

# “I Don’t Really Care for the Rules of English”: Jazz Money, Author of *How To Make a Basket*, on Writing in Language

*Broadsheet*, 8 March 2022

by Emma Joyce

Wiradjuri poet and artist Jazz Money is perched outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales on a particularly rainy Sydney morning. Money is in the city for a run of performances in the gallery, but also ahead of [All About Women](#) at Sydney Opera House, the annual ideas festival held close to International Women’s Day.

It’s been six months since Money published her debut book *how to make a basket*, and she tells *Broadsheet* it’s been like a “staggered birth” for her collection of poems, which examine the tensions of living in the Australian colony today through humour, humility and strength.

“It came out through one of the dark parts of lockdown, then it had this slow blossoming,” says Money. “That part has been really lovely to watch – the way something shifts and changes, even in a short amount of time – and the ability to connect with audiences as someone who reads poetry is so incredibly meaningful. It has reminded me about why gathering, celebration and face-to-face dialogue is really important. But also, I’ve been really thrilled by how many people have gotten in touch after having read the book in their own time.”

One reader, a friend Money says she didn’t realise she’d have such a deep spiritual connection with, gifted the artist a series of printed photographs as a way of saying thanks. “He felt ‘not alone in the world’ after having read the book, but didn’t have the right words to express how it felt ... It’s the most remarkably generous response,” she says.

“There’s an odd thing about writing a book, I found, which is that writing is a very solitary process, and reading is typically a solitary process, so it’s very unusual to have moments of connection. But I was also really aware, when going through the steps of publishing, that it’s an incredible privilege – and I mean that in every sense – to have a book made. It’s quite an elitist thing to create a book because it predicates that someone has the money to buy it, or has access to a library where they can borrow it, and once they have it in their hands that they have the ability to read it and read it in the language that it’s been published in.”

Money tells *Broadsheet* she wanted to lean into writing a book – a physical object – that would be meaningful when people held it, but that she doesn’t want to prioritise working on the page any more than in live settings, or in site-specific artworks. Her work *garrandarang* (Wiradjuri for “paper” or “book”) currently features as part of [Eucalyptusdom](#) at Sydney’s Powerhouse and Money’s poem *still the night parrot sings* was printed out on bright yellow paper with perforated holes that visitors could pick up and take away with them as part of Dean Cross’s artwork [Icarus, My Son](#) at Carriageworks.

“There’s a sort of electricity that comes from listening to or experiencing something live, but personally I feel like I really engage with something once I can sit with it,” she says. “If something resonates, I usually want to be able to have it at hand and see how it changes with multiple readings, and that’s something you can’t do [live] by the nature of performance.”

One of the distinctive patterns across Money’s written poetry is that she doesn’t like to use capital letters, punctuation or traditional formatting rules.

“I don’t really care for the rules of English,” she says, laughing. “I’ve found that writing becomes quite joyless when it’s about following rules. That was my experience of writing in school – it was very much learning how to stay within the confines of what someone else had drawn out, and that isn’t fun.”

Losing the capital letters on her work was “just a very neat way of saying ‘fuck the colony’ but without having to do very much” she says.

The 30-year-old artist lives on Gadigal land, in Sydney's inner west. She grew up in NSW's Southern Highlands before moving to the Mornington Peninsula as a teenager. Money has lived in Melbourne, the Blue Mountains, America and Europe, and says she has a transient sense of "home".

"I think the ability to make home where you are is really important and maybe that has something to do with being a diaspora First Nations person. I never lived on Wiradjuri Country, and perhaps I have a dislocated sense of home because I have my homeland, then the place where my family are, then the place where I am, and in some ways all of them feel like home."

Money writes in Wiradjuri and English; she reconnected with Wiradjuri language as an adult. "I often find that when writing poetry the Wiradjuri word is so much better than any English version of it, and we have spent so long trying to unpack the beauty, elegance, philosophy and science of one Wiradjuri word that takes 50 English words to describe [the same thing]," she says. "Turning to Wiradjuri is a very obvious choice for me, particularly when responding to Country – it just makes sense to say it in the true words, rather than the English approximation."

For Fremantle Biennale in November 2021, Money worked with Noongar elder Aunty Sandra Harben to translate her English words into the local Aboriginal language for *these words will remain*.

"[It's] a privilege to respond to something that exists on someone else's Country [and] I don't take that lightly, so if there's an opportunity to make it so the custodians of that place feel the work is resonant then that's something that I am always going to want to do."

"That piece was all about the river, and I really wanted the river to know," she says. "The language of that place is Noongar, so having the poem in Noongar means that place can engage and be respected, but it also means audiences that come who speak Noongar can see the importance of that, *and* audiences that don't speak Noongar have the opportunity to be reminded that there's a much richer, deeper, more significant language of place than the English words hanging with [it]. Returning to language is just the right thing to do I think."