

Feature

Koorie



Night Market

The Koorie Night Market: cultural connector,
meeting place and business incubator

By Timmah Ball

At the Koorie Night Markets
Photographs by Bindi Cole (top), Steven Rhall (below), James Henry (right)

The Koorie Night Market is a regular arts, food, culture, and music market that debuted in 2008. Since then it has developed significantly to become a community event that showcases Indigenous culture. The idea had been on the City of Darebin's agenda for 10 years, but it took the work of market co-coordinator Deb Salvagno and stall liaison officer Eva-Jo Edwards to get it off the ground. Eva-Jo travelled through Victoria from Mildura, along the Murray and across the centre, down to Warrnambool and over to Gippsland to find Indigenous artists, craft makers and performers interested in participating.

The aim was to demonstrate the depth of Victorian Indigenous culture, addressing assumptions that the most interesting displays of Indigenous culture occurred only at the top end of Australia—a view that has only acted to downplay and marginalise urban and regional Aboriginal communities throughout the rest of Australia. The Koorie night market has evolved into a regular series of markets which take place in a range of locations throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria. The market has significant value to Indigenous Victorians as a gathering place as well as being a networking and

career development platform. Equally important is its status as a cultural connector in providing a space for a range of Australians to engage with the Koorie people and their art.

The Koorie Night Market Vision:

To have a vibrant, viable and innovative Koorie Night Market enterprise that creates opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote their culture now and into the future.

To be a cultural showcase, meeting place, community builder and business incubator, giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access to the resources they need, the space to promote their culture, and the opportunity to achieve their potential.

To bring people of all nations together to build socially-inclusive communities where diversity and differences are embraced and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, heritage, sacred and significant sites are acknowledged, respected and protected.

Our vision is guided by principles of collaboration, respect and equity.

At the Koorie Night Markets you'll find stall-holders who not only sell authentic wares but can demonstrate how they were created and the stories and concepts involved. The result is a deeply personal relationship that is transferred between the creator and their product. I had the opportunity to interview store-holder and artist Safina Fergie to get a further understanding of the success, value and ongoing need for the Koorie Night Markets.

Visual Artist: Safina Fergie

Country: Mabuiag Island (Torres Straits) and Wuthathi country (QLD)

Location: Melbourne

Tell us a bit about your art practice. How long have you been working as an artist?



Photograph by Tania Weston

I've been painting for about five years. I was always a kid who loved painting and creating things. My acrylic paintings each carry a story about the relationships we hold with others and our Creator. I aim to share messages of hope through the vibrant tones and fluid line work that I use to tell the story behind each painting. I've worked on many private and corporate commissioned projects and exhibited in group and solo shows. Producing acrylic paintings, fine art pigment prints, sharing cultural insights through school artist-in-residence programs (I'm also a trained high school teacher), and joining the Koorie Night Market have been recent highlights.

When did you start selling work at the Markets?

I've been selling at the Koorie Night Market since December 2009. I love



Photograph by Bradi Cole



Photograph by Tania Weston

how the market setting allows me to get up and close to people interested in my art. It gives me a chance to connect one-on-one with them and it's an invigorating thrill when the stories expressed in my art connect with the stories of their life experiences.

Have the markets helped you find a greater audience for your work?

Definitely! The market tours to so many regions of Victoria and links me to people and companies that I may not have connected with otherwise. Consequently, I've had art purchased and sent interstate and overseas because of this wider audience exposure.

Do you think they are a good way to promote Indigenous culture to wider audiences?

Absolutely. There is such a strong and proud representation of the broad spectrum of Indigenous creative and performing arts at these markets. It's a chance for us mob to gather together and showcase this deadly talent.

What other experiences have come from your involvement?

Being a part of the Koorie Night Market has allowed me to further develop my business, connect with other Indigenous artists and broaden my networks. It has also been a place of inspiration and opportunity to develop and explore my chosen creative communication medium, which for me is wonderfully life-giving.



Photograph by James Harry



Photograph by Steven Rhall

Artist Safina Fergie



Southern Cross Turtle by Safina Fergie