AT THE EXHIBITION

Welcome to Replant

Activity Sheet 1

Have a good look around the exhibition. Discuss the works with your friends, then consider one or more of the following questions.

Exercise 1

Several of the artists in *Replant* draw relationships between things, i.e. plants and insects, history and stories, plants and traditional craft practice. Choose two of these artists and write a paragraph about how each artist does this. What do you think is the intention of their work?

Exercise 2

Make drawings of your favourite works. Make notes about techniques and colours used. Think about your own environment and how you might create an art work which responds to your surroundings.

Exercise 3

Having thought about *Replant*, what roles do you think each of the following have played in the presentation and interpretation of this exhibition?

- The artist
- The gallery
- The project coordinator
- The ethno botanist
- The printmaker
- The photographer
- Yourself, as viewer

Exercise 4

Write two or three sentences about the parts played by each of these exhibition participants. What do you think is the role of art galleries in showing an exhibition like *Replant*?

Exercise 5

Exhibition report

Make notes on the following:

- The title of the exhibition
- The printing technique (see *Project Notes* for information)
- Where the artists come from
- What the art works have in common
- Your favourite work

Exercise 6

Back in the classroom

- Research the artists
- Find out about the history of printmaking by Aboriginal artists in Australia
- Find out about herbaria and what they do.

Look at traditional forms of botanical drawing.
What makes a botanical illustration?
What is the difference between a scientific drawing and a work of art?

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Activity Sheet 2/1

Find the following works in the exhibition, read about the work and discuss the ideas and concepts with the class.

Deborah Wurrkidj
Pandanus Weaving

The Spring Pandanus (also sometimes referred to as the Screw Palm), *Pandanus spiralis*, is one of the most conspicuous and useful plants in north Australia. The Kunwinjku name for Pandanus is kundayarr.

Pandanus is an important food resource and provides different types of food from the seed, fruit, cabbage and peduncle. It is also used for a range of medicinal purposes including treating headaches, toothache, infected wounds, diarrhoea, mouth and throat sores, ulcers, back pain and many other afflictions. It is also used as fish poison, to make rafts, toys, didgeridoos, ropes, as a dye, to light fires, to carry fires, and as a totem for some clans.

However, this classical interpretation of Pandanus is based on its iconic use as a base for fibrecrafts by an artist steeped in contemporary fibrecraft expertise and coming from a line of famous fibrecraft artists. Deborah's deceased grandfather was a renowned fish-trap artisan whose works are displayed in many museums and galleries in Australia and overseas.
Glenn Wightman

Irene Mungatopi
Pink Beach Apple

The Red Bush Apple, *Syzygium suborbiculare*, is a common and well known bush tucker in north Australia, however, a rare form occurs in coastal areas on the Tiwi Islands and some other coastal areas. It has pink fruit that are particularly tasty, it is called pinyama, the Pink Beach Apple. The fruit are produced during Jamutakari, the wet season, and sometimes they are produced in profusion. They are one of the most important Tiwi bush foods.

The shape of the pinyama fruit as interpreted by Irene are very similar to the shape of the traditional, uniquely Tiwi fighting clubs produced by senior Tiwi men. In the past these clubs were deadly weapons used in hand-to-hand combat by Tiwi warriors, but now they are mainly prepared for sale to tourists visiting the Tiwi Islands.
Glenn Wightman

Winsome Jobling
Spear Grass

Spear Grass or *Sarga intrans*, previously Sorghum intrans, is one of the most common and important grasses in the western Top End of the Northern Territory.

During the mid to late wet season Spear Grass is the characteristic feature of the savanna habitats, when its stems dominate the lower levels of the vegetation profile. In the later parts of the wet season, which coincided with our field trip to Nauiyu, the stems began to dry out and the colours and tones of the drying stems and leaves were stunning and inescapable; they are literally in your face whenever you walk through the bush.

Spear Grass is also critically important for Aboriginal people as the stems provide a large proportion of the annual fuel load of dry grass that is burnt early in the dry season. Burning grass is an essential element of land management for traditional custodians and is likened to 'cleaning up' or providing medicine or fertiliser for country after the heavy rains. Fire is seen as providing balance to savanna landscapes after the cloudiness, dampness and often floods of the wet season. Without the volume of fuel provided by the Spear Grass stems this fire cleansing would not be possible.

Spear Grass seeds and stems also provide a large amount of organic matter every season and it is one of the most efficient and important energy converters in the savanna habitat. The seeds and stems provide food and shelter for many animals, mainly invertebrates, in savanna habitats.

As a plant it is incredibly well adapted to the wet-dry tropics annual period of aridity, when it survives as a seed bank on the ground. It then takes advantage of the pre-wet humidity build-up, which causes the seed awns to absorb moisture and twist. This drives the seeds into the ground so that they are ready to germinate with the first rains and not be washed away. Once germinated, the leaves are produced to begin photosynthesis, this powers the stems to elongate quickly and get the seeds as high as possible to aid dispersal.

Winsome has captured the essence of two of the principal characteristics of Spear Grass in her prints, the seeds and the stems.
Glenn Wightman.

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Judy Watson
bat-wing coral tree

The twin leaves depicted are from the normally trifoliate compound leaf of the Bat-wing Coral Tree, *Erythrina vespertilio*; however, in this case the third, terminal leaflet was missing. The leaf was from the tree growing near the entrance to the Merrepen Art Centre at Nauiyu. This tree produces red flowers and bright, hard, kidney-shaped, red seeds. These seeds are used in drier parts of Australia to make long, heavy necklaces; these have special significance for Aboriginal women. In the past the black fine ash from the burnt corky bark was rubbed onto the skin of pale-skinned babies to darken it, so that welfare officers would not take them away. This plant also has a number of other uses, including the wood for woomera shafts and the large taproot as food.

The scientific name *Erythrina* is derived from the Greek word erythros, and refers to the red flowers and seeds, which are so distinctive for this species.

The small dark round dots on the print are formed using the seed of the Red Bean Tree, Adenanthera pavonina. The hard, red seeds from this species are also used to make necklaces by some coastal Aboriginal groups in north Australia. The seed interior can be eaten, though the hard red shell is considered toxic and is difficult to break.
Glenn Wightman

Marita Sambono
Water-lilies

Two of the most important aquatic plants for Aboriginal people in north Australia are depicted; above the water-line the emergent leaves of the Red Lotus Lily, *Nelumbo nucifera*, and on the water surface, the floating leaves and flowers of the Water-lily, *Nymphaea macrosperma*.

The Red Lotus Lily is called miwulngini, it has a number of uses. The large green 'seeds' (actually fruit) are eaten raw or lightly roasted; they are very good to eat and occur in large numbers in the mid dry season. The roots are also eaten after roasting and they are used as medicine to treat constipation. The new leaf shoots are eaten raw. The large concave leaves can be used as a hat, as camouflage when hunting in the billabong or to carry water and to wrap food when cooking.

This species is considered sacred in India, Tibet and China being the padma devoted to Brahma (sacred red colour), cultivated throughout south east Asia for food; 'seeds' remain viable for several hundred years in river mud.

Marita Sambono
Water-lilies (continued)

The Water-lily is called minimindi, it also has a number of uses. The fruit contain many small oily seeds that can be eaten raw or lightly roasted, they are very tasty. The flower stems called mintyangari, are also excellent bush tucker and taste like celery. The tubers are used as food and are also used to treat constipation. The flowers can also be eaten.

Collecting Water-lily fruits is one of the favorite activities of senior women at the Daly River. The fruit are found on the bottom of billabongs, as the fruit swell with seeds they get heavy and fall to the bottom. The fruit are located with the feet while slowly walking through the water.
Glenn Wightman

Fiona Hall
Green Ant Nest

The leaves of Ghost Gum, *Corymbia bella* (previously *Eucalyptus papuana*) have been formed into a Green Ant nest; this is unusual as larger, broader leaves are generally preferred by Green Ants.

The Ghost Gum is an important plant, it is called yerrik by MalakMalak speakers. It is used for firewood as it burns slowly and evenly, the bark is burnt and applied to swellings on knees and legs to reduce the swelling, sugarbag (native beehives) are often found in hollows and water can be found in swellings on the trunk. Many other Aboriginal groups use the burnt bark as an additive for chewing tobacco, where it improves the flavour and potentiates the tobacco.

Green Ants, *Oecophylla smaragdina*, are used as medicine by MalakMalak people and are called pirrinykam. The nest is crushed in the hands and the juice is rubbed over the skin; this also stops the skin from feeling itchy. The large mother or queen ants are eaten to treat colds and influenza; they have a sharp taste. Many other Aboriginal groups also use these ants as medicine and food. The green abdomen of workers can be eaten; it has a pleasant tangy taste caused by the formic acid they contain, which has medicinal properties as a mild expectorant and antimicrobial.
Glenn Wightman