrated with bold pavement design referencing Aboriginal language, colour and patterns



A cultural Mapping of the site, revealing cultural flows and pressures on this site through high quality materials and design



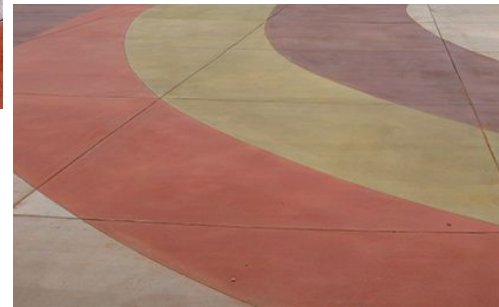
Pavement treatment

Bora grounds are meeting places. A bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks, and connected by a pathway.⁵



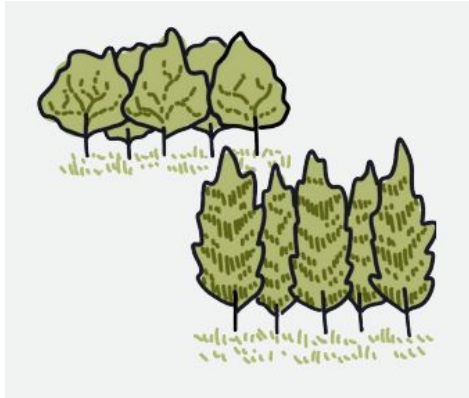
Re-used sandstone from the site / coloured concrete / asphalt / bitumen

There is potential to re-use sandstone from the site which may lead to an opportunity to create Cultural designs, co-designed by local Aboriginal artists with the design team.

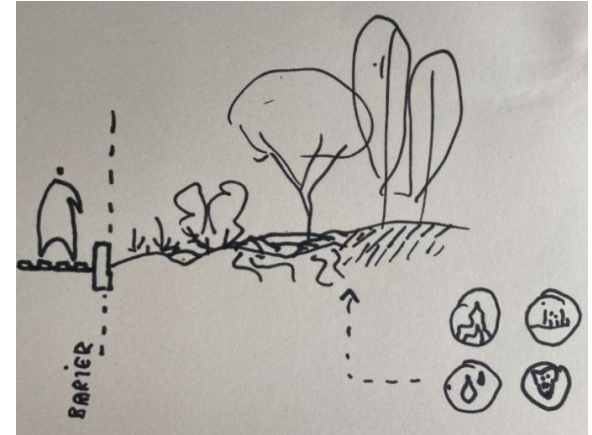


3. Ground plane - landscape

Use of endemic species will attract and enhance the biodiversity of this place. Curating into groves creates places of difference and diversity

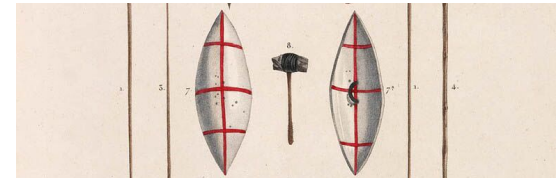


Landscapes are resource collection points for First People. We can all learn from these places about how First People lived and thrived in this place. How can we design this site with these values?



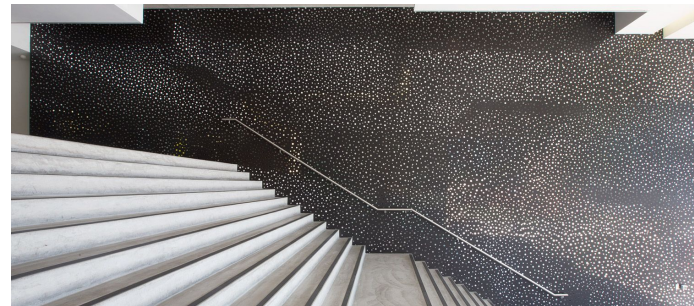
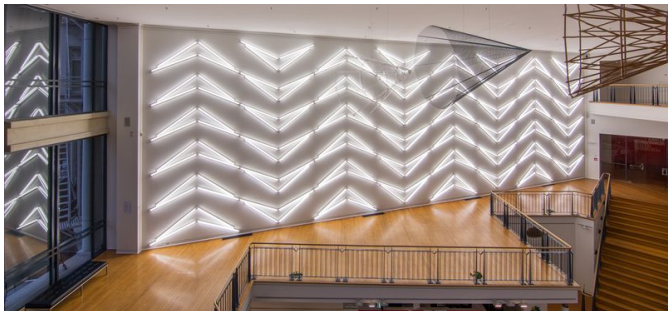
4. Sculptural art

Art and sculptural elements can assist user legibility and wayfinding enabling the user to recognise and navigate successfully through the new landscape.



5. Wall treatments

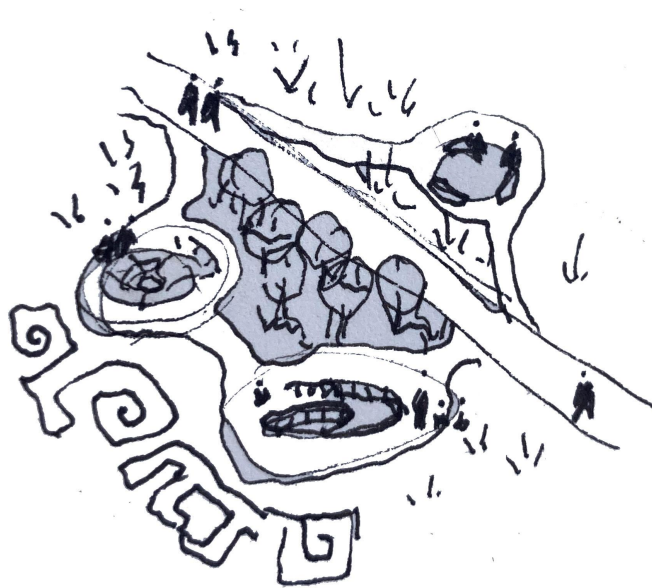
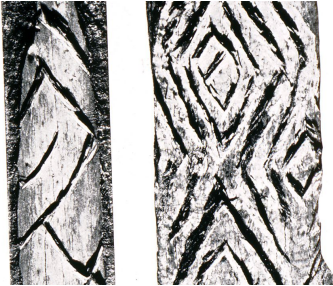
Murals, light art and applied surfaces can be important canvases for integrated and art commissioned aboriginal input



6. Resting / Yarning places

Shared places can celebrate Gamaragal culture while catering for multiple users including pedestrians, cyclists, road users and 'more than humans' ie plants, animals, waterways and ecology.

By using permeable hard surfaces for secondary pathways, local endemic plant species in gardens and verges, and adopting water sensitive urban design principles places can benefit all users.

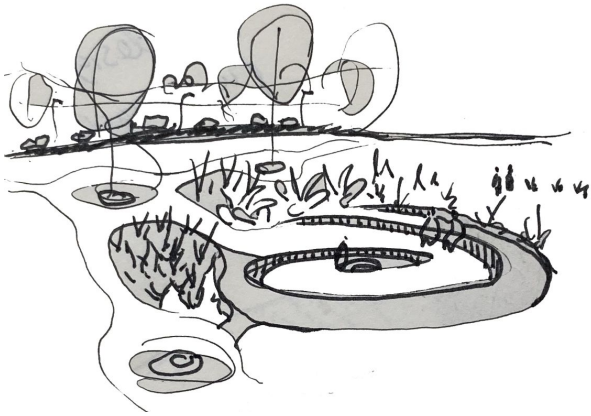


Bora rings are in a celtral space

Bora grounds are Aboriginal ceremonial places. These are where initiation ceremonies are performed and are often meeting places as well. A bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks, and connected by a pathway.⁵

6. Landscaping / a place for culture

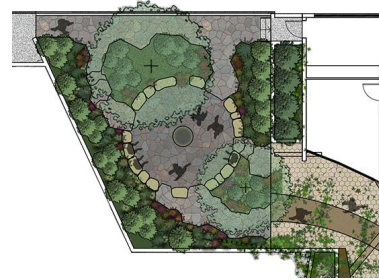
The landscape can facilitate in cultural practices
such as weaving or healing gardens, or spaces
specific for Aboriginal people to celebrate their
culture



A physical space to celebrate design and culture - could be an accessible site to enhance certain cultural practices, such as healing or weaving gardens, a yarning circle etc.



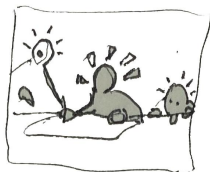
Aboriginal design examples - urban design / landscape



How we will apply these themes

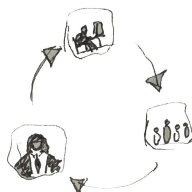
1. Engagement

The first step will be to engage with the relevant Aboriginal group (artist / elder, Lands Council etc), early and often, through a series of 'yarns' or conversations about the potential opportunities to incorporate the theming contained within the document (or other themes) into project outcomes.



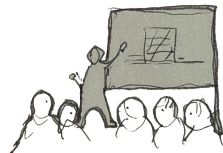
2. Co Design

To kick off the co-design process design teams are given time to integrate the themes and ideas into the scope of the project



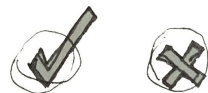
3. Co Design workshops

Engagement workshops with the relevant Aboriginal group will everyone gets in the room to co-design cultural solutions to project outcomes, yet Aboriginal voices should be given preference to ensure they are heard.



4. Endorsement:

All content that uses local Aboriginal theming will be endorsed by the Aboriginal group.



5. Other opportunities:

Should be highlighted and put forward to ensure the local Aboriginal community has opportunities, economic outcomes and better connections to their Country, through the project



Future Aboriginal participation

1. Consultation with Aboriginal Community. Elders, community, respected community members etc

The use of Aboriginal patterns and motifs must be done with approval - and hopefully involvement - from the elders and community. A document like this can begin these conversations between community.

We need to ask:

- Can we use your Countries patterns?
- Do you want to make patterns for the project?
- How would you like to be involved?

2. Engage Aboriginal artists and designers

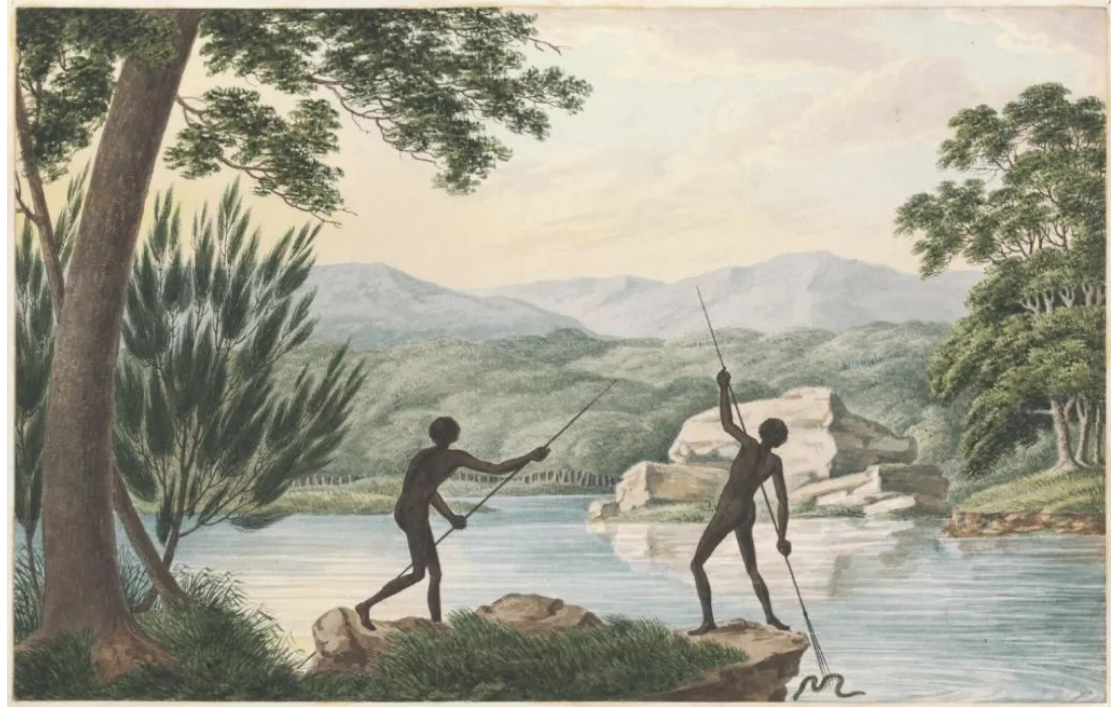
Aboriginal artists should be engaged from the local community who acknowledge Country / culture in their designs

3. A Smoking Ceremony recommended on the site

Smoking Ceremonies are conducted by Aboriginal people with specialised cultural knowledge. The ceremony aims to cleanse the space in which the ceremony takes place (this site being of major significance). Given the significant nature of the ceremony, smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major events.

4 Perform a Welcome to Country when site opens .

Generally, providers offer participants local Aboriginal history and cultural information and will go on to welcome the delegates to the Country.



'Two Aboriginal people spearing eels' by Joseph Lycett . National Gallery of Australia.

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