



2021



King & Wood Mallesons
Contemporary **First Nations**
Art Award 2021

kwmatartaward.com

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We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands upon which we sit, work, live and play, our First Peoples, who have walked upon these lands for thousands of years before us. We pay our deepest respects to the First Nations Peoples of this country, their culture and their Elders past, present and emerging. We commit ourselves fully to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Catalogue cover image of Michelle Woody’s winning artwork *Ngija Murrakupupuni (My Country)* (2020)

Foreword

Berkeley Cox
Chief Executive Partner, Australia
King & Wood Mallesons

The King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award (KWMCFNAA) celebrates the cultural significance of Indigenous artists and the stories they share through their work. A biennial award held over at least six years, 2020 marks the second time King & Wood Mallesons (KWM) has hosted the KWMCFNAA (delayed in its exhibition due to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19). We are pleased to see how quickly the award has been embraced in both regional and urban communities across Australia since its inauguration.

This year we expanded the award criteria to include a greater variety of art forms including digital, weaving and jewellery which resulted in a richly diverse range of submissions that represent the many ways in which First Nations artists share their stories; stories of country, of their experience and of the contemporary landscape.

The KWMCFNAA is also one of the ways we strive for meaningful reconciliation with and empowerment for Australia’s First Nations Peoples. This goal is core to the values of the firm’s social impact practice, KWM Community Impact, and is detailed in our Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan, which was implemented by the firm earlier this year.

We feel we have a responsibility to use our skills, resources and networks to try to make a positive impact and create opportunity for First Nations communities to restore their rightful position of respect, voice and prominence in society. Our global presence means that we have deep ties to different cultures around the world and we recognise the true power of art to connect, learn and grow from different communities.

We are grateful to have received the wonderful works that were entered in this year’s award and the stories told by all the artists. It is our wish that the King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award will continue to celebrate the significant contribution of First Nations artists to our society, to continue to create a platform for understanding and respect and to showcase the outstanding talent that exists across this nation.


Berkeley Cox

Patron essay

Djon Mundine
OAM FAHA



Maps of the Mind – Maps of the Heart

‘We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea.’

Samuel Taylor Coleridge ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ (1798)

Maps are derived from, and show us many diverse things, landforms, weather, population and social dispersions, language use, and spiritual belief patterns. The second King & Wood Malleson Contemporary First Nations Art Award (a map of the Aboriginal art world) accidentally came to be held on the 250th anniversary of the English map-maker James Cook’s arrival to the eastern shores of the Australian continent (2020), but due to the arrival of the Covid-19 virus, the exhibition had to be put off a year. When Cook arrived there existed at least 250 maps of distinct Aboriginal societies and languages living in diverse environments, mapped out in language, seasons, landforms and species - a representation of art forms embodying complex knowledge systems. These are maps of the heart that define the Australian continent and society itself. Claiming its own cultural identity, the landscape is different because of the Aboriginal consciousness in our imagery.

Nearly twenty years after Cook’s initial visit (1770) in 1788, when the first shipment of British convicts arrived, they brought with them a plague. This plague was smallpox, killing 50-90% of the Aboriginal population of Sydney. Ironically today, on the anniversary of Cook’s arrival, another plague disrupts our lives. Despite all that has impacted us over the last 12 months, the King & Wood Mallesons award went on, a sentiment acknowledged by all of the exhibiting artists.

The human brain consists of millions of neurons that carry different pieces of information - fragments of memory. Each neuron is a particle of energy, an emotional impulse (or has an emotion attached to it). This is a map of the heart. Art is the result of a series of actions, influenced by scattered entities and influences operating almost oblivious to each other within a society and a history. Each image or painting’s life is mediated by its own social history.

The First Nations artists’ artwork featured here - their message, their collection, subsequent travels, acquisition, and exposure through this exhibition - if not for the convergence or crossing of parallel paths, then a close approach. It is the viewing and the turning inward of sets of eyes to a common nearer subject, the place of Aboriginal people present in today’s Australian society.

So-near, so-far away, embodied in the KWM winning painting of Tiwi artist Michelle Woody, NT; *Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country)* (ochre on canvas). Tiwi people are geographically close to the capital of the Northern Territory but culturally, a world away. The Tiwi people had a reputation as fierce defenders of their land, driving off firstly the Macassans (from the early 1600s), the Dutch, and then the English. They are also fierce in retaining their age-old cultural practices. In 1824 when establishing a military base on Melville Island on the land of the Tiwi people, the British saw mortuary structures, (sculptures) and in 1834, a Major Campbell recorded white pipe-clay figures and line work on the inside surfaces of walls of Aboriginal bark shelters. It is this practice, this responsibility that Michelle Woody carries on.

‘That’s good news. I can take my daughter to Darwin for Christmas.

I’m saving money for a Pukumani Ceremony for my recently deceased husband. He was an artist. He said, ‘I am always Tiwi.’ I’m checking with my in-laws about it. We will video the ceremony. Today when I’m working, I can feel his spirit within me.

This will pass on knowledge to my children and grandchildren in doing this, so they know this is what Tiwi culture is. It makes me feel wonderful.'

Michelle Woody in conversation with the author.

Tiwi people have used a long-toothed ironwood comb since the beginning of time for personal grooming and to paint with. A comb is a tool, something that clears insects and unwanted debris that tangle-up in hair. A comb untangles our hair, untangles our minds, and untangles our lives. Hair expresses that an entity is alive, it's in bloom, as a string or tassel, connecting that individual being with others. As a relic it acts as a reminder, triggering memories of the past, to bring seemingly unrelated events and unusual facts together in meaningful imaginative ways.

For Aboriginal people, God often appears in their art as a flash or refraction of light (rainbow). When a comb is used to apply ochre paint and create patterns of dots, it brings a shimmer that catch's our eyes and points to the vibrancy of life. In quantum physics we are told that all matter, even solid matter, is made up of minute, spaced, vibrating particles that emit energy that we perceive as a shimmering image of light and colour. This image is made more alive as a painted human body in motion, in dance, or as painted *Pukumani* poles (representaions of the human body) and

other dance objects that are moved in the performance space or viewed in a blur as dancers circle around it.

Tiwi post-death, cubist cut, *Pukumani* ironwood poles are an age-old tradition that celebrates the closure. These objects have a special place in the history of Australian art. 'Tony' Tuckson, Deputy Director of the Art Gallery of NSW, created a controversy when he and patron Dr. Stuart Scougall, commissioned a set of such poles for the state gallery collection in 1958. A debate followed in the contemporary art world about whether they were considered art or curiosity. No definitive conclusion was reached, and the poles remain still at the gallery today.

Aboriginal society and art forms were dismissed by colonists who (some still to the present day) were blind to the intelligence and beauty of the Aboriginal ways of living in joy with the Australian natural world. In the award winning novel, *The Glass Bead Game* (1943) by German author Herman Hesse, a sect of intellectuals retreat from their day to day worldly activities to research the meaning of life and how science, and art of all forms - music, visual arts, literature, oration, and performance - are woven together to come to this truth. The central character struggles with this seclusion to the reality of the world outside.

In Australia, another intellectual life of Aboriginal culture, across ages and genders, continues unobserved to the present day by the Western world. As has been done for tens of thousands of years, transformative art, science, joy, emotion, and imagination have developed in the mind-maps of Aboriginal individuals and societies.

People are maps and black symbolizes the most intense strength. The first work I saw by Maree Clark was a series of simple, but powerful black and white portraits of her extended Aboriginal family, their faces marked with a common white clay face mask. Intellectual artist Maree Clarke innovatively weaves all forms of materials and art practices to return the colonial map to its correct truth in her mixed media -

A Moment in Time – Connection to Country (2020).

'I don't normally enter competitions. I could imagine the calibre of the artists I would be against. But down here, down south, with so many exhibitions delayed, postponed, cancelled... Still it's really great to be in a prize (competition) and win like this. I'm really excited.'

Maree Clarke, conversation with the author.

A direct consequence of the 'dot and circle' Western desert Aboriginal painting movement was the naming of the empty centre, the dead heart, with Aboriginal names. Culture didn't just come from foreign places like New York, or Pigalle in Paris, but Papunya or Yuendumu. We see this in the work by artist, Carolanne Ken - *Minyma Malilu Tjukurpa* (canvas).

The colonial act of invasion and occupation - attempts at extermination - were acts as brutal and inhumane as any in history. Worse, it is a silent crime of denial and hidden history. Art is a central technology to both remember and relieve our traumas and to continually remind Australian society that all our present day riches and hedonistic good-life was achieved through the murders of hundreds of thousands of intelligent human beings, the Aboriginal civilization.

'It's been a weird year. I lost some shows. Others were cancelled. Some say they're doing well, but it's just been a weird period for me.'

The work I entered is different to my previous imagery. I hadn't made an image without people in it before. There's actually a whole set of artworks following that one on the effect of colonization on the environment, and on us.

This one, 'Veiled Bird' was concerned with drugs and alcohol. The next in the set is on the effects of Western farming, then one on the mining industry, then the sugar industry, and then the consequences of Western colonization on native flora and fauna populations.'

Michael Cook, conversation with the author.

History, memory, and geometry are ghosts. They are parodies of ideas but never the idea itself. Often casually described as simple and primitive, peculiar and special, the teaching, learning, research and practice in bark painting comes from another non-Western art history of over 40,000 years. To arrive at or build the compositions and intellectual structures we see here in these art works, they are not 'free form' primitive outpourings of expression, but tightly constructed compositions at the tip of a complex social and legal system of living. The paintings provide one capacity to maintain difference and through this, a capacity to survive.

Aboriginal people have used this diverse expression and form to try and make themselves visible. However, as the audience for Aboriginal art grows, it seems the Aboriginal people are becoming increasingly invisible. The art, in acting as a form of representation, has allowed non-Aboriginal Australians another means to avoid interacting with Aboriginal people themselves. They see the art but are not forced to see the people nor the statement behind it.

Bandjalung intellectual and preacher Lyle Roberts Snr. (art producer, Rhoda Robert's great uncle) set down three principles for his descendants to live by; retain pride of race and colour, retain identity and language, and consider other people to make the best of life. All foods in the garden are edible and were used by the Indigenous people. Aboriginal time without clocks is cyclical and not linear to Western culture. And so, after 250 years of British colonisation we come back to Australia's original sin that the present society must reach a closing on. The theme of '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*' (the poem, the original *terra nullius* quote for this essay) is of sin, and repentance, transgression and *makaratta*. The moral way of being is to appreciate all life in all its forms. To see all life forms and human societies as equal and beautiful and profoundly informing us in their own special way.

Aboriginal art is a technology of communication, it is how First Nations interact to heal. This is expressed by French writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant, in his book, 'Poetics of Relation.' Where we see every interaction as a complex, continuously moving mix of oppression, at the same time it is also a creolisation, where art influences and converts the oppressor. Art aesthetics shape the way we think and sense a view of the world. It goes back and forth to create another positive view of history and the future.

Coleridge, Samuel. Taylor. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." 1798, lines 105-106 – Prospero's Isle <https://www.prosperosisle.org/spip.php?article979>. Accessed 9 June 2021.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

Essay

Professor Ian McLean

Hugh Ramsey Chair of Australian Art History, University of Melbourne

The gift: The second King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award

‘What rule of legality and self-interest ... compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?’

Marcel Mauss, The Gift 1925

Art awards gift gifts, for art is a gift, indeed the quintessential gift. Further, the stated purpose of this KWM award, reconciliation, goes to the very giftness of the gift because receiving a gift triggers a social obligation i.e., the necessity of conciliation. Put simply, a gift comes with credit that must be repaid with interest. But even when this involves an economic transaction, it is primarily a social and political transaction, which is why gifts, said Mauss, are usually exchanged in ceremonial meetings between different groups i.e., in the communal space of the social and political – as will occur in the exhibition of this award.

Even art’s current commodification has not eroded its original power and function as a gift. Thus, art never cedes its artness to its buyers/recipients but entraps them in a social contract, an obligation to the artist’s legacy. Even buyers who believe they are making a purely commercial investment depend on the artwork retaining the artist’s name and spirit. Thus, the importance to the buyer/owner/

investor of provenance. This leaves the recipient/buyer obliged or indebted to the artist, who receives interest from the buyer in the form of cultural capital.

The accumulation of cultural capital in the commodification of art confirms its primary social and political function and also its temporality. Its provenance relates not just to its legacy – its journey from the artist into the future – but also its inheritance or origin. Art is already always a gift in that it was first gifted to the artist by ancestors to pass on to future generations. Its temporal returns in the form of future gifts down the generations is recouped with interest in its increasing cultural capital, such that it is eventually claimed as national heritage (i.e., ancestral). It inevitably ends up in the national art gallery, either gifted by the owner or bought by the gallery from gifts given by donors and tax deductions given by the people (nation).

In his anthropological study of gift giving, Mauss didn’t consider its aesthetic aspect – though he noted it, especially in its political theatre. Art is the quintessential gift because a gift is not a gift unless it’s beautifully packaged. Mauss focused on the emotional coercion that comes with giving/receiving in establishing a social contract, a politics. However, the aesthetic element seduces rather than coerces, which induces a deeper and more compelling emotional investment: returning the gaze of the artwork cements the powerful social bond of love and devotion, thereby creating a potent polity. The

buyer of art is invariably an ‘art lover’ or soon becomes one. The meaning and function of art lies in its conciliatory rather than coercive impulse. Beautiful gifts heal, they reconcile differences.

The reciprocal action of the beautiful gift makes it a formidable instrument of sociality and politics, made all the more powerful by the emotional charge of aesthetic experience. While the individualism of modern life leads many to think that aesthetic experience is purely one-way, a personal subjective taste, there is remarkable agreement on the star performers, even across cultures. Art’s power to socialise difference, to connect, is why nation states subsidise the arts and build national art galleries to showcase a national culture and tradition, usually set out like a family tree of ancestral and kin relations that endows the nation-state with its sovereignty or authority.

The nation-state’s sovereignty rests on its sociality being embedded in a national culture and tradition gifted by its ancestors. This type of sociality is a very recent invention, initially devised to reconcile the terrible religious wars tearing apart Europe’s empires and principalities following the Reformation – a time when sovereignty was the gift of God and monarchs, not the people or nation. The secularisation of religious art transformed art’s conciliatory impulse into a force of nationalisation, focusing individual emotional lives in all their differences on a shared national heritage. When things go terribly wrong,

as they sometimes have with the national idea, the gift of art can even provide a path to reconciliation when all else has failed.

This was the thinking of KWM when, like many large organisations, it developed a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in response to the RAP program launched in 2006 by Reconciliation Australia. The RAP program helps organisations foster positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in ways geared to the organisation’s strengths, the aim being to heal the nation’s unreconciled original sin.

Reconciliation Australia was established in 2001 to supersede the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which had been created by an act of National Parliament in 1991 following a recommendation of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report. As a national expert body tasked with healing the litany of injustices that flowed from the racist origins of the Australian nation-state, its establishment was Australia’s BLM (Black Lives Matter) moment. There is nothing transitory or passing about the BLM moment and nor was it the first. Like a bad dream it keeps returning from some deep unresolved nefarious past into another nightmarish unresolved dead end, momentarily jolting the national consciousness awake. Australia’s previous BLM moment was the 1967 Referendum, which sought to right Australia’s original sin by striking out that part of its Constitution that had excluded the continent’s First

Nations from being Australian. This feel-good moment didn't last long as a few years later, in 1971, Australian law denied land title to Yolngu claimants in the Gove land rights case.

Australian law and its representatives continue to be the reason for this BLM moment returning to unsettle the consciousness of the Lucky Country. Being a law firm, KWM is exactly the sort of organisation that needs a RAP. This is even more the case with KWM, which isn't any law firm; it's a large international law firm based in Hong Kong. Formed in 2012 through an amalgamation of two-top-tiered Australian and Chinese law firms, its clients are multinational companies needing to navigate different national law systems. The development of international law that became necessary with the formation of nation states is, in its doctrine of *terra nullius*, at the root of Australia's original sin that KWM must negotiate around for its multinational clients.

Following the guidelines of Reconciliation Australia, KWM has embedded its RAP in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and businesses, of which Aboriginal art centres are significant participants. The story of the latter, which was one of the most positive and lasting outcomes of the 1967 Referendum BLM moment, is well known. A gift given by Aboriginal artists to the Australian art world was reciprocated in being recognised as contemporary

rather than primitive art. That this has been a significant (if not the most significant) site of reconciliation in Australia, is evident in the rapid transformation of the nation's national heritage from one that excluded Aboriginal culture to making it foundational or ancestral. It's a compelling example of art's conciliatory impulse.

So, it's no surprise that in 2018 KWM launched The King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award, to run as a biennial competition and exhibition for at least six years, with each exhibition in a different national centre. Meticulously planned, with senior Indigenous curator Djon Mundine OAM – one of the most knowledgeable curators in the field of contemporary art – as a chief consultant and 'Exhibition Patron', it attracted a good number of very well-known artists. What does this award tell us about reconciliation?

It showcases how the gift – for the Award is a gift given by KWM – creates a space of reciprocation, which presented in the political frame of the official reconciliation processes of RAP, has an obligation to this national body. The judges seemingly felt this obligation as they acted like an international forum – a committee of the United Nations – conciliating the differences of Australia's diverse First Nations to create a national platform that voiced First Nations aspirations. This was not primarily about picking a winner, as awards usually are – though the judges did

do this – but choosing the 29 finalists as a representative sample of the diversity of styles, traditions and subjects, from emerging, mid-career and senior artists.

While diverse, the exhibition is no more diverse than any other national art award. The aspiration of the national idea is its conciliatory accommodation of diversity, and while there remains an attempt in the plural tense of the term 'First Nations' – a recent adoption from a North American lexicon – to retain the original differences of Indigenous traditions across the continent, this exhibition has the effect of conciliating these differences into a national platform, in a word, nationalising them. This raises the urgent unresolved questions about the place of Australia's First Nations art in the current category of Australian art – as for example, how it appears in Australian national art collections. If in being a gift to the artists, the award put them under certain obligations (policed by the judges), it was also a gift to the Australian nation and specifically to its artworld, compelling it to address this question of how to reconcile First Nations art with a racist story of national art founded on their exclusion.

A First Nations art exhibition – even one framed in terms of reconciliation – cannot and should not be expected to provide all the answers to reconciliation. However, there are real lessons in this exhibition for a national art. I doubt if any other national award is as representative of

the different regions of the nation as this and other First Nations art awards, and without any diminution of quality.

Another striking feature of the exhibition is how the modernising of First Nations cultures have not been conducted, as in Western modernism, as a subversion of traditional practices. This is clear in this exhibition in the dozen or so works that draw directly on traditional stories and styles – to the point that the extent of their modernisation may not be apparent to many viewers. However, one only has to compare the bark painting of Dhuwarrwarr Marika, believed to be the first Yolngu woman authorised to paint sacred designs, with those of her father, the renowned leader and artist Mawalan, who taught her to paint. This embedded temporality speaks to a feature of First Nations contemporary art that distinguishes it from the dominant ahistorical approach of curators and artists of contemporary art more generally. Reasons for this Western nervousness about the past are not difficult to see given the legacy of colonialism but many First Nations artists, even those educated in Western art schools – as many in this exhibition have been – find strength in history, using contemporary technologies to future proof their traditions. Digital artist Josh Muir seeks to reconnect with his Yorta Yorta heritage through the hip hop, comic books and street art of his upbringing in Victoria, whereas mixed-media artists Maree Clarke directly revives traditional Victorian

practices with equally contemporary technologies. The photographer Michael Cook, who is as likely to draw on Renaissance iconography as Indigenous or Australian colonial references, eloquently sums up this historicised conciliatory aesthetic in an artist statement:

I create artwork about Indigenous issues, past and present, about how the past relates to the present and, eventually, moulds the future. Put simply, I'm a person of mixed ancestry – some of which is Indigenous. I look at the big picture: I tell my stories to Australians of all races and also to those beyond our shores. I am a part of the human race.

Despite the shock of modernity and colonialism on Indigenous lives and traditions, Indigenous art practices have not experienced the 'shock of the new' that characterised Western modernism. I can only surmise that the temporality of Indigenous cultures is future orientated, in which the past is a resource rather than a burden to be overcome – which of course, is the way of the gift.

¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

This is reflected in the structure of the award, with a very senior patron, Djon Mundine, and three young emerging/ novice curators working and trained in Victoria (where the exhibition will be mounted), Shonae Hobson, Myles Russell-Cook and Stacie Piper. Theirs must have been a daunting task shortlisting and then selecting winners for the exhibition, let alone repaying their obligations to the gift of their patron's experience. If they have, rather courageously, boldly and perhaps naturally, tended to award younger artists over senior and well-established artists, at the same time they have sought to balance their personal tastes with the social obligations of their inheritance. Then there is us, the viewers. If the award is a gift to the artists, their gifts to us, its viewers and recipients, are the greater. How will we, as individuals and a community, reciprocate in this time of reconciliation?



Curator essay

Sarah Cox

2020/21 King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award Exhibition Catalogue Curator essay

*‘Aboriginal art ... is art that speaks as to what it is to be human’*¹

Will Stubbs, Buku Larrngay-Mulka Art Centre art coordinator, Yirrkala, NT (2020)

*‘There is a ...group of Australians who... are not automatically opposed to reconciliation and are willing to bridge the social divide...this group of exhibition visitors can openly absorb and appreciate new information of which they were previously unaware. This could lead to a larger swell of people who are willing to consider and recast a different future, separate and away from the colonial present we live in now.’*²

Carly Lane, First Nations curator (2018)

First Nations art in Australia is as diverse as the many different language and nation groups that make up First Nations Australians. In the second iteration of the biennial King & Wood Mallesons (KWM) Contemporary First Nations Art Award, unity in this diversity is expressed. With respect, trust, empowerment and agency the different artists share distinct cultural, social, political and geographical stories.

These gestures seep into our national consciousness. By listening to the stories and viewing the art, the legal, corporate and wider community, can appreciate the aesthetic artwork and hear, see and empathise with First Nations people. This enables First Nations artists to have a reality of themselves as society’s creators and their confidence can be affirmed from the outside. The art award facilitates an exchange between First Nations Australian and Western cultures, offering a different worldview for the largely Western audience to consider. Based on our shared humanity, as Australians with a common heritage, we can walk a path of reconciliation and forge a future together.

Visualising a map of the artists’ origins, reveals remote, regional and urban art centres, galleries and studios throughout Australia. From the small community of the Spinifex People of Tjuntjuntjara, deep in the Great Victorian Desert of WA; to the rural seaside town of Wynyard on the north west coast of Tasmania; from the tropics of the Tiwi Islands and Yirrkala; to the Kuuku T’au language group at Lockhart River in Eastern Cape York Peninsula; and in the south, the metropolitan cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane - rich and creative talent is showcased by the twenty-nine finalist artists and their many diverse geographic and political backgrounds acknowledged.

*‘In an age where we are drowning in images, these common, average Aboriginal artists; make these gestures to give us moments of imagination and pointed meaning. We Aboriginal people, strive to talk in art across generations so we can remain in the focal point in this national imagination.’*³

Djon Mundine OAM FAHA, First Nations curator (2020)

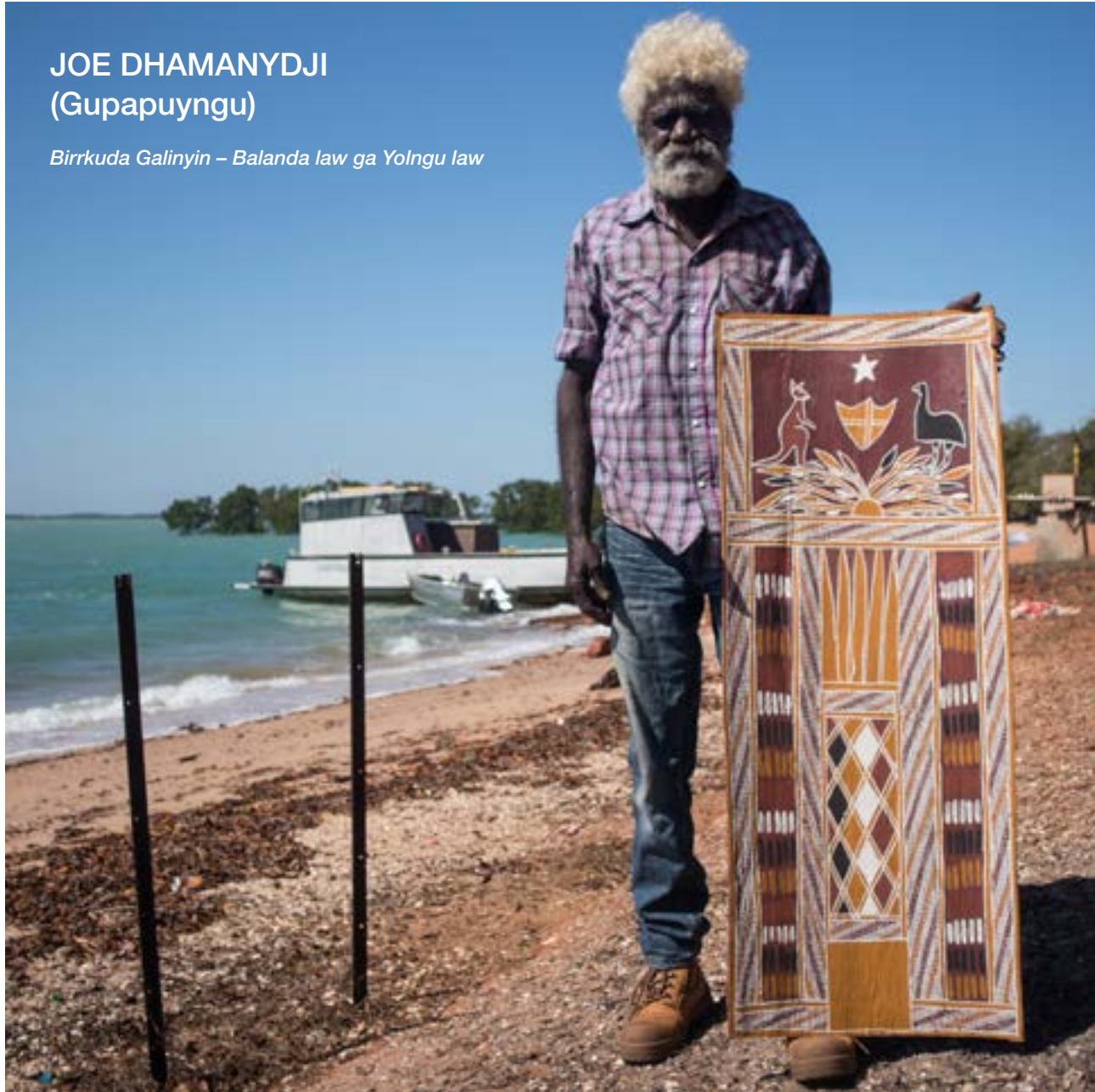
■ Three senior artists in the KWM exhibition, **Dhuwarrwarr Marika**, **Joe Dhamanydji** and **Kaye Brown** have entered bark paintings. Dhuwarrwarr Marika, an Elder artist and statesperson for her Yirrkala community, captures the eternal cycle of the Yolngu spirit manifested by the *miny’tji* in her work *Gama-Wukitj Rulyapa*. These sacred designs of her saltwater country express contemporaneously her people’s social identities and kinship connections to flora and fauna, their ancestral law and ownership of land. She uses white, brown and black earth pigments sourced on country to meticulously paint *rarrk*, the fine crosshatched lines, on the contoured three-dimensional stringybark. The lines are carefully painted using a brush made of human hair. The fan shaped *rarrk* patterns tessellate, creating optical movement, resembling the swirling of waters, creating a shimmering effect - simulating a fourth dimension, generating ancestral power for her Yolngu people.

Milingimbi senior leader Dhuwal artist, Joe Dhamanydji, paints an ochre-on-bark portrayal of a cross-cultural encounter he witnessed as a child in 1954 when his father, cultural leader Tom Djäwa, met with Queen Elizabeth II. The Commonwealth coat of arms kangaroo and emu emblems are juxtaposed with Dhamandji’s clan totem designs – a yellow ochre crown representing the nose of the native bees’ hive, a central diamond pattern symbolising the honeycomb of the hive, and a yellow base standing sentinel that represents the tree stump, a symbol of his Gupapuynu people’s foundational knowledge. This artwork is a cultural object with its instantly recognisable signs for both First Nations and non-First Nations people, communicating a dichotomy of world views, a sign of hope and unity in diversity.

Tiwi Islands senior culture woman, Kaye Brown, in her distinct bark painting, *Yirrinkiripwoja*, paints ‘old Tiwi design’ work. She uses the *pwaja*, a traditional Tiwi comb carved from ironwood with a single row of teeth. Brown uses it as a tool to dab in ochre then roll and press onto the bark. She uses strong intersecting lines to signify *minga*, the body designs she remembers her older relatives used to mark themselves.

¹ Yolande Brown, Bangarra Dance Theatre interview with Wills Stubbs, 29 June 2020 - <https://bangarra-knowledgeground.com.au/journeys/nandhu-nyapanyapa>
² Dr Julie Nagram, Carly Lane, and Megan Tamati-Quennell, *Becoming Our Future: Global Indigenous Curatorial Practice*. (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2020), 86.

³ Djon Mundine, Patron mission statement for 2020/21 King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award (2020/21).



JOE DHAMANYDJI
(Gupapuyngu)

Birrkuda Galinyin – Balanda law ga Yolngu law

The KWM exhibition reveals that Aboriginal art has come full circle with these bark paintings from Top End artists. In his seminal essay, anthropologist Professor Howard Morphy analysed that Aboriginal art first entered an Australian art gallery in 1959, when the Art Gallery of NSW acquired major works from Melville and Bathurst Islands by Tiwi artists and from Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land by Yolngu artists.⁴ Bark paintings of red, yellow and white ochre, and *Tutini* or *pukumani* burial poles finely decorated with *rarrk* crosshatching representing visual narratives of song cycles were unveiled. Classifying these cultural objects for the first time as aesthetic abstract and figurative art in an art gallery rather than as ethnographic artefacts displayed in an anthropology museum, was a landmark, transformational moment in Australian art history. An internationally recognised contemporary art movement began that exploded in the 1980s and 1990s at the time of Australia's 1988 bicentennial celebrations. This art movement now spans sixty years. More importantly it derives from a civilisation of people who have had continuous connection to their country for over sixty thousand years.

⁴ Howard Morphy, "Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery," *Humanities Research* vol. 8 no. 1 (2001): 40.
⁵ Namila Benson, ABC Radio National 'The Art Show' interview with Djon Mundine, 24 June 2020.
⁶ Art Gallery NSW website - <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artsets/6ilyeq>
⁷ Maura Reilly, "Curatorial Activism / Decolonial Curating: Maura Reilly and Friends" 4 February 2021 - <https://brooklynrail.org/events/2021/02/04/curatorial-activism-decolonial-curating-maura-reilly-friends/>

*'We want to live in it, be in that history with truth and integrity and not be seen as subordinate or lesser people who should have died out.'*⁵

Djon Mundine OAM FAHA, First Nations curator (2020)

Given Australian Aboriginal art dates back in millennia, it is fitting that the new extension to the Art Gallery of NSW, the Sydney Modern Project, due for completion in 2022, will display Aboriginal art permanently front and centre of the first gallery space⁶. Installed at the entry, it will contextualise Aboriginal art's position within the canon of Australian art history as fundamental, representing the cradle of Australia's cultural heritage. Galleries, museums and art awards today need to be curatorially active to not ghettoize or exclude non-Western artists from the master narratives and demonstrate an anti-racist practice with their acquisition policies, collection research and curatorial narrative⁷.

One of the four NSW-based finalist artists in the KWM exhibition, established Wiradjuri artist **Karla Dickens**, has been honoured and commissioned by the Art Gallery of NSW to celebrate its 150th anniversary, by creating a new work that will hang front and centre on the

sandstone facade of the gallery's portico⁸. *To see or not to see* (2019) is a photographic image of Dickens wearing a white hood with the printed image of Mona Lisa referencing the spit hoods forced over the heads of Aboriginal youths incarcerated in detention. In 2020, at the Biennale of Sydney, *NIRIN*, artistic and first Indigenous director, Brook Andrew, commissioned Dickens, to create a work that was displayed in the gallery's front vestibule.⁹ A mixed-media installation of recycled and repurposed everyday objects titled, *A Dickensian Circus*, addressed First Nations peoples' persistence and resilience amidst a history of dispossession and racism. Aboriginal art that is controversial, like all important art that touches on the zeitgeist of the times, raising political, social and economic conversations, now has prominence in the main state art academic institutions. Dickens is a finalist in the KWM art award and her grand scale photographic work, *Ready, willing and able*, shows a defiant Aboriginal woman confronting the gaze of the viewer, wearing a sequin mini-dress with an emblazoned Australian flag, challenging the hierarchies and hegemonies of power in these times of the Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and LGBT movements.

Melbourne-based finalist artist and winner of the KWM Victoria Local Artist Award, Yorta Yorta Wamba Wamba Mutti Mutti Boon Wurrung woman, **Maree Clarke**, will hold a solo exhibition and major retrospective of her work spanning three decades, *Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories*, at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia in June this year.¹⁰ Her interest is in reviving and reclaiming Aboriginal cultural practices – ceremonies, rituals, objects and language in the southeast. She crafts river reeds, ochre, echidna quills, kangaroo teeth and possum skin using contemporary media including glass, photography and video installation. Her work beautifully and meaningfully references her connection to place, family, and her own identity. It is a powerful means of passing on knowledge to future generations. Clarke's artwork in the KWM art award, *A Moment in Time - Connection to Country*, is a contemporary necklace made of glass, river reeds and crow feathers symbolising health and strength, with glass shaped seed pods containing ochre and charcoal. The large scale of the jewellery and mixed-media work references the scale of loss of land, language and cultural practices for her

⁸ Linda Morris, "New Façade Commission for Art Gallery of NSW" 8 March 2020 - <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/new-facade-commission-for-art-gallery-of-nsw-20200306-p547p3.html>

⁹ Biennale of Sydney 2020 website - <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/artists/karla-dickens/>

¹⁰ NGV website - https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/media_release/maree-clarke-ancestral-memories-2/

people and raises a discourse about caring for country and protection of the environment.

Now with increasing regularity more First Nations artists are being invited to stage solo exhibitions showcasing their art practice at the main government art institutions. First Nations art has always been expressed in ritual and performance for First Nations people. Since 1959 in all forms of media, First Nations art has and will continue to educate, confront and inform Western audiences.

*'It is absolutely critical that institutions create sustainable pathways for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the arts to ensure authentic representation and interpretation of ourselves across all forms of our cultural material ...It is not just an economic imperative for our arts workers and communities but a political one also.'*¹¹

Clothilde Bullen, First Nations curator (2020)

In recent years, there has been a growing rise in the number of First Nations curators who are employed to curate and manage the state institution First Nations art collections. One such curator, Nici Cumpston, has for the past seven years acted as the Artistic Director of *Tamanthi* at the Art

¹¹ Clothilde Bullen, "The Big Picture," *Vogue Australia* (October 2020): 182.

¹² Nici Cumpston, "Nici Cumpston on the Power of Art," *CityMag* (September 2018) - <https://citymag.indaily.com.au/culture/opinion/nici-cumpston-on-the-power-of-art/>

Gallery of SA in Adelaide. *Tamanthi*, is an exhibition and festival realised by Cumpston held annually celebrating contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture. She positively and proudly asserts, 'The festival expands Australians' understanding of who we are as a nation, empowering us to grow as a nation.'¹² A national platform, it seeks to showcase First Nations history and culture as a legacy to be shared by all Australians.

The grand narrative is arguably now not about Indigeneity but for Indigeneity. The KWM art award has been judged by Victorian-based First Nations curators from the NGV - Myles Russell-Cook, a descendant of the Wotobaluk people; and Shonae Hobson, a southern Kaantju woman; and curator Stacie Piper, a Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung woman from TarraWarra Museum of Art. The judges were overseen by the guidance of First Nations Patron, Bundjalung man Djon Mundine OAM, curator, writer, activist and recipient of the 2020 Australian Council for the Arts Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement and Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Mundine pronounces the KWM art award is a 'player's player award' judged by and awarded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

‘We are like the coronavirus, attaching to the spike, or our spike pierces the cell. Once people see the art, they can potentially become infected with the idea all humans are valuable and the greater the diversity the better, and it’s not an offence to think different, to look different, or speak different especially when that difference is actually the original.’¹³

Will Stubbs, Buku Larngay-Mulka Art Centre art coordinator, Yirrkala, NT (2020)

‘There is a similitude in the way Indigenous peoples and the local population relate themselves to their territory: with respect and pride. These values, inherent in Australian Indigenous art, resonate in striking relevance with today’s questioning about mitigation and adaptation to climate change.’¹⁴

Béregère Primat, Aboriginal art collector and founder of Swiss Aboriginal art museum, Fondation OPALE (2020)

A cross-cultural exchange of different world views takes place between the artists and the legal, corporate and wider community with the KWM Art Award and exhibition where Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians share

a history of ‘colonial entanglement.’¹⁵ An opportunity is provided for collaborations to be had and mutually beneficial relationships to be established between the Indigenous artists, the judges and Patron, curator, art centres, galleries, legal and corporate communities and art patrons. An opportunity is created for Indigenous artists to self-determine their cultural knowledge, heritage and artistic practice and in the process educate non-Indigenous Australians, offering a counter narrative to the inherent hegemonic meta- narrative. The opportunity exists for relationships of trust to develop over time between artists, their representatives and KWM. An opportunity is presented for patrons to support Indigenous artists’ practices and purchase meaningful art.

Established Brisbane-based Waanyi artist, **Judy Watson**, draws deeply on her matrilineal lineage for inspiration. Researching archival collections and oral histories and working from site and memory she honours her First Nations heritage. Her raw, unstretched pigment and dyed fabric artworks address ecological and environmental elements and the importance of caring for country in the face of climate change. Powerful, political messages

accompany the works that recount the traumatic history of First Nations peoples’ in Australia - incidences of colonial massacres, and the forcible removal of members of the Stolen Generation from their families and land. In her work, *dog head pool (dara kulaji nangka)*, Watson vividly pays homage to her Boodjamulla country in north west Queensland and her ‘running water’ people. In an ekphrastic poem that forms part of the work, Watson dives deep beneath the surface of the ultramarine blue washed pigment canvas, evoking memory of First Nations peoples’ spirituality, their ritual and ceremony, and hints at a darker theme, the abuse of Aboriginal women - ‘dark beyond black velvety’, ‘other worldly,’ and ‘transcendental’ ‘calling to us.’ A rhythmic swirl of white delicate marks, resembling a school of fish, swarms between the silhouettes of two black carbon washed ferns. Their strong spines symbolise First Nations peoples’ resilience and strength. In a nod to Western art history, the shape of the swirl of marks resembles the shape of a dog’s head, Watson sometimes references in her practice as a personal tribute to the Spanish artist, Francisco Goya (1746-1828), and his black mural paintings.¹⁶ Senually described and aesthetically eloquent, Watson’s work is imbued with a sense of serenity

that easily greets the viewer’s gaze however narrates a darker, more thought-provoking tale.

Torres Strait Islander born Kala Lagaw Ya / Wuthathi artist **Brian Robinson**, in his linocut black and white printmaking work *Miffy + Friends: The Usual Suspects*, presents a double perspective between different worldviews with his Torres Strait Islander *minar* (repeated infill water patterns) that distinctly reference the ebb and flow of the tides of his home juxtaposed with imagery of Western pop culture and modernism that includes Dick Bruna’s Miffy character, Disney rabbit figures and space invader arcade game icons. He uses humour to juxtapose different cultural mythologies and layered histories to show the contemporary world we live in.

In the context of this corporate art award, a 2020 study by Martin Williams and Sergio Biggemann, discussed that Aboriginal art was found to contribute to a firm’s identity and corporate social responsibility, especially when an Aboriginal art collection (and by extension, an Aboriginal art award) included the work of emerging artists and more challenging political content.¹⁷ It is interesting to note with both iterations of the KWM art award emerging artists have

¹³ Yolande Brown, Bangarra Dance Theatre interview with Wills Stubbs, 29 June 2020 - <https://bangarra-knowledgeground.com.au/journeys/nandhu-nyapanyapa>

¹⁴ Andy Hermann, “Aboriginal Art Experience in the Swiss Alps: Interview with Béregère Primat” 30 June 2020 - <https://andymeetswarhol.ch/2020/06/30/aboriginal-art-expedition-in-the-swiss-alps-interview-berengere-primat/>

¹⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Louise Martin-Chew, James C Sourris Artist Interview Series, *Judy Watson – Blood Language* interview with Judy Watson, State Library Queensland. 13 August 2011 - <https://vimeo.com/27672306>

¹⁷ Martin Williams and Sergio Biggemann, “Corporate Art Collections in Australia: The Influence of Aboriginal Art on Corporate Identity.” *International Journal of Business Communication* (2020): 17.

won - Tiwi Island artist, **Michelle Woody** (2020/21) and Barkindji artist, Teena McCarthy (2018).

In Michelle Woody’s work her mark making is done using the Tiwi comb or *pwoja*. It is contemporary and organic in design and an extension of the Tiwi Islander practice of painting up the body for *pukumani* ceremony to mourn the dead. The undulations in the work depict the mapping of an aerial perspective of her country at Milikapiti – a simple but powerful flag-like tricolour of yellow, white and red (created from heating yellow pigment) ochres sourced on country. The judge, Myles Russell-Cook, critically appraises strong culture woman, Woody, represented by Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association on Melville Island, and explains his reason for conferring her the winner of this year’s award - ‘This exceptional ochre painting on canvas demonstrates Michelle Woody’s true mastery over the Tiwi comb (*pwoja* or *kayimwagakimi*). Woody works gesturally with tightly clustered dots creating layers of ochre tonalities that at once appear both flat and full of depth. Through her painting, Woody continues a strong tradition of Tiwi art that is known for pushing the boundaries of creative practice.’

In the 2020/21 exhibition, many other emerging artists are finalists and have their work hung in the exhibition at fortyfivedownstairs gallery in the Melbourne CBD including

highly commended artists, Carolanne Ken and Carmen Glynn-Braun, and artists Amala Groom, Ashlee Murray, Jenna Lee, Josh Muir, Kait James, Marina Pumani Brown, and Travis De Vries. The judges commented that the quality of the finalist artworks was overall exceptionally high.

Williams and Biggemann also found that a firm that aligns itself with promoting Aboriginal artists and their work, communicates a certain political stance amongst employees and affiliated associates and emphasises the commitment of the firm to its pro-bono work with Aboriginal communities.¹⁸ King & Wood Mallesons has a social impact practice, KWM Community Impact, which seeks to inspire and empower people to work together to create a more just society. With its Reconciliation & Empowerment Project it has created partnerships with the remote First Nation art centres - Waringarri, Jilamara and Moa. KWM has a partnership with the national community legal centre for the arts, Arts Law Centre of Australia, who provide legal advice and support to Indigenous artists through the Artists in Black service. KWM has introduced the KWM First Nations Fellowship, a new program to support First Nations legal practitioners through their first year studying law. The KWM Contemporary First Nations Art Award forms part of the firm’s Reconciliation Action Plan and aims to promote and encourage the highest standards of First Nations art

practice. KWM elevates its employees and stakeholders to become advocates of Aboriginal art. It encourages a corporate identity that educates the executive team, staff, clients and the public to recognise the limitations of a racist mindset, and to recognise that social change can be brought about, and positive connection of inclusion rather than exclusion can be achieved between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

‘I make work that speaks to the union of all peoples and to the indivisibility of the human experience that traverses identity, culture, race, class, gender and religious worship.’¹⁹

Amala Groom, Wiradyuri conceptual artist (2020)

Cultural awareness is raised with the staging of the 2020/21 art award where First Nations finalist artists are the storytellers and KWM acts as the caretaker of their stories. With this year’s award, several themes have emerged. Social themes around cultural connection to Country, custodianship of ceremonial sites, and the spirituality or Dreaming are touched on by Western Desert, APY Lands, Tiwi Islands and Arnhem Land artists. Reviving cultural practices and affirming cultural heritage are explored by artists creating three-dimensional work - weaving, bark

painting, and jewellery. Social stories of traumatic domestic violence and substance abuse are told. Political themes concerning the Stolen Generation, Assimilation Policy, and reclamation of identity in a post-colonial world are discussed. The political theme of First Nations artists as international practitioners creating contemporary art in a global context is a focus that is gaining momentum with the KWM art award.

Social Themes:

Dreaming and Country

‘Through my paintings you can see my Ngangkari work: watching over people and also looking after Country. My Country. This place is very important – we all need to look after each other and respect our home.’²⁰

Betty Muffler, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Elder artist and spiritual healer (2020)

Emerging artist, **Carolanne Ken** is from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the north tip of South Australia, from Kaltjiti Arts, one of ten art centres that make up the APY Lands Collective, which have been producing some of the most innovative, vibrant desert

¹⁸ Martin Williams and Sergio Biggemann, “Corporate Art Collections in Australia: The Influence of Aboriginal Art on Corporate Identity.” *International Journal of Business Communication* (2020): 16.

¹⁹ Amala Groom, First Nations artist website - <http://amalagroom.com/about>
²⁰ Kelli Cole and Aidan Hartshorn, “Pitjantjatjara artist Betty Muffler.” *Vogue Australia*, (September 2020): 102 - <https://www.vogue.com.au/culture/features/vogue-australias-september-2020-hope-issue-features-an-artwork-by-ananguaboriginal-pitjantjatjara-artist-betty-muffler/news-story/066c0ad77916903b7467a6cbb5e85f2>

art and most commercially successful artists in the past decade.²¹ Ken is one of the three highly commended artists in the 2020/21 KWM art award. Ken paints *Minyma Makuli Tjukurpa*, a Dreaming story about her grandmother's country and the underground cave that provides a permanent water supply for her community. It is a tragic story about a crippled mother who carved out her cave for shelter for herself and her two daughters whose husbands then killed her. The dynamism of the central concentric form with its pulsating rays of fine dotting and the use of white, symbolising sacred energy, make the contemporary work a visual grand scale painting of place referencing the past, present and future and the importance of protecting the environment.

Elder, **Reggie Uluru**, is the winner of the people's choice award in the 2020/21 KWM art award and sentimental favourite. As a traditional owner of Uluru, he has actively campaigned for land rights throughout his life. In 1985 he was instrumental in his Mutitjulu community in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in securing ownership of Uluru being returned to the Pitjantjatjara Anangu people by the Australian government. He also helped facilitate the permanent closure of climbing Uluru as a sacred place in 2019. He paints the perentie lizard man, *Wati Ngintaka*, depicting the large desert goanna as an ancestral being that

helped form the long chain of land forms in the northern ranges of South Australia. He conceals sacred knowledge in his artwork painting dots using subtle tonal colours, however through the veil of dots, reveals four perentie men gathered together in a meeting. His contemporary art expresses the traditional performance of ceremony for the Yankuntjatjara people and bears witness to the legal native title to his Country.

Elder artist, **Patju Presley**, resides in the remote fledgling community of Tjuntjuntjara in the Great Victorian Desert. He is a Pitjantjatjara Law man with a deep knowledge of his desert geography. In his work *Waltari*, he references an aerial perspective of the geographical features of his Spinifex people's Country. The visual representation depicts the epic narrative Dreaming or *Tjukurpa* creation story of *Wati Kutjara*, father and son water serpent spirit beings who shaped the living, breathing physical landscape as they moved through. Presley's methodical and meditative dotting over geometric fields of vibrant colour is disrupted by a rectangle of white signifying ancestral energy.

Tiwi artist, **Timothy Cook**, paints *kulama*, an initiation ceremony for young men where the Elders of his community sing and dance for three days welcoming the youths into adulthood. This ritual coincides in the late wet season with the harvest of the wild yam, a time when a ring

²¹ APY Art Centre Collective website - <https://www.apyartcentrecollective.com/about>



REGGIE ULURU
(Yankunytjatjara)

Wati Ngintaka - Perentie Lizard Man

appears around *japarra*, the moon. His unique, grand scale, loose gestural designs of cosmic circles of yellow, red and white ochre contain *pwanga*, or dots that are also applied to his face when painting up for ceremony.

Angkaliya Curtis, is a 93-year-old cultural custodian from Nyaparu community in the APY Lands and paints, *Cave Hill*, the Country she inherited from her husband, and an important site for the Seven Sisters Dreaming story. She values Cave Hill as a precious and magical place with its life sustaining rock holes and connecting creeks. She depicts these rock formations in bold colour, with painterly marks and expressive lines in her grand scale painting of *Tjurkupa*, the Dreaming. Dabbed in black are silhouettes of the animals of the central Australian desert - perentie, rabbit and donkey.

Marina Pumani Brown is an APY Lands artist whose mesmerising vibrant orange and black work, *Ngayuku Ngura Kuvari*, is about trips to the sacred site, Antara, near her community as well as Paralpii where rock holes are located and where she collects bush tobacco. Her work focuses on the environment and the importance of rain to sustain the fertility of the land - a call to action about climate change.

Yorta Yorta / Gunditjmara Melbourne based artist, **Josh Muir** in his innovative digital print on aluminium work, *WAA series no. 5*, conveys the Dreamtime story of his totem

animal the Waa, a black crow responsible for bringing fire to mankind. The urban artist is influenced by street art and pop culture that informs his Aboriginal heritage. The narrative of a bushfire burning the crow black before spreading over his country, references the devastating bushfires in Victoria in 2019 and is a call to action about climate change.

Lockhart River in far north Queensland is the home of established Kuuku Ya'u artist, **Samantha Hobson**, the aunt of KWM art award judge Shonae Hobson. Her painterly work, *Fatal Shore*, uses vibrant red, blue and white to reference the ritual burning off after the wet season in her sand beach and rainfall country. The power and force of fire racing along the beach is expressed in the paint that gesturally blurs across the canvas, powerfully bleeding and pulsing with energy. The vascular smear of red is a metaphor for the violence she experienced as a woman in the past in her community. The tricolour is a symbol of the Australian flag and raises the recent issue of copyright surrounding the Aboriginal flag.

Reviving Cultural Practices

Tasmanian, **Ashlee Murray's** *Kanalaritja* or King Maireener shell necklace reflects the revival of her Palawa people's cultural practice of shell stringing after the generational loss of knowledge following colonisation. The rare King Maireener shells are harvested annually during the Spring Tides and then are collected, cleaned and polished to reveal

their blue iridescent colour before being pierced and strung. Historically they were worn not only as body adornments but were given as gifts, tokens of honour or used in trade. They remain a symbol of identity for the Palawa women. Murray's contemporary gleaming necklet shows her fine skill in spacing the shells apart similar to the pattern followed by Palawa women pre-contact however she uses the modern materials of needle and jute or cotton thread.

Milingimbi Dhuwala artist, **Helen Ganalmirriwuy's** work, *Lurrkun mindirr* (three conical baskets) confirms the traditional craft of weaving as innovative contemporary art. The rare, natural plant black dyed, pandanus twined baskets exemplify her precise weaving technique. The textiles are embedded with cultural knowledge that has been intergenerationally transferred from her father to her and her sister, Margaret Rarru. Rarru who invented the black dye process, has given special permission for her sister to use the dye that takes on a metallic appearance when woven. The baskets have a distinct bulbous base and when painted with striped ochre bands resemble pendulous breasts which reflect the body paint designs used for *ngara* or ceremony for a funeral as well as regeneration and renewal. The conical baskets are used in community for carrying things, gift giving or trade.

²² Reviews by Judith interview' of Carmen Glynn-Braun, 20 October 2020 - <https://reviewsbyjudith.com/music-reviews-and-more/carmen-glynn-braun>

Political Themes:

Stolen Generation, Assimilation Policy and Reclamation of Identity

*'They didn't understand that it was a highly political work when they looked at it, which is a really good tactic, I think. Using gentle aesthetics as an intentional medium to tell heavy political stories can be a really effective way to get black storytelling across to white audiences.'*²²

Carmen Glynn-Braun, Southern Arrernte, Kaytetye, Ammatyerre emerging artist (2020)

Emerging Sydney-based artist, **Carmen Glynn-Braun**, a Southern Arrernte / Kaytetye and Ammatyerre woman is one of the three highly commended artists in the 2020/21 KWM art award. Her ethereal installation piece, *Branded*, belies a heavy political message. Four sheets of shimmering white organza suspended close together from above sway at eye level. They are coloured at the base with women's foundation, each one a different pigment tone varying from fairest to darkest. The matte makeup bleeds up into the fabric and meets the viewer's gaze. Glynn-Braun powerfully references the colonial branding of Aboriginal Australians as full, half-cast and quarter-cast. Commenting on the Australian government's Assimilation Policy and the Stolen

Generation from the female perspective, she reclaims her Aboriginal identity highlighting the diversity, resilience and continued survival of Aboriginal Australians.

Established urban artist, **Fiona Foley**, in her photographic work, *Protector's Camp*, reclaims her identity and *Badtjala* cultural heritage and connection to her *Thoorgine* homeland of *K'gari* (Fraser Island) off the south east coast of Queensland. Inspired by her research of archives, she reconstructs the colonial history of her repressed forebears. In her artwork, that forms part of a larger series of photographic work titled *Horror has a Face*, she focuses on the restrictive Queensland legislation - *The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (1897)*. Foley recreates a bush campsite of Archibald Meston, the Southern Protector of Aboriginals, highlighting the coercive control he exerted over Aboriginal communities while documenting their language and culture. A figure resembling him, dressed in period costume sits with a musket slung over his shoulder and kangaroo pelt underfoot. He dominantly watches on as an Aboriginal servant wearing a breastplate chops firewood for him. A female Aboriginal figure, portrayed by the artist who places herself in the narrative, boils the billy tea for him over the campfire.

Conceptual Wiradyuri artist **Amala Groom**, in her clever work *aeternum imperium*, repurposes a Chambord bottle and replaces the black raspberry liqueur with rainwater, the first of the season collected after the Black Summer of 2020. The Latin title refers to the notion of Empire having power forever. In a play on words, Groom reclaims this colonial settler notion of identity by imprinting the text 'eternal reign' on the outside of the bottle, affirming First Nations peoples' belief that sovereignty was never ceded in this country. She also references rainwater as the life force used in First Nations' ceremony to connect ancestors to country.

Emerging artist, **Jenna Lee** is a Larrakia / Wardaman and Karajarri woman whose practice involves actions of resistance and resurgence that disrupt and decolonise Australia's settler colonialist history.²³ By physically destructing language and text from historical novels and books in the printed form and reconstructing them into three-dimensional material forms she establishes her own agency to self-determine. Delicately weaving these pages of paper into tiny baskets with the use of red silk thread, that like a red pen, signifies making a correction, Lee translates her own and First Nations people's history into one of cultural resilience and strength.

²³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 212-216 – <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/55843>

Melbourne-based Wadawurrung emerging artist, **Kait James**, uses the techniques of punch needling and embroidery in her work and reappropriates kitsch souvenir Aboriginal calendar tea towels from the 1970s and 1980s that stereotyped First Nations culture. She subverts the power of non-First Nations western colonial culture and changes the narrative by embroidering over the Aboriginal images with non-Aboriginal pop-culture iconography. In this way James reclaims First Nations peoples' identity and culture giving power back to her people. With her vibrant craft work James uses her voice to softly address Australian race politics in her contemporary visual art practice.

Contemporary Artists in a Geopolitical Global Context

*'As Bell demonstrates in his art, indigeneity, like any idea, can only be contemporary through how it is made to be here, now, in the crossroads of contemporaneous traditions. What it means will ... be found ... in the moment as its meaning is remade at every crossing, with every iteration.'*²⁴

Professor Ian McLean, Hugh Ramsey Chair of Australian Art History Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne (2013)

²⁴ Ian McLean, "Surviving 'The Contemporary': What Indigenous artists want, and how to get it." *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet* 42.3 (2013): 167-173.

²⁵ Rex Butler, "A Short Introduction to UnAustralian Art." *Broadsheet* (2003) 32 4:17.

²⁶ Tate Gallery interview with Richard Bell 'My Art is an Act of Protest'. 7 June 2019. - <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/activist-art/richard-bell-my-art-act-protest>

*'The true greatness of Aboriginal art is that it refuses to become either a national (Australian) or an international (Biennale, Art fair) art. It instead takes the risk ... of becoming a universal art.'*²⁵

Professor Rex Butler, art historian Monash University (2003)

'I found out that I could say whatever the #! I like in art and not get arrested.'*²⁶

Richard Bell, activist artist (2019)

A niche focus for both the 2018 and 2020/21 KWM art awards is the political theme Patron Djon Mundine talks about of contemporary First Nations artists operating outside Indigeneity. Art historian Rex Butler describes First Nations artists making 'un-Australian art,' or art that is Australian but aspires to the universal. Tracey Moffatt AO, an internationally acclaimed First Nations artist adopts this methodology in her art practice. She identifies herself first and foremost as a contemporary artist creating work in the geopolitical space of globalisation rather than engaging in First Nations' debates about decolonisation, claims to country or identity politics. KWM art award finalists, Brisbane-based proppaNOW activist conceptual artists, **Richard Bell** and **Gordon Hookey**, represented by Josh

Milani of Milani Gallery, are urban artists making art around non-Western narratives in a global context.

Bell's black pearlescent painting, *Too Cool*, with the text, 'Too Cool to be Happy' boldly stencilled over his signature appropriated abstract expressionist and pop art patterned background pays homage to Western futurist, Kazimir Malevich's (1879-1935) landmark, non-reality painting, *Black Square* (1915). Bell comments on the selfie-driven digital age of social media, the contemporary narcissistic culture of our times, and acerbically ascribes it comes at the price of happiness. He also critiques the tortured artist making a witty stab at the art world.

Hookey's humourous video, *Ready to Rumble*, shows two figures in a boxing ring, representing the confrontational leader, an orange-faced US President Trump fighting Covid, with other divisive, racist figures suggesting Pauline Hanson, Rupert Murdoch and Adolph Hitler watching on ringside. The repetitive innocent jingle accompanying the time-lapse video satarises Trump's infant-like denial and mismanagement of the coronavirus as witnessed by the rest of the world.

Queensland-based Kurtjar artist, **Ian Waldron**, represented by Michael Eather of Fireworks Gallery, in his abstract, painterly work, *Talking to my mate Matthew in lockdown* (*Covid 19*), uses the formal painterly qualities of colour,

pattern and shape to address the universal theme of connection especially poignant during these times.

Established Queensland-based Bidjara artist, **Michael Cook** evokes empathy in the viewer with his deeply personal photographic work of lament and loss. Through the lens of a First Nations person living in a post-colonial Australia, Cook explores the theme of civilized society with irony in his practice. He also draws on his personal story of growing up as an adopted child in a non-First Nations family. In *Veiled Bird*, one of the three highly commended works in the 2020/21 KWM art award, Cook adapts the art historical Dutch tradition of *nature morte* or still life painting with a carefully curated *vanitas* photograph. The transience of life is poignantly portrayed by a solitary shrouded bird immersed in darkness that stands shackled by chain. Decaying poppies and gum leaves, overturned wine goblets and a smouldering candle symbolise its mortality. These symbols allude to opiate and alcohol addiction, a mother unable to nurture burdened by her addiction. A soft glow of hope is revealed in the warmth of the blood red wine, the tiny eggs and pure white feather in the bird's beak. Repentance for past wrongdoings is a universal human feeling that this contemporary artist successfully conveys.

Emerging NSW-based Gamilaroi artist, **Travis De Vries** (Page 64), in his work, *Becoming*, a photographic mixed media series of seven self-portraits, explores universal notions of self-actualisation and embodiment. He references

the coming of age initiation ceremony in Aboriginal culture and hints at the levelling up or coming of age of a fully rounded global cultural person who accepts everyone without judgment.

Arrernte / Luritja / Yankunytjatjara / Pitjantjatjara woman, **Sally M Nangala Mulda**, in her naïve, balanced work, *Worrying for sickness*, emotively depicts two women sitting cross legged on the ground sharing their grave local concerns, that are also global concerns, about the impact of Covid in their community. As well as 'worry' being used by the artist in text, the beanie clad woman drinking orange juice is imbued with a sense of worry reflected in her facial expression. Using pops of colour and simple text to further illustrate her figuration, Mulda provides social commentary on the hardship of everyday life in Alice Springs town camps, an everyday concern of much of the world's population.

*'People at birth are inherently good ... I have always found goodness in the people I met everywhere I went in the world. So, this is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves. And to hold on to the goodness in each other, no matter how difficult it is to do that.'*²⁷

²⁷ Claire Shaffer, "Chloe Zhao Wins Best Director at Academy Awards: Watch Her Speech," *Rolling Stone*, 25 April, 2021. <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/oscars-2021-chloe-zhao-best-director-speech-1161069/>

Chloé Zhao, Chinese Film Director of American film, Nomadland (2021)

The times they are a-changing. The Australian people stand on the cusp of recognising First Nations Australians' Uluru Statement from the Heart, facilitating a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and constitutional recognition for First Nations Australians. The artists and cultural custodians in this exhibition, with their dynamic visual artworks and artist statements that layer language, emotion and memory, take non-First Nations Australians on a journey to listen, empathise and learn. Is the KWM art award audience, such a group of Australians who are not automatically opposed to reconciliation and are willing to bridge the social divide? Are we as individuals, able to hold on to the goodness in each other, no matter how difficult it is to do that? Can we as a nation tell truths and forge a path forward? Together we share a rich cultural heritage. As humans we share the future.

The 2020 King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award Finalists

AMALA GROOM (Wiradjuri)

aeternum imperium (ii)

Glass, metal, spray paint, rainwater
16 x 12 x 12 cm
Single Edition

As a triple entendre, *aeternum imperium (ii)* is a conceptual intervention into Chambord's use of Catholic iconography which formerly represented the bestowing of Colonial power to reign supreme over First Peoples by 'divine right'.

In questioning the legal authority of the Colonial Project, this work repurposes a vintage Chambord bottle by replacing the original text 'Royal Deluxe Chambord Liquor' with 'Eternal Reign' and replacing the alcohol content with the first rain of the season after the Black Summer of early 2020.

The design of the Chambord bottle is modelled after the globus cruciger (cross-bearing orb), or 'The Sovereign's Orb', a piece of British coronation regalia. A symbol of 'godly power', the orb is depicted throughout art history most notably in Da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* (Saviour of the World, c.1500) and represents the 'celestial sphere' of the heavens, also known as Aether, or as the fifth element in alchemical studies.

Traversing language groups, rainwater is used in Aboriginal ceremonial business, in the connection of ancestors to country, literally bringing the heavens to earth.

aeternum imperium (ii) posits that true sovereignty transcends the physical plane and that it is fictitious for any single person to hold the world in one's hand.

aeternum imperium (ii) further declares that 'Reign' meaning to 'hold royal office'; 'lasting or existing forever; without end' and 'a supreme ruler' is colonial mythology, with actual dominion held within First Peoples' unbroken connection to the multiverse reigning supreme.



ANGKALIYA CURTIS
(Pitjantjatjara)

Cave Hill

Canvas
122 x 152 cm

Ngayuku Mitaku Ngurangka (the country I have inherited from my husband) is a wonderful place called Cave Hill. Cave Hill is an important site for the Seven Sisters Dreaming story. When you come here you can see in the rock formations the story of the seven sisters as they ran from *Wati Ngiru* (the cheeky man). The sisters hid in the darkness of the big cave and the oldest sister used her *wana* (digging stick) to make a hole and escape through the back of the cave. You can still see the scratching marks she made.

Cave Hill *ta tjukurla tjuta ngaranya*. There is a lot of water here too, many rock holes and connecting creeks and water courses. The abundance of water, food and *tjurkupa* makes Cave Hill a precious place. My husband Billynya and I travelled on a camel from the mission in Ernabella to this magical home.

Today Curtis lives and works between Nyapari Community and Cave Hill. She once lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle often walking long distances in the desert where traditional knowledge of the country, its waterholes and food supplies, are vital to survival. She learned from her mother and grandmother the secrets of the land and acquired an intimate understanding of the environment and the ancestral creation stories associated with it.



ASHLEE MURRAY (Palawa)

Kanalaritja

Jewellery

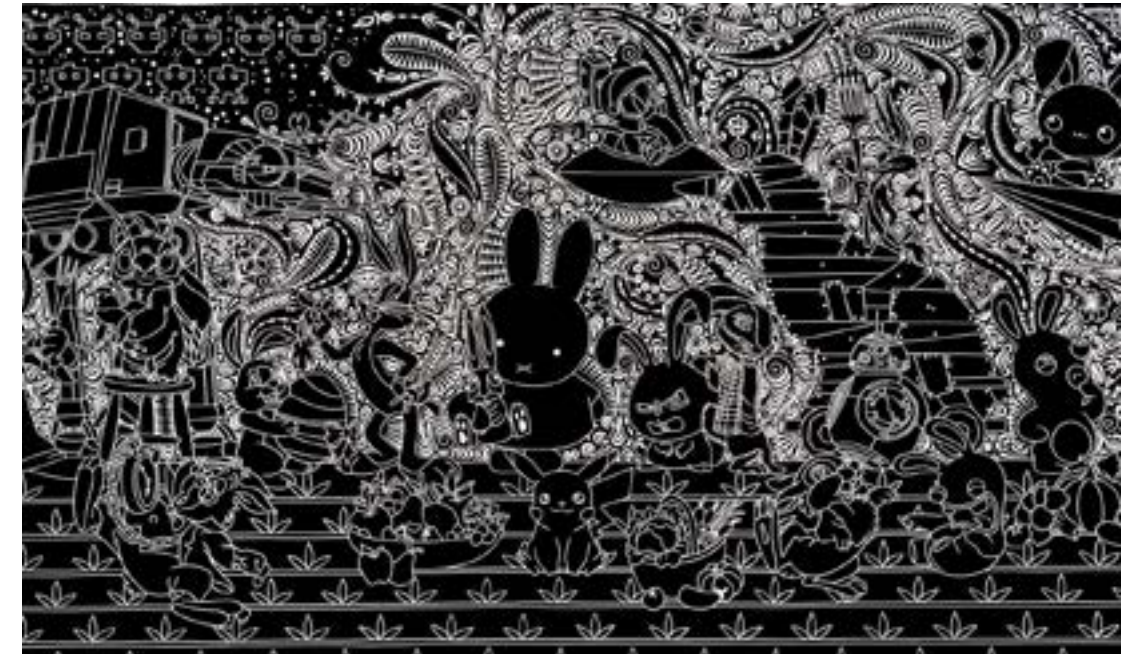
This is a single species traditional King Maireener necklace. King Maireener necklaces, or *kanalaritja*, were once a favourite type for my ancestors. Over the last 5 years these necklaces have made a resurgence and are highly prized by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Shell stringing is one aspect of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture that has survived over time. This ancient practice remains relatively unchanged and the transfer of knowledge between generations of women is the same as it was for my ancestors.

This species of shell is the rarest of all stringing shells and my work is known for its presence. The shells are harvested during Spring Tide once yearly – these particular ones were collected in January 2020. They are then processed for a minimum of 6 weeks until they are ready to be cleaned. The outer layer is removed from the shells to reveal the beautiful colours. They are then pierced singularly by hand. The shells are then sorted into appropriate sizes and strung onto various fibres; this particular one is strung with a jute to accommodate the heavy shells. The necklace is then rested for a number of weeks to ensure its durability.

BRIAN ROBINSON (Kala Lagaw Ya / Wuthathi)

Miffy + Friends: The Usual suspects

linocut
120 x 208 cm



Look deeply into Robinson's imagery and you begin to lose your footing. A constellation of details absorbs you into spaces that are at once foreign and familiar, and a gentle but liberating sense of disorientation takes hold.

Miffy + Friends: The Usual Suspects takes the viewer on a magical journey through many different lands, several universes and a diversity of narratives as each and every character is explored leaving you to ponder . . . should I take the red pill or the blue pill? You take the blue pill . . . the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill . . .

you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Numerous epic narratives unfold in Miffy's universe, once peaceful and placid, but now full of chaos and mayhem.

In bringing this imagery into one frame reference, Robinson encourages us to understand how all cultures involve a complex attempt to make sense of their world as we all continue to circulate in the same vast space of knowledge and mystery and create idiosyncratic ways of navigating its rhythms.



CARMEN GLYNN-BRAUN (Southern Arrernte, Kaytetye, Ammatyerre)

Branded

Mixed media
120 x 70 cm (x4)

Through *Branded*, Glynn-Braun draws attention to contemporary Indigenous skin politics, a result of the devastation of Australian colonisation, while simultaneously promoting generational Indigenous resilience and identity. *Branded* consists of four large white sheer sheets of organza dyed in different flesh coloured shades of facial foundation (makeup). The soft fabric sheets are hung in an overlapping diagonal formation suspended gently from the ceiling, from fairest to darkest. Hung together, the sheets reflect the diversity in skin colours of Indigenous Australia today.

Through highlighting the many different skin shades that belong to Indigenous people, Glynn-Braun draws attention to contemporary Indigenous skin politics and contestations of Aboriginality through skin colour. As the foundation makeup travels upwards, enveloping the fabric sheet, Glynn-Braun reclaims the white colonial branding of full, half-cast and quarter-cast ascribed to Indigenous people who were descendants of the Stolen Generation.

The Stolen Generation brought by the Assimilation Policy (1951-1962) was designed to obliterate Indigenous bloodlines by removing children from their families and ultimately ‘breeding out’ melanin over generations. Glynn-Braun positions *Branded* as a reminder of this colonial wrong but strongly highlights the continued survival and generational resilience of the Aboriginal people through the reclamation of identity and the continual generation of a strong sense of self.

CAROLANNE KEN (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) (APY Lands)

Minyma Makuli Tjukurpa

Acrylic on Belgian linen
174 x 148 cm

This is the cave of Minyma Makuli. She was a crippled woman who had to crawl on her hands and knees across the ground. She dug out this cave with the *piti* (wooden bowl), to create her big *wiltja* (shelter). She camped here with her *kungkawara kutjara*, two daughters. One evening the girls returned from hunting with *kuku pulka* (large game). She wondered how they got it, and where it had come from? Two men had given it to the girls! Her girls left her alone for a long time and didn’t help her. Poor old weak woman. So, she decided to follow them. She crawled after them, using a walking stick. When she reached their camp, the men hit and killed her. They had called the girls in marriage and taken them away.

This is Carolanne’s grandmother’s country. The underground cave at Kanypi is a permanent water supply. Carolanne is from Fregon on the APY Lands. Precise, fine brushwork are characteristics of her work. Carolanne is a keen story teller and combining a traditional style with a contemporary edge to her work, reflects a keen sense of place retaining the importance of traditional country as inspiration for her work.



DHUWARRWARR MARIKA (Rirratjingu / Miliwurrwurr)

Gäma-Wukitj Rulyapa

Work on bark
134 (H) x 72 (W) x 10 (L) cm

This *miny'tji* represents Rulyapa, the rough saltwater country between Nhulunbuy and the large island of Dhambaliya (Bremer Island), ballooning up from the secret depths, around the sacred rock *Manhala*, which can be a manifestation of *Daymirri*. *Daymirri* is an enigmatic giant sea being (perhaps a whale shark) that according to Rirratjingu and Djambarrpuynu clan *manikay* (sacred song) pertains to the saltwater country close to Yirrkala. It is echoed in the dome-shaped rock *Manhala* which exposes itself at the low tide, above the *ran* (tide marks), bleached white, a patina of brine and weather.

The fine crosshatching is the Rirratjingu sacred clan design denoting the swirling of these waters. The constriction of the channel between the mainland and Bremer Island coincides with the meeting of the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Arafura Sea on the very north eastern tip of the Top End. This causes deep water to billow up to the surface in shifting patterns of calm and rough chop.

Dhuwarrwarr is sister of Wandjuk, Bayngul and Banduk Marika, and daughter of Malawan, the Rirratjingu clan leader who originally welcomed the missionaries to set up on his land. Dhuwarrwarr is believed by many to be the first Yolngu woman authorised to paint sacred designs on her own.



FIONA FOLEY (Badtjala)

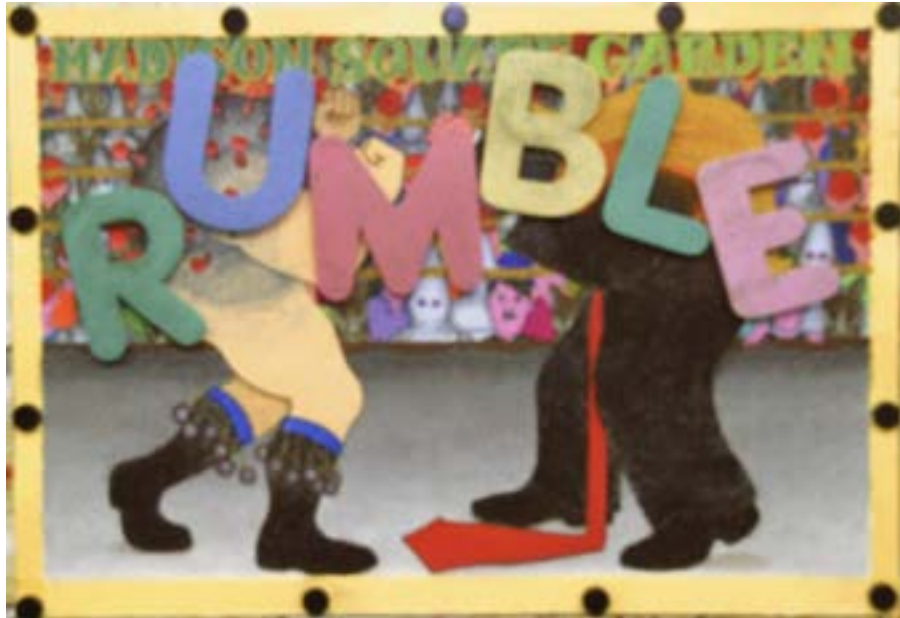
Protector's Camp

Photograph
45 x 80 cm

My photographs offer re-enactments of selected incidents. This series is focused on two central characters: Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble. These two protagonists strode onto the historical stage and became central to Queensland's *The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* (1897). Archibald Meston became the Southern Protector of Aborigines and Reverend Ernest Gribble was instrumental in running Anglican missions across the state. Meston and Gribble had active roles in shaping the destinies of many Aboriginal lives through their ideologies, experiments and methods of isolation.

Rendered herein, featuring a largely Aboriginal cast, are some of my thoughts on colonial vice and profiteering. The various scenes address themes of daily life, control, addiction, assimilation, fear, survival and strength of character.

Until 1897, opium use in Queensland was both widespread and legal. Meston settles in a bush camp where his gun is "shown" as well as a kangaroo skin and wooden box in order to exercise control. This scene is permeated by wafts of arrogance — as pervasive as smoke from the campfire. My research has revealed that Meston was a man of contradictions. Significant colonial attitudinal changes occurred within his lifetime and he progressed from pot shot killer to Protector of Aborigines.



GORDON HOOKEY (Waanyi)

Ready to Rumble

Video / animation

Amongst increasing political tension and global defence against the Coronavirus pandemic, Gordon Hookey takes on the position of ringside commentator. *Ready to Rumble* takes aim at the confrontational leadership of Donald Trump and his management of the global pandemic. The boxing match, which becomes synonymous with political realities, highlights Trump's infant-like conduct as a global leader.

Hookey locates his art at the interface where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures converge. He explicitly attacks the establishment and implicates our current political representatives. His style and approach is distinctive in its vibrancy and best known for its biting satire of Australia's political landscape, its leaders and representatives. Through his idiosyncratic visual language, he has developed a unique and immediately recognisable style. His work combines figurative characters, iconic symbols, bold comic-like text, and a spectrum of vibrant colours.

Hookey's perspective comes from a divergent, activist positioning – his work challenges hierarchies, skewering the status and integrity of the 'elite', while working to bolster the position of the marginalised and oppressed.

HELEN GANALMIRRIWUY (Liyagauwumirr / Garrawurra)

Lurrkun mindirr (three conical baskets)

Woven baskets

Bidi'yun means to apply colour – typically by painting or rubbing, but also more recently by immersion dyeing with local plant material. This set of three *mindirr* exemplify senior artist Helen Ganalmirriwuy's mastery of form and colour. For the monochrome restraint of the rare black dilly bags, she harvests and ferments native plant materials and prepares them for the immersion dyeing techniques which have been developed to achieve this deep colour.

By contrast, the coloured form has been painted with the soft tones and textures of the *gamunungu* (earth pigments) which Ganalmirriwuy collects from the coastal cliffs of her mother's homeland of Lanarra (Howard

Island). Extracting and grinding these materials are a time-consuming and time-honoured process. Rather than being considered laborious however, the method is almost meditative. It places the artist on a continuum of cultural practice grounded in Yolngu synergies with the natural world. The colours themselves are not randomly chosen but applied according to traditional systems of meaning and rules for use.

There is a refined elegance to these designs: at their simplest they consist of nothing more than a series of austere horizontal bands of yellow, red and white. To the Liyagauwumirr, however, they contain all the mysteries of their ancestral homelands.





IAN WALDRON (Kurtjar)

*Talking to my mate Matthew in
lockdown (Covid 19) 2020*

Canvas
113 x 143 cm

'I am in Yungaburra in Far North Queensland, north of Cairns. We don't have the virus up here at this stage, we feel very fortunate. So, I give my friends in Melbourne a call to give them some support.'

Painted in August 2020 during stage 4 lockdowns in Victoria caused by the COVID pandemic, this work was inspired by phone conversations Ian had with friend and fellow artist Matthew Johnson. The artists are linked through their celebration of colour, pattern, and their love of the Australian bush. In 2019 Matthew and Ian exhibited together, including a collaborative installation. The catalyst for this was a visit by Matthew and his son to see Ian on his family's traditional land and cattle station, Delta Downs in the Gulf of Carpentaria. This is the largest Indigenous

run station in Australia. Together they explored the natural surroundings, taking in the peculiar and brilliant light and colours of the deep North, including catching and cooking fish and fresh water turtle!

Working with a classic gridded background this structured composition highlights Ian's background in graphics as a self-taught sign writer developing into a fine art practice.

Expansive and freewheeling, Waldron's work oscillates between formal conventions and a modern painterly spirit shared with many urban Aboriginal artists.

JENNA LEE (Larrakia, Wardaman, Karajarri)

a/mended with red volume 1

Weaving
Pages of 'Aboriginal Words and Place Names',
linen bookbinding thread, red silk thread, red
cotton thread.

'..those who are in search for names for houses,
children, boats and other purposes, will find a
rich treasury of words native to their own land...'

While simultaneously being dispossessed from land and waters and having children stolen, our words were served up with no connection to people or place in the form of 'Aboriginal' word-list dictionaries. *a/mended with red volume 1* seeks to correct this offensive omission of agency and representation, by undergoing a transformative process of analysis, deconstruction and reconstruction. The resulting forms translate the original pages into a work of personal and cultural resilience, beauty and strength. The red silk thread represents the retrospective addition of First Nations authority to the pages of this book in the same way in which red pen is used to correct and edit documents prior to publishing.



JOE DHAMANYDJI (Gupapuyngu)

Birrkuda Galinyin – Balanda law ga Yolngu law

Work on bark or board
116 x 45 cm

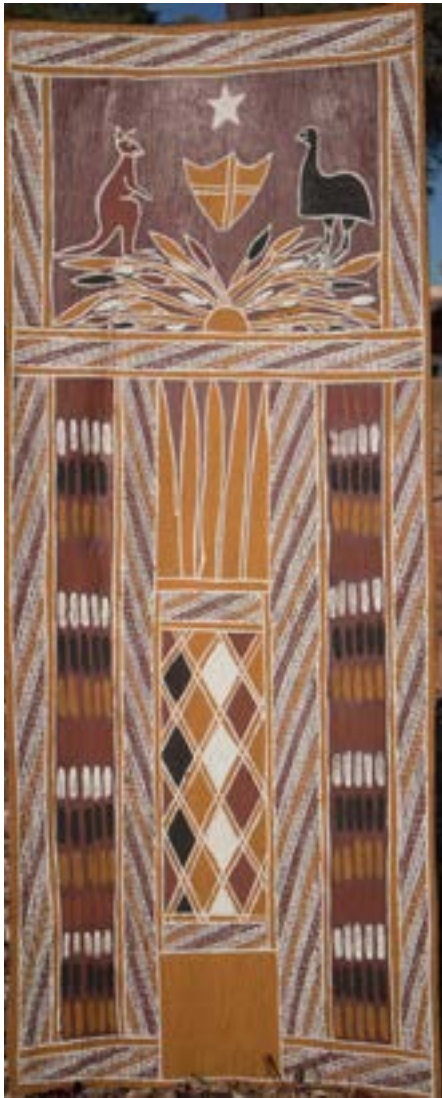
This piece represents the meeting of two cultural leaders, the artist's father, Tom Djäwa, and Queen Elizabeth of England. This meeting occurred in 1954 in Toowoomba, Queensland.

To depict this meeting the artist has combined his Gupapuynu clan wild honey bee and bandicoot body paint designs, with the Australian coat of arms flanked by the emu and kangaroo.

The elongated triangular shapes beneath the coat of arms are the protruding nose of the native bees' hive. Dhamanydji also describes the motif as a crown for Yolngu people. The central diamond pattern in the work is native beeswax or honeycomb. The red, black, yellow

and white diamonds indicate different stages of the development of the hive while the solid yellow block at the base of the work is the tree stump, symbolic of the foundational knowledge held by Gupapuynu people. The dashes of yellow, black, red and white represent scratchings made by the bandicoot.

At the beginning of *Närra* (cleansing ceremony) the bandicoot, nose of beehive and honey designs are painted onto men's bodies when they are not allowed to be seen by the uninitiated. After the ceremony, the Yirritja participants dance to the salt water and are cleansed by people of the Dhuwa moiety who splash them, washing the body paint off.



JOSH MUIR (Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wada Wurrung and Barkindji)

WAA series no.5 - The bushfire which burnt Crow black

Digital print on aluminium
115 x 115 cm

I have chosen to convey the Dreamtime story of *Waa* as it is featured in Indigenous narratives throughout Australia. As a proud Yorta Yorta man, *Waa* holds totemic importance. Drawing on my own connection to Country and taking inspiration from Indigenous motifs and markings, I use the motif of *Waa* the Crow to illustrate the richness of historic and contemporary Indigenous knowledge and to facilitate the sharing of culture and exchange of stories.

My work takes inspiration from my Indigenous heritage, street art, pop culture and from youth references. I am interested in creating unique imagery that alludes to the narratives around culture, nature, ceremony and connection to Country and that will root the story of *Waa* strongly in its place.



For this new series, I have depicted *Waa*'s role in bringing fire to mankind as told by the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. This work – *The bushfire which burnt Crow black* illuminates the following part of the narrative:

“Bunjil's helpers, *Djurt-djurt* the nankeen kestrel and *Thara* the quail hawk, grabbed the rest of the coals. Then the coals made a bush fire which burnt *Waa* black. It also spread over his country and Bunjil had to gather all the Kulin to help put it out.”

JUDY WATSON (Waanyi)

dog head pool (dara kulaji nangka)

Canvas
193.5 x 147 cm



blue is the colour of memory
the colour of water and sky
translucent and dense
dark beyond black
velvety
soft and porous
a tinge of blue across ochre
allowing the warmth of the red, pink and orange to glow through
blue is dreamy and liquid
pooling and washing over the ground
it can sparkle and become luminescent
it cools and recedes
blue transports us to a level of deep subconsciousness
it is other worldly
it lives in its liquid state deep beneath the ground, laps at
our feet and floats above us
blue is a water diviner
transcendental
a blue mirage
hovering, calling to us
a quiver of anticipation
quenching our thirst.

KAIT JAMES (Wadawurrung)

Annus Horribilis

Mixed media
77 x 46 cm

This vintage tea towel from 1980 has been reworked to reference Australia's colonial past and the continuing issues we are facing in 2020.

Through the use of humour, familiar imagery and vivid colours, James addresses the way white Western culture has dominated Australia's history, how Australia and the world perceives our First Nations' People and her personal reflections on her Indigenous heritage.

James' current work focuses on Aboriginal calendar tea towels from the 70-80's that generalise and stereotype her culture and subverts them with familiar pop-cultural references, Indigenous issues relevant to that year, as well as the present day to reflect her contemporary perspective.

Using punch needling techniques with predominantly wool and cotton, she embroiders and reappropriates kitsch found materials to explore her Indigenous identity and Anglo heritage. By reappropriating these images, she endeavours to develop and use her art in ways that encourages responsiveness, unity and optimism within and beyond Indigenous communities.



KARLA DICKENS (Wiradjuri)

Ready, willing and able

Photograph
180 x 120 cm

Ready, willing and able

No erected Big Top today
no sawdusted arenas or rolls of painted canvas
a dark sideshow has found its way
into a womb of Colonial privilege

Star-spangled banners exert unease
Ms Ready emphatically reclaims this sacred space
her legs mirroring the strength of its marble columns
an exotic Koori knockout, she harnesses the spirits
stolen from those caged
in the rusty menagerie over which she towers

These Aboriginal faces reflect historical human zoos
sadly mirrored today in jails countrywide
unnatural spectacles without safety nets
spell-binding juggling acts are needed to sidestep
those circuses
as the magicians who manipulate such entertainments
continue to shine
ticket prices skyrocket as risks and casualties increase

Mr Ready firmly stands his ground
not just a boxing-tent performer
his fists help him to protect and survive—day in, day out
tattoos share daredevil stories and legacies
scars of resilience
just like tightrope walkers, who demand respect

Knife dodging acts, gun shooting cowboys and
bareback riders
fires rage with spectacular damage
evidence of a nation with holes in buckets
which leak more than water
“There’s a gaping hole in this bucket, dear Liza,
how on earth can you fix it dear Henry, dear Henry?”

The clowns enter and the show goes on...



KAYE BROWN (Tiwi)

Yirrinkiripwoja

Locally sourced earth pigments on stringybark
120 x 26 cm

“From olden days, the old people used to do *minga* (body markings) with stringgray barb and with *jukwarringa* (mud mussel) shell. They used *jukwarringa* shell to cut the baby’s cord. Aminayi (grandfather) used to talk to us and show us. He had two across his belly and he had on his arms, four each. He used to show us, we thought it was strange but now we are trying to keep that design alive through painting. It is like culture, like the old way to the new so the kids will know what has been done since a long time ago. We can keep the old stories alive through our painting. They used to use *jukwarringa* shells to cut everything and mark themselves, with how many boyfriends or girlfriends they had, how many husbands and wives.”

Yirrinkiripwoja is an exemplary example of Brown’s mastery of the *kayimwagakimi* or *pwoja* (bone). It is a painting ‘comb’ originally used to apply design to the body and face for Tiwi ceremonies based on disguising oneself from *mapurtiti* – the spirits of the deceased. Carved from ironwood harvested on Melville Island, Brown uses the comb to apply locally sourced earth pigments to the surface of stringybark, paper and linen.



MAREE CLARKE (Yorta
Yorta / Wamba Wamba /
Mutti Mutti / Boonwurrung)

*A Moment in Time - Connection
to Country*

Sculpture - glass, natural river reeds, red
ochre, charcoal and crow feathers on steel
thread
7 metres

A Moment in Time – Connection to Country
represents my connection to country,
culture, and place. The charcoal and
ochre inside the glass seed pods is from
Warrakoo past Lake Victoria in NSW. The
area around Lake Victoria is one of the most
concentrated Aboriginal sites of historical
habitation in the world. My family would go
camping at Warrakoo every year. The natural
river reeds are from the Maribyrnong River in
Melbourne, which is Boon Wurrung Country.

The river-reed necklace is based on a
traditional talisman that was given to people
passing through Country as a sign of safe
passage and friendship but are supersized
to reflect the scale of the loss of knowledge
of cultural practices and land. Utilising
glass together with these natural materials
transforms the work and places it within the
context of contemporary art and reinforces
our traditions as they develop and remain
relevant in contemporary Australia.



MARINA PUMANI BROWN (Pitjantjatjara)

Ngayuku Ngura Kuwari (My Home Now)

Canvas
122 x 152 cm

My work captures a long line of cultural knowledge that I am proud to be the custodian of, responsible for keeping it safe and passing it on to the next generation. Whilst my mother strictly paints Antara, a sacred ceremonial site close to Mimili, I have broadened my practice to include other knowledge that is important to me. This knowledge speaks of traditions that are very much part of our day-to-day life out here in Mimili, traditions that are eternally old but ever present. My paintings are about trips to the area around Antara and Paralpii (Victory Well), where we collect *mingkulpa* (bush tobacco) and care for the local *tjukula* (rock holes). Particularly after kapi pulka (big rains), the land becomes so fertile, and we harvest bush foods

like the *gnurru* (lollie tree) and camp out on country like the old people used to.

My paintings are both literal maps of the landscape and objects of meaning removed from any physical representation. Though not always depicted, the importance of Antara is never lost in my work. The site has been integral to the existence of Anangu culture since the beginning of time. Today my life is different to that of my ancestors and my work is a tool to document my part in a story that spreads across timespans bigger than our imagination.

MICHAEL COOK
(Bidjara)

Veiled Bird

Photograph
140 x 160 cm

This photographic image has a sombre and painterly darkness, out of which a central light reveals a tableau of stillness. A bird stands, head veiled by a shroud made from a dried leaf of a native lily. She holds an emu feather gently in her beak, while her leg is manacled, attached by a chain which rests in the gathered linen tablecloth.

Grounded in an aesthetic that echoes the Old Masters, this image is vested in symbolism and has a simmering emotional register unusual in Michael Cook’s oeuvre. The veiled bird, her three eggs resting in the nest and the altar-like candle, recently snuffed out, allude to nurturing instincts derailed by substance addiction. The emu feather, renowned for its softness, suggest good motherly intentions despite an enslavement to addiction (drugs and alcohol evoked by the empty bottles, and broken poppies in a floral



arrangement). The central leaf is worn like a cape which blinds this bird, physically and metaphorically, and takes us to the pieta, the mother’s loss of her progeny. Yet in the eggs lies a seed of hope, an inherent belief in the individual over environment, and the redemption of culture.

In its intensity, art historical antecedents, and oblique biographical reference (to Cook’s adoption), this image marks a compelling departure from the artist’s previous series-driven photography. It is also powerful in its evocation of colonisation’s devastating impact on Australia’s First Nations peoples and cyclical and ongoing poverty.

MICHELLE WOODY (Tiwi)

Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country)

Locally sourced earth pigments on linen
120 x 90 cm

“When I was a little girl, I always watched the old people getting painted up for ceremony and wearing those special adornments – *pamijini* and *marruwi*. I remember when my uncle passed away my cousins were crushing ochre and they painted themselves with the *pwoja* comb (Tiwi ironwood comb for painting dots). For me when I got painted up, it felt like a special moment when family and friends came together to mourn. When family leave us and are laid to rest, we all come together and have a special memory of them, they have a special space in my heart forever.



When I was watching my family it gave me traditional knowledge, I learnt about ceremony and art from my elders. We go out on country to collect ochre for ceremony and this is the same ochre I use in my art. I use yellow, red and white ochre. In my new paintings I have been using this comb to paint my country. My Country is Pupatuw.”

Ngiya Murrakupupuni encapsulates Michelle Woody’s contemporary Tiwi style for which she is gaining national recognition. In the long-standing tradition of her ancestors she utilises natural ochres sourced on country around Milikapiti – they are collected, crushed and burned into the three traditional colours of the island landscape: white, yellow and red.



PATJU PRESLEY (Pitjantjatjara)

Waltari

Canvas
122 x 76 cm

Patju Presley paints with a spiritual confidence, as someone who knows their place in the Creation. Here he depicts Wa Kutjara Tjukurpa (Two Men Creation Line) as it transcends the significant site of Waltari.

This is an epic narrative that follows a father and son *wanampi* (water serpent) as they traverse the Spinifex Lands on ceremonial business. It is at Waltari that the father departs to hunt game and leaves the son behind. When he returns he finds his son embroiled in conflict with many *tjitji* (children) who are striking him with sticks. The father eventually rescues his boy from the danger.

These characters that Presley depicts within a living, breathing landscape are the creation beings who shaped the immediate environment as they moved through it, leaving a moral narrative etched into the physical domain as testament to their power and presence.

It is this physical, spiritual and religious existence that cannot be separated for Presley and is what gives his work the transcendent quality we experience from it.



REGGIE ULURU (Yankunytjatjara)

Wati Ngintaka - Perentie Lizard Man

Canvas
122 x 76 cm

“When people see my paintings and ask why my Perentie always have a different colour face, I tell them they've been head in the mud, looking for good tucker or *kapi* (water)... like we did when we were little boys. My brothers. We'd look at the ground, touch it and smell it... see if what's in it is good to take.”

In the *Tjukurpa*, or Creation Period, the Creation Ancestors travelled the unformed land and through their everyday activities and adventures shaped its features and left behind information for humans to follow. In the northern ranges of South Australia is a long chain of land forms marking the passage of *Wati Ngintaka* (Perentie Lizard Man). He stole a grindstone and headed west, pursued by the rightful owners and hiding it magically in his tail every time they caught up with him. They finally killed him for his theft and the story has been passed down for centuries in the *Tjukurpa* or song and ceremony.

Filling the entire canvas, Reggie depicts four large *Ngintaka* (Perentie Lizard) men gathered together, “..in a meeting” as he describes, discussing the theft of the grind stone. To the bottom left of the painting, you can see that *Wati Ngintaka* escaping.

RICHARD BELL
(Kamilaroi, Kooma,
Jiman And Gurang
Gurang)

Too Cool

Canvas
120 x 120 cm

‘This is a me me me painting. It’s about how people try too hard to please others, to their detriment.’

Urban activist artist, Richard Bell comments on the contemporary narcissistic culture of our times, acerbically ascribing it comes at the price of happiness. Using humour, satire and word play he makes a witty jab at the art world and critiques the tortured artist.



Bell works across a variety of media including painting, installation, performance and video. One of Australia’s most significant artists, Bell’s work explores the complex artistic and political problems of Western, colonial and Indigenous art production addressing issues around representation, place, and identity politics. He grew out of a generation of Aboriginal activists and has remained committed to the politics of Aboriginal emancipation and self-determination.

SALLY M NANGALA MULDA (Arrernte, Luritja,
Yankunytjatjara, Pitjantjatjara)

Worrying for sickness

Acrylic on Linen
61 x 91 cm

‘Old woman eating hot pie. Other woman drinking orange juice. Two woman talking sickness, get worry. Dog sleeping. No worry.’

In this painting Mulda demonstrates the way Covid-19 looms in the minds of the Aboriginal population of Central Australia, a topic of grave concern. A long-term town camp resident in *Mpamtwe* (Alice Springs), Mulda has consistently narrated her life in and around *Mpwetyerre*, also known as Abbott’s Town Camp, and prior to that, Little Sisters Town Camp.

Her body of work is an on-going autobiographical document, witness to both everyday life and its complexity as experienced by any and all residents of the 18 Town Camps in Alice Springs.



SAMANTHA HOBSON (Kuuku Ya'u)

Fatal Shore

Acrylic on canvas
122 x 150 cm

Beginning her career in the Lockhart Community young artist group (Art Gang), Samantha has since developed her own dramatic expressionist style, characteristically attacking her canvas with intense colours and fluid energy. Whilst she avoids typical representational motifs, a powerful symbolism emerges from her paintings. *Fatal Shore* employs only three colours; red, blue and shards of white aggressively strewn across the canvas in varying layers and intensity. In such a disharmonious work this choice of colour, those of the Australian flag or more explicitly the Union Jack, could even be understood as a comment on Australia's colonial history and frontier conflicts.

The fractured lines are agitated and turbulent, bleeding uncomfortably, disturbing the picture plane. Whether or not audiences interpret such a meaning from the painting, the raw emotion it evokes is undeniable, and this is the fundamental aim of the artist.

Familiar with painting about the more painful aspects of her own Indigenous community life and challenges, much of Samantha's earlier work centered on abuse, suicide and domestic violence - yet painting was always her release factor. This new work is less specifically issue-based yet still feeds into our (collective) anxieties about the current world.



TIMOTHY COOK (Tiwi)

Kulama

Locally sourced earth pigments on linen
150 x 150 cm

During his extensive and successful career, Timothy has focused on representing the *Kulama*. The *Kulama* ceremony is a traditional initiation for young Tiwi people, which coincides with the harvest of wild yam in the late wet season when a ring appears around *Japarra* (the moon). The circles in his work symbolize the moon, yam and ritual circles of the ceremony. Crosses reflect his spiritual life and the *pwanga* (dots) reflect the *japalinga* (stars). *Japarra* (the moon) is very significant to Tiwi

people and *Taparra* (the moon man) is a central figure in the *Parlingari* (old time) creation stories – Timothy's representations of the moon are also references to *Taparra* (the moon man).

Timothy Cook expresses himself through his loose and gestural designs. He paints exclusively with natural red, white and yellow ochres that are sourced from country around Melville Island, creating a rich cultural and material representation of the Tiwi landscape.

TRAVIS DE VRIES
(Gamilaroi)

Becoming

Mixed media
78.5 x 103.5 cm

Becoming is a series of self-portraits for exploring and creating one final piece similar to a ‘Gundam-esque’ machine. Utilising a process of self-actualisation and embodiment, through the use of layering paint (acrylic, gold leaf enamel, oils), Travis is able to picture himself as different characters - a Gamilaroi deity, an early post-colonial Gamilaroi King (traitor to his people), a super hero tapping into Gamilaroi magic powers, or a mythical creature similar to the bunyip or yowie.

The central figure in the series is adorned with a very basic traditional ‘paint up’, mimicking ochre by using an oil paint paste. This work represents a blank canvas or an entry level initiate in the cultural experience.

Each other work is connected to the central figure by using the same ochre motif and then builds upon that with different variations through colour and form to create the embodied characters. The works that appear opposite each other are meant to be akin to mirrors, on one side they look to explore how ‘leaning in’ to the effects of colonisation would impact the central character, and on the other they draw on Travis’ idea of ‘level-ing up’ as a fully rounded cultural person. They draw on the idea of magic and the crucible that every initiated person goes through.



Acknowledgments

KING & WOOD MALLESONS
CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS
ART AWARD 2020

Over the past two years an enormous amount of planning and coordination has gone into bringing to life the second iteration of the King & Wood Mallesons Contemporary First Nations Art Award. This is not least due to the impact of Covid-19 in Melbourne and the delay of staging the exhibition due to lock down restrictions.

We sincerely thank Briar Holt and her team at Melbourne gallery fortyfivedownstairs for their guidance and support throughout this period. And International Art Services (IAS) who coordinated the travel of the artwork from all around Australia as well as their guidance in and installation of the exhibition.

We are very grateful and thank Professor Megan Davis for taking time out of her busy schedule to attend and officially open the Exhibition Opening Night at the gallery on Monday 12 July 2021.

Our sincere thanks also to Patron, Djon Mundine OAM FAHA, curator, activist, writer and artist, for all his involvement again in the organisation of this award. We dearly thank Professor Ian McLean, Hugh Ramsay Chair of Australian Art History Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne for writing his formal, focused academic essay for the catalogue. Our sincere thanks to the three judges: Myles Russell-Cook, Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Shonae Hobson, Curator of Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria and Stacie Piper, First Peoples Curator at TurraWarra Museum of Art.

The success of this initiative is a result of their active encouragement of artists and the First Nations community to participate, guidance on cultural sensitivity, time spent raising awareness within the arts community, and their expertise in critically appraising the artworks. Our thanks to all of them.

Our thanks extends to the PR team of Kabuku, Belinda Dyer and Amy Chilcott who helped promote the award in the media, Tony Bemrose Insurance Brokers for providing insurance, and Suzanne Derry from the Arts Law Centre of Australia for providing legal advice regarding the touring exhibition.

Our sincere thanks to the art coordinators of the remote art centres, the art gallery representatives of the regional and urban art galleries and the solo artists, art studios and all of the artists who entered the Art Award. Thank you for the time taken creating, preparing, framing and coordinating the transport of the works to regional depots.

A sincere thank you must also go to our incredibly dedicated and caring people of KWM including Belinda Melocco, Amelia McColl, Anne-Marie Sears, Charlotte Geddes, Dan Creasey, Kate Montano, Clarissa Reid and Amy Jepson.

Finally we thank Sarah Cox for her energy, drive, commitment and passion in curating such a deeply meaningful, engaging and inspiring exhibition which we believe represents the highest standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice in Australia.



Winner

KING & WOOD MALLESONS
CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS
ART AWARD

Michelle Woody (Tiwi)

Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country)

The VIC Local Artist Award

KING & WOOD MALLESONS CONTEMPORARY
FIRST NATIONS ART AWARD

**Maree Clarke (Yorta Yorta/Wamba
Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung)**

A Moment in Time - Connection to Country 2020





Highly Commended Award

KING & WOOD MALLESONS CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS ART AWARD

Carolanne Ken (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) (APY Lands)

Minyma Makuli Tjukurpa



Highly Commended Award

KING & WOOD MALLESONS
CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS
ART AWARD

**Carmen Glynn-Braun
(Southern Arrernte,
Kaytetye, Ammatyerre)**

Branded



Highly Commended Award

KING & WOOD MALLESONS CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS ART AWARD

Michael Cook (Bidjara)

Veiled Bird

People's Choice Award

KING & WOOD MALLESONS
CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS
ART AWARD

Reggie Uluru
(Yankunytjatjara)

Wati Ngintaka - Perentie Lizard Man



2018 Award Winner Written Piece

Teena McCarthy

Winner of the 2018 King & Wood Mallesons ATSI Art Prize

I would like to acknowledge the First Peoples of the Land that my work is shown on and thank the King & Wood Mallesons ATSI Art Award for the selection of my work. The team at KWM have been a terrific support to me for the Arts is a very competitive place to work, and there is such an important need for competitions like these.

It was my intention with my work to educate the viewer, whilst also informing them. It's a wonderful experience to make an artwork, as your passion, that one may also sell. This artwork is currently on display at Parliament House in Sydney NSW, being the face on the current 'Reconciliation Wall'. It is also printed on a pamphlet that advertises the promotion of the importance of Aboriginal Art, and its Reconciliation Action Plan.

As an artist-poet, by winning this award, I felt it helped to shine a light on both the meaning and message within the work. In *Kopi in the Mourning* she brings attention to the importance of the river Darling, my grandmother's Country. The *Baaka* means 'the river', and the Barkindji are 'the people of the river', of which the water has a great depth of meaning both culturally and spiritually. The river must stay alive, for the culture of the Barkindji to survive.

The photograph 'timed exposure portrait', was deliberately done on butchers paper, as a way to express the fragility, within the narrative of the river. Its many layers within the paper enable it to be as fragile as it is strong, and is designed to break down organically, as part of the work.

It's a call to action, as the recent fish kills had shocked the nation - the river drying and cracking beneath the heat, and the stench of death upon the river banks from the theft of corrupt corporations upstream taking that water from the Barkindji and many other nations along the Murray Darling.

In my work, I am portraying my grandmother in a 'sorry ceremony' wearing a *kopi*. These 'mourning caps' are heavy and determine the weight of the grief, compared to the weight of heavy gypsum clay applied in layers on the head, sometimes up to eight kilos, and often women were seen bleeding from the head. The women would wear the *kopi* for months and then when 'sorry business' was over, return it to the grave, seen to ward off bad spirits, whilst returning to earth.

I also thank the judges, Cara Pinchbeck of the AGNSW, contemporary artist Vernon Ah Kee, and Sharni Jones of the Australian Museum.



TEENA MCCARTHY

BHP (Be Humble Please)

Painting & poetry for Nanna

black by day
white by night
this broken ol' town
all battered and burned
high gutters in case of a storm
silver & gold
yes! you were born
you gave yourself so mercilessly
bromide, chromate and lead
you were bled
dry like the riverbed
oh, my darling
river of young and old
where if you're lucky
you may find gold
women in long dresses
formaldehyde and babies' clothes
faces of the strong men
who came in droves
the settlers, all holed up in a
house on a hill
with a chapel and an ol' donkey
just standing
in the mud
near the well
when just over the hill
10 kms out of town
there you were
your plains as red
as dry
as the river bled

Gallery of works



Amala Groom
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Cave Hill
Tjungu Palya
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Ashlee Murray
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