

FUTURE COUNTRY

COUNTRY ROAD +
NGV FIRST NATIONS COMMISSIONS

THE IAN POTTER CENTRE:
NGV AUSTRALIA
20 MAR – 13 SEP 2026

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Installation view of Pitta Pitta artist **Jahkarli Felicitas Romanis**' work *Channels 2025*, mentored by Wiradjuri artist Brook Andrew on display in *FUTURE COUNTRY: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions* from 20 March – 13 September at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Sean Fennessy

EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to *FUTURE COUNTRY* to support the following Learning Outcomes of VCE Art Making and Exhibiting:

Unit 2: Understand, develop and resolve, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

Unit 3: Collect, extend and connect, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

Unit 4: Consolidate, present and conserve, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation and conservation at the NGV refer to **Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV**





ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions is a national mentorship exhibition program that pairs eight emerging First Nations artists and designers with established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives, presenting a unique opportunity to connect and share intergenerational knowledge, and foster artistic and professional growth.

FUTURE COUNTRY celebrates land, legacy, community and cultural continuity. In response to the exhibition's key themes of ancestral memory, re-storying, truth-telling and future-making, participating artists have created deeply personal, culturally significant and innovative works that engage Indigenous futures and envision alternative realities.

Each of the artists share an empowering message affirming the strength, resilience and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, languages, and cultures past, present and future.

FUTURE COUNTRY reflects the dynamism and depth of contemporary First Nations art and design by emerging practitioners.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

The exhibition features eight newly commissioned works spanning weaving, photography, sculpture, possum skin cloak making, moving image, sound and design.

KEY TEAM MEMBERS

SENIOR CURATOR, FIRST NATIONS ART

Dr Jessica Clark

EXHIBITION DESIGNER

Allie Mactier

CONSERVATOR OF INDIGENOUS ART

Genevieve Sullivan

KEY ARTISTS

Artist

Paul Girrawah House
Ngambri-Kamberri/Ngurmal (Walgalu)/Pajong
(Gundungurra)/Wallaballoo/Erarnbie/Brungle
(Wiradyuri)

Boneta-Marie Mabo
Nywaigi/Meriam/Manbarra

Nunami Sculthorpe-Green
Palawa/Warpiri

Carly Tarkari Dodd
Kaurna/Narungga/Ngarindjeri

Katie West
Yindjibarndi

Jahkarli Romanis
Pitta Pitta

Stephanie Ali
Burarra

Charlotte Allingham
Wiradjuri/Ngiyampaa

Mentor

Brenda L Croft
Gurinji/Malngin/Mudburra,
Anglo-Australian, Chinese, German,
Irish, Scottish

Megan Cope
Quandamooka

Lola Greeno
Trawoolway

Yhonnie Scarce
Kokatha/Nukunu

Clothilde Bullen
Wardandi (Nyoongar)/Badimaya (Yamatji)

Brook Andrew
Wiradjuri

Doreen Jinggarrabarra
Burarra

Karla Dickens
Wiradjuri

CURATORIAL RATIONALE

The primary aim of *FUTURE COUNTRY* is to support the foundation of emerging First Nations artists' careers by commissioning them to create their most ambitious works to date. Participating artists were invited to respond to themes of ancestral memory, re-storying, truth-telling and future-making.

CURATORIAL PROCESS

COMMISSIONING ARTISTS

In early 2025, representatives from the NGV's First Nations Curatorial team reached out to 8 emerging artists from across various Australian states and commissioned them to produce an artwork for the proposed exhibition. Each artist was paired with a more established artist mentor and invited to respond to suggested themes of ancestral memory, re-storying, truth-telling and future-making in their work. Supported by their mentors, the artists began their creative journeys, producing their works throughout 2025.

BUILDING THE CHECKLIST AND ARRANGING THE ARTWORKS

Once the artworks were completed, essential details – including titles, materials, dimensions and display considerations – were documented in a checklist. This document enabled the curator, Dr Jessica Clark, and exhibition designer, Allie Mactier, to arrange the artworks within a floorplan and 3D model of the gallery space weeks prior to the physical installation of the exhibition. In developing the exhibition layout, they first determined which artworks would bookend either side of the exhibition. They positioned Stephanie Ali's *Jin-gapala, jin-mirrkajariya, jin-merdawa* as the first work encountered for the way it filled the space and invited visitors to look upwards. Katie West's *Shiela's Dream* was selected as the final work, as the contained, darkened space at the end of the exhibition was best suited to its audiovisual elements. Each of the remaining artworks were distributed to allow visitors to experience them individually while, in some cases, recognizing shared aesthetic and thematic qualities. For example, Boneta-Marie Mabo's *Colonial threads* and Carly Takari Dodd's *Great Grandfather Seth and Great Nanna Bella* share a space as textile works centered on truth-telling.

WALL TEXTS AND LABELS

The curator also developed the exhibition's the wall texts and labels. In line with the curatorial rationale of foregrounding emerging First Nations artists' voices, much of the written content features direct quotations from the artists.



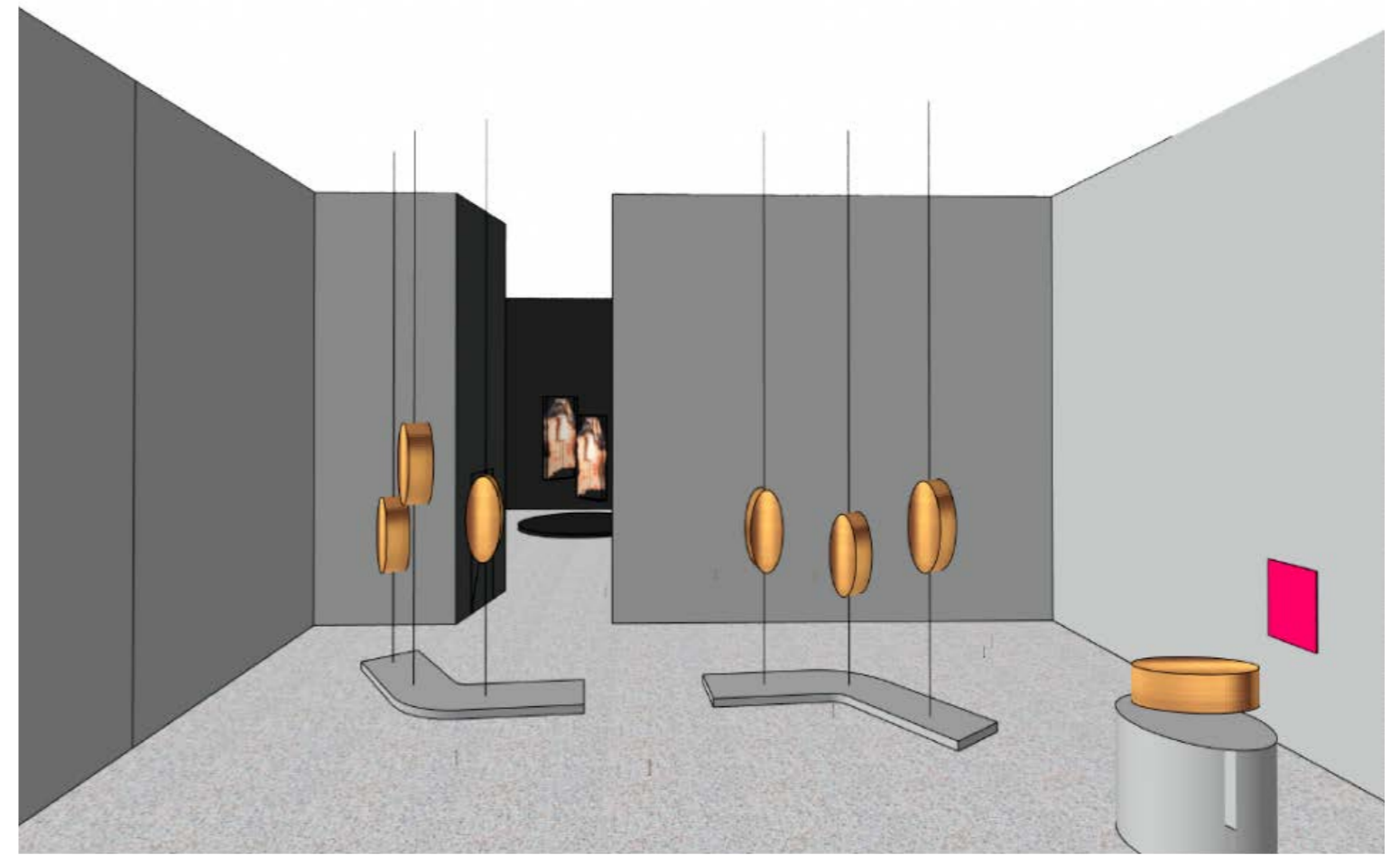
(previous) Installation view of Wiradjuri/Ngilympaa artist **Charlotte Allingham** (Coffinbirth)'s work *Maggie Doll!* 2025, mentored by Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens on display in *FUTURE COUNTRY: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions* from 20 March – 13 September at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Sean Fennessy (right) Artist Stephanie Ali (left) with mentor Doreen Jinggarbarra (right) preparing pandanus for weaving. Photo: Alana Holmberg

EXHIBITION DESIGN

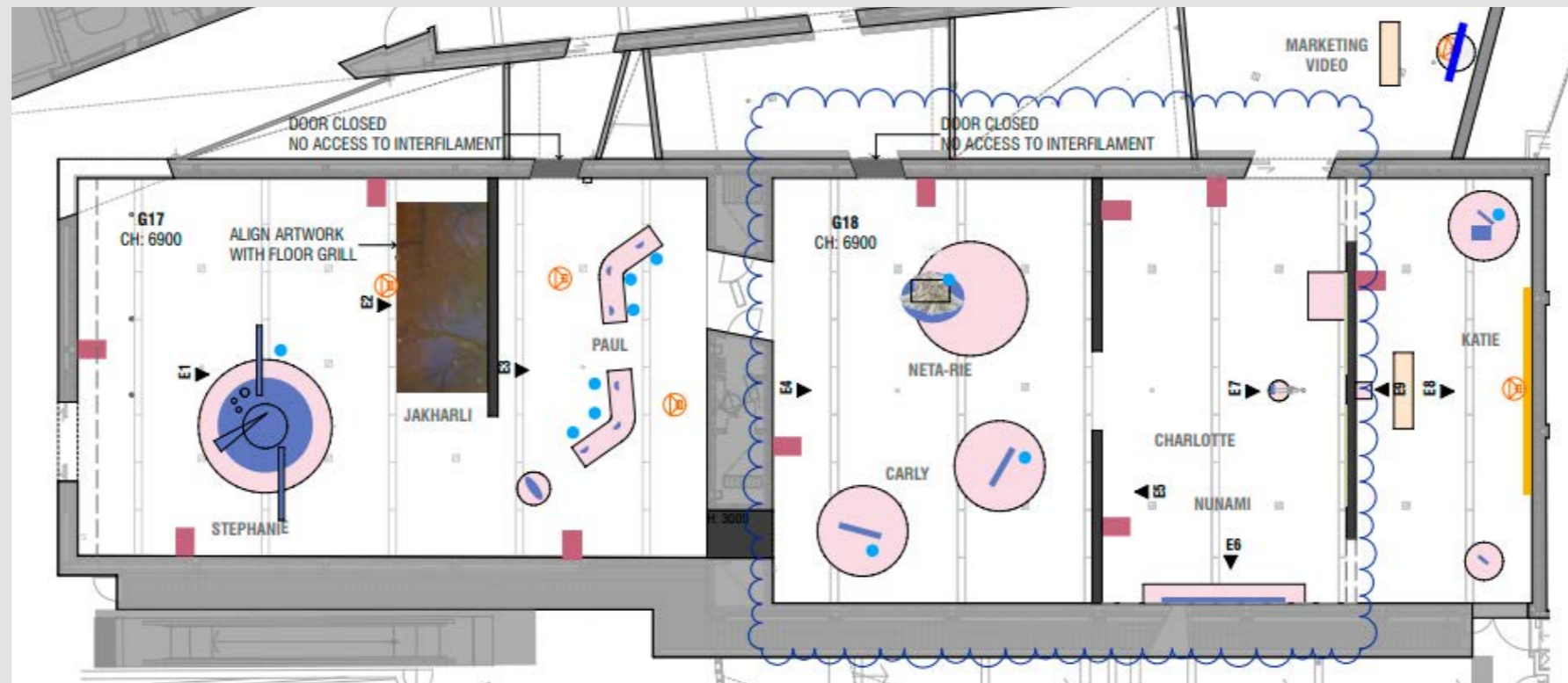
FUTURE COUNTRY is on level 3 of the Ian Potter Centre. For the purposes of the exhibition, the two existing gallery rooms were divided into five spaces with the construction of three temporary walls. These spatial divisions enabled the eight artworks in the show to be arranged according to the curator's vision.

Because *FUTURE COUNTRY* is a group show with a high degree of variation between artworks and mediums, the exhibition design team decided upon restrained wall colours of Dulux Dieskau – a light grey – and Dulux Domino – a soft black – which alternate from room to room. Lighting also emphasizes contrasts between spaces as visitors move from brightly lit rooms with grey walls to darker spaces painted in a soft black with spot lit works.

As most of the artworks in the exhibition are sculptural, the designers aimed to bring them into the centre of each space, allowing visibility room for visitors to circulate around them. The plinths have been designed to safely contain the artworks as well as influence the flow of visitors through the gallery rooms. For example, Paul Girrawah House's bronze cast coolamons are displayed above plinths, which are curved to reflect how the visitor might move through the narrow space.



A virtual model of the exhibition space showing the curved plinths supporting the installation of Paul Girrawah House's *The Ngambri-Kamberri-Canberra Walgalu-Wiradyuri coolamons* (*Giyalang-belonging to a group*)



Detail of a floorplan made by the exhibition design team detailing artwork locations, plinth fabrications and temporary alterations to the space

CONSERVATION

Broadly speaking, the conservator's role is to maintain artworks in their optimal state for as long as possible.

The conservation team for FUTURE COUNTRY oversaw the safe transit of artworks from different artist studios across Australia to the NGV. With the artworks in their custody, they prepared them for display, considering and mitigating the risks of presenting them to the public. Throughout the exhibition, the team will inspect, clean and maintain artworks, as well as monitor the humidity, temperature and light levels of the gallery space. Once the exhibition is over, conservators will determine methods to safely deinstall and store these eight newly acquired works in the NGV Collection.

SELECTED WORKS

JAHKARLI ROMANIS – *CHANNELS*

ABOUT

Jahkarli Felicitas Romanis is a Pitta Pitta woman born and raised on Wadawurrung Country and currently based on Wurundjeri Country in Naarm/Melbourne. Her work spans photography, moving image and spoken word, informed by family stories, oral histories and archival research.

The photographic installation *Channels* features a large-scale landscape photograph of the artist's Ancestral lands on Pitta Pitta Country, North-West Queensland. Romanis invites audiences to walk across the image – which stretches almost to the ceiling and extends across the floor – with the intention that it will change over time. Paired with the transportive sounds of Country recorded at the time of image-making, *Channels* prompts reflection on individual and collective impacts on the 'health and wellbeing of Country' while challenging the inherent cultural bias embedded in colonial image-making and archival practices.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Because of its large scale, the photographic image in *Channels* was printed as six separate prints and adhered together with double-sided tape in the gallery space. Despite Romanis's intention for her image to be walked on and changed over time, the conservation team planned measures to ensure it wouldn't be unnecessarily altered during deinstallation and storage. They applied a barrier layer of Japanese tissue, with a heat-set adhesive beneath, to avoid further damage during the separation of the six panels at deinstall.

Whilst, preparing Romanis's work for display, the conservation team identified the risk of someone walking over the curved area of the image close to the wall and ripping it. As a preventative measure, the team adhered a layer of fabric along the reverse side of the top edge of the panels for reinforcement.

At the end of the exhibition, each of the six prints that make up *Channels* will be rolled onto cylinders, and any dust or signs of wear acquired throughout its display will be retained as part of the work.



SELECTED WORKS

STEPHANIE ALI – *JIN-GAPALA*, *JIN-MIRRKAJARRIYA*, *JIN-MERDAWA*

ABOUT

Stephanie Ali is the eldest daughter of senior weaver Doreen Jinggarrabarra and the granddaughter of Elizabeth Mipilanggurr, an expert weaver connected to the Blythe River region. Her father's Country is Yilan and her mother's Country is Jina-wunya. From an early age, Ali was taught to collect, prepare and weave pandanus under the guidance of her mother and aunts.

Jin-gapala, *jin-mirrkajariya*, *jin-merdawa* materialises the cultural knowledge passed down to Ali over her lifetime, as well as knowledge gathered across generations spanning millennia. Featuring a meticulously handwoven series of suspended cultural objects, *Jin-gapala*, *jin-mirrkajariya*, *jin-merdawa* honours intergenerational knowledges by sharing stories of women's weaving practices in Maningrida, celebrating their continuation into the present and for future generations. As Ali explains, 'I'm proud that I'm weaving what my forebears made for fishing and gathering bush foods'.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The woven forms of Ali's work retain a memory of shape when tightly folded and require careful handling and storage to support their structural integrity. In preparation for the show, some works were rolled onto cylinders and others were stored with soft padding to maintain their form and prevent the development of creases. A light humidification treatment was undertaken on the floor mat to ease a crease that had formed. After the treatment, conservators rested the mat flat for several days allowing it to gradually return to its natural shape.

As Ali's pieces are woven from natural fibres they will continue to dry over time. For this reason stable and controlled environmental conditions are essential for their long-term preservation. The gallery spaces always stay within a temperature range of 16 to 25°C and a relative humidity range of 40 to 60%. The works are also highly sensitive to light, with prolonged exposure leading to colour shift and fading; accordingly, the works can only be exposed to low light levels and at the conclusion of the exhibition must have a sufficient period in storage to rest. While such objects were originally made for everyday use and exposure to varied environments, their presentation within a gallery context requires a more controlled approach to ensure the object remains in good condition for as long as possible.



Installation view of Burarra artist **Stephanie Ali's** work *Jin-gapala*, *jin-mirrkajariya*, *jin-merdawa* (*Senior women, young mothers and girls*) 2025, mentored by Burarra artist Doreen Jinggarrabarra on display in *FUTURE COUNTRY: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions* from 20 March – 13 September at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Garry Sommerfeld

SELECTED WORKS

BONETA-MARIE MABO – *COLONIAL THREADS*

ABOUT

Boneta-Marie Mabo is a Nywaigi, Meriam and Manbarra woman whose multidisciplinary work explores notions of resistance, memory, identity and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Colonial threads positions 238 faceless hand-stitched white cotton ragdolls – collectively representing 238 years of colonisation – within a rusted-iron antique cot. Suspended above is a hand-stitched baby mobile, embroidered with text reading 'care' and 'justice.' Mabo has dedicated this work to the countless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls who were taken from their families, denied culture and language, and subjected to colonial violence and forced labour under Queensland's *Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865*. *Colonial threads* highlights 'the colonial myth of protective care', while acknowledging the strength, resilience and sovereignty of First Nations peoples of so-called Australia, and the family reconnections and cultural reclamation that continue today.

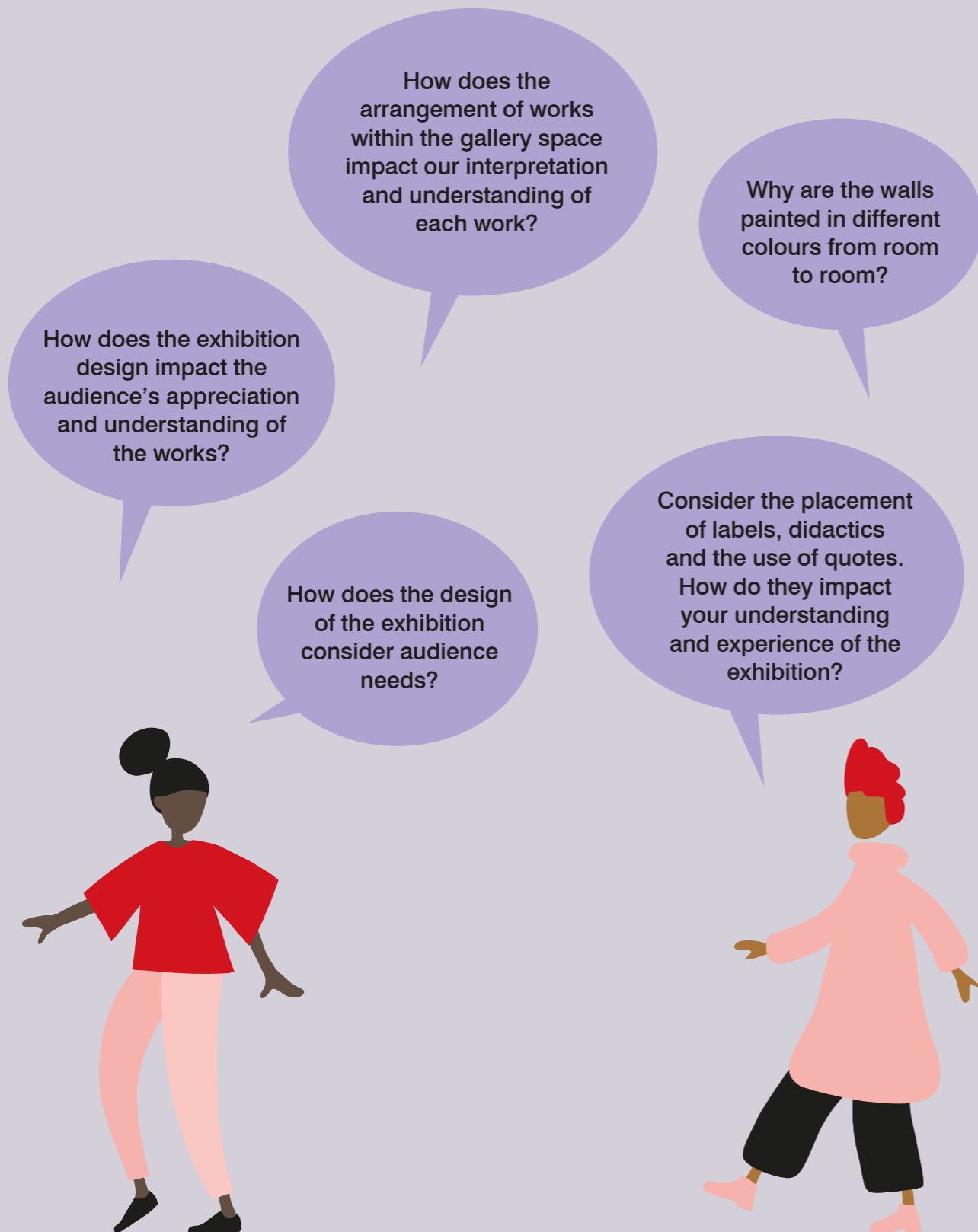
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The textile components of *Colonial threads* – including the wool, dolls and cushions – were frozen upon arrival at the Gallery as a preventive conservation measure. Although the works were only recently crafted and presented in good condition, the process ensured any potential pests were contained and unable to migrate to other artworks. This process will be repeated when the work is deinstalled prior to storage. In consultation with the artist, additional measures were implemented to maintain the stability of the installation and limit audience interaction, including the use of a large plinth with an extended reach distance.



Installation view of Nywaigi/Meriam/Manbarra artist **Boneta-Marie Mabo's** work *Colonial threads* 2025, mentored by Quandamooka artist Megan Cope on display in *FUTURE COUNTRY: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions* from 20 March – 13 September at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Sean Fennessy

IN THE GALLERY



FURTHER RESOURCES

- This resource is designed to support VCE Art Making and Exhibiting **Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting**
- VCE Art Exhibiting and Making **Study Design and VCAA support materials for implementation 2026**
- National Gallery of Victoria, **Explore Conservation**

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The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support of the NGV School Support Program.