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# RICARDO IDAGI DECOLONISING

14 MARCH – 14 APRIL 2012





1.  
*The Coconut* 2012  
glazed earthenware  
34.0 x 27.0 x 24.0 cm  
\$5,000

A common practice of teasing someone is to call them a coconut – white on the inside and brown on the outside. This could also be called the tall poppy syndrome. It means you love white people and live their values even though you have a black skin. You disregard your own 'race' and the values it holds. This coconut/tall poppy syndrome is so negative it has crippled me from a young age as I tried to integrate. The effect has been so great that I have lived on the fringes of society and still continue to do so today. Ever since birth as a Torres Strait Islander child I have had to adapt and my environment has been a strange and contrary world.

In my family home adults spoke Meryam mir, the traditional language. When I went to primary school on Mer everyone spoke Pidgin, the Torres Strait Creole, except for the white Principle who spoke English. As a Coconut I would have preferred to converse in perfect English, then speak to my elders in Meryam mir and disregard the derogatory slave lingo, Torres Strait Creole. In using this lingo people can continue to live in the perfect world of the second-class citizen; Creole is the language of slave labour in which we unthinkingly use expressions like 'kole' which originally meant master or boss-man; today, however, every white man is 'kole'. Continuing with this slave language we even call our bros, 'coon'. 'Bala speak da coon em come ya pass.' (Tell that bloke to come here.)



2.  
*Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* 2012  
glazed earthenware, feathers, cane  
60.0 x 27.0 x 65.0 cm  
\$6,500



*Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* 2012 (detail)

For the 2009 and 2010 Mabo Day celebrations, I visited Mer Island, where cultural ceremonies were held at the mission yard. A day after these events all traces of the festivities are removed because it is a churchyard. To my mind this leaves the people transients in their own homeland. They have no permanent place in which to mourn, grieve and then celebrate their past. How can they even think about the future when they have no permanent place to do that? After Mabo the government gave the people their land back. The question is when will the Anglican dioceses give that mission yard back to its traditional owners?

In this sculpture the past trauma is present in the mass of silent people along the sides. They cannot speak their minds or see another point of view. An image of the old Dog and Shark idol of the past becomes the head of the priest as he goes from dog to wolf. The intricate trellis of a traditional headdress (dari) becomes his disguise - angel wings. The image on the front of the sculpture is a suffering man who bears his own heavy cross but to the wolf this suffering is his power and gives him recognition as a priest. I chose orange glaze – when the suffering becomes power it's disguised as a golden fleece.



3.  
*Black Skin, White Mask* 2012  
glazed raku  
21.5 x 17.0 x 16.0 cm

The white glaze is glossed over the face but it cannot mask the rough texture and the true colour of the raku clay which speaks out from within and defies all principles of hand glazing in pottery.

In this self-portrait I search deep within myself, unlocking secret compartments that have been under lock and key, white-washed, since my childhood – child abuse, teasing and negative reinforcements, racism, social trauma and culture shock.

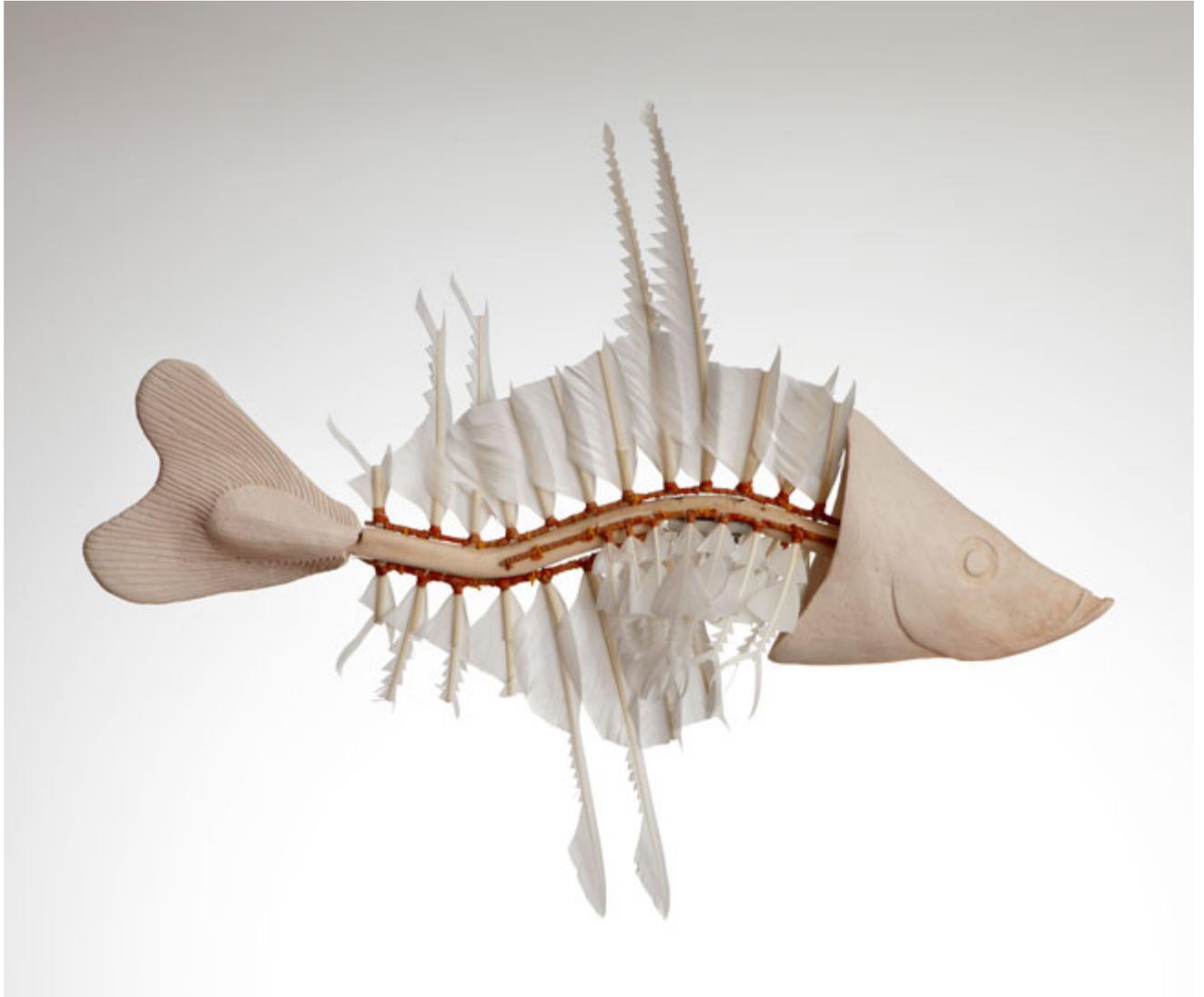


4.  
*Dari Urn* 2012  
glazed earthenware  
25.0 x 20.0 x 20.0 cm

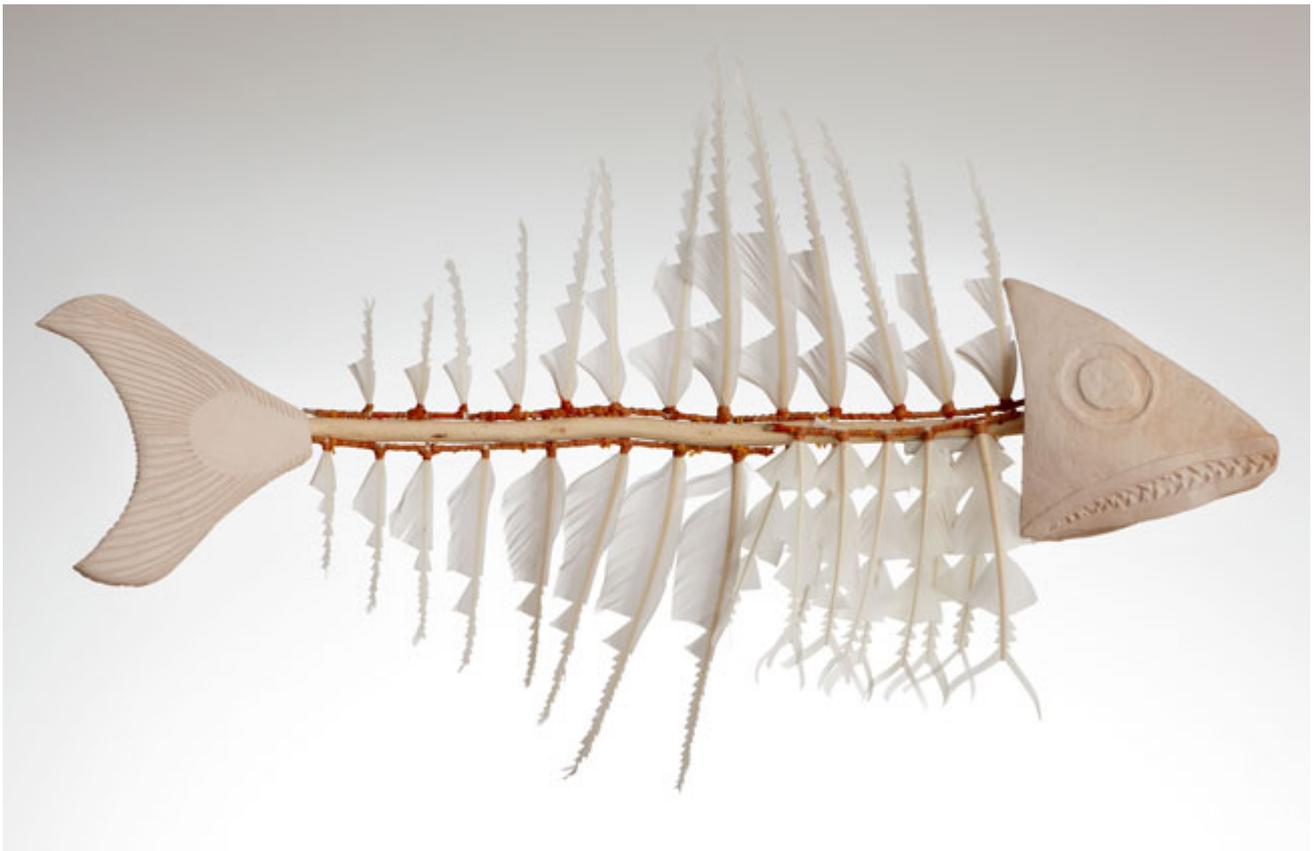
This vessel holds the lost language, culture and traditions that the missionaries flogged out of my ancestors. The schoolteachers flogged it out of the children because they had a different way of expressing themselves. This Dari Urn is something tangible to capture the intangible. I imagine that I'm holding a thimble to capture every single raindrop in a storm.



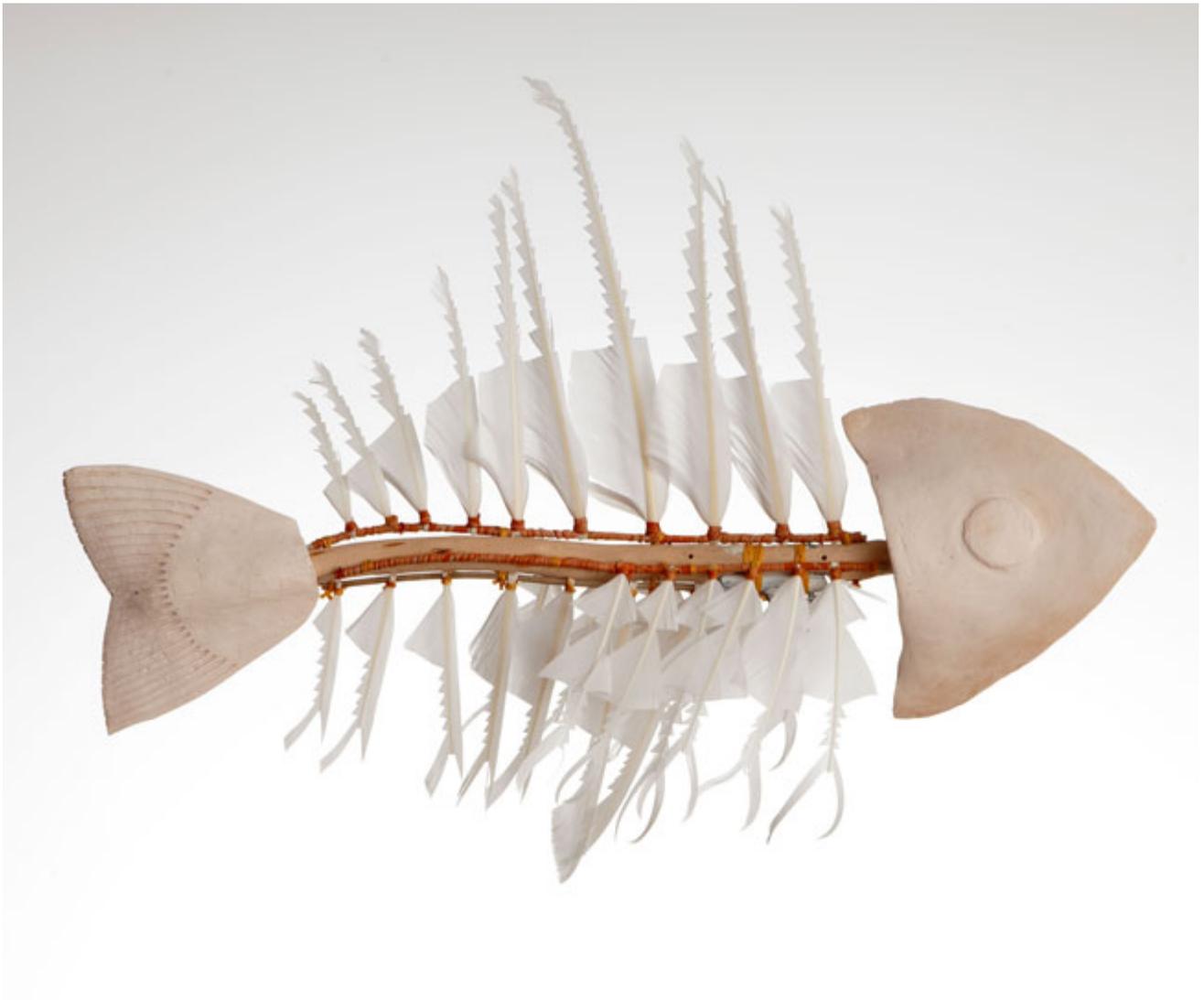
5.  
*Happy Anniversary – Zulai Won 2012*  
glazed earthenware  
20.0 x 25.0 x 25.0 cm



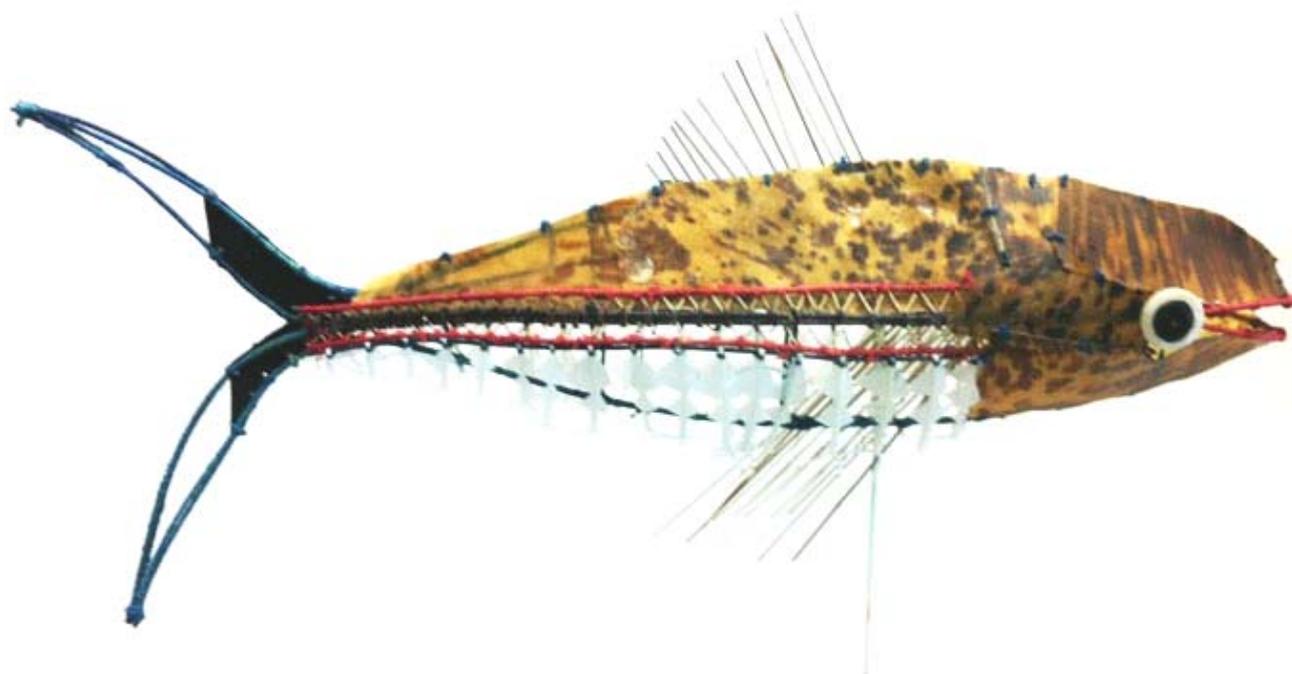
6.  
*Barramundi* 2012  
earthenware, feathers, wood, raffia  
60.0 x 63.0 x 12.0 cm



7.  
*Barracuda* 2012  
earthenware, feathers, wood, raffia  
70.0 x 72.0 x 14.0 cm



8.  
*Barramoney (til next week)* 2012  
earthenware, feathers, wood, raffia  
57.0 x 50.0 x 12.0 cm



9.  
*Rainbow Runner 2011*  
turtle flake, wood, cane, feathers, raffia, pearl shell, goa nut  
38.0 x 87.0 x 14.0 cm



10.  
*Dari 2012*  
feathers, cane, raffia, pearl shell  
85.0 x 67.0 cm



11.  
*Dari 2012*  
feathers, cane, raffia, pearl shell, goa nut  
80.0 x 63.0 cm



12.  
*Dari* 2012  
feathers, cane, raffia, pearl shell  
90.0 x 53.0 cm



13.

*Upi Mop Le – Tail End Man 2011*

turtle shell, turtle flake, mussel shell, pearl shell, cowrie shell, hemp string, goose feathers, cassowary feathers, saimi saimi seeds, goa nuts, black ebony wood, bamboo, cane, raffia, white ochre, sea tree black coral, digital projector

130.0 x 90.0 x 130.0 cm

WINNER – New Media Award, 28<sup>th</sup> Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2011.

I worked on the mask in fine detail searching for the innocence and beauty that is the soul of a child. But I conceded to the fact that the mask is an empty shell; the face is an imprint of my memory as a small boy. It is empty of the spirit of my youth, taken away by child abusers and molesters. When I wear the mask I am ready to take back that spirit. When I dance my victory dance, I break their spears and take the power from them. I will reclaim my spirit that I lost as a child.

The large fish sculpture on top of the mask is called upi mop le, literally tail end man. It is a fish named turrum or albacore and closely related to the king Trevally. Sometimes, when the men fish with their spears for king Trevally, they miss their prey but they know there is a tail ender, upi mop le, so they are ready for him and the tail ender becomes the target of their spears. I was the tail ender. I was the target of those men.