Connection to Country

Summary Letter

37 Archer Street, Chatswood

May. 2025

Sydney from the North Shore, 1827, J. Lycett Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales

Question today
Imagine tomorrow
Create for the future

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Dear Reader,

The purpose of this letter is to inform the reader of the process undertaken within the Connection to Country process during the competition phase for 37 Archer Street, Chatswood.

Background:

WSP's Indigenous Specialist Services (ISS) were engaged by HPG General Pty Ltd in 2024 to provide client-side assistance for Connecting with Country outcomes during the competition for the development at 37 Archer Street, Chatswood.

Process:

An Aboriginal Design Principles Connecting with Country document was developed as a starting point to assist the competition team in their development of Country centered outcomes for the project. The document contains a section about Gamaragal (Cammeraygal) called 'Discovering Country' based on desktop research. This was to inform the competition teams and begin to develop their cultural competency and appreciation of Gamaragal Country. This approach aligns with the NSW GA Connecting with Country Framework- *Starting with Country: Project Formation- Research and prepare* (pg44) and *Imagining with Country: Design- Design basics* (pg45).

Design principles provided in the Connecting with Country document shown below have been informed by the International Indigenous Design Charter (IDDC) and were included in the document. The IDDC was developed and co-authored by Dr Russell Kennedy and Dr Meghan Kelly from Deakin University and developed in collaboration with the Deakin University, Institute of Koorie Education (IKE), Indigenous Architecture and Design Victoria (IADV) and the Management and Executive Board of the Design Institute of Australia (DIA) in consultation with Australian and international community representatives. [1]

The following principles guide the best practice approach when designing with cultural themes:

Aboriginal led: Aboriginal people designers, Elder and community members) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous design elements.

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Community involvement: The local Aboriginal communities to be engaged in this process; can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?

Appropriate use of Aboriginal design: All Aboriginal design elements must be approved by consulted Indigenous Elders and community members. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used on the project.

The Connecting with Country document also includes a section providing high level design ideas and opportunities for the development to inspire and identify possible Country centered outcomes.

A presentation was delivered online to the competition teams with the purpose of increasing cultural competency of the teams; unpacking the information in the document; and allowing team members an opportunity to ask questions. The document was shared with the teams for further investigation and familiarisation.

During the design phase of the competition one team reached out (DKO & Nura) and set up an online meeting with the ISS team to gain feedback on their proposed design. They shared the Connecting with Country ideas and outcomes for their competition submission and were provided advice and feedback to help develop the themes and design further.

Once the competition submissions from each team were made, they were provided to the WSP ISS team to analyse, assess and critique. The outcomes of this assessment were provided to the jury to assist their decision making in choosing the winner. The content presented to the jury for the Fuse / Back Beetle entry is included below.

Feedback on Fuse and Black Beetle Design Competition Entry:

- Documentation starts with Country- considers views, vegetation, sky, wind water, opportunities
- Passive design considerations
- Ongoing First Nations engagement with whoever the client decides
- North facing wall considers the structure as a living space being permeable allowing light, views and fresh air
- Creation of an elevated platform (like an elevated ceremonial space) above flood level, terraced down to permeable edge.
- Incorporation of verandah for sheltered outdoor viewing and passive design comfort
- Shade screens for passive design on east, west and south sides
- Northern edge strip park
- Permeable ground plane for movement

- Landscaping in deep soils and green accents on roof/s
- High % of tree canopy, communal space and new trees proposed
- Facade responding to nature, perforated screen to allow air and shade
- Comprehensive list of ESD elements
- Landscape responds to Blue Gum Forest ecology using endemic species, views, WSUD, creating spaces for FN and non-indigenous, seating immersed in landscape, use of sandstone in gardens, good list of endemic groundcovers and trees

Summary: Starts with Country and good integration of Country design features through the design. Good consideration of integrating ESD and passive design elements. Plant list based on local species.

Criteria	FUSE / Black Beetle
1. Starts with Country- shows value in hierarchy	Yes
2. Refers to Country in document (beyond Acknowledgement, contents and CwC page)	Yes in Design Principles, Landscape appendix,
3. Was there a First Nations consultant in the team?	No
4. Are there CwC Objectives / Principles?	Yes
5. Is there an FN inspired space? (walk, garden, gathering, play)	Yes
6. Is CwC considered in built form? (massing, colours, materials, permeability)	Yes - permeable wall- connection to outside
7. Is CwC in interpretation / art / story?	Yes- communal space, wayfinding opp.
8. Is CwC in landscape? (endemic planting, materials, permeability)	Yes
9. Reused / repurposed / sustainable materials?	? (not clear)

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Criteria for assessing the submissions were informed by the NSW Government Architects Connecting with Country Framework [2] (NSW GA CwC Framework), along with experience from working on Connecting with Country projects.

1. Starts with Country. Shows value in hierarchy- relates to Starting with Country From NSW GA CwC Framework- Project formation (pg44) *'Research and prepare'* Imagining with Country: '*Design: Start with the First Nations map'.* (pg 45)

2. Refers to Country in document (beyond Acknowledgement, contents and CwC page) This is to assess if the CwC outcomes have been integrated across the project and are more than just a tokenistic approach.

3. Was there a First Nations consultant in the team? This criterion relates to the International Indigenous Design Charter (IDDC) principles, along with guidance from NSW GA CwC which says: '*It may be appropriate to engage the services of a cultural adviser who can add value to projects by helping to develop and facilitate relationships with Aboriginal communities'* (pg30).

4. Are there CwC Objectives / Principles? From NSW GA CwC Framework- Practices: 'Reframing our way of working. Changing our approach and processes to support a Country-centered approach.' (pg 28).

5. Is there an FN inspired space? (walk, garden, gathering, play) From NSW GA CwC Framework- Enabling cultural practices in projects: 'Providing spaces within projects for living cultural practices to continue on Country will make more meaningful any planning and design decisions that interpret cultural narratives.' (pg39).

6. Is CwC considered in built form? (massing, colours, materials, permeability) From NSW GA CwC Framework-Imagining with Country: Design: Reawakening memory- 'Allow space for truth-telling, and consider how acknowledgement and celebration of memory can be embedded in the built form'. (pg45)

7. Is CwC in interpretation / art / story? From NSW GA CwC Framework-: Imagining with Country Design: Reawakening memory- 'To incorporate storytelling and knowledge of the past so it can enrich the design of places' (pg45).

8. Is CwC in landscape? (endemic planting, materials, permeability) From NSW GA CwC Framework- 'Original landscapes are repaired or restored.' (pg51)

9. Reused / repurposed / sustainable materials? From NSW GA CwC Framework- Planning and design projects create places that are connected with Country- Indicator of Success: '*Where possible, locally sourced, sustainable building materials are used; they have a relationship with and belong to the Country they come from.'*

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(pg51) and '*Materiality of place: Use materiality as an opportunity to tell the story of the place*' (pg64).

Result:

The jury chose their preferred team based on outcomes that included Connecting with Country, but their choice involved criteria beyond the Connecting with Country design outcomes with Fuse & Black Beetle being the competition winners.

The following outlines the Connecting with Country outcomes proposed by Fuse & Black Beetle.

Connecting Site to Country

The Fuse / Black Beetle design identifies tangible and intangible opportunities for Connecting the site, and the built outcome, to Country.

Tangible outcomes include incorporating the character of the existing street trees and referencing the contextual environment through the colors and textures. Along with the selection of plant and tree species that are native to the area to create a layered landscape.

Intangible outcomes include design decisions to provide access to views, the northern setback to define a clear publicly accessible path of travel and the built form articulation to create high performing spaces that are welcoming, accessible and safe.

Open Up the Site

The permeability of the site has been considered with the following design responses applied to create spaces that are open, shared and welcoming to all members of the community, while providing views to Country.

Providing views to Country, and the landscape, while moving through the building. Providing views to the street though landscaped setbacks; views of the tree canopy; views from the level 1 courtyard; views from the level 8 communal open space and rooftops. The slender tower form celebrates views of the surrounding neighborhoods and sky.

Other approaches to open up the site include: the raised platform, tiered seating and landscaping at street level that provides a shared space and ensures the building is open, accessible and provides access across the site for people to encourage occupation and dwelling in place.

Celebrate Country

The project offers an opportunity to learn about and connect to Country by incorporating native and endemic plant species through the spaces. Understanding that Indigenous plants contribute to holding cultural stories and are of great cultural and ecological importance.

A move to return Blue Gum and Red Bloodwood species that belong to the area along with additional native trees and understory vegetation aims to achieve a greater canopy cover / greening of the site and encourage existing habitat and ecologies.

Creation of a microclimate on level 8 through the inclusion of greenery, tree canopy and water will help create a cool gathering space and more resilient environment.

The identity of the building through materiality and colour draws inspiration from the trees, with earthy tones and the use of natural materials.

Tell the Stories of Country

The Chatswood area is traditionally a place of ceremony, lore, and settlement, with many stories waiting to be told through place-based interventions.

The design will provide future opportunities to build on the tangible and intangible culturally derived themes embedded within the building. It will provide space to tell the stories of Country through co-design with local Aboriginal artists, to embed the stories of place, in the way-finding strategy and through interpretive elements in the building, such as the selection of the texture for the northern facade, pavement treatments.

Notes:

1 International Council of Design, International Indigenous Design Charter, available- https://www.theicod.org/resources/international-indigenous-design-charter

2 NSW Government Architects Connecting with Country Framework, available- https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/connecting-with-country.pdf

Aboriginal
Design Principles /
Connecting to Country

This document acknowledges the Elders, past and present, of the **Gamaragal (Cammeraygal) People** *as the Traditional Custodians of the land and its knowledge*

"Warami wellamabamiyui, yura."

It is good to see you all, people.

Cover image Sydney from the North Shore, 1827, J. Lycett Dixson Galleries, State Library of New South Wales

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Aboriginal Design Principles and Design Approach

Discovering Country.
A look at Gamaragal Country People and culture

Project site and ideas
High level concepts

Sydney Harbour from North
Shore [section from
panorama], 1853, William
Leigh, State Library NSW

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ABORIGINAL DESIGN PRINCIPLE	
Indigenous led	Indigenous people (designers, Elders, etc) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous elements in the design.
Community involvement	The local Indigenous community to be engaged in this process. Can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?
Appropriate use of Indigenous design	All Indigenous design elements must be approved of by involved Indigenous people / community / Elders. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used in the project.

DESIGN APPROACH		
Image	Signage / surface treatment / walls / art using local Aboriginal design knowledge, commissioned from artists, or by urban designers with engagement and approval from community. Signage tells story of the Country and its people.	Acknowledgement of the Gamaragal People and Country is to be included as a feature through wording on a boundary wall and/or embedded in paved elements. The exact design and location of the acknowledgement will be resolved at construction certificate stage. To be guided by an Aboriginal Heritage Interpretation and Art Strategy.
Space	Indigenous space / landscaping Indigenous Space. A space or landscape where Aboriginal people can have their culture celebrated. Cultural land management practices, firestick farming, daisy yam propagation, etc	Native trees are retained and will be supplemented by the introduction of endemic planting species. Promoting gathering spaces and seating to engage people who have some time to pause, read and reflect absorbing messages and stories about the site.
Language	Sharing language is critical to keeping it alive, this can be done through its use in the built environment, surface treatment, signage, wayfinding, storytelling devices etc..	Interpretative panels / placards will be incorporated into the nature play area providing information/stories about the planting species provided in the space. To be guided by an Aboriginal Heritage Interpretation and Art Strategy.

/ Discovering Country
Aboriginal Design Statement

Chatswood is within Gamaragal Country (also spelt Cammeraygal) which includes the air, land and water. This project has the potential to acknowledge this Country and engage with local Aboriginal design knowledge and connect users of to the Aboriginal history of this place.

This document aims to provide ideas / concepts / design principles on how to engage with local Indigenous knowledge within the design aspects of the project.

Willoughby Falls North Shore, Sydney, 1878, Charles Troedel & Co., lithographer, State Library Victoria

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/ Aboriginal Design Principles

Indigenous led. Indigenous people (designers, Elders, etc) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous elements in the design.

Community involvement - The local Indigenous community to be engaged in this process. Can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?

Appropriate use of Indigenous design. All Indigenous design elements must be approved of by involved Indigenous people / community / Elders. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used in the project.

/ Design Approach

Image: Signage / surface treatment / walls / art using local Aboriginal design knowledge, commissioned from artists, or by urban designers with engagement and approval from community. Signage tells story of the Country and its people.

Space: Indigenous space / landscaping
Indigenous Space. A space or landscape where Aboriginal people can have their culture celebrated. Cultural land management practices, firestick farming, daisy yam propagation, etc

Language: Sharing language is critical to keeping it alive, this can be done through its use in the built environment, surface treatment, signage, wayfinding, storytelling devices etc..

Sydney from the North Shore, 1860, F.J. Jobson, National Library Australia

Country focused design

Overall, Aboriginal Australia has a simple but quite different hierarchy when it comes to their connection to nature. It is best contrasted against human-focused design, depicted below.

How might this shift or enhance current practices?

**Country, over
Community, over
Individual**

Country focused design

Guiding documents

The NSW Government Architects: *Connecting with Country Framework* and *Designing with Country* guides our approach.

The International Indigenous Design Charter provides protocols to follow when working with Indigenous knowledge in design.
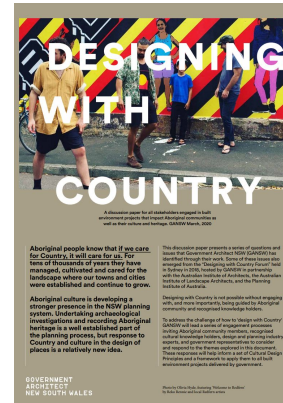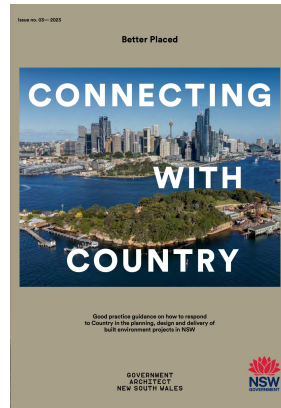
Discovering Country

This section covers publicly available knowledge about Country, people and culture as a introduction to understanding Gamaragal Country

Gamaragal Country

The Sydney Basin is traditionally inhabited by people belonging to several clan groups. These clan groups predominantly spoke the Darug and Dharawal languages, with Darug more common to the north and Dharawal to the south and south west side of the basin.

Governor Arthur Phillip noted that Gamaragal people occupied 'the northwest side of Port Jackson'. Their Country is now thought to extend from Cremorne in the east, to Woodford Bay in the west, and probably to Middle Harbour which forms a natural boundary to the north.[1]

'The clever men, or Koradgi in the Darug tongue were believed to have special powers and could visit the Sky Country - the abode of the ancestors and home of the sky father Biami.' [2]

Chris Tobin, Darug man and artist, 2005

Gamaragal Country

Country changed by rising Sea Water

About 12,000 years ago during the last ice age sea levels were around 125 metres below their current level, and the eastern coastline of this continent was about 25 to 30 kilometres further east. The landscape we now call Sydney was very different with gullies and canyons carved into the sandstone by creeks and rivers over many millennia. [3]

As ice caps melted and the sea level rose these river valleys filled up and were slowly inundated by seawater covering the lower-middle slopes of ancient valleys and creating the deep protected harbou we know today. [3]

Food resources for Gamaragal people would have changed dramatically with traditional freshwater areas being covered by the sea creating a new array of flora, fauna and resources. [3]

With sea level stabilising about 8000 to 6000 years ago, a rich maritime resource economy was now available to Gamaragal people. They lived, hunted,cared for and thrived in this new environment until a few decades after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. [3]

Southeast Asia and Australia during the last Ice Age. Image: Migration Heritage NSW

A curated country

A Country of Beauty

Early settlers in Sydney 'found environments which reminded them of the manicured parks of England, with trees well spaced and a grassy understorey'.[4]

Arthur Bowes Smyth from The First Fleet described the landscape around Sydney as:

> '.. fresh terraced, lawns and grottos with distinct plantations of the tallest and most stately trees I ever saw in any nobleman's grounds in England, cannot excel in beauty those whose nature now presented to our view'.[5]

A Country Curated by Fire

Aboriginal people in this Country utilised sophisticated environmental management conducted over long periods of time — in particular, traditional cultural fire management.[6]

The First Fleet officer John Hunter noted that Aboriginal people around Sydney 'set the country on fire for several miles extent'. He recognised that the purpose was 'to clear that part of the country through which they have frequent occasion to travel, of the brush or underwood', as well as enabling women to get at edible roots with digging sticks and hunting kangaroo.[7]

The mosaic of landscapes was 'maintained by Aboriginal burning, a carefully calibrated system which kept some areas open while others grew dense and dark'. [6]

Distant view of Sydney, from the Light House at South Head, New South Wales 1825 by Joseph Lycett. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Joe White Bequest

People using fire to hunt kangaroos by Joseph Lycett, 1817. National Library of Australia.

Gamaragal Country

Salt Water Country

In traditional times Gamaragal Country held bountiful water resources. Watkin Tench observed that Gamaragal people possessed the best fishing grounds in Port Jackson.

Gamaragal people had easy access to the harbour and tributaries to launch their bark canoes and subsequently their main food sources were collected from harbour resources. Many fishing techniques had been honed and refined over time with sea urchins, shellfish and burley thrown into the water to attract fish. [8]

Women were the masters of the canoe or **Nawi**, they made and used fishing lines called **currejun** from the inner bark of the kurrajong tree and fish hooks called **burra** by grinding down the turban shell. They would cook fish on a small fire built on an ochre clay base on the canoe floor. Men would make and use spears and wooden tools to hunt and fish, often fishing on the rocks with a spear.

Shell middens can still be seen in several North Shore locations providing a record of countless meals, showing the type of food that was eaten and the places where feasts were held. [8]

View in Port Jackson, ca. 1789, R. Cleveley, State Library of New South Wales

VIEW IN PORT JACKSON .

Gamaragal Country

Bara, or fish-hooks, made from turban shell. Paul Ovenden, Australian Museum.

Barangaroo and Fisher Women

Barangaroo was a Gamaragal woman, and a prominent figure in Sydney's early history. Barangaroo was a powerful woman, her power came from her role as a hunter and provider. She provided her clan group with fish caught in and around the harbour, using a Nawi canoe. She survived the smallpox epidemic of 1789 that killed her first husband and it is believed more than half of Sydney's Aboriginal population, she was *'one of a reduced number of women who had the knowledge of laws, teaching and women's rituals and she exercised this authority over younger women'.* [9]

Unlike the settlers, Barangaroo would only ever catch enough fish for her people's immediate needs. When she witnessed settlers catch more fish than they could possibly eat- about 4,000 salmon she was outraged because in Aboriginal culture you only take what you need.

Fish was their staple food, women made fishing lines (**carrejun**) by twisting together two strands of fibre from kurrajong trees, cabbage trees or flax plants, sometimes animal fur or grass was used. This fiber could also be used to make nets, bags, sleeping mats and other useful items.

The distinctively crescent-shaped fish hooks, called burra or bara, were created from the broadest part of the turban shell. The pearly reflection of the hook would have acted as a lure. The skill of the women in catching the fish and navigating the changeable harbour conditions in their modest Nawi was also greatly admired.[10]

Their skills are described in detail in journals and captured through multiple watercolours. These artworks show fisherwomen in Nawi with fires going, fishing, minding and feeding their small children.[10]

Aboriginal woman with her baby, in a canoe fishing with a line, c1805. State Library of NSW

A changed country and people

Colonial Impacts on Traditional Life

The traditional life of Aboriginal people in the Sydney region was severely damaged through the course of the early 19th century. The cumulative impacts of colonisation including dispossession of their lands and the effects of smallpox and influenza decimated the Aboriginal population, with individual epidemics killing large numbers of people.[11]

Early colonial settlement of traditional hunting lands deprived Aboriginal groups of sources of food and access to camping and ceremonial sites. Disrupting their way of life, having negative impacts on their survival and culture. This forced individuals to either relocate into the potentially hostile lands of neighbouring Aboriginal groups and partially integrate into colonial society as fringe dwellers or to resist and face consequences.[11]

Resistance by Aboriginal groups was often met with retaliatory action by white settlers and the colonial administration. A combination of these factors led to the demise of traditional lifestyles and a decrease in the Aboriginal population.[11]

Despite the damage done by colonisation to the various traditional ways of being, an evolution of culture, language and knowledge has survived and now lives on through the descendants of Aboriginal people.

East View of Sydney, New South Wales. 1819 taken from the Macquarie Tower J. Lycett State Library of NSW

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Cultural Heritage of the Greater Sydney Region

Middens
These are mounds of shell built up over hundreds or thousands of years as a result of countless meals. They primarily contain mature species of edible shellfish species. They might also contain bird and animal teeth and bones, campfire charcoal and stone tools. [12]

Rock Shelters – "giba gunyahs"
These are places where the Cammeraygal people would have taken shelter. This would have been a warm place to eat, sleep, repair or fashion tools and, we can imagine, talk of stories and exploits. Artefacts such as stone tools may be found in the rock shelters. [12]

Painting and Stencils
Stencils are produced by mixing ochre in the mouth with other material into a wet paste and spraying it over the object to be stencilled. Often we find stencilled hands and tools represented in rock shelters. Other forms of artwork include ochre painting as well as charcoal drawings and etchings. [12]

Grinding Grooves
These are grooves resulting from the production or sharpening and maintenance of an edge ground tool such as a stone axe. These sites are usually located near a water source, like a water hole. [12]

Engravings
Engravings were made by drilling or pecking a series of holes in the rock which were then connected to form a line. An accepted understanding of these engravings is that they are the product of sacred ceremonies and were periodically re-engraved as part of ongoing ritual and to pass on knowledge and stories. [12]

Shields were coated with white pipeclay and often painted with a red vertical line crossed by one or two horizontal lines.

Scar Trees
These trees are evidence of bark and wood being removed for shields, shelters, coolamons and canoes. They are rare in the Sydney region and can be divided into three categories:

- Bark removal for use eg. coolamons (water / grain containers) and canoes.
- Wood removal for use eg. boomerangs and digging sticks
- Evidence of climbing footholds eg. hunting possum and 'sugar bag' (honey)

The tree was not killed by these methods and therefore scarring is evident. [13]

Middens are remnants of feasts and gatherings, they are time capsules that show what types of food were collected and eaten

Waterhole and grinding grooves at Balls Head. Photo by Daniéle Hromek

Engravings of a sea creature at Berry Island Reserve, Wollstonecraft. Photo: https://www.visitsydneyaustralia.com.au/

Scar trees are rare in the Sydney region

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Cultural Places of the Sydney region

Meeting places: places where different groups of Aboriginal people met to trade and partake on corroborees together. In the Sydney region, such corroborees are known to have taken place near Hyde Park and The Domain near the CBD.

Bora or Ceremonial Ground
Bora grounds are Aboriginal ceremonial places. These are where initiation ceremonies are performed and are often meeting places as well. A bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks, and connected by a pathway. [13]

Sacred places: are areas set aside for religious ceremonies, initiations etc. Very little evidence of the use of such sites remain, the major tell-tale signs being the arrangement of stones in patterns or formations.

Most sacred sites were located on hilltops which offered panoramic views of the groups lands. A prerequisite for such sites was a large slab of flat rock upon which engravings recording tribal history and culture could be made. [13]

Economic places: Generally campsites which show evidence of occupation. Often close to or within rock overhangs and caves used to give shelter, evidences of occupation include middens (piles of discarded shells at feasting sites), fish traps, scarred trees, cooking mounds, wells, watering holes (often depressions carved into flat rock surfaces used to catch the water), remnants of discarded tools, quarries and axe sharpening grooves. [13]

Burial places: Senior members of a group were buried or cremated at sacred sites from which their spirits were freed to travel skyward. Other family members were buried within their area, often near campsites, in caves and beside middens. Often such sites were marked by earth mounds, stone arrangements and carved trees. [13]
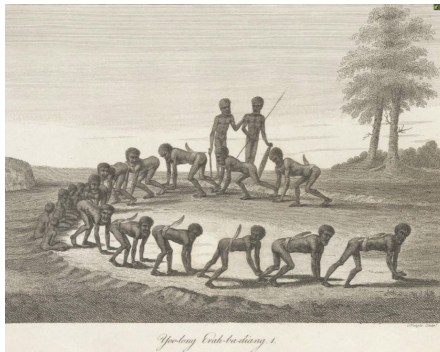
Corroboree at Hyde Park, *Yoo-long Erah-ba-diang.1* Engraving by James Neagle after Thomas Watling, 1798.

Rock engravings at Ben Buckler, North Bondi.

Water well at Balls Head. Photo: Daniéle Hromek
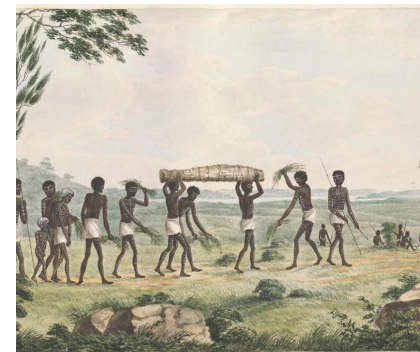
An Aboriginal funeral by Joseph Lycett, National Library of Australia

6 seasons

1 **Yuruga Burra -** Hot and Thirsty (Mar - Apr)

2 **Bayin Dyarra -** Wet and Cooler (May - June)

3 **Durga Guwara** - Cold and Windy (Sep - Oct)

4 **Dagara -** Cold and Frosty (July - Aug)

5 **Bayin Gura -** Cool getting Warmer (Nov - Dec)

6 **Bunnul Marray -** Warm and Wet (Jan - Feb)

THE SEASON
THE TREES
THE LAND
THE ROCK
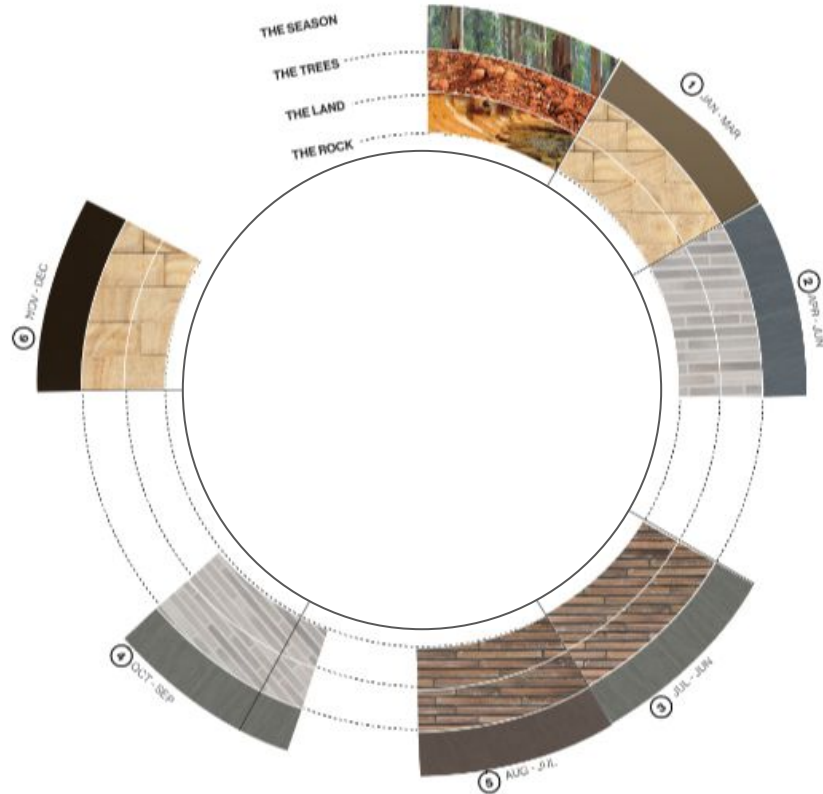
Fishing Culture in Design

The distinctively crescent-shaped fish hooks, called **burra** or **bara**, are honed from the broadest part of the turban shell. The pearly reflection of the hook would have acted as a lure.

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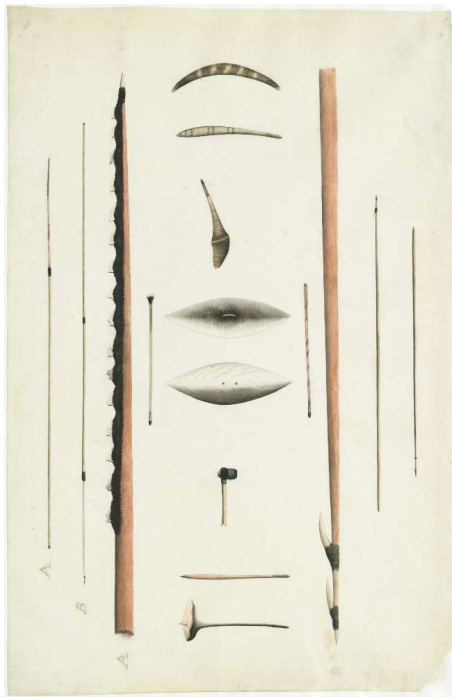
Aboriginal hunting implements and weapons, Port Jackson Painter, active 1788-1792 National Library of Australia.

Necklace worn by females, Fibre cord necklace made of reed pieces (*Phragmites australis*), Port Jackson, c1860s, British Museum.

Fish hooks of NSW, detail of plate from John White's Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales 1790. Image: Mitchell Library. State Library of NSW.

/ Discovering Country
Design

Sydney's Aboriginal people expressed themselves visually across many different mediums including on wooden and stone surfaces, body scarification and painting, incised designs on weapons and tools, and etchings on skin cloaks.

Many other tools made of stone, shell and plant materials were used for making canoes, weapons and to collect food. Ornaments were worn in the hair and scarring of chest and arms served both ornamental and ritual purposes. Initiated men wore a waistband of plaited possum fur. [15]

Each clan distinguished itself from other clans in having different designs and decorations on their tools and weapons. They also distinguished themselves by having different body decorations – for example painted designs worn during certain rites and ceremonies, and the cicatrices (scarification) formed during initiation rites. Some groups also had distinctive hair styles. [16]

French explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville in 1824 describes different Sydney groups gathering for ceremony. Their different body paint is a clear way to distinguish each group from the other:
'on high ground about two miles from the sea' (between Sydney and Botany Bay, and where there) 'were the people from Parramatta, Kissing Point, Sydney, Liverpool, Windsor, Emu Plains, Broken Bay, Five Islands, Botany Bay, and even from the Hunter River etc. All were distinguished by the designs of their body painting'. [11]
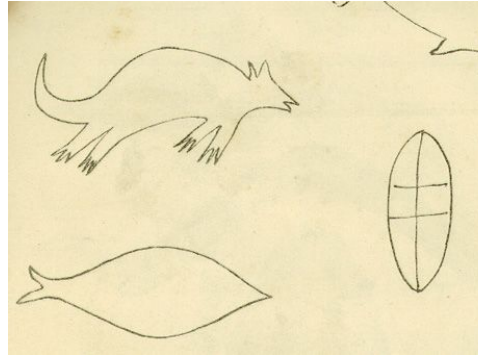
Left:Detail Moore Park-engraving. State Library of NSW
Right: Native Arms By T.R. Browne Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Shane Smithers, Darug artist and academic describes the horizontal lines as representing Wiari, Mother Earth whom, along with Biari Father sky, is held in the highest respect. Together their generative power is the basis of Darug lore.
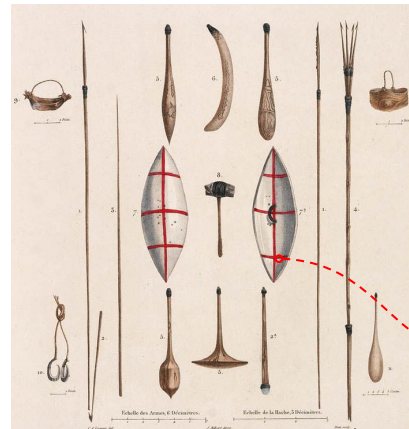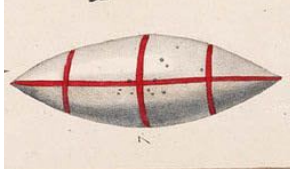

^ Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Indigenous Weapons - Sydney Region (1802-04)*, Australian Museum

Referencing cultural elements

Pavement design can reflect the design language of this Country, in this concept, the white and red of the Gadigal shield is translated into a pavement design.
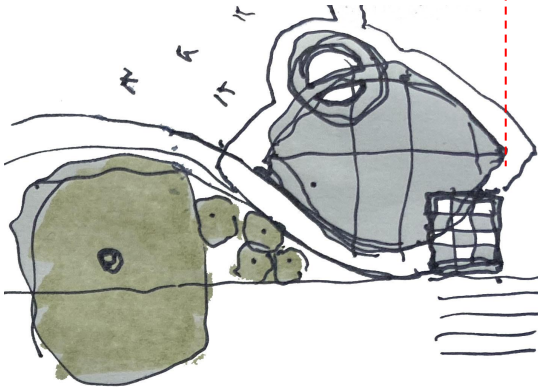
Paving colours to reflect red line, If implemented it is to meet the requirements for residents with dementia or those who are visually impaired
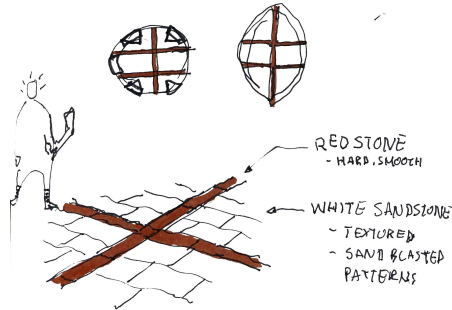
The cultural act of carving into sandstone rock can be continued
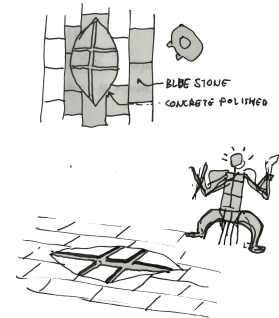
Engagement

This section includes the engagement methodology with relevant Elders and Knowledge Holders.

/ Engagement
Methodology

Who:

- **Aboriginal community Groups**

- Digital Yarns over TEAMS
- Walk on Country / Meetings on site
- Meetings at the site, an Elders place of choice (park, their house etc)

1. Engagement

The first step will be to engage with the relevant Aboriginal group (artist / Elder, Lands Council etc), early and often, through a series of 'yarns' or conversations about the potential opportunities to incorporate the theming contained within the document (or other themes) into project outcomes.
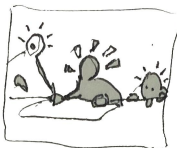
2. Co Design

To kick of the co-design process design teams are given time to integrate the themes and ideas into the scope of the project

3. Co Design workshops

Engagement workshops with the relevant Aboriginal group will everyone gets in the room to co-design cultural solutions to project outcomes, yet Aboriginal voices should be given preference to ensure they are heard.
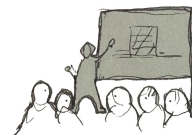
4. Endorsement:

All content that uses local Aboriginal theming will be endorsed by the Aboriginal group.

5. Other opportunities:

Should be highlighted and put forward to ensure the local Aboriginal community has opportunities, economic outcomes and better connections to their Country, through the project

wsp

Project site and ideas

This section starts to investigate the site, and identifies some high level design opportunities for Gamaragal cultural expression.

/ Discovering Country
Project site

Shield carving
Highlighting clan territory and a sign for the western clans to stay away

Manly Cove beach
A long time camp and site of famous colonial interactions

Songline north
- Main trail along Pacific Highway
- 2nd trail along Lane Cove River, yet more dangerous

Chatswood Golf club
- Resistance Cave
- Hand stencil area

Ceremony Ring
At Gore Hill Oval

Ancient pelican
Aboriginal people here believed North head was a massive pelican that was laid to rest

Mowbray Park
- Grinding grooves
- Scar trees & Middens

Ceremony Ring
1 large ring under Anglican Church in North Sydney

Whale carving
Under the Sydney Harbour Bridge pylon

Connecting the Building to Country

Connecting the site to Country

Sydney has always been an important place of gathering for Aboriginal people, overlooking two waterways and old tracks that went west and south.

How might we honour Country and ensure it's dignity is still intact after the project?

Any new building should Honour Country and the culture associated with this land through tangible and intangible outcomes
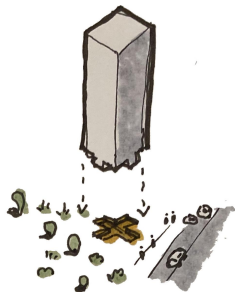
Open up the site

Ensuring the building is open, accessible, and to provide access for people.

How might we bring people closer to the site, make them stay longer, and learn a bit about Aboriginal culture?

Celebrate Country

This precinct will be a threshold to the city for many visitors who come from a long way away and are here to stay on Aboriginal land and learn.

Can the project provide a space to celebrate this important gateway to Country and have elements of education and teaching about Aboriginal values?

Tell our stories.

Sydney was a place of ceremony, lore, and settlement. There are many latent stories associated with this place waiting to be told through place based interventions.

How might we tell the stories of this Country and it's first peoples in the design of this building? What are the appropriate stories / themes to tell?

Connect the building to Country

Connect people to the site

Connect the building to local Design

Invite Country into the building
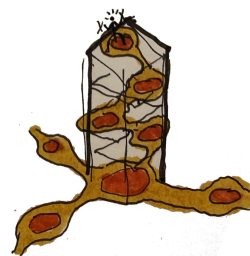
Connect the building to Culture

# Potential use of Aboriginal design

Aims of the project:
· Tell the story of the local People.
· Incorporate native and endemic plant species through the space.
· Create opportunities for the installation of Aboriginal Art through the space.

Safety in Design: The following are just ideas and we are not dictating accessibility, maintenance etc. any Connection to Country feature will consider Safety in Design in the future as a residual risk in the design and construction of Aboriginal art.
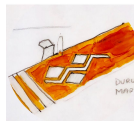
-    Murals / wall treatments - access, maintenance
-    Sculptures - constructability

1. Entry statement, Art piece referencing Aboriginal Design.
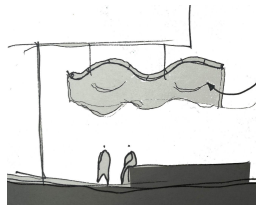
2. An iconic Art piece to mark important gateway or zone.

3. The ground plane. Landscaping and Pathways with local Aboriginal patterns in coloured asphalt.

4. Sculptural, Art piece , landscape communicating stories and design.

5. Wall treatment, anti throw screens, abutments, noise walls etc

6. Resting / yarning place design treatment in pavement, seating, landscape art.

7. Language and naming Can the building represent culture through appropriate language shared through consultation?
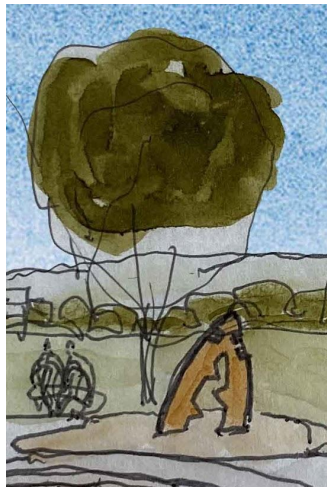
wsp

1. Entry Statement

Sculptural and mural can be combined

Tell a story at important thresholds

Storytelling and wayfinding devices help connect people and orientate them to Gamaragal Country and the stories and history that came before.

A space to celebrate culture, such as a viewing, yarning or sitting place with references to local design

1. Iconic Statement

**Soffit art** can stand out as a significant contribution to Aboriginal design.

The below concept takes inspiration from the 7 season of this Country, with the red gum leaves, yellow wattles and glue fig tree fruit. The eel, an important totem, is a reference to air intact requirements, perhaps an art opportunity?

Concept of St Leonards vaulted ceiling artwork

Burwood Brickworks, Mandy Nicholson artist
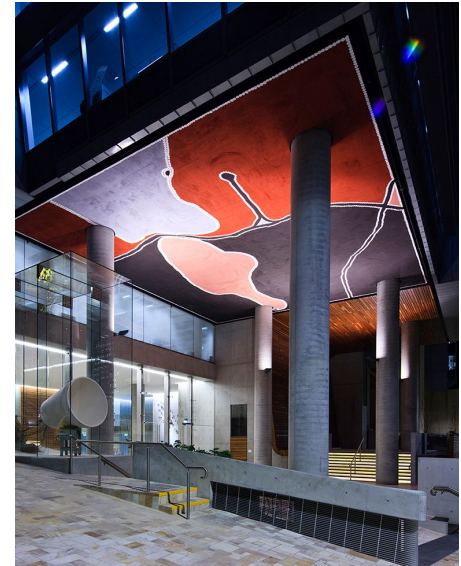
Coca Cola Place North Sydney

wsp

2. Contemporary Aboriginal Art

Examples used in this photomontage art by Aboriginal artists Jonathan Jones and Daniel Boyd.
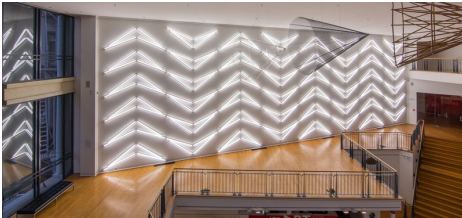
Thresholds can be celebrated with bold pavement design referencing Aboriginal language, colour and patterns.

A cultural Mapping of the site, revealing cultural flows and pressures on this site through high quality materials and design.

Pavement treatment can create a sense of place and interest in cultural features of this place. It can also assist in wayfinding,
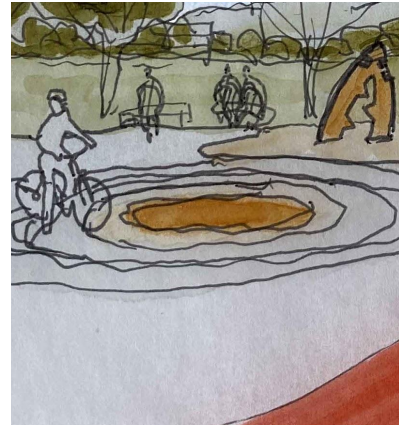
**Re-used sandstone from the site / coloured concrete / asphalt / bitumen**
There is potential to re-use sandstone from the site which may lead to an opportunity to create Cultural designs, co-designed by local Aboriginal artists with the design team.
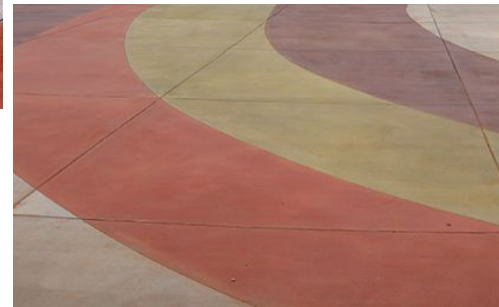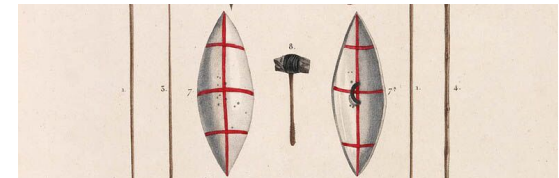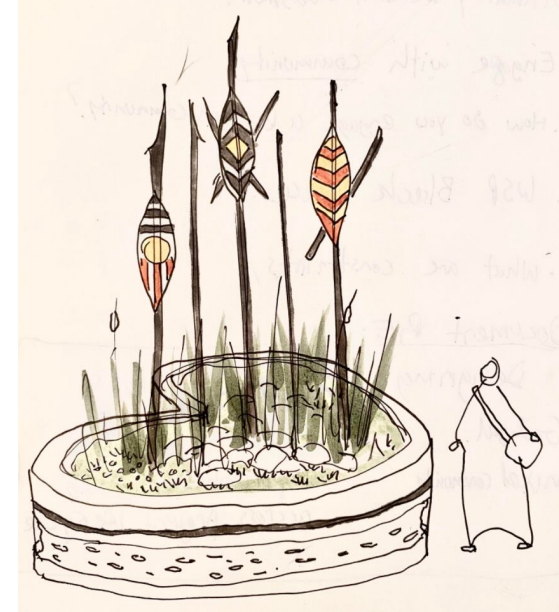
3. Ground Plane- Landscape

Use of endemic species will attract and enhance the biodiversity of this place. Curating into groves creates places of difference and diversity.

Landscapes are resource collection points for First People. We can all learn from these places about how First People lived and thrived in this place. How can we design this site with these values?
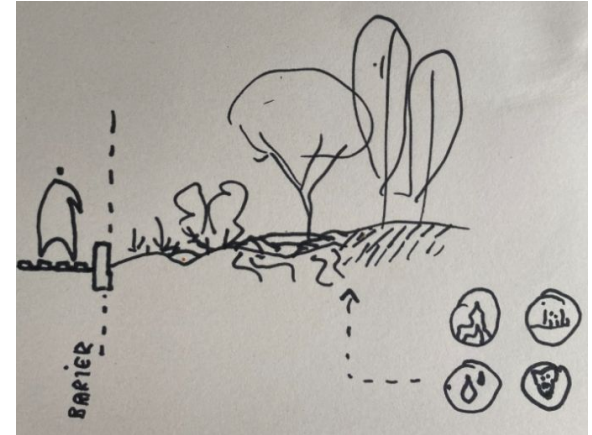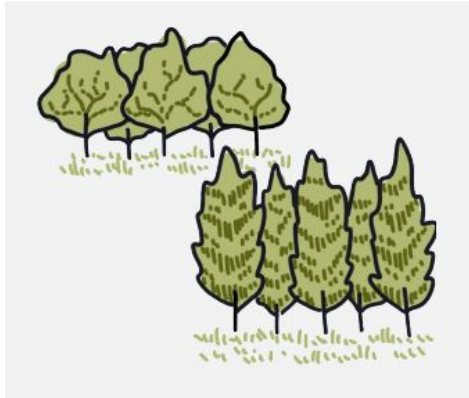
4. Sculptural Art

Art and sculptural elements can assist user legibility and wayfinding enabling the user to recognise and navigate successfully through the new landscape.

5. Wall treatments

6. Resting / Yarning places

Shared places can celebrate Gamaragal culture while catering for multiple users including pedestrians, cyclists, road users and 'more than humans' ie plants, animals, waterways and ecology.

By using permeable hard surfaces for secondary pathways, local endemic plant species in gardens and verges, and adopting water sensitive urban design principles places can benefit all users.


Bora rings are in a celtral space

Bora grounds are Aboriginal ceremonial places. These are where initiation ceremonies are performed and are often meeting places as well. A bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks, and connected by a pathway.[5]

6. Resting / a place for culture

The landscape can facilitate in cultural practices such as weaving or healing gardens, or spaces specific for Aboriginal people to celebrate their culture.
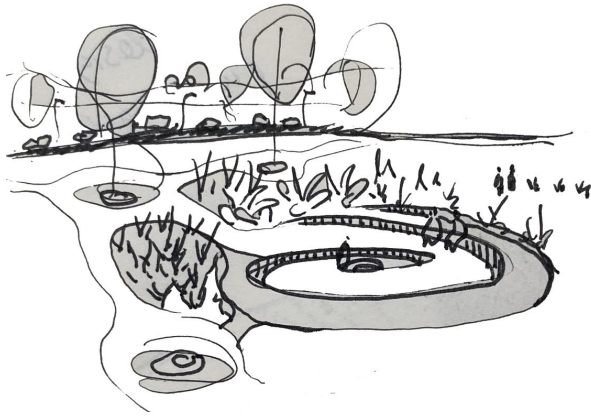
A physical space to celebrate design and culture - could be an accessible site to enhance certain cultural practices, such as healing or weaving gardens, a yarning circle etc.
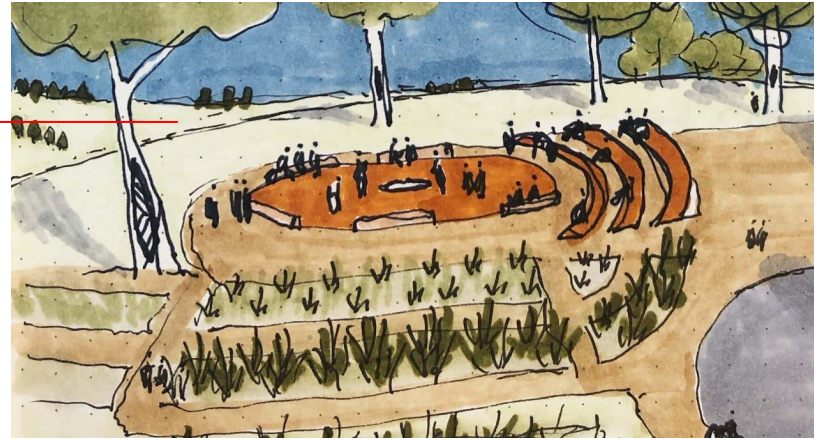
Aboriginal design examples- urban design / landscape

Caring for Country examples

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