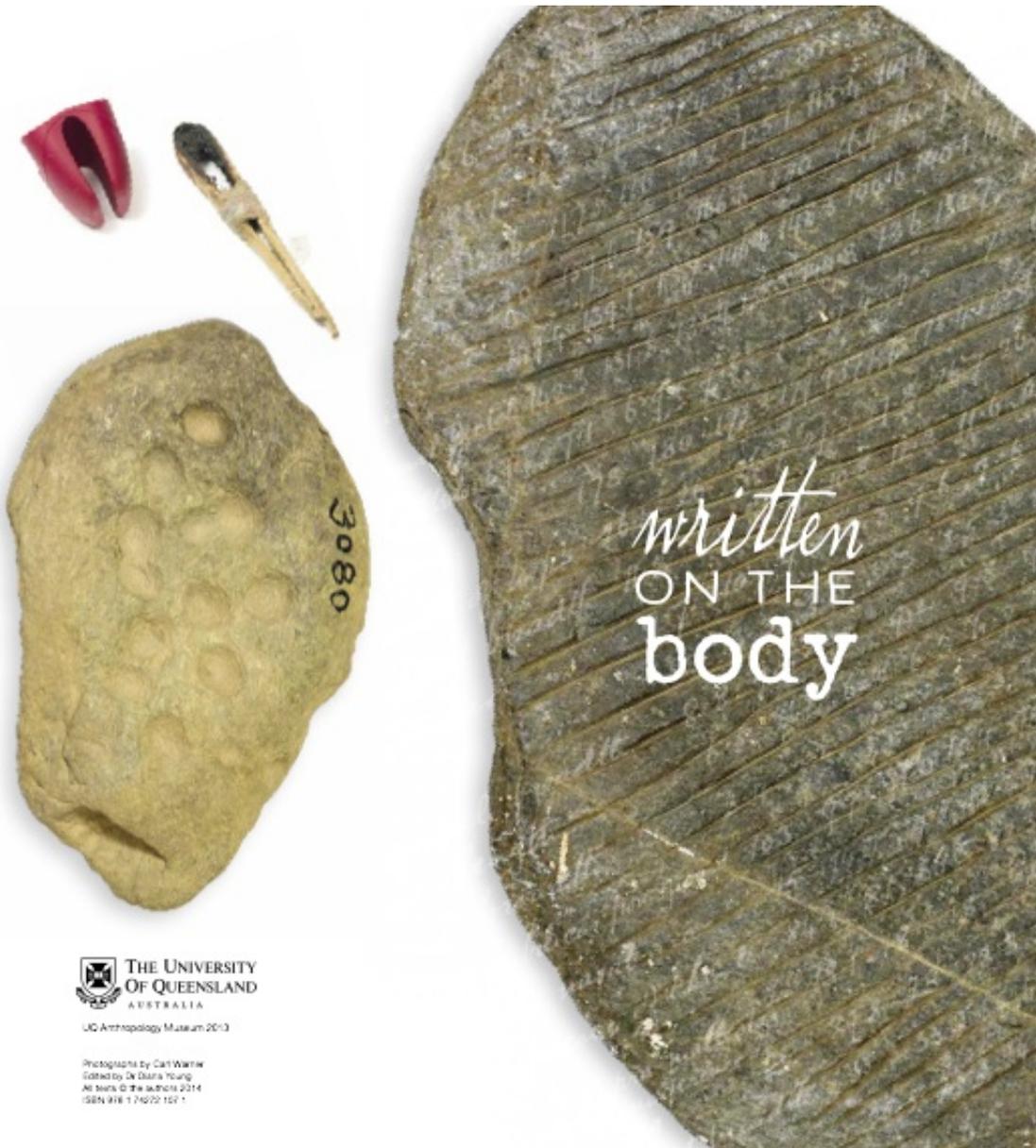


## Our Writing on your things

Date : April 29, 2014

Diana Young, University of Queensland Art Museum



 THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

UQ Anthropology Museum 2013

Photographs by Carl Warner  
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ISBN 978-1-74222-157-1

The University of Queensland Director Diana Young writes...

Since 2009 the Anthropology Museum has again had a rolling exhibition program both to enable more of its significant 26,000 item collection to be seen, to present academic research in ways that engages with a wide audience whilst challenging and expanding ideas about what an 'anthropological' collection can be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Eshewing long text panels the installation of all exhibitions must in some way convey ideas and context. In *Gapuwiyak Calling* the curators wanted a rainforest in which to hang the tiny projections of films made on mobile phones and the Museum team worked to make that forest from plinths together with the paper, mini projectors and repro retro phone handsets sourced by Miyarrka Media.



My aim also has been to include collection things in each exhibition and initially *Gapuwiyak Calling* seemed to be a show composed entirely of intangible media. But a sculpture of a spirit figure arrived with Miyarrka media and was armed with spear, spear thrower and yidaki from the collection. He resides in the gallery video projection of the forest in where he dwells.

In this double bill in one gallery space *written on the body*, curated by Waanyi artist Judy Watson and Diana Young, is an exhibition that is seemingly the inverse of *Gapuwiyak Calling* - crammed full of stuff. Both these exhibitions question received ideas about Museum processes by making them more visible to the visitor through different Indigenous interventions.



In *written on the body* playfulness and visual poetry is evident in the tableau of written on museum collection things that have been arranged with used kitchenware, mirrors and anthropometric measuring devices. These have been deployed both to reassure through their worn ordinariness and to emphasise the violence in the gesture of writing on someone else's property.

As Watson writes in her catalogue essay;

'To the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descendants of the places from which these museum - held objects came, the act of writing onto the objects can be seen as an act of vandalism, a sacrilege, an infliction of control by another, dominating culture.'

This sentiment is played out in the film Watson made in the Anthropology Museum collection store in which descendants of the people to whom the things once belonged touch and talk to them. In Watson's words these '... are an extension of their family's embrace, carrying messages from home'. The used kitchenware conveys similar sentiment.

Jennifer Deger, anthropologist and co-curator of *Gapuwiyak Calling* describes the exhibition as "...an experiment in activating a Yolngu poetics of connection in an anthropology museum; a project that, if it were to succeed, needed to do more than simply catalogue and classify Yolngu new media as contemporary cultural artefacts. Throughout the design, the media selection, the arrangement and production of wall and touchscreen texts, the challenge has been to find ways to present this phone-media in a suitably performative way, in keeping with the subject matter as well as Yolngu social and aesthetic values. For us, the art of curation lay in finding ways to re-mediate the photographs and films so as to give them new life and meaning appropriate to the broader, and yet still site specific, intercultural context of the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum".

The performativity of *Gapuwiyak Calling* contrasts with the meditative stillness of *written on the body*. But in this exhibition too is an intention by the curators to activate things through a ricochet of relationships that destabilises the layers of information and misinformation on the museum labels ( mostly dating from the early period of the collecting of 1940s to 1960) and provide a rich visual experience for visitors.

The exhibition catalogue can be download [here](#)