

Basic Detail Report

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Title

Kelp water carrier

Date

c 2004

Primary Maker

Lola Greeno

Medium

Bull kelp, tea tree sticks, twine made from red hot poker leaves

Dimensions

Overall: 565 x 141 mm, 380 g

Name

Water carrier

History

The contemporary Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal people) had their beginnings in the early 19th century when European sealers in particular stole Aboriginal women from both the Tasmanian and Australian mainland and settled on the north-east Tasmanian islands in Bass Strait. The communities grew and the skills of sealing and then muttonbirding became the mainstay. By the mid-19th century a community of 50 was centred on the Furneaux Group. The lifestyle was built on both Indigenous and European ways - hunting kangaroos and other animals, growing crops and using a mixture of many languages. Kelp water carriers, such as the ones made by Lola Greeno, were traditionally used to collect and store fresh water. It became a custom of Palawa women over many generations. 18th century French explorers, such as Labillardière (a naturalist on the d'Entrecasteaux expedition of the region during 1791-1794), wrote about the Palawa kelp water carrier. Labillardière named the species of kelp 'Fucus potatorum' in recognition of its use as a practical container. 'Potare' means 'to drink' in Latin. Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, part of the 1802 Baudin expedition, made detailed observational studies in the form of drawings of such containers in the early 19th century. Due to the devastation of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and people during the 1800s and 1900s, many lives, languages and cultural practices (such as the art of kelp water container making) were lost. Until recently, illustrations made by European explorers were often the only historical record left of this practice. Artists like Lola Greeno are reviving the cultural practice of making these kelp water carriers for current and future generations of Palawa people.