

Exhibit showcases Tjuntjuntjara works

An exhibition of new works by the Tjuntjuntjara Community was displayed in Fremantle earlier this year, showcasing traditional artefacts and new contemporary designs against a backdrop of paintings provided by the world renowned Spinifex Arts Project.

The two-week exhibition was held at the Japinka Gallery after its official opening on Friday, July 19.

Tjuntjuntjara is described as one of the most remote Aboriginal communities in Australia and is located 660 kilometres east-northeast of Kalgoorlie-Boulder in the Great Victoria Desert.

The Punu (woodworking) project, which started in 2012 with a series of workshops facilitated by Australian artist/sculptor and Punu Project coordinator Ange Leech, is a partnership between AngloGold Ashanti Australia, the Shire of Menzies and Country Arts Western Australia.

This year it was expanded with the involvement of the GSTIG (Goldfields Specialty Timber Industry Group Inc) and the Tjuntjuntjara School and focused on engaging local Spinifex artists to practice traditional and contemporary woodworking techniques, including the collection of timber using traditional methods (digging roots and collecting green timber).

Ange said without the support from AGAA the project would not have been possible.

"Beyond financial support I am grateful for the patience, trust and guidance offered by AngloGold's experienced community staff," she said.

The school's participation involved students from ages 5 to 17 over a five-day period and incorporated a unique workshop which was a hit for both visitors and community members.

As part of this, up to seven GSTIG members and three Department of Environment and Conservation personnel attended, bringing with them one truck and two trailer loads of wood, machinery and special timbers.

GSTIG generously prepared gifts for the community including two salmon gum benches for the school.

The latest collection of works examines the transition of punu making techniques from grandparents to grandchildren and the contemporary skills developed as a result of the workshops.

The Spinifex people are strong in culture and the elders are highly skilled artefact makers with a passion for working with timber and teaching the younger generation.

According to Ange, the most successful aspect of the project was the positive cross-generational activities which created a productive learning environment where older participants were able to practice and teach young artists cultural processes involved with making punu.

"Here young and old practice traditional modes of sourcing the soft wood for carving (punu tjula) roots of the Guangdong tree (wyanu)," she explained.

"These trips would often involve other cultural activities including collecting maku (witchetty grubs) and cooking damper together. Artworks would often be swapped, left or shared, as the actual activity and process of working carried as much value as the works themselves.

"Other positive outcomes included reaffirming work place skills such as using correct PPE gear and safe work practices in a workshop environment."

Ange described some of the most enjoyable activities as being the punu bush trips where artists of all ages would take the tools and head out bush to create works.



Spinifex Elder and artist Fred Grant working on the Punu (woodworking) project.