

An Exploration of Material Culture: A Case Study of Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training

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This essay is dedicated to the residents of Palm Island. I will always remember you.

FOREWORD

For over 64 years, Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training (Tranby) has been Australia's national center for Indigenous adult education and training, community development, and social action. As an Aboriginal-led non-profit educational organization, our mission has always been to provide free vocational education and training courses to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders nationally and to provide a culturally competent and supportive learning environment in which our students can achieve their academic and personal goals. We strive to empower Aboriginal people and build stronger Aboriginal communities nationally.

Tranby has a strong and unbroken record of providing a culturally safe learning environment for the thousands of students who have walked through our doors. Empowered by their training, our students have gone on to create grassroots change within their communities, positively impacting their own lives and the lives of those around them.

Tranby values our connection to our ancestors who guide us as we shape and build a future for our students and their communities. As an Aboriginal woman, Aboriginal culture shapes how we see and understand the world. The Tranby campus and our campus artifacts are central to the notion that we teach through culture. The Aboriginal education pedagogy framework we have developed is supported by the Indigenous perspectives of knowledge and learning embedded in our educational programs and impactful community projects.

It is wonderful to see Tranby's passion and commitment to empowering Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and communities through the culturally responsive, high-impact programs highlighted in the brief "Material Culture at Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education and Training." The text and images reflect the multitude of material culture and artifacts on campus at Tranby and capture the essence of an inclusive and welcoming learning space. We walk together with Indigenous peoples from all over Australia from different clans and nation groups and this is reflected in the many cultural artifacts that we have on our campus.

When our students come to our campus, they feel connected to culture as they see it around them. The photographic exhibits remind them of the previous students who have graduated, the cultural artifacts connect them to culture and spirituality and the artworks, many of which have been painted by previous students, expressly remind them of the significance of this learning space and the relationship and respect for the local community and our previous students.

In Tranby's 64-year history we have been fortunate to accumulate a wonderful and diverse collection of cultural artifacts on campus. They are part of our story, our growth, our challenges and our achievements. The valuable work of Le'Passion and her commitment to telling the 'stories' of these cultural artifacts allows us to proudly share them with the rest of the world.

Tranby has always strived to be a hub of social action and community impact and our focus is to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment. Our history, cultural material and campus artifacts help us achieve exactly that, as we walk in the footsteps of our ancestors.

Belinda Russon
BA.LLB.LLM.SJD
CEO of Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training, Sydney, Australia

“The material culture of the campus comprises the human-made objects that are viewable by the inhabitants of the campus, including those who are on campus for a substantial time – students, faculty, and staff – and the visitor who spends a shorter time.” - James H. Banning

February 9, 2020. After a fifteen-hour outbound flight from Chicago, I had finally landed in Sydney, Australia. My objective? To observe, photograph, and record material culture at Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training. In my quest to study campus artifacts on six continents, I had arranged a three-day tour at Tranby after seeing it listed under “Australia” in “Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them: A Global Perspective” (Gasman & Castro Samayoa, 2015).

Per Banning (2018), I would use my cellular phone to capture images of the art, architecture, and signs at Tranby, and later interpret those same images for the nonverbal messages they communicate to campus users. Quintessential to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), the built environment at Tranby made my task straightforward and engulfed me in an assemblage of opportunities to practice Banning’s (2018) methodology. This essay will explain that methodology and document Tranby’s history as an MSI. The bulk of this writing, however, will spotlight, pictorialize, and interpret the material culture at Tranby that I found most expressive. Of note, there were many photographs captured of Tranby that are referenced throughout the piece. All photographs corresponding with this piece can be found in this [album](#).

BANNING’S PERSPECTIVES ON CAMPUS MATERIAL CULTURE

The cover of Banning (2018) illustrates the analytical framework it proposes. An unidentifiable human hand is holding a cellular phone that has seemingly photographed a yellow caution sign at what appears to be a college campus. Centered by large, black, block letters, the sign announces, “Men Working.” In the actual book titled, *Campus Artifacts as Diversity Messages: A Photographic Approach*, Banning demonstrates photographs as a viable option for examining material culture in campus environments for both positive and negative meanings. The “Men Working” sign for example, can convey (or scream given the font used for the sign) that only

men are capable of the type of work taking place in that particular campus area, or that only men are in the midst of conducting the type of work for which the sign was placed. Both interpretations can cause women campus pedestrians to question their value to the campus community, feel ignored, rejected, or uninvited by campus administration, or challenge institutional values regarding gender equality (Banning, 1978; 1992; Banning & Bartels, 1997; Bott, Banning, Wells, & Haas, 2006; Banning, Middleton, & Deniston, 2008).

James Banning is a long-time and pioneering scholar of campus ecology, which he defines as “a conceptual framework focused on the dynamic relationship between students and the campus environment” (Banning, 2000, p. 16). Though myriad, Banning’s literature concentrates on the interactions between campus users and the campus-built environment with specificity to art, architecture, graffiti, and signs. In 1993, Banning co-published a taxonomy for evaluating material culture for multiculturalism ([Image 1](#)) (Banning & Bartels, 1997). In 1997, Banning redesigned that taxonomy to audit the ethical climate at colleges and universities ([Image 2](#)). And, in 2008, Banning et al. amended the evaluative parameters of the taxonomy to effectively assess campus equity climates ([Image 3](#)). In Banning’s 2018 publication, he alters the message content of the equity climate taxonomy (roles, equality, safety, and belonging) (Banning et al, 2008) with terms suitable for conceptualizing diversity photographs: community, inclusion, safety, and welcoming ([Image 4](#)).

Collectively, Banning promotes visual anthropology as a method for studying material culture, and has applied his taxonomies and perspectives on campus ecology to issues that support benevolent and responsive higher education settings. For my visit to Tranby, however, I exclusively implemented the qualitative approaches expounded on in Banning (2018). To start, Banning (2018) identifies the following objects as campus material culture: “... the buildings, institutional artifacts, furniture

arrangements, official signage, and the installation of various campus art forms [such as] paintings, murals, and sculptures” (p. xiii).

I aimed to photograph examples of all these items during my tour. Banning suggests that researchers use photographs to “expose messages of diversity” (p. xiii), especially those associated with race, ethnicity, physical abilities, gender, sexual identities, and religion. At Tranby, ethnic diversity consists of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, and my photographic samples reflect these cultures. Tranby’s mission statement, which is considered a verbal campus artifact (Kuh, 1993), encompasses Banning’s other suggested diversity parameters:

We [Tranby] are committed to ensuring that fully-subsidized education will continue to be provided to all Indigenous students. We strive to maintain a welcoming and inclusive environment where learning styles are reflective of traditional Indigenous techniques.

Banning’s (2018) resource reference list (p. 6) confirms that material culture can be referred to as objects (Berger, 2014), stuff (Miller, 2010), things (Lubar & Kingery, 1993; Myers, 2002), semiotics (Deely, 1982; Frutiger, 1989; Hodge & Kress, 1988), lines (Ingold, 2015; 2016), and architecture (Bonta, 1979; Rapoport, 1982); the material makeup of campus grounds symbolize institutional culture and values (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Material culture is cited by Banning (2018) as one of three scholarship lines for interpreting the communicative properties of campus artifacts. The other two frameworks are the ecological perspective line (the study of the campus as an ecological system and its artifacts as material culture) and the visual/photographic research line (specifically as it relates to “the use of photographs to capture the meaning of campus cultural artifacts,” p. 8). The campus setting at Tranby is saturated with eclectic cultural artifacts and allowed for the execution of all three scholarship lines.

Lastly, Banning considers visual images of artifacts necessary for the process of understanding campus culture and nonverbal communication as the “voice of cultural artifacts” (p. 23). He acknowledges that interpretations of artifacts vary by person and that decoding material culture includes “both the artifacts and its encoded messages and the values

and life experiences of the observer/photographer” (p. 23).

TRANBY AS A MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTION

“For a campus culture to be positive and healthy for its designed activities of education, research, and service, all inhabitants need to feel welcomed and not lost, safe and not endangered, and included rather than excluded.” - James H. Banning

Located in the Sydney suburb of Glebe, the façade and entry walkway of Tranby’s campus resembles the shotgun homes commonly resided in by emancipated African Americans in the southern United States after the American Civil War (Photos [1.1](#) and [1.2](#)). The artifacts and landscape within and behind the structure, however, symbolize devoted service to students who primarily share threads of oppression with Native Americans.



Photo 1.1 Norwood-Williams House, constructed in the 1930s Columbus, Mississippi.



Photo 1.2: Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education & Training façade. (Darby, 2020)

The first peoples of the geographic area now designated as Australia were the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Based on a 2016 genomic study spearheaded by University of Cambridge and the Wellcome Sanger Institute, the history of these Indigenous groups dates back approximately 72,000 years when it is theorized that they migrated into Australia and other equatorial countries during a single 'Out of Africa' event (Malaspinas et al., 2016).

The migration and settlement of these groups established them as the first peoples of Australia, and they lived on the continent for over 50,000 years before British explorer, James Cook, came in 1770 to vet the land to be a convict settlement (Parliament of New South Wales, n.d.). The British began to colonize and populate Australia with the first groups of Scottish convicts in 1788.

Similar to the massacre of Native Americans, European colonization of Australia annihilated an estimated 90% of the original population. This devastation was the inevitable result of forced dislocation, poisonings, brutal violence, petrifying and unspeakable population control tactics, and venereal and skin diseases (e.g., smallpox, measles, influenza) transmitted by the newcomers who raped Indigenous girls and women (Australians Together, n.d.).

Systems and policies were also instituted to marginalize and prohibit the original landowners from socioeconomic advancement, citizenship, political participation, and cultural expression and ownership (Blakemore, 2019).

Vestiges of these dark and murderous times are still evident today as only 3.3 percent of the total Australian population is made up of Aboriginal Australians (Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders), making them the minority (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

According to *National Geographic*, Aboriginal peoples "are related to those who already inhabited Australia when Britain began colonizing the island in 1788," and Torres Strait Islanders are those "... who descend from residents of the Torres Strait Islands, a group of islands that is part of modern-day Queensland, Australia" (Blakemore, 2019, para 1).

Between both groups, Aboriginals make up 91% and Torres Strait Islanders make up four percent.

The highest concentration of Aboriginal Australians resides in Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) where Tranby was founded in 1957. Today, Tranby stands as Australia's oldest independent Indigenous education provider, warranting its published designation as a Minority Serving Institution (Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2015).

Per Tranby's aforementioned mission, it serves Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders solely, and provides a psychosocial (Smith, 2013) and culturally safe learning environment that combats the harsh traces of British colonization, particularly as it seeps through the crevices of higher education in Australia.

That being said, Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders only make up about one percent (13,781) of all university enrollments in Australia (1,313,776) (Wilks & Wilson, 2015). Only 3.7 percent of Aboriginal Australians complete a bachelor's degree compared to 16.9% for non-Indigenous peoples, and 24.1% of Aboriginal Australians earn a certificate or diploma, whereas 32.7% of non-Indigenous peoples earn the same credentials (Australians Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Based on a 2018 report by the Centre for Research in Social Inclusion and Education at University of South Australia, Indigenous students confront six significant barriers in their pursuit of postsecondary learning that contribute to these statistics: 1) financial stress, 2) personal factors, 3) disabilities, 4) online learning, 5) racism, identity, and belonging, and 6) Aboriginal content and knowledge (Rigney & Neill, 2018).

Most relevant to this essay, however, is that the colonial legacy that permeates most mainstream higher education settings in Australia are evident by way of the campuses' artifacts, and can make Indigenous students feel unsafe, tormented, unwelcomed, minimized, excluded, misrepresented, discriminated against, or pressured to code-switch (Hall & Wilkes, 2015). Tranby aims to counter all these impediments through its policies and material culture.

MATERIAL CULTURE AT TRANBY

“... Institutional values, beliefs, and “how things are done around here,” are communicated by the campus artifacts. The building designs and architecture, art, sculpture, posters, signs, and graffiti all contribute to the telling and reminding of the campus culture.” - James H. Banning

Banning and Bartels (1997) explain the artifacts to be exhibited below:

- Architecture, the physical structures within educational settings, including classrooms;
- Art, including paintings, posters placed in campus buildings, and statuary found within the campus landscape; and,
- Signs, which fall into several categories, including official signs, unofficial signs, and illegitimate signs. (p. 30)

The authors reiterate that “artifacts are objects made by members of a culture and take a variety of forms” (p. 30), and that those objects constitute the material culture.

ARCHITECTURE

The Georgian style cottage in which Tranby's administrative offices are housed ([Photo 1.2](#)) is divided by a walkway that ultimately spills into sunlight, greenery, and circular buildings reflective of Indigenous culture in shape and color ([Photos 2.1](#) and [2.2](#)).



Photo 2.1: Native Garden at Tranby

Researcher Maha Baalbaki explains the architectural features she observed at Tranby after conducting her own tour:

Tranby utilizes culturally appropriate architecture and surroundings to make for a more culturally sensitive learning environment. Tranby was built by Peter Lonergan and Julie Cracknell, architects who practice a commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation and conservation. The whole complex was designed in sympathy with both the Victorian feel of the suburb of Glebe in which Tranby is located and a holistic approach to Aboriginal education. It is made of circular pavilions alongside rectangular buildings. The round learning areas were built to reflect Indigenous ‘learning circle’ practices in which students and elders sit facing each other. The outside space is central to the design. It links the old and the new, the European heritage and the Aboriginal living heritage, the square and the circle. There is a significant tree on campus that stands as a symbol for the Aboriginal culture, and all of the plants on campus are native to Australia. There is also a “reconciliation bridge” connecting the older buildings to the new buildings on campus. (Baalbaki, n.d., p. 9)

A replica of Tranby's full complex is exhibited in a campus display case ([Photo 2.3](#)); the campus is also listed on the New South Wales Heritage Register (New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, 2015).



Photo 2.4: Camp-fire style round learning area (exterior).

Photos [2.4](#), [2.5](#), [2.6](#), and [2.7](#) illustrate the interior and exterior of one of the round learning areas referenced by Baalbaki (n.d.) and are known as camp-fire style classrooms. In [photo 2.6](#), and in

accordance with the nature of Aboriginal learning circles, the elder in the room, who is an Indigenous and longtime lecturer at Tranby, is shown facing and sitting at the same level as the student. A large, Aboriginal flag is hung in the back of the classroom in [photo 2.7](#).

Overall, the soundscape at Tranby is tranquil and compliments the large and open green space that seems to bind the cottage, both levels of the learning areas, and Tranby's Interpretive Walk. Starting with the image in [photo 2.8](#), the Interpretive Walk narrates Tranby's heritage, acknowledges Glebe as the home of the Gadigal ancestors, recounts the origins of the institution, and describes the material makeup of the campus' architecture ([Photos 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, and 2.12](#)).



Photo 2.8: Tranby Interpretive Walk. Photograph provided by Belinda Russon



Photo 2.9: Tranby Interpretive Walk. Photograph provided by Belinda Russon

The Walk's location promotes visibility, and thus readability, by campus pedestrians passing between the classrooms and cottage and/or sitting ([Photo 2.13](#)) or gathering in the green space that is often used for cultural ceremonies ([Photo 2.14](#)).



Photo 2.13: Campus seating area.

As a collection, the buildings at Tranby materialize "a strong and robust sense of place" (Bott et al, 2006, p. 43) for Indigenous students, which Bott et al (2006) defines as "an emotional bonding to a particular geographical place" (p. 42).



Photo 2.14: Cultural ceremony at Tranby. Photograph provided by Belinda Russon.

ART

Artwork produced by Aboriginals fuse iconography that represents creation, community, nature, and animals (Figure 1).

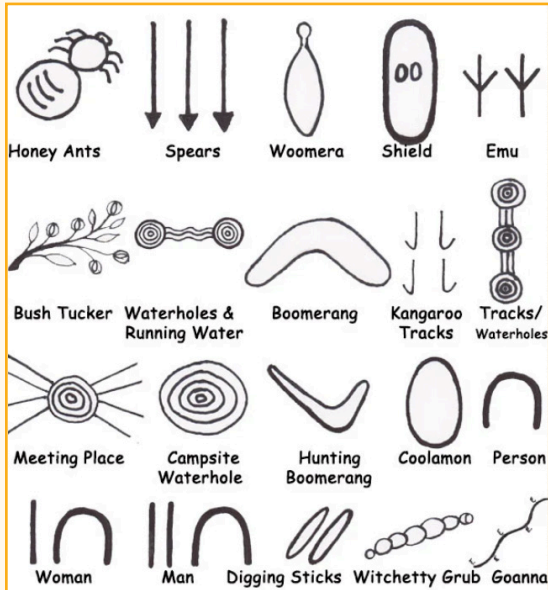


Figure 1: Symbols used in Papunya Central Desert art

These symbols are often combined in artwork to tell simple, complex, and ancient stories, many of which have been passed down by elders (Artlandish.com, n.d.).

Archaeologists have discovered prehistoric cave or rock art depicting these symbols throughout Australia (Maynard, 1976; Brady, 2002). Early Aboriginal peoples did not have a formal written language and used symbols to communicate, pass down their history and culture, and teach cultural and moral expectations to the young. Some of the symbols represent what is known as 'Dreamtime,' which is believed to be the time in which the world was created. Contemporary visual arts for Aboriginal Australians can include rock art, bark paintings, body decorations, and wood sculptures (Artlandish.com, n.d.) and carvings (Artsper.com, n.d.).

At Tranby, the walls are adorned by student paintings that blend Aboriginal symbols and colors. Most of the paintings integrate dots in some fashion, which were used for generations to mask or camouflage meanings and to hide sacred or covert details from colonizers (Artlandish.com, n.d.) ([Photos 3.1](#), [3.2](#), [3.3](#), and [3.4](#)).



Photo 3.2: Student Painting

Hands are used to represent belonging and the 'u' shape to represent people - whether the person is a man or woman is determined by the feminine or masculine tools (e.g., spear, boomerang, coolamon) near the individual ([Photos 3.5](#), [3.6](#), [3.7](#), and [3.8](#)).



Photo 3.3: Student Painting

Meeting places are drawn to communicate where to locate shelter or water or where to gather for congregations, sacred rituals, and ceremonies. Gathering points are symbolized by a single or a series of circles per the Aboriginal tradition of sitting in circles, at campsites, or at fireplaces. Images of rock holes are also used to indicate water supplies (Red Kangaroo.com, n.d.) ([Photos 3.9](#) and [3.10](#)).

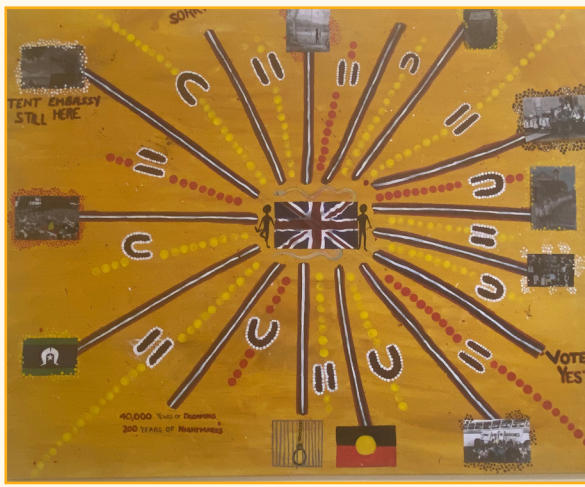


Photo 3.9: Student Painting



Photo 3.10: Student Painting

Animal depictions hold spiritual significance and are typically sketched based on the unique tracks each creates when moving about the land. Kangaroos, turtles, and snakes are heavily depicted in Aboriginal art; the snake in particular, is believed to be a symbol of strength, creativity, and continuity (Artlandish.com, n.d.). Food and nature icons are used to communicate where food sources can be found and which foods and plants can be used for cooking or treating illnesses. Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders hold intrinsic connections to the land.

Naturally, elements of matter (fire, water, sun) are represented in the material culture and with ochre colors that reflect the Australian landscape (e.g., chocolate browns, tobacco reds, blood reds, tones of yellow and cream, charcoal blacks, sages, and smoky greys) (Japinkaaboriginalart.com, n.d.; Artark.com, n.d.). (Photos [3.11](#) and [3.12](#)).

Two noteworthy murals at Tranby embody traditional Aboriginal symbolism. The first is titled *Gaining Knowledge to Empower Communities* ([Photo 3.13](#)) and is positioned to the left of Tranby's entrance door. The painting was created in 2018 for Tranby's 60th year anniversary by a then 39-year old Aboriginal artist named Ivy Minniecon.



Photo 3.13: *Gaining Knowledge to Empower Communities* by Ivy Minniecon (2018).

According to writeups provided by Tranby's Chief Executive Officer, Belinda Russon, the larger circle in the center of the painting:

"... Represents the Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education and Training Centre learning environment. The dots around the circles in the middle represent the people gathering to gain qualifications and skills to ultimately empower and drive change in their respective communities. The lines swirling away from the center represent the journeys that students will take back on country to their communities to share, educate and deliver the knowledge that they have gained through studying at the Tranby National Indigenous Adult Education and Training Centre. The circles along those lines are a representation

of the many different communities that will benefit from Tranby's vision in educating and empowering and creating future Leaders of this Nation (Tranby, Ivy's Artwork Description, p. 1).

The other mural ([Photo 3.14](#)) was painted by students from the Glebe Youth Service, and is located in an underpass near the campus' Native Garden. The artwork is complete with deep earth tones and centered by Tranby's slogan: Educate, Achieve, and Empower. The mythological Rainbow Serpent or Rainbow Snake believed by the Aboriginal community to be "the giver of life" and to represent water (Artlandish, n.d.) brings eminent iconography to the canvas.

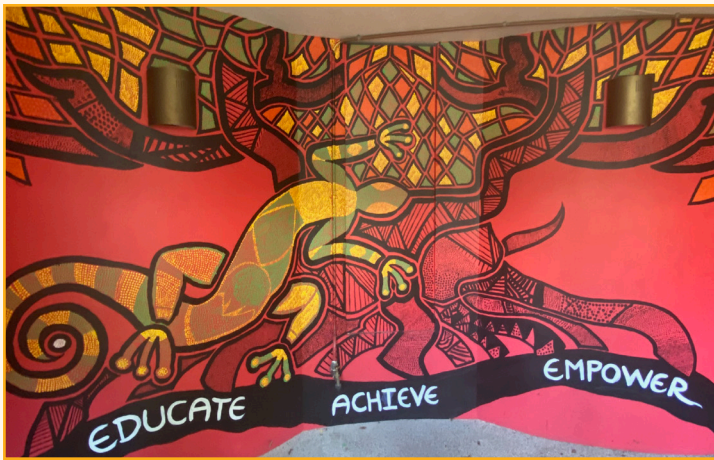


Photo 3.14: Mural painted by the Glebe Youth Service.

Posters and photographs cover wall areas at Tranby where paintings are absent, particularly in the campus' boardroom. While not particularly artistic, the information and figures presented in the items contribute to Aboriginal identity, belonging, content, and knowledge (Rigney & Neill, 2018).



Photo 3.15. Map showing the distribution of the Aboriginal language groups of Australia. Norman B. Tindale, 1940.

For example, the map in [photo 3.15](#) details the geographic locations and language groups of Aboriginal Australia before Europeans inhabited the land.

The poster in [photo 3.16](#) advertises the 2019 NAIDOC Week, which is an event hosted by the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC). As the organization's website states, the philosophies behind the event reflect Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders' desire to:

- Have their voice heard after being excluded when the Australian Constitution came into being.
- Have an enhanced role in decision-making in Australia's democracy.
- Have their fellow Australians recognize that sovereignty has never been ceded, and their land was taken without agreement.

Various types of Aboriginal symbols surround a poem in [photo 3.17](#).

Tranby houses several large wood carvings by world-renowned Indigenous artists. Two distinct pieces were carved by Myangah Pirate, a Budawang man from the Yuin Nation. According to Tranby's Art for Heart Community Gallery brochure,

Pirate uses traditional materials on a contemporary base. Painting with ochre, not acrylics, he tends to use natural colours with contemporary flavours to create a positive debate over those issues facing Indigenous Australians today. His art includes totemic items from road kill, burning carving, sculptures, paintings, weaving as well as the production of weapons, tools, and artifacts from traditional materials in a traditional way. Pirate has been exhibiting prolifically over the last three decades. He has works in numerous public and private collections, both within Australia and internationally. These works are exhibited in places such as the United Nations Building in New York, and the Australian Consulates in Israel, Turkmenistan, France and Ireland. (Tranby, 2018, p. 14)

Litany of Losses ([Photo 3.18](#)), *Bunyarinjarin* (Plover Man) ([Photo 3.19](#)), and *Gwoya Jungarai* ([Photo 3.20](#)), which centerpieces Tranby's boardroom, are three pronounced examples of Pirates' pyrographic craftsmanship.



Photo 3.18: Litany of Losses (Myangah Pirate, 2017).



Photo 3.19: Bunyarinjarin (Plover Man) (Pirate, 2018).



Photo 3.20: Gwoya Jungarai (Myangah Pirate, 2018).

Gwoya Jungarai was gifted to Tranby by Pirate, and is one of three iconic images of Jungarai, a Walpiri-Anmatyerre idol from Australia's Northern Territory. The other images of Jungarai are a 1964 national postage stamp and the Australia two-dollar coin minted in 1988. The sculpture in [photo 3.22](#), also by Pirate, demonstrates the traditional use of bones in Aboriginal art (McCarthy, 1940) and is displayed in the boardroom, which is adjacent to Tranby's kitchen and intimate dining area. Together the spaces create what many campuses designate as a student union that can be leveraged as a teaching and learning medium for Aboriginal history and culture (Banning, 2000).



Photo 3.22: Sculpture with Bones

Other wood carvings line the halls at Tranby ([Photo 3.23](#)) or are stored in display cases near the dining area (Photos [3.24](#), [3.25](#), and [3.26](#)), most of which symbolize Indigenous hunting and gathering practices (Edwards, 2012) and music instrumentation ([Photo 3.27](#)).



Photo 3.27: Clap Sticks

Finally, photographs of Indigenous heroes, Freedom Fighters, cultural performances, and social activism events are framed inside the boardroom ([Photos 3.28](#) and [3.29](#)).



Photo 3.28. Photograph display.

SIGNS

For the purposes of this paper, symbols fall under the category of signs (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). As Kuh and Whitt (1988) point out, “symbols, such as organizational signs, communicate the value placed on time, space, and communication, different modes by which institutional agents express their feelings about others, and the activities of a college.” (p. 36).

Examples at Tranby consists of wayfinding, prohibition, accessibility, and cultural signage as well as national symbols. Photos [4.1](#) and [4.2](#) welcome visitors to the campus; the former is at the right of the entry walkway and the latter is affixed above the campus doorbell.

Both signs carry symbols that expound and signify Tranby’s history and values. The banner in [photo 4.3](#) publicizes Tranby’s moniker, inception date, architecture, website, and contact information. The cultural signage in [photo 4.4](#) communicates Tranby’s ethical climate (Banning, 1997).

Finally, unifying symbols such as the Aboriginal flag raised outside the campus ([Photo 4.5](#)) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags posted on a desk in the primary administrative office ([Photos 4.6](#) and [4.7](#)) notify the Glebe community and Tranby constituents of the student population the institution proudly serves.



Photo 4.6: Unifying symbols.

ADDITIONAL COMPLIANCES WITH BANNING (2018), FUTURE LIMITATIONS, AND PERSONAL BIASES

“The camera does not take pictures, the photographers do – they choose what to photograph, suggesting they have an interpretation of why the photo is important.” - James H. Banning

In closing, and unless otherwise stated, I photographed all the images included in this paper. Given my own academic experience at a Historically Black University, my eye naturally and keenly zones in on ethnic artifacts, which enabled me to tour, audit, photograph, and interpret objects at Tranby swiftly (Banning, 2018). During my tour, I prioritized meeting with Tranby employees, particularly Tranby’s CEO, Belinda Russon, to understand their perspectives on the institutional culture (Banning, 2018). I also attended a class session with hopes of holding informal focus groups with students (Banning, 2018). Unfortunately, I arrived at Tranby a few weeks after the 2020 Australian bushfires began, which prevented many students from traveling to the campus, particularly those who reside in remote areas. These circumstances limited my ability to talk with students about their interactions with Tranby’s built environment (Banning, 2018).

It is also important to note that after departing Tranby, I flew to Townsville, Australia for a pre-arranged tour of James Cook University (JCU) to photograph Indigenous material culture there. While I did have the fortune of observing an awe-

inspiring smoking ceremony for incoming freshmen ([Photo 5.1](#)), and to photograph some on-campus learning circles ([Photo 5.2](#)), I was disappointed after learning the harsh colonial practices of James Cook and that a university would be named after him on what is obviously Indigenous land.



Photo 5.1: Smoking ceremony at JCU

The day after my tour, I took a 45-minute ferry ride from Townsville to Palm Island where I observed the aftermath of Cook's desecration and pillage firsthand. What I witnessed at Palm Island snatched and ripped a part of my essence that I have yet to recover. I am constantly haunted and hurt by the multitiered destitution of the island and the eerie ambiance and inheritance of forced displacement.

According to the Queensland Government website (2018), Palm Island is one of 16 islands in the Palm Island Group and has 2,340 residents. The isle was originally occupied by the Manburra people; most of the current residents are descendants of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders who were forcibly removed from Queensland to Palm Island by James Cook and his affiliates. Palm Island was also renamed by Cook from its Indigenous name

Bwgcolman (Moran, 2020), and converted into an Aboriginal reserve with human transfers to the island that spanned decades, and that Australian scientist, Thomas L. Bancroft, once described as 'the Black-fellows Graveyard' and 'filthiness and squalor' (Queensland Government, 2018).

Given my intrinsic sensitivity to the tribulations of people who look like me, I developed an immediate appreciation towards Tranby and bias against JCU after touring Palm Island, which might favorably skew future interpretations I make regarding Tranby's material culture. I also felt more welcomed at Tranby as an American woman of African descent and as someone who had traveled internationally to understand Indigenous campus artifacts. Thus, my excitement to share my experience at Tranby with others has remained with me long after my tour.



Ironically, in December 2020, JCU renamed the particular campus I toured Bebegu Yumba, which means "Place of Learning" in the Birri-Gubba language. The change was made as part of JCU's 50th year anniversary celebration and to acknowledge the role of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in the university's evolution (JCU, 2020). Still, the physical positioning and size of the new name in contrast to the large and bold letters that spell 'James Cook University' ([Photo 5.3](#)) brazenly bellows who the dominant and more powerful population is to the multibranch campus users (Banning, 2018), including its Indigenous students and visitors like me. As a woman who is a proud and beholden alumna of the historic Marva Collins' Westside Preparatory School, I know how emancipating attending a school named after

someone from your ethnic group can be. Conversely, attending a school named (or co-named) after an oppressor can reinforce the negative experiences associated with the oppressor, impede students' academic pursuits, and ultimately abide as heritage that hurts (Uzzell & Ballantyne, 1998).

It is my most earnest hope and invocation that in their higher learning undertakings, the noble people of Palm Island, as well as other Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, are positioned to matriculate at culturally affirming institutions such as Tranby where they will be empowered, celebrated, safeguarded, and elevated by the material (and nonmaterial) culture.

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In her professional role, Le'Passion collaborates with faculty to design and develop asynchronous graduate courses and faculty-facing e-Learning materials. Prior to studying learning design, Le'Passion managed college readiness programs for first-generation, college-bound students for our nation's most notable youth development organizations, including two Boys & Girls Club branches in her hometown of Chicago, Illinois. As Director of Girls Programming for the YWCA Evanston/ North Shore, Le'Passion developed her niche for leveraging campus artifacts and heritage to excite students to attend and graduate college.

Le'Passion's research interests are campus artifacts, campus heritage, and material culture at colleges and universities worldwide. To date, she has toured more than 90 colleges and universities in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America.

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