

Media Release

The Hon Danny Pearson MP
Assistant Treasurer
Minister for Regulatory Reform
Minister for Government Services
Minister for Creative Industries



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RARE ARTWORKS TO RETURN HOME TO WURUNDJERI COUNTRY

The Andrews Labor Government has supported the return of rare artworks by Wurundjeri artist and leader William Barak, with the historic moment set to deliver the works home to their rightful owners.

Auctioned by Sotheby's in New York early this morning, The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation has been successful in its bid to secure the works.

Minister for Creative Industries Danny Pearson said the Labor Government was proud to contribute \$500,000 to secure the purchases, ensuring the Corporation could bring these culturally and historically significant works home to Wurundjeri Country where they belong.

Along with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation's own contribution, more than 1,000 donors contributed to a crowdfunding campaign which will see the successful repatriation of the significant indigenous artworks.

William Barak has had a profound influence on Victoria's history, with his artwork providing an invaluable insight into the rich culture and way of life of the Wurundjeri people before European settlement - as a Ngurungaeta (headman), an artist, a leader, ambassador and advocate for his people, Barak continues to have an impact today.

The two artworks – a painting and a parrying shield – date back to 1897. *Corroboree (Women in possum skin cloaks)* depicts three rows of women wearing possum skin cloaks in a ceremony. The carved hardwood parrying shield is long and pointed with a geometric design and a unique motif at its centre.

While Barak's artworks are held in prestigious public and private collections around the world, this is one of a rare few to return to Wurundjeri ownership.

Both the painting and the shield were gifted from Barak in the late 19th century to the de Pury Family. They have remained with this family until now. The artworks are expected to arrive home within weeks.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Creative Industries Danny Pearson

"The Labor Government is proud to support the successful bid to bring artworks - which are invaluable to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People – back to their rightful home and owners."

"William Barak has had a profound impact on Victoria's cultural heritage, with his contribution as an ambassador and advocate for his people continuing to have an impact today."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams

"William Barak's artwork will return to Country – where it rightfully belongs. We congratulate the Wurundjeri on their success in fighting for and securing this important piece of history, which is invaluable to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People, and to the broader Victorian public."

Quotes attributable to Wurundjeri Elder Ron Jones

"We've made a step forward in closing the gap between Victorian Aboriginal people and the State government today. We're bringing William Barak's spirit home."

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