



**Interview with Tracy Wise  
(Barkindji, Ngiyampaa)  
Recipient of the G4S Australian & New  
Zealand Encouragement Award (1 of 2) for  
*Jandahl – Dilly Bag 2021*, natural jute and  
raffia fibres, wire and fishing swivels.**

The 9<sup>th</sup> Koorie Art Show (4 December 2021 –  
20 February 2022)

**By Andrew Stephens**

The act of weaving is a spiritual practice that brings deep connection for artist Tracy Wise. It is also a key part of her story in how she embarked on a journey in art-making, that continues and sustains her in many different ways.

The daughter of well-known artist Mary Wise, Tracy says a turning point came for her in 2012 when she returned to community in Mildura to live with and help care for her mother. “To help my mum, we made sure we did art together and it was a form of therapy,” she says. “She opened her place up to me. At the time, she was sick and going through stuff, so it was good therapy for her – but it was also therapy for me.”

During some house moves afterwards and various ups and downs, they continued their practice together. Eventually they took up residence in a new home in which they also set up a private gallery to show their work. Tracy had also made a video of her mother, to put her story and art work “out there”. The gallery helped with this endeavour, and Tracy also became connected with The Torch, where she now works as an Indigenous Arts Officer, drawing on her 20-plus years of grassroots community work.

While maintaining her close connection with her mother, the gallery and the Wimmera Mallee, Tracy says her life’s work has been supporting and guiding mob to overcome challenges in life, and her art-making has become a significant part of offering that example. Moving to Melbourne was part of her continuation of her art practice. “The Torch provided that,” she says. “I decided mum was ok and she was able to look after herself. So really it started in 2020 when I became the Torch arts officer and I was around a lot of talented artists.”





It came to her that it was necessary to have a five-year plan for her art-making. Living out the start of this plan was what has helped her through various lockdowns over the past two years. “I am a spiritual artist and I listen to the ancestors when they speak to me,” she says. “I listen to the land, the sky and the stars.”

Last year, having entered the 2020 Koorie Art Prize, she also began to do some weaving, a practice with strong family connections. She used a spaghetti container to store her tools and materials – natural jute, needles, and some fishing paraphernalia. “Then I saw that the spaghetti container looked like a dilly bag so I used it to hold the shape of the form.” She weaved around it and created the bag she entered in the 2021 show.

“The ancestors came to me and showed me the song and the stories and how they would sit around and sew,” she says of her weaving sessions. “They would softly sing at the same time as weaving so they could remember the patterns. That’s what I could see and feel. And out came this dilly bag.”

Each part of the bag is significant. The bottom is the foundation, indicating learning from Country and land where sacred knowledge is held. The upper centre attachments are the fruits and nuts of life woven into the land connecting to animals, plants, the sky and stars. And the eight strands with the knot in the centre enable the dilly bag to hang loosely over the shoulder, a tribute to Tracy’s mob’s learning in life.

Tracy remembers her Great Granny Mary Coombes Moore trying to teach her to crochet, and this is reflected in the geometry of her weaving, all the patterns and designs she sees in the world, also reflected in the paintings she has done.

“So, while I was doing the dilly bag, all the that knowledge was coming to me and through me and it helped me in lockdown as well, with something to think about and do.” Tracy also worked on weaving a coolamon – a traditional vessel with curved sides – and a wall hanging. “They all came together and along with the dilly bag are part of a group of sacred women’s business stuff: birthing, family and connection. And the coolamon is there for the baby.”

Tracy says she couldn’t wait to enter the dilly bag in the Koorie Art Show – she got it in at the earliest opportunity – and hopes that viewers might also see how it could be used as a tool for survival by its owner: containing fishing swivels, she says it can be pulled apart to make a fishing line.

“I ask myself what knowledge is it the ancestors want me to share? Especially when you are weaving, you hear them in the background saying:



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'Don't do it that way, do it this way; you need to do it proper'. They are with me, but gently guiding me through so that I can almost sense I am sitting up there with them doing this



**Tracy WISE (Bakindji, Ngiyampaa)**, *Jandahl - Dilly Bag* 2021, natural jute and raffia fibres, wire and fishing swivels.

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