

Media Release



New State Library exhibition reveals little-known stories of the Dyarubbin

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We are still here, we are still strong and we have more than 60,000 years of culture in our blood and in our hearts. Rhiannon Wright (Darug)

Little-known stories of Dyarubbin — the Hawkesbury River — are revealed by Darug women storytellers in an evocative new exhibition that has just opened at the State Library of NSW.

In *Dyarubbin*, Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators — Leanne Watson, Jasmine Seymour, Erin Wilkins and Rhiannon Wright — bravely share their stories of seven special sites along this beautiful and haunting place.

According to State Library curator Marika Duczynski (Gamilaraay): “Darug people have lived along Dyarubbin for millennia, but their stories are often unacknowledged in the widely celebrated heritage of the region. The focus on colonial history ignores the devastating impacts to Darug Country and the lived experience of Darug people.”

“It’s time to tell a deeper and more truthful story about Darug Country,” said Ms Duczynski.

“The real story of this place is much darker,” added Jasmine Seymour.

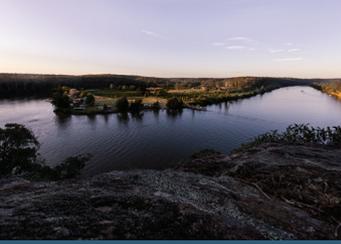
Darug culture, spirituality and sense of being are all connected to the river. Shaped like an eel, its bends and features are all encoded with meaning.

Moving from Yellomundee Regional Park to Canoelands in Marramarra National Park, the women generously share their culture and tell stories of their ongoing connection to Country. They recount oral histories of Darug ancestors whose sustenance, livelihood and spirituality were intrinsically connected to the river. They also reflect on the negative impact of modern farming and urbanisation to Darug Country today.

One site of enormous spiritual significance, which exhibition visitors will have the privilege of experiencing, is one of the resting sites of Gurangatty, the Great Eel ancestor spirit. Visitors will also see a rare Great Eel rock engraving — only a few survive — in a part of Dyarubbin not accessible to the public.

Ms Seymour said seeing the eel engraving for the very first time was “incredibly beautiful and deeply sad.”

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And while the Darug women were overjoyed that it was safe and had not been destroyed, “we were overwhelmed by the cultural loss that our people have had in the Hawkesbury. Many sites are inaccessible to us because they are on privately owned land.”

“Gurangatty is one of our creation heroes. The Aboriginal geography of Dyarubbin shows us the path of Gurangatty and the deep time connection to Country the Darug people have custodianship of,” said Ms Seymour.

“Floods are connected to the Gurangatty story. Gurangatty’s flood power created Country. Floods and fire have always been part of this Country. We are experiencing the same force of nature that Aboriginal people have experienced for eons.”

The exhibition builds on the Darug women’s collaboration with Professor Grace Karskens on ‘The Real Secret River, Dyarubbin’ project, following her landmark discovery of Reverend John McGarvie’s list of Aboriginal placenames on the Hawkesbury (1825–35) in the State Library’s collection.

McGarvie’s list will be on public display in the exhibition for the first time, along with:

- ration lists (1866–84) from the Sackville Aboriginal Reserve;
- 1907 letters written by Aboriginal women living on the Sackville Aboriginal Reserve;
- 1816 watercolour panorama of the Hawkesbury (Dyarubbin) and South Creek (Wianamatta) in flood around Windsor (Bulyayurang); and
- 1809 watercolour of the confluence of the Nepean, Grose and Hawkesbury Rivers.

Dyarubbin is on display at the State Library of NSW until March 2022.

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