

# firstdraft

Gallery 1

8 December - 28 January

# The Enlightenment

Phyllis Stewart and Samantha Snedden

Curated by Samantha Snedden

@samanthasnedden | @weavingbysammi

*The Enlightenment*, curated by Samantha Snedden, seeks to disrupt conventional imaginings of weaving and woven work, specifically within the aesthetic scheme of the settler colony. A cheeky nod to the Age of Enlightenment, the exhibition reimagines what the emergence of new ideas can look like through a critical and playful use of First Nations weaving practices. In this exhibition you will see the relationship between an emerging weaver, Samantha Snedden and a master weaver, Phyllis Stewart through their work.

The exhibition is a portal into a woven world — our everyday objects including lampshades, teacup sets and more traditional First Nations objects, like water carriers are subject to Snedden and Stewart's contemporary interpretation. At the core of any woven piece, is a sense of presence and focus, requiring a strong practice of mindfulness and connection to each work. For First Nations peoples, weaving is a powerful, holistic practice with significant ties to one's well-being and mental health.

Poetry is an integral part of this exhibition. For Snedden, change can be made through stronger connection to culture and a deeper listening of First Nations voices from all Australians. With thought provoking questions, Snedden seeks to challenge outdated narratives and look ahead to the future, one that is enlightened with First Nations practices, stories and truth.

As part of the First Peoples Curators Program, Samantha was mentored by First Nations Curator, Tess Allas.

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**Shannon Toth**  
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Gallery 3  
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**Samantha Snedden** is a Dunghutti and Wiradjuri emerging artist and curator, who has grown up on and was born on Darug land. Connecting to culture and community has always been a passion, which has been passed down from her grandparents. Her late grandfather, David Wright taught her stringing, a weaving technique, as a young child. Years later Samantha reignited her weaving by learning to weave baskets, bracelets, and earrings. This passion for weaving has led her to her art practice today, expanding her weaving into new forms and creative expressions, particularly her iconic lampshades as well as unique woven responses.

While Samantha has been pursuing her practice she has been working as First Nations Program Producer for Museums of History NSW. She has developed and delivered a wide range of programs and events, working closely with community, artists, and Elders in the process. Samantha is also passionate about poetry, art and storytelling, particularly in how it can support alongside her main focus of weaving. Her first exhibition, 'The Enlightenment' is a combination of all of these passions, culminating in a thought provoking and insightful exploration into her practice and growing collection of work, spanning across multiple artforms and disciplines.

Samantha weaves for her own joy and expression, with the aim of sharing her work with others to spark inspiration, conversation and understanding. As her work has grown and expanded, she has now led a range of workshops and weaving classes for teachers, students and corporates, while producing commissioned works when available.

**Phyllis Stewart** is a Dharawal/Yuin painter, drawer, shellworker and weaver. She was born in Berry, NSW, in 1954 and has lived her whole life on the NSW South Coast. As with many South Coast Aboriginal women, Stewart was taught the art of shellworking objects as a child, in particular miniature shoes and slippers.

Stewart has said the main influences in her art practice are 'reflections on my life, my family,

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land and culture', and that she hopes her work will be a 'legacy for my grandchildren and future generations to value Aboriginal culture'.

Stewart has participated in many exhibitions – including South Coast Weavers at the University of Wollongong and Pallingjang II at Wollongong Art Gallery. In 2006, she was a finalist in the Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize with a shellworked 'painting'. Stewart has three shellworks and an octopus sculptured weaving in the permanent collection of the Wollongong Art Gallery that were purchased in 2002. In 2015, her shellwork was curated into Shimmer, - an exhibition that investigated the shellworking practices of Indigenous communities around Australia, and in 2023 Stewart's shellwork was included in the exhibition Thinking Through Pink – both exhibitions were held at Wollongong Art Gallery. Stewart's 2023 public artwork, Interwoven stories, is a 3-D printed woven work depicting traditional and contemporary life of First Nations people and migrating communities of Sydney and is now part of the Meriton apartment complex in Zetland.

*Text adapted from Design & Art Australia Online*

**Artworks** (clockwise from left, and top to bottom)

Samantha Snedden

*Ripples*, 2023

acrylic on canvas

30 cm x 20 cm

Samantha Snedden

*Ripples*, 2023

woven raffia

20 cm x 20 cm

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Samantha Snedden

*Large Wave Lampshade, 2023*

woven raffia

30 cm x 40 cm

Phyllis Stewart

*Woven Miniatures, 2023*

raffia, twine, rope and bark

58 pieces of 10 cm x 10 cm

\$2,500 for the collection

Phyllis Stewart

*Octopus 1, 2023*

lomandra

33 cm x 13 cm

\$750

Samantha Snedden

*Small Wave Lampshade, 2023*

woven raffia

30 cm x 40 cm

Phyllis Stewart

*Octopus 2, 2023*

lomandra

30 cm x 10 cm

\$750

Samantha Snedden

*Wall Piece, 2023*

woven raffia, emu feathers and gum nuts

30 cm x 18 cm

Samantha Snedden

*Small Lampshade, 2023*

woven raffia

17 cm x 10 cm

For sales enquiries, please email

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For weaving commissions, please email

[samanthasnedden@hotmail.com](mailto:samanthasnedden@hotmail.com)

Scroll to next page for essay  
by Samantha Snedden

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### Curator Essay

#### Weaving and Mentorship

Weaving has been around for thousands of years, as an artform and personal expression, as well as a skill to enhance ways of living and being on Country. Weaving has given me the opportunity to connect with my culture on a deeper level. I started weaving bracelets, but wanted to push myself and began working on baskets and experimenting with different materials, colours, and shapes. I wanted to weave something that would surprise people, something that most people would never expect to see woven by hand. This desire sparked the idea for my lampshades and this exhibition.

I began weaving lampshades with the aspiration of putting a blak lens on the light that fills our homes. My passion and dedication to becoming a better weaver and creative, led me to gain mentorship by Master Weaver, Phyllis Stewart. Phyllis has been an inspiration and the kind of warm, supportive and insightful mentor that I had always yearned for. Through this relationship, I was able to listen, observe, and learn from arguably one of the best weavers of our time.

In 2023, I commissioned Phyllis to create woven miniatures to add a new lens and layer to the overall exhibition experience. Miniatures consisting of a teacup set, pots and pans, octopi, foot-balls, and traditional water carriers amongst other domestic and traditional objects were all made by her expert hand. My hope in working with Phyllis and having her create these wonderful woven miniatures, was to provide the viewer with a deeper understanding that almost anything can be used as inspiration and anything can become a woven object using our traditional knowledge and techniques. My vision is for people to see that weaving is an incredibly diverse and creative medium, in the same way that our cultures are much more than people may see at first glance. Just like weaving, our cultures have many threads, layers, knowledge systems and expressions

The lampshades depict the journey of life. Light at the centre, with the ongoing path that circles the ups and downs. Then of course, meeting a time when there is a steady flow, and life is good. When you get a chance to look back on your journey, you see the experiences that shaped you. Whether they are perceived as good or not so good experiences, joyful or challenging times,

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we all have those experiences that mould us into our future selves. That's what the lampshades represent, the shaping of our lives, from the potential calm and monotony that come from steady times and routine, to the highs and lows of change and chaos. It's a part of us and our journey of how we navigate life. Each row gives me a new opportunity to weave differently and better, in the same way each year and each day gives us a chance to change and grow.

The woven pieces throughout the exhibition also explore and display the powerful practice of weaving and how it can support mental health and well-being. At the core of any woven piece, is a sense of presence and focus, requiring a strong practice of mindfulness and connection to each work.

My well-being and sense of connection is always lifted when I weave and I have had the good fortune of learning from Phyllis and other great women in my weaving journey.

## Artwork

The painting, 'Ripples' depicts two women together at a meeting place and their ongoing connection through culture, stories, love, and friendship. I painted this after my Nan passed away in 2020. She was a major part of my life and upbringing and is still in my mind and heart every day. I still feel her guiding me and I feel her love and warmth whenever I close my eyes, or when I look at a photo. I can definitely feel her love every time I look at this painting. It's a testament to the legacy we can have in our lifetime, as the love we give is the legacy we make and leave behind. It's also a beautiful parallel to the wonderful mentorship and connection I am now so thankful to have with Phyllis.

## Poetry

The poem 'Peace by Piece' is a reflection on history and the lack of truth telling that has persisted

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in this country across schools, media, cultural institutions and government. It's a change of tone and a juxtaposition to the weaving and art seen throughout the exhibition. The poem shines a light on the taking, piece by piece, of our land and our culture. The spelling of 'peace' is also a reference to the mental and emotional peace that was lost or damaged throughout the dispossession of our land and attempted erasure of our culture.

It also explores the fact that our knowledge systems, ways of living and our connection to Country were deliberately ignored or clearly misunderstood by the same people who were supposedly wise and educated, sophisticated and enlightened. Until of course, our knowledge and wisdom were essential to their survival, upon which they were happy to take and use for their own benefit. Despite the debates and misinformation that persists across media and socials, we are reclaiming what is rightfully ours. Our culture is strong and growing stronger every day. The way our young ones are being raised and engaging with culture, celebrating who they are and being proud of where they come from. Elders who were punished for practicing their own culture, are now able to speak language and share stories and knowledge. And, in a post-referendum Australia we proudly say "We are still here, we are not going anywhere, and the future is ours to create."

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