



Visual arts

Andrew Harper

Rare and treasured

**AUNTY LOLA GREENO
CELEBRATES 80 YEARS**

Bett Gallery

Level 1, 65 Murray St, Hobart

Until August 15

Price range: \$4850 – \$6420

The Cape Barren goose is a bird most distinctive. It's definitely a goose, but it's one of the rarest in the world; it is only found endemically in southern Australia, with populations here on Lutruwita/Tasmania, and on the islands of Bass Strait. They're strong and adaptable creatures – they can drink salt water if they have to, and this is sometimes the only option on a smaller island. They're herbivores. They mate for life and, once bonded, a pair will perform a loud, honking, neck-shaking dance. They're funny, but they'll staunchly defend a nest, and are big enough to give anyone pause if they run hissing and flapping at you.

They have had their ups and downs; evolution made the error of making them edible, which is never a good move, and shipwreck survivors and sealers in Bass Strait took advantage of this unfortunate fact. Later, farmers considered them pests, and unceremoniously killed the geese.

In the 1950s, they were endangered: like so many animals that suffered after colonisation, we could have lost these big, spectacular birds, with their distinct light-grey feathers and pinky-red legs.

They're tough though, and given a chance they bred, and the population is now no longer at the edge. If you are lucky enough to go the islands of the strait, you might see their big impressive wings as they fly to their roosts after feeding.

Lola Greeno thought to make one of her beautiful shell necklaces for the Cape Barren goose. According to the story I was told, she had to hunt a bit to get the colours just right for the goose necklace, but she managed it, of course. She does what she sets out to do.

You should know who Aunty Lola Greeno is, but let's just be certain here: she's one of the most important, and most honoured and most recognised artists in the whole country, never mind on this island.



Aunty Lola Greeno and her shell necklaces. Pictures: Jack Bett and Alastair Bett

She's a Pakana/Tasmanian elder, and she's known for her creation of traditional shell necklaces, a practice passed down to her from her mother and maternal grandmother. Given that this exhibition marks her 80th year, that's a long reach back in time; she was born in 1946 on Cape Barren Island, the place that gave that goose its name.

What Greeno does is beyond special; when we talk about "Australian art" there is nothing that defines it more than art made by those who represent the myriad complex cultures of the people who have been here for 60,000 years. Greeno's shell-stringing is part of that: it reaches back, yet it is not static. Greeno has approached the practice like the contemporary artist she is: bringing herself and her life into it, while keeping the essential aspects alive, and teaching her

children and grandchildren as she was taught: that line goes forwards as well as back.

Aunty Lola trained as a curator of Aboriginal art at the University of Tasmania; then became a regional Indigenous curator at the National Gallery of Australia. In 2014, she was the first Aboriginal artist recognised with the Australian Design Centre's Living Treasure Master of Australian Art Award.

And she's 80, and still finding those shells and polishing them, and stringing them. She is part of a line that was too tough to break, and she comes from an island in Bass Strait, and she makes art that is unique in all the world.

Go and look at her necklaces. See if you can find the one she made for the Cape Barren Goose.

PICTURE STORIES

FACES FROM OUR TOWN

Paul County

Moonah Arts Centre

23 – 27 Albert Rd, Moonah

Monday – Friday 10 – 5

Saturday 10 – 2

Until August 22

This rather delightful exhibition is the outcome of a large and ongoing project by Paul County. The scope was fairly ambitious: over a six-month period, County visited 16 schools and community centres all over Lutruwita/Tasmania. He conducted 20 workshops that explored the history of photography in Tasmania, how photography changed, and who had access to the technology in the early days, through to digital photography and even AI images. County also introduced the idea that photography can be used for art, and that it is in fact a medium with a huge amount of possibility. It wasn't just history though: things got hands-on – the idea of studio photography was introduced, taught, and ultimately participated in. Portraits became the focus, as did the stories of the people captured.

Out of all this work, learning and experimentation, what you'll see at MAC are some really impressively diverse images of a lot of people who are part of the broad community, and the stories of their lives. Every one is fascinating and moving – if there's one thing this exhibition exemplifies, it's that everyone has an incredible story. Life is complex and people live through astonishing, and challenging, times and events.

This is a genuinely good show that has a point to make about how a community is made of a lot of very different people. It's telling that the work was made by a lot of students – the images differ wildly, but that's the point; all the different ways a photograph can show a person neatly reflects all the different stories people live.



An image from the Faces From Our Town exhibition