

# Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket

**SANDRA AITKEN**

23 August - 23 November 2025



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Koorie Heritage Trust acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Narrm, the Wurundjeri People of the Greater Kulin Nation, on whose lands we operate. We pay respect to their community, their Ancestors and their Elders, past and present. We also pay respect to the Gunditjmara Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the coastal areas in far south-western Victoria, encompassing Portland, Port Fairy, Warrnambool and inland to Camperdown, along with the Eastern Maar, whose lands cover a shared area from Macarthur, further north towards Ararat and across to Cressy and the Lorne region.

We extend this acknowledgement to Gilgar Gunditj Elder Sandra Aitken and family, of the Gunditjmara Nation.



Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area. Still image from *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket*, produced by Gatherer Media for Koorie Heritage Trust, 2025. Collection of Koorie Heritage Trust.

Title page image: Sandra Aitken weavings on volcanic rock at Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area. Photo by Tiffany Garvie, 2025.

## FOREWORD

Wominjeka (Welcome). In celebration of the Koorie Heritage Trust's 40th Anniversary (and 10 years in the Birrarung Building at Fed Square), we are honoured to present *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket*, a major commission by Gilgar Gunditj Elder Sandra Aitken of the Gunditjmara Nation. This powerful new work which has been acquired for the KHT's unique and irreplaceable collection of cultural belongings, acknowledges and continues the enduring legacy of her aunt, the late Aunty Connie Hart (1917-1993). Aunty Connie was a revered Gunditjmara Elder and master weaver, whose advocacy and cultural leadership were instrumental in maintaining traditional weaving practices in Victoria. Aunty Connie's influence helped shape the foundations of the Koorie Heritage Trust when it was first established in the mid-1980s, ensuring that First Peoples cultures, stories and practices were preserved and celebrated. Her teachings continue to inspire new generations of weavers, including Sandra, whose practice is deeply rooted in both familial and cultural lineage.

*Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket* is a striking expression of cultural strength, resilience and continuity. The work honours

the historical and ongoing significance of eel traps and woven forms to the Gunditjmara people, while also speaking to the living transfer of cultural knowledge — between Elders and descendants, across Country, and through time. Through this commission, the Koorie Heritage Trust proudly reaffirms its commitment to nurturing cultural knowledge, championing First Peoples' creative expression, and ensuring that the cultural heritage of the First Peoples of South East Australia continues to be celebrated, valued and shared for generations to come.

The commission and acquisition of *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket* by Sandra Aitken has been made possible through the very generous support of the Gandel Foundation, in celebration of the Koorie Heritage Trust's 40th Anniversary.

We also acknowledge exhibition sponsors Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support, ANZ Bank and Viva Energy.  
Ngoon godjin (Thank you).

**Tom Mosby**  
KHT CEO



# Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket

by SANDRA AITKEN

“My interest in basketmaking grew when I was much younger. Auntie Connie Hart (née Alberts), my father’s sister, would tell us how she secretly watched her elder women with her mother make baskets when she was young. She would peep around buildings at Lake Condah Mission to learn how to start the gnarraban, and other baskets to raise money for the mission.

Her mother, Frances Alberts (née Carter), was born and raised on the Mission and was forbidden to teach her children about their culture. But Auntie Con, being the naughty girl that she was, wanted to make baskets. We know this story because when we misbehaved as children, she would pat us on our shoulders and tell us about when she was naughty too.

In the early 1980s my sister and I wanted to learn about basket weaving, but for the many times we asked her to teach us, she would say no. Eventually, she gave in and said she would teach us behind locked doors and that the blinds must be pulled down so that no one could see inside. Again, this was another of my grandmother’s way of life at the Mission. Don’t speak your language, don’t teach your culture, don’t dance or sing in your traditional ways. Auntie Connie was very scared that if the police found out she was teaching us this ancient craft, our children would be taken away, or that the police would lock her up. Again, another Mission way of controlling the people. Auntie Connie realised that when we told her that we were doing this traditional Gunditjmara art and showing and telling our

Image left: Sandra Aitken making *Gildar Gunditj Eel Basket* 2025. Photo by Tim Stone, 2025.



Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area. Still image from *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket*, produced by Gatherer Media for Koorie Heritage Trust, 2025. Collection of Koorie Heritage Trust.

friends, she eventually would hold basketweaving classes for all to learn, not just for Aboriginal women but for all women.

I do the same, it is a way to stop this ancient art from disappearing.

My sisters, my daughters, nieces, great nieces and hopefully all my great great nieces do or will learn to weave when they become older.

I have taught basketweaving in many towns and cities between Melbourne and

Portland, in many pre-schools, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, TAFE, Universities, including Canberra.

Because of our traditional Gilgar Gunditj law, women cannot teach men to weave with Poonyart, but with raffia or other textiles is approved.

We, my Gilgar Gunditj sisters, must continue to teach as many as possible, to carry on this Gunditjmara tradition”.

– **Sandra Aitken** 2025



Sandra Aitken making *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket*, 2025. Still image from *Gilgar Gunditj Eel Basket*, produced by Gatherer Media for Koorie Heritage Trust, 2025. Collection of Koorie Heritage Trust.



Aunty Connie Hart holding a large eel basket outside her home on Gunditj Country in Portland, Victoria, late 1980s. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Sandra Aitken.



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