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JANET KOONGOTEMA
ARCHER RIVER COUNTRY

LAN

19 – 22 FEBRUARY 2026
MELBOURNE ART FAIR

28 FEBRUARY – 2 APRIL 2026
D LAN GALLERIES 40 EXHIBITION ST
MELBOURNE/NAARM AUSTRALIA

GALLERIES



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D Lan Galleries, in collaboration with Wik & Kugu Art Centre, presents Archer River Country, the first solo exhibition outside Queensland by Janet Koongotema, one of Australia's most significant living First Nations artists.

A Wik-Mungkan Elder from Aurukun on the Western Cape York Peninsula, Koongotema is the senior custodian of the Winchanam ceremonial clan and keeper of its sacred creation sites, including the Dilly bag, Burdekin Duck and White-Breasted Sea Eagle. She is also one of the last living practitioners of traditional Wik-Mungkan weaving techniques, knowledge she learned as a young woman by watching the hands of master weavers.

Her paintings are not continuations of a pictorial tradition. Two-dimensional design has never been part of Wik material culture, but rather a remarkable translation: the structural logic of fibre construction rendered in acrylic on linen. Each horizontal band of colour echoes the rows of a woven dilly bag, built up layer upon layer. The canvas

becomes both map and vessel, encoding historical, ecological and ancestral knowledge of Country along the Archer River.

In 2023, Queensland Arts Minister Leeanne Enoch presented Koongotema with the Premier's Award for Excellence at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair. She has been selected as a finalist twice in both the Wynne Prize and the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. Despite this national recognition, her paintings remain extraordinarily rare in public and private collections.

Archer River Country debuts at Melbourne Art Fair 2026, featuring new works created specifically for this occasion alongside Koongotema's acclaimed award-finalist paintings. Her canvases, in their structure, embody a lifetime of making and invite us to see Country as she sees it, revealing its splendour, band by band.

**VANESSA MERLINO
CURATOR & WRITER, D LAN GALLERIES**

Janet Koongotema, Aurukun.
Photographer: Gus Davidson

Photography: Leslie Haworth
© Courtesy the Artist
and Wik & Kugu Art Centre



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Moun.aw – Archer River Story Place 2024

synthetic polymer paint on linen

150.5 × 151.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 23-24

EXHIBITED

Wynne Prize 2024, Art Gallery of New South

Wales, Sydney, 8 June – 8 September 2024

AUD 24,000

‘Moun.aw is one of the most beautiful places on my Country,’ Janet Koongotema says. ‘The sand is really white, and the water is really clear and fresh. You can see all the fishes like barramundi, catfish and red snappers swimming around.’

Koongotema is a senior artist working with Wik & Kugu Arts and a two-time Wynne finalist. She has painted the sacred Aak Puulwuy (Story Place) called Moun.aw, located along the Archer River, a place of high cultural significance to the Winchanam clan and only accessible to Traditional Owners. ‘Moun.aw is really good, but you have to be careful when the tide comes in ... not just because of Pikkuw [the crocodile], but because of the fairies that live there. They protect this place,’ says Koongotema.

In this work, Koongotema has translated her weaving practice into paint on canvas to capture the shimmering colours of Country as it transforms with the light of the day. She also gives literal form to Waangk Aw, the Dilly Bag Story Place near Moun.aw from which she draws inspiration.



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Waangk Awa / Dilly Bag Story Place 2024

synthetic polymer paint on linen

151 × 151 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 43-24

AUD 24,000

This painting depicts Janet's Country on the Archer River near Aurukun. It is the traditional Country of the Winchanam clan of the Wik-Mungkan people. There are many Story Places here, including Waangk Awa, the Dilly Bag Story Place. Waangk Awa is a very colourful place. The water shimmers with many different colours, and there are lots of ducks. Janet often paints this place and is able to clearly assert her tribal rights to that part of Country. This place is considered Ngench Thayan (sacred), and it is forbidden to enter unless you are a Traditional Owner like Janet.



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Antbed Story Place 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

151 × 151 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 14-25

AUD 24,000



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Aak Chaim / Archer River Country 2023

synthetic polymer paint on linen

137.5 × 137.5 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 230-23

EXHIBITED

2023 *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island*

Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 11 August 2023 – 14 January 2024

AUD 18,000

Aak Chaim is a place on my Country along the Archer River. It's very cold there. Chaim, that's the main place where the old people stayed.

I went there with my sister Dawn many times. We went right up the river until we got to Chaim. When we arrived I said to her 'all the lilies have good colours and smells good'.

We like that place so we camp there a lot. Chaim has a big swamp with plenty of broлга, duck, minh ko'an [magpie geese]. There is a duck story there too. That's my totem. We call the duck 'minh themp'.

'Min.a!' [really lovely] I said to Dawn as we arrived to Aak Chaim. We smelt that place. So many lovely flowers smelling really good. There are lots of alligators [crocodiles] down at the river so you must be careful getting there.

— Janet Koongotema



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Minh Temp / Burdekin Duck 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

200 × 137 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 102-25

AUD 28,000

Archer River is traditional Country for Janet Koongotema, the most senior of the Winchanam clan. Minh Temp, Burdekin Duck Story Place, is a major totem for Janet. These ducks can usually be seen in large flocks on the sandbanks or along freshwater lagoons.

There are plenty of Story Places across this region, including Waangk Awa, the Dilly Bag Story Place. Waangk Awa is a very colourful place. The water shimmers with many different colours. You can see lots of ducks too. Janet often paints this place but reminds everyone that it is considered Ngench Thayan (sacred Country). It is forbidden to enter unless you are a Traditional Owner like Janet.



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Waank Uulk' / Dilly Bag Story Place 2022

synthetic polymer paint on linen

195 × 143 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 81-22

AUD 28,000



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Punpan 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

200 × 137 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 111-25

AUD 28,000

Punpan is where my father's mother comes from. That's where my great grandmother is from too. She spoke Wik-Alkan language. That's a very hard language to learn. I have tried to teach my grandchildren this language but they think it is too hard. Wik-Mungkan is my real language, and we all know how to speak that very well. It's our first language.

Punpan is a Story Place on my Country, just up along the main Archer River, south of Aurukun. People must not go around that Country because it's forbidden. It's a very important place for me and my people. The land there is very strong and sacred.

— Janet Koongotema



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Minh Themp | Burdekin Duck Story Place 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

200 × 137 cm

PROVENANCE

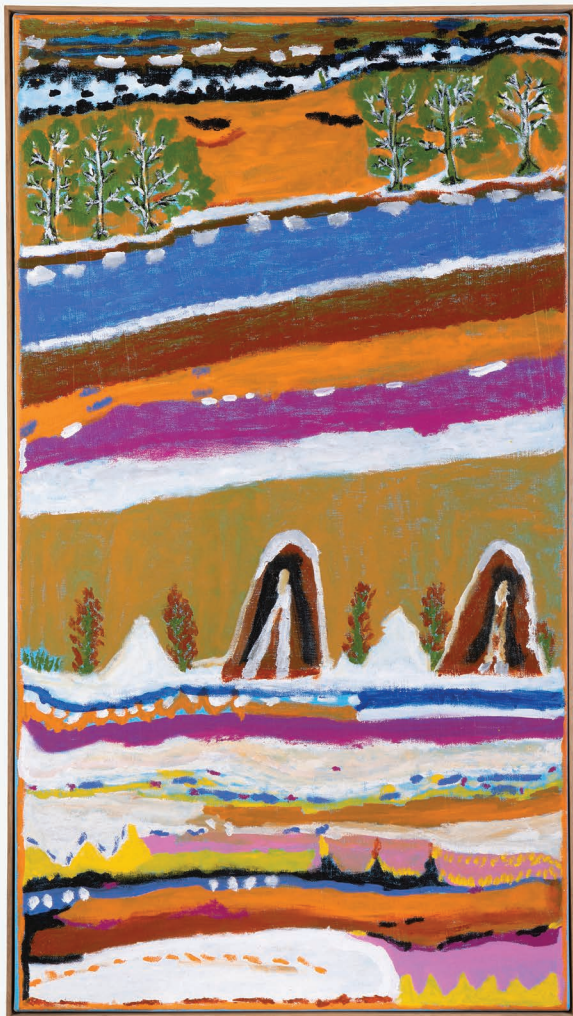
The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 101-25

AUD 28,000

Archer River is traditional Country for Janet Koongotema, the most senior of the Winchanam clan. Minh Themp, Burdekin Duck Story Place, is a major totem for Janet. These ducks can usually be seen in large flocks on the sandbanks or along freshwater lagoons.



(Left)

JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Aak Puul Ngaantam | Father's Father's Country 2022

synthetic polymer paint on linen

110 x 61cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 157-22

AUD 10,000

(Right)

JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Aak Puul Ngaantam | Father's Father's Country 2022

synthetic polymer paint on linen

110 x 61cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 156-22

AUD 10,000



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Waangk Awa / Dilly Bag Story Place 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

150 × 121cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 100-25

AUD 18,000



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Mo'iam | Archer River 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

150 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

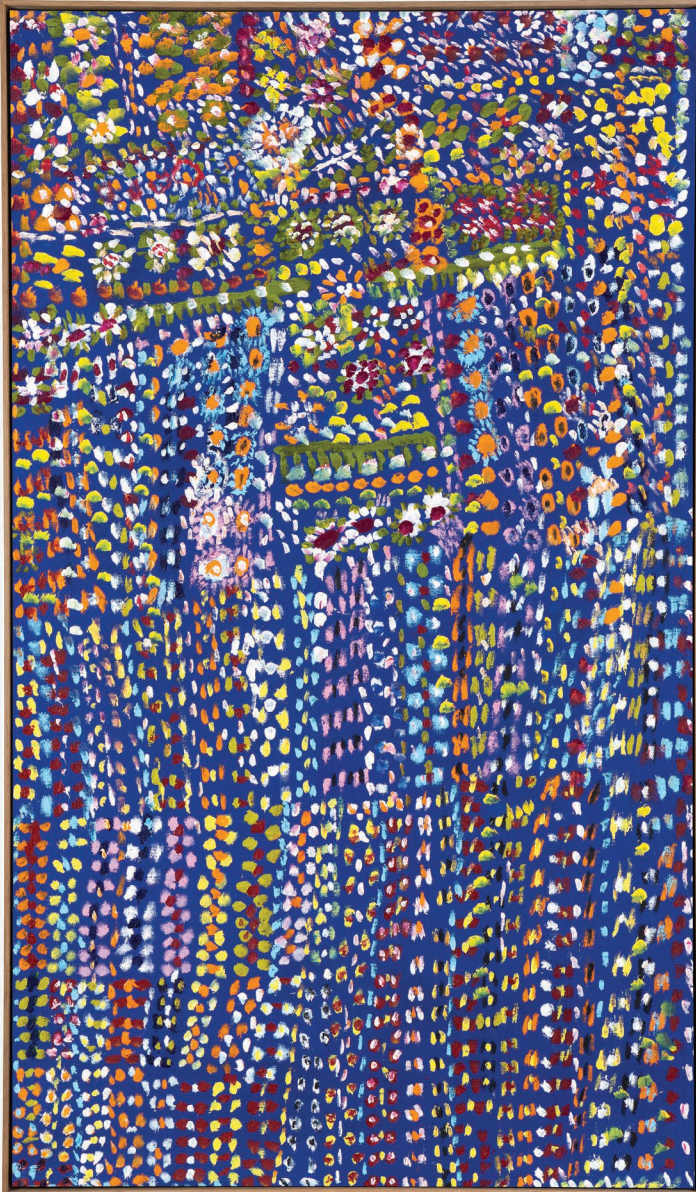
Queensland, cat. no. 99-25

AUD 18,000

Mo'iam is a sacred Story Place and is very important for me and my family. My father Edward showed it to my sister Dawn and me when we were little girls. In those days, my father would sometimes take us to our Country when he was working as a ringer mustering cattle. He would work from the outstation on our Country.

We visited Mo'iam from time to time. We would travel a long way up the main Archer River and turn off up a long narrow creek to get there. When we arrived, we could see many different colours in the Land, even the colour of gold. The water up there is very clear, and there are fish everywhere including jew fish. I loved collecting ant bed from this place to use for cooking our fish. There is also lots of white sand there which helps for cooking lots of fish on the fire. The food from this place makes me healthy. Aak min.a! [This is a lovely place.]

– Janet Koongotema



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Mo'iam | Archer River 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

114 × 66 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 106-25

AUD 10,000



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Moun.aw | Archer River 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

151 × 76 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 107-25

AUD 12,000

Moun.aw, that's that place. When I saw this place I thought how beautiful it is. That's why I painted it. It's near the Dilly Bag Story Place, one of the main totems for us Wik-Mungkan people. We are Archer River people.

It's not really deep, it's just shallow. You can see all the fish coming out from the stones under the water. Those white fish, red snappers and cat fish. But very few times we don't catch one kind of fish at lowtide. We have to wait for the big tide. In our language we call this special fish *minh wuungkam* [barramundi]. The old people learned us the names of these places and for the fish. These places are really good but you have to be careful when the tide comes in because that is when the alligator [crocodile] comes up. We call him *Pikkuw* [crocodile]. Really big ones too.

– Janet Koongotema



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Moun.aw | Archer River 2024

synthetic polymer paint on linen

95 × 78 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 39-24

AUD 10,000

In the early days, the old Mission boss named McKenzie went swimming at a place called Moun.aw. He left all his clothes on the shore and swam naked. He knew that place very well. But the old people told him to be careful swimming around there because it's full of fairies. Those fairies have long red hair. After a while, McKenzie felt he'd better get out of the water. 'I can't stay here,' he said, 'because I might see those fairies sitting on the shore.' When he got out of the water, there was no sign of his clothes anywhere. Luckily, his wife wasn't too far away and gave him a spare towel. He looked everywhere for his clothes. The old people laughed and reminded him that this was an important Story Place and that it was protected by those fairies. Some of them have yellow, black and orange hair.

– Janet Koongotema



JANET KOONGOTEMA

born 1938

Wik-Mungkan language

Waangk Awa / Dilly Bag Story Place 2025

synthetic polymer paint on linen

89 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Art Centre, Aurukun,

Queensland, cat. no. 118-25

AUD 8,000



Archer River, Aurukun. Photographer: Gabriel Waterman

