

WHEN LOUISE MARNE FIRST ENTERED THE OUTBACK ARTS OFFICE over eight months ago I was presented with an extraordinary woman with a deep conviction for the sharing and rediscovery of her traditional culture. Louise is an artist, a storyteller, a weaver.

It is one day before Louise leaves for Adelaide. I walk from Coonamble Caravan Park with a beautiful carved emu egg wrapped in a painted soft cloth inside a gorgeous dilly bag. I feel the weight of these gifts — the skilfully etched egg created by her partner Jim Gordon and the dyed jute-string dilly bag — because it's rare she has any on her, Louise laughs, "I got a tendency of giving them all away."

Louise Marne is one of fifteen fibre artists internationally to be accepted into the Tjanpi Desert Weavers Project at WOMADelaide World Music & Dance Festival 9–11 March 2007 in Adelaide. The project is a unique skills exchange led by six fibre artists

weaving yarn

by ANGELA SIDOTI

from the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands which lie close to the borders of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

There's a simplicity to weaving, Louise explains. "It's something we can all sit down and do as we're yarning and something we can share easily and bring back and have something to show for what we do too with our time." And while she prepares for Tjanpi with me she shares her stories; a slow weave spun-string telling of her hopes, the greatest being that it will "help me restore what's missing in this area, to recreate the weaving here."

Childhood memories exploring the spectacular Brewarrina Fisheries with her mother, a Murawari woman she would watch mend her father's fishing nets, are vivid. "She used to point out certain things they used to do along the fisheries; whether it was good weather for the reeds, you know, when to take them, when not to take them." Since those days the determined artist has spent countless hours at the near devastated Macquarie Marshes in western NSW collecting native grasses and experimenting with curing treatments. "I kind of missed that with watching, being so young," she says. Rediscovering this process has proven a difficulty, despite Louise's many efforts, so her experience has been working non-traditional fibres. "I've never had the privilege of using traditional grasses or anything like that. I've more or less used fishing line, raffia,



butchers string, thick fishing cord, recycled hats from the op shop." The traditional dilly bags Louise makes are special, each one with a different purpose, a different tale. "I think the bag, once it's made and, you know, where it's come from and who made it and its story ... it holds a lot of strength."

Central to Louise's passion for the weave is passing knowledge on to others, like her children. "They want to learn it, and that's important, that's why I think that I do it — because I want other people to see and feel the importance of our culture." I think of the loss Louise has often spoken about, the missing knowledge. Does she believe it can it be found again? Without hesitation she answers, "Oh yes for sure. To learn from such knowledgeable women with such a craft that is in our country, in our Aboriginal country, which in our homelands is almost lost. These women have a lot to offer to our region. Being a part of Tjanpi and what they've got to offer is just a great privilege."

Day 4 of Tjanpi. Louise is on the phone from Adelaide. "You know they don't make dilly bags everywhere. One of the old women asked me to make one for her." I smile recalling her words, "Just about everybody ends up with a dilly bag". ■

Angela Sidoti is the RADO for Outback Arts

Louise Marne with one of her dilly bags
Photo: Angela Sidoti.



May

4 – 5 May

🎭 Shakespeare Festival Performances, workshops and feasts, celebrating the work of the famous playwright. **GLOUCESTER** Recreation Grounds, Tel 02 6558 1408 www.gloucester.org.com.au/shakespeare

4 – 6 May

🎷 Yalumba Thredbo Jazz Festival
3 days of jazz, food and music in the Snowy Mountains, **THREDBO**
Website www.thredbojazz.com

4 May – 2 June

👁️ *Earthly Encounters* Studio ceramics of local artists in the Central West, Bega Valley Regional Gallery, **BEGA**
Tel 02 6499 2187 (See story p.31)

5 May

🎭 Danny Bhoj A One of the most popular international comedians touring the Australian festival circuit. \$32.90/\$29.90
Star Court Theatre, **LISMORE**
Tel 02 6622 0300
Website www.norpa.org.au