

# Steven Russell

## About the artist



### Short Biography

Born: 1957

Dharawal  
Bidjigal (south-east region), Eora  
(South-east region)  
Lives and works in Gerringong, NSW  
South Coast

**Steve Russell** (*Bidjigal*) is a master weaver, drawer and painter who is the son and great-great grandson of La Perouse shellworkers Esme and Queen Emma Timbery. His works demonstrate a deep connection and appreciation of his Country, including around the Botany Bay area. He creates work, relearning past cultural practices, “waking up traditions” and runs workshops to pass on knowledge.

Russell was inspired to join West Wollongong TAFE teacher Kelli Ryan and eight other students to build the Boolarng Nangamai Aboriginal Art and Culture Studio at Gerringong in 2000. Since forming, work from the studio has been included in the 2012 Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW, The National Gallery of Australia and the Wollongong

City Gallery.

He established “Jungah Weavers” with Phyllis Stewart and Kristine Stewart.

In 2009, the Museum of Sydney commissioned some of the Boolarng artists, including Russell, to recreate the work of their ancestors. The artists were invited to respond to original family works in the Australian Museum collection such as spears, nets, dilly bags, hooks, shields, water carriers, digging sticks and axes. The work produced now forms part of the Museum of Sydney’s permanent display.

## Artist Practice

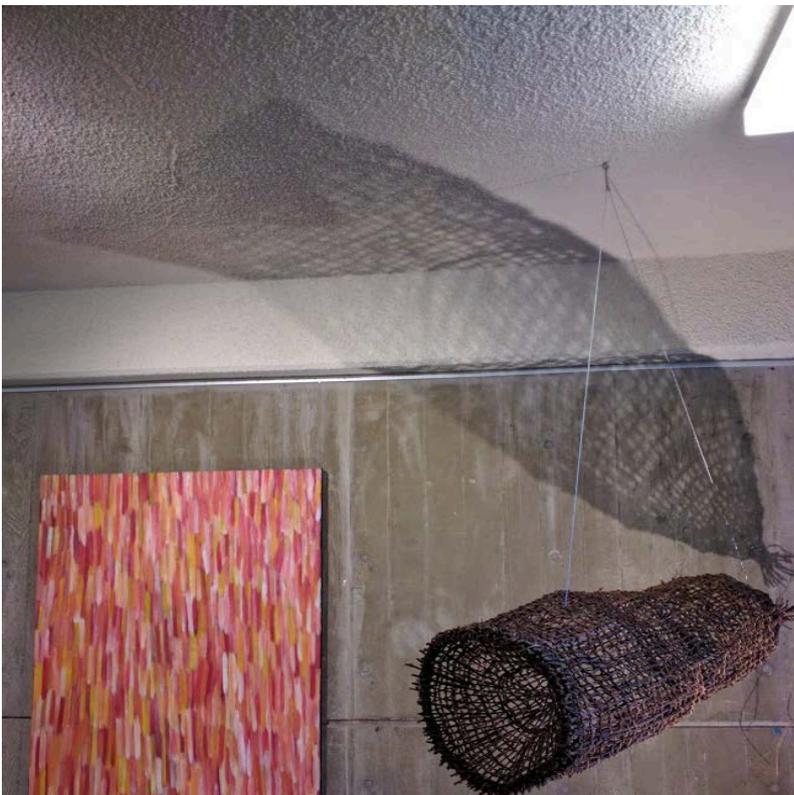
The Fish Trap 2017 uses indigenous plants, *Kennedia prostrata* [Running Postman] and *Cayratia clematidea* [native grape], which are dried and then re-soaked before use. One plant forms the sturdier framework, the other, the netting. The Boolarng artists cultivate a “weaving garden” of reeds as part of their practice.

Conceptually, Russell’s practice is “rewaking” cultural practices, temporarily sidelined by missionaries and colonial agencies. He passes on his knowledge through workshops.

## Art work

The Fish Trap is a commissioned work. It is modelled on fishtraps from the Bidjagal region that Russell researched in museums. The fishtrap is designed to funnel fish into the trap. They are released by untying one end and shaking the catch out. Rocks would be placed inside the trap to anchor it at a suitable location. This design would have been used in estuaries.

Russell's material practice involves gathering suitable natural vines, selected for rigidity and strength or flexibility. These are dried and then resoaked to become pliable. A framework is formed through which the more pliable fibre is woven.



*Fish Trap*

2017

Woven sculptural form - *Kennedia prostrata* [Running Postman] and *Cayratia clematidea* [native grape]  
1050 x 500 mm