

STATE LIBRARY QUEENSLAND

# MEDIA RELEASE

17 March 2025

## **Survival story of the Kalkadoons showcased in new exhibition**

Secret family stories of strength and survival will be revealed in a new exhibition opening at State Library of Queensland on 22 March.

*The unbroken spirit of the Kalkadoons* will showcase artwork and personal narratives that explore the resilience of the Kalkadoon people of North West Queensland and the continuation of their culture.

The exhibition shares artist Colleen Sam's family story through paintings, digital stories, and archival materials. Research for the exhibition has also uncovered new historical knowledge about events in Mount Isa through State Library collections.

Since the frontier violence in the Kalkadoon/Mount Isa region of Queensland, the Sam family have passed down their stories of survival in secret.

These stories follow the family's journey of survival from the first contact in the 1850s through to the 1900s, highlighting key figures such as Kalkadoon senior law keepers King Jimmy and Queen Nellie, along with the resilient warrior Wild Harry, a survivor of the Battle Mountain.

These stories include accounts of massacres, Kalkadoon resistance, and frontier battles. Some of these stories of resilience and survival are being shared publicly for the first time.

"Culture creates that sense of self and that strength; not only emotional strength but spiritual strength as well," Colleen Sam said.

"My aunties, my uncles, my mum – they all had a part to play in all the traditional knowledge and it flows into my artwork," she said.

Colleen said her mother, Aunty Ena, would gather the children at night and tell them stories about the land and their ancestors.

"Mum said; 'You will listen to these stories because if you don't know your stories, you'll never know your Country.'"

*The exhibition builds on its first iteration at Logan Art Gallery, with State Library working with the Sam family to develop new stories, artworks and learning resources.*

**Quotes from State Librarian and CEO Vicki McDonald AM:**

“Visitors to this important exhibition will experience the quiet courage of the Sam family over four generations.

“It is an act of bravery to share personal stories and State Library thanks the Sam family for this gift.

“The exhibition features a dedicated learning and healing space, including a yarnning circle for community discussions.

“*The unbroken spirit of the Kalkadoons* is part of State Library’s commitment to honouring Aboriginal peoples, culture, knowledge and stories.”

*The unbroken spirit of the Kalkadoons*

22 March – 24 August 2025

Open daily 10am–5pm | Free entry

slq Gallery, level 2 | State Library of Queensland, Cultural Centre, South Bank

slq.qld.gov.au/discover/exhibitions/unbroken-spirit-kalkadoons | [media kit](#)

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Interviews available on request.