



Talismans

Power & Charm

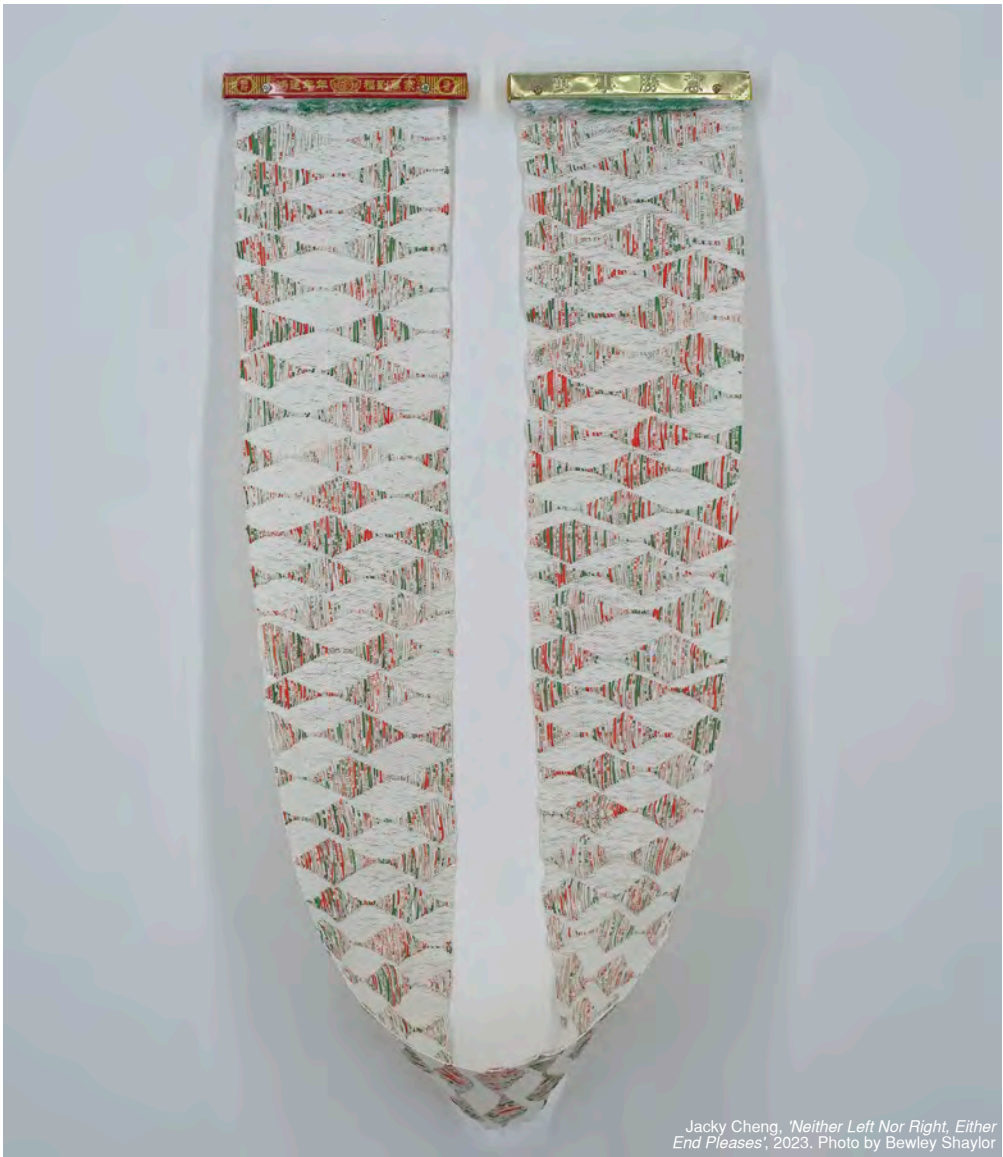
IOTA24

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(Cover) Clare Peake, 'A Thread of a Spider (Portal B)'; 2024, muslin baby wraps, hair, gold thread, acrylic eyes, 160 x 160cm.
Photo: Clare Peake

(Inside cover) Sailmakers Shed. Photo: Clancy McDowell



Jacky Cheng, 'Neither Left Nor Right, Either End Pleases', 2023. Photo by Bewley Shaylor

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(Background image) Sailmakers Shed with
Jetty to Jetty Projection Artwork, Shinju 2016.
Photo: Vanessa Margetts

INTRODUCTION

The origins of this project may date to the first Indian Ocean Craft Triennial in 2021. But equally the origins could be traced through the winding paths of the diverse creative work of these artists. It feels inevitable that their paths have crossed here.

In 2021, visiting IOTA in Perth was exciting and energising, and it left me wanting to be on the map; for Broome to be recognised as intrinsically linked through geography, culture and artistry.

We thank the Regional Arts Fund for financial support, and Art on the Move for assisting us to get this unconventional exhibition into an unconventional space. Thanks also to Broome International Airport for venue sponsorship. MudMap Studios for the catalogue, Kate Rendell for the putting it into words, Mangkaja Arts for assistance with the Coolamon project, and the Broome Museum for hosting us.

The Talismans exhibition has taken shape in a collaborative process with these women who brought deeply considered, crafty (in all senses of the word) and generous work to the Sailmakers Shed, creating an enveloping space that revels in the charm and power of these beautiful handmade objects.

Clancy McDowell

Kimberley Arts Network
Curator



INTO THE MYSTERIES

The word talisman has its origins in Arabic and Greek: Telim in Greek meaning 'to initiate into the mysteries', from telio 'I complete, perform a rite'. Thus, both a practice and an outcome, talismans result from ritual.

Stepping from the blinding light and heat of Wilburu season into the dark Sailmaker's Shed on Roebuck Bay, is to step into an exhibition of talismanic works both deeply personal and profoundly universal.

Talismans: Power and Charm, presented within the Indian Ocean Craft Triennial 2024, is the outcome of many hours of labour and reflection from seven makers: Angela Bakker, Clare Peake, Jacky Cheng, Vanessa Margetts, Eva Nargoodah, Anthea Nargoodah and Julia Lawford, whose work each holds within its fibres, folds, minerals and forms, a unique meditation on the materiality of the object and the rituals of artmaking.

Talismans, while subject to individual beliefs and traditions, surround us in ways familiar and ordinary. Ascribed with powers to protect or harm, they are found across almost all cultures and religions. To reflect on the occurrence of talismans in contemporary Rubibi (Broome) is to reflect on the complex, rich and sometimes competing cultural, spiritual and occult practices of this place: the rich scent of Gungarra smoke burning within Yawuru ceremonies; the daily offerings at the Yu family altar; the crucifix worn by many locals, a constant reminder of the continued Catholic influence in this town; the Shinto shrine within the Japanese cemetery, where the annual Obon feast is held to commemorate ancestors passed. These are the rituals, simultaneously traditional and contemporary, shared and private, which provide meaning and guidance within our lives.



For the seven artists exhibited here, talismans have a varied influence. Some explicitly express a cultural heritage or occult reference. Others reflect more broadly on the power of the object. All are engaged in the rituals of making and the exploration of materiality. It is a formidable collective, and an astounding calibre of artistry for such a remote locale.

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In **Jacky Cheng's** three striking works: *Thrums*, *Time Keeper* and *Neither Left nor Right Either End Pleases* - we witness the outcomes of a painstaking material interrogation - an experimentation with paper as thread and offcuts as unrealised potential.

Cheng's Malaysian Chinese heritage and the Confucian piety of her upbringing underpins each work. Constructed from Chinese New Year calendars, the daily tearing of each page a ritual practiced by Cheng since childhood, the works are a beautiful reimagining - *Neither Left nor Right Either End Pleases* cascades down the wall, the calendar literally unfurling into a new form. The woven layers shimmering a red, green and gold pattern both familiar and unrecognisable. Similarly, the repetition of *Thrums* reveals the obsessive, concentrated process with which Cheng works. While *Time Keeper* uses the same pages to reconstruct a functional talismanic object, an incense burner to aid in prayer.

Cheng's reconfigured objects thus present the culmination of her enquiry - each a beautiful reinterpretation of inherited rituals. Or as Cheng says: an expression of 'a bi-cultural sense of pride, questioning the desire to hold on to those belief systems.'



In contrast, the ngurti/ luwantja (coolamons) made by Wangkajunka, Walmajarri and Gooniyandi artists **Julia Lawford**, **Eva Nargoodah** and **Anthea Nargoodah** do not seek a new form but present a craft already perfected. To explicitly call these ngurti/ luwantjas talismanic is to reveal the limitations of translation, but one cannot deny the ritual of their creation - the beauty within the grooves or the function within the form.

The six ngurti/ luwantja in this exhibition vary in their usage, as vessels for collecting bush foods like the lukarrara seeds to grind into damper, storing fresh water from the jilas or as a cradle for a baby. But their process of construction is shared, a craft each artist learns from the generation before. Of course, practices change - chainsaws replace stone axes, the spring from the Toyota replaces the carving stone - as Eva Nargoodah explains 'different ways, but same idea'.

Ceremonies enhance the function and power of these objects - like the baby smoking conducted by the women; or the special ngurti/ luwantja for the first-born son carved by the Grandfather; or the seasonal Junda (bush onion) dance to increase supply - collective rituals that have served Wangkajunka, Walmajarri and Gooniyandi people from time immemorial.

Engaged in a more private, inward ritual, Clare Peake's tapestry *A Thread of a Spider (Portal A)* draws on various inspirations, including a short story by Edgar Allan Poe and medieval talismanic practices, to construct a portal that is 'both a window to potentiality' and 'a record of everything that has passed.'



It is an unnerving work - so beautiful yet haunting. As a record, the tapestry contains personal materials and remnants from Peake's life - muslin baby wraps, her own hair and threads repurposed from past artworks. At its centre embroidered interlocking circles represent medieval 'witch marks': historically etched into buildings to entrap witches or demons. It is not clear what Peake seeks to capture - her demon may come from within - a part of oneself newly revealed - or it may be external, a force beyond our control - either way it is a presence that paradoxically once entrapped will remain.

In this way Peake's intuitive process is a kind of artmaking that allows her to expel ideas, perhaps moving on but never quite letting go - each artwork a part of the next. Her self-interrogation and material exploration achieves superb realisation in this tapestry - yet I suspect it is but a momentary resolution.

As collectors, fossickers and self-proclaimed bower birds **Angela Bakker** and **Vanessa Margett's** take direct inspiration from the natural world.

As Bakker tells me, it was a beam of sunlight refracting through the honeycomb of her beehives that compelled her making. Using fine porcelain clay, tissue paper, dried honeycomb and translucent green and lilac glazes - Bakker set about paying homage the sheer joy of light. *Swarm of Teapots* is the outcome of this exploration, with non-functional teapots the vessels for experimentation. The final grouping, lit from within, revealing the fragility of the material and the essence of the suns glimmer.



Luminosity is not a new preoccupation in ceramics - in ancient Egypt, objects created with faience (a siliceous glaze material) were ascribed talismanic value, said to be filled with the undying shimmer of the sun and imbued with powers of rebirth.

In contrast, Bakker's haunting work, *Haven't I seen you somewhere before* speaks to an eerier encounter. The work also explores light - in this case the illumination of recognition. Or that moment when you think you know someone, but do not. The faces with their bright eyes and cynical smiles evoke remembrance, the reverberating force that washes over you - that uncanny feeling of knowing and being known.

Vanessa Margett's multi-media work *Holding Flight* suggests a more healing encounter. Using found feathers as the objects with which to consider the meaning and message of the naturally occurring talisman, hers is a beautifully ephemeral work.

For Margett's the act of gathering is the ritual, the hours upon hours of walking that became a way to clear the mind and heal the soul - with each feather upon the path requiring an openness to discovery. Collected over a year, the feathers are time capsules. Here the artist is finder and holder.

Sewn together upon the taut yet fragile paper screen the feathers are too many to individually recall or trace, but each hold within their fibres the stories of their encounter. Bringing things into perspective, they are a humbling presence.



Onto these feathers, Margett's projects visions of her own marking and mapping. We catch glimpses of her hands as they retrace the paths and places of discovery. It is a subtle layering. An atmospheric installation. Here mapping is re-journeying and rekindling, reflecting the ways in which we continue to seek talismans as offerings of reassurance, care and hope in our complex lives.

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As I reflect on the talismanic force of the work in this exhibition, I imagine each artist in the act of making - collecting, weaving, folding, tearing, dying, moulding, carving and stitching - enacting their own intricate rituals.

Such is the potency of this collective showing - a concentration of intent and labour so charged that we cannot help but be drawn into their mysteries.

Kate Leah Rendell works in the arts and is privileged to live on Yawuru Country in Rubibi (Broome).



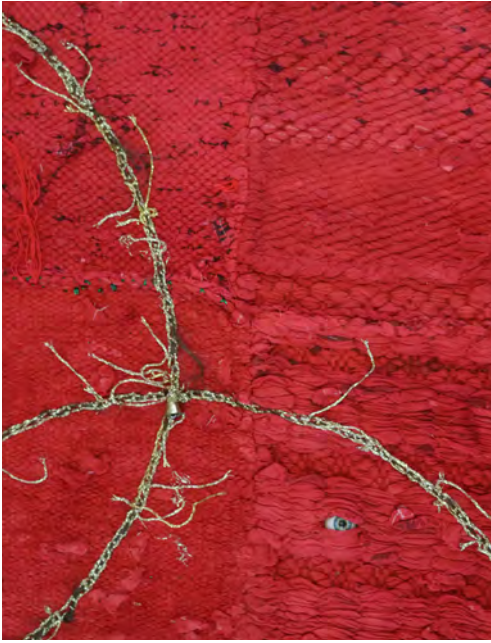
(Above & Opposite) Angela Bakkar, Works in Ceramic, 2024.
Photo: Clancy McDowell



ANGELA BAKKER

Angela Bakker is a highly respected Broome ceramicist who has continued a workshop practice since training as a potter in London in the 1950's. Bakkar trained in London in the 1950's at Hammersmith College in traditional aspects of ceramic production with an emphasis on drawing, history, museum studies and the final year working in a small factory; production throwing; a very intense, traditional art training environment. At this time women were in a minority in art institutions and Bakkar specialised in ceramics and printmaking while studying. This led to combining printmaking with clay. This approach of combining techniques has become an integral part of her entire practice.

Bakkar is renowned for her quirky teapots and other objects that embody a unique personality. She incorporates a lot of 'stuff' in her pieces, adding precious objects she's found; trinkets inherited from her family, springs squished on the road or wood washed up on the beach. She uses local Kimberley clays to create sculpture and functional wares. This work uses fine porcelain to create works that have an inner life and that reach out for interaction, sharing the intimacy of a chat or a cup of tea.



(Above & Opposite) Clare Peake, 'A Thread of a Spider (Portal B)', 2024, muslin baby wraps, hair, gold thread, acrylic eyes, 160 x 160cm.
Photos: Clare Peake



CLARE PEAKE

Clare Peake graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Art) from Curtin University in 2006 and completed postgraduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia in 2010. Clare was selected as a finalist in the 2017 Ramsay Art Prize (Art Gallery South Australia) and has contributed to a number of significant solo and group shows, notably, *The National* (2019) as well as recent exhibitions at sydenham international, Lawrence Willson Gallery, Carriageworks and Casula Powerhouse. Clare has also recently completed residencies at the Jenni House in Whitehorse, Canada and Artspace, Sydney.

Clare Peake's practice focuses on process and material investigation often engaging in slow, repetitive processes that continuously revisit past works. Her work explores the ways in which we gather and re-form ideas and knowledge. How we conjure up something we don't know about, how we search for something that is unknown and how we navigate through what we already know to consider something we don't - these are central questions underpinning her work. This approach to the process of making is aimed at exploring what it means to invent, make and discover.



(Top L) Water Carrier, 2024, Anthea Nargoodah. Photo by Clancy McDowell.

(Top R) Bush onion roller, 2024, Eva Nargoodah. Photo by Clancy McDowell.

(Bottom L) Various coolamons, 2024, Eva Nargoodah, Julia Lawford and Anthea Nargoodah. Photo by Clancy McDowell.

(Bottom R & Opposite) Baby Carrier, 2024, Eva Nargoodah. Photo by Clancy McDowell.

EVA NARGOODAH

Languages: Gooniyandi, Walmajarri, Wangkatjungka
Country: Christmas Creek

'I was born on Christmas Creek Station and grew up with my parents until the age of six. My dad was a stockman and my mother worked in the house. I was taken away to GoGo Station where my great-grandmother lived. We moved there with the manager from Christmas Creek. His name was Vic Johns. At GoGo Station my father worked at the stock camp again and my mother in the house.

Next we shifted to Cherrabun Station where I went to school in 1965 at the men's quarter. I moved to many different places. From Cherrubun we went back to Christmas Creek. I did my next years at school in Derby and worked at Christmas Creek School as a teacher. In 1984 I was married. I have nine children and nine grandchildren.'

Eva is based at Jimbalakudunj Community, 120 km southwest of Fitzroy Crossing. She paints with Mangkaja Arts, and she and her daughters have a natural dyeing enterprises called 'Rukaji Designs'. Eva and also is known for carving and traditional bush medicine and healing skills. These carved items have been made by Eva and her family members.



(Top L) Jacky Cheng, *'Time Keeper'*, 2021, Upcycled Chinese calendar papers, beeswax, copper, incense holder, cotton thread, 24cm x 13.5cm x 24cm. Photo by Sean Breadsell.

(Top R) Jacky Cheng, Artist in Residence Program, 2023, Australian Tapestry Workshop. Photo by ATW

(Bottom L & Opposite) Jacky Cheng, *'Thrums'*, 2023, Upcycled Chinese calendar papers, Tyvek®, nylon bond, paper thread, UV conservation varnish, 600cm x 30cm. Photo by Jacky Cheng.

(Bottom R) Jacky Cheng, *'Neither Left Nor Right, Either End Pleases'*, 2023, Pine paper, upcycled Chinese calendar papers and metal holder, Tyvek®, UV conservation varnish, 55cm x 80cm x 3.5cm. Photo by Bewley Shaylor



JACKY CHENG

Jacky Cheng was born in Malaysia of Chinese heritage and currently resides in Yawuru Country, Broome, WA. Jacky Cheng weaves narratives and materials drawn from her familial and cultural experiences, and maps these to the esoteric and social constructs of her physical environment and its collective surroundings. Deeply rooted in her own bi-cultural experience, a focus of her work her is an emergence of identity and awareness through cultural activities, nostalgia and intergenerational relationships. Her predominant choice of medium reflects an intense relationship within her practice through methodologies and manipulation of papers and fibres.

Her recent accolades include the national prize 46th Fremantle Art Centre Print Award (2023), The John Stringer Prize (2022), Best Bespoke Design, VIC (2023); finalists in multiple national art awards including National Works on Paper, VIC (2024, 2022) and 67th Blake Prize, NSW (2022). Jacky was an artist-in-residence with SPACED's Rural Utopias program focusing on socially engaged art culminated in a group exhibition at Art Gallery of WA (2023). She attended residencies in Japan, Finland, Spain and Australia and was one of the selected artist in Regional Assembly 2023/24 (Regional Arts Australia) connecting with other cultural practitioners working in regional and remote geographies across Australia, Asia and the Pacific. Her work has been acquired by public and private collections in regional, national and international recognition from Australian Institute of Landscape Architects for small project category.

Today, Jacky continues to practice, teach and facilitate on the lands and waters in and around Yawuru Country, Northwest of Western Australia where she lives and work since 2006.



(Above & Opposite) Vanessa Margetts' *Holding Flight* details and process, 2024, feathers, cotton, paper, timber, 75cm x 2m.
Photos: Vanessa Margetts & Phoebe Thomas



VANESSA MARGETTS

Vanessa's work often finds her collaborating with Tradition Custodians to bring stories to life and celebrate connections to place. Her public artworks, ephemeral works and installations share histories/truths and ask people to view places with fresh eyes. Vanessa's work celebrates what is often overlooked and unseen.

Vanessa studied visual art at Curtin University majoring in photography and textiles. She went on to study Landscape architecture at UWA and currently runs her own design studio - MudMap Studio.

Her work has been exhibited at galleries and festivals across Australia including the Art Gallery of WA, No Vacancy Gallery Melbourne, Fremantle Art Centre and Cullity Gallery at University of Western Australia, Shinju Matsuri (2016, 2017, 2021) and Corrugated Lines Writers Festival (2017 & 2021).

'The Calling Over Nagula' (2021) - a collaborative ephemeral public artwork with Michael Jalaru Torres and Jacky Cheng received the 2023 National Landscape Architecture Award - a national recognition from Australian Institute of Landscape Architects in the Small Project category.

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ART ON
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