

Case study

ReFire



“Be bold, be brave, do your own thing and enjoy the work!” The *ReFire* project rekindled a love and appreciation of pottery and highlighted the talent of Cherbourg’s artists.

What

ReFire is a unique initiative, funded by Arts Queensland, to continue the legacy of ceramic art production in the Indigenous community of Cherbourg—30 years after the closure of the original Barambah Pottery.

Established in the 1960s, Barambah Pottery (Cherbourg) was the one of the earliest art/craft ventures in Queensland to provide consistent creative employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Renowned nationally and internationally Barambah Pottery closed in 1987.

In December 2016, the State Library of Queensland presented *Barambah <> Cherbourg <> Art <> Craft*, an exhibition featuring work from the original potters. At the launch, Ration Shed Museum, *ReFire*, as a stepping-stone towards reviving and rebuilding pottery production in Cherbourg.

Eleven local artists, including two artists from the original Barambah Pottery group, were guided through a series of workshops by local potter Fay Stumm at the Rations Shed Museum’s Yidding Art Studio in Cherbourg. The artists learned techniques to translate their ideas onto pottery surfaces.

With a simple directive – “*be bold, be brave, do your own thing and enjoy the work!*” – the local artists produced more than 250 plates, bowls, dishes and



Plates by *ReFire* artists Venus Rabbitt and Maurice Mickelo. Image courtesy: Ration Shed Museum (photography: Caitlin Morgan)

trays that expressed their own artistic styles and stories. While inspired by the original Barambah pottery the new works incorporate new mediums and styles.

The work met with high praise with *ReFire* exhibitions at Kingaroy, Cherbourg, and Brisbane. Two publications were also produced: *Barambah Pottery*, a companion book to the State Library of Queensland exhibition, and the *ReFire* exhibition companion booklet.

When and where

2016-2017, Cherbourg

Key stats

- 2 books
- 11 artists
- 250+ new pieces produced
- 3 exhibitions
- 5,000 visitors/audience
- National broadcast news coverage on ABC and NITV



Plate by ReFire Project artist James Hopkins. Image courtesy: Ration Shed Museum (photography: Matthew Wengert)

Investment

\$15,000 Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund, a partnership between the Queensland Government and the Cherbourg Historical Precinct Group

\$50,000 – Queensland Arts Showcase Program – Ignite

Outcomes

- The *ReFire* project has revived the art of pottery in Cherbourg, a significant part of the community's history and culture.
- Artists have learned new skills, and shared traditional stories.
- Artists exhibited their pieces at the Ration Shed Museum and at galleries outside the community including Kingaroy Regional Art Gallery and FireWorks Gallery in Brisbane.

Many pieces exhibited at Kingaroy and at FireWorks Gallery were sold before the official exhibition openings, with all proceeds going to artists.

- The Queensland Museum purchased works to add to the State's collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceramic art, which includes original Barambah Pottery from Cherbourg.

- *ReFire* artists have produced additional large-scale special commission pieces by request.
- Books about the project has been produced and is stocked in cultural institutions including the State Library of Queensland and the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art.

Impact

There is a wealth of talent amongst these artists that should be encouraged and nurtured. As the younger generation learns and adds modern techniques to traditional Indigenous style, a whole new style is being born. I would like to believe that this project is just the beginning of something big for these artists. Fay Stumm, Pottery Instructor.

The *ReFire* project has had a significant impact both in reviving pottery in Cherbourg and development of local artists. The success of the workshops and the new works has raised the profile and interest in Cherbourg pottery again. This in turn has led to equipment donations and partnerships with the local TAFE.



Plates by ReFire artists Rocko Langton and Kane Brunjes. Image courtesy: Ration Shed Museum (photography: Caitlin Morgan)

For more information

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<https://www.facebook.com/ReFirePotteryProject>

What next?

The Cherbourg Historical Precinct Group are looking to expand pottery production, employment, training and commercial operations by creating a Pottery Studio production and training centre within the Precinct.

"The Pottery House" will house a pottery studio, a gallery and small-scale cafe. The aim is to develop a small business that will train and employ 6 to 8 potters.

The Ration Shed are working with James Hopkins, a local ceramic artist to build his skills to run the pottery. James has dedicated his time to organising numerous exhibitions, Certificates of Authenticity and running regular workshops in the art studio.



ReFire work on display at FireWorks Gallery in Brisbane. Image courtesy: Ration Shed Museum.