



The Comfort Provided by Artwork During COVID-19

Aunty Lucy Williams-Connelly
Waradgerie (Wiradjuri)
Interviewed by Andrew Stephens
May 2020



Sometimes when Aunty Lucy Williams-Connelly goes on a trip, or heads out along the highway, she will see something in the natural world that sticks with her. It may be a certain tree, or a particular view, but it gets into her bones and her mind. Asleep in the night, she will dream of what she has seen: it emerges, it wakes her, and she gets up to deal with it.

“All the things you see on the side of the road,” she says. “Well, they get into your brain.”

While it might be two or three in the morning when she is awakened, she simply sets to work getting that image recorded. She’ll work for a few hours on it because she likes to get things finished.

An artist who has been making things since she was nine years old – she’s now almost 80 – Aunty Lucy’s work is sold in shops, including at the Koorie Heritage Trust. Her work also makes its way via gifts or purchases into people’s homes, though she describes herself as “not a very good salesperson”. Even so, the authenticity and beauty of her works speak for themselves and perhaps need no marketing ambassadors.

Aunty Lucy has lived in the Swan Hill area for about 67 years, but the past year has been marked by illness, which has kept her indoors a lot of the time. Unexpectedly, being indoors was great preparation for the COVID-19 pandemic: she has grown used to the sort of lifestyle that is governed by restriction, and the use of facemasks in public is no great extra burden either. Overall, Aunty Lucy says she has coped pretty well since the outbreak began and lockdowns were imposed.

“I live inside, I’m doing pretty good,” Aunty Lucy says. “I am mainly inside doing something anyway. I am not a ‘street’ sort of person; I am not a visiting person, I don’t visit anybody. I’ve worked all my life and I never had friends because I never had time.”

Now, she spends a lot of time creating her artwork. “The ‘friend’ is the work,” Aunty Lucy says. Her activities in this department range from crochet and using pine needles to carving emu eggs (she was once told the



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egg-carving was ‘men’s work only’ but begged to differ and made sure she learned how to do it). The main component of her art-making, though, is rendering images on wood and paperbark using a hot-wire technique.

These paperbark works have an especially interesting genesis. Aunty Lucy collects bark from various trees around the Swan Hill area and pulls it apart in strips. “It is like making a book, because you ‘turn’ the pages by pulling it off,” she says. The strips are then pressed between bricks and she has to wait until they are completely dried out before setting to work on making the picture. When she does, she begins by drawing the images that have come to mind from her dreams. Then she uses the hot wire – a wire that is heated by putting it into a firebox – to trace over and embellish the picture.

She remembers how her parents – both of whom were also artists – loved doing their art-making. She learnt the hot-wire technique from her father, who would use fencing wire for his work. Now, decades later, Aunty Lucy does this work too, sitting at her kitchen table, or in the lounge-room – it doesn’t matter where, because the work absorbs her. It is a comfort for her during difficult, restrictive times.

Aunty Lucy Williams-Connelly is a Waradgerie (Wiradjuri) Elder based in Swan Hill, Victoria. Aunty Lucy is a painter, wood burner, emu egg carver and basket maker, trained in bark painting and wood burning by her father, and emu egg carving by her uncle.