Under the sun: the Kate Challis RAKA Award 2013  
The Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne  
10 August to 3 November 2013

List of works

**Teresa Baker**  
Pitjantjatjara  
born Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 1977; lives Kanpi, South Australia

1. **Kalaya** 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
The Zemaitis Croft Collection, Melbourne

2. **Kalaya Tjukurpa** 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Private collection, Melbourne

3. **Tjukurpa Kutjara** 2012  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
Private collection, Melbourne

Teresa Baker paints from her home in the settlement of Kanpi, in the far north-west of the South Australian desert. Custom and tradition remain strong for Anangu people, and the *Tjukurpa* (Dreaming) is at the core of their culture and everyday lives. Painting *Tjukurpa* as a means of transferring knowledge is a relatively new phenomenon for Anangu—for many thousands of years, these stories were passed down through story, song and, in some regions, ceremonial dance.

Baker began painting in 2005 under the guidance of her artist grandfather, the late Jimmy Baker. The two stories, *Minyma Malilu* and *Kalaya Tjukurpa*, which are the subject of these paintings were taught to her by her grandfather. The segmentary motifs and irregular fields of dots in Baker’s paintings create areas that appear to overlap with a dense collage effect that conveys the complexity of the narratives described. Her paintings capture the vastness of the desert landscape, replete with areas of vegetation, water-holes and camp sites.

The striking patchwork effect of Baker’s compositions is an innovation in the iconography of Western Desert painting. It shows the artist’s confidence, in her mid-thirties, to learn the cultural knowledge and painting style of her grandfather and present a new and individual visual language.

**Daniel Boyd**  
Kudjla/Gangalu  
born Cairns 1982, lives Sydney

4. **Untitled** 2012  
oil and archival glue on canvas  
Private collection, Sydney

5. **Untitled** 2012  
oil and archival glue on canvas  
Collection of the Reszka Family Trust, Melbourne

6. **Untitled** 2013  
oil and archival glue on canvas
Daniel Boyd’s ongoing investigations into the documentation of Aboriginal cultures by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century explorers took a major turn following his residency at London’s Natural History Museum in 2011. In a stylistic departure from previous work, Boyd began a series of black and white paintings—some almost photographic in their figurative realism, others more abstract and inscrutable—that directly explore the colonial past through the depiction of historical scenes, landscapes and artefacts. Boyd’s images are veiled with a textured field of dots, a device that references the early strategies of concealment used by artists of the Papunya Tula art movement and also stands for the multiple lenses through which we view history.

The works presented here reference Boyd’s ancestry in Vanuatu—specifically the colonial slave trade and the fetishisation of so-called ‘primitive cultures’ by modern artists such as Picasso and Matisse. Boyd offers a reinterpretation of historical situations and events, and engages viewers in a critical appraisal of assumed histories. That each painting here is untitled is significant and Boyd intentionally withholds background information for these images. He invites us to contemplate the absence of information and the decimation of language and tradition that is the legacy of Australia’s colonisation.

Hector Burton
Pitjantjatjara
born Pipalyatjara, west of Amata, South Australia, c. 1937; lives Amata

7. Punu 2011
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Private collection, Sydney

8. Punu-ngura 2013
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy the artist, Tjala Arts, Amata, South Australia; and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

9. Hector Burton
Pitjantjatjara
born Pipalyatjara, west of Amata, South Australia, c. 1937; lives Amata
Kumanara Wangin
Pitjantjatjara
born Pukutja (Ernabella), South Australia; c. 1939, died Pukutja 2012

Punu-ngura 2011
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Private collection, Sydney

A senior custodian of Pitjantjatjara law, Hector Burton was among the first men in the Amata community to paint following the establishment of the men’s painting room at Tjala Arts in 2003. Pitjantjatjara men were initially reluctant to produce paintings for the public, not wanting to reveal sacred spiritual knowledge through this medium. While Burton’s early paintings are formal and commanding depictions of his creation stories, his recent work reflects a radically different conceptual basis. Rather than continuing to pursue aesthetic strategies for masking and concealing sacred designs, Burton adopts a subject he regards as more appropriate for his artistic energy: the depiction of trees.

The three paintings displayed here are key works resulting from Burton’s new approach. Pulsing with colour and life, these paintings represent a proactive stance against the revelation of too much cultural knowledge to outsiders. Placed at the centre of the composition and depicted from multiple view-points, the trees are shown as fertile, vital forms growing out of water-holes with multiple branches.
Frank Young, chairman of Tjala Arts, explains: ‘We’re painting the outside story in these trees: the leaves, the branches, the stories that spring from them. But the secrets beneath the trees, the root of the story—that we can’t tell’.

**Timothy Cook**

Tiwi  
born Milikapiti, Melville Island, Northern Territory, 1958; lives Milikapiti

10.  
**Kulama** 2009  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on paper  
Collection of Joseph Eisenberg, New South Wales

11.  
**Kulama** 2009  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on paper  
Collection of Bridget Kennedy, Sydney

12.  
**Kulama** 2012  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on paper  
Courtesy the artist and Aboriginal & Pacific Art, Sydney

13.  
**Kulama** 2012  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on paper  
Private collection, Perth

14.  
**Kulama** 2012  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on paper  
The Carroll Fairhall Collection, Perth

Working for the past thirteen years at the Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association in Milikapiti, a town located on the northern coastline of Melville Island north of Darwin, Cook is known as a painter of *pukumani* poles and, more recently, as a visionary painter of pared-back ochre compositions on paper and canvas. Tiwi art is characterised by patterning and detail, often displaying motifs embedded within a repetitive ‘all over’ pattern. Cook chooses instead to focus on a single, key motif in his telling of the important *Kulama* ceremony.

The circular form at the centre of Cook’s *Kulama* paintings represents the moon man Japara, one of the main figures of the Tiwi creation story (along with his brother Purukapali, and his brother’s wife, Waiyai). Connected to the Tiwi mortuary ceremony *Pukumani*, the *Kulama* ceremony takes place at the end of the wet season, to coincide with the ripening of the yams. Every year, Japara signals that it is time for the ceremony by throwing a visible halo around his moon form. Cook refers to *Kulama* as his ‘favourite/special’ subject for painting, describing the ceremony as a representation of coming of age, the cycle of life and an initiation into Tiwi kinship.

**Mabel Juli**

Gija  
born Five Mile, south of Warmun, Western Australia, c. 1933; lives Warmun

15.  
**Garnkeny Ngarranggarni** 2010  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on canvas  
Collection of the Daffodil and Daisy Superannuation Fund, Perth

16.  
**Wardal and Garnkeny** 2011  
natural pigments and synthetic binder on canvas
Mabel Juli’s paintings deploy a synthesis of horizontal and topographical perspectives—stars and hills are shown in profile, while other aspects of the land are represented as if from the air. Her work is characteristically minimal; complex narratives are distilled into key iconographic forms. In the East Kimberley region of Western Australia, as in other areas of Australia, many major geographical sites are associated with the *Ngarranggarni* (Dreaming) and ancestral beings embodied in country.

A senior artist, ceremonial singer and dancer in the Gija community of Warmun, Juli possesses a depth of cultural knowledge that is reflected in her dedication to the detailed process required to paint with ochre. Sourced locally from beneath the ground, ochre is pounded by hand in a mortar and pestle to a fine powder so it can be mixed with acrylic binder. Juli creates consistent, velvety surfaces by coating her canvas in multiple layers of ochre pigment. This is highly significant for Juli and all Gija artists; the use of ochre for painting reaffirms their connection to country. It also reflects the generosity of Gija artists—they are sharing not only their sacred culture with outsiders, but literally the country itself.

Kunmarnanya Mitchell
Ngaanyatjarra
born near Papulankutja (Blackstone), Western Australia, 1943; died Kalgoorlie 2013

As a child, the late Kunmarnanya Mitchell travelled widely with his family through the desert and sandhill country Ngaturn and Walu in-between Warakurna and Papulankutja, close to the tri-state border in Western Australia. Mitchell began painting in 2005, when the art centre Warakurna Artists was established by the Ngaanyatjarra people. A senior Ngaanyatjarra law man, Mitchell was also a renowned carver of traditional ceremonial weaponry.

While dazzling in their jewel-like beauty, Mitchell’s paintings reflect knowledge of *Tjukurrpa* (Dreaming) stories held since childhood. In creating the three paintings on display, Mitchell used a range of bright and pastel colours to depict the native wattle known as *Wakalpuka*. An important medicine and food source, *Wakalpuka*’s hard, fine-grained wood is also used for making tools and weapons. The profusion of tiny dots in Mitchell’s compositions is evocative of the wattle’s iridescent blaze of singular blooms. These precise daubs—often of alternating colours—join to form a delicate, linear web across the surface of the canvas. Mitchell’s work demonstrates his spirited mark-making; chequerboard-like sections seem to spiral towards the centre of his canvases.

Alick Tipoti
Kala Lagaw Ya
Argan and Wakaid clans
born Badu (Mulgrave) Island, Torres Strait, 1975; lives Cairns and Badu Island
Alick Tipoti is one of the most recognised printmakers and sculptors of the Torres Strait Islands. The four major sculptures here relate to traditional Mawa masks. Mawa masks are worn by Torres Strait Islanders during ceremonies that are connected to life, death and magic. Mawa literally translates as ‘sorcerer’ or ‘medicine man’. Tipoti draws inspiration from the ancient artefacts he has accessed in various university and museum collections in Australia and overseas, as well as from traditional stories handed down from the elders of the Torres Strait.

Historically, unnamed artists carved Mawa masks from turtle shell, decorating them with feathers, shells, seeds, human hair and other natural materials. In his Cairns studio, Tipoti uses modern materials and techniques in a practice which he believes to be guided by his spiritual ancestors, the Zugubal. These arresting sculptures embody Tipoti’s successful straddling of two realms—the contemporary and the customary. The masks’ powerful evocation of sacred aspects of traditional Torres Strait culture is matched by the unmistakably contemporary nature of their materials and scale.

Garawan Wanambi
Yolngu
Dhuwa moiety, Marrakulu clan
born Gangan, East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 1965; lives Gangan
The system of classification that underpins North-east Arnhem Land social life is integral to the art produced by the Yolngu people. The land is divided into areas held by clans, and clans are classed as belonging to one of two moieties, Dhuwa or Yirritja. Yolngu painting is characterised by an elaborate system of designs which reflect the different relationships of various clans with their ancestors and land. The title of these works, Marrangu, refers to the clan into which Wanambi was adopted when his father passed away.

The central image of Wanambi’s larrakitj (hollow log) design represents, among other things, the ancestral tree after which Wanambi is named, a stone spearhead from Ngilibidji, and the pointed stick used by Yolngu to lance boils. The geometric designs and cross-hatching represent a place in the river mouth near Raymangirr in East Arnhem Land, where the currents of fresh and salt water mingle and surge around the rocks in his clan country. Wanambi communicates the drama of this moving, dynamic body of water by introducing subtle shifts in the formal, diamond-shaped repetitive designs in his work. These skilful, sometimes barely perceptible adjustments create absorbing visual effects; the rhythms of the designs become unpredictable, melding forms together and creating purely optical boundaries between what might be foreground or background.

Regina Pilawuk Wilson
Ngan’gikurrunggurr
born Daly River region, Northern Territory, 1948; lives Peppimenarti, Northern Territory

30.  
Warrgadi [Dilly bag] 2011
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy the artist and Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Northern Territory

31.  
Sun mat 2013
pandanus, sand palm and natural dyes
Courtesy the artist and Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Northern Territory

32.  
Syaw [Fish net] 2009
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy the artist, Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti, Northern Territory; and Michael Reid, Sydney

The subject matter of Regina Pilawuk Wilson’s paintings derives from various weaving techniques she was taught by her mother and grandmother as a young girl. Since she began painting in 2000, Wilson has developed a sophisticated process of transferring traditional designs used in the making of woven fibre objects including syaw (fish net) and warrgadi (dilly bag) onto canvas. A skilled weaver, Wilson applies her rich knowledge of colour, line and texture to painting the delicate and variegated lines that suggest interwoven textures in the paintings Syaw and Warrgadi.

Wilson extends the creative possibilities of traditional weaving in her brightly hued, iconic Sun mat. Flat, circular mats (which now hang on the walls of Australian museums and galleries) have evolved out of a tradition of utilitarian mats that are made in areas of the Northern Territory, including the Daly River region and Arnhem Land, where the pandanus tree flourishes. Collecting the natural materials in the heat is physically demanding work. In contrast, stripping and dyeing the pandanus, and then tightly coiling it by hand, is a slow, meditative and sometimes social act. The perseverance and patience required for weaving is reflected in the fine, repetitive mark-making of Wilson’s paintings.