



Government of Western Australia
PERCENT FOR ART SCHEME

SOUTH METROPOLITAN AREA HEALTH SERVICE



This series of paintings for the South Metropolitan Area Health Service, by indigenous artist Deborah Bonar, illustrates the inextricable link between health and the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Connection to country is of great importance to the artist and indigenous people as it contributes to their wellbeing and sense of identity.

Deborah's Aboriginal identity, Gija (East Kimberly) and Yamatji (Mid-west regions of Western Australia) and her growth as an artist are strongly interwoven. Creating these works provides her with a voice and artistic expression necessary to tell her interpretive stories of her culture and her people's strong spiritual connection to land, water and nature. Deborah has developed a unique and delicate, yet complex, style of paintings of abstract shapes and prismatic colours that reflect energy, optimism, balance and harmony. The myriad dots and motifs on the works symbolise the footprints of her ancestors as they travelled across the country to meeting places.

These four acrylic paintings titled *"Healing and Wellbeing"* feature lakes, rivers and wetlands, which add great beauty to the landscape. Water flows through the earth's veins and is essential for all life, for people, animals and plants. Bonar's artwork is an exploration and a celebration of her Gija and Yamatji heritage. She reconnects with her culture through her art.

"Ageing" - Elders keep our culture strong and pass on their wisdom and knowledge to their families. Older people are valued and respected in Aboriginal communities.

"Birth" - The grandmother gathers bark, dry wood and leaves to make a smoking ceremony for the baby. She digs a shallow pit for the fire so the heat is kept away from the child. She uses strong, firm massaging strokes to coat the baby's skin with the fragrant

smoke. The smoking ceremony makes the baby strong and healthy. It also helps to heal a sick baby.

"Bush Medicine" - Local plants were used for bush medicine. The moist gum from Eucalyptus gum trees was applied to fresh wounds to slow bleeding, or diluted with water to make an antiseptic solution, or a mouthwash.

"Strong Women" - When a young woman is starting a family of her own, her mother and aunties give her help and advice on how to look after her own health when she is pregnant. They show her how to breastfeed and look after her baby when it is born, to keep it strong and healthy.

"Healing and Wellbeing" are artworks that enrich the Health Service environment and resonate with meaning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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