In Cape York, we thank the Djonggandji, Eba, Koko and Phyllis Dungudja.

Giblet, Particia Clarmont, Raydale Spratt, Gavin Bassani, Jennifer Creek, Benjamin Keith Liddy, and Wik Mungkan clans, and particularly Yuri, Lama Lama, Banduk Marika and family, Mawalan Wukun Wanambi and family, Philip Gudthaykudthay, and family, Roy Burnyila, Djambawa Marawili and family, and Yan’nhangu clans, particularly Dhundala Munu Walamangu, Wangurri, Warramiri, Wubulkarra, Wullaki Murrungun, Numburindi, Nunggubuju, Iwaidja, Liyagalawumirr, Liyagawumirr, Madarrpa, Djinang, Galpu, Ganalbingu, Gumatj, Gupapuyngu, Dhaḻwa Balmbi, Balamumu, Burarra, Cape Stewart, Dai’I, Datiwuy, this exhibition, of members of the Alawa, Anindilyakwa, contributions, and the connection to the objects within and the Milingimbi community. We acknowledge the Mulka Centre, Bula'bula Arts Aboriginal Corporation Authority, Babbarra Women’s Centre, Buku-Larrngay Yunupingu, the North East Arnhem Land Dilak in Arnhem Land, we thank Yothu Yindi Foundation Board, participating in this project.

We thank them and their families for the connection between Indigenous peoples and cultural that audiences can understand the deep and abiding relationships, and for their unwavering dedication to the care and management of the collection. We acknowledge the Thomson family and their children Annette, Miranda, and David, for their knowledge and guidance. We also thank Shonae Hobson, Assistant Curator for her work in engaging with these communities and families.

In Central Australia, we thank the Pirapitj and Wajarri people, including Lyle and Teddy Gibson, for their knowledge and guidance.

Thats are extended to Associate Provost and Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies, Professor Marie Langer, and to Gordon Van Kirk Fisher, Chair of the University of Melbourne’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Oversight Committee, for leadership of the community engagement associated with the exhibition.

We acknowledge the many contributions of the Thomson family, particularly Miss Dorita Thomson for her generous gift of the objects and artifacts. We extend our thanks to Lisa and Lesley Thomson, Louise Thomson Officer and Graeme Thomson, who have been instrumental in their preparation and organisation of the exhibition, and for their unwavering dedication to the care and management of the collection.

We thank Professor Thomson’s last secretary Miss Judith Watson who transcribed his fieldwork notes and letters. After Donald Thomson passed away in 1970, the Donald Thomson Collection was officially established under a tripartite agreement between his widow Mrs Dorita Thomson, the University of Melbourne and Museums Victoria. In 1975, the collection was transferred, on long-term loan from the University of Melbourne, to Museums Victoria. In 2000, the collection was transferred, on long-term loan from the University of Melbourne, to the National Gallery of Australia. In 2018, the Donald Thomson Ethnohistory Collection, was placed on the prestigious UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register in 2000 thanks to the work of Rosemary Wrench.

Museums Victoria has assisted greatly in developing and supporting the exhibition. Museum staff have contributed their skills, expertise and knowledge on collections, community engagement, conservation and object installation. We are grateful for their support and assistance.

We also acknowledge the Indigenous, families and communities who have shared their cultural knowledge and stories with Donald Thomson when he was on their country; and we are indebted to their descendants who have passed them on through stories, knowledge, and generosity.

Acknowledgements

The faculty of arts is grateful to the family of Donald Thomson, the Indigenous communities of Arnhem Land, Cape York and the Pirapitj in the Western Desert and to Museums Victoria, who have assisted us in creating this display of significant objects from the Donald Thomson Collection. The Awaken exhibition, currently on view at Museums Victoria in collaboration with Rosemary Wrench and Shonae Hobson, provides a unique opportunity for our staff and students to learn from, engage with, and undertake research on, the important personal and Indigenous materials and stories with Donald Thomson when he was on their country; and we are indebted to their descendants who have passed them on through stories, knowledge, and generosity.
Awaken

The Awaken exhibition highlights material objects from one of our most important cultural assets, the Donald Thomson Collection, connecting the communities of origin, students and the broader public.

Awaken has been curated by Wiradjuri Nation film maker, curator, storyteller and Head of First Peoples at the University of Melbourne, Genevieve Grieves, with Rosemary Wrench and Shonae Hobson (Kaantju).

Awaken highlights the deep and abiding relationships that exist between communities of origin and objects held in museums. Objects are a rich source of knowledge and understanding, but they truly awaken when connected with their communities.

Awaken explores a collection of objects, animals and plants that emerged out of the relationship between anthropologist and biologist Donald Thomson and many Aboriginal people from three main source communities: the Pintupi in the Western Desert, and the diverse cultural regions of Arnhem Land and Cape York. Aboriginal people from three main source communities: the Pintupi in the Western Desert, and the diverse cultural regions of Arnhem Land and Cape York.

Awaken has a focus on community participation and cross-cultural exchange, highlighted by several displays that exist between communities of origin and objects held in museums. Objects are a rich source of knowledge and understanding, but they truly awaken when connected with their communities.

Awaken is an immersive digital platform that reconnects selected objects that came to the collection through Thomson’s personal relationship with the Pintupi and diverse communities around the exhibition, enriching the Faculty’s offerings, and will build on the knowledge of this significant collection. Other opportunities to engage with Awaken over the life of the exhibition will be provided through extracurricular activities and a comprehensive public engagement program which will engage students, the University and the broader community.

Donald Thomson Collection

The Donald Thomson Collection was amassed by the Melbourne-based anthropologist and biologist, the late Professor Donald Thomson OBE (1901–70), during a professional career, predominantly at the University of Melbourne, that spanned five decades. With a broad and varied career, Donald Thomson’s work in the Solomon Islands and West Papua, and his field collecting in Arnhem Land, and from the Great Sandy Desert and the Gibson Desert of Western Australia. A smaller collection of the collection was acquired during his work in the Solomon Islands and West Papua.

For over 80 years; the collection material forms the Donald Thomson Collection which was placed on long term loan to Museums Victoria. Together this material forms the Donald Thomson Collection which was placed on long term loan to Museums Victoria. After Thomson’s death in 1970, his wife, Mrs Dorita Thomson, donated the object and science collection to the University of Melbourne. His literary estate was retained by his family. Together this material forms the Donald Thomson Collection which was placed on long term loan to Museums Victoria.

Awaken provides the Faculty of Arts with a unique opportunity to introduce a new approach to teaching and learning through object-based learning to enhance the experience of its students both within and outside the classroom.

Curricular and research programs will be developed around the exhibition, enriching the Faculty’s offerings, and will build on the knowledge of this significant collection. Other opportunities to engage with Awaken over the life of the exhibition will be provided through extracurricular activities and a comprehensive public engagement program which will engage students, the University and the broader community.

As an immersive digital platform that reconnects selected highlighted objects to the place from which they came, the exhibition, in space and time, the objects are animated and in effect re-united with their original landscape and community for the first time in almost 80 years.

Fitted interviews on a multimedia interface that reveal personal stories of connection between community members and their relationship to objects from the Donald Thomson Collection.

A display of objects still made and used by communities today, highlighting the ongoing connection between past and present.

A collection of Donald Thomson’s personal belongings, articulated through the experience and memories of Wonggu Mununggurr (Djelk) and Shonae Hobson (Kaantju). Within the exhibition, Donald Thomson’s personal belongings, articulated through the experience and memories of Wonggu Mununggurr (Djelk) and Shonae Hobson (Kaantju), are animated and in effect re-united with their original landscape and community for the first time in almost 80 years.

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