

**BARK
MASTERS**

SYDNEY

17 JULY – 23 AUGUST 2025

BARK MASTERS

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INTRODUCTION



D'Lan Contemporary welcomes you to *Bark Masters*, an exhibition of museum-quality bark paintings by some of the finest practitioners of this distinctive artistic tradition. Given the growing global interest in Australian First Nations art, it is both timely and appropriate to acknowledge and celebrate Australia's great bark painters.

This exhibition seeks to raise the profile of artists we believe deserve greater appreciation for the contribution they have made, not only to Australian art history, but to the identity of our nation. Bark paintings provide a unique lens into the remote corners of Australia's north, which enables us to glimpse the profound knowledge, life experience and belief systems that have continued in Australia for tens of thousands of years.

Prior to painting on portable sheets of bark to sell or trade with interested non-Indigenous people, for thousands of years Aboriginal people across northern Australia painted on the interior walls of bark shelters, and on the walls of rocky escarpments. The motivations behind this practice are diverse. In various contexts, these paintings served as educational tools, facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge and ancestral stories. They also functioned as a form of visual and cultural expression, allowing artists to convey their identity, beliefs and connections to Country. Beyond their functional purposes, the act of painting itself was a source of enjoyment, providing family and community members with a medium to explore creativity and personal expression.

Too often, rather than being seen as remarkable individual practitioners, artists working on bark are defined by their medium. This exhibition seeks to shed light on the lives and artistic achievements of Australia's great bark painters.

We are excited to present the first exhibition of *Bark Masters*, in what we hope to become a series of annual exhibitions celebrating this unique Australian art form.



Arnhem Land wetlands. Photographer: Steve Strike



**THOMAS NANDJIWARRA
AMAGULA**

c. 1924 – 1989
Anindilyakwa language

Untitled circa 1955
earth pigments on bark
26.5 × 44.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Groote Eylandt,
East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
Private Collection, United States
of America
Gregg Dearth, United States
of America
Private Collection, North Queensland,
acquired from the above

AUD 12,000

The remarkable, though ambiguous form in this painting suggests the outstretched arms of a seated ceremonial performer, or perhaps an ancestral insect, both of which are subjects from Thomas Nandjiwarra Amagula's oeuvre. Careful comparative analysis suggests the equal possibility of both, this mystery being part of this object's allure. This work was possibly once part of a larger multi-panelled series of artworks that artists such as Amagula employed to illustrate complex chapters of an ancestral journey or ceremonial performance.

Early bark paintings from Groote Eylandt have a compelling and singular aesthetic, defined by sparse compositions against a dark manganese background; they are characterised by their narrative and illustrative qualities. *Untitled* circa 1955 exemplifies the technique employed by artists from this region, who create their compositions with dashes of red, white and yellow earth pigments. Although this technique briefly appeared in early paintings from nearby areas, its consistent use by Groote Eylandt artists has made it a defining stylistic trait of work from this period.

Despite the meaningful contribution that the founding artists from Groote Eylandt have made to the canon of bark painting, few of them have the profile that they deserve. Thomas Nandjiwarra Amagula was

a man of extraordinary skills and integrity. Born near Emerald River, he was one of the sons of Tiamondu, a great patriarch of the island. Named after the south-east wind – Nandjiwarra – and the ancestral sea-serpent – Amagula, Thomas Nandjiwarra Amagula's childhood was spent living in the bush prior to his first encounters with Europeans in the late 1930s.

Long recognised as an effective leader and determined traditionalist, Nandjiwarra played a key role in the protection of sacred sites after manganese was discovered on Groote Eylandt in 1963. He forged an agreement with mining interests which resulted in the formation of the tribally controlled Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust. His dedication to his community was recognised in 1970 when he was awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his services.

Works by Amagula are held in the collections of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.



NANDABITTA MAMINYAMANDJA

c. 1911 – 1981
Anindilyakwa language

*Untitled – Death Adders and
the Witch Doctor* circa 1951
earth pigments on bark
61 × 38 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Groote Eylandt,
East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
Collected by Professor Fred Rose
Sandra Le Brun Holmes, Sydney,
New South Wales
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above in 1991

AUD 6,000

The three painted Death Adders that dominate this composition bear a remarkable likeness to the snakes themselves. The Papuan rough-scaled death adder (*Acanthophis rugosus*) features a distinctive triangular head and a slender neck. Its robust body displays bands of pale brown and bronze, sectioned by irregular dark stripes.

Beneath the snakes is a traditional healer, or doctor, who appears to have laid down his possessions – including spears, spear throwers, and what are possibly forked mabarrkwa (fighting or dancing sticks). He has felled a tree with a stone axe, possibly to collect traditional medicines derived from various native trees on Groote Eylandt including dumberumba (native sandalwood), mamarra (small leaved paperbark), mawilyaburna (liniment tree) and merrika (broad leaved wattle). Typical of works from the late 1960s, and a particular feature of paintings by Nandabitta, is the use of a decorated ‘false frame’ to enclose the composition.

The Indigenous people who occupy the Groote Archipelago today are an amalgamation of two cultures, the Warnindilyakwa, who have occupied Groote Eylandt for around eight thousand years, and the Nungubuyu, from the mainland. The latter, at the invitation of the Warnindilyakwa,

began their migration to Groote Eylandt in the second half of the eighteenth century. The Warnindilyakwa and the Nungubuyu now constitute a family-based collective culture bound by ceremonial participation.¹

Many of the Anindilyakwa people’s ancestral narratives explain how they arrived on Groote Eylandt, and the ways in which the land, rivers, animals and people came into being. Many of Nandabitta’s paintings explored these themes as well as the historical visits from Macassan fisherman, primarily Bugis people from the area of Makassar (Sulawesi, Indonesia), who made regular visits to Groote Eylandt and other parts of Arnhem Land for over two centuries.

Paintings by Nandabitta are held in the collections of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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1. <https://anindilyakwa.com.au/preserving-culture/anthropology/traditional-culture/#:-:text=The%20Indigenous%20people%20who%20occupy,is%20no%20longer%20formally%20recognised.>
Accessed 13 June 2025.



**ATTRIBUTED TO TIPUAPUNGAPILA
KERINAUIA**

c. 1930 – deceased
Tiwi language

Purrukuparli Fights Tapara 1964
earth pigments on bark
33 × 65.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted on Bathurst Island, Northern Territory
Private Collection
Aboriginal & Tribal Art, Sotheby's, Sydney, 9 November 1997, lot 22
Private Collection, acquired from the above
Aboriginal and Oceanic Art, Sotheby's, Sydney, 25 November 2007, lot 38
Private Collection, acquired from the above
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, New York, 23 May 2023, lot 40
Private Collection, United States of America, acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2012, p. 29 (illus.)

AUD 40,000

This rare and important figurative bark painting illustrates the foundational Tiwi narrative of the violent confrontation between Purrukuparli and Tapara. The mystery surrounding its maker, combined with its intriguing provenance, compelling subject matter and distinctive aesthetic, affirms this painting's status as one of the most important works of Tiwi art remaining in private hands.

On the left of this composition stands Purrukuparli, with both hands in the air brandishing forked fighting sticks known as a milunata, or jamburaringa. On his right, Tapara has assumed a similar position. Purrukuparli had discovered that Tapara had been sneaking into the bush and having sexual relations with his wife, Bima, or Wai-ai. On one such occasion Bima had neglected their son, Jinani, who died from exposure to the sun. Bima is pictured between the two men clutching the dead body of her child. At either edge of a clearing the combatants' dogs bark, as two ancestral bird men perched in a tree look on fearfully.

Prior to the 1960s, Tiwi bark painting had largely featured esoteric designs which broadly fell under the banner of jilamara (designs). Figurative elements, usually the presence of ancestral beings, appeared only occasionally. At the time *Purrukuparli Fights Tapara* was created, collector and art dealer Dorothy Bennett was actively acquiring works from artists on the Tiwi

Islands and across Arnhem Land. In 1963, Bennett wrote to Pastor John Morris seeking to commission figurative depictions of the Purrukuparli story on bark. According to archival records, Morris was able to obtain 'several figurative paintings of this story', which upon completion were shipped to Darwin via the barge.¹

According to writer and historian Jennifer Isaacs, the group of artists who became the first to respond to the commissions were 'Jerry Kerinauia, or Cardo Kerinauia, sometimes with Don Hocking'.² It is well known that Pudjamali Don Hocking, a close relative of Cardo, assisted him in the completion of sculptures and bark paintings when Cardo became unwell, an experience which amplified 'Cardo's content with figurative drawing'.³

When this painting was originally collected by Morris, he attributed it to Tipuapungapila Kerinauia (recorded as Tupera-Bunga-Dila), also known as Eileen, the widow of the recently deceased Cardo Kerinauia Tiyantingalayang (c. 1892–1964).⁴ Cardo was a prominent figure among a small community of artists who worked at Paru on Melville Island, and continues to be acknowledged as one of the Tiwi Islands' finest sculptors. Not just a famous carver, Cardo was a 'cultural mainstay, dancer, innovator and leader'.⁵

In the early 1960s, the very few women who were given the rare opportunity to paint created



dynamic renditions of jilamara. The rarity of women's painting at this time is acknowledged on the small annotation attached to the back of this painting, which rather condescendingly suggests that the reason Tipuapungapila was given the opportunity to paint was because of the status of her late husband: 'The enormous respect and reverence in which her husband had been held explains why a woman should here, confidently paint a Creation Time Story, albeit in simple fashion.'

While it is not impossible that Tipuapungapila was an active, though unattributed artist at this time, the lack of any other extant examples of her practice suggests that rather than being the creator of this work, she was in possession of it in the aftermath of Cardo's death. According to information contained in the archive of Pastor John Morris, Kerinauia's funeral occurred on 3 January 1965, a full six months after he passed in July of the previous year. On the occasion of his funeral, Tipuapungapila entered the house they had shared to express the depths of her grief: 'A crowd of men then entered the room expressing grief and made an inventory of Cardo's possessions before dividing them among the relatives.'

Given the remarkable likeness *Purrukuparli Fights Tapara* 1964 has to the style and well-documented examples of two of Cardo's close cultural and artistic associates, Jerry Kerinauia and Pudjamali Don

Hocking, and the archival evidence above, we must consider that this painting was either painted by Cardo Kerinauia, Jerry Kerinauia and Don Hocking, or that it was a collaboration between some, or all, of the above.⁷ Perhaps Morris assumed that because Tipuapungapila was in possession of this painting that she had created it, explaining why he attributed it to her.

Rather than muddying the provenance of this extraordinary painting, this mystery highlights a unique period in Tiwi art history and enhances its enigmatic appeal.

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1. Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2012, p. 169.
 2. Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, p. 29.
 3. Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, p. 135.
 4. Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, p. 133.
 5. John Morris, 'Leaders of yesterday and today', typescript, c. 1965, p. 4.
 6. Jennifer Isaacs, *Tiwi: Art, History, Culture*, p. 133.
 7. Jerry Kerinauia's *The Terrible Fight of Purrukuparli and Tapara*, in the collection of the National Museum of Australia, features a near identical scenario of a 'wife watching two armed men chasing each other'. This example has similarly articulated figures with faces shown in profile and the remainder of the figure presented in frontal perspective. In both examples the artist has employed delicate stippling to decorate the bodies of the figures.



CHARLIE NEWILI BRINKIN

c. 1910 – 1993
Marringarr language

Untitled circa 1962
earth pigments on bark
39 × 29 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Wadeye –
Port Keats, Northern Territory
Private Collection, Adelaide,
South Australia
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 26 July 2004, lot 294
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above

AUD 18,000

Untitled circa 1962 depicts a perspectival view of a ceremonial ground. At the centre, a large concentric circle anchors the composition, while, below it, a decorated performer seems to exit the scene – his wide gait suggesting a sense of urgency. Perhaps the arrival of a mysterious spirit figure at the apex of this composition is the source of the performer's haste? The exaggerated depiction of several ceremonial implements may reflect their cultural significance. Similarly, the compositional emphasis placed on the quivering lines stretched between the roundels at either edge of the substrate suggests the importance Brinkin attributes to them.

A member of the Neewili clan, Brinkin's ceremonial responsibilities covered a vast area, from the northern coast of the Northern Territory as far south as Lajamanu in the northern stretches of the Tanami Desert. Little is known about his early life prior to the Catholic mission being established at Port Keats when he was in his twenties. Alongside Nym Bandak, he worked as an informant and friend of renowned anthropologist W.E.H. (Bill) Stanner for more than forty years.

Beginning in the late 1950s, the bark painters of Port Keats produced a remarkable – though largely unheralded – corpus of important bark paintings. For over two decades a core group of artists including Nym Bandak, Charlie Brinkin, Djinu Tjimari, Indji, Charlie Roche Nganbe, Charlie Mardigan and Pundaminni gathered to paint the cultural lives of Murrinhpatha and Marringarr people. Created for and sold through the local Catholic mission, these

paintings were gradually distributed across Australia – well before the desert paintings of Central Australia began circulating in the early 1970s.

There is no clear chronology of the history of bark painting at Port Keats. It appears, however, that a small conglomerate of men had become aware that various missions across Australia's Top End were facilitating the creation and sale of bark paintings by Aboriginal men. According to Port Keats historian Mark Crocombe, Brinkin and Nym Bandak were the first men to ask Catholic priest Father Richard Docherty about the viability of bark painting; Docherty would go on to support the artistic pursuits of local men during his time at the mission. Crocombe suggests the possibility that Bandak, who spent time in Darwin in the 1930s as a witness in a court case relating to two Japanese murders, observed the practice of trading barks and brought this commercial practice back to Port Keats.¹

When painting did eventually become a small industry at Port Keats, little information was recorded about the painters and the subjects of their paintings. This, combined with a longstanding failure to engage meaningfully with the community of Wadeye – Port Keats, has resulted in this remarkable art movement remaining one of the most underexplored chapters in Australian art history.

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1. Graeme Ward and Mark Crocombe, 'Port Keats painting: revolution and continuity', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 1, 2008, p. 51.



DJINU TJIMARI

c. 1901 – deceased
Murrinhpatha language

Untitled circa 1968
earth pigments on bark
94 × 31 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Wadeye –
Port Keats, Northern Territory
Dorothy Bennett Collection, Darwin,
Northern Territory
Private Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Fine Art, Lawson-Menzies,
Sydney, 9 November 2005, lot 89
The Thomas Vroom Collection,
Netherlands, acquired from
the above
The Thomas Vroom
Collection, Bonhams, Sydney,
6 September 2015, lot 132
Private Collection, Perth, Western
Australia, acquired from the above
AUD 15,000

When asked about their memories of Djinu Tjimari in 2005, senior Elders from the Wadeye – Port Keats community, Lawrence Kulumboort, Felix Bunduck and Leo Melpi, described him variously as ‘the big boss’, a ‘proper business [cultural] man’ and a ‘good fighting man’.¹ Beyond these memories everything we know about Tjimari comes from the writings of the celebrated anthropologist W.E.H. (Bill) Stanner. According to Stanner, Tjimari, also known as Wagon, was ‘a restless wanderer’ and ‘the main agent provocateur of the Daly River’ when they first met in the 1930s.²

Tjimari was the first Aboriginal person that Stanner had ever met, and during the quarter of a century they were acquainted, they developed a complex relationship. According to Stanner, Tjimari was a miraculous dancer who ‘had polish and a set of artful tricks which made each dance end in a furore. He would introduce a comical contrast of position and expression, prolong a stance so that it seemed absurd even to my eye, or use some form of caricature too

subtle for me to grasp. But the roar of appreciative laughter from the watchers told its own story’.³ His skills as a dancer were matched by his abilities in combat: ‘He was so extraordinarily agile that it was almost impossible to hit him with spear, fist, or stick. He claimed to be able to dodge bullets as easily. Since he was deadly accurate with a spear, no one liked to fight him, for it meant being wounded without being able to give wounds in return.’⁴

As an informant, Tjimari was ‘a man of much if inaccurate knowledge’. In a part of Australia experiencing relatively rapid change, Stanner occasionally felt compassion for Tjimari’s circumstances, and his determination ‘to make something of the ruined life around [him]’. Tjimari’s efforts to assert his position within a complex social environment may help contextualise Stanner’s more critical observations, in which he describes Tjimari as ‘a liar, a thief, an inveterate trickster, a tireless intriguer...’⁵



Intriguingly Stanner also described Tjimari as an artist of high ability, an observation that Stanner may have made later in the 1950s when Stanner commissioned works from Nym Bandak on large sheets of masonite. It is also possible that Stanner was referring to his contribution to the paintings for the altar of the Port Keats church, or perhaps his artistic abilities in a ceremonial context.

Only a handful of existing paintings are known to have been created by Tjimari, all of them incorporating human-like forms such as this example. Pondering Stanner's descriptions of Tjimari, it is tempting to see something of the artist in the figure in *Untitled* circa 1968, with his animated, wide-eyed face, alert to his circumstances, arms outstretched as if dancing for a crowd who have gathered in anticipation of his every move.

Later in life Tjimari became the primary informant of Roland Robinson, a poet and writer who worked with several Murrinhpatha men at Port Keats, including Nym Bandak. According to Stanner,

Robinson 'greatly admired his intelligence, knowledge, and imaginative gifts but took a somewhat sentimental view of other aspects of his character'.⁶

Untitled circa 1968 is widely regarded as the finest of Tjimari's known works. Paired with Stanner's perceptions, it provides a fascinating insight into the enigmatic lives and artistic practice of the Port Keats bark painters, whose contribution to Australian art history is as significant as it is overlooked.

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1. Bill Ivory, *Kunmanggur, Legend and Leadership: A Study of Indigenous Leadership and Succession Focussing on the Northwest Region of the Northern Territory of Australia*, PhD thesis, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, 2009, p. 133.
 2. *Durmugam: A Nangiomeri*, in W.E.H. (William Edward Hanley) Stanner and Robert Manne, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 23–24.
 3. *Durmugam: A Nangiomeri*, p. 23.
 4. *Durmugam: A Nangiomeri*, p. 23.
 5. *Durmugam: A Nangiomeri*, p. 23.
 6. *Durmugam: A Nangiomeri*, p. 24.



ARTIST NAME NOT RECORDED

Untitled circa 1955
 earth pigments on bark
 73 × 45 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in West Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
 Stuart McKee Struever, Evanston, Illinois, United States of America
 TAD Tribal Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico, United States of America
 Private Collection, United States of America, acquired from the above in 2006

AUD 18,000

While the name, exact date and place of creation of this painting cannot be specified, the style of painting and use of materials suggests that this is an early bark painting from the West Arnhem Land or central Arnhem Land region. Much of the population who gathered at the missions and small communities where these barks were created arrived from across the vast region of central Arnhem Land and the Alligator rivers. Many of the men who produced bark paintings for interested anthropologists and missionaries had extensive knowledge of the spectacular rock art galleries of the region. It's likely that the person who created this painting had produced rock paintings in their own lands prior to relocating to the place where this bark was collected. This artistic heritage provides an explanation for the characteristic style of this painting, and how the lived experience of men from this region, during this period, informed the unique aesthetic of the barks they created. The influence of rock art on the artistic and cultural lives of Kuninjku people is emphasised by anthropologist and art historian Luke Taylor: 'Rock art remains a wellspring for Kuninjku creativity, and in many respects Kuninjku gain distinctiveness from the unique rock country of their clan lands.'¹

Much like in this painting, the rock art of this vast region has a pronounced use of white paint roughly applied as the background of the imagery. This kind of painting is called *rungkalno* and it is common in the rock art of Arnhem Land, where images can be displayed as a simple white silhouette without any interior infill.² Occasionally coloured dotting or linework was incorporated, such as in this example.

The three male figures in this painting may be a family, or group of ancestral beings. Their long hair, elongated arms and extended fingers suggest the

physical attributes of *Namarnde*, a ghost-like being of the human dead. These figures feature strongly in the rock art galleries of the sandstone escarpments of central Arnhem Land and West Arnhem Land.

It is not uncommon for the identity of early bark painters to be unknown. In some instances, this information has simply been lost to the passage of time, but in many instances and for different reasons, the names of the painters were not recorded.

At different times and locations across Australia's Top End, the creation and collection of bark paintings took place within diverse cultural contexts. Anthropologists, some of the earliest collectors of paintings on bark, prized them as cross-cultural items of exchange.

The prevailing Eurocentric view at the time was that these paintings served primarily as vessels of cultural or ethnographic information, rather than being recognised and appreciated as works of art. Compounding this view was the belief that knowing the specific identity of the artist was irrelevant to the interpretation of the subject matter. The maker, some anthropologists believed, was a mere mouthpiece for a collective cultural tradition, rather than an important individual artist with personal agency and creative intent. Aboriginal people, however, understand that the identity, cultural background and social status of the knowledge holder are vital to understanding the information they shared.

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1. Luke Taylor, in Hetti Perkins (ed.), *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004, p. 116.
2. Luke Taylor, 'The Lance Bennett Collection of bark paintings', in *Aboriginal Art*, Sotheby's, London, 10 June 2015.



YIRAWALA MBE

c. 1897 – 1976

Kuninjku language

Mimih Spirits circa 1970

earth pigments on bark

68 × 29 cm

PROVENANCEThe Artist, created at Minjilang –
Croker Island, West Arnhem Land,
Northern TerritorySandra Le Brun Holmes, Sydney,
New South WalesPrivate Collection, United States,
acquired from the above

AUD 35,000

Yirawala was born at the mouth of the Liverpool River in the Marrkolidjban region of West Arnhem Land, where he spent his formative years living in the bush. After a brief time spent living at the mission at Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli, he moved north to Minjilang – Croker Island. At Minjilang, he worked among a group of artists including Jimmy Midjawmidjaw, Paddy Compass Namatbara and January Nangunyari-Namiridali, all of whom attracted the interest of the artist and important collector Karel Kupka.

In 1964, Yirawala met Sandra Le Brun Holmes, who was on Minjilang documenting ceremonial songs and stories for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Holmes continued to work with Yirawala, purchasing works from him and documenting his stories. With her assistance, he had a solo exhibition in 1971 at the University of Sydney, which then toured to the South Australian Museum, Adelaide, and the Melbourne Museum. Holmes directed two films on Yirawala: *Return to the Dreaming*, 1971 and *Yirawala: The Picasso of Arnhemland*, 1982. She also wrote two books: *Yirawala: Artist and Man*, 1972, and *Yirawala: Painter of the Dreaming*, 1992.

In the 1970s, Yirawala often worked with Peter Marralwanga at Marrkolidjban. The two were good friends, and Yirawala taught Marralwanga how to translate his stories into works on bark. It was during this time that Yirawala undertook to paint an extensive collection of works relating to ceremonial themes.

According to Balang Nakurulk (John Mawurndjul AM), it was Yirawala who pioneered the introduction

of rarrk in the work of Kuninjku artists.¹ Yirawala is also credited as being the first Kuninjku artist to use white pigment as a background for his paintings, such as in the example of *Mimih Spirits* circa 1970.

Yirawala was a key advocate for the Land Rights movement and fought for many years to reclaim ownership of his Country at Marrkolidjban and to prevent mining on Kuninjku lands. In 1971, Yirawala was awarded an MBE for services to Aboriginal art, and also received the International Cooperation Art Prize.

Yirawala held solo exhibitions at the University of Sydney, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, and Melbourne Museum, 1971, and the exhibition *Eighty Paintings by Yirawala* was held at the Sydney Opera House, 1975; group exhibitions include *Spirit in Land: Bark Paintings from Arnhem Land*, 1991. Yirawala died in 1976, only months before the Northern Territory Land Rights Act was passed.

Yirawala is a towering figure in the history of Australian bark painting; his paintings and sculptures are held in almost every major collecting institution in Australia.

1. See John Mawurndjul, 'My head is full up with ideas', in Anne-Claire Ducreux, Apolline Kohlen and Fiona Salmon (eds), *In the Heart of Arnhem Land, Myth and the Making of Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue, Musée de l'Hotel-Dieu, Mantes-la-jolie, France, 2001, p. 53.



YIRAWALA MBE

c. 1897 – 1976

Kuninjku language

Lumaluma and Mimih circa 1964

earth pigments on bark

95 × 33 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Minjilang –

Croker Island, West Arnhem

Land, Northern Territory

Private Collection

Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,

Melbourne, 24 July 2007, lot 83

Private Collection, United States of

America, acquired from the above

AUD 45,000

Lumaluma is the main creator figure of the Kuninjku Maḏayin ceremony. He is said to have created all the other ancestors of contemporary humans and to have placed them in their respective clan territories. As one feature of this creation, he made all the paintings and sacred objects used by dancers in the Mardayin ceremony.¹ More specifically, Lumaluma's body was cut into pieces (evidenced by the long split in Lumaluma's figure), which transformed into the sacred objects used by human groups today.

Yirawala painted many images of Lumaluma, and the Mardayin ceremony was an important topic in many of his works. In *Lumaluma and Mimih*, Yirawala illuminates Lumaluma's body with finely delineated striae reflecting the coloured designs of the Mardayin ceremony. In Mardayin performances, the designs are used to create a dramatic statement of the continuing spiritual identity between the dancers and their ancestral lands. The lines can be interpreted as representing the body parts of the dancers such as their backbone and ribs. At another level, the design represents features such as waterholes, watercourses and rocky cliffs in their Country. In a spiritual sense, the dancers understand that their own body derives existence from Lumaluma's original creativity.

1. <https://www.mca.com.au/collection/artworks/1993.276/#:-:text=Lumaluma%20is%20the%20main%20creator,hip%20bones%2C%20are%20also%20emphasised>. Accessed 15 June 2025.



BOBBY BARRDJARAY
NGANJMIRRA

Kuninjku language
c. 1915 – 1992

*Untitled – Mimihs and
Barramundi* circa 1968
earth pigments on bark
48 × 31 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kunbarlanja –
Oenepli, West Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory
Private Collection, New South Wales

AUD 12,000

Barrdjaray was born around 1915 at Marlwon, his father's Country between the Gumadeer and Liverpool rivers in West Arnhem Land. Marlwon is best known as a place created by the Yawk Yawk sisters, Likanaya and Marrayka – the primary ancestral narrative of Nganjmirra's branch of the Djalama clan. As a young teenage boy, Barrdjaray visited the mission at Kunbarlanja at the invitation of a visiting stockman. Though his initial stay was brief, he later attended school there – and for a short time at Goulburn Island. After World War II, Barrdjaray worked with the anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt.

Barrdjaray's earliest works display the parallel red hatching on white silhouettes typical of works on rock. As his practice progressed, his works became narrative driven, and occasionally he used a series of barks to explore complex narrative themes. The most distinct feature of his practice is his highly expressive figures and his unusually fine linework, both apparent in *Untitled – Mimihs and Barramundi*.

Barrdjaray was the head of one of the great Australian art dynasties – the Nganjmirra family – which includes his younger brothers Jimmy Nakurridjilmi and Peter Nganjmirra, and their sons and grandchildren. Barrdjaray was a prolific painter

whose high ceremonial status and artistic ability enabled him to engage with a wide range of subject matter. He painted the narratives of his own Yirridjdja moiety, including the actions of ancestral beings such as Mimihs and Lumaluma. His cultural knowledge and custodial and managerial rights permitted him to paint Nimbawah rock, another important place belonging to the Dhuwa moiety on a neighbouring estate. He was equally adept at capturing mundane scenes from the everyday and beautifully distilled articulations of various animals including crocodiles, kangaroos, fish and occasionally birds.

His work is part of significant national and international collections including the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Australian Museum, Sydney; Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, Perth; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; Arnotts Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; the Holmes à Court Collection, Perth; and the Kelton Foundation, Santa Monica, USA.



WALLY MANDARRK

c. 1915 – 1987
Dangbon/Dalabon language

Mimih Spirits Dancing circa 1979
earth pigments on bark
84 × 40 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Maningrida,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture,
Maningrida, Northern
Territory, cat. no. MA01
Private Collection, Sydney,
New South Wales, acquired from
the above
Aboriginal Art, Lawson-Menzies,
Sydney, 30 May 2006, lot 190
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above

AUD 12,000

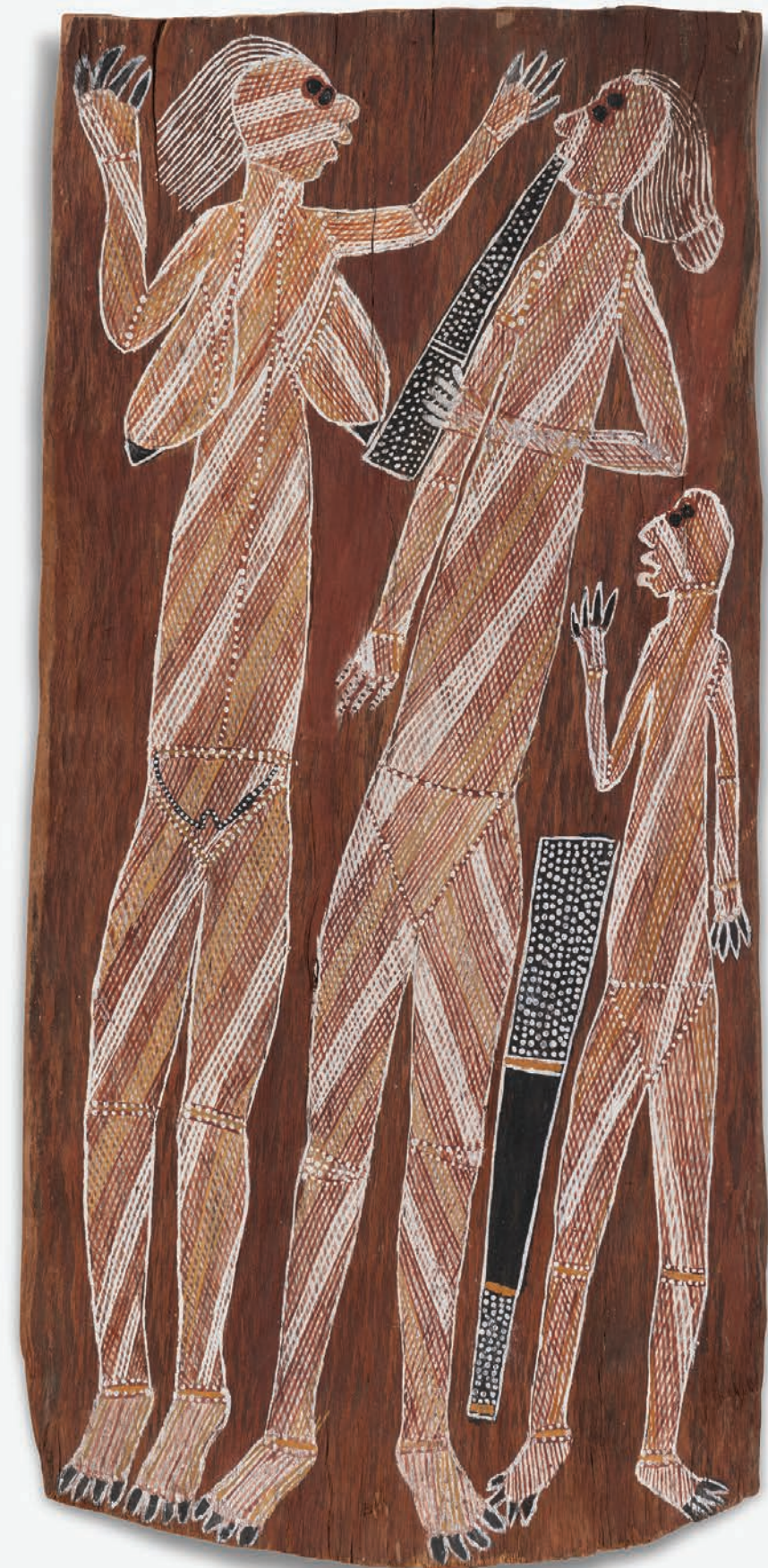
This painting features dancing Mimih spirits, with one of the figures appearing to be playing the mako (didjeridu). For Kuninjku people, these spirits sometimes form the basis of morality stories, living, as they do, in a fashion not entirely different from Bininj (Aboriginal people). Mimih spirits are thought to have developed many everyday bush skills which they then passed on to Bininj.

As was common across the majority of Mandarrk's oeuvre, the physical subject matter in *Mimih Spirits Dancing* fills much of the bark's substrate. His thickset figures are defined by strong outlines filled with bold rarrk. The subtle expressions and bodily forms of each figure provide a glimmer of their unique character.

Born around 1915, Mandarrk grew up in south-central Arnhem Land and spent time at Marlkawo near Bardayal Lofty Nadjamerrek's Country of Kabulwarnamyo. He did not encounter European settlers until he was encouraged to settle at Maranboy, east of Katherine. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, he lived at a number of bush camps, including one at Mankorlod, before establishing Yaymini outstation with his family in remote Arnhem escarpment country.

During his time spent living remotely, Mandarrk was known to paint the surrounding escarpments, presumably in the same manner he painted his barks. Bark paintings by Mandarrk were collected during the 1948 American–Australian scientific expedition to Arnhem Land. In the 1960s, he worked with the anthropologist Eric Brandl, who documented a rock painting Mandarrk completed of Bolung, the Rainbow Serpent, in a cave in the Cadell River region. Prior to the establishment of Maningrida Arts and Crafts in the early 1970s, Mandarrk sold his bark paintings through a network of collectors and anthropologists. A man of tradition, he continued using djalamaridi (juice from the orchid *Dendrobium* spp.) as a binder for his ochres long after bark artists were introduced to PVA glue.

Significant works by Mandarrk are in the collections of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.



**DICK NGULEINGULEI
MURRUMURRU**

c. 1920 – 1988
Kunwinjku and Dangbon languages

*Mimih Hunters and
Wallabies* circa 1968
earth pigments on bark
45.5 × 77 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kunbarlanja
– Oenpelli, West Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory
Oenpelli Church Missionary
Society, Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli,
West Arnhem Land, Northern
Territory, cat. no. C734
Private Collection, acquired
from the above
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 26 July 2010, lot 85
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above
AUD 18,000

Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurru was born at Kukadjeri, on the Liverpool River plateau between Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli – and Maningrida. He grew up in the headwaters region of the Liverpool River and briefly, in the 1930s, he attended school at Kunbarlanja. He later worked occasionally as a crocodile shooter on a cattle station at Goodparla, and at a timber camp in the Kakadu area. In 1965, Murrumurru returned to Kunbarlanja, often visiting his mother's Country at Kurrukkurr (Table Hill).

While at Kunbarlanja during the late 1960s and 1970s, Murrumurru became a key figure in the bark painting movement, working for Peter Carroll of the Church Missionary Society. His subject matter focused on animals such as kumoken (freshwater crocodile) and ngarrbek (echidna), which were painted with a hunter's attuned sense of proportion, anatomy and personality. He also painted stories and spirits from the stone country, such as the Wardbukarra-wardbukarra from nearby Manmoyi and the Mimih spirits that inhabit the escarpment.

Murrumurru belonged to a group of artists who identified themselves as the 'Kunwinjku-Dangbon school', which included Bardayal Lofty

Nadjamerrek, whose lands lie along the southern edges of Kunwinjku territory. On occasion, they shared camps, either on their traditional lands or at the township of Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli.

During the 1980s, Murrumurru lived at Marlkawo outstation, close to his own Bularlhdja clan lands, with fellow artist Bardayal Lofty Nadjamerrek and their families. He died there in tragic circumstances in 1988.

Important paintings by Murrumurru have appeared in several major exhibitions including: *The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, which toured North America in 1974–1976; *Oenpelli Paintings on Bark*, 1977; *Kunwinjku Bim*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1984; *The Art of the First Australians*, Kobe, Japan, 1986; *Dreamings*, Asia Society, New York, 1988; *Keepers of the Secrets*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 1990; *Crossing Country*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004; and *Old Masters*, National Museum of Australia, 2013.

One of the finest bark painters to emerge from West Arnhem Land, Murrumurru is represented in most major collecting institutions in Australia.



BARDAYAL LOFTY NADJAMERREK

c. 1926 – 2009
Kuninjku language

Rainbow Serpent 1994
earth pigments on bark
30 × 64 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kunbarlanja –
Oenpelli, West Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory
Injalak Arts & Crafts Association,
Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli, West
Arnhem Land, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 126-7-94
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above

AUD 18,000

Nadjamerrek is responsible for many of the seminal images of Ngalyod that appear in contemporary bark paintings. Ngalyod is regarded as a most important ancestor spirit in West Arnhem Land and appears in various manifestations in Kunwinjku spirituality. She is the ancestral creator of the Bininj people, capable of benevolent and malevolent actions that are embedded in the animate topography of djang (sacred sites).

In the Wangarr (the ancestral period) she assumed a range of animal forms including snake, kangaroo and crocodile, and at times transformed herself from one to the other, or into a combination of each. In this example, Nadjamerrek shows her with a fish tail and mandem (waterlilies) protruding from her back. It is possible that the very fine stripes on the waterlilies and parts of the body refer to Ngalyod's manifestation as the Rainbow. The barbed extensions from her head, and the bony protuberance from her neck, enable her to tunnel underground.

In the wet season, Ngalyod appears in the sky as a rainbow. During the dry season, she is said to inhabit deep billabongs and lagoons. Ngalyod is responsible for the production of most water plants, and other plants that grow near water sources, such as waterlilies, water vines, algae and palms. Waterlilies on the water's surface are said to indicate her presence, thus Kuninjku are careful not to damage the lilies or disturb the still bodies of water so as not to anger her.

Sometimes Ngalyod is known to swallow Bininj as punishment when they break traditional laws, only to regurgitate them, transformed by her blood. The roar of waterfalls in the escarpment country is said to be her voice, and large holes in the stony banks of rivers and cliff faces are said to be her tracks. Delek (white ochre) that Kuninjku people use to create white paint for bark paintings, body decoration and rock art is believed to be the transformed faeces of Ngalyod.

Bardayal Lofty Nadjamerrek was born at Kukkurulumurl, in the Kabbanderre area south of Mankorlod outstation. He began painting on rock as a youth, instructed by his father. Nadjamerrek recalls that when he was young, he went to Maranboy to mine tin and during wartime he worked in the army camp at Mataranka, south-west of Katherine. Later he went to Bulman to work as a stockman, before returning to his life in the bush. Sometime in the 1950s, he was forced to return to work, first cutting timber at Maranboy, then as a buffalo shooter in country around Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli. Later Nadjamerrek worked for the Kunbarlanja mission in the market garden, sawmill and on the roads.

Nadjamerrek started painting in the 1960s, when Peter Carroll was working at the mission at Kunbarlanja. Nadjamerrek later worked with the collector and gallerist Dorothy Bennett, then Peter Cooke at Maningrida Arts and Crafts. In 1972, he moved to Kurrukkurr (Table Hill), which had only recently been established as an outstation. He also spent time at Kumader and Manmoyi, before moving to his own outstation at Marlkawo by 1980. Here Nadjamerrek lived with Dick Nguleingulei Murrumuru and their families until a tragic incident which claimed the life of his friend Murrumuru and others in 1988, after which the outstation was abandoned.

Nadjamerrek's works featured alongside those of Mick Kubarkku in the exhibition *Rainbow Sugarbag and Moon: Two Artists of the Stone Country – Bardayal Nadjamerrek and Mick Kubarkku*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 1995. In 2011, he was celebrated with a major retrospective exhibition, *Bardayal Lofty Nadjamerrek AO*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.



BARDAYAL LOFTY NADJAMERREK

c. 1926 – 2009

Kuninjku language

The Bandicoot – Yok circa 1975

earth pigments on bark

76 × 39.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kunbarlanja –

Oenpelli, West Arnhem

Land, Northern Territory

Kunbarlanja Council Inc.,

West Arnhem Land, Northern

Territory, cat. no. A63-BI

Private Collection, Sydney,

New South Wales

AUD 14,000

The northern brown bandicoot is known as Yok for Kuninjku people. Sometimes artists like Nadjamerrek portray an animal's role in Wangarr (ancestral period) narratives, or sometimes they can provide insights into specific anatomical details including the presence and positioning of their internal organs.

Nadjamerrek was a Kundedjnenghmi-speaking artist whose Mok clan lands were located on the Arnhem Land escarpment, the Kuwadehwadeh. He marketed his work through Injalak Arts & Crafts and lived in various outstations of Kunbarlanja – Oenpelli before finally returning to Kabulwarnamyo, the sacred site of mankung djang (wild honey).

Bardayal was taught to paint on rock by his father, Yanjorluk, an experience that greatly informed his practice on bark.



PETER MARRALWANGA

c. 1916 – 1987

Kuninjku language

*Nawilah – Stingray**Dreaming* circa 1982

earth pigments on bark

132 × 51.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in the Maningrida region, Northern Territory
 Gallery of Dreams, Sydney
 The Collection of Dr Ronald and Alison Fine, Sydney,
 acquired from the above
The Collector's Auction,
 Leonard Joel, Sydney,
 17 September 2024, lot 7
 Private Collection, Melbourne,
 Victoria, acquired from the above

AUD 33,000

Nawilah – Stingray Dreaming is an exceptional example from Marralwanga's esteemed oeuvre. Nawilah, the brown river stingray, can be found in saltwater, or in big estuarine rivers. They are hunted in shallow water with djalakirradj (three-pronged fishing spears) during the wet season. The name 'nawilah' literally means 'wide one'.

Marralwanga was an innovator in rarrk techniques – interchanging colour sequencing and the orientation of the bands of rarrk, using blocks of full colour and sections of dots.¹ Some of these techniques can be seen here between the intertwined bodies of the Nawilah. Their heads and liver, the latter a prized part of their anatomy for Bininj, have been dotted, a technique Marralwanga continued from his experience of painting on rock.

Peter Marralwanga was one of the most influential Kuninjku artists of his generation, inspiring artists including Jimmy Njiminjuma, Balang Nakurulk (John Mawurndjul AM) and his sons Ivan Namirrkki and Samuel Namunjdja. Marralwanga's daughter Kay Lindjuwanga was one of the first women in this region to start painting on bark.

Marralwanga started to paint in the 1970s, relatively late in his life. He was a close friend of

Yirawala and, at the beginning of the outstation movement, they established a camp at Marrkolidjban. Yirawala taught Marralwanga how to paint Mardayin designs for ceremony. Both men had lobbied for the development of an outstation at Marrkolidjban, situated in Yirawala's clan estate, while Marralwanga had established rights there through long-term residence. Marralwanga lived in the region most of his life until the early 1960s, when he was persuaded to move to Maningrida. However, his dissatisfaction with the lifestyle at Maningrida, and his concern at mining exploration of Kuninjku lands, led Marralwanga to return to Marrkolidjban in 1973.

Significant bark paintings by Marralwanga are in national collections including the National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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 1. Luke Taylor, in Hetti Perkins (ed.), *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004, p. 121.



BALANG NAKURULK (JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)

1952 – 2024

Kuninjku language

Buluwana and Death Adder Snake 1993
earth pigments on bark
205 × 58 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Milmilngkan, Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Maningrida, Northern Territory, cat. no. MAW236
Hogarth Gallery, Sydney, New South Wales
Private Collection, United States of America, acquired from the above in 1994

AUD 120,000

The Kuninjku people of Arnhem Land tell of a time when their ancestors suffered a terrible drought. After a prolonged period of struggle, eventually people began dying of thirst. The bones of these people are said to be those found in the caves of the escarpment country of West Arnhem Land in the Mann River district.

During this time, Buluwana and her family camped at Ngandarrayo on Kurulk clan land. They were weak from thirst and close to death. The malevolent gigantic form of the Death Adder snake confronted the group. Buluwana attempted to run away with the rest of her family but was crushed and turned to stone. Today an arrangement of rocks standing in the ground remains as Buluwana's present-day form. Only her head protrudes as a prismic standing stone; the rest of her body is under the ground. Other human remains lying on rock ledges are said to be the remains of other early ancestors. The Ngandarrayo site is a place of great significance to people of the Kurulk and Kulmarru clans, and is classed as a highly sacred and dangerous place.¹

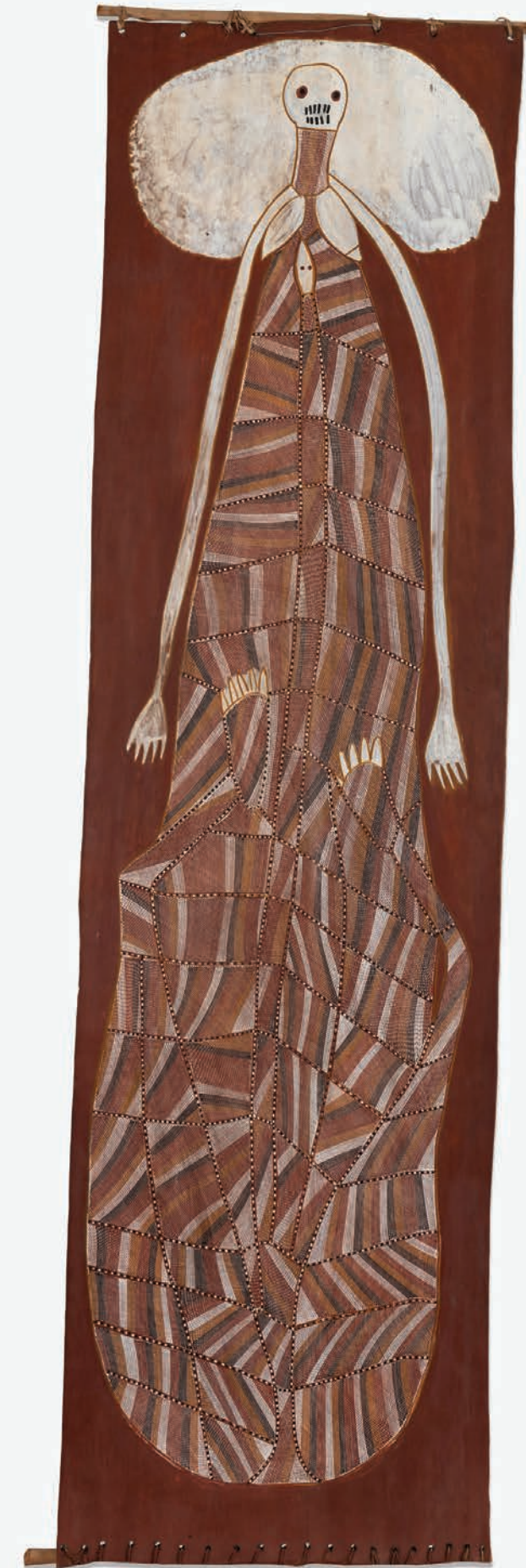
The son of Anchor Kulunba and Mary Wurdjedje, Balang Nakurulk was born in the Mumeka/Milmilngkan area, close to the Mann River. Along with his brothers Jimmy Njiminjuma and James Iyuna, and sister Susan Marawarr, he spent his childhood in this area and also at Marrkolidjban. He had little contact with balanda (non-Aboriginal people) until the establishment of Maningrida in 1957. In the early 1970s, following the establishment of the outstation, he returned to Mumeka with Peter Marralwanga, Mick Kubarkku

and Jimmy Njiminjuma. At Mumeka, Balang started to paint small barks, under the guidance of Marralwanga and Njiminjuma. At times he would finish Njiminjuma's paintings for him, and Marralwanga is also known to have painted the background of paintings for Balang, who would then do the infill.

In the 1980s, Balang started to work independently on larger and more elaborate barks. In the early 1990s, when Mumeka had become too small to accommodate all of the extended families living there, Balang set up an outstation for his family at Milmilngkan, where he lived with his wife, Kay Lindjuwanga, and family. Balang taught his wife and their daughter, Anna Wurrkidi, to paint. A renowned hunter, he was actively involved in caring for Country while working alongside local rangers.

During his lifetime, Balang won several prizes, including the Telstra Bark Painting Award of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, in 1999 and 2002, and the 2003 Clemenger Contemporary Art Prize. His legacy was celebrated in two major exhibitions, <<rarrk>> – *John Mawurndjul: Journey Through Time in Northern Australia*, The Museum der Kulturen Basel guest of the Museum Tinguely, 21 September 2005 – 29 January 2006, and *John Mawurndjul: I am the old and the new*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 6 July – 23 September 2018.

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1. Maningrida Arts & Culture.



BURANDAY WAYNBARRNGA

c. 1914 – 1980
Djambarrpuyngu language

Untitled – Crucifixion Study circa 1963
earth pigments on bark
87.5 × 60.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted on
Milingimbi, central Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory
Yarrandoo Australia,
Cairns, Queensland
Private Collection
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 25 July 2005, lot 220
Private Collection, Sydney,
New South Wales, acquired
from the above
Important Single Owner
Auction, Mossgreen, Melbourne,
14 September 2014, lot 27
Private Collection, Melbourne,
Victoria, acquired from the above

AUD 30,000

Prior research by curator and author Wally Caruana has identified this rare and unusual bark as being related to the creation of the Milingimbi Easter Panels, one of which now hangs in the National Gallery of Australia. The community had decided to make the Easter Panels as a backdrop for a pageant organised by the Methodist Church – they were not intended for permanent display. One half of the table was painted by artists of the Yirritja moiety and the other was painted by Dhuwa artists, including Buranday.¹

Caruana suggests that *Untitled – Crucifixion Study* circa 1963 may be a study for the finished Dhuwa panel, which featured Jesus Christ on the cross surrounded by his family and Roman soldiers. The production of a study for a future work would be a rare, if not unprecedented, endeavour for an Arnhem Land bark painter; however, given the church's involvement in the production of the panels, this is entirely possible. Bark paintings depicting Christian subjects are rare, with only a handful of images known to have been produced.

Buranday Waynbarrnga was among the group of Djambarrpuyngu clans who moved to the small island community of Milingimbi in Arnhem Land following

the establishment of the mission by the Methodist Church in 1923. Although his birth date is recorded as being around 1914, it is likely he was born earlier, as he is recorded by the first anthropologist to come to the island, W. Lloyd Warner, as having an active role in the severe clan feuding that took place within Arnhem Land in the 1920s and claimed the life of Buranday's brother.

In the 1950s, Buranday began to engage with the art market, as the then mission superintendent, Reverend Edgar Wells, formalised the sale of artworks through the mission and visits from anthropologists increased. In the ensuing years, Buranday worked consistently, creating bark paintings, paperbark objects and carved wooden sculptures. A major focus of his work was the mortuary rites of the Dhuwa moiety, particularly Banumbirr, the Morning Star.²

1. Wally Caruana, *Important Single Owner Auction – European Furniture and Decorative Arts*, Mossgreen Auctions, Melbourne, 14 September 2014, lot 27.

2. Cara Pinchbeck, Louise Hamby and Louise Allen, *Art from Milingimbi: Taking Memories Back*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2016, p. 60.



LIPUNDJA

c. 1912 – 1968
Gupapuyngu language

Old Men's Ceremony circa 1965
earth pigments on bark
100 × 49 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted on
Milingimbi, central Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory
Milingimbi Methodist Mission,
Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above
Inaugural Aboriginal Art Auction,
Deutscher and Hackett, Melbourne,
25 March 2009, lot 214
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above

AUD 12,000

This painting features Burala (Diver Duck) totems that relate to mortuary ceremonies. Diver ducks feed on small fish in billabongs and freshwater holes, acting as a metaphor for the soul of an individual being plucked from the pool of life. The totems incorporate herringbone design, which represents the skeleton of the catfish. When catfish are young, they have transparent bodies through which the skeleton is visible: thus the design incorporates notions of birth, new life and death.

Burala travelled from the east to Gat'dji and in its journey stopped in prominent areas of Yirritja land. On its travels it stopped at Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella). From there it continued to stop at various places until it came to Yatharamara, where it gave the Balmbi their songs and ceremony. From there Burala flew to Gat'dji lagoon, where its spirit now rests. Gat'dji is a Yirritja place and belongs to the Bulkbulk Mapurn (place of ducks) clan group, a Wulaki/Djinang-speaking people.

Lipundja was at the forefront of the dynamic art movement that emerged at the small island community of Milingimbi in Arnhem Land from the

early 1950s. He was a younger brother of Djäwa and therefore shared connections to the Gupapuyngu Daygurrurr estate of Djiliwirri at Buckingham Bay, on the mainland to the east. Of most importance at this location is the Yirritja honey, known as niwuda, which offered a constant source of inspiration to Lipundja throughout his career.

Widely recognised for his distinct sculptures, Lipundja created impressive figures in matte black ochre featuring the vivid diamond pattern for niwuda on their chests and thighs.¹

Paintings and sculptures are held in the collections of Museums Victoria, Melbourne; National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

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1. Art Gallery of New South Wales.



NARRITJIN MAYMURU

c. 1916 – 1981
Yolŋu language

Garritjpi circa 1962
earth pigments on bark
144 × 73 cm

PROVENANCE

Painted in Yirrkala, north-east
Arnhem Land
Rev. Edgar Almond Wells, Yirrkala,
acquired circa 1961 – 1963
J. A. Davidson, Melbourne,
presumably acquired from the above
Private Collection
Thomas Vroom, the Netherlands
Private Collection, Brussels, Belgium

AUD 35,000

Narritjin Maymuru is one of the outstanding masters of his generation of artists from Arnhem Land.¹ A painter and sculptor, he elaborated on the complex systems of Yolŋu visual expression, symbolism and meaning. With its multitude of references and visual puns, *Garritjpi* is no exception. On one level, the painting is a pictorial narrative from the Wanŋarr ancestral past that depicts Nulumun, a Mangalili ancestor at Garritjpi on Arnhem Bay; on another level it is a treatise on Mangalili cosmology and ritual; it is also a map of Country and more besides.

The focus of the painting is the yingapungyapu burial ceremony at the Mangalili homeland of Djarrakpi, on Cape Shield on the eastern coast of Arnhem Land, depicted in the upper register of the painting. In the right section, the vertical ovoid form has several overlapping meanings: it represents a sacred Marrawili cashew tree; it replicates a ritual object decorated with a stylised map of the salt lake at Djarrakpi; and it also represents one of the major totemic beings of the Mangalili, Njukal the Kingfish. The harbinger of death, Guwak, the Koel Cuckoo,

stands on top, and to either side are the digging sticks of the Nyapililŋu sisters, ancestors of the Mangalili clan, beside Marrŋu, the Possum, whose fur the sisters spun into lengths of string used in rituals. Two yingapungyapu appear in the top left section with interred figures flanking a sacred Marrawili tree containing cicadas; the cicadas are also associated with the site of Djarrakpi. The two upper sections of the painting are separated by a Marrawili tree in the form of a ritual object also bearing images of the cicadas.

Nulumun, the great hunter, is depicted in the central section of the painting with a yingapungyapu emblem painted on his torso. He is the kingfish Njukal in human form. A great communicator, he hurls spears as messages to neighbouring clans. The lower third of the composition describes a traditional second burial at the inland freshwater site of Wayawpuy. In the ritual, the bones of the deceased are placed in a painted hollow log, which appears vertically at the centre of the panel. To the left, musicians play and below them are groups of mourners wearing painted designs.



Garritjpi was painted at a critical time in the history of the recognition of the rights of Indigenous people in Australia, and in the history of Aboriginal art. In the Yolŋu homeland of north-east Arnhem Land, Narritjin Maymuru was a ceremonial leader of the Mangalili, who believed in the power of art to transcend cultures. Born before Europeans had entered the region, Narritjin was at the forefront of the accommodation of Christianity, introduced through missions in the 1930s. To mitigate the impact of the religion on Yolŋu culture, in 1962 he, along with clan leaders in the area, collaborated on two monumental paintings detailing the ancestral origins of their Country. The painted panels were placed on either side of the altar in the newly built mission church to emphasise the continuing presence of Yolŋu belief systems: the Sistine Chapel of Aboriginal art. A year later, when the region was threatened by extensive bauxite mining, Narritjin was a leading protagonist for Yolŋu rights and the main painter of four Yolŋu bark petitions that were presented to the federal government, requesting the recognition of

the ancestrally endowed ownership of their land. The episode marked the beginning of the Land Rights movement in the Northern Territory.

The provenance of *Garritjpi* connects the work to the events described above. From the inscriptions on the back of the bark, written in the hand of the collector J.A. (Jim) Davidson, of Melbourne, the painting belonged to or likely hung in the home of the superintendent of the Yirrkala mission, the Reverend Edgar Wells and his wife, Anne. The Wells were advocates for Yolŋu culture who not only encouraged artists to create work for a public beyond the community but collaborated with Narritjin and other clan leaders to install the painted panels in the mission church.²

WALLY CARUANA

1. Thanks go to Emeritus Professor Howard Morphy for his contribution to this entry.
2. Wells, A.E., *This Their Dreaming: Legends of the Panels of Aboriginal art in the Yirrkala Church*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1971.





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Established in 2016, D'Lan Contemporary presents exceptional modern and contemporary art by leading and emerging First Nations artists at its galleries in Melbourne, Sydney and New York alongside an international program of exhibitions, educational talks and events that celebrate and promote the rich art and culture of Australian First Nations peoples.

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- Purchase receipt or invoice
- Inclusion in academic / art historical publications
- Inclusion in exhibitions and exhibition catalogues (private and/or public institution)
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- Documented appraisals

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All contemporary Australian Indigenous works of art should be accompanied by documentation linking the artwork to the artist via their Community Art Centre or their primary gallery/representative.

Community Art Centres operate with an ethical focus and establish their own individual guidelines by which all artworks are sold.

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Secondary market artworks should only be bought with a source of provenance from a Community Art Centre or an official artist gallery/representative.

MODERN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART (1950s–1980)

For artworks created prior to the establishment of Community Art Centres, such as bark paintings, Hermannsburg watercolours, Papunya boards and sculptural artworks made for sale, there is less necessity for Community Art Centre provenance.

However, artworks from this period with no traceable history are likely to have less market value than those that do – even when an artwork is clearly authentic.

Highly desirable provenance for artworks from this period includes Papunya Tula Artists, Stuart Art Centre and Maningrida Arts, or a clear link to a primary collector such as Geoffrey Bardon, Dorothy Bennett, Sandra Le Brun Holmes or Dr Scougall – who were all active in the 1950s–1970s.

ARTEFACTS AND OBJECTS (1880s–1950)

With artefacts, often much of the important collection history has been lost over time. Therefore, proven provenance can greatly impact value.

Before acquisition, research should be undertaken to ascertain the origin of the artefact or object, and how and when it left its country of origin.

Best practice in this segment is to obtain advice from a trusted industry expert before buying or selling.

PROTECTION OF MOVEABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT

The *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1985* (PMCH Act) implements Australia's obligations under the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 (1970 UNESCO Convention), to which Australia is a State Party.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention requires State Parties to ensure that no collecting institution accepts illegally exported items.

The Australian Government administers the PMCH Act through the Ministry for the Arts. The PMCH Act regulates the export of Australia's most significant cultural heritage objects by implementing export controls for objects defined as 'Australian Protected Objects'.

If you have any questions about acquiring or selling Australian Indigenous Art, please contact us at: enquiries@dlancontemporary.com.au

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