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Gunyah artists-in-residence program provides low cost self-contained accommodation for solo, collaboration, group and family short term creative residencies for visual artists, writers, composers, designers, curators, new media and performance artists.

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Merridy Eastman: artist-in-residence Sept 2017

My Gunyah trip was a desperately needed break from a stressful year of moving house, being a working mum and carer for two dear elderly parents in Hobart. The book I'm writing is about discovering that our family is not descended from a Spanish pirate, as our Nana told us, but from a Worimi man from Paterson. For the last three years I've been gathering research on our family ancestry, as well as the Worimi people, their culture and history. So the best thing about the Gunyah residency for me, even before I got there, was that it's located in Worimi country. And although I'd grown up visiting my grandparents in Allworth half an hour's drive away, I'd never been to North Arm Cove and wasn't expecting anything so beautiful as the location, let alone this open, light, welcoming timber built house.



Merridy Eastman, Gunyah AIR Sept 2017

Gunyah



Gunyah is a private split-level timber pole house set in a bushland garden overlooking the waterways of Port Stephens. The artists-in-residence program offers an idyllic retreat to produce artwork or pursue creative research. 'Gunyah' is an Aboriginal word, meaning resting place or place of shelter, this term is found in a number of Indigenous languages in NSW, including the Gathang/Kattang language of the Worimi people in the North Arm Cove area.

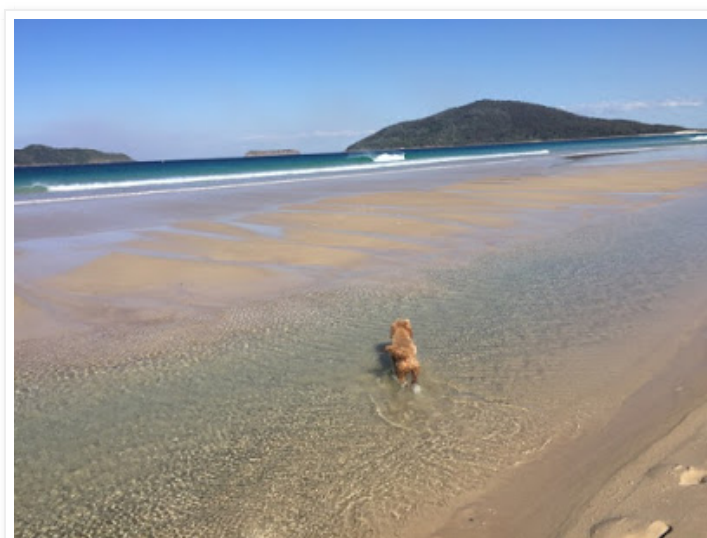
Acknowledgement of Country

"Gunyah artists-in-residence program acknowledges and pays respect to the Worimi people - the traditional custodians of this land - to their elders past and present, it is on their ancestral lands that the Gunyah artist-in-residence program is located."

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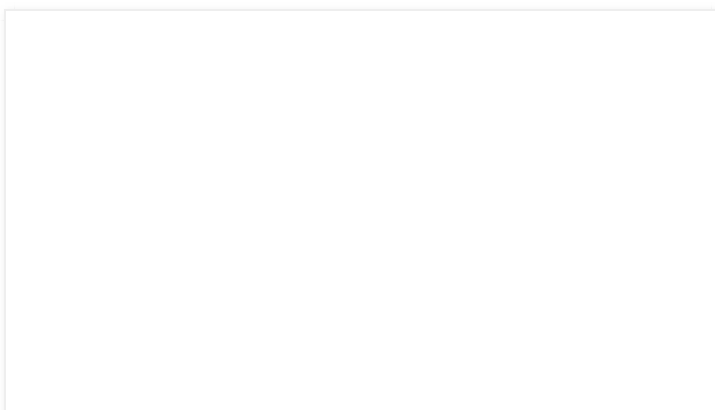
The very first thing I did was set out all my books, my research papers, my computer and screen on the large dining table overlooking the tall gum trees and the water below (where the Karuah River meets Bundabah Creek) before exploring my new, peaceful surroundings with an afternoon walk accompanied by my elated sensory-overwhelmed companion, Teddy. We were both in heaven.

Every day it was such a pleasure to wake up to the sound of the wind in the trees all around us, birds singing, and the water lapping below, (and hilariously on just one occasion - in the middle of the bush- the sound of a leaf blower!) Every day I got so much reading, research and writing done, and always with an afternoon break with Teddy, either sitting on the jetty downstairs, or else we'd drive 20 minutes east to Hawks Nest for a walk along Bennetts Beach. My cousin Liz was so happy to hear I'd discovered this place by accident, as this stretch of beach leading further up the coast to the Myall Lakes National Park contains Worimi burial sites and middens from thousands of years of fishing and feasting here. In fact it was the Aborigines at Hawks Nest who, thinking they were spirits of ancestors, adopted five escaped convicts for five years before they (the convicts) were recaptured in 1795.



Merridy Eastman, Gunyah AIR Sept 2017

From Gunyah I was also able to drive just 10 minutes west to Karuah to visit an 85 year old Worimi elder. Aunty Colleen told me a lot about cousins of mine she'd known well, and about her days growing up on the Karuah Mission, better known as "the Mish". She talked about foraging for food in the area, how to get meat from the pipi shells under the sand, how to catch mud crabs, and she also told me about the Christian missions and missionaries, even those with genuinely good intentions, and the effect they had on Aboriginal spirituality, culture, language, and the forbidden practice of rituals and ceremonies. I'd already read her son, Dr Joe Perry's thesis on this subject, but meeting this wise, plain talking mother, teacher and activist who's done so much for her own community was a great privilege and an enormous help to my research.



INFORMATION FOR ARTISTS

Applications for 2017 residencies have now closed.

You can find out about applying for the 2018 residency program [here](#)

Kath Fries: Gunyah artist-in-residence coordinator

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Merridy Eastman, Gunyah AIR Sept 2017

I also went with my husband and son (when they came up for one night) to search for the sacred site near Gunyah where the older boys were initiated by the men in the Keepara ceremony, and the women were forbidden to visit on punishment of death. Maybe it was the rich spiritual world I'd been researching, but I was glad we only discovered a far corner of the site when the setting sun forced us to retreat.

The best moment of my stay was several days in when, writing at the table (and having left the screen door open), I heard a mysterious, clicking sound from the balcony. No sooner had I stood up when a large creature with wings outstretched - flew towards the open door. "No!" I shouted, waving my arms like mad, but the kookaburra flew in anyway, right past my head to the kitchen window beyond. I ran outside to tap from the other side of the window, hoping to send him back the way he entered without injury, and thought I'd succeeded until I came back in and there he sat, perched majestically on the linear horizontal light suspended over the dining table. He stayed for a couple of glorious minutes, gently swinging over my keyboard (looking a tiny bit like Barry Cassidy on a trapeze), until his work was done and out he flew again. It was magic.



Merridy Eastman, Gunyah AIR Sept 2017

I am very grateful to Kath Fries, her family, and the other owners of Gunyah for the opportunity to stay in this beautiful, peaceful place, where I enjoyed such a rewarding, creative time, and on land that I not only know so much better, but now has such special meaning for me.

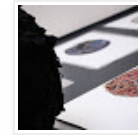
Merridy Eastman



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Acknowledgement of Country

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