Groote Eylandt bark paintings

CREATION TRACKS AND TRADE WINDS

from the University of Melbourne Art Collection
With increasing pressure on traditional Indigenous communities in Australia to become ‘mainstream’ there is stress upon the cultural identities of those traditional communities. The maintenance of its cultural identity is essential for the Anindilyakwa language speakers of the Groote archipelago. To ensure that this identity is maintained, the Anindilyakwa Land Council is encouraging the people of the Groote archipelago to continue with traditional ceremony and to rekindle the unique style of art and craft that was readily identified as belonging to the clans of the Groote archipelago. The aim of our program is to again produce paintings of a character and quality as contained in this collection.

The material contained in this collection is among the best examples of bark paintings produced in the early part of the 1900s. The totems and ceremony depicted in the paintings continue today as an integral part of our culture. The interaction with Macassan traders depicted in the paintings is also of special significance to us Groote Eylandters. My family, along with many families from the region, was involved with the Macassan traders, with my grandfather’s father spending about four years in their country. This collection has, therefore, special significance for us and is an important documented link with our past while at the same time giving guidance to those current artists who are reviving the style.

Tony Wurrumarrba Chairman, Anindilyakwa Land Council

While museums undertake a complex range of activities, the common perception is that it all boils down to owning and exhibiting items. The Potter’s recent activities with the collection of Groote Eylandt bark paintings held in the University of Melbourne Art Collection show just how varied the activities and responsibilities of an art museum are. In the case of the Groote Eylandt bark paintings, a significant priority for the Potter has been to inform the cultural owners of what we hold in our collection. As a museum, our task is to share and understand artworks. We begin this process by opening up lines of communication with communities to ensure that our information on the artworks is accurate and our use of them is appropriate. Curator Joanna Bosse has learned a great deal from artists’ relatives, elders and community members. As a result of their generous cooperation in her research, we can pass on new and more accurate information about artists, titles, dates and meanings. We can establish cultural protocols for care, display and interpretation of the artworks. Just as we can ensure that the works are there for community members themselves to engage with when they wish, the university's relationship with these bark paintings began in 1946 when Frederick Harold Gray donated them, forming the beginning of the Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture. Since then, the Leonhard Adam Collection has been a focus for teaching and research. In addition to the curator's field research, this exhibition also required conservation research and treatment in order to present the barks in the best possible condition and to determine an appropriate display and storage system. These technical matters are not always noticed by visitors but they are the foundation of a striking encounter with artworks.

I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Gordon Darling Foundation and the Potter’s 2005 Donor Program towards the realisation of this exhibition, brochure and associated activities. I express my appreciation to staff in the Potter’s curatorial, collections management, administration, development and education divisions who have undertaken the necessary work to develop and present the many aspects of the project.

The journey and the dialogue does not end with this exhibition. We know you will enjoy these remarkable paintings; we are also sure that there will be new stories to tell in the future, as our research continues.

Dr Chris McAuliffe Director, the Ian Potter Museum of Art

This exhibition presents thirty-two bark paintings made by people of Groote Eylandt in the 1940s. The University of Melbourne became custodian of the first of the total group of thirty-six artworks in 1946, with a final shipment received from Groote Eylandt in May 1950. This modest group of bark paintings, the first items acquired by Dr Leonhard Adam for his study collection of international Indigenous culture, became the nucleus of a collection that would total over 1000 objects drawn from collecting networks intersecting America, Africa and Asia. Today, these thirty-six bark paintings are a significant highlight of the university's Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture. Of enormous cultural value to the people of the Groote archipelago, the works are also at the centre of a fascinating history – beginning centuries ago with Macassan trade relations, and traversing the Second World War and recognition of Aboriginal art as one of the most important art forms of this country.

It is possible to expand upon several key histories when investigating the works’ content and the context of their production. Some of these, such as narratives of contact, are apparent in the bark paintings themselves: four works depict Macassan boats with sails that are said to have given the wind totems their symbolic shape, while two others show the Holly, the missionary boat used in the region during the 1930s and 1940s. Not so evident are the other narratives that underwrite these paintings. The trading of painted barks for tobacco is not illustrated but is intrinsic to the works’ production, as is the anthropological inquiry that privileged bark painting as an important form of cultural expression. Questions of museological practice that these works provoke are perhaps more a product of today’s context, but such questions are equally significant to our fulsome understanding of the past, present and future of these striking works of art.

A project such as this is both historical and contemporary. Although these works were produced more than sixty years ago, the paintings and their subjects have continued relevance to Groote Eylandters today. Importantly, the interpretations of the paintings evolve. An inherent challenge to researching these works was that they were made several generations ago, and it was inevitable that information specific
to the paintings would disappear with the passing of time. While we are only able to speculate about certain aspects of the artworks, such as the motivations of the artist or why one colour was chosen over another, other aspects of the artworks, such as the motivations of the Groote Eylandt community members on four separate occasions during preparation for this exhibition. Discussions were held in Melbourne, Darwin, and, importantly, during two visits to Groote Eylandt. These meetings involved many hours of careful and detailed analysis by a number of senior Groote Eylandt men. It was my impression that their efforts to discuss and explain the content were matched by their relief and satisfaction at ‘getting to the bottom’ of these paintings. The interest, generosity and patience with which members of the Angurugu and Umbakumba communities have embraced this project affirms the continued importance of visual culture for the people of the Groote Eylandt archipelago.

Produced during a time of dramatic social and religious change brought about by European-Australian interaction with the small Aboriginal population of Groote Eylandt, this group of paintings tells us a complex story of negotiating cultural meaning and value within what was quickly becoming an inter-cultural context. At this time Groote Eylandt was at the forefront of a tidal current of change. These artists were among the very first of their clans to experience contact with white men and women, but given the history of seasonal visitation to Groote Eylandt by Macassan fishermen, the Eylanders were not unaccustomed to visitors from other shores.

A rare feature of several of the works is the inclusion of Macassan sailing boats. The islands of the Groote Eylandt archipelago had for many centuries been visited seasonally by Macassan seafarers from south Sulawesi in Indonesia. This is a well-documented subject in recent academic studies, however these paintings and the ancient rock art found on the Groote Eylandt archipelago tell the story of this interaction first hand. The last Macassan prau to visit Groote Eylandt was around 1907, after which time neighbouring countries were prohibited by law to fish in Australian waters. In his painting, Quartpot Wurramamba provides us with an apt illustration of the shifting interactions with foreign. His work depicts the missionary boat, Holly, several Groote Eylandt canoes and white settler Frederick Gray’s boat Oituli within the same pictorial space (cat. no. 25).

The first of the enduring incursions into the Groote Eylanders’ established way of life was the founding of a missionary settlement in the south-west of the island in 1921 to remotely house mainland children with part-Aboriginal parentage. This was followed in 1938 by the construction of a Qantas flying boat base on the exterior shore of Little Lagoon in the north-east of the island. Fears of instability between the locals and the white workers led to the establishment of an independent settlement on the shore opposite the base the same year. Named Umbakumba (from the Macassan ombak ombak meaning ‘little waves’), the site was a favourite fishing and camping spot of Fred Gray, a pearl and trepang (sea-cucumber) fisherman who had worked the shores of the Arnhem Land coast since 1932 and was known for his friendships with the local Aboriginal people. Fred Gray was the superintendent at Umbakumba from 1938 to 1939 and was instrumental in commissioning and collecting this group of bark paintings.

From contemporary photographs and other documentation, we know that several of the artists were living and working at the native settlement of Umbakumba during the time these paintings were made. A photograph held in the Fred Gray photographic collection at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory shows several of the artists working on the dam that is illustrated in Minimini Mamarika’s painting (cat. no. 20). Gray’s plans for the settlement moved heavily on self-sufficiency, and Umbakumba quickly became a site of productivity, culture and exchange. An important activity in maintaining independence was the sale of artefacts (spears, bark paintings, carved turtle shell) to the staff and visitors to the flying boat base. This burgeoning cultural economy of traded objects may account for the vast refinement in painting styles from the late 1930s to those made in the mid-1940s.

In comparison to earlier paintings collected in 1921–27 and 1941–46, the paintings illustrated here are technically and conceptually advanced. An important stylistic innovation is the laying of opaque ochre over the already painted ground to create a solid form. Patterning in a contrasting colour is then overlaid to form iconic and highly graphic figures (for example see cat. nos 10, 23, 25). Multiple narratives in a single painting are indicated by a deviation from the usual black manganese-based background to include combinations of red and yellow (see cat. nos 5, 16, 18). Previously, artists had used a series of adjoining dots or thick white lines to outline the motif. Here we see very fine lines of white, red or yellow. An uncommon feature is what we might describe as pictorial scenes: birds pecking at the nectar of flowers (cat. no. 29), and a group of figures uncovering stone axes while excavating sand for a dam wall (cat. no. 20). This group of spatially complex and sophisticated paintings displays similar stylistic features to the important group collected a few years later during the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land lead by Charles Mountford.

Characterised by their narrative and illustrative qualities, the paintings depict ancestral creation beings, totemic animals, constellations, important wind totems, and contemporary and historical events and interactions. They comprise a mixture of Alawdawarra (Dreamtime beings and stories, and totems of significance to particular clans) and narratives of a largely secular nature. The detailed patterning, or ‘number’, used to infill the characters and symbols is owned in the same way that totems are owned and shared by clan groups. Unlike the ‘x-ray’ style that is characteristic of western Arnhem Land bark painting, the patterning generally doesn’t convey information about the physical structure of the character depicted. Elders have advised that in many instances the patterning in these works is not culturally ‘true’, the explanation being that they were made for trade rather than ceremony.

Documented records about the works’ production are scarce, and historically remote. Unfortunately Fred Gray did not consistently identify artists or content when he collected the paintings, which was not uncommon for the time nor is it surprising given Gray’s priorities as superintendent. In the course of
acquiring the works, Leonhard Adam did inquire as to the meaning of the iconography, though he received only a few answers to the many questions he sent Fred Gray.\[11\]

It is clear that these bark paintings are sites of inventiveness, and there remains much to learn from them. This exhibition goes only part-way toward a complete cultural, art-historical and aesthetic appreciation of these fine paintings. As custodian of these works, the Ian Potter Museum of Art recognises that our task is to begin this process of inquiry at the correct place, with the people of Groote Eylandt and with the objects themselves. It is hoped that this exhibition will introduce the work of these important Groote Eylandt artists to audiences who know little about their unique painting style and the important history of the region.

**Joanna Bosse** Curator

Notes

1. The first shipment of artworks was originally sent to Melbourne by Fred Gray, a white resident of the island, at the suggestion of Frederick GG Rose who undertook anthropological fieldwork on Groote Eylandt on several occasions from 1938 to the late 1940s. The works arrived too late for inclusion as planned in the Exhibition of Aboriginal arts & crafts organised by the Victorian Division of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, held 24 April-5 May 1945, at the Velasquez Gallery, Melbourne. Leonhard Adam, who wrote the introduction to the catalogue, suggested the works be presented to the University of Melbourne.


5. The CMS had made attempts to take control of the settlement for many years, succeeding in reaching an agreement with Gray in 1958.

6. I am indebted to Dr Mickey Dewar, Curator Territory History, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, for bringing these records to my attention.

7. The first known Groote Eylandt bark paintings were collected by Norman Tindale during his fieldtrip to Groote Eylandt in 1921-22. These works are now held in the collection of the South Australian Museum. See N Tindale, ‘Natives of Groote Eylandt and of the west coast of the Gulf of Carpenteria’ in *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol. III, 1925, for a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of these works.

8. Held in the Australian Museum, Sydney, and donated by Frederick GG Rose.

9. Works collected during this expedition are held in the collections of all state and national galleries and museums in Australia.

10. Four of the paintings in the collection relate to ceremonial activity, and are only to be discussed or viewed by appropriately Groote Eylandt individuals.

11. Research into Leonard Adam’s papers held at the Ian Potter Museum of Art (Adam’s papers are also held in the University of Melbourne Archives), and the papers of Frederick Harold Gray held in the collection of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, has not located a great deal of correspondence between the two. Where it does exist, the correspondence generally comprises letters from Adam asking for information or additional items. A notable example of a successful exchange between the two is the transportation of several live tree-orchid specimens to Melbourne (tree-orchid extract was combined with ochre and used as a binding agent in painting).

**Creating Tracks and Trade Winds**

**Groote Eylandt bark paintings from the University of Melbourne Art Collection**

Published by the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, on the occasion of the exhibition *Creation tracks and trade winds: Groote Eylandt bark paintings from the University of Melbourne Art Collection*, 23 September 2006 to 21 January 2007

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Thanks also to Lindy Allen, Senior Curator, Northern Australia, University Museum Victoria; Francesca Cubillo, Senior Curator, Aboriginal Art and Material Culture, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory; Barry Cundy, Collection Manager, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Library; Brett Davies, Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust; Dr Mickey Dewar, Curator Territory History, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory; Professor Marcia Langton, Foundation Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies, the University of Melbourne; Emeritus Professor John Mulvaney AO CMG; Robyn Sloggett, Director, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, the University of Melbourne; and the conservators at the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation.

- Joanna Bosse

Supported by the 2005 Donor Program
CATALOGUE

All works are held in the Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture, the University of Melbourne. The holdings comprise thirty-six Groote Eylandt bark paintings, four of which (acc. nos 1960.2199, 1960.2202, 1960.2203, 1960.2205) have strong ceremonial associations and are not for public display. These works are omitted from the catalogue.

This catalogue of works is not a definitive record of the artworks’ meaning and associations. It represents an abridged version of information provided by Groote Eylandt elders in 2005–06. Works marked with an asterisk (*) indicate that artists’ names have been attributed during the course of this research; further investigation may reveal alternative attributions.

Where appropriate, additional information has been sourced from historical and contemporary documentation (both published and unpublished). Dates of artworks have been ascribed according to available information in historical records. The spelling of Anindilyakwa language, including artists’ names, reflects the spelling approved by Groote Eylandt speakers in 2004. Groote Eylandt Linguistics, Angurugu, has provided valuable assistance and guidance.

Works are organised alphabetically by family name, and then by year. Descriptive titles have been given based on information provided by Groote Eylandt individuals. All artists were born and died on Groote Eylandt. The medium for all works is ochres and orchid extract on eucalyptus bark. Dimensions are given height before width.

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THOMAS NANJI WARRA AMAGULA
born c. 1924, died 1989
clan group: Warnungwamakwula
language group: Anindilyakwa
2 Macassan prau (mijiyanga) c. 1941–45
39.5 x 71.5 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2228*
3 Dugong (dinungkwulangwa) c. 1945–49
59.8 x 22.5 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2227*

KALANGA NUMARNDANGIYA BARA
born c. 1905, died 1978
clan group: Warnungwadarrbulangwa
language group: Anindilyakwa
4 Blue-tongued lizard (yimarndakwuwaba),
sea eagle (yinungwakarda), turtles
(yimenda) and body-painting designs
1945
61 x 28 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2215*
5 Macassan prau with figures, fish,
birds and small sailing boat 1945
49.8 x 26.4 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2220*

DAN NABIYA MAMARIKA
born 1907, died 1971
clan group: Warnindilyakwa
language group: Anindilyakwa
6 Group of sea creatures, a wind symbol,
the south-east wind (Mamarika) and the
north-west wind (Barra) c. 1941–45
65.8 x 24.3 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2218*

This painting includes a number of different types of fish. In the bottom half of the picture, from left to right, are three black-fin and barred long toms (merrukwurra and wujulukwa) and two greenback mules (yilyangbilyangbada). In the upper section of the painting from left to right are the symbols for the north-west wind Barra and the south-east wind Mamarika, a rock cod (damaburna), a symbol that represents the four winds, and a cuttlefish (dilyimba).

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ABADJURA NINGKUMANJA AMAGULA
born c. 1903, died 1973
clan group: Warnungwamakwula
language group: Anindilyakwa
1 Castle Rock (Diduwa) c. 1945–49
66.8 x 34 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2226

This painting represents the important creation ancestor Diduwa, also known as Two Sisters. Diduwa travelled from the mainland and, after creating rivers and creeks and naming many sites along her journey, settled on a hill in the interior of Groote Eylandt. In this painting, the two white lines on the top of each point of Diduwa are the lookouts that were built during the Second World War.

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the south-east wind (Mamarika) and the
north-west wind (Barra) c. 1941–45
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This painting includes a number of different types of fish. In the bottom half of the picture, from left to right, are three black-fin and barred long toms (merrukwurra and wujulukwa) and two greenback mules (yilyangbilyangbada). In the upper section of the painting from left to right are the symbols for the north-west wind Barra and the south-east wind Mamarika, a rock cod (damaburna), a symbol that represents the four winds, and a cuttlefish (dilyimba).

7 A dugong (dinungkwulangwa),
crocodiles (dingarribya), turtles
(dingaluwa), a dolphin (dinginjabena)
and body-painting designs 1945
56.2 x 32.4 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2221*
Group of sea creatures, figures, birds, a snake and a tomahawk 1945
62.8 x 34 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2216*

The tomahawk shown is most likely of the style brought to the island by Macassan fishermen.

MINIMINI NUMALKIYIYA
MAMARIKA
born c. 1900, died 1972
clan group: Warnindilyakwa
language group: Anindilyakwa

Ancestral blue-tongue snake
(Yiningburna) or death adders
(yimabedukwena) c. 1941–45
33.5 x 89 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2200

Dolphins (dinginjabena) and
jelly-fish (armbulirra) c. 1941–45
35.5 x 86.5 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2201

There are numerous paintings of both Macassan and European sailing boats in the many cave painting sites on the Groote Eylandt archipelago. The figure standing at the top of the first mast is possibly Harold Hamilton, a mainland Aboriginal who worked for the mission at Angurugu and was theskipper of Holly during the 1940s. The dingos (warnungwamadada) are totem for the Mamarika and Amagula clans.

Missionary boat Holly with figure,
canoes with paddling figures, dingos,
insects, a figure, fish and a canoe with figures harpooning turtle c. 1941–45
58 x 23.4 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2214*

Sawfish (yukurrirridangwa), round
sting-rays (amaduwaya), diamond
sting-rays (dumurnindangwa), and
figure at low tide c. 1941–45
110.8 x 61 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2204

Air sea creatures depicted here have totemic significance for the Wurrakgwakgw and the Warnungwamadada group of clans. The sawfish and the sting-ray are important creation ancestors and their creation tracks link clan lands on the mainland to Bickerton Island and Groote Eylandt. The bottom section shows the impressions left in the sand by the sting-rays at their resting place. A figure, possibly holding a spear, is shown at low tide waiting for the sting-rays to return.

Seven sisters and Orion’s belt
(Wurrubirrimba) c. 1941–45
85 x 37 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2203
The nine large stars in the bottom half of the painting represent Wurrubirrimba. The three yellow stars are three men paddling canoes and the six red stars below are their wives. During the half moon, the stars that form Wurrubirrimba begin their journey paddling westward across the sky. When the moon becomes full, the sky becomes cloudy, a light rain begins and there is a cool wind. This weather lasts for a few days, while the men and women continue their journey. Wurrubirrimba’s journey brings the last rain before the dry season commences. This is also the time when turtles start to nest. The row of smaller red stars in the middle section is the Milky Way, which Wurrubirrimba passes through.

Tracks of wallabies, brolgas and men; hooked and stone spears and spear throwers, and figures engaged in a war-dance preparing for battle c. 1941-45 74 x 44 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2204
The many stone spears (miyarnawa) on the right, and the wallaby and brolga tracks signify hunting activity, although the inclusion of hooked spears (memelerrbirra) indicates a fight, or preparation for a battle. The bottom section shows eight figures carrying hooked spears and spear throwers engaged in a pre-battle war-dance.

Turtles (yimenda) eating jelly-fish (armbulirra) or siphonophore (marringa), Macassan prau (miijyangga), crocodile (dingarrbiya), false trumpet shell (mungarniyenda) and sting-ray (amaduwaya) c. 1941-45 70 x 31.2 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2211
The fine detail in which the artist has depicted the Macassan prau conveys the precise knowledge many Groote Eylandt people had of these Malay boats. Most likely this knowledge was handed down from the painter’s father, or senior relatives. It is possible however that Minimini Mamarika recalled the form of the distinctive boats and their rigging from when he was a young boy, as the Macassan fishermen continued to visit Groote Eylandt until around 1907. There are also many detailed paintings of Macassan prau in the caves on Groote Eylandt. The rainbow depicted follows the path of the distinctive boats and their rigging from when he was a young boy, as the Macassan fishermen continued to visit Groote Eylandt until around 1907. There are also many detailed paintings of Macassan prau in the caves on Groote Eylandt.

This work illustrates an event that took place in 1944 during the building of the dam at Umbakumba. During the excavation of sand required for the dam walls, a number of stone axe-heads were uncovered. The top section shows the excavation site where a group of men (painted in yellow) are shown digging. The ten white figures shown in the centre represent the men who had previously camped at the spot, the original owners of the stone axe-heads. The concentric circles below represent the billabong that supplies water to the dam, and the dam is represented by the lines that stretch across the centre of the painting.

Excavation of stone axe-heads during the building of the dam at Umbakumba 1944 96 x 41 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2297

NENGBINARRA NEYANGKUMANYIRRRA MAMARIKA
born c. 1902, died 1980
clan group: Wurraliliyanga
language group: Anindilyakwa

NEYANGKUMANYIRRRA MAMARIKA
born c. 1902, died 1980
clan group: Wurraliliyanga
language group: Anindilyakwa

QUARTPOT NANGENKIBIYANGA WURRAMARRBA
born c. 1900, died 1972
clan group: Warnungangkawumirka
language group: Anindilyakwa

23 Hawksbill turtles (dingaluwa), long-neck turtles (yimungunmarda), echidnas (dajinungkwa), crocodiles (dingarrbiya), dilly-bags (kayuwa) and young wallaby (yuwankija) c. 1942-45 75 x 28.2 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2206

24 Milkfish (yimurarra), big turrm (kunk-wurna) and skinny fish (yarruwarra) c. 1943-45 65 x 23 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2232

Groote Eylandt. The rainbow depicted follows midalyuma, the channel made by Yabangwa, which stretches from Bickerton Island to the Amagula River, meeting the sea on the south coast of Groote Eylandt. These rivers are represented in the painting by the bands of red, yellow and white at each side.

Hawksbill turtles (dingaluwa), long-neck turtles (yimungunmarda), echidnas (dajinungkwa), crocodiles (dingarrbiya), dilly-bags (kayuwa) and young wallaby (yuwankija) c. 1942-45 75 x 28.2 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2206

23 Hawksbill turtles (dingaluwa), long-neck turtles (yimungunmarda), echidnas (dajinungkwa), crocodiles (dingarrbiya), dilly-bags (kayuwa) and young wallaby (yuwankija) c. 1942-45 75 x 28.2 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2206

24 Milkfish (yimurarra), big turrm (kunk-wurna) and skinny fish (yarruwarra) c. 1943-45 65 x 23 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2232

Najalka Wurraramara

22 Rainbow (duwuurruwilya) c. 1945-49 30 x 60.3 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2230
Yabangwa is a mythical snake whose travels link certain clans on Bickerton Island and Groote Eylandt. The rainbow depicted follows midalyuma, the channel made by Yabangwa, which stretches from Bickerton Island to the Amagula River, meeting the sea on the south coast of Groote Eylandt. These rivers are represented in the painting by the bands of red, yellow and white at each side.

Najalka Wurraramara

22 Rainbow (duwuurruwilya) c. 1945-49 30 x 60.3 cm irreg.
acc. no. 1960.2230
Yabangwa is a mythical snake whose travels link certain clans on Bickerton Island and Groote Eylandt. The rainbow depicted follows midalyuma, the channel made by Yabangwa, which stretches from Bickerton Island to the Amagula River, meeting the sea on the south coast of Groote Eylandt. These rivers are represented in the painting by the bands of red, yellow and white at each side.
The first five fish depicted are milkfish (yimurarra) brothers. They represent the Mamarka and Amagula clan groups. The red fish second from the bottom is a big turram (kunkwurra) and represents the Jarapba and Bara clans. The black fish on the bottom is a skinny fish (yerruwarra) and is not a Groote Eylandt totem.

Missionary boat Holly with dinghy, canoes with paddling figures, Fred Gray’s boat Oituli and goats c. 1941–45 46 x 29 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2222*

**Jack Numarngkwiyida Wurrwiluya**
born 1924, died 1995
clan group: Warnungawerrikba
language group: Anindilyakwa

Dugong (dinungkwulangwa) with its young c. 1945–49 63.5 x 34 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2225*

**Numaldinga Lawurra Wurrwiluya**
born c. 1882, died 1958
clan group: Warnungawerrikba
language group: Anindilyakwa

Blue-tongued lizards (yimandrakwuwabba), a water python (alija), a sea eagle (yinungwakarda), dolphins (dinginjabena), a hawksbill turtle (dingaluwa), dingos (warnungwenimbubula), a dugong (dinungkwulangwa), and a scrub fowl (yinkaburra) c. 1941–45 59 x 32.5 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2213*

Birds, snake and unidentified object c. 1941–45 31 x 45.2 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2207*

**Peter Nangwurrma Wurrwiluya**
born c. 1926, died 1986
clan group: Warnungawerrikba
language group: Anindilyakwa

Birds eating flowers of the swamp banksia (enindurrkwa) or casuarina (muwarraka) c. 1845–49 29 x 64.5 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2230*

This is a pictorial representation of two totems for the artist. It shows either friar-birds (dijaruwa) or curlew (diwalya) eating the sweet nectar from the large yellow flowers of the swamp banksia (enindurrkwa) or casuarina (muwarraka) tree. The birds are shown with white dots below their beaks, which is the artist’s representation of the movement of the birds as they peck at the flowers for nectar.

Castle Rock (Diduwa) and Shy Crab (Mamukiyeliya) c. 1945–49 65 x 32 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2221*

One interpretation of this painting is that it tells the story of the meeting between two creation ancestors, the two sisters Diduwa (Castle Rock) and Mamukiyeliya (Shy Crab), which took place in the country between Salt Creek (Amudalya) and Second Creek, near the locality of South Point on Groote Eylandt. This important story links the Wurrawilya clan, for whom Diduwa is of totemic significance, and the Maminyamanja clan, for whom Mamukiyeliya is a totem. The two sisters are represented by the two largest shapes at the bottom of the painting. The Shy Crab hole is the circle in the centre of the composition. The original documentation notes that the artist described this work as a representation of the south-east wind Mamarka.

Goanna (yaraja) c. 1945–49 67 x 32.4 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2224*

The south-east wind (Mamarika) with stars c. 1945–49 64.5 x 34.5 cm irreg. acc. no. 1960.2208*

Mamarika is the Macassan name adopted by the Groote Eylandters for the south-east wind totem also known as Yiniyerrma. It is said that the wind totems derive their symbolic form from the shape of the Macassan prau sail. Mamarika was highly significant to the Macassans as it was the wind that took them back to Macassar to trade the cured trepang (sea-cucumber) that they had gathered from the warm waters of northern Australia. A crucial wind for the Groote Eylandters, Mamarika brought the clear skies and cool nights of the dry season. Mamarika is frequently depicted in bark and cave paintings, possibly as a way of summoning the wind to end the long season of rain.