

THE FOCUS GALLERY  
KENNETH THAIDAY (Snr)  
June 2009



**BELZAM – Kenneth Thaiday (Senior)**

The Focus Gallery at Cairns Regional Gallery displays works of art from the Gallery Collection. During the month of June, Belzam, a dance mask by Torres Strait Artist Kenneth Thaiday (Senior) will be on display.

Torres Strait Islanders have long been connoisseurs of dance. Islander dance performance and dance paraphernalia is the most powerful visual expression of indigenous culture in Australia, combining dance, theatre performance and visual art in graceful cohesion. The dancers strive for what Islanders call style in personal decoration and performance. Dance performances portray a myriad of social and cultural beliefs including myths and legends, daily domestic chores, rituals and storytelling that are referred to as Ailan Kustom.

The importance of the shark in the seas around the Torres Strait means the use of this type of mask in ceremonial dance is paramount. While this is an example of a contemporary interpretation of traditional masks, it is necessary and appropriate for the maintenance and transmission of the traditional culture to the youth of today.

Many parts of the shark were cut out using a jigsaw, sanded and glued together, with strips of black bamboo also adhered to the central body. The strings, when pulled, will manoeuvre the shark from side to side in a swimming motion imitating the motion of the animal.



Kenneth Thaiday Belzam  
Mixed media construction  
2001