

# Artists' modern twist on tradition

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AURUKUN'S artistic talent will be showcased once again at this year's Melbourne Art Fair, with two of Wik and Kugu Arts Centre's big hitters currently in the city preparing to share their culture with a southern audience from 20 February.

Keith Wikmunea and Leigh Namponan will present Ngak Apalech | Clear Water, an installation employing sculpting techniques, traditional materials found on Country and upcycling waste.

Mr Namponan, who will be exhibiting at the Melbourne Art Fair for the first time, made use of corrugated iron that would have otherwise gone to waste to tell his cultural story.

"I found these sheets of iron on Country; lots of waste materials out there," he said.

"Each year, the freshwater makes a journey into the mouth of the Arafura Sea; they have a big fight, but that freshwater is always too strong for that saltwater."

Wik and Kugu Arts Centre manager Gabriel Waterman commended Mr Namponan for his creative mixture of tradition and innovation.

"Instead of painting on bark or canvas, he's actually painted on the sheet iron, and these pieces



Aurukun artist Leigh Namponan blends tradition with innovation in his work for the Melbourne Art Fair.

are done with the ochre and the designs are his clan ceremonial markings," he explained.

"It's kind of like using contemporary found materials on Country and expressing his culture through that to bring something different and new."

Mr Wikmunea, who represented Aurukun at last year's Melbourne Art Fair, used his award-winning sculpting technique to explore the role of saltwater in his Country's history.

"There's a large freshwater lagoon on my homeland called Kencharang; this is where Theewith, my white cockatoo totem, lives," the artist told *Cape York Weekly*.

"During the wet season, saltwater comes in from the river and travels all the way up the creeks, flooding my Country.

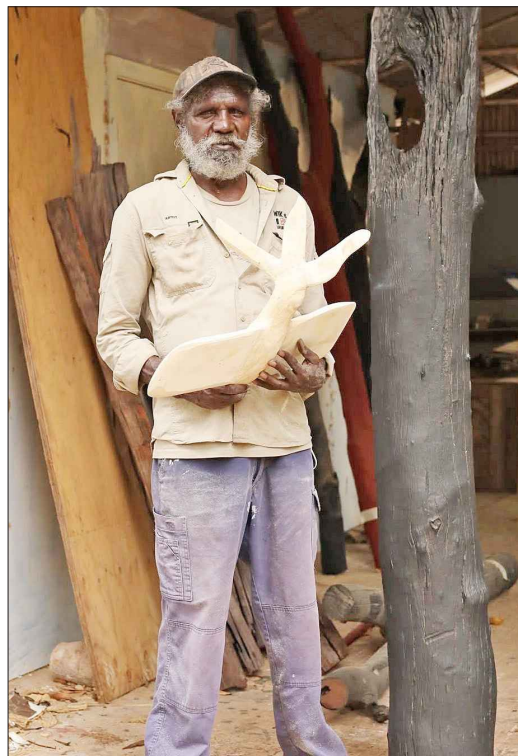
"This is the land of my people belonging to the Apalech ceremony."

Melbourne Art Foundation director and Mapoon man Jack Wilke-Jans said it was wonderful to see artists from remote Far North Queensland communities being represented, adding the pair's modern take on traditional art practices was something not to be missed.

"This is a great collection of works that speak to Country, because on the one hand, you've got Keith, who is utilising local timber that his people have always utilised, and then you look at Leigh's work, and we know that our remote communities were built on corrugated iron, and it's about recycling those materials and transposing those beautiful Apalech designs," he said.

"For artists in remote areas, it's challenging sometimes to have materials of that museum standard quality, so this is a really beautiful take.

"To see this coming from Wik and Kugu, I think is really exciting, because it shows that while you have these brilliant artists who are senior loremen who are experts in traditional and customary art practices, they're also being so modern in using new materials and introducing that to our eyes."



Award-winning Aurukun sculptor Keith Wikmunea depicts the story of water with timber found on Country.