



Case study

Ochre Shields

Cultural retention projects in Kowanyama are ensuring the art of traditional ochre fighting shields is celebrated and passed on to future generations.

What

Craftsman Stephen Patterson used traditional carving, painting and design methods inherited from his father to produce ochre shields. The shields were created from timber cut by hand in the local area.

The production stimulated high community interest and has strengthened community knowledge and skills in this traditional craft.

The shields were exhibited as part of the Cape York Art exhibition during Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) 2016 and were viewed by an estimated 51,000 attendees at CIAF, including students from various schools.

Exhibiting at CIAF also provided an opportunity for artists to talk to a wider audience about the Kowanyama community and its cultural heritage.

When

2015-2016

Where

Kowanyama region and Cairns



Artist at work. Image courtesy Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council

Key stats

- Two projects - production of Ochre Shields and the exhibition of works at CIAF
- Two artists
- Six young people participated

Investment

Funding of \$11,171 was provided through two Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund (IRADF) grants, a partnership between Arts Queensland and Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council.

Contact for further information

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Outcomes

- Local craftsmen developed their skills in traditional carving and painting methods.
- Local young people were engaged during the production with one student taking a continued interest in traditional crafts.
- Three traditional ochre shields were exhibited during CIAF 2016 through the Cape York Art exhibition. Two of the shields were sold during CIAF.
- Attendance at CIAF provided Kowanyama artists with insights into professional gallery presentation of cultural objects, marketing and commissions. Artists were also able to network with other artists, share stories and celebrate Indigenous cultural heritage.
- Two further commissions for shields were received following CIAF.



Completed shields on display. Image courtesy Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council



Stephen Patterson talks about the shields at CIAF. Image courtesy Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council

Learnings and reflections

Transfer of cultural knowledge regarding the making and the use of shields is vital to “*keeping the craft of ochre shields alive*”.

An important outcome from the projects has been the retention and use of traditional techniques in the community. Involvement by elders from the community provided useful insights into the function of the shields.

Input from two elder mentors, one of whom was the last of the stick and shield fighters at Kowanyama, provided an insight into the finer points of traditional shields’ manufacture and function.

The benefits of involvement in traditional activities and the impact on wellbeing were noted by participants.

It was clear that being in the bush and focusing on traditional activities led to positive impact on those suffering from depression, especially increased feelings of self-worth.

‘Being out bush working on things give me peace... I feel good’ – Participant.