

Cross Fibre brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists from the Territory. Emerging Darwin artist Lia Gill, Alice Springs-based sculptor and installation artist Pam Lofts and Ramingining weavers from Bula Bula Arts, Elizabeth Djutarra and Clara Wubugwubuk as well as a cluster of their sisters showed a clutch of fibre work during the Bougainvillea Festival. The exhibition criss-crossed the Territory and moved between sculpture and craft, encompassing the traditional and the innovative; the functional and the entirely expressive; the domestic and the ceremonial.

Lia Gill's work provides the focus. A recent graduate from NTU, Gill majored in sculpture and makes what she calls "Big cocoons and nests" from indigenous fibre products. Gill grew up in Darwin and is of Aboriginal descent; however, her Aboriginality underpins rather than defines her art. Her work reflects her love of the bush, her interest in horticulture which she is now studying and her familiarity with collecting and plaiting fibres which she has done since childhood.

Gill's cocoons are fibre sculptures - the products of expansive nature, spun by imaginary gargantuan insects. At first they seem like the real thing magnified, but on closer viewing reveal a degree of stylisation and detail different from nature. Some are built up around a chicken-wire shape but most are built as an insect would, by accumulation of layers.

A number of cocoons are made of palm leaves from *Livistonia Humilus* and *Cycas Armstrongii*, plaited and then these plaited leaves which still retain their leaf shape but are now fabricated are attached to a branch as if they

might have grown there in the first place. These cocoons spin and twirl in the air and light passes through them as they move in the breeze. Another cocoon looks as if it is made of mud and been moulded into a long cigar with patches apparently scratched away to reveal patterned bark beneath and yet another is short and egg-shaped, layered with strips of crumbly paperbark, apparently as light and vulnerable as a green ant's nest. Another is bandaged in wide ribbons of banana trash and its delicacy protected by protruding sticks. On the gallery floor sections of a work made of paperbark, like round elbows emerge from a sandpit of red earth, as a nest as big as a bed invites you to climb in or waits for an unknown bird to settle.

Clara Wubugwubuk, better known as a painter, has made a series of yam sculptures which are suspended in a group. There are manyngani tubers made of bunches of paperbark bundled and tightly wound around with bush string in subtle shades giving stripes. They are solid and light and there is a satisfying clarity and purity in the finished form and the directness of the making, and a dynamic necessity between inside and outside which Gill is still searching for in her cocoons.

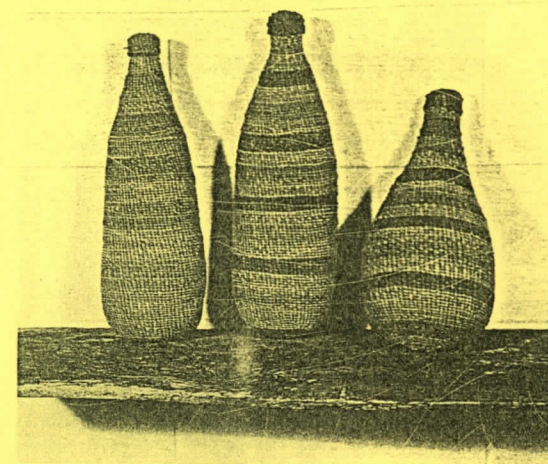
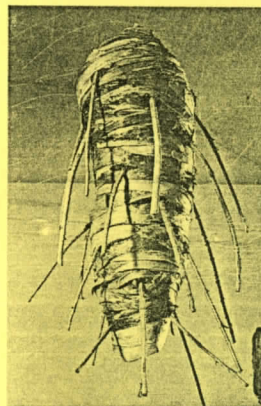
Pam Loft's installation *Moving Towards Mortality* is a long intestinal spindle of massed fibres - cotton mattress flocking, greasy wool,

domestic debris, off-white and flecked with scraps of colour, suspended from the ceiling it hangs loose and soft, finishing in a pouch, a secret pocket, and at the other end it ties off on the wall like the guy rope of a tent. It is knotty and knobby and a bit squishy so although not of the body, it unsettles because it almost could have been made in the body and pulled from it - an umbilical cord. You expect/imagine a foetus in the pouch. On the two enclosing walls are small clipseal plastic

bags and inside each are samples of similar material in discrete forms like claws, tuberous roots, larvae - relics to remember and specimens for further study.

Loft's work has affinities with the quirky unfinished but complete pandanus woven forms made by Dina Wirridgji which

begin as mats or dilly bags with a tightly and finely woven core but as they progress they get looser and freer, change directions and tumble into disarray or mutation, with the frayed and opened bundles of fibre spilling out as if the weaving has sprouted. An organic metamorphosis where the artist appears to allow the material to go its own way and break out of structure and tradition. Another departure from tradition are Robyn Djuginy's three woven bottles in graduated stripes of colour - these are the functional obverse of the dilly bags they resemble - they



Top: Robyn Djuginy *Bottles*, 1994, pandanus.
Left: Lia Gill *Cocoon No. 2*, 1994, banana trash, papier maché, sticks, coco peat.

contain nothing, cannot be opened and exist as beautiful objects free of need or use. No longer containers, complete in themselves, they look like woven gourds, and you wish they had seeds inside so more could be grown.

The circular pandanus mats woven by so many women were the backdrop for *Cross Fibre*, lying flat on the floor or hanging on the walls like women's shields. Beautiful and useful these mats are an innovation, an adaptation - prior to contact, conical mats were made to put over sleeping children to protect them from mosquitos or apron skirts were worn by women for ceremony - now such things are rarely made, just these mats that coil themselves so artfully and yet sit flat. □