

# Basic Detail Report

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**00030026**

**Title**

Rice shell necklace

**Date**

1993

**Primary Maker**

Lola Greeno

**Medium**

Brown rice shells, string

**Dimensions**

Overall: 0.05 kg

**Name**

Necklace

**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. Stringing shells as a way of earning money has been an occupation for Aboriginal women in the Furneaux island group since around the 1930s. The practice of necklace-making in the region dates back at least 2,000 years, and the associated knowledge and skills are passed down by women over generations. Lola Greeno was taught by her mother Val MacSween, who in turn was taught as a young girl by the 'Old People' of Cape Barren Island. Shell craft and muttonbirding were economically important to the community when Val was young. As with the muttonbird season, the community sees the time when the necklaces are being made as a time when history, language and song are shared and passed to younger generations. The making of such necklaces is being revived across the Bass Strait islands, especially Cape Barren Island. Traditionally the necklaces had ritual and cultural significance as gifts, body adornment and tokens of honour. This significance remains, although there are now wider meanings associated with them. This includes being a gift marking rites of passage, cultural and personal expressions of identity, family heirlooms, trade goods, souvenirs, and works of art. As one of a family of ten, Lola remembers her mother "made them in the earlier times for pocket money helping to feed and clothe us kids". Different shells are collected at different times of the year, according to the seasons. The men often help the women to collect

the shells from the ocean and beachside. The rice shell is tiny and found under large clumps of seaweed. Nowadays, rice shells are mainly located around Flinders Island. The seaweed is gathered and placed in buckets of water and the shells are collected as they sink to the bottom. The rice shells are so small and fragile they can be pierced with a needle. Traditionally, shells were pierced with the eyetooth of a wallaby or kangaroo, threaded onto kangaroo tail sinews or string made from natural fibres, and smoked over wood ash to clean any sea snails out. Then they were rubbed in grass to remove their outer coating to reveal the pearly surface. The shells were also polished using muttonbird or penguin oil. The size of the shells plus the washing, cleaning, polishing, sizing and sorting of each shell means that making a necklace or even a bracelet can take a long time. Fingers need to be supple and nimble; they get sore after a while. There are definite patterns to each piece and it is worked before the stringing commences