

Basic Detail Report



00000463

Title

Makassan prahu padawakang model

Date

1987

Primary Maker

Nick Burningham

Medium

Balsa, hibiscus wood, paper, raw silk, pandanus leaves

Dimensions

Overall: 590 x 760 x 170 mm

Name

Model

History

Since at least the 17th century Macassan traders from Indonesia were coming to the shores of northern Australia on an annual basis to harvest trepang (sea cucumbers, beche de mer) - a delicacy favoured throughout Asia, particularly in China. Macassan prahus could hold up to 30 people and carry rice as a staple food source, canoes for close-in work, clay pots for cooking and bamboo for constructing makeshift shelters. At the time, Macassan traders were travelling in the most technologically advanced vessels seen in Australian waters. In their prahus (also spelled perahu) they sailed down during the monsoonal wet season and returned at the start of the dry season to trade with Dutch and Chinese merchants. They also collected and traded other marine products such as pearls, pearl shell, trochus shell, fish, turtle shells and meat. This trade started to decline at the turn of the 20th century when the Australian government introduced customs taxes and license fees as a deterrent. The contact between the local Indigenous people, the Yolngu and the Macassans had an impact on both cultures in aspects of art, trade, technology, language, economy and even marriage. The Macassan visitors are remembered in Indigenous oral history, ceremonies and paintings depicting Macassan prahus.