

Ever Present

First Peoples Art of Australia

Artwork Labels

Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia

Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia surveys historical and contemporary works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia. Drawn from the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, the works in this touring exhibition bridge time and place and are interconnected through identity, story and experience.

TINA BAUM

GULUMIRRGIN/LARRAKIA/WARDAMAN/KARAJARRI PEOPLES

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Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications
Office for the Arts

ANCESTORS + CREATORS

*We know we can't live in the past, but the past lives in us.*¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been in Australia since time immemorial. Our Ancestors created the foundation for all living things, humans and animals, as well as the sky, seasons, landscapes, waterways and lore. Ancestors take many forms and sometimes transform in the process of creating. Some are human in form, some are anthropomorphic, while others are combinations of different animal parts, such as a crocodile or buffalo head with a snake body and fishtail, or whole animals like birds or crocodiles. They are the embodiment of our creators and protectors and continue to regulate and inform our beliefs today.

Ancestors have been depicted in art since the beginning of time – from rock art out in Country to contemporary painting and sculpture – reinforcing their power and presence and their connection to Community, culture and identity.

The repainting of Ancestors and creators aids in the maintenance, re-energising and reinforcement of their stories. By reproducing these powerful beings in their work, artists strengthen their cultural connections to them and keep knowledge about them alive.

CHARLIE PERKINS QUOTED IN *ART + SOUL* (DOCUMENTARY),
ABC TV, SERIES 2, EPISODE 1, 2014.

COUNTRY + CONSTELLATION

*Our Country is us and we are our Country.*¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always been and always will be part of this country, Australia. There is deep-time evidence of our presence in the landscape, from mark-making on the ground, on trees or in caves, to sacred burial sites and ceremonial grounds. Rock art galleries are filled with painted representations of Ancestors, animals, the outlines of hands, weapons and even encounters with strangers in ships.

Returning to Country is essential for many Indigenous people. For many others, returning is not always possible. The forced removal and relocation of people, along with the incursion, theft and destruction of Country by colonisers, has created devastating disconnection for many Indigenous people. Loss of connection and the desire to reconnect are ongoing subjects in Indigenous peoples' art.

This intimate connection to and knowledge of Country also informs our links to the constellations and stars. The stars help us navigate land, inland waterways and oceans and teach us about creation stories. They are like maps, directing us to certain landscapes, informing us when seasons are about to change, when certain hunting and gathering activities should occur, and when animals and plants are ready for harvest. The stars are inseparable from Country and people.

¹ LOLA GREENO IN 'ELDER OF SHELLS', *WOMEN OF THE ISLAND* (DOCUMENTARY), WIDE ANGLE TASMANIA, APRIL 2019.

COMMUNITY + FAMILY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are bound together by a strong sense of family and Community. Whether connected through blood relations, broader clan affiliations or the shared experience of colonisation, we identify as one of many peoples.

The forced removal and relocation of Indigenous people to Christian missions and government-run reserves and children's homes since first contact has had long-lasting intergenerational consequences. Communities not traditionally associated with each other were grouped together and forced to change their cultural norms, systems and structures.

For many Communities, the breakdown of culture occurred rapidly, within one generation; for others, it took several generations. In many Communities, however, culture remains intact. And despite segregation, many strong Communities have been forged through cross-cultural exchange and intermarriage, providing a sense of belonging for many of the displaced.

The stolen generations were devastatingly affected by the breakdown of their family, their identity and their cultural connections. These profound experiences have led to a redefinition of family and Community and a coming together to build new ties and relationships.

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Representations of family and Community are important for challenging stereotypes about what it means to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. By reclaiming representation, artists change and direct the conversation about identity.

CULTURE + CEREMONY

Oral history was one of the primary ways that stories, culture, language and history were memorised and immortalised by Indigenous people. This accumulated cultural knowledge has been passed down the generations through song and storytelling, exactly as our forebears recounted it. New experiences and knowledge add richness, depth and essential information to an already strong and dynamic culture.

The transfer of cultural knowledge continues in Communities today. For some Communities, however, colonisation resulted in cultural knowledge being forcibly taken, denied or forgotten. As Indigenous Elders grow older and pass away it becomes more urgent that our stories, life experiences and knowledge are recorded by artists, performers, writers, archivists, historians and videographers.

Cultural revival is increasingly occurring today, with the creation of new ceremonies and the recovery, through archival documentation and oral recordings, of Indigenous languages taken during colonisation. Access to physical and online collections in museums and galleries that hold old material culture made by Ancestors and Elders offers opportunities to reconnect and revitalise culture and ceremony. Whether through art, song and dance, or by written, oral or new-media storytelling ways, the passing on, documentation and preservation of culture and ceremony will remain critical into the future.

TRADE + INFLUENCE

Trade, cultural exchange and relationships with neighbouring clans established important inland networks across Country – well-travelled cultural tracks also known as songlines. Traditionally, these networks were used for the exchange of goods, ceremonial material and women for marriage, and for the safe passage of people through others' Country. Now, however, access to new technology and economics have replaced much of the old ways and networks, and Communities have adapted to new ways of trading – including the global trade of goods, services and art, which has refined artists' practices and extended their reach.

There is a long history of trading relations and encounters by sea between Indigenous people in Australia and other countries. These exchanges have been with people from Papua New Guinea and Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, with Chinese and Macassan trepang fishermen, with the Dutch and Spanish in the 1600s in Western Australia and Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, and later with Chinese goldminers, Japanese pearlers and European colonisers throughout the mainland – each a different type of relationship with vastly different impacts.

Introduced art techniques, materials and methodologies have changed Indigenous peoples' artistic expression. Many continue to utilise cultural knowledge in their works, some still practice traditional production, designs or methods, while some solely invent their own style and embrace introduced mediums to explore new ways of telling their stories.

RESISTANCE + COLONISATION

*All Aboriginal art is political because it is a statement of cultural survival.*¹

Indigenous people are fierce protectors of their people, culture and Country. The resolute defiance of the early Indigenous warriors and Elders who resisted the colonisation of Australia is what inspires many present-day activists, agitators and leaders at the forefront of recognition and change. Australia has a shared history but Indigenous experience and Indigenous voices have for too long been contested or denied – a situation that artists have helped to expose and change.

For many First Nations artists whose culture, language, Country and family have been taken from them since first contact, the ongoing effects of violent frontier encounters and government policies forcing their integration, assimilation or removal have been important subject matter for their works. Their art highlights the social and political injustices of the past and present.

Artists have mined archives and used the official writings of governments and colonists, along with Indigenous oral histories, to reveal the hidden stories of colonisers' deliberate acts of incursion, theft and massacres – bearing witness and telling the truth of Australia's history. It is their ongoing resilience, courage, determination and pride that drives many Indigenous artists today.

¹GARY FOLEY, 1984, BROADCAST ON *THE POINT* (TELEVISION SERIES), NITV, 2020.

INNOVATION + IDENTITY

As the First Peoples of the continent called Australia, innovation has always been at the heart of Indigenous peoples' lives. Through innovation we have continually adapted and incorporated new ways of living in order to survive.

One of Indigenous peoples' most important and ground-breaking innovations – and one of the most recognisable and iconic Aboriginal symbols – is the returning boomerang. The boomerang is one of the world's first examples of a human-made aerodynamic flying object. Indigenous people have complex and sophisticated societies and are Australia's first in many fields: the first doctors, scientists, astronomers, engineers, horticulturalists, farmers, fishermen, designers, physicists, artists and more. We have always used creativity and ingenuity to innovate, adapt and overcome.

It is important for Indigenous artists to express their identity on their own terms. It is a personal journey and not one that can be dictated by society. Art is a platform for them to explore and challenge this aspect of their lives. Regardless as to how they identify, their art speaks for them and for their Communities and is a meaningful, lasting, ever-present legacy.

Vernon Ah Kee

Kuku Yalanji/Yidinji/Waanyi/Gugu Yimithirr/
Koko Berrin peoples

1967 Innisfail, North Queensland, Queensland

shield board (cantchant)

2007

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

synthetic polymer paint and resin over collaged digital
print on foamcore

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.909

The colours of the surfboards are bright, ... based on the ochre colours ..., but red, black and yellow, are the colours of the Aboriginal flag, I wanted to evoke those as well. Shield designs that are designed for combat, they're meant to be fierce, but I wanted them to be removed, ... I wanted them to be about action, using the surfboard to compete with, so they're about competition and combat, and fierce competition. It's about a discussion about the beach in Australia, about the identity issues surrounding Australian notions of the beach and beach culture.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2009

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On the front of the surfboard, Vernon Ah Kee uses traditional Yidinji shield designs from his father's Country in the Aboriginal flag colours. Ah Kee uses a surfboard to respond to the racially motivated Kurranulla/Cronulla riots in Sydney on 11 December 2005. Growing anti-immigration sentiments stirred over 5,000 mostly white Australian rioters, chanting 'we grew here, you flew here', to target and attack nearby Middle-Eastern Australians in an attempt to 'reclaim' the beach from 'outsiders'.

Tony Albert

Girramay/Yidinji/Kuku Yalanji peoples

1981 Thul Garrie Waja/Currumbilbarra/Townsville,
Queensland

Ash on me

2008

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

vintage ashtrays on vinyl lettering

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the 50th Anniversary
of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.173.1-470

Ash on me is about having a cigarette put out on you. It's politically charged and everything... There was something so sinister about an ashtray that I felt needed a work of its own. I put all my ashtrays aside and thought, I'll just keep collecting ashtrays. I was saving them up for something special... Aboriginalia is my term for kitsch Australiana from the fifties, sixties and seventies. I can't even say what it spans because it never ceases to amaze me what an Aboriginal face has been printed on, and so I have been collecting since I was a child... I always had a love affair with that iconography. It's intensified as I got older... It started to inform my work and then it just became my work... now it's been released back into mainstream society in a clack empowering way, a positive way.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2009

Left to right

Shell stringing is a celebration of culture and a symbol of identity – an unbroken string that connects the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, to Ancestors, culture and Country.

ZOE RIMMER, CURATOR, TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY 2016

Delicate strings of shells have been created for personal or family use for over 1,800 years in Iutruwita/Tasmania. By incorporating the variety of small, fine and robust shells, each maker remains connected or reconnected to her Country and culture. In renaming unknown makers as Ancestors, connection to a community or family is acknowledged even if the original cultural connections have been broken.

Ancestor

people not recorded
born–died Australia

Shell necklace

c1920

truwana/Cape Barren Island, Iutruwita/Tasmania
Maireener shell (*Phasianotrochus irisodontes*) on cotton
thread

Purchased 2003

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2003.16

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Shell necklace

c1920

lunawuni/Bruny Island (attributed to), lutruwita/Tasmania
Maireener shell (*Phasianotrochus irisodontes*) on cotton
thread

Purchased 2003

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2003.17

Lola Greeno

Pakana people

1946 truwana/Cape Barren Island, lutruwita/Tasmania

Blue Ceremonial King Maireener necklace

2020

Launceston, lutruwita/Tasmania

blue Maireener shell (*Phasianotrochus irisodontes*) on
cotton thread

Purchased 2021

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2021.63

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Green Maireener shell necklace

2016

Launceston, lutruwita/Tasmania

green Maireener shell (*Phasianotrochus irisodontes*) on cotton thread

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.63

A lot of my work is about cultural awareness, letting people know what we did, what we are doing, and it's about passing on to future families, for them to know about where we come from. I think you've always got to be grounded in your own culture. You know, what means so much to you and your family. I think that's really important to be preserved for younger generations.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2016

Lola Greeno was taught shell stringing by her mother, Valerie McSween, who was taught by generations of women before her. This necklace moves away from the more traditional longer, singular and smaller shelled styles. The reintroduction of rare King Maireener shells creates a stunning focal point. These incredibly important necklaces represent not only Greeno's artistic expression of her Pakana culture, but also the unbroken connection she and the women in her community have to their Ancestors and Country.

Ancestor

people not recorded
born–died Australia

Club

date and place made not recorded, Queensland
wood and metal

Gift of Barton Place Pty Ltd, Trustees for the
Albert Wong Family Trust, 2011. Donated through
the Australian Governments' Cultural Gifts Program.

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.766

Originating from central and north Queensland regions, these fighting or throwing clubs were originally carved from hardwood with long-tapered handles perfectly weighted for the individual. When colonists introduced metal, Aboriginal people incorporated these new materials into their traditional methods. Here, iron nails have been used to replace the typically carved bumps, creating a more intimidating weapon that would inflict more severe injuries.

By renaming unknown makers as Ancestors, connection to a community or family is acknowledged even if the original cultural connections have been broken.

Ancestor

people not recorded
born–died Australia

Shield [Rainforest]

nineteenth century
Rainforest region, Queensland
natural earth pigments and binder on fig tree wood

Purchased 2012

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2012.2144

This shield shows signs of heavy use in battle or ceremonial fights. Traditionally made by men from the buttress roots of native fig trees of far north Queensland rainforests, the shields were given to the young initiates new owners. The fronts of the shields were painted with natural earth pigments of black charcoal or vine sap, red, yellow and white ochre or clay. Binders like sap, honey or egg were used to adhere the ochre to the wood. The shields' designs showed the owners' totems or family designs relating to animals, insects, plants or traditional marks.

By renaming unknown makers as Ancestors, connection to a community or family is acknowledged even if the original cultural connections have been broken.

Brook Andrew

Wiradjuri/Ngunnawal peoples

1970 Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

Australia 1

2014

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

metal leaf printed on Belgian linen

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Brook Andrew has appropriated the nineteenth century bookplate imagery of artist Gustav Mützel. Commissioned by the Prussian naturalist William Blandowski (1822–1878), Mützel himself had never been to Australia nor witnessed the events described to him by Blandowski. Using gold foil, Andrew challenges and defies the ideals and representations of colonial artists, naturalists and historians and subverts the colonial perspective that overlaid Aboriginal histories for centuries. The large-scale format suggests Western colonial paintings of the time, which had overtly romanticised imagery of colonial and non-colonial landscapes.

Jean Baptiste Apuatimi

Tiwi people

1940–2013 Australia

Yirrikapayi

2007

Nguiu/Bathurst Island, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

Purchased 2007

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2007.180

Yirrikapayi was once a man who lived around Cape Fourcroy. They been spear him. He crawled into the water and turned into a crocodile (Yirrikapayi).

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2007

In this work, the concentration of alternating square and diamond shapes represent crocodile skin. The fine dotting and typical Tiwi palette of black, white, yellow and grey ochres accentuates the repetitive application of lines. Use of the pwoja comb, a traditional Tiwi painting 'comb' made from ironwood, adds a layered effect of dark and light. The dense patterning and intensity of lines alludes to the ceremonial power of the Yirrikapayi and gives a sense of movement.

Mervyn Bishop

Murri people

1945 Brewarrina, New South Wales

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hand of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari, Northern Territory

1975

Wave Hill, Northern Territory

dye destruction photograph on white Fujichrome
photographic paper

Purchased 1994

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

94.1403

We originally took the picture under the shade of a bough shed and it didn't have a nice look about it. It might be better if we got them outside and re-shot it. So after the formalities finished I asked Mr Whitlam...to re-shoot the picture again. Mr Whitlam bent down and got another handful of soil and said 'Will this do?', I took about four frames and thought that it looked good in the view finder.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2017

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During the 1960s and 1970s Bishop worked as a press photographer with The Sydney Morning Herald when he took this highly symbolic image of then prime minister Gough Whitlam pouring soil into the hand of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari. It documents the formal handing back to the Gurindji people of the deeds to the Wave Hills Station in the Northern Territory. As the first professional Aboriginal photographer, Bishop did not realise the impact or importance of his images until later in his career.

Daniel Boyd

Kudjla/Gangalu/Kuku Yalanji/Jagara/Wangerriburra/
Bandjalung peoples
1982 Gimuy/Cairns, Queensland

Treasure Island

2005

Kamberri/Canberra, Australian Capital Territory and Blue
Mountains, New South Wales
oil on canvas

Purchased 2006

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2006.285

Questioning the romantic notions that surround the birth of Australia is primarily what influenced me to create this body of work. With our history being dominated by Eurocentric views it's very important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to create dialogue from their own perspective to challenge the subjective history that has been created.

With the European Nations vying for unoccupied lands, 'Terra Nullius', the race was on to find the fabled 'Great Southern Land' and nothing was to stand in the way of obtaining it not even a complex culture tens of thousands of years old. Intentions to me seemed dishonest and dishonorable, traits I found too similar to modes of operation related to Piracy. Being so closely intertwined in the fabric of the British nation, the process of the Colonisation of 'Terra Nullius' allowed me to experiment and explore different subject matter under the blanket of piracy and construct an alternate version of our history.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2006

Robert Campbell Jnr

Ngaku people

1944–1993 Australia

Aboriginal camp at sunset

1988

Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

This work represents the cusp of change, the beginning of colonisation. The golden shine of the sunset evokes a time before change and colonial upheaval. The use of colour indicates ‘them’ and ‘us’—the darker colours for the Aboriginal side of the canvas and the paler yellow colours for the colonisers. The people, landscape, trees and sky all have the same stippled dotting, a subtle reminder that before the foreign incursion, it was all Aboriginal Country. It looks to the old way and shows the new ways coming and is a powerful work of Community, culture and connection through memories.

Michael Cook

Bidjara people

1968 Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

Broken Dreams #2

2010

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

pigment inkjet print on paper

Purchased 2011

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.173.2

A journey, through the eyes of a young Aboriginal woman reflecting upon the first European settlers in Australia; these are her broken dreams.

Where have these strange people come from? What are the huge vessels they travel on and those particular skins they wear? Her dreams conjure up visions of their stories; she imagines herself in these strange clothes and living with these material possessions. Her musings are curious rather than fearful - do they feel the same way she does? As her journey progresses, so does her realisation that their culture is not her culture. As time passes, she sees the impact these new settlers are having on her people. Dreams broken, hopes replaced with despair, she begins to shed her newly-clothed skin and returns to her roots to find freedom - the connection back to her land.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2011

Michael Cook

Bidjara people

1968 Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

Undiscovered #3

2010

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

pigment inkjet print on paper

Purchased 2010

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2010.1133.3

Undiscovered is a photographic project that reflects upon European settlement in Australia. This moment was presented in history as the 'discovery' of Australia, despite the fact Aboriginal people had been living here for thousands of years. The new British settlers had no idea of the basis and meaning of Aboriginal culture prior to their arrival. Aboriginal people were seen as inferior, people with no education or organisation, their knowledge and experience of the land was ignored. Undiscovered is a contemporary look at European settlement in Australia, a land already populated by its original people.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2010

Timothy Cook

Tiwi people

1958 Goose Creek, near Milikapiti, Melville Island,
Northern Territory

Kulama

2010

Melville Island, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on linen

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Traditionally, the Tiwi kulama was an initiation ceremony for both men and women, held on the night that a ring forms around the moon. Today a shorter version is performed to promote health and the regeneration of life. Some personally owned designs used in the ceremony conform to an artist's Dreaming or aspects of their Country. Other, designs are free for anyone to use. Timothy Cook continues the Tiwi tradition of jilamara (ceremonial) painting in his own bold and energetic style, using ochres that create a 'gritty' result to make the canvas shimmer.

Karla Dickens

Wiradjuri people

1967 Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

The nips are getting bigger

2014

Lismore, New South Wales

glass, ceramic, feathers, bone, shell, skin, plastic, twine, wire and felt-tipped marker

Purchased 2017

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.208.A-X

By juxtaposing limited edition 'Captain Cook RN' whiskey bottles—symbols of the colonisation and its devastating after-effects—with feathers and adornments, Karla Dickens presents an alternative narrative of the Aboriginal and colonial experience. The artist chose the title of this work from a popular song by Australian band Mental as Anything not only to address the critical issue of over consumption of alcohol but also the story of Bungaree. An Aboriginal man from Gadigal Nura/Sydney who was paid for his services to the colonists in alcohol, Bungaree was possibly the first Aboriginal man to succumb to the devastating effects of alcohol on Aboriginal people.

Julie Dowling

Badimaya people

1969 Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

Self-portrait: in our Country

2002

Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

synthetic polymer paint, oil and red ochre on canvas

Purchased 2002

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2002.377

I painted this self-portrait to express my feelings about returning to my grandmother's country, which is located near a small town called Yalgoo. My great uncle George Latham told me the story of when white people asked my ancestors to describe gold and where to find it. They said that gold looked like Yalgoo, which is the Badimaya/Budimia word for the fat deposits around the belly of a large goanna found in that area. The faces depicted in my body are of my ancestor women. I wanted to express to the viewer the feeling of connection with their spirits.

The group inside my body consists of a family group on a hunting party with the two small children carried on hips or walking alongside their mothers and grandmother. I am situated as a member of this group with time not separating our mutual connection to this country.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2002

Julie Gough

Trawlwoolway people

1965 Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

Some Tasmanian Aboriginal children living with non-Aboriginal people before 1840

2008

nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania

found chair with burnt tea-tree sticks

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2008.811.1-84

This artwork contains part of me and my family. We come from Aboriginal people removed from Country and family in Van Diemens Land (VDL) in the early 1800s...I have a list of 209 children, including one of my Ancestors and her two sisters, compiled over the past decade... This artwork consists of unfinished tea-tree 'spears' held within the framework of an old chair, whose legs are burnt... The chair holds the children captive, but together, united... These spears are raw tea tree sticks...each have a section peeled away...which I have burnt the name of one of these lost children...of about one-third of the children I am seeking.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2008

Sandra Hill

Minang/Wardandi/Ballardong/Wilmen
(Nyoongar) peoples
1951 Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

Double Standards

2015

Balingup, Western Australia

lightbox, Japanese rice paper, shellac, marri and balga
resin, ink, perspex and synthetic resin in wood

Purchased 2016 with the support of Warwick Hemsley and
The Hon Melissa Parke to mark Mr Hemsley's tenure on
Council and in recognition of the 50th Anniversary
of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2016.27

Featuring 216 handmade Japanese rice paper boxes, this work is neatly configured within a lightbox. Most boxes have a single image printed on them, including images from archival, at the time mainstream sources and Sandra Hill's personal family photos. Some boxes are intentionally left blank, perhaps to be filled subconsciously by the viewer or perhaps as an historical reference of lives lost forever. In the upper left corner boxes placed together make up a fragmented image of the Union Jack, unaligned but still recognisable. Hidden at first, a glowing Australian flag emerges, only to reveal on closer interrogation the disparity of lives and experiences—a glimpse of the double standards that Hill observed growing up in Western Australia.

Sandra Hill

Minang/Wardandi/Ballardong/Wilmen
(Nyoongar) peoples
1951 Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

sKIN Deep

2015

Balingup, Western Australia

lightbox, Japanese rice paper, shellac, marri and balga resin, ink, perspex and synthetic resin in wood and light fixture with electrical component

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

*No matter what colour we are - we are all in this together.
We are all joined by blood and humanity.*

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2017

The mistreatment and dislocation of her peoples is reflected in much of Sandra Hill's work. She also uses her artistic practice as a means of recovering fragmented histories for herself and her people as a reclamation. In *sKIN Deep*, like many of her other works, Hill adds other meanings and layers when addressing the female perspective and experience of Aboriginal women. Using metaphoric gestures through mission craft sewing, she evokes her matriarchal lineage passed down for generations. The aesthetic and act of 'stitching' paper together references a time when Aboriginal people made clothing, among other objects, with unwanted or unused materials such as potato sacks or calico fabric.

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The pieces of paper, which recall the artist's experiences of forcible removal from her family, are attached to each other. Although different shades, they are all one and the same, all dyed with the same plant resin and all made of the same components—a reminder that colour is only skin deep.

Jonathan Jones

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples

1978 Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

Buguwiny (grass)

2019

Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

ink on nineteenth century newsprint on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Each print in this installation shows a black impression of indigenous grasses that grew in the south-east or Murray Darling region before colonisation. Different plant species are printed over different south-east regional historical newspaper pages that promoted the sale of, or provided information about, introduced metal agriculture equipment.

The work is a reminder that Aboriginal people were the first agriculturalists in Australia and developed a deep and intimate knowledge of how to successfully farm it, a connection not recognised and often completely dismissed by colonists then or by society today.

Mabel Juli

Gija people

1931 Five Mile, near Moola Boola Station, Western Australia

Wardal and Garnkeny

2011

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

In the Ngarrangkarni (Dreaming), Garnkeny, the moon, returned from hunting kangaroo, saw a beautiful girl with long black hair and instantly fell in love with her. This girl was Daawul, the black-headed snake. When the old people asked him, 'Who do you want for your wife?' Garnkeny pointed to Daawul and said, 'That one, that one'. But they said, 'No, she is your mother-in-law, you must marry one of these promised girls, these Nyawana Daawul's daughters.' Garnkeny strode off angrily, walking some distance before he sat down and turned into a hill. He cursed the people, telling them that they were going to die but that he would live forever. As the moon, he comes back to life every month and the wardal (stars) are Daawul's daughters of Nyawana skin.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2011

Tjungkara Ken

1969 Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Sandra Ken

1966 Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Yaritji Young

1955 Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Freda Brady

1961 Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Maringka Tunkin

1959 Mulga Park, Northern Territory

Pitjantjatjara peoples

Seven Sisters

2018

Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Purchased 2020

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2020.6

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When we work together as a family, we are learning from each other and teaching each other. Our family is strong because we teach all our young women this important tjukurpa.

ARTISTS' STATEMENT, 2018

This work, *Seven Sisters* is an epic Ancestral story that show seven sisters travelling on a journey pursued by an old man Wati Nyiru. He wanted one of the sisters to be his wife but, due to their different skin classifications and familial ties, they were culturally incompatible. To evade Wati Nyiru, the sisters eventually launched themselves into the sky, transforming into the stars that form the Pleiades constellation. Wati Nyiru became Orion, and every night the women launch themselves into the night sky with the old man following. The retelling and depiction of this story reinforces and teaches law and cultural structures of forbidden love and traditional morals.

Barbara Kngwarray

Anmatyerr people

1936 Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory

not titled

1988

Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory

batik on silk

Gift of Mick and Judy Fleming 2004

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2004.357

Batiks have been produced at Utopia since their introduction as adult education classes by artist Jenny Green in 1977. This highly water-dependent medium from Indonesia was an unusual choice for the women living in the desert, but they excelled at producing exquisite and detailed lengths on silk and cotton for sale. Subject matters were personal to each artist and often depicted scenes associated with her Country. Although this detailed work is not titled, it represents the abundant and blossoming plant life that grows in Country after the rains.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye

Anmatyerre people
1908–1996 Australia

Anoranggait, healing plant

1990

Utopia, Central Australia, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased 1990

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

90.1385

Emily Kame Kngwarreye started painting in her seventies—moving from batiks to acrylic on canvas in 1988. Her works are the culmination of a lifetime of making art for ceremonial purposes so by the time she took up a paintbrush and acrylic paints, Kngwarreye was a truly experienced artist.

This important work reflects healing treatments and a particular plant used when a child or adult falls ill in the artist's country. The women would collect the leaves of a fuchsia-type shrub called anoranggait and boil them in water to produce a light but strong green liquid. This is then washed over the body, particularly on the affected areas. 'Kam', means the seeds and flowers of the pencil yam plant and by naming her after this it ensures she remains connected to her culture.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye

Anmatyerre people
1908–1996 Australia

Anaty inger (Bush Potato Dreaming)

1995

Utopia, Central Australia, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

The culmination of a lifetime of making art for ceremonial purposes, Emily Kame Kngwarreye's strong marks and fields of colour express the resonance of Ancestral power in the landscape. *Anaty inger (Bush Potato Dreaming)* shows the healing power of plants. Following harvesting of the tubers from the bush potato, the leaves and plant adjust to the disturbance below and parts of the plant die off—shown in this work through the brown, white and yellow dots—only to be rejuvenated over time as new life develops and repair occurs below.

Yvonne Koolmatrie

Ngarrindjeri people

1944 Wudinna, South Australia

River Dreaming

2012

Berri, South Australia

bilbili (spiny-headed sedge rushes, *gymnocaulos cyperus*)

Purchased 2016. This acquisition has been supported by Sue and Steve Dyer in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2016.28

Every time I go to the river, I'll always think of these people that were here many years ago. When I come back to this land, I'll always respect it. It is their land.

After attended a one-day workshop in 1981 with Aunty Dory Koolmatrie I knew the basic stitch, the material, and how to prepare it, and the time of the year to collect it.

Then I got interested in that culture, my mother's culture. I sort of didn't realise how important it was until ... you know, I learned to weave. I couldn't put it down once I started, I just could not leave it down. Sort of in my blood, you know? I've got to keep the culture alive.

ARTIST STATEMENT 2012

Gary Lee

Gulumirrgin/Larrakia/Wardaman/Karajarri peoples
1952 Garramilla/Darwin, Northern Territory

Shaba (from the series Nice Coloured Boys)

2006

Garramilla/Darwin, Northern Territory
colour digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.325

My aim is to re-represent contemporary Indigenous male identity in Darwin through the beauty and diversity of Aboriginal and Islander males who live here. The series is also in homage to the subjects of the portraits - local guys as in this case, my nephew Shannon whose family nickname is Shaba. I took this photograph recently, the day after his 18th birthday in the Darwin Botanic Gardens. I photographed him holding a bilata (woomera), in reference to colonial male portraits showing Larrakia men rarely without their own. I first photographed him when he was 16 and he is as at-ease with the camera now as he was back then. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people look like so many other nationalities, yet this diversity is not yet widely understood let alone celebrated. I hope to do just that.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2006

Pantjiti Mary McLean

Ngaatjatjarra people

1928 Kurrkulta, Docker River, Western Australia

Palunya: that's all

2002–2004

Kalgoorlie, Western Australia

synthetic polymer paint on board

Purchased 2006

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2006.27.A-M

Birds! Kids running chasing birds, and a dog running around too, on one small canvas. All the kids in the bush around a big fire, old ladies grinding bush tucker, old man comes to the fire, she's cooking rabbit for tea. Dogs chasing an emu, and the old man runs up and grabs it, then cooks it in the ground...When I was a little girl I used to run around digging bardies. No feed, it was a hard life; mothers dig rabbits, collect quandongs, grind wild seeds for damper. Mens all go out hunting kangaroo. Night time there is a big rain; all the men are shouting and happy. Men are all naked; they keep the fires burning all night, shouting and singing. Next day they go chasing kangaroos. Kangaroos get tired, then they catch them. No knife, they cut it up with a white stone, with a quartz stone. I showed you the place before, near Docker River. There were no tomahawks; we made dishes with that axe, I learned from her at Tjunti.

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We made wind shelters; in the storm we put up our hands over our heads, we were frightened... painting a little wind shelter with the kids lying down. I've done that before; people can see how Wongis make places to camp. With little boards there will be stories from my mother's country, my father's country at Papulankuta (Blackstone), those places where I was running around.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2004

Nonggirnga Marawili

Madarrpa people

1937 Baniyala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

Rock and lightning

2016

Yirrkala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

I paint water designs. The water. As it crashes onto the rocks at high tide. Sending the spray into the sky. You know what I mean. That's what I do. And also those things on the rocks that I paint as dots are called dungunanin, the barnacles that dress up the rocks. I just do my own design from the outside. Water. Rock. Rocks that stand strong. And the waves that run and crash upon the rocks. The sea spray. This is the painting I do. You may spy on me and think that I am painting sacred things. This would be a lie.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2016

Danie Mellor

Mamu/Ngadjon peoples
1971 Mackay, Queensland

The Song Cycle

2018

Bowral, New South Wales

wax pastel, wash with oil pigment, watercolour, metallic ink and pencil on paper mounted on aluminium

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

The Song Cycle focuses on the artist's disputed homelands during the wet season in the Rainforest country of the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland. The techniques and imagery the artist uses are similar to those of a colonial-style aesthetic associated with the period of first European contact in Australia. Mellor reclaims his traditional homeland by telling the Aboriginal and colonial Australian narratives within the same landscape of the song cycle. Through their strong gaze and ghostly infrared quality, the Indigenous figures create a powerful presence within the work's romantic setting.

Albert Namatjira

Western Arrarnta people
1902–1959 Australia

Ghost gum

c1945

Ntaria/Hermannsburg, Central Australia,
Northern Territory

painting in watercolour over underdrawing in black pencil
on paper

Gift of Marilyn Darling AC in memory of Gordon Darling AC CMG 2016.
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2016.505

Depicting the same cultural areas and sites as his Arrarnta contemporaries instead of the layered abstraction and iconography typical of his fellow artists, Albert Namatjira's works are literal representations of landscape that provided rare visual access to important Central Australian areas. Centred and in the foreground of this work is the ghost gum (*ilwempe*). These monolithic drought-resistant trees stand strong and, like so many big trees in Country, are believed to be an Ancestor being.

Albert Namatjira

Western Arrarnta people
1902–1959 Australia

Quarta Tooma – Ormiston Gorge

1939

Ntaria/Hermannsburg, Central Australia,
Northern Territory

graphite and watercolour on paper

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

This work depicts an important area, known by its English name as the Organ Pipes, in the MacDonnell Ranges in the Northern Territory. Albert Namatjira painted several versions of this same location at different times of the year, capturing its ever-changing beauty. The deep reddish-browns of the hills contrast with the still, reflective water in the foreground to show the area after rain. The careful placement of highlights and shadows enhances the craggy edges and undulation of the hills in the background.

George Nona

Kala Lagaw Ya people

1965 Waiben/Thursday Island,

Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, Queensland

Torres Strait Spiritual Headdress

2009

Badu/Mulgrave Island,

Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, Queensland

pearl shell, cassowary feathers, bone, twine, synthetic

polymer paint, bamboo, shell, pigeon feather, eagle

feather, beeswax, Kulop shell and natural earth pigments

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.823

The Dhoeri (Western Island language) and Dhari (Eastern Island language) varies from island to island in its size and form. Originally worn during clan war the more elaborate the Dhoeri, the higher you were in rank. When a Dhoeri was seen worn, it meant death was near. These days the Dhoeri is only worn by dancers at ceremonial occasions. The dancers interpret the stories by mimicking the events that happened during clan wars, and sacred ceremonies. The markings on the Dhoeri, signifies which clan/cluster of the Torres Strait you identify with. The technique that I have used was once used by our forefathers and many Torres Strait Islanders perform with a headdress.

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Through research, experience and oral history I have tried to return to original way of putting on feathers. The Dhibadib that hangs below the Dhoeri, made of pearl shell in the shape of a half moon, represents a warrior going through initiation.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2009

Lena Nyadbi

Gija/Kija peoples

1934 Walmanjilugum, near Greenvale Station, Western Australia

Dayiwul Ngarankarni

2008

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Kimberley, Western Australia
natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2008.681

Long ago three women were using a nyiyiriny (spinifex) net in the local river. Halfway to Gawinji (Cattle Creek) they stopped and left the nyiyiriny (spinifex) net across the water but the gundarri (fish) saw it and jumped over it. Eventually the net turned to stone becoming Ngarrankarni rocks. When the Argyle Diamond Mine was first cut it destroyed this important site and the Ngarrankarni rocks were removed to higher ground where they remain today. The nyiyiriny (spinifex) net is depicted as the long white line at the bottom of the work and the large brown shapes to the right of it are the Ngarrankarni rocks.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2008

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The circular centre of the work shows the straight lines of the jimbirla (spearheads) at the top and the Dayiwul (Barramundi Dreaming) downturned semi-circle scales at the bottom. The diamonds are the scales that fell from the escaping Barramundi that the mine extracted. Nyadbi painted this work as way of remembering Country before destruction as a legacy for her children and grandchildren.

Lin Onus

Yorta Yorta people

1948–1996 Australia

Dingoes

1989

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

synthetic polymer paint on fibreglass, wire and metal
installation (variable)

Purchased 1990

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

90.1085.A-H

For Lin Onus, one Australian icon in particular, the dingo, had such a profound impact on him that after encountering some in the 1980s, at the now dual named Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre in South Australia, he adopted it as his totem. He likened the strength, adaptability, playfulness and strong survival instinct of the dingo to the same determined strengths of Aboriginal people.

In his major installation, *Dingoes*, Onus captures the comical positioning and activity of a pack of nine dingoes clustered into five stationary, almost chronological life-cycle scenes. On the surface the work appears to be funny dogs doing dog things, yet there is a deeper correlation to the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people as well as on the dingo itself.

Lin Onus

Yorta Yorta people
1948–1996 Australia

Guyi Na Wugili Bulawili (fish and reflections 2)

1994

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

In *Guyi Na Wugili Bulawili (fish and reflections 2)* Onus uses his own cultural identity to tell the story of a colonised Australia and what it meant to be Aboriginal at a time of rapid urbanisation. This work is about survival, repatriation and the revival of the First Peoples of Australia. This hyperreal large-scale representation of his Yorta Yorta Country, Lin reveals its beauty, richness, and importance to his people. This significant red river gum forest sustained Aboriginal people and native animals for centuries. Logging, low-level flooding due to upstream damming, and farming deforestation destroyed much of the area until its protection as a national park in 1987.

Christopher Pease

Minang/Wardandi/Bibbulmun (Nyoongar) peoples
1969 Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Wrong side of the Hay (A deserted Indian village)

2005

Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

oil on linen

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Using an eighteenth century plate titled *A deserted Indian village in King George III Sound, New Holland* by John Sykes, Christopher Pease has shifted the dialogue from settler notions of vacant lands to contested land ownership of an already pre-populated country. By layering and adding iconography, cartography, geography and Indigenous motifs to the painting, the artist disrupts the original narrative in the Sykes plate. The artist powerfully makes his mark in repatriating Aboriginal Country while subverting the colonial perspective that has tarnished Indigenous people from the time of first contact.

Prince of Wales / Midpul

Danggalaba Clan, Gulumirrgin/Larrakia peoples
1933–2002 Australia

Body Marks

2002

Garramilla/Darwin, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased 2002

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2002.392

This work reflects the traditional designs painted on the bodies of Gulumirrgin or Larrakia men for ceremony. When the work was created, traditional ceremonies were largely prohibited and the body designs, along with much of the knowledge associated with them, has been lost. Nicknamed 'Prince of Wales' after he performed for Queen Elizabeth II in the 1960s, Midpul began painting in 1995 and was the first nationally recognised, award-winning, and celebrated senior Gulumirrgin/Larrakia artist. This work reflects culture, mark making and connection to his Country. It also hints at the deep blues and shallow water tones from the saltwater around Garramilla/Darwin.

Jock Puautjimi

Tiwi people

1962 Nguiu, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory

Luna Ryan collaborator

Arrow, Arrow, Buffalo Horn, Fighting Stick

2004–07

Kamberri/Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

kiln-cast Blackwood crystal glass, metal, rubber

Purchased 2011

2011.912.A-J, 2011.916.A-J,
2011.917.A-E, 2011.918.A-F

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

Ngiya Tiwi ngiya-pamurrumi ngini Jilamara yirrikiripwaja amintiya kapi wuta waya purruwiyanyimi yiloti kapi wuta murrakupuni. My Tiwi Island Jilamara (skin design) expresses who I am. The Pukumani Poles carry the Jilamara of the lost ones, who's souls are released into the spirit world.

TRANSLATED BY MARTINA BAXTER AND MARIA JOSETTE ORSTO, 2019

I saw the old people carving, their designs looked great. I was keen to learn to keep our culture going. I hope that future generations will feel the same and keep the culture alive with their art. I feel really good when I am doing my art.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2006

r e a

Gamilaraay/Wailwan/Biripi peoples
1962 Coonabarabran, New South Wales

PolesApart

2009

Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales
single-channel moving image, colour, silent, 6 min 55 sec,
aspect ratio 16:9

Purchased 2010

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2010.143

...In this work I also make historical references to American pop art and to Jackson Pollack's Blue Poles – signifying the 'brand' of Empire - the colours red, white and blue. The title 'PolesApart' is in fact a reference to Pollack's painting. ...The colours that appear in the video also reference the colonisation of Australia by the British and our current colonisation by America. These colours link the British flag, the OZ flag and the US flag...all of which have been party to the blotting out, the rendering invisible, of Indigenous cultures. Ultimately, the work is about the continuing lack of visibility of Indigenous identity, and of the diversity of Indigenous identities in the Australian landscape. I represent this through the movement of my own body through the physical and conceptual landscape - I am the subject in both the photographic and video work.

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At the end of the video work, I become invisible through the spraying of these colours all over me. It seems that the harder I work to be visible the more I'm blotted out - like I'm continuously running, hoping to find the freedom to create my own identity.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2009

Harry Tjutjuna

Pitjantjatjara people
1928–2020 Australia

Wanka Tjukurpa (Spiderman)

2007

Amata, Anangu Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2008.815

This is a big spider man. Watipaluru Ngankari, a male healer, traditional doctor. He is a powerful man. When rain comes he hides in his nest. He is a clever man. At night-time he changes colour. His name is Wanka, spider. That's the story. Minyma wanka tjuta, these are all the women and the children for this man (around him). I am the spider man, Ngankari.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2007

As a nangkari, a traditional healer, Tjutjuna references the use of spider webs as part of his healing tool kit to treat cuts and skin injuries in his work. Spiders play an important role in the creation stories of his birthplace and is an important part of his Tjukurpa or Dreaming story. By painting these stories Tjutjuna ensures the continuation of his Anangu law and culture for future generations.

Daniel Walbidi

Mangala/Yulparija peoples

1983 Bidyadanga Community/La Grange,
Kimberley, Western Australia

Winpa

2011

Bidyadanga Community/La Grange,
Kimberley, Western Australia
synthetic polymer paint on linen

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

I paint to educate people about my culture and our history, and where we come from, so to give people understanding. I also paint so I can learn about my culture from the old people. It is important for me to paint so I can keep my culture strong and living so it can be carried on into the future. Painting is not just limited to what you see.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2009

Winpa was an Ancestral being, the greatest desert rainmaker, who travelled extensively across Australia. When he went to lie down and rest, he turned into a snake and created the jila (living water). This resting spot became an important rainmaking ceremonial place. Daniel Walbidi has depicted the winpa (large black waterhole), the warla (white salt lake), mayi (bushfood) and the tali (sand dunes) in his Ancestral homelands in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia.

Judy Watson

Waanyi people

1959 Mundubbera, Queensland

the names of places

2016 Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

single-channel digital media, soundscape, 21 min 58 sec

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the
50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.178

Since the late 1970s certain aspects of my work have focused on massacres of Aboriginal people. the names of places spools place names of massacre sites across maps of Australia and previous images of my artworks like credits in a movie. A website for the names of places will continually collect and update place names of massacre sites for public access and memory retrieval of this important but forgotten of our shared history.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2016

Judy Watson

Waanyi people

1959 Mundubbera, Queensland

stake

2010

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

pigment, synthetic polymer paint, aquarelle and chinagraph pencil on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Blue is the colour of memory and is associated with water; it washes over me. Waanyi people are known as 'running water people' because of the inherent quality of the water in their country.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2007

Blue is an important colour to Watson and is a key part of many of her works. It is also the colour of the coloniser, in uniforms and flags, another subject frequently used in her works. In this work *stake*, Watson uses bright white to highlight three different ambiguous shapes laying on a base of iridescent blue pigment wash. The work can be read in different ways, from an Aboriginal or a coloniser perspective. The work signifies the military and the open wounds inflicted on Aboriginal people. It is also a strong counter-reference to the colonial experience through the expression of Aboriginal connection to Country, culture and presence in landscape.

Owen Yalandja

Kuninjku (Eastern Kunwinjku) people

1962 Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

Yawk Yawk

2008

Maningrida, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on kurrajong wood

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

I always use the same wood, kurrajong [Brachychiton diversifolius], to make my sculptures. My father Crusoe Kuningbal used the same wood and taught me and my brother Crusoe Kurddal how to carve...I decided to change and to start representing yawkyawk spirit figures. Yawkyawk is a bit the equivalent of a mermaid in balanda (whiteman) culture. Yawkyawk is my Dreaming and she lives in the water at Barrihdjowkkeng near where I have set up my outstation. She has always been there. I often visit this place.

I love making these sculptures and I have invented a way to represent the fish scales on her body. The colours I use have particular meanings [which are not public]. I make them either red or black. I am now teaching all my kids to carve, just like my father did for us.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2007

Gulumbu Yunupingu

Gumatj peoples
1943–2012 Australia

Gan'yu (Stars)

2005

Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and synthetic binder on eucalyptus
wood

Purchased 2006

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2006.411

Ganyu the Universe

2008

Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

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...I have this knowledge that my father told me, about the seven sisters and about the sky... I had this knowledge that these stars are in the sky, and this came to me about the universe. Then I had this dream ... one night; we were sleeping outside, my sisters and me, and we were looking up in the sky, and we saw a beautiful sky ... it was bright and the sky was blue and light stars everywhere. [When] I woke up ... in the morning I had this vision and [was] told: 'do this'. Maybe hiding somewhere at the back of my mind [was] knowledge my father had. Then I got these rocks and paints and brushes and hairbrush and then I did this first one ... little piece of bark ... and then I tried these stars.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2005

Yunupingu's source of inspiration was Garak, the Universe, which at first glance appears to be a literal representation of the Milky Way, an important customary and ancestral story, particularly for the Yolngu of North East Arnhem Land. However, as Yunupingu has stated, her art is about the entire universe, all the gan'yu or stars that can be seen by the naked eye, and also everything that exists far beyond any scientific expedition or estimation.

Ms. N Yunupingu

Gumatj people

1943–2021 Australia

Pink and white circles

2010

Yirrkala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

My father Munggurrawuy Yunupingu taught me how to paint. I learnt from watching him. He was always working. He said to me, ‘When I am gone you will follow behind me and paint too. Show the people—paint and work’...That is what he said, and that’s what I do. I love working. I miss it when the bark is too dry to harvest or I can’t find carving wood or make a print. It is the way I was brought up. If I cannot paint I have to go and get fish or oysters or yams. I cannot sit and do nothing.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2012

Mayilimiriw, which means ‘meaningless’, is the essence of many of Ms. N Yunupingu’s later works, which she painted simply to create—these works are not associated with sacred law or stories. Although masterly and aesthetically beautiful, the artist created these works purely as an expressive gestural exercise in mark making.

Ms. N Yunupingu

Gumatj people

1943–2021 Australia

Djulpan - Seven Sisters story

2011

Yirrkala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

My father Munggurrawuy Yunupingu taught me how to paint. I learnt from watching him. He was always working. He said to me, 'When I am gone you will follow behind me and paint too. Show the people—paint and work'...That is what he said, and that's what I do. I love working. I miss it when the bark is too dry to harvest or I can't find carving wood or make a print. It is the way I was brought up. If I cannot paint I have to go and get fish or oysters or yams. I cannot sit and do nothing.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2012

This Creation story tells of the seven sisters who travelled westward in their canoe, Djulpan, to hunt and gather food. The sisters appear as seven stars in the sky (the Pleiades constellation) travelling westward during September, when the plants and animals on land and sea are abundant. Seeing the Djulpan in the night sky is also a sign that it is time for the cultural burning of Country. If the fires are lit too early the Djulpan becomes sad and jealous and cries, creating unseasonal rains that extinguish the early fires.

Raymond Zada

Barkindji people

1971 Tarntanya/Adelaide, South Australia

At Face Value

2013

Tarntanya/Adelaide, South Australia

single-channel digital media video, colour, no sound, 2 min 29 sec

Purchased 2014. This acquisition was acquired in recognition of the 50th Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2014.1708

To take something at face value is to believe that the way the thing appears is the way it really is. At Face Value examines issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other minority groups. To take something at face value is to believe the way the thing appears is the way it really is.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2013

The work challenges narrow or stereotypical views of what an Aboriginal person looks like and how they identify. In the video the faces slowly morph from one to the other, slightly blurring identities as the viewer is made to question or shift their paradigms and accept that the person they're looking at is Aboriginal.

WARNING: This work may contain the images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Nonggirnga Marawili

Madarrpa people

1937 Baniyala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

Larrakitj

2015

Yirrkala, North-East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus wood

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Left to right

Carved pearl shells, also known as riji or lonka lonka, were made by early Kimberley artists of northern Western Australia. For thousands of years, they were traded east, gaining greater cultural significance the further away from the coast and through the desert they moved. These small but highly valued objects with their intricate, incised, ochred designs are an example of an Aboriginal cross-cultural influence as they and their designs were traded back and forth across the country.

By renaming unknown makers as Ancestors, connection to a community or family is acknowledged even if the original cultural connections have been broken.

Ancestor

people not recorded
born–died Australia

Riji

c1950s–1960s
Kimberley Region, Western Australia
natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2011

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.1337

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Sebastian Arrow

Yawuru people

1994 Rubibi/Broome, Western Australia

Jalinyi – Tribe design

2017

Rubibi/Broome, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the
50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.187

Aubrey Tigan

Bardi/Djawi peoples

1945–2013 Australia

Riji (Old design)

2010

Rubibi/Broome, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2011

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.1029

Ancestor

people not recorded
born–died Australia

Riji

c1950s–1960s
Kimberley Region, Western Australia
natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2011

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.1362

Lonka Lonka

date and place made not recorded,
attributed to Kimberley region, Western Australia
natural earth pigment and human hair string on pearl shell

Purchased 2012

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2012.2114

Sebastian Arrow

Yawuru people

1994 Rubibi/Broome, Western Australia

Jalinyi – Lacepede shell patches

2017

Rubibi/Broome, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the
50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2017.186

Ancestor

people not recorded

born–died Australia

Riji

c1950s–1960s

Kimberley Region, Western Australia

natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2011

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2011.1325

Sebastian Arrow

Yawuru people

1994 Rubibi/Broome, Western Australia

Riji – Tribe design

Jalinyi

Arlingoon

2017

Rubibi/Broome, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigment on pearl shell

Purchased 2017 in recognition of the
50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum

National Gallery of Australia,
Kamberri/Canberra

2017.180, 2017.182, 2017.181

My art is not just something about me; it encompasses a large history. I am aware that every mark is weighted with significance, of what it is to be part of a community and carry culture forward. These are the tangible links to my ancestry other than my genetic lineage and they evoke powerful feelings of connectedness and belonging.

ARTIST STATEMENT, 2017.

Sebastian Arrow maintains his identity and cultural connection by making incised and ochred pearl shells known as rijis. Sourced from his homelands of Roebuck Bay, the rijis feature old local law and trading designs passed on to Arrow by his mentor, the late artist Aubrey Tigan.

William Barak

Wurundjeri/Woiwurung peoples
1824–1903 Australia

Corroboree

c1885

Coranderrk, Victoria

drawing in charcoal and natural earth pigments over black
pencil on paperboard

Purchased from Aboriginal Art Fund
from admission charges 1985

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

85.1692

Paddy Nyunkuny Bedford

Gija/Kija people

1920–2007 Australia

Merrmerri Creek – Queensland Creek

2005

Kununurra, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Richard Bell

Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Goreng Goreng peoples
1953 Charleville, Queensland

Omega (Bell's Theorem)

2013

Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Peter Farmer

Nyoongar people

1971 Gnowangerup, Western Australia

Chirriger #12 (Nyoongar dancers painted ready for ceremony)

2008

Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

oil on canvas

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.90.A-C

Robert Fielding

Western Arranda/Yankunytjatjara/Pitjantjatjara peoples
1969 Kurdnatta/Port Augusta, South Australia

Piti, munu and wana

2020

Mimili Maku, Anangu Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia
bronze, gold leaf and camel hair

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

Kaiadilt people

1922–2015 Australia

Dibirdibi country

2012

Gununa/Mornington Island, Queensland
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Alan Griffiths

Ngarinyman/Ngaliwurru peoples
1933–2018 Australia

Waringarri dancers

2005

Kununurra, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Paddy Jaminji

Gija people

1912–1996 Australia

Goomanawangun Kuril Kuril

1984

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Kimberley, Western Australia
natural earth pigments and binders on plywood

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Jonathan Jones

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples

1978 Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales

untitled

(walam-wunga.galang)

2020–21

Wiradjuri Country, New South Wales,

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

sandstone with metal, rubber and audio

Purchased with the assistance of Wesfarmers 2020

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2020.43.A-I

Emily Kame Kngwarreye

Anmatyerre people
1908–1996 Australia

Arlatyeye

c1995

Utopia, Central Australia, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Bequest of the late Warwick Flecknoe
and the late Jane Flecknoe 2018

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2018.531

Angkuna Kulyuru

1943 Wamitjara, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY)

Lands, South Australia

Kunmanara Ken

1946–1992 Australia

Margaret Dagg

1949 Arlywanyuwanya, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Tjunkaya Tapaya

1947 Antalya, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Atipalku Intjalki

1955 near Pukatja/Ernabella, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Amanyi (Dora) Haggie

c1938 Pukatja/Ernabella, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Kunmanara Tapaya

1971–2004 Australia

Alison Miliyika Carroll

1958 Pukatja/Ernabella, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia

Yilpi Marks

1969 Pukatja/Ernabella, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia
Pitjantjatjara people

Mas Cong collaborator
Nia Fliam collaborator
Agus Ismoyo collaborator

Seven Sisters

2005

Pukatja/Ernabella, Anangu Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, South Australia
silk habutai batik

Purchased 2006

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

006.288.13

Queenie McKenzie

Gija people

1930–1998 Australia

Artists' country

1993

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and synthetic binder on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Tommy McRae

Kwatkwat people

1833–1901 Australia

Victorian Blacks - Melbourne tribe holding corroboree after seeing ships for the first time

1890s

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

drawing in pen and iron-gall ink on cream wove paper

Purchased 1994

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

94.1232.2

Nandabitta Maminyamandja

Anindilyakwa people

1911–1981 Australia

Macassan prau and trepang curing

c1974

Anindilyakwa/Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1984

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

84.1963

John Mawurndjul AM

Kuninjku (Eastern Kunwinjku) people

1952 Mumeka, near Mann River, Central Arnhem Land,
Northern Territory

Milmingkan under Wak Wak

2009

Maningrida, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory
natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

John Mawurndjul AM

Kuninjku (Eastern Kunwinjku) people

1952 Mumeka, near Mann River, Central Arnhem Land,
Northern Territory

Lorrkon

2007

Maningrida, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus wood

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Danie Mellor

Mamu/Ngadjon peoples
1971 Mackay, Queensland

Culture Warriors

2008

Kamberri/Canberra, Australian Capital Territory
drawing in black pencil, pastel and watercolour wash with
collage of glitter and Swarovski crystals framed

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2008.948

Left to right

Danie Mellor

Mamu/Ngadjon peoples
1971 Mackay, Queensland

In memory (absentia)

£5 of culture

The biggest yet

Of dreams the parting

The heart's tale

2007

Kamberri/Canberra, Australian Capital Territory
metal

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia,
Kamberri/Canberra

2008.68, 2008.67,
2008.71, 2008.69, 2008.70

Alec Mingelmanganu

Wunambal people

1905–1981 Australia

Untitled (Wandjina)

1980

Kalumburu, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and natural binders on canvas

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Tracey Moffatt

1960 Meanjin/Brisbane, Queensland

Gary Hillberg collaborator

Lip

1999

New York, United States of America and

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

single-channel moving image, colour, sound

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.621

Doreen Reid Nakamarra

Pintupi people

1948–2009 Australia

Untitled

2007

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased 2007

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2007.198

Ivan Namirrkki

Eastern Kunwinjku people

1959 Maningrida, Northern Territory

Hunting crocodile by moonlight under the Milky Way

2010

Maningrida, central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus bark

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Maria Josette Orsto

Tiwi people

1962–2020 Australia

not titled

1989

Nguiu, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory

batik on silk

Purchased 1989

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

89.1902

Christopher Pease

Minang/Wardandi/Bibbulmun (Nyoongar) peoples
1969 Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia

Souvenir

2016

Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia
oil on Belgian linen

Purchased 2019

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2019.976

Reko Rennie

Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay/Gummaroi peoples
1974 Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria

Message Stick (Green)

2011

Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria
hand-pressed metallic textile foil, screenprint and
synthetic polymer paint on Belgian linen

Purchased 2012

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2012.832

Message Stick (Totem Pole)

2011 Naarm/Narrm/Melbourne, Victoria
bronze and steel base

Purchased 2012

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2012.833

Michael Riley

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi peoples
1960 Dubbo, New South Wales

Untitled, from the series cloud [boomerang]

Untitled, from the series cloud [cow]

2000

Gadigal Nura/Sydney, New South Wales, printed 2005
pigment inkjet print on paper

Purchased 2005
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2005.294.8,
2005.294.7

Yhonnie Scarce

Kokatha/Nukunu/Mirning peoples
1973 Woomera, South Australia

Silence part 1 + 2

2014 Tarntanya/Adelaide, South Australia
glass and stainless steel

Purchased 2016

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2016.11.A-B

Darren Siwes

Ngalkban people

1968 Tarntanya/Adelaide, South Australia

Oz Omnium Rex et Regina (Silver woman)

Oz Omnium Rex et Regina (Gold man)

2008

Tarntanya/Adelaide, South Australia

photographic print on Kodak Endura metallic paper

Purchased 2008

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2008.817.4,

2008.817.2

Rover Thomas [Joolama]

Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples

1926–1998 Australia

All that big rain coming from top side

1991

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Kimberley, Western Australia

natural earth pigments and binder on canvas

Purchased 2001

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2001.128

Rover Thomas [Joolama]

Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples

1926 - 1998 Australia

Tomato Creek and Ord River

1984

Warmun/Turkey Creek, Kimberley, Western Australia
natural earth pigments and gum on composition board

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Warwick Thornton

Kaytetye people

1970 Mparntwe/Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Way of the Ngangkari #6

2015

Mparntwe/Alice Springs, Northern Territory

single-channel moving colour image, no sound, 10 min 28 sec

Purchased 2016

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2016.236.3

Alick Tipoti

Kala Lagaw Ya people, Maluilgal nation

1975 Waiben/Thursday Island,

Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, Queensland

Koedal Baydham Adhaz Parw (Crocodile Shark) Mask

2010

Ngurupai/Horn Island,

Zenadth Kes/Torres Strait Islands, Queensland

fibreglass, synthetic polymer paint, cassowary feathers,
feathers, raffia and seeds

Purchased 2010

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2010.280

Long Jack Phillipus Tjakamarra

Luritja/Warlpiri peoples

1932 - Australia

Untitled (Kalipinyapa)

1972

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer powder paint and binder on
composition board

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth

Kaapa Mbitjana Tjampitjinpa

Anmatyerre/Warlpiri/Arrernte peoples

1926–1989 Australia

Corroboree and body decoration

1972

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and boncrete on composition board

Purchased 2013

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2013.4000

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri

Anmatyerr people
1932–2002 Australia

Love Story

1972

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Purchased 2014

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2014.864

Timmy Payungka Tjapangarti

Pintupi people

1938 - 2000 Australia

Sandhill country west of Wilkinkarra, Lake Mackay

1972

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory

synthetic polymer paint on hardboard

The Peter Fannin Collection of
Early Western Desert Paintings, 1998

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

98.107

Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi

Pintupi people

1920–1987 Australia

Big Cave Story

1972

Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory
synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Purchased 2012

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2012.1175

Patrick Olodoodi Tjungurrayi

Pintupi/Kukatja peoples

c1935–2017 Australia

Untitled

2009

Kiwirrkurra, Gibson Desert, Western Australia

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Purchased 2009

National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra

2009.583

Ivan Namirrkki

Eastern Kunwinjku people

1959 Maningrida, Northern Territory

Lorrkon

2010 Maningrida, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

natural earth pigments and binder on eucalyptus wood

The Wesfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Boorloo/Perth