

STYLEUP

FASHION, BEAUTY
& LIFESTYLE

Giving back

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hits milestone in
royalties and
donations

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Picture: Jose Yutiu



All going swimmingly fo

PHOEBE BLOGG

First Nations menswear brand Gali Swimwear is making waves with its niche designs, engaging colourways and culturally crafted pieces.

Founded on Bondi Beach by proud Kamilaroi man and volunteer surf lifesaver David Leslie, GALI fuses First Nations culture with sustainable swimwear. "In 2025, we expanded into new parts of Europe, launched our first swim shorts, grew our towel range, and released a new collection in collaboration with Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay and Biripi artist Dennis Golding," Leslie told Style Up.

"Each step helped us evolve the brand while staying grounded in our purpose; sharing Indigenous stories through swimwear that gives back.

"Like many businesses, the introduction of tariffs in the US pushed us to think about how we expand internationally. Since launching, GALI has built a strong and loyal customer base in the US, and we wanted to ensure we could continue to grow sustainably.

"We spent time working with agencies and industry experts, seeking advice on international growth and best practices. As a result, we're now developing launch strategies for our swim shorts range across the northern hemisphere."

This month GALI hit a remarkable milestone — \$100,000 in artist royalties and donations to community projects. "That moment really sums up what GALI is about:

designing beautiful, meaningful pieces and creating economic opportunities for artists and communities," Leslie said.

The designer noted his experience as a surf lifesaver led to him taking more notice of what people were wearing on the beach and where there are gaps in the market.

"We're expanding our designs across our new swim shorts and finalising development on resort shorts, which we started working on in 2025 and plan to launch in 2027," he said.

"GALI's swim shorts are designed with comfort, fit, and versatility front of mind. They feature a tailored cut, lightweight and quick-dry fabric, and a comfortable fit that works in the water and beyond."

Leslie said the launch planned for next year includes five designs drawn from three existing GALI swimwear collections. Each artwork has been carefully translated from swim briefs into swim shorts, maintaining the integrity of the original designs while offering a new silhouette.

"It gives customers more choice in how they wear GALI, while continuing to share Indigenous art and culture through wearable, everyday pieces," he said.

"Launching swim shorts is about creating swimwear that people feel comfortable wearing. I wear both briefs and shorts myself, and being out on surf patrol I notice what people wear on the beach. Australia has always been the home of swim briefs, but in other countries some men prefer to wear swim shorts over swim briefs."





or designer

Leslie said the fashion industry is welcoming more male Indigenous brands and designers.

"There's definitely momentum in men's First Nations fashion, and it's exciting to see the field expanding. There are so many incredible Indigenous brands doing amazing work in menswear. House of Darwin, Joseph & James, Take Pride Movement, Kirrikin, Magpie Goose, Gammin Threads, Kaninda, Yapa Mali, By Josh Deane, just to name just a few," he said.

Looking ahead, Leslie said GALI has multiple projects kicking off in 2026.

"We have two new artist collaborations in the works. We're hoping to launch one as part of NAIDOC Week and the second towards the end of the year, bringing new stories and artworks to our swimwear and towel ranges," he said.

"We've started development on a men's resort wear line, taking GALI beyond swimwear. The collection is designed for relaxed, everyday wear with the same focus on culture, creativity, and quality that our swimwear is known for."

Leslie said GALI was excited about the prospect of collaborating with an emerging First Nations artist for the launch of resort wear.

"Their water-inspired artworks are vibrant, full of life, and instantly captured our imagination," he said.

"We hope to work with them and their art centre to translate their stories into wearable

pieces that we can share with new audiences.

"This resort wear collection we aim to showcase on runways in Australia and internationally in 2027/28."

Leslie balances his own inspiration with community input, consumer sentiment and market demand.

As the talented designer enters 2026 with an abundance of inspiration, he reflected on his early days of designing, explaining how sometimes you don't find inspiration; it finds you.

"Sometimes an artwork just stops you in your tracks. That happened during COVID when I first saw Pauline Napangardi Gallagher's Lukarrara Jukurrpa (Desert Fringe-Rush Seed Dreaming) online, when we were planning the launch of GALI," he said.

"The energy, the movement, the way the story was told through the artwork . . . it completely shaped how I thought about translating Indigenous art on to men's swimwear.

"Now, as we plan our resort wear collection, I feel that same excitement seeing an emerging artist's water-inspired works.

"The way their pieces move and feel already points us in a fresh direction for GALI, while customer feedback continues to shape what people want to wear.

"It's this mix of inspiration, collaboration, and listening to our community that's guiding the next chapter for the brand."

Photographers

Jose Yutiu

Dan Castano

Main model

Trent Owers

(mob: Kamilaroi)

Artists

The late Pauline

Napangardi

Gallagher,

Jake Simon

Art Centre

Warlukurlangu

Artists

Telling the truth in her songs

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Kankawa Nagarra will bring her truth-telling songs to WOMADelaide in March, performing on Kurna Country as part of the four-day festival at Tainmuntilla (Botanic Park).

The Walmatjarri Elder from the Kimberley is known for blending folk, gospel and blues into music shaped by a life of work, community and deep connection to Country.

Ms Nagarra told National Indigenous Times she was looking forward to the festival experience and described it as another step in a journey she has taken through music.

"I feel good about WOMADelaide because it's going to be a very interesting journey," she said.

"I've been on those sorts of music journeys before, but this one is going to be really good."

While her performances draw crowds, Ms Nagarra said she does not see herself as someone

who belongs on a stage for the sake of it. A big part of her work is telling the truth about the experiences carried by Indigenous people, while using music as a way to speak to pain, loss and survival.

"I don't see myself as a stage person," she said. "I'm here to truth-tell and to spread my stories and my feelings."

Her message is grounded in what she feels for land and community, with a focus on younger people who are struggling and those who feel pushed to the margins.

"What I feel about our land, our soil, you know, that we walk on because I also feel for the youth, for the ostracised and those who are suicidal," she said.

Ms Nagarra's commitment to that message comes from personal grief after losing two sons to suicide. She said those realities are present across Indigenous nations and remain an urgent issue.



Kimberley singer Kankawa Nagarra is set to perform at Adelaide's WOMADelaide in March.

The songs Ms Nagarra performs often reflect the influences that have shaped her life, from the music she grew up with to what she discovered later. She said audiences at WOMADelaide can expect stories that reach beyond the performance itself, with each track introduced in a way that explains its origins.

"I want people to understand and I do talk about each song before I perform it and where it comes from," she said.

Her work is guided by a belief that Indigenous people hold a responsibility to stand strong

and lead, particularly in moments when the country is facing major decisions about its future. "We as Indigenous people are in this country for a purpose," she said. "Everything has happened for a purpose for us as Indigenous people so that we can be made prominent out there."

Ms Nagarra was recognised nationally in 2024 when she won the Australian Music Prize for her album Wirlmarni, becoming one of the oldest winners in the award's history. Beyond WOMADelaide, Ms Nagarra said she is working on

a plan to build a women's choir back home in the Kimberley, bringing together voices from different language groups across the region.

She said the goal is to create a choir where women can sing in their languages and feel their stories are valued.

"I've been talking to a group of women . . . to create a choir of women, all singing the languages," she said. "So, we kind of get all these women to start seeing themselves and know that they are important."

WOMADelaide runs from March 6 to 9.

For those who go further

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Garabari a watershed work

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Merrigong Theatre Company, in association with BlakDance, will bring Garabari to the Illawarra next month, presenting acclaimed Wiradjuri choreographer Joel Bray's immersive contemporary corroboree.

The work shares the Giilang of Marramalngidyal Marrambidyagu, a story and song about the making of the Murrumbidgee River, developed on Wiradjuri Country with Elders and artists.

Dunghutti and Gomeroi woman Zoe Brown-Holten will feature as one of the dancers in the production, performing the role of Balana within the story.

Brown-Holten told National Indigenous Times Balana's journey centred on retrieving water from Goanna men who were holding it back on Mt Tumut.

"It's basically



about this, this journey that Balana had gone on to get more water from the Goanna men that were hoarding it up on Mt Tumut," she said.

"She drove her bilow here, which is the digging stick right through the crack of one of the mountains where they were hoarding the water and thus the creation of the Murrumbidgee had then come through.

"It then gave water back to the land and the community that Balana came from, the Wiradjuri people," she said.

Brown-Holten, left, said being part of Garabari came after first seeing the work when it premiered.

"I remember seeing the work and being absolutely flabbergasted with the beauty and the complexities of First Nations stories," she said.

"To stumble



Joel Bray's Garabari brings Wiradjuri story of the Murrumbidgee to Wollongong and Dapto.

across a work that celebrates and that shows so much positivity and unity and collaboration, it was just something that was so bizarre to me at that time.

"I was like, I have to get on to this project."

Brown-Holten said the production created space for audiences to move with the work and leave changed.

"If you've got a problem, you come to Garabari and you just dance it out," she said.

"Leave like a different version of you as you came in."

Brown-Holten said the experience of working with Bray and the wider team had been grounded in shared learning and respect.

"It's been such a wonderful journey," she said.

"Coming into a work where everyone's so open and genuine and so willing to share knowledge and everyone's so respectful, so kind, so creative. I'm a walking sponge at this

point." Garabari will be performed at Wollongong Town Hall on Friday, February 6, and Saturday, February 7, at 7.30pm, before travelling to Dapto Ribbonwood Centre on Saturday, February 14, at 1.30pm and 7.30pm.

The show runs for one hour and 20 minutes with no interval and is recommended for ages 12 and over. Tickets start from \$40, with adult tickets priced at \$55 with more details available on the Merrigong website.

HOUSE LIGHTS ON FOR JOINT PROJECT

ALEXANDRA GIORGIANNI

Badu Gili: Story Keepers will light up the Sydney Opera House's eastern Bennelong sails nightly from sunset until March 2026, featuring the artworks of Gooniyandi Elder Mervyn Street and Inuk custodian Ningiukulu Teevee.

The installation celebrates the third year of a partnership between the Opera House, Biennale of Sydney and the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain as a vital pillar in the Opera House's First Nations program.

Badu Gili, meaning "water light" in the Gadigal language of the Traditional Owners of Tubowgule (Bennelong Point) celebrates the richness of First Nations culture and stories expressed through contemporary and traditional artworks sourced from First Nations and Indigenous artists across Australia.

Story Keepers marks a new chapter in this experience. Curated by the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain's First Nations curatorial fellow Bruce Johnson McLean, the projection features artwork by Street and Teevee, with Sydney-based creative agency Vandal animating the work of both artists to produce a mesmerising visual effect on the sails.

Street's artworks are influenced by his life as a stockman in the Kimberley and his ongoing



Gooniyandi Elder Mervyn Street with his artwork displayed on the Sydney Opera House sails. Picture: Cassandra Hannagan

advocacy for cultural preservation through language and living on Country. "My mum and dad used to work. My dad was just like a slave working over and over, every day," he said.

"I'm going back through my history. I'm doing it for the people, doing it for everybody, not for myself.

"I'm passing on my knowledge.

"This was a big project. I didn't know it was going to go this far. It's been a long journey for my art, and now I can't believe I'm doing this with the Sydney Opera House. I'm giving my story to the people."

Teevee's art is founded in Inuit myths and legends, keeping traditional stories alive while providing a contemporary lens on Inuit culture.

"I am honoured to be part of this animation project, which brings to life the legend of The Owl And The Raven — a story that has stayed with me since childhood. I first heard it in school from an Elder whose storytelling captured my imagination," she said. "The themes of curiosity, transformation and the balance between patience and pride continue to inspire me. Through

this animation, I explore how Raven's restless spirit and Owl's calm wisdom reflect human nature and the lessons found in our traditions.

"This work connects Inuit storytelling with contemporary art, celebrating the voices, memories and teachings that guide my creative journey."

At the heart of the project is a shared commitment to upholding Indigenous culture and history, a sentiment expressed by McLean.

"It's been a real privilege to bring together two leading Indigenous artists from opposite

sides of the world, from lands of heat and smoke and lands of snow and ice," he said. "What unites these artists is their incredible commitment to holding and sharing the knowledge and histories of their communities.

"Story Keepers is a celebration of those members of our Indigenous communities who continue to share our stories and give voice to our memories."

Badu Gili: Story Keepers will light up the Opera House's eastern Bennelong sails every 30 minutes from 8:30pm to 10:30pm until February 28.

Doco tells story of Buffalo nations

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Riders Of The Buffalo Nations, a long-form photographic and documentary project on Indigenous youth living on reservations across South Dakota and Montana, examines how culture, family and survival intersect in contemporary life.

The project follows young riders from nations including Oglala Lakota, Dine, Blackfeet and Northern Cheyenne, using rodeo as a lens to explore endurance, identity and continuity in communities shaped by generational trauma and resilience.

The work tracks how rodeo brings people together across nations, and how young riders move between cultural inheritance and the pressures of modern life.

The story is carried by families, Elders, and community members who asked for a record that moved beyond the public narratives that often define reservation communities from the outside.

English photographer Doug Hancock described the project as something that became less about making a documentary and more about staying close to the people who let him in.

"The work is secondary," he said. "You can't do the work without that level of mutual understanding . . . friendship comes first."

His connection to Indigenous communities developed through

relationships formed around rodeo and film, then through an introduction that helped shape his responsibilities.

He detailed how he was at a film festival in Missoula when he met a Blackfeet man, Jonas Rides-At-The-Door, during a conversation outside a bar.

He later contacted Mr Rides At The Door, who introduced him to a Blackfeet Elder, Allen MadPlume. Hancock described that relationship as formative, because it grounded the project in community context rather than his assumptions.

The project expanded across families and rodeo networks, including time spent with riders and relatives connected to the Dine Nation and communities at Pine Ridge.

Hancock framed rodeo as a shared meeting ground, where nations converge and young people are seen in motion, supported by family and community. "Rodeo becomes a collective, a collective of the nations," he said.

Within that collective, he said rodeo reflected struggle without flattening people into crisis stories.

"It became a metaphor for their struggle, but also for their hope and ambition."

Hancock said families and Elders were clear about what they wanted the work to do, particularly in response to the way places like Pine Ridge are often portrayed. "Just tell everyone we're still here," they said. "Paint the kids in a positive light, there's more to



Fort Hall wapici or powwow. A celebration of culture. Picture: Doug Hancock

it than just drugs and alcohol and everything else."

He said trust was something earned through everyday actions and restraint, rather than an exchange for access.

The approach relied on humility and an acceptance suspicion was reasonable because of the history communities carry.

"Everyone's like super cautious and for good reason, you know, I'm a white guy coming in," Hancock said.

Consent was imperative with people shown photographs and kept informed about where images would appear. The project now includes a monograph and a film, alongside an upcoming exhibition at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Wyoming running from April to December 2026.

Hancock said the exhibition was selected by a First Nations board and curated by Crow Agency.

He said the work is intended to live beyond a gallery setting through education materials connected to the exhibition.

"So, it can go to become part of an education pack in Wyoming," he said.

He described the broader impact as creating a record that helps audiences understand Indigenous communities through family, culture and the everyday reality of young people holding their ground.

Exhibition explores origins of Bundjalung tribes

JOSEPH GUENZLER

A new exhibition sharing the Bundjalung creation story of the Three Brothers is now open at the Tweed Regional Museum.

Titled The Wiiyaan, the exhibition explores the origins of the Bundjalung Nation's tribes and dialects through story, digital works and material illustration.

The exhibition is led by Gudjingburra Bundjalung men Kyle Slabb and Bijang Slabb, who worked as artists and cultural advisers on the project.

Slabb said the project was driven by the need to strengthen knowledge transfer at a time when cultural connection could be lost



The exhibition tells of the journeys of three brothers.

between generations. "One of the considerations that we have to think about now and the time that we're in is what we pass on to the next generation," he said.

"We're the last generation of contact with traditional people in our community.

"Our kids' generation never knew our grandmothers and grandfathers."

He said the risk of loss during that transition was central to why the work was made.

"During that transition, what doesn't get passed on, you can lose," he said.

Slabb noted the exhibition was part of ensuring Bundjalung children understood their origin story and what it connected to.

"This project is part of that exercise for me — making sure every Bundjalung kid knows our origin story, understands our lore and knows what connects us back," he said.

"For us, this exhibition really is about our ancestors and the

spiritual ancestors of Bundjalung country," he said. "It's really at the heart of Bundjalung lore, culture and tradition."

The creation story tells of three brothers who arrived by canoe with their families before splitting up and travelling north, south and west.

In the southern dialect, the brothers are known as Mamoon, Birrung and YarBirrain.

In the northern dialect, they are known as Yarbiri, Marming and Birin.

The story explains the origins of Bundjalung tribes and dialects across the Northern Rivers, with key locations tied to natural landmarks across Country.

Slabb said the exhibition reflected living cultural knowledge

rather than a story locked in the past. "A lot of the artefacts and the things that are in the museums, they have story and there's still people that carry those stories and attached to those things," Slabb said.

"For us, they're not ancient artefacts."

The exhibition includes digital and material illustrations created over several years by the local Tweed Aboriginal community and shared with Elders and knowledge holders for teaching younger generations.

Museum curator Erika Taylor said the exhibition reflected a community-led approach to cultural storytelling.

The Wiiyaan runs until July 18 at Tweed Regional Museum.