

ABORIGINAL CULTURES MUSEUM

“A destination building that celebrates living cultures, the museum will expand our social horizons and foster a deeper knowledge and appreciation of one another and our histories.”

Winthrop Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA
Director, Cultural Precinct

Create the future



Artist's impression courtesy of Kerry Hill Architects.

Culture: as elusive as a grain of sand and, yet, it defines us, driving what we believe in, what we value and how we behave in the world. Throughout history, culture has inspired our greatest accomplishments and incited our most intense struggles. For each of us, the experience of culture is at once personal and communal, determined by our ancestry and it is where, today, we live, work and play.

In a world of unprecedented interconnectivity, cultural appreciation and understanding have never been more important. Global progress and creating a future free of conflict depend on it. We are diverse peoples who share common ground. Our challenge is not so much to shape culture as it is to learn from it, to be inspired by it, and to celebrate the richness of diversity.

There is much to be gained from studying the cultural landscape of Western Australia and bridging the gaps in our understanding. In many ways, we are a microcosm of the world and our success in achieving social cohesion can serve as an example. Of particular importance is the reconciliation of our Aboriginal heritage. The University of Western Australia has a long-held commitment to collaboration with Aboriginal

communities and is uniquely positioned to partner in the understanding and conservation of that heritage.

The University's campus is situated on Wudjuk Noongar land, where the Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians and continue to practise their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge. Through the *New Century Campaign*, we will create a landmark Aboriginal cultures museum, an unprecedented space where Aboriginal culture will continue to thrive and grow under the guidance of Aboriginal elders and leaders.

The Aboriginal cultures museum will be a place to share the beauty of iconic cultural symbols and artefacts, and to encourage understanding and alliance.

Adjunct Professor Dr Richard Walley OAM

Consultant to the Aboriginal cultures museum

I am delighted that, after many years of discussion, the vision for an Aboriginal cultures museum is finally becoming a reality. A group of elders from around the State has consulted at length on the location and scope of this project. The elders jointly validated that the Noongar people should host the museum because it is on their land. The museum will have a Noongar name, to be determined by an Aboriginal advisory committee. Its working title is Kaalak — place of fire — a broad reference to 'home'.

We have waited a long time for this place of reflection and enlightenment. Finally it is taking shape and in a form that will clearly benefit all Australians with an interest in the significant cultural material that continues to be added to the incredible Ronald and Catherine Berndt Collection, along with international visitors and researchers who wish to explore our rich cultural heritage. The museum will offer curatorial training and future jobs in this area for Aboriginal people. It will be a doorway to direct communication with Aboriginal people – a centre for cultural and artistic expression as well as personal and community interaction.

Now that we have the proposed site, we need Australians to get behind this hugely exciting — and long overdue — project that will honour and share our nation's extraordinary cultural heritage. The museum and the treasures it houses will be there as a community resource and gathering place. In that respect, it is invaluable. Raising the money for it, then, becomes very important. Whoever contributes to this place is contributing to enlightenment on Aboriginal questions and appreciation of the Aboriginal community.



A University without gates

As the founder of the Perth International Arts Festival, UWA has long promoted cultural engagement, offering world-class enrichment opportunities and experiences to the people of the State. Moreover, diversity and equity are high priorities on our campus, where we welcome and engage with people from all cultures and backgrounds.

Establishing a new Aboriginal cultures museum at UWA is an integral step in creating a future in which cultural understanding is recognised as central to responsible global citizenship. The museum will be an inspirational and iconic focal point in our city and State, representative of the importance of Aboriginal cultures.

The University is fortunate to have been entrusted with one of the world's finest collections of Aboriginal cultural material and heritage. Due to space limitations, the current temporary home for these collections allows less than one per cent to be displayed at any one time. The Aboriginal cultures museum will provide long-overdue access to the exceptional Ronald and Catherine Berndt Collection, the UWA Collection, as well as future collections and the prestigious Centre for Rock Art Research and Management.

The Aboriginal cultures museum will be brought to life by the rich and vibrant cultural palate of Western Australia. The space will sparkle with colour and discourse, inspiring collaboration and understanding both at home and around the world.

The museum's vision is to:

- Deepen relationships with the Aboriginal communities whose cultures are represented in the collections.
- Showcase one of the world's finest collections of Aboriginal material and promote collaborative understanding and conservation of Aboriginal heritage.
- Open opportunities for international dialogue and, in doing so, increase global appreciation of Aboriginal cultures.

The museum will house more than 11,500 treasures, among them rare artworks and artefacts; hundreds of invaluable sound and video recordings; a 4,000-volume reference library; an extensive archive on the history of the collections and their collectors; and approximately 45,000 historic and contemporary photographs. The largest and most significant component is the Ronald and Catherine Berndt Collection, widely considered one of the most important individual collections of Aboriginal works in the world.



Morning Light and Song Lines, by Shane Pickett, Noongar, Perth, WA.
Acrylic on canvas, 91.3 x 91 cm. Berndt Museum, 2004. [WU10628]

Few people can be aware of the full range and quality of the Berndt Museum collection for until now, the University has only had very limited space in which to display it. The news that, at last, plans are being made to provide it with the space it truly deserves will be widely welcomed not only in Australia but overseas, and not only by scholars but by the growing number of the general public who today recognise the beauty and fascination to be found in these extraordinary works.

Sir David Attenborough

Winthrop Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA

Director, Cultural Precinct

The Aboriginal cultures museum will provide a new home for extraordinary collections of Aboriginal art. Through it, students, scholars and members of the community will be able to engage with the rich materials that document the cultural life of the custodians of this country, and with the Aboriginal people themselves. For years, the material has been inaccessible. The new museum will change that forever, opening our vaults to audiences from Australia and around the world. This will be a destination building that celebrates the living cultures of the Aboriginal people of this country.

The treasures held within the Berndt and other collections at the University are known and lauded internationally. The landmark building to house these collections, designed by renowned architect and UWA graduate Kerry Hill, will be a beacon that attracts international interest and scholarship. With the inclusion of the eminent Centre for Rock Art Research and Management (CRARM), it will become a hub of knowledge about the incredible cultural resources found in Western Australia.

Building a bridge between the original owners and custodians of this country and those who have made their home here is one of our major challenges. Respect for cultural diversity is a defining platform in this process of reconciliation and an essential component of a successful and sustainable society. The Aboriginal cultures museum will expand our social horizons by fostering a deeper knowledge and appreciation of one another and our histories.

The new museum will be a catalyst for research and teaching that establishes a new level of understanding and cooperation with Aboriginal Australia, while simultaneously offering the original owners and custodians of the land a resource to educate future generations about their heritage.

It's a big challenge to raise the funding for this project from the private sector, the corporate world and from government. Still, what could be more empowering than realising a project that brings into alignment our shared hopes and aspirations for a better Australia built on respect and solid understanding of our cultural heritage?



Centre for Rock Art Research and Management

In addition to the collections, the Aboriginal cultures museum will house the Centre for Rock Art Research and Management, bringing together such multidisciplinary researchers as archaeologists, chemists, fine arts specialists, Aboriginal artists, historians and Aboriginal consultants to bring about a holistic understanding of the cultural significance of rock art.

Rock art is the oldest surviving Aboriginal art form in Australasia. More than 350,000 sites are known across the region and the majority are inaccessible. These sites are progressively degrading over time and there is a pressing need to conserve and protect rock art for future generations. A number of innovative research projects, including the Australasian digital rock art archive, will ensure rock art is widely accessible and preserved.

The landscape of Western Australia features spectacular rock art galleries, and few landscapes offer as much tangible evidence of human history as ours. The Centre will explore the modern relevance of the stories, history, relationships to land, social boundaries and belief systems found in rock art. It offers an unmatched opportunity to delve into the rich visual history of Aboriginal cultures.

King Edward River Wanjinias, image by Mike Donaldson





Winthrop Professor Peter Veth

**Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art
Centre for Rock Art Research and Management, Archaeology**

I came to UWA because it is now the world leader in rock art research and management. The research we are doing here on Australian Aboriginal archaeology and rock art has the power to transform world views on the origins of modern human behaviour. Rock art in Western Australia provides an extraordinary window into one of the oldest cultures on the planet.

The Centre for Rock Art Research and Management will attract top-level international scholars and research collaborations. It will fill a void in high quality heritage studies in Australia, while hosting world experts, exhibitions and research. Equally important, it will provide a platform for Indigenous communities to engage meaningfully with their visual heritage.

The need for documentation, analysis and management of Australia's rock art conservation estates is profound. Support for the Centre and for rock art research at UWA will close major gaps in surveying and study that can only be carried out in close collaboration with traditional owners. We are at a crossroads in the effective management and strategic protection of Australian rock art. Funding for research and management initiatives is needed now.

A cultural icon

The Aboriginal cultures museum marks a pivotal step in the creation of a dynamic Cultural Precinct at UWA, a hub that will enhance student life, promote interdisciplinary discovery, and foster a cohesive cosmopolitan community in our city and our State.

The positive impact of the museum will be felt by many, including Aboriginal communities, local school children and families, UWA staff and students, academic researchers and international visitors.

The hallmarks of this iconic centre will be:

Community engagement

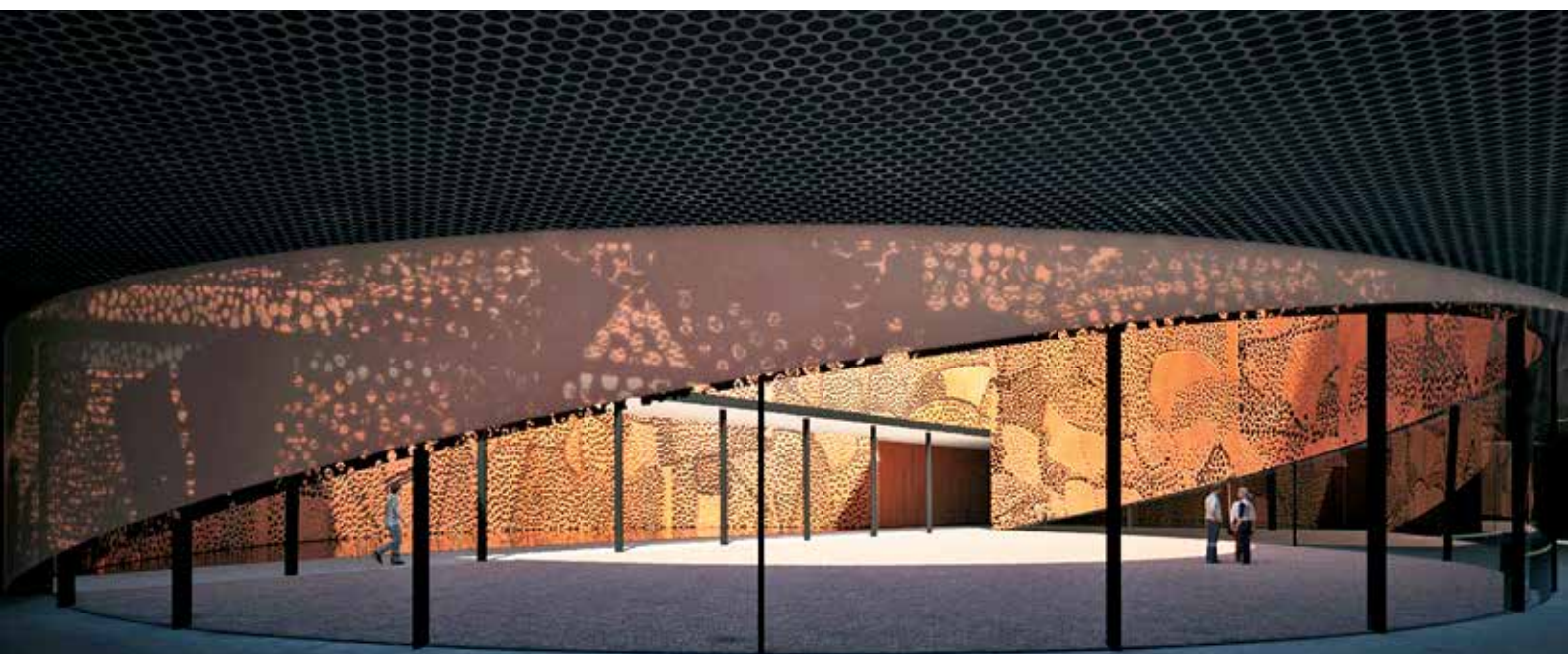
- The museum will be a welcoming place for Aboriginal communities, encouraging a sense of belonging, reconnection and reconciliation.
- Training and employment opportunities for the next generation of Aboriginal curators will foster economic empowerment and enable cultural organisations to tell stories in their own voices.

- Emerging artists and community groups will benefit from a community access gallery, a dynamic exhibition space where dialogue with Aboriginal elders is encouraged and outreach activities with schools and other community groups is ongoing.

Understanding

- Research, teaching and learning will yield new insight into Aboriginal cultures, increasing our knowledge and appreciation.
- Interactive digital programming will extend the reach of educational resources into rural and remote areas, many of which are represented in the collections. Communities around the world will be able to enjoy and learn from the museum.

Artist's impression courtesy of Kerry Hill Architects



Barbara Bynder

Deputy Curatorial Director/Assistant Curator, Berndt Museum

The Berndt Museum houses a significant collection of Aboriginal cultural material that assists communities of origin in maintaining and reinvigorating their cultural practices as well as teaches the broader community about the richness and diversity of Aboriginal culture and heritage. Providing exhibition space will fill a void in Aboriginal research, demonstrate representations of anthropological fieldwork, extend educational knowledge about Aboriginal Australians as well as maintain an ongoing community outreach.

The Aboriginal cultures museum will be a ground-breaking centre of excellence in Aboriginal research. This initiative is a testament to forward thinking at UWA. The museum will realise a collaborative forum of national and international significance to become a leading research and educational facility in Aboriginal culture and heritage.

I am looking forward to being a part of this exciting project and I believe that the museum will enhance UWA's reputation and reinforce its commitment to Aboriginal people through education, research development and the exhibition and representation of contemporary Aboriginal Australian cultural identity.

The museum will also provide the necessary space and resources required to make the museum collections widely accessible, thereby increasing the knowledge of generations of graduating students who will go into the world with a much clearer understanding of the issues around and concerns of contemporary Aboriginal people.

Through this project we will equip our future leaders with the resources to move forward and the strength to embrace all cultures.





Create a future of cultural understanding

We invite you to share our vision and support the Aboriginal cultures museum. The success of the project, along with all that it represents, depends on our ability to attract \$50 million in funding from the community.

The University of Western Australia recognises and celebrates the generosity of our graduates and friends. We would be delighted to explore how you can contribute to creating a brilliant future, with and through UWA, in whatever way speaks to you.

Contact us

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Images on pages 3, 6, 8 and 10 by Craig Kinder@f22 photography

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