



LOCAL COMMISSIONER PROFILE

MOSSMAN GORGE COMMISSIONER KAREN GIBSON, OAM



Karen Gibson, aside from being a well-respected Local Commissioner for the Family Responsibilities Commission in Mossman Gorge, is also a committed community leader who has held many roles in the community of Mossman Gorge.

Karen was born and raised in the Mossman area as a member of the Kuku Nyungul and Kuku Yalanji Clans. She was appointed as a Local Commissioner in 2011, but prior to that time Karen worked with the Commission as its Local Coordinator, managing the local registry operations in Mossman Gorge.

A passionate and acknowledged artist in her own right, Karen remains humble but dedicated to her art. She is at her most creative when surrounded by canvas, bright colourful paints and peaceful surroundings. Karen states that she feels a continual conflict between her desire to devote time to her personal commitment to work for social improvements for Aboriginal people, and her desire to devote time to following her creative flow. Both are callings which beckon her strongly and she often finds herself combining them in her artistic expressions.

Karen's artistic drive is so deeply embedded, that she recalls from her early school days frequently getting into trouble for drawing in her books. She is happy she can now laugh at those memories. After leaving school Karen became more serious about her art and her paintings became an outlet to share cultural knowledge and to relate in visual terms the stories she'd learnt from her people.

As Karen matured she began to take more interest in her cultural history and sought more knowledge from her Grandfather, George Kulka Senior, about traditional ways. Karen grew up in a very close relationship with her Grandfather who she says gave her the tribal name of 'Dilbel' at the age of 21, meaning 'poison white flower' in English. Karen's fascination with her culture can be seen through the many expressions of her artwork which are expressions of the stories shared not only with her Grandfather, but also with her Mum, Isobella Ross-Kelly. Karen said, "My Mum, Isobella, contributed in a big way, and is a key influence in my artwork, but it was my Grandfather who was the inspiration for the artwork 'Women's Business'". Karen's Grandfather George shared stories of when he was

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a child watching the women collect and gather. 'Women's Business' is one such painting that shows the traditional role of women, gathering berries and fruits, digging yams and collecting clams and mussels. 'Women's Business' is Karen's way of sharing her culture and ensuring it is kept alive for generations to come.

Karen has recently taken on a new role with Cape York Partnership as an Engagement Officer for Empowered Communities. Karen said, "I am contributing to the journey of Empowered Communities and have been guided by the people of Cape York". In her role with Cape York Partnership, and as Local Commissioner with the Family Responsibilities Commission, Karen listens to the stories of men, women, children, families and the community. She has in the past worn, and continues to wear, many hats – mother, grandmother, cultural teacher, community leader and student of the arts.

Women's Business

In traditional Australian Aboriginal culture women have their own roles, ceremonies, songs and sacred sites, it is called 'Women's Business'. This painting shows the women working together, gathering and hunting. They carry the eggs of freshwater turtles and brush turkeys in woven baskets. They have caught fish and a goanna. Others are holding leafy branches to keep mosquitoes away. They also carry long sticks for getting small animals out of inaccessible holes or honey out of long hollow branches. These are Rainforest women, wearing body paint which consists of dots that represent rain on the river, and white lines being the river itself. "These women go out to collect wild fruits and small game, providing and teaching for younger family members. Women from all around play a very important role in this world. They are the providers and carers, handing down what was passed down to them from other women".



Gibson, K 2008, *Women's Business*. Exhibited Cairns: Family Responsibilities Commission. Painting on canvas.