



**The Melbourne Vixens 2020 Indigenous Dress design has been created and shared by Aboriginal artist, Alice Pepper, from East Gippsland in Victoria. Alice's design depicts the regeneration and healing of the land and her local community following the summer's devastating bushfires.**

I am a proud Gunnai woman with family bloodline connections to the Yorta Yorta, Mutti Mutti, Gunditjmarra and Arrunte peoples. I'm a proud mum, wife and active community member across Gippsland with knowledge and experience working in programs dealing with health, justice, education, drugs and alcohol, employment and training, social and emotional wellbeing, youth mentoring and lateral violence.

I'm passionate about the arts and cultural expression through local stories, songs, language and dance that connects me to my country. I like experimenting with different mediums and practicing the skills and knowledge that has been passed on by my elders and cultural specialists over the years and sharing that knowledge with our youth. This style of artwork is traditional to the Gippsland area where linework is used to give meaning.

Our Gunnai/Kurnai Country is very special, made up of the High Country and the Low Country from the mountain ranges to the bushlands, river, lake systems and ocean views, which are home to many of our totem animals all connecting our songlines.

The Bogong Moth is significant to High Country and is placed in the mountains in the highest part of the dress where our ancestors travelled from many directions for gatherings, bringing many clans together for alliances, ceremony, food source and many other things.

The Vixen head at the top of the dress looks over the country through the eyes of those surrounded by the fires, hoping for more rain. The blue symbolises the donations of water that were received across East Gippsland from Melbourne during the fires, when there was a lack of water and poor quality water in some areas.

The footprints are of those who were evacuated along the Gippsland Line, walking down the centre of the dress away from the fires towards Lakes Entrance.

Along this Gippsland Line people are helping each other and gathering in large numbers, represented in the circle at the bottom of the dress. This is gathering and coming together of communities, with many people offering accommodation, food, water and looking after children. The rivers can be seen flowing horizontally across the dress, and represents a place where people crossed when evacuating.

In the middle panel of the dress, is the burned landscape of trees and natives. The green regrowth on the trees and leaves is a stark contrast to the blackened country.

After a traumatic experience watching our country burn, the new sign of life gives a sense of calm and healing. That's what we need to do as well after such a traumatic time, is find ways to heal. We need to look after the land because in turn, the land looks after us and if it's sick, we're sick.

Painting this story was healing for me.

Alice Pepper