

Blak Dot

Spaces to thrive

It is impossible for one or two people who are Indigenous and First Nation to speak on behalf of the entire Indigenous community. To do so, would be to ignore the unique experiences of colonialism felt by families, kinship groups, tribes and nations across the globe. Instead, we offer two voices, both informed by our differing vantages points; **Maya Hodge** is a proud Lardil & Yangkaal woman raised in Mildura, Victoria and Assistant Curator - Exhibitions & Programs at Blak Dot Gallery, and **Dr Kirsten Garner Lyttle** is a Naarm (Melbourne) based artist and academic who is of Māori descent (Waikato, Ngāti Tahinga, Tainui A Whiro). These are our thoughts on why Blakademy and Blak Dot Gallery in Brunswick, Naarm, are treasured spaces.

Blakademy: a space run by us for us by Maya Hodge

Blakademy is a dedicated learning space for First Nations community members in and around Bulluke-bek (Brunswick), with a library of solely Indigenous authors and an audio booth especially for oral history recordings. The library is continuously growing with new and donated books, courtesy of the donations received from Blak Dot Gallery.

I have been working at Blak Dot Gallery for nine months and in that time I have seen Blakademy

evolve with every new community group that comes into the space. It is a place to be mentored, to research, and to feel comfortable as a person of colour to learn in a culturally safe environment. That is what makes this place so unique; this is a place especially for community members to share knowledge and come together over books, food, workshops and residencies. I have seen Blakademy transformed into a print-making workshop, an artist residency studio, a collective gathering place and mentoring space for young artists to workshop their ideas and concepts.

Blakademy is home to arts and community collectives including Colectiva de Abya Yala, Pasifika Storytellers Collective and Pacifiquex who all bring various events, knowledge and vibrancy into the space through storytelling, writing, weaving, dancing, music, film and cooking, with ingredients gathered from the community garden.

During my university experience, as a student and emerging artist, I have felt isolated and culturally unsafe. Since working as a curator at Blak Dot I have deeply understood the crucial need for Indigenous-led and run initiatives (like Blakademy), so that we can tell our stories the way we wish to, without pressure from white institutions. Blakademy is not only a resource; it is also a family hub for community creatives and academics to be able to work and practice their craft.



Blak Dot Gallery

by Dr Kirsten Garner Lyttle

It is hard to put into words the many ways in which Blak Dot Gallery is a treasured space. A space created, nurtured and gifted by the awe-inspiring and unstoppable force that is Kimba Thompson, a strong Wiradjuri woman who has lived in Naarm for over 25 years. This Blak Gallery space is at the centre of many communities in Melbourne; Indigenous, First Nations, People of Colour (POC), LGBTQIA+, and the intersectionality of these communities and their allies. Blak Dot Gallery has taken the uninviting, tomb-like, historically-laden and constructed "white cube" of modernist and institutional art spaces and shifted it – painted it Blak (literally; the gallery walls have been painted Black since 2018). Blak Dot Gallery has been making a spatial shift in the Melbourne arts scene since it was established as a contemporary First Nations artist-run space in 2011.

As a Māori-Australian woman, I have experienced (and in all likelihood, will continue to experience) how white-walled Melbourne art institutions are unwelcoming or uninviting spaces. My community is rarely visible on the walls, working within, or as visitors to these buildings. Blak Dot Gallery is radically different; it is, at its very core, a Blak art space – offering an alternative to colonial display practices. It is a site that understands the dichotomy between inside and outside, invisible and represented, rejected and embraced, stereotype and authenticity. Blak Dot Gallery is a space that is aware that its walls are not a neutral container or plane for art to be placed, instead it has created a context in which conversations and places of exchanges between communities can occur.

Offering more than simply art placed on walls, plinths, screens and gallery floors, Blak Dot Gallery is a hub of interactions, exchanges and experiences. Hosting an annual artist market, films, workshops, and artist talks among other events, it is a site where communities and allies come together to talk, laugh, eat, exchange, educate, represent and importantly, decolonise. On a personal level, Blak Dot has played host to some of the biggest events in my life; it was where I had my PhD examination exhibition in 2019 and in April 2021, between Melbourne lockdowns, it is the place where I got married. Put simply, I have a lot of love for this space.