Ghost Nets from the Ocean: ERUB ARTS COLLABORATIVE
ERUB ARTS COLLABORATIVE: GHOST NETS FROM THE OCEAN

Ghost Nets of the Ocean consists of woven sculptures made by artists from Erub Arts Collaborative on Erub (Darnley) Island in the Torres Strait Islands. Erub (Darnley) Island is one of the most remote communities in Australia, located 160km north east of Queensland’s Cape York Peninsula.

Artists from the island have transformed ghost nets (abandoned fishing nets) to create a dynamic installation featuring marine animals and environments. Ghost nets drift with the ocean currents and tides, continuing to catch fish, trapping and killing marine fauna in the process. Indigenous rangers, who care for their country in Northern Australia, clean up the nets and rescue entangled wildlife. The nets are then used by the artists to create works of art, bringing to light the irreparable harm that discarded nets cause to local marine life.

These works share the artists’ concern for the loss of marine life and environmental damage caused by rogue nets. Importantly this project helps to raise awareness of the devastation that ghost nets cause.

Erub Arts Collaborative remind us to be attentive to our local environment and that sustainability is everyone’s responsibility. As artist, Florence Gutchen states: ‘We are all connected by the world’s oceans’.

WHAT CAN WE DO? THE SIX R’S

Remove ghost nets from the coastline to prevent their destructive cycle.

Record information about the nets, their location, their abundance and their size to aid research.

Rescue any animals found entangled.

Recycle and encourage the making of ghost net art and other products rather than sending them to landfill or burning them.

Raise awareness about the ghost net issue through education, art projects, community activities and the media.

Research the source of ghost nets, their movements and impacts to help aid prevention of this issue.
**EARLY YEARS**

**RESPONDING**

What do the colours used in the sculptures remind you of? Describe what the materials might feel like.

Look closely at the patterns on the sculptures. What shapes can you see?

Imagine you are one of the jellyfish like those on display in the Studio. Use your body to move like a jellyfish.

Make a list of all the items you have come into contact with, used or eaten today. Document what these things are made from or what your food items were wrapped in. Identify which items can be recycled. As a class discuss reasons why it is important to recycle.

**MAKING**

Create a jellyfish tentacle by plaing recycled strips of plastic. Attach the plastic plaits to the end of a plastic bottle to create a collaborative class jellyfish.

Artists are keen storytellers. Using *Ghost Nets of the Ocean* as inspiration, create an illustration that tells a story about your favourite sea creature on display.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Most supermarkets in Australia invite customers to dispose of their soft packaging responsibly by providing a collection point for dropping soft plastic bread, cereal and frozen food bags, plastic and reusable shopping bags. Some of the soft plastics are recycled and turned into outdoor furniture for schools and local parks, while some plastics still end up in landfill.

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**PRIMARY**

**RESPONDING**

Locate Erub (Damley) Island on a map of Australia. Why do you think ghost nets are such a problem in this area?

Ghost nets are fishing nets that have been lost, discarded or simply abandoned at sea and left to drift with the ocean currents. Why do you think these fishing nets are called ghost nets? Find out what materials ghost nets are made from, how they are constructed and used by commercial fishing boats. Discuss some of the reasons why the nets end up as marine debris and are consequently damaging to marine life. Brainstorm some potential solutions to these issues.

Select your favourite creature in *Ghost Nets of the Ocean*. Write a fictional story about your animal. Discover some interesting facts about your animal to include in your narrative.

The *Ghost Nets of the Ocean* sea creatures have been made by hand using coiling, weaving, felting and binding techniques. Find evidence of these techniques in the works of art in the installation. Locate another work of art on display in the Gallery made with natural or synthetic fibres. What techniques have been used? What materials are these works of art made from? Compare this work of art to *Ghost Nets of the Ocean* and consider how the work was constructed, the materials used and the artist’s ideas.

**TIP** Look at the work by Shirley Macnamara in TARNANTHI as a starting point.

What role do turtles, jellyfish and hammerhead sharks have in Australia’s ecosystem? Find Indigenous, common and scientific names for these marine animals.

Like ghost nets, other rubbish that is not disposed of correctly can also end up in our rivers and oceans. Plastic bags, bottles and straws are common items found in our waterways. How might this debris impact the ocean, animals and human beings? Brainstorm some additional uses for a plastic drink bottle other than as a vessel to hold liquids.
PRIMARY

RESPONDING

Indigenous rangers are responsible for the day-to-day management of their country. In the Torres Strait this includes collecting data, cleaning up nets and rescuing endangered wildlife. With your family, join a local cleanup in your area.

TIP You may like to check out #5minutebeachcleanup, #kittiekipper, #ourcoastourmission or #seashepherdsscs on Instagram to see what they are doing to maintain their coastlines.

Investigate the role of Indigenous rangers in other locations across Australia. In small groups, select a region and investigate the specific role of the rangers in this area. What are the main concerns in this region and how are rangers managing the impact? Write a letter to the Australian Government highlighting the benefits of continuing the Indigenous Rangers program throughout Australia.

TIP See the Australian Youth Climate Coalition website for details on how to write a letter to an MP.

Most ghost nets are made from nylon, which is a type of plastic. This material ensures the nets are strong, but it also means it can take between 30–40 years to begin to break down. Research materials which are biodegradable. Make a list of other materials that the nets could be made from and document the pros and cons of using these alternative materials.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research suggests that 10,000 turtles have been entangled by ghost nets in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Naparunama rangers Peter Harper and Angela Christie rescued 63 turtles in January 2009. Imagine the total number of turtles they have helped rescue since this time! Sometimes the turtles are released back into the ocean straight away. Other times their condition is extremely poor and the turtles need to be taken to a triage facility where they are treated and cared for.

image: Various artists, Turtles, 2016-17, Erub (Darnley) Island, Torres Strait Islands, Queensland, recycled discarded fishing nets, rubber, metal armature, dimensions variable; Courtesy the artists and Erub Arts, photo: Lynnette Griffiths
MAKING

As a class create a large mind map about Ghost Nets of the Ocean. Use the words on your mind map to create a poem in response to the ghost net issue.

Design and create a tiny turtle using coiling, wrapping, weaving and binding techniques as used in Ghost Nets of the Ocean. Alternatively, you may like to create a coral habitat for your turtle. Using your tiny turtle as your main character, write a story and create an animation.

Ghost Nets of the Ocean responds to an environmental problem that directly impacts their local area. Investigate an issue that is prevalent where you live. Watch the Young Man and the Ghost Net video. Make a series of puppets and stages, and perform a puppet show that communicates your local environmental story.

You probably already recycle at home and at school. However, many of our everyday items can end up as marine debris. Draw an illustrated diagram of how rubbish from your lunchbox might end up in the ocean if not disposed of properly. Document some ways this may affect marine life and humans.

Find colourful and vivid images of coral in the Great Barrier Reef. Create a drawing or lino print inspired by the patterns and colour found in coral.

Image: Marion Gaemers, Australia, born 1958, Sydney, Coral panel, 2017, Townsville, Queensland, recycled discarded fishing nets, rubber, metal armature, dimensions variable; Courtesy the artist and Erub Arts, photo: Lynnette Griffiths
RESPONDING

Ghost Nets of the Ocean has been described as ‘uplifting and beautiful’. However, the work addresses the destructive and deadly impact of ghost nets. Discuss aspects of the sculptures that are both beautiful and deadly? Why is this so?

Raising awareness is one of the Six Rs that GhostNets Australia identify as things we can do to create change. Explain how Erub Arts Collaborative have used works of art to raise awareness.

Northern Australia is a ghost net hot spot, with debris prominent on the shores from Broome to Cairns. Directly to the north of Australia is the Arafura Sea from where 90% of the nets originate. Locate this area on a map and begin to brainstorm why Northern Australia, particularly the Gulf of Carpentaria, is prone to marine debris.

Investigate the role of ocean gyres which are circulating ocean currents. Locate the 5 key gyres on a world map. What other countries do you think might have similar problems with marine debris?

Fishing is a necessary part of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as a matter of cultural practice. In the past, traditional coastal fishing occurred on the beach or in shallow pools with fish traps used to catch fish in creeks, which were made from natural fibres, such as twined pandanus palm leaf. New technologies and an increase in commercial fisheries has meant that fishing and marine resource management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has changed over time. Investigate traditional fish traps, nets and baskets. List some of the advantages and disadvantages of using these methods compared to commercial fishing practices. Consider both cultural and environmental sustainability as well as its functionality in terms of cost, strength and convenience.

TIP Look at the Walabi (fishing net) by Jill Djalburrburr; Fishing basket by Mary Marabamba or Large mustard eel trap #1 by Jenni Kemarre Martiniello in the Gallery’s collection online.

Australian and Torres Strait Islander rangers are responsible for the day-to-day management of their country. The ranger program began in 2007, providing conservation training to protect and manage land, sea and culture. This includes reducing threats from feral animals and weeds and monitoring endangered or threatened species. In 2009, funding for Indigenous ranger programs was reduced, resulting in a decrease of Indigenous rangers in the Torres Strait Islands who collect data, clean up nets and rescue endangered wildlife. Write a report on the social and cultural benefits of Indigenous land management initiatives.

TIP Read the Social Ventures Australia article Healthy Country, Healthy People.

Discuss the role of art centres, like Erub Arts Collaborative, in engaging community and sustaining culture.

While Ghost Nets of the Ocean communicate the deadly destruction caused by the ghost nets, the act of making these works of art provides opportunities to exchange knowledge, transfer skills and work in collaboration with community. The Tjanpi Desert Weavers from across the desert regions of Australia, create figurative sculptures and vessels using dry desert grasses and other materials. Write a comparative essay titled ‘Artists challenge us to understand and engage with the world’ with reference to the Erub Arts Collaborative and the Tjanpi Desert Weavers. Discuss and compare their use of materials, techniques, ideas and connection to Country.
The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) is Australia’s largest youth-run organisation which comprises of young people leading solutions to the climate crisis. Investigate some ways you and your school can become involved with the AYCC.

Research companies who manufacture products that you purchase regularly. What commitment have they made to sustainability? What types of changes have they implemented? Next time you are out shopping, try to select alternative products manufactured by companies who are environmentally-minded.

Did you know that most plastics can be recycled? However, a great deal of plastic waste still ends up in our oceans or landfill. Conduct a plastic audit for yourself, your family and school. Consider products you purchase on a regular basis. Are these products sold in soft plastic wrapping or containers? Research the lifecycle of these types of plastics. List three strategies you can implement at home to help reduce your plastic footprint.

**TIP** Look at the website *Life Without Plastic*.

Fishing nets are made from nylon which is a type of plastic called polyamide. Polyamide is a general term given to any polymer linked amide group. Research the history of plastic, its purpose and function and how plastic has evolved over time.

As a class create a table for each of the 7 different types of plastics. List their function, pros and cons. Suggest some ways we can reduce our use of low-density polyethylene.

**MAKING**

Design an environmentally friendly method for catching fish by commercial fisheries. Consider form, function and sustainability. Investigate the costs, impact on the environment and the lifecycle of the product e.g concept – design – development – manufacturing – market – use and end-life.

90% of the net debris that ends up on the North Australian coastline originates from the Arafura Sea, which is one of the most productive fisheries in the world. Identify an environmental problem in your community or school. Investigate your issue and list some questions you may have. Share these with your class. Create a work of art using recycled materials that responds to this issue. In your artist statement propose some innovative ways we can reduce this problem.

The most common plastic items that end up in the ocean consist of single use plastic items such as straws, food wrappers, bottle tops and drink bottles. Using recycled plastic items, create a work of art that responds to the single-use plastic problem.

**TIP** Look at El Anatsui, John Dahlsen, Gabriel Orozco and Alison McDonald for additional inspiration.

Coiling is an ancient technique, one which has been used by Aboriginal people over generations to make reed and grass stalk mats and baskets. Research different weaving practices used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Using some of the techniques you have discovered, make a sculpture using recycled soft plastics.

Read the recent news articles titled *Plastic and how it affects our oceans*, *Whale drags fishing trap more than 1700km from Tasmania to Port Macquarie* and *Nearly Every Seabird on Earth is Eating Plastic*. Consider what the state of the ocean will be in 2050. Imagine it is 2050 and you have been asked to write a newspaper article reporting on the state of the oceans. Begin by brainstorming a list of potential outcomes for our oceans if we don’t modify our behaviour. What changes need to happen to secure a healthy future for our oceans and marine life?

Watch *Life of a Plastic Bag*. Create a short satirical film about an environmental issue.
RESOURCES

ABC News – Plastic and how it affects our oceans
http://ab.co/2hdwiGx

ABC – War on waste: Artist uses maths and science to shock, educate viewers on plastics
http://ab.co/2xjhrEl

ABC News - War on Waste: What plastics can be recycled?
http://ab.co/2xhvCZQ

ABC News – Whale drags fishing trap more than 1700km from Tasmania to Port Macquarie, then dies
http://ab.co/2xfRYVC

Alison McDonald

The Australian – Dream weavers of Erub

Australian Government – Indigenous Rangers

Australia’s Science Channel – Sea of Chemicals

Australian Youth Climate Coalition – Switched on Schools: How to write a letter to your MP
http://bit.ly/2xt5IjN

Beautiful/Decay: Green Art
http://bit.ly/2wC4XDn

Broadsheet – New Surfwear Made with Salvaged Plastic and Nets from the Ocean

City of Adelaide - Sustainability

Clean Up Australia
http://bit.ly/2wCKgHE

Clean Up – Plastic as a Resource
http://bit.ly/2wCkTPR

Country Needs People – Strengthening the Sea

Creators – Kids are playing with a dead whale in the Philippines - Here’s why
http://bit.ly/2wCCaia

Dumbo Feather – Conversations about climate change

Eco Watch – Pharrell Williams and G-Star Transform Ocean Plastic into Clothes
http://bit.ly/2w3uQwr

Lavinia Ketchell, Erubam Le, Torres Strait Islands, Queensland, born 1993, Thursday Island, Torres Strait Islands, Queensland, Pelly (Squid), 2017, Erub (Darnley) Island, Torres Strait Islands, Queensland, recycled discarded fishing nets, rubber, metal armature, 104.0 x 44.0 x 18.0 cm; Courtesy the artists and Erub Arts, photo: Lynnette Griffiths
RESOURCES

Erub Erwer Meta (Darley Island Art Centre)
http://bit.ly/2xCUko4

Ghost Nets Australia

Irmina van Niele
http://bit.ly/2w3RoRU

John Dahlsen - Environmental Art
http://bit.ly/2fJ0Gg

Life without Plastic
http://bit.ly/2x9m0BS

National Geographic – Ocean Gyres
http://bit.ly/2f5QKs9

National Geographic – Nearly Every Seabird on Earth is Eating Plastic

Nigerian Bottle Cap Sculptor Taps Museums Staff’s Inner Artists
http://n.pr/2WcMxJd

Our Coast Our Mission
http://bit.ly/2w3yVB2

Plastic Adrift
http://bit.ly/2FvqPEs

Plastic Pollution Coalition

Plastics NZ
http://bit.ly/2yJ0STG

Precious Plastic – Spread the know-how, boost plastic recycling
http://bit.ly/2wC8MsV

REDcycle

SBS – Building resilient ecosystems for threatened animals

Singapore Art and Gallery – Ghost Nets of the Ocean
http://bit.ly/2fVrMPW

Social Ventures Australia: Healthy Country, Healthy People
http://bit.ly/2xttFm

Splash ABC – War on Waste
http://ab.co/2w3QhNW

Working on Country and Indigenous Protected Areas programmes
http://bit.ly/2hiFq

The Young man and the Ghost Net – Moa Island Torres Strait
http://bit.ly/2xe0bQI

WWF Environmental Problems in Australia
http://pand.as/2he2hGw

Zero Waste SA

VIDEOS

ABCTV Catalyst – Micro Plastics

How much plastic is in the ocean?

Life of a Plastic Bag

What really happens to the plastic you recycle?

The Gallery’s Learning programs are supported by the Department for Education and Child Development.

Information and hyperlinks correct at time of print. Art Gallery of South Australia staff Kylie Neagle and Lisa Slade contributed to the development of this resource.