

Chantal Henley is an Artist & Designer from the Ngugi and Mununjali clans of the Quandamooka and Yugambah peoples of South-East Queensland.

From an early age, Chantal connected to culture through Dance and Song and soon became familiar with textiles through both of her Grandmothers, encouraging her to learn various techniques and explore fabrics and fibres.

Through a brief stay at design school, she explored western design fundamentals and obtained insight into the production and manufacturing processes within the textile and fashion industry, soon deciding to journey elsewhere with her creativity. Henley credits her time with master weavers and their unconditional effort to exchange with her through kinship and storytelling, contributing to her ability to regain and retain those Gulayi songlines.

Chantal carries her strong message of connection and retaining ancestral skills and techniques through her woven Gulayi (bag, vessel) and hand painted Ungarie (Swamp Reed) prints included in her collections and body of work, paying homage to her Mununjali and Ngugi songlines. Her textiles and body adornments have been showcased and exhibited by Artisan, National Gallery of Australia, Redland Art Gallery, Jam Factory, Art Gallery Gold Coast and Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair, including publications such as Peppermint & RUSSH Magazine. Henley is currently based in Tarntanyangga (Adelaide) Kurna Yerta with her partner and children.

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Gulayí

[woven vessel]

20 October 2023
19 January 2024

Curated by
Caleena Sansbury

Presented by
The Mill

The Mill Adelaide
154 Angas Street
Adelaide SA 5000

About ————— Chantal Henley

The Mill is excited to present *Gulayí [Woven Vessel]*, a new exhibition by Quandamooka and Mununjali artist Chantal Henley as part of Tarnanthi 2023. Working with textiles, Chantal explores body adornment through garments, sculpture, dance and film, embedding her connection to her Grandmother's country and her own experience as a mother.

Artist Statement



Gulayí [Woven Vessel] is a gathering of exclusively hand woven, hand printed garments and body adornments that highlight the prominence of retaining and reclaiming language, dance, song and design.

Embellished in gathered fibers, up-cycled fabrics, shells, feathers and clay, Gulayí features custom prints that are a direct tribute to my Quandamooka and Mununjali kinship, paying homage to Country and Water through woven techniques reclaimed through the many Gulayí makers that carry and contain the stories of our Elders.

Caleena Sansbury Curator



Caleena Sansbury is a proud Ngarrindjeri, Narungga and Kurna woman. She is also a proud mother to her three year old son. Caleena's interests as a performance artist draws from cultural and contemporary dance, theatre, storytelling and choreographing. She is a graduate from NAISDA Dance College and currently works as The Mill's First Nations Program Co-ordinator and at Act Now.

Caleena has worked nationally and internationally with companies/choreographers: Vicki Van Hout in; *Long Grass & Les Festivites Lubruffier*; Thomas E. S. Kelly; *[MIS] CONCEIVE*, Karul Projects; *SSHIFT*, Insite Arts; *Our Corks Bubs & Saltbush*, Polyglot Theatre; *Tangled and Legs On the Wall*; *The Man With The Iron Neck*.

Caleena has also worked as a producer at Melbourne Fringe 2018. Caleena performed in Taree Sansbury's work as performer in *mi:wi* touring to South Australia with Country Arts SA and Vitalstatistix. More recently Caleena is currently a dancer and rehearsal director of the South Australian First Nations dance collective Tjarutja.

1: Chantal Henley
Born, 1984 Adelaide, South Australia
Ngugi / Mununjali - Quandamooka / Yugambeh
'Blak Earth' 2022, Tarnantyangga (Adelaide)
Dress: Swamp Reed, Feather, Pigment, Acrylic, Polyester, Ochre
Photo by Connor Patterson, Courtesy of Jam Factory

2: Chantal Henley
Born, 1984 Adelaide, South Australia
Ngugi / Mununjali - Quandamooka / Yugambeh
'Gulayí Ngari' 2023, Tarnantyangga (Adelaide)
Ochre, Cotton, Swamp Reed, Feather, Raffia, Pigment
Photo by Connor Patterson, Courtesy of Jam Factory

3, 4, 5: Caleena Sansbury wearing Chantal Henley
photographed by Jimblah

Gulayí

[woven vessel]

Essay by **Lilla Berry**

Lilla is a Yankunytjatjara woman, multi-disciplinary artist, arts worker and producer.

I can't recall a time where I haven't felt instantly at ease when sitting in a weaving circle. The rhythm of the fibres moving, crossing, looping, pulling, as those who sit around me yarn away. Stories of life flowing as the woven vessel grows with each coil. It's a simple safe space to just be, held by the weaver leading and guiding us.

Our part of the world is home to some extraordinary weavers, from Ngarrindjeri and Ngadjuri, to the desert mobs and beyond. Chantal Henley has had the chance to learn from some of the best, who have given so willingly and unconditionally. Those who have been lucky enough to learn from her have witnessed the way she embodies this energy. Following our obligations and respect for protocol and knowledge systems, and ensuring she continues to be part of the weaving that is life. A weave that figuratively and literally crosses Songlines across our beautiful country.

As Chantal knows, our mob now have the responsibility to ensure culture and story are not forgotten. That we continue to share these intergenerational knowledges and build up our young ones. Chantal's practice, like so many First Nations artists today, is one of reclamation. Whilst her grandmothers

hands may not have always been able to practice her traditional weaving techniques, they have always been weaving hands. But through the reclaiming of these ancient weaving techniques, she now holds the ability to share this practice back with her family, and see its safe keeping for future generations, weaving with her mother, grandmother and family.

As mob, space to create can come in many forms. From a kitchen table to brick-and-mortar studio space. But we often crave space to create with other First Nations mob. A guaranteed safe space to be seen and heard. Even more so true amongst Blak mothers. There is a special connection and trust held in this space. A natural shared spirit, understanding and respect which allows creativity to flow. Chantal's expanded practice as part of this residency has resulted in collaborations with Caleena Sansbury and James Cubillo in creating the works.

Chantal's practice merges the traditional textile practice of weaving, with modern fashion textiles. Bringing the oldest living culture into present day methods. Using fibres as paint brushes in the dying process of cloth, repurposed through upcycling, Chantal's textiles are stunning and have graced audiences across Australia. Gulayí also features new works and forms. Her grandmother's Quandamooka and grandfather's Mununjali languages sung beautifully, honouring the fibres and weave.

Chantal's work is a true reflection on her life experience as a mother, artist and teacher. Combining these threads in creating Gulayí and its works. Always honouring the land of her grandmother and grandfather, and the salt water and freshwater country they come from, whilst honouring the Kurna Country where she lives and works.

We are all woven in the womb, and will continue to be part of the fibres in the woven Songlines of this Country.



Chantal Henley in conversation with Caleena Sansbury

The Mill's artist in residence for Tarnanthi 2023, Chantal Henley, sat down with Project Co-ordinator and exhibition curator Caleena Sansbury to talk about Chantal's upcoming exhibition. In this conversation they speak about making work as contemporary Aboriginal artists and women.

Chantal: So I have been a textile artist from a young age, I was introduced to it through dance. I grew up in a very creative family, a family of storytellers. I always felt connected to body adornment and textiles, it's been a way that I've been able to express myself as a woman and as a mother. This body of work is called Gulayi, which translates in my grandmother's language, Jandai, to woven vessel. It's about being woven in the womb. The main piece is the work that Caleena will dance with, it's a large scale woven net dress. She will be wearing it, moving in it, on Country, in the water and on the sand because I'm a saltwater woman myself. Gulayi connects to coming together and collaborating as First Nations women, it's about motherhood, and how we carry our grandmother's lineage and strength.

Caleena: Chantal's work speaks to me in every kind of way; dancing and filming on Country, being on the water here on my family's Country. My sister Taree's dance piece called Mi:wi that I performed in and was a part of the creative development was created on my grandmother's country. It was a work about listening to your gut instincts (not your mind or your heart), connection to mother and child in the womb and to our grandmother. Your child carries some of your mother, the egg that you were, was made inside your grandmother's womb. So to contribute to Gulayi, it's a full circle thing.

Chantal: Caleena and I have a really strong connection. I've always adored watching her create movement, being authentic in connecting to the music. I'm living off-Country at the moment but I've got connections with mobs from here. And Caleena has gone on my Country and felt that connectedness. For the exhibition I'm creating a soundscape with recordings from Quandamooka Country from where my nan is from. It has developed through talking to my mum about how everything is interconnected and interwoven. Our other collaborator Jimblah (James Alberts) will be working with us to film on Country.

Caleena: He's got a really good way of catching things on film!

Chantal: We all share the vision and connectedness about creating on Country and how important it is to capture that. My story is in the garment, and once Caleena has got it on and is listening to the music and then it's her artwork that she is creating.

Caleena: I think as a dancer I can bring it to life, using different things like projection on the body and the textiles plus wearing the garment will change the way I have to move. They're many different elements that convey what we're trying to say. I'll be working with Chantal to produce and curate this exhibition and also be in it.

Chantal: Well, we're moms, we can juggle so many things!

Caleena: Having Chantal in residence at The Mill is a good space to really refine what it is that we're trying to say!

Chantal: Working across so many disciplines, I think there's real strength. For both of us we're going to be in a new space, but a space that we're both quite confident in. It's a safe space to do it, it's something that everyone can feel connected to.

