

ONE FOOT
ON THE GROUND,
ONE FOOT
IN THE WATER



La Trobe University proudly acknowledges
the traditional custodians of the
lands on which its campuses are located
in Victoria and New South Wales.

This catalogue was produced by
La Trobe Art Institute on the traditional lands of
the Dja Dja Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.
We respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors
and their Elders, past and present.

ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND, ONE FOOT IN THE WATER

Curated by Travis Curtin

Catherine Bell
Timothy Cook
French & Mottershead
Mabel Juli
Richard Lewer
Sara Morawetz
Michael Needham
Nell
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Nawurapu Wunungmurra

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Cat. 1
Catherine Bell
Final resting place (detail) 2018–20
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill



Cat. 1
Catherine Bell
Final resting place 2018–20
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill

Foreword

Bala Starr, Director La Trobe Art Institute

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water is the fifth exhibition La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) Curator Travis Curtin has organised for our Bendigo galleries. At first glance, the intimate scale of the exhibition seems to belie the depth and scope of research, exchange and close looking that Travis has undertaken over the last year. It has been an ambitious undertaking.

The exhibition and this catalogue offer an opportunity to consider artists' perspectives on experiences that are both commonplace and unknowable. In conceptualising and organising the project, Travis Curtin has set La Trobe Art Institute the task of testing what art and writing can do to illuminate our understanding of mourning, grief and loss. At a time when many of us are experiencing complex feelings about the fragility of life, Travis asks how an art exhibition can offer new insights into death and dying. A key curatorial premise of *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* is that an exhibition itself functions as a kind of transitional zone or in-between space, where artists and viewers (and the curator too) can speculate about assumptions, propose ideas and consider the interrelationships between artworks and indeed between cultures.

Thoughtfully installed in two galleries, three adjacent enclosed courtyards and the LAI entrance area, *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* presents more than 20 works by 11 artists across several generations who are respectively based in London, the United States and three Australian states. It presents diverse cultural

material. Fifteen works in the exhibition reflect La Trobe Art Institute's aim to centre and highlight contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, ideas and practices in our programs. We are especially proud to present a group of five mokuy (spirit figures) and a larrakitj (memorial pole) by the late Yolŋu artist Nawurapu Wunŋmurra held in the La Trobe University Art Collection. The works of Nawurapu Wunŋmurra, along with works by senior Gija artist Mabel Juli and Tiwi artists Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri from the geographically and culturally distinct regions of the East Kimberley and Tiwi Islands respectively, have been brought into dialogue with works by seven non-Indigenous artists.

LAI is La Trobe University's hub of arts practices and cultural collections, tasked with fostering artistic and intellectual exchange. In this our partnerships are key. We gratefully acknowledge the organisations that have supported us to realise this project. We thank NETS Victoria, which assisted the catalogue through its Exhibition Development Fund 2020 supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria. We are grateful to sound and video artist Jacques Soddell and Bendigo Tech School, hosted by La Trobe University, for producing the technology and advising on the installation of work by French & Mottershead, and to Chapman & Bailey, which supported the presentation of the three tutini (Pukumani poles) by Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri.

Our deep gratitude goes to the participating artists, Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer,

Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, and the family and representatives of Nawurapu Wunŋmurra. We thank all lenders to the exhibition and the gallerists and art centre staff who so generously shared information and advice with our curator. In particular, we thank the community of Milikapiti, staff and artists at Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, for generously hosting Travis Curtin during his research visit in late 2019.

We warmly acknowledge the contributions of writers Yinimala Gumana, Mabel Juli, Dominic Kavanagh, Kade McDonald, Pedro Wonaeamirri and Wukun Wanambi. Dominic Kavanagh, Will Heathcote and Hannah Raisin, Kade McDonald and Will Stubbs generously provided editorial support and advice. We extend our gratitude to Frances Kofod who transcribed and translated the Gija spoken by Mabel Juli.

In bringing together this catalogue, Travis Curtin worked with graphic designer Tristan Main to devise a special document in parallel with the exhibition. We thank Tristan for his care, patience and attention to detail. And finally I thank the whole LAI team for their dedication and commitment to this project, to enabling experimental creative practices and to inviting visitors' inquiry through art at View Street and in this catalogue.

Bala Starr is Director, La Trobe Art Institute



Cat. 1
Catherine Bell
Final resting place (details) 2018–20

Dying, a conversation worth living

Travis Curtin

We discovered that grief was much more than just despair. We found grief contained many things – happiness, empathy, commonality, sorrow, fury, joy, forgiveness, combativeness, gratitude, awe, and even a certain peace. For us, grief became an attitude, a belief system, a doctrine – a conscious inhabiting of our vulnerable selves, protected and enriched by the absence of the one we loved and that we lost.

[...] in time, *there is a way*, not out of grief, but deep within it.

Nick Cave, *The red hand files* 95 (May 2020),
<http://www.theredhandfiles.com/create-meaning-through-devastation>.

The immediacy of loss is one of the most difficult experiences to articulate in words. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* tests what an art exhibition can do to express the complexities and mysteries of the emotional experiences surrounding death and loss that reverberate through time.

In his 2008 book, *Art and death*, Chris Townsend suggests that rather than coming to terms with our own death, ‘it is the deaths of others that lay claim to us, as witnesses’. Townsend proposes that ‘there is a degree to which, as Jonathan Strauss argues, death is “a fiction derived from other experiences of loss, most significantly that of other people”’. As quoted by Townsend, Strauss has stated that ‘my death is an awareness of myself that I can only have through the idea of others who will survive it, and it is in this sense a blind spot in my self-knowledge’.¹

My personal experience of loss has been an overwhelming sense of present-absence. As Townsend and Strauss identify, our own experience of death is intangible. Like many of us, I have a second-hand experience of death. My partner Anna was diagnosed with stage-four cancer and lived with it for four and a half years until she finally could not. I was with her for the last three weeks of her life, between Warrnambool Hospital and the Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, where she passed away on 31 May 2015.

1 Chris Townsend, *Art and death* (London and New York: IB Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2008), 2.

Most vivid in my memory is the shock at just how quickly she slipped from being her beautiful cognisant self to being presently absent. Her body lying on the hospital bed in front of me. But not there at all. A vessel for life, finally no longer capable of supporting it. A container emptied of its essence.

I was asleep in the next room when Anna died. When I entered the room, I could no longer feel her in it. She was absent. Her life had finished. Nothing could have prepared me for the finality of that moment. Nothing could have prepared me for the sense of absence when it was all over, despite being acutely aware of the drawn-out process of her body shutting down over the course of her final weeks. Anna desperately wanted to live to the end, right up until her last shallow rattling breath, drawn as Nick Drake's album *Five leaves left* (1969) played softly through the speaker in a corner of the room. When I entered, the song 'Saturday sun' was playing. I think it was around 5:00 am. I'm foggy on the details. Being at the hospital no longer made sense. I was no longer needed there. Together with her family I packed up Anna's things and drove home. Home, another vessel emptied of meaning and the significance it once held when we were both in the world to share it. Layers and layers of things to grieve for. Layers and layers of things to let go of or hold on to.

Anna had a small family funeral and burial at Lilydale Cemetery, northeast of Melbourne, where her grandparents are also buried. This was followed by a large memorial service in Williamstown by the

water. That week I felt numb amidst a blur of activity while preparations were made. Part of the process involved preparing Anna's body for burial by washing and dressing her with her sister, brother, mother and father. Laying her in her coffin. These were Anna's wishes. She had wanted her family to put her in her coffin. Until this moment I hadn't used the word 'goodbye'. I had completely avoided it. Instead, whenever I left the room at the hospital I would say 'see you soon'. Perhaps fearing it would be the last time. Now it was the last time.

Death has been a source of inspiration that has stimulated the production of art, music and the word (sung, spoken and written) throughout history. It is a vast and diverse subject – too vast and diverse to cover here in any honest way. There are countless examples of cultural material across time that have been influenced and inspired by the subject of mortality. In his book, *Very little . . . almost nothing*, Simon Critchley suggests that 'death is radically resistant to the order of representation. Representations of death are misrepresentations, or rather representations of an absence'.² We may never truly know or articulate the experience of our own death, but perhaps we can better learn to live with death through the experiences of others and the myriad ways the living respond to death, through acts of mourning and grief. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* shifts the focus from skulls, skeletons and

2 Simon Critchley, *Very little . . . almost nothing: death, philosophy, literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 31.

memento mori (reminders of inevitability) towards lived experiences that have a lasting legacy. It offers experiences that stimulate broader discussion around death and dying; experiences that bring the living together.

Throughout the exhibition, singular and repeated forms reinforce the reality of death as both an individual and universal experience. Sara Morawetz's *March 17* (2020) presents an unconventional memorial dedicated to Peter Morawetz, who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident 32 years ago while in the process of selling his motorbike to pay to legally become her father. Morawetz's artist's book catalogues the objects that were in Peter Morawetz's wallet at the time of his passing. The book documents her deeply personal experience of loss, the act of making itself a form of grieving. As Morawetz identifies, the wallet's contents are the 'unremarkable ephemera of a 28-year-old man – made invaluable by his absence'. *March 17* captures an intangible essence beyond physical presence.

Nell's *Mother of the Dry Tree* and *With things being as they are ...* (both 2017) have also been created in the context of grief following the artist's loss of her son, Lucky, due to stillbirth in 2012. These works feature recurring images of large and small egg-shaped forms, ceramic sprites and glass ghosts, open-mouthed and open-eyed, suggesting a state of shock. Throughout Nell's installation, mother and child are disconnected from one another, but close nonetheless.



Cat. 15
Nell
Mother of the Dry Tree 2017

Referring to these works, Nell has stated:

In my painting the mother and the child are separated, as if calling to each other. I had a stillborn baby boy [...] and it was, goes without saying, incredibly traumatic and changed my life irrevocably and it really changed my art practice too. I made a commitment to make art about my life, a long time ago and now this little spirit's very much in my work [...]. My arms ached afterwards and so I wanted to make these little vessels or little spirits that I could hold in my arms.³

With this body of work, Nell shares with the viewer the little sprite who 'passed through', who will forever dwell in her heart and mind and perhaps continue to reappear at times in her works of art.

These personal expressions of loss contrast with the repeated forms of Richard Lewer's *Crucifixes* (2018) and Catherine Bell's *Final resting place* (2018–20). Both these works use repetition to depict the interlinking of discrete individual experiences through our shared humanity.

Lewer has previously referred to the symbolic ambiguity of the cruciform, stating 'the crucifix, to me, is an unmistakable visual representation of absolute vulnerability, with its twisted human form

3 Nell, 'Love and music,' interview by Rachel Storey, *Art makers*, ABC Arts, 22 June, 2017, video, 5:56, <http://iview.abc.net.au/show/art-makers/series/0/video/AC1646H009S00>.



Cat. 16
Nell
I AM Passing through 2017



Cat. 10
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes (detail) 2018

evidence of extreme physical suffering, whereas for others, it offers a beacon of hope, as with death there is always the opportunity to transcend this life to a better place'.⁴ Lewer's work embodies this ambiguity and locates it in the viewer's reading of the work, questioning the universality of iconography associated with death and dying. Similarly, Mabel Juli's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* (2020) in proximity to Nell's *A cross* (2017), draws into question Eurocentric readings of the cruciform, reminding us that iconography is a cultural construct and that forms are capable of embodying a multitude of meanings.

The repetition in Lewer's 52 crucifixes contrasts with his painting *As a bald man, I miss going to the barber* (2019), a singular representation that draws our attention to the small ways we endure and survive embodied experiences of loss over the course of our lives.

The relationship between the individual and the universal significance of mortality resonates in Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's carvings, *Purukuparli* (2020) and *Waiyai* (2020), and their roles in the Purukuparli story recounted in this catalogue by Pedro Wonaeamirri. The Purukuparli story explains the origins of mortality from a Tiwi perspective in the death of Purukuparli and Waiyai's son Jinani, during Parlingarri (olden times). In his second essay, Wonaeamirri outlines the significance of Pukumani and the Pukumani ceremony in Tiwi culture.

4 Richard Lewer, 'There is light and dark in us all', (Adelaide: Hugo Michell Gallery, 2018), <https://www.hugomichellgallery.com/richard-lewer-there-is-light-and-dark-in-us-all>.

In the exhibition, tutini (Pukumani poles) carved by Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and animated with jilamara (designs) by Timothy Cook, are exhibited alongside Cook's iconic representations of Kulama, which refer to the men's initiation ceremony and annual celebration of life, as well as Japarra (the moon man) and his role in the Purukuparli story, exemplifying the inseparable link between life and death in Tiwi culture.

In late 2019, I visited Timothy Cook, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Pedro Wonaeamirri in Milikapiti on Melville Island. On the second last day of my stay an old man passed away. Timothy and I had been talking about Jinani the day before and he said to me, 'That old man died. Jinani died. Then we all go follow like that'. The Purukuparli story has been told countless times, by different people in different ways. The death of Jinani, the first in Tiwi culture, has resonated for generations of Tiwi and is a unifying force that brings people together through the universal experience of dying – 'we all go follow like that'.

Throughout the exhibition, organic materials encourage us to consider states of permanence, impermanence and transitional phases in-between. Wood and natural earth pigments feature prominently, as in Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's tutini (Pukumani poles), Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri's carvings, *Purukuparli* and *Waiyai*, Mabel Juli's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* in natural earth pigments and charcoal – the residual carbon of burnt wood and other organic matter – and Nawurapu Wununmurra's *larrakitj* (memorial poles)



Foreground, left to right:
Nawurapu Wununmurra
Mokuy 2012

French & Mottershead
Grey Granular Fist 2017

Background:
Richard Lewer
As a bald man, I miss going to the barber 2019

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill



Garrapara (2007 and 2012) and *Mokuy* (2012). In ceremonial contexts, *larrakitj* in Yolŋu culture and *tutini* (Pukumani poles) in Tiwi culture are left to deteriorate in the elements (sun, wind, rain and saltwater) following the conclusion of the respective ceremonies that perform the function of seeing the spirit of the deceased safely on its way.

Just as the *larrakitj* returns to the earth, decomposing in the elements, Wunŋmurra's *larrakitj* represents the cyclical journey of the spirit from a Yolŋu perspective. The *miny'tji* (sacred clan designs) on Wunŋmurra's *larrakitj* represent the sea at Garrapara, a Dhalwaŋu clan estate, coastal headland and bay area within Blue Mud Bay, in Northeast Arnhem Land. The wavy design indicates a Yirritja moiety body of saltwater in Blue Mud Bay called Munŋurru. It is here that the 'water (soul) transmogrifies to vapour, entering the "pregnant" waŋupini (storm clouds) which carry the life-giving freshwater back to the start of the cycle'.⁵

As Will Stubbs identifies in his essay 'Water, kinship and the cycle of life' in *larrakitj: Kerry Stokes Collection*:

Water is paramount because each person has the water from which they have sprung, within [...] The purpose of many Yolŋu ceremonies is to guide the spirit through the cycle and through the water – to return the spirit back to the reservoir of origin.

5 Nawurapu Wunŋmurra, *Garrapara*, artwork documentation (Yirrkala: Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, 2012).
<https://www.hugomichellgallery.com/richard-lewer-there-is-light-and-dark-in-us-all/>

There is a sense that the spirit doesn't want to leave. The body has components: the spirit, the flesh and the bones. The flesh melts away shortly after death; the bones are geologic, and must return to the land through the agency of *Larrakitj*. That leaves the eternal spirit, which must find its way through the waters, back to the reservoir of the communal soul. That resides in sacred springs or rivers, and it must be assisted in that progress, guided by rituals and music, patterns and dancing.'⁶

Ephemeral materials also feature in Catherine Bell's *Final resting place* (2018–20), consisting of 100 vessels crafted from biodegradable floral foam by participants in her Facing Death Creatively workshops. The workshops provide a forum for public mourning through, as Bell states, bringing the living together to use 'ephemeral materials to think about impermanence'. They are a catalyst for discussing mortality and the participants' final resting places.

The act of carving is a reductive process. The creation of a new form by rubbing away or removing layers provides a gentle metaphor for loss and letting go, a change in state or shedding of form. Bell's choice of biodegradable floral foam reflects her interest in processes of decomposition and the return of materials to natural elements: earth, water and gas. These vessels also correspond to our corporeal

6 Will Stubbs, 'Water, kinship and the cycle of life' in *Larrakitj: Kerry Stokes Collection*, ed. Anne Marie Brody (West Perth: Australian Capital Equity, 2011), 39.

existence and the body as a 'carrier'. Bell links their functional form to the way the human body holds water. The floral foam holds water to sustain life for flowers 'yet is paradoxically the grave to those flowers'.⁷

Nell also incorporates organic materials in *With things being as they are ...* (2017). Japanese igusa tatami mats woven from soft rush straw, chicken skin, eel skin and stingray skin are all former living things, repurposed and given life in another form.

French & Mottershead's *Grey Granular Fist* (2017), from the series *Afterlife*, presents an opportunity 'to experience the afterlife of your body'. The work makes exhibition visitors acutely aware of the organic materiality of our own bodies, introducing the notion of the life cycle and the sometimes uncomfortable alliance between life and death. Sound inhabits the liminal space in-between tangible and intangible experiences. Here it is grounded in the embodied experience of sitting in a wooden chair where the materiality of the listener's body (their physical weight) triggers the audio. Andrew Mottershead has commented that, 'the [*Afterlife*] series stems from a combination of personal fear connected to dying alone and not being found, and also a curiosity about the science of decomposition and decay [...] It's all about the life that occurs after that last breath, about the process of transformation and renewal'.⁸

7 Catherine Bell, 'Facing Death Creatively' (La Trobe University Creative Arts, Visual Arts and Law School, 7 October, 2020), online workshop.

8 Hannah Reich, 'Dark Mofo: Festival-goers experience death, decay and degloving on River Derwent in audio work "Waterborne,"' ABC Arts, 23 June, 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-23/dark-mofo-waterborne-audio-tour-river-derwent-body-decomposing/9898448>.

Michael Needham's *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020) evokes a sense of permanence through its weighty cast-iron bulk and looming 3.3 metre height. The exaggerated degree of ornamentation for an ambiguous mourned subject provides a layer of sardonic humour, and, as Needham states, the work overplays 'formal posturing as a means of questioning implicit and often justifiably guarded sentimentality around loss'. In this context, Needham's signature discarded plastic cemetery flowers offer further irony, as flowers provide an earthly reminder of the beauty and impermanent nature of life, meaning that is undermined by their plasticity and permanence. Nonetheless they imply that an offering, an embodied grief process, has taken place.

The monument elicits an uncomfortable presence in the Australian landscape, an intentionally jarring interplay between the sacred and the profane. This is further enhanced by the strangeness of the landscape Needham has created in the La Trobe Art Institute courtyard. The monument is installed on a bed of sandy earth littered with twigs and scatterings of casuarina needles and seedpods that remind us of the life cycle; former carriers of life are now discarded vessels, left to decompose on the surface of the earth.

Mortality is imposed on all of us eventually. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* ultimately tells a story of finality and legacy through art as a form of ongoing life beyond life itself. In death, the body continues to merge with the life cycles of other humans, living



Cat. 12
Michael Needham
Monument to Muther [sic] 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill

things and processes. The cycle continues and we are undeniably a part of 'life that exists beyond life itself'.⁹ The essence of a person, whatever name you give it, continues to resonate in present-absence.

Art and other forms of cultural expression play a major role in the way we respond to death. There is solace to be found in art, music, words and 'deep within grief', as Nick Cave writes in response to questions about finding meaning from tragic loss.¹⁰ Art provides a means of connecting with one another in order to make sense of our own experiences. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes that, 'In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces [...] Paul Klee's famous formula – "Not to render the visible, but to render visible"'.¹¹

The works presented together for the first time in this exhibition offer a unique group of intercultural perspectives on death, dying, loss and grief. It is my hope that *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* echoes and reverberates in a poetic way for its viewers in much the same way that someone remains with us as a series of traces in memory or echoes in objects that carry the mark of their being after they are gone.

9 French & Mottershead, *French & Mottershead*, 2020, <http://frenchmottershead.com/works/afterlife>.

10 Nick Cave, *The red hand files* 95 (May 2020), <http://www.theredhandfiles.com/create-meaning-through-devastation>.

11 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 56.



Cat. 11
Sara Morawetz
March 17 (detail) 2020

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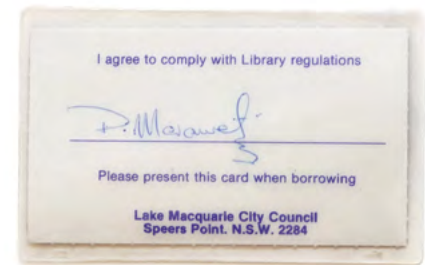
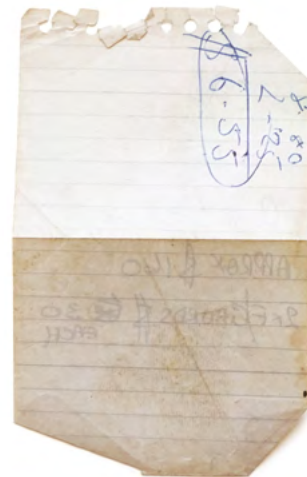
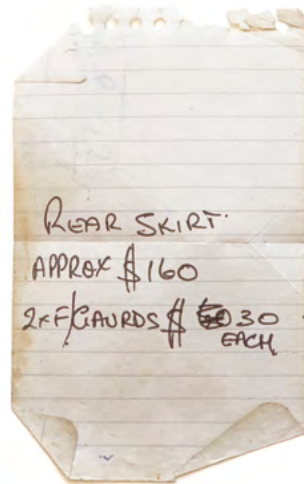
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Cat. 11
Sara Morawetz
March 17 (details) 2020

Garnkiny Ngarranggarni

Mabel Juli

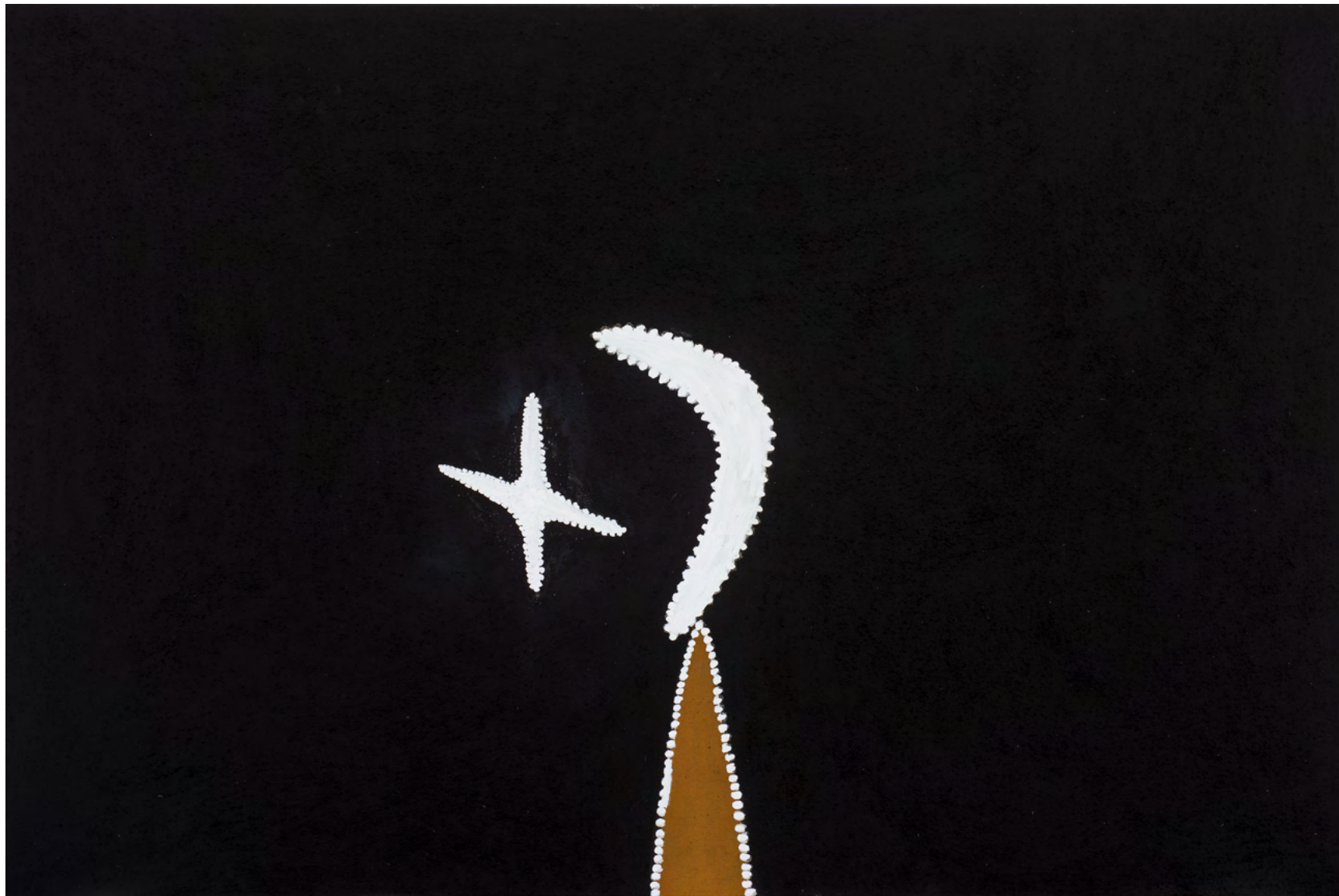
Gija transcription and translation by Frances Kofod

Garnkiny ngelmang rurt ngarri nginji. Wardel tal kerlurr ngarrkalen laarne pertij nginyi tanyi garnkiny. Wiji ke ngarri ngurramangpe ngewa tampurru-kal. Gangpelkpe nginini. Kerlewirring tek nginini Nginini pirri nangkap parrun na nginini pirri ngayimuwana murlinte ngenpenke. Purapurap ngeliyante wanemay pirri melakawum tam. Wurrji ngarri perrani yilak. Taam merrkernpem purakarr ngeliyante Nangkapwa perrayin kili namuwana ngininji. Merrkern taam nginji purap ngitji. Taam merrkernpem.

Well this the Dream by Wardel and Garnkiny (star and moon). That's what my mother and father told me about that Dream. The moon sits in the east. The star sits on top of the hills, the moon came and climbed that hill. That moon loved his mother-in-law, but they told him he couldn't love her and to go away. He left with shame and climbed up the hill and he was looking from on top [of the hill]. He told all the people that they were going to die. He said that he would be the only one living. He cursed those people, saying that he would be the only one coming back alive. He told them, while they were sitting down, 'you are all going to die and I will be still alive, coming out. Every month I will rise from the dead.' They all died and he was the only one that stayed alive. He came back as the moon every month.

This is Yarin Country in Darrajayin (Springvale Station), south of Warmun, Mabel Juli's traditional Country.

Cat. 8
Mabel Juli
Garrkiny Ngarranggarni 2020



Mabel Juli at Garn'gin, Darrajayin, 2011
Courtesy of Warmun Art Centre
Photo: Frances Kofod



Garn'giny, death and rebirth

Mabel Juli interviewed by Dominic Kavanagh

Gija transcription and translation by Frances Kofod

Mabel Juli Jarrag-jarrag ngenarn-noo garn'giny ngarranggarniny. Nginyjiny garn'giny jarrag ngenarn-noo ngarranggarniny. Ngagenyji ngajiny, ngarranggarniny. He Joowoorroo, I call em brother.

I am talking about the Dreamtime moon story. I am talking about this Dreamtime moon. I say for him, 'This moon is a Dreamtime, and I'm talking for him.' My brother, a Dreamtime thing. He is Joowoorroo skin, I call him 'brother'.

Garlmi nginini goorndarrim. Nginyjiny, goorndarrim garlmi wanemayinde, yilag, Garn'gin ngenengga yilag Darrajayin, yilag. Place called Garn'gi again.

He was catching fish by pushing grass through the water. This one [the moon when he was a man], was catching fish by pushing grass through the water, down there, at the place called Garn'gin in Darrajayin Country. The place is called Garn'gin, the place of the moon, too.

Dominic Kavanagh What does this story teach us about death and dying?

MJ That moon, if they bin let him married that, black head snake. Bat I jarrag. Garn'giny, waj-ngarri nyimberridbe-ni, dal dawool, boora-boorab woomberramande, nawoo-gelaj, boora-boorab-garri ngirne. See? He bin bin wanta married that black head snake. That his thamboorroo. I call em 'mother-in-law' too. If they bin give him married, let him married, people would a be, die and come out like him again. Life again, you know.

That moon, if they had let him marry that black-headed snake [who was a woman of his mother-in-law's skin]. But I say, if they had given the moon that black-headed snake woman [as a wife], they would have kept coming out just like he keeps on appearing. Do you see? He wanted to marry that black-headed snake woman. She was his mother-in-law. I call the black-headed snake 'mother-in-law' too. If they had let him marry her, people would have died and come back again like him. Alive again you know.

Joowoorroo. He like me. Me Nyawoorroo, him Joowoorroo, my brother. Nyawana. Yeah he my wardoo. That Nambin, he's, that's his daughter.

Garn'giny is in the Joowoorroo skin group, which makes him my brother. I am Nyawoorroo skin. Nyawana is the right skin for the moon to marry. Nyawana is my sister-in-law. That Nambin, [Nyawana] is her daughter.

DK When someone passes away in Gija culture what happens to them?

MJ Anybody, yeah, where they die? Nang-ngarri boorroowoonbe. They come back la, they come back la people you know when. Jarriny, you know jarriny? They come back, jarriny, baby. Like my son. Son bin passed away, my young son. And he Michael, Michael Malgil, bin come back, that's my son him come back.

Yes, when they die? When they die, they come back, they come back to other people, they are reborn. 'Jarriny' is the spirit that is reborn. Yes you come back as a reborn spirit with another mother. They have the same skin name when they are reborn. Like my son [Leo Juli]. My young son passed away. And now he is Michael Malgil. Michael Malgil is my son who came back.

DK What happens to the body when someone passes away?

MJ Yeah. They put em, they put em paperbark, sometime they, with a blanket, wrap em up. They put em la rock. Sometime they bury em la ground. Nawane, walig bemberrilinbe yiligin nawane. They got big mob everywhere. And they put em ola rock now, ngarrgale rerr finish. Jamboorn, ngarrgalem dambi la that, they put em ola rock you know la hole. Same way like ngaboony, where they bin put em in a thing. And ngaboony bin come back laive igen.

They used to put them in paperbark, sometimes they used to wrap them in a blanket. They put them in a rocky place. Sometimes they bury them in the ground. Or they put them inside a cave. There are lots of burial places everywhere in Gija Country. And they put lots of rocks then, they drag stones there, done. They heap up those stones at that, they cover the hole with rocks. The same way as Jesus, when they put him in that thing. And Jesus came back alive again.

That what ngaboony bin do. They in bury im la nawan, walig la im la nawan. Im bin there for, couple a days, I think three days, and his mum and his Aunty bin go and look in that place. 'He not there, where him?' He was standing behind. So they bin look back 'Oh here!' They never touch him, nothing. They just leave em. That's what, that's the ngaboony way now.

That's what Jesus did. They buried him in a cave, put him in a cave. He was there for couple of days, I think three days, and his mother and Aunty went and looked at the place [Mabel has interpreted Mary Magdalen as an 'Aunty']. 'He's not there, where is he?' He was standing behind. 'Oh here' [they said]. They did not touch him, they just left him be. That's the Jesus way now.

Same way like my grandpa, la Springvale you know, they bin clean, knock all them rock. Well my grandpa was there la that rock. They bin clean em out now my jaja. I can't find em my grandpa now. My grandpa we, that side rock, you know that rock place one like this,

they bin jis, chuck em down there, and chuck ola big, big mob rock la im. That's what they bin do la my grandpa. And they bin knock em down now. They bin go do mining there now. He finish. You can see all a rock everywhere laying down. Big hole there now.

The same as my grandpa at Springvale you know. They [granite miners] graded that place, knocking all the rocks. Well my grandfather was buried among those rocks. They cleaned out my grandfather, I can't find my grandpa's burial place now. My grandfather you know that rocky place like this, they put him down there and put lots of big rocks over him. That's what they did to my grandfather. And the miners have knocked that place down now. They did mining there and the place is ruined. You can see all the rocks lying down everywhere. There is a big hole there now.

DK How do Gija people say goodbye or mourn someone who has passed away?

MJ They cry now. But early days, people you know, when they bin lose, and, only all the boy go, got that body, all the girl not gonna go. Not girl, no, only all the boy go. They bury em that man or woman, and girl stop la home. When they see the man come back, after that for that, bury em ola dead body now, and they cry now, all a girl cry la camp. See? Law, you know, early days. But not this time, everybody going. No, you can't see. Or might be some people can look, not like me. Put a smoke, inside. We bin want em for jarriny you know. They come back jarriny.

They cry now. But before, people, when someone dies, only all the men went with the body, women did not go. No women, only the men went. They buried that man or woman and the women stayed home. When they saw the men come back after the burial, all the women cried. All the women in the Sorry Camp cried. You see? It was the law in the old days. But not today, everyone goes. No, you can't see them [photographs]. Maybe some people can bear to look, not like me. [We should] smoke [the Art Centre] because lots of white people come here. Smoke inside the gallery. We want people who pass away to come back as spirit and be reborn.

DK Do you have any personal thoughts about dying?

MJ I don't worry. I don't want to worry. I know my, where this, where this, tell old ngaboony, that's all we talking to ngaboony. Pray la ngaboony everyday, every night, that's what we do. We don't think about for nhang, for die. You get a kangaroo or might be you get sugarbag, big mob sugarbag, you come back jarriny thadan. Might be that girl when he eat em that kangaroo, and he vomiting, where first feeling come out. See, he come back. Even gardiya. We bin have ola gardiya here, ola missus we bin have, they bin get jarriny here too. They wanta know bout that, jarriny. He'll come out la you. You can call em he right, he finish he come back. Come back jarriny. My daughter bin lose he might come back la somebody, my daughter. Come back la somebody there.

I don't worry. I don't want to worry. I know me, when this, we tell God, that's all. We speak to God. Pray to God every day and every night, that's what we do. We don't think about dying. Sometimes when the mother eats kangaroo or sugarbag, you are reborn from that thing. Maybe that woman when she eats the kangaroo and she vomits [as a result of morning sickness], then she knows she is pregnant and a spirit has come back to her. Even white people. We have had lots of white women come here and they became pregnant with the reborn spirits of old people. They go swimming at Winniba Spring and find babies there. They want to know about that, spirits being reborn. It comes out to you [appears]. You can say the name, the time of restriction is finished, once he comes back. Came back, spirit reborn. My daughter died, she might come back to someone [as a baby]. Come back as a baby to someone there.

Note on translation:

There are multiple spellings for the moon in Gija. Garnkiny and Garn'giny are both used in this catalogue. 'Garnkiny' is an older spelling, 'Garn'giny' is more recent.

Until March 2020 the Gija spelling system used 'ng', 'ngg', 'nk' and 'rnk' to distinguish the pronunciation of words like wangala, wangga, wanggarnal, warnkam and wankil.

When Frances Kofod visited the Purnululu Association School at Woorreranginy, Frog Hollow, in March 2020, the Gija school staff asked that instead of 'nk' and 'rnk' the spelling system should use 'ng' and 'rn'g'. This is because the sound in the middle of the word really sounds more like a 'g' in English.

The 'ny' suffix at the end of Gija words that have stems ending in vowels indicate masculine singular gender. The moon was a man in the Ngarranggarni, so the word ends in 'ny'.

Gija nouns can replace the gender suffixes with a locative 'n'. 'Garn'gin' means 'in, at, on the moon' or 'the place of the moon'.



Foreground:
Timothy Cook and Patrick
Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Background, left to right:
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2014
Mabel Juli
Garnkiny Ngarranggarni 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art
Institute, 2020



Cat. 16

Nell

With things being as they are ... 2017

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020

Photo: Ian Hill



Cat. 16
Nell
Sprite resting in hat 2017



Cat. 16
Nell
Mother and Child #2 2017



Cat. 16
Nell
BYE-bye 2017

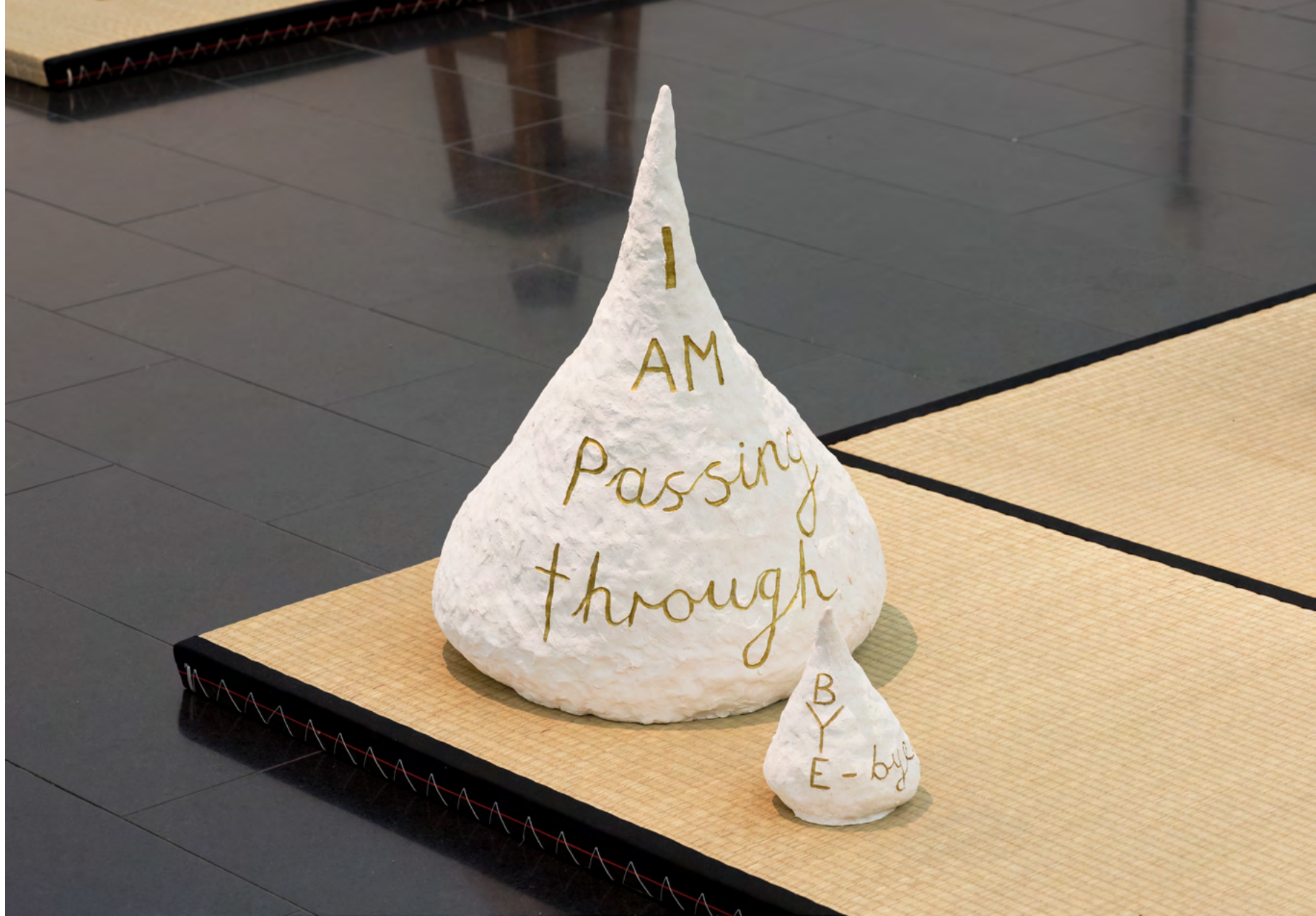


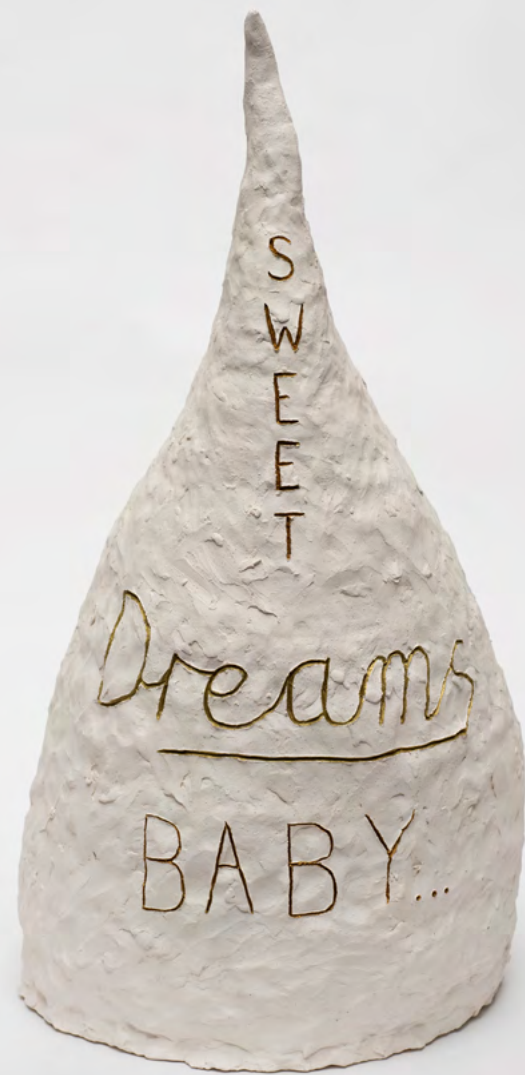
Cat. 16
Nell
Two on One 2017



Cat. 16
Nell
Sprite guide me (detail) 2017

Cat. 16
Nell
I AM Passing through 2017
BYE-bye 2017
Installation view, La Trobe Art
Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill





Cat. 16
Nell
SWEET dreams BABY ... 2017



Cat. 16
Nell
A cross 2017



Cat. 16
Nell
The sound of A face 2017



Cat. 2
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2014

Foreground:
Nell
With things being as they are ... 2017

Background, left to right:
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Waiyai 2020

Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Kulama 2014

Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy
Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute,
2020
Photo: Ian Hill





Left to right:

Nell

With things being as they are ... 2017

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

Purukuparli 2020

Waiyai 2020

Timothy Cook

Kulama 2013

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020

Photo: Ian Hill

Purukuparli story Pedro Wonaeamirri

Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami
japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma, punjami,
pumpi, wiya . . . Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami,
Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami
japumpunuma punjami, pumpi, wiya . . . Ngawulayapunjami
japumpunuma, punjami, pumpi, wiya

Old Tiwi songline.
Purukuparli calling out telling the world:
'now my son is dead, now we all have to follow him'.

A long time ago before there were many people on earth, there was a place called Yimpinari, on the eastern side of Melville Island. On this place there lived a small family: Purukuparli, Waiyai and Jinani. Purukuparli's brother Japarra was staying not far away on the other side of a creek. At that time, they were the only people on earth.

Purukuparli was a very important man to the Tiwi. He is the idea of a great man, like a cultural leader, strong and heroic. He introduced the Pukumani ceremony to all the people that have their home on the Tiwi Islands, north of Darwin. This story is of a time in the past that we call Parlingarri (olden times), before death came to the islands and when the differences between human, animal and Country were less clear. It was long time ago, in fact, Purukuparli's mother Muntankala who had brought light to the earth, she was the first to come up from the underworld with three children in a tunga (bark bag) on her back. We believe that as she crawled in the dark, she created the ocean straight between the two Tiwi islands with her body and then left her son Purukuparli and his two sisters on the dry sand.

Some years later, Purukuparli, Waiyai and their baby Jinani lived in a bush camp at the place called Yimpinari. One morning Waiyai said to Purukuparli, 'I'm going out to get some yinkiti [food] and kukuni [water].'

She put her son down under a shady tree and then went out in the bush alone searching for that yinkiti. While she was away, she saw Japarra and instead of looking for food she went off to make love

with him. Purukuparli who was still at the bush camp then went out for a walk. While he was walking around, he found his son dead under the tree where Waiyai had left him earlier. The wanarringa (sun) had moved in the sky and the shade of the tree was gone, leaving the baby exposed. He then started calling out to Waiyai, but she did not reply back to his calls and Purukuparli knew something was really wrong.¹

Purukuparli picked up his baby son and went looking for Waiyai, all the time calling out. Before he could find Waiyai, it was Japarra who answered his calls. ‘What’s wrong?’ he said.

‘My son is dead,’ Purukuparli said. ‘My son is dead and now we will all die. From now and forever.’

Japarra really wanted to help his brother and replied, ‘I will take our son for three days and bring him back to life.’

Purukuparli said back to him, ‘No, our son is dead.’²

1 Today whenever we go out hunting, we call out to see if everything is okay. Sometimes when you do not hear back you know that there is something wrong. We still call out on Country. Many parts of this story make up who we are as Tiwi people today.

2 In Tiwi way, because Purukuparli and Japarra are brothers they call Jinani ‘our son’. The boy connects with Japarra through the father’s side, therefore Japarra calls Jinani ‘son’ and Janini calls Japarra ‘father’. When siblings of the same gender have children on the Tiwi Islands they are also their children and they call their aunties and uncles ‘mum’ and ‘dad’. This is the Tiwi way.

He put his son back down under that tree and picked up his spear in anger and said, ‘miyuwarrimi’, which means ‘me and you fight’.

Japarra then picked up his own spear. Purukuparli threw his spear and first missed his brother. He then picked up a fighting stick and hit the side of Japarra’s forehead. Japarra did not fight back, but when Purukuparli threw that fighting stick and hit him, Japarra said: ‘waya juwa’ (finish) and put his fighting sticks down. He started singing to himself. Purukuparli stopped the fight and everything else was quiet. As Japarra was singing and dancing, he started flying up off the ground. He was a powerful man too, that moon man. He kept flying up far into the sky that covers the earth and that is where we see him today. Whenever there is a full moon we can still see the mark on his face where he got hit by his brother – the right side of his forehead.

The next morning where Purukuparli was staying at that bush camp near the beach, a pelican and egret came to meet him. Before these characters were birds, they were human. This was Parlingarri, a time when humans could change into animals. The birds had heard that Purukuparli was going to hold a ceremony for his son’s death. From Parlingarri to today, birds are still considered messengers for the Tiwi people; for my tribe the white cockatoo is a messenger for us.

After hearing about the ceremony, the pelican and egret offered feathers from their own bodies to make ceremonial ornaments such

as pamajini (armband), pimirtiki (headpiece), tokwayinga (feather ball) and impuja (false feather beard). Purukuparli made these ornaments to disguise himself from the spirit of his son. He had a big ceremony for Jinani – it was to become the first Pukumani ceremony. The whole time Waiyai was upset, crying and swearing to herself about what she had done. She felt very guilty.

As Purukuparli was dancing and singing in the ceremony, he was moving down the beach toward the sea.

‘Ngawulayampanjami punjamimi jumpunipunuma punjanimi’ – ‘We all have to follow,’ he was singing.

He picked his son up and as he walked, he stomped a beat into the ground with his feet and was singing to himself. This was to let the world know that everyone to come after this ceremony were to follow him.

‘You will all have to die and follow my son,’ he sang.

As he carried his son into the water it got deeper and deeper and the winga (saltwater) came up until they both disappeared under the surface – that was it.

Waiyai continued to cry and mourn for her deceased son. She was ashamed of herself and what she had done. Like today, partners can become ashamed. This was a lesson for that lady, that whole family and for all Tiwi. Then ashamed of herself, as she continued to cry,

she transformed into the curlew bird. Like the way the lessons of this story follow our people, the curlew continues to cry out at night. We hear her when it is dark at night-time. Calling out and searching for her dead son. Looking around for him under the light of Japarra – the moon.

This story of Purukuparli, his wife and son, is important to Tiwi life and culture. It teaches lessons about life and is also the beginning of our ceremonial culture. Since the time when Purukuparli danced his dead son into the sea at Yimpinari, the Tiwi people have come together for the Pukumani ceremony – to sing, dance and farewell the spirit of our family so they can be at rest back on Country. Pukumani ceremony is a grieving ceremony, but it is also a celebration of life. Every dance has a song. The song and dance are how you connect to the land and the spirit of the deceased person. To let go and say goodbye, see you next time on your Country.

Resource for spelling and translation:

Jennifer R Lee. *Ngawurranungururumagi Nginingawila Ngapangiraga: Tiwi English Dictionary*. Bathurst Island, NT: Nguiu Nginingawila Literature Production, 1993.

Pedro Wonaeamirri is a senior Tiwi cultural leader with significant knowledge of the ‘hard’ Tiwi language and the songs and dance important in Tiwi culture. Wonaeamirri grew up in Pirlangimpi (Pularumpi) on Melville Island, where he was born in 1974. He was educated in Darwin and returned to the Tiwi Islands in 1989, moving to Milikapiti in the same year that Jilamara Arts and Crafts was incorporated, where he currently practices as a senior artist.



Cat. 17 and cat. 18
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Waiyai 2020

Cat. 18
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Waiyai (detail) 2020





Cat. 17
 Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli (detail) 2020
 Cat. 6
 Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy
 Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019





Cat. 4 and cat. 5
 Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy
 Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Pukumani Pedro Wonaeamirri

Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi,
Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi,
Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Wurra wurra, pumpi, wiya ...
Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi,
Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi,
Puthaningja, Puthurrungulimayi, Wurra wurra, pumpi, wiya

Culture is always changing and moving forward,
this is my grandfather's songline about the sound
of the first bulldozer coming to make roads
on Melville Island for the first time.

When a Tiwi person dies, a time called Pukumani begins. At the start there is a smoking ceremony to cleanse areas where the person lived and worked; the funeral when the body is buried; then after some time a small ceremony to start the making of the tutini (Pukumani poles); and finally the main Pukumani ceremony where the spirit is put to rest.

Six months or a year after a person passes, the family of the deceased begin to organise the Pukumani ceremony. During Pukumani, we do not use this person's name, even people who hold that name are called by their middle name. The Pukumani ceremony marks the end of this time, six months or a year after the funeral. After the main ceremony the name comes back and Pukumani for that person is over.

The nieces and nephews who are the close family from the father's side (in Tiwi way these are also the children, like 'son' and 'daughter') first organise a small ceremony to start things off. This little ceremony is sometimes organised four weeks before the main ceremony – this is the beginning. The sons and daughters dance with a tomahawk, lighter¹ and white ochre. When dancing they give these things to the workers for the main Pukumani ceremony – these workers are always the in-laws of the deceased. There is a special dance for the giving of the tomahawk, lighter and white ochre – each has their own separate song and dance.

1 Today we give modern-day lighters, but before lighters they used to give out boxes of matches and long before that fire sticks. When we say lighter, we mean fire as a gift to the in-laws.

It is the in-laws who are commissioned to make Pukumani poles and do all the work in preparation for the final ceremony. When they are given the tomahawk these workers go out and cut the timber for making the tutini and shelter. The tomahawk is to cut the wood and the lighter is to burn and prepare the wood. It is also used to burn the yellow ochre and make the red colour. The ochre is to paint the poles, tunga (bark bags) and the bodies of the dancers.

When the close family are ready, they ask the workers to begin making the shelter. Close family we call warnatawi, which means father and aunty of the deceased person. It has been very important since Parlingarri (olden days) until today, that the close relatives do not work, because they are in Pukumani. It is taboo and they are grieving. During the time between the little ceremony and main ceremony, close family should observe grieving behaviour. In Parlingarri, close family could not work, travel anywhere or go hunting and warnatawi are even forbidden to touch food.

The workers prepare an area for the ceremony that has been selected by the close family. For example, when I organised a Pukumani ceremony for my son, I selected a space next to my house, in a spot where you can see over the ocean to our Country, then my son's in-laws built a shade there. They start by collecting materials to build the shade. This includes forked timber lengths that we call rails or in Tiwi language, 'bubliey'. We put six or nine of these upright in the ground in a square shape as posts to support straight rails hung between these

forks. Once the wood frame is built then we use arliba (coconut leaves) to cover the top and create the shade under which we will yoi (dance). The workers then collect sand from the beach to prepare the ground under the shade. We do this for dancing and also to remember Purukuparli, who danced down the beach towards the sea with his baby Jinani during the first Pukumani ceremony. The commissioned tutini are placed upright in the ground at one end of the prepared area. Once the workers have finished the poles, built the shade and prepared the ground for dancing, the ceremony is ready to begin.

Always in preparation for the ceremony we do jilamara – body painting. We always use natural ochres from Melville Island to paint ourselves: turtiyangini (white), tunuwuni (black charcoal), arrikinga (yellow) and yarringa (red). The red is yellow ochre that we have cooked on the fire. The design goes on the poles, tunga (bark bags) that are made for the ceremony and the bodies of the family. The body painting, the ceremonial ornaments like the pamajini (armband), and tokwayinga (feather ball) are used to disguise ourselves from the spirit of the dead, 'mopartiti'. When we are dancing all painted up, we are disguising ourselves from the spirit world. That is the meaning of the word jilamara: design that we paint on ourselves to disguise ourselves. Now we use these design styles to make art at the art centre and still for ceremony as well. When individuals are all painted up the designs are never the same. Each person has their own unique jilamara that is based on how they connect to the deceased and other things, like their animal totem.

The ceremony always starts in the morning with a smoking for cleansing the area before entering the dancing area. We burn the kutukuni (ironwood) leaves and circle the smoke together as a group calling out to the deceased spirit. The dancing goes all day and finishes in the afternoon. Everyone takes part in the ceremony in different ways. Some family members are like leaders and they call out to different groups to come forward and dance. Everyone on the Tiwi Islands is given an animal totem at birth based on their father's family. For example, a leader of the ceremony can call all people with brolga totem to come forward and dance jilarti (brolga). The ceremony continues with dancers coming forward and dancing different totems to the rhythm of the whole group clapping their hands together as one. The groups dance towards the Pukumani poles and sometimes the family will put a photo of the deceased person on one of the poles for everyone to look at as they sing and dance. When there is a ceremony there is always a singer chosen who is a strong cultural leader, who knows all the different songlines. Totem dance is different to the dance of how you are related to the deceased person. Then when you dance that connection song, the totem comes in with a separate song. Dancing for a funeral is often shorter than when we dance for Pukumani; it is always much longer and about our totem, as well as how we are related to the deceased. In a funeral you cannot dance for your mother, or your uncle (mother's brother) or your brothers and sisters from your mother's tribe. Dancing for Pukumani ceremony is different. The Pukumani ceremony is for everyone to dance and get involved and connect with the spirit of the deceased – to let go of that person and finish the grieving process.

The in-laws help throughout the ceremony, continually smoothing the sand area with a rake for the next round of dancers. At the end of the yoi (dance) in the afternoon, the in-laws are paid for their work by the immediate family. Before they had money, long time ago they used to give ceremonial ornaments, spears and sometimes young women – now it is just money. One at a time the in-laws collect money from the family. With a special song and special dance, they come forward at the end of the ceremony and collect their pay. When these arrangements finish, the warnatawi (immediate family – father and aunty) can eat and touch food again – it means no more Pukumani. All the family then have yinkiti (food) together.

In Parlingarri (old times), the poles were always taken to the grave on that same day. Now sometimes on the same day or next day the in-laws take the poles from their place under the shade area. They are taken to the person's grave site and erected around the grave. The poles are left in this spot in the bush. No tribe or clan group can repaint or replace another pole; they are left to age over time.

I had ceremony for my mother, then I had ceremony for my father and now I have had one for my son. I was the leader of these ceremonies because of my close relationship to these family members. Like for my ceremony, I grieve in sadness but also remember and just let it all go, all the time remembering. For the Tiwi, Pukumani ceremony is about letting go, but always remembering. We believe that it is a way to send the spirit back to their Country. From then and forever, whenever we

go to this Country we always call out to the spirits of those relatives and let them know we are entering their place. We say hello, let them know why we are there and introduce any visitors we might have with us. They are at rest on Country, but always there. If we don't call out to them, then we believe something bad will happen.

Resource for spelling and translation:

Jennifer R Lee. *Ngawurranungururumagi Nginingawila Ngapangiraga: Tiwi English Dictionary*. Bathurst Island, NT: Nguiu Nginingawila Literature Production, 1993.

Kurrumungarimily Pukamani site,
Melville Island, 2019. Courtesy of
Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association,
Milikapiti. Photo: Will Heathcote



Kurumungarimily
Pukamani site, Melville
Island, 2019. Courtesy of
Jilamara Arts and Crafts
Association, Milikapiti.
Photo: Will Heathcote



Foreground, left to right:
Nawurapu Wunungmurra
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2012
Background, left to right:
Patrick Freddy
Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Waiyai 2020
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Timothy Cook and Patrick
Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Installation view, La Trobe
Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill





From far left:
 Cat. 21
 Nawurapu Wunungmurra
 Garrapara 2007
 Cat. 22
 Nawurapu Wunungmurra
 Garrapara 2007
 Cat. 21
 Nawurapu Wunungmurra
 Garrapara (detail) 2007



Manikay: The song knows the destination

Wukun Wanambi

Edited by Kade McDonald

Death is related to life, life is related to death. The manikay (sacred song) is related to the Country. It doesn't matter if you are gapu (water) Country or land Country, the manikay belongs to that place. If we sing about water, we can connect the people to that place. We can know where it [manikay] comes from.

We can complete the whole manikay cycle with the Bāpurru (funeral). How do we know the story? Through the songline.

We can say: this song is about the wind and this wind can cycle around the body and move around to find the destiny and where it will be. The wind will pick the spirit and relocate it to his Country or place of destiny. The song knows the destination of the deceased's resting place.

Wind

Wata marrtji burrburrun garminydi,
Wata marrtji burrburrun guṇḁa nyurrunyurru,
burrburrun wata dhukuyuna,
burrburrun wata garminydi wukiḁi ga djok-Marrakulu Wukiḁi.

The wind cycle, north, east, south and west has blown across Marrakulu Wukiḁi (resting place for Dhuwa moiety – Djapu, Dhudi Djapu and Djambarrpuyṇu clans).

When we do this, everything allows a natural way for the deceased to lay down quietly and be at one.

The gurrutu (relationship) system, allows the family groups to come in, the Märi (grandfather/grandmother) comes in and takes over the element of moving the deceased. When Märi controls the time and moves the body then the other Yolŋu can come in (to ceremony) with bilma (clapsticks) and manikay to assist the Bäpurru.

The larrakitj (hollow log coffin), before, the old people used to keep the bones in the larrakitj. The bones would go into the larrakitj. This is the old times but the song hasn't changed. Nothing has changed. From the beginning to today.

We still plan the ceremony through Märi as we always have. The Märi is responsible for all the things relating to the deceased.

Yolŋu can sing the manikay to bring the life of the spirit back to the Country and into the people of his clan so other people can be attached with the spirit as well, as we continue to move along the songline.

That songline is the Guwak (nightbird, Koel Cuckoo) and it tells where the spirit can go down, for Dhuwa that is Guwak, a bird.

Guwak nightbird

Burrkun yaliyali wayimbaba dilimdilim liya ŋäthi ŋarra yurru dhiyaku dharpatjiwu marawili wulŋultji'wu.

The night bird (Guwak) cries at Djarrakpi telling that someone passed away. The bird flew to Yilpara, Gäŋgän and to different places letting people know and continues, the spirit went back on their journey, until it reaches the homeland where the deceased is resting in their home ground.

The water – the cloud touches us and we can cry, cry along the songline. The journey begins from where we hold it, then it travels across the sky, the water and the Country. He goes back to his own land. The spirit will find its destiny. If I die my spirit goes back to my Country, Gurka'wuy (Trial Bay).

It's more about the spirit and its resting place in his Country. The spirit and body cannot move without song. The body can be here (Yirrkala) or anywhere but the spirit will go back to its rightful resting place, like for me its Gurka'wuy.

As the deceased is resting in peace and quiet, then we can sing the song cycle of the manikay, this is where the destiny of your spirit goes back into your Country. So when we say:

Wulata, Wulata, rolmi, rolmi marrŋal maypa gapu dhallirr'yuna.

The spirit of deceased women or men returned from his/her journey to their Country.

The manjan (cloud) sung by Djapu clan also tells the story of the deceased, people going back to their home.

When we bring the larrakitj it represents the image of the deceased who has passed away. For Dhuwa or for Yirritja it's the same thing. We don't hide it, we put it up. It is the image of everything we see and for where the spirit goes.

This is the memorial. We see this as a larrakitj but also as the songline, the place and the journey of the deceased.

You can sing the manikay of the journey. This is the beginning of the cycle of the journey.

Sun going down . . .

Walirr nħaŋal dhunbiryuna nyikthuna gulanthū warrarra
dhunbiryuna.

As the sun is going down and changed colour to red or orange,
the spirit is on their way to their Yirralka (homeland)

Honey (Yarrpany)

Rakiny malka ŋalyun yolŋu'wal mokuy'wal,

Murruymurruy'yurr ŋayi gularrwaŋa yothun mirmir'nha
mandhulba.

Yothu gularrwaŋa barrku djalkthurr bala Gurkawuy'lil ga barrku
djalkthurr Gowutjurr Raymaŋgirr.

When the deceased one is resting, the special white string hanging above the deceased represents the Dhuwa Guku (honey).

The song continues and also the bees. The bees started their journey from Gurka'wuy and stopped at Raymaŋgirr. From Raymaŋgirr they flew again to the Wagilak tribe.

Our manikay never ends, it has been passed on from generation to generation. The manikay knows our destiny, it knows the destination.

Wukan Wanambi is a leader of the Marrakulu clan (Dhuwa moiety), an award-winning artist and Director of The Mulka Project, the media centre at Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala. Wanambi recently exhibited with La Trobe Art Institute in *unbranded* (2019) and worked as curatorial consultant on the exhibition *Miwaŋj* (2018). He is a co-curator of the exhibition *Maŋayin* at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.



Cat. 20
Nawurapu Wunurjmurra
Mokuy 2012



Cat. 20
Nawurapu Wunungmurra
Mokuy (details) 2012





Cat. 20
Nawurapu Wunungmurra
Mokuy (details) 2012



Bäpurru

Yinimala Gumana in conversation with Kade McDonald

Yinimala Gumana When someone has passed away, family or relatives participate in Yolŋu ceremonial way, the deceased person goes back to where they come from or where they are coming from and that's why Yolŋu, every family or relative goes and participates in ceremony.

Kade McDonald So when you say 'where they come from' do you mean their ceremonial place?

YG Yes ceremonial place, like from every significant place where they have promised land.

KM When you are talking about the family and the community response, are we talking about the fact that they also have to get together to coordinate the roles and responsibilities?

YG Yes, to coordinate and also to mourn them, the deceased.

KM Is that the same response for Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties?

YG Yes, both for Dhuwa and Yirritja and to make sure people from the two sides of Dhuwa and Yirritja always have to work together.

KM Like the custodian or the djungaya [caretaker, manager or custodian who inherit rights and responsibilities to land and ceremonies via their mother's clan].

YG Yes Djungaya or Waku-waṯaṯu [sister's son, designated handler of bodily remains], could be, Gathu-waṯaṯu [the proper patrilineal great grandfather's clan]. They all have to work together to coordinate the ceremony.

KM Do clans do it differently?

YG Clans do it differently and according to their cultural protocol, like songlines or sand sculptures and there could be other objects that they make, or display and put in place, like ceremony and song. But the ceremonial song cycle they have to do goes from the start, from the beginning, as you know, from the horizon, from where the horizon is coming up and all the way down towards the inland

Country. The sand sculpture [yinjapunapu] that I mentioned is very important for the person, because that is the way it goes down deep into the ground. It opens the way for that person to go deep in the ground because our bundurr, bones, will go back to the Country, where we are coming from.

KM So your bones will return back to the Country?

YG Yes, the bone and also the flesh. The spirit will go back to the Country too, to where they have been going through, where they have been moving through, along the coastal area or along the inland Country.

KM So the spirit goes back to their ancestral birthplace?

YG Yo [Yes].

KM So for the spirit to go back, for the soul to return to the ancestral domain, is it essential that the appropriate songs, manikay [songlines] and bungul [dance] are practised?

YG Yeah, through the song cycle and ceremonial way of putting the person back to the Country.

KM Who organises those ceremonies, when you talk about the custodian or the djungaya?

YG The main person in my clan. My clan have to decide, or the other relatives, like Gutharra [maternal grandchild] or Märi [maternal grandmother] or other relatives, family members. But the owner who runs that particular ceremony, he is the one to give the responsibilities and authority to djungaya mala [caretaker (of the clan)] or to any other relatives like Waku-waṭaṇu [sister's son, designated handler of bodily remains] or Nāṇḍi-waṭaṇu [the proper mother clan], mother and child.

KM Is it important that all the appropriate people participate in this ceremony?

YG Yes of course, in our world, we always go and participate, all Yolṇu mala [clan or clans].

KM When you talk about these ceremonies is it less about the individual and more about a community as a collective of people, that help take that individual's spirit back to its ceremonial birthplace?

YG Yeah.

KM Like a whole clan, like gurruṭu [kinship or Yolṇu foundation¹] in a way?

1 For a detailed description of gurruṭu see Nici Cumpston, ed., *Tarnanthi: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2019).

YG Yeah, all clan, gurruu.

KM Everybody has their purpose and their responsibility in that Yolŋu law.

YG Because of gurruu. Without gurruu we aren't connected to each other, we aren't connected to the Country and the clan estates.

KM In a way you could say that each person has a greater sense of community in their role, rather than like balanda [non-Indigenous person] where it's about the individual, this is about everybody having a purpose yeah?

YG Yes.

KM And that purpose is defined through gurruu?

YG Yes. Way back, very very way back. Way back when the old people were here, and when someone died, they put that person into the platform shelter and leave it for another couple of months or years and then they go back and then they make big ceremonies and sand sculpture and cut hollow log and put the bones back to the larrakitj [hollow memorial pole]. Then they put that person back to their Country, but also other areas, when they die in another area and they will make the ceremonial connection to that Country where that person is coming from.

KM And then after that, many years later, the ceremony of the larrakitj is practiced yeah, or months later. Can you tell me a little bit about what is the purpose of the larrakitj and what was its role, or what is its role still? Not about the art, but about the time when it was used for burial.

YG Well, the purpose of the larrakitj, the way our old people used to use it, way back when there was no coffin, that's why they made the larrakitj, to put the persons bones into the larrakitj. That is the purpose, so that person can go back to their Country and they make clan designs to go with it, miny'tji [clan designs or patterns].

KM That miny'tji, that clan design, does that relate to that person who has died?

YG It has to be coming from a very close relationship, like Märi [maternal grandmother] and Gutharra [maternal grandchild] or the owner like Walkur [great grandchild, patrilineal line], what we call Walkur.

KM When the ceremony is happening, do the people participating in the ceremony have designs painted on their body or gapan [white clay] on their forehead? If so, how does that relate to the funeral ceremony?

YG They put white clay all over the body and also red ochre as well. That is the very important thing that Yolŋu people use so they can go

and mourn, and they can go free and close to that area where they are having the Bāpurru [funeral ceremony]. It protects them in a way.

KM But now when we go into the art centre and we see larrakitj being painted by different artists including yourself and other people like Gunybi Ganambarr pushing the boundaries, how do you see that transition now? How has the purpose of the larrakitj changed to serve a contemporary art function? Does it still represent the same thing?

YG Yes, it still represents the same thing through gurrutu and through that person who does the painting and puts that miny'tji on the larrakitj, according to gurrutu you know, because they want to describe that Country you know through the miny'tji.

KM I mean they're not just beautiful patterns are they? They're still related to –

YG They're still related to that Country and to the ceremony and to gurrutu. What they call that Country, for example, what I have to call my clan or any other clan next to us, you know? I can call it Nāndi [mother] or Waku [nephew], or it could be another relative.

KM What was your relationship to Mr Wunūmurra?

YG He is my cousin and we are both Dhalwaṇu, and we are both speaking one language, but two homelands, Gurrumuru and

Gāṅgān, and also Garrapara. We all share in the expertise together, all of us, all Dhalwaṇu people. And the person [Mr Wunūmurra] is my cousin and I have my family here with me, from his side. Like my wife. I married one of his nieces.

KM He was a good man huh?

YG Yo. He was a good man and his father was a very great artist and he was a law man as well, and humble and gentle man. And he was a knowledgeable man.

KM Any thoughts on Mr Wunūmurra's work on his mokuy or bark paintings?

YG Mokuy is the spirit woman, also I didn't mention the spirit woman lives in that Country too at Garrapara, the other one right in the land, right in the middle of the area there near Baraltja, what they call Balambala, between Gāṅgān and Baraltja, a place called Balambala. That's where the other spirit lives on that Country too and also around in this area where the mokuy is. What does it say about this work?

KM It says that these are happy spirits. They are going home. The spirits come in together Dhuwa and Yirritja to the sacred ground called Balambala, past Gāṅgān, the other side for all the mokuy to get together.

YG That's the place that I mentioned, Balambala. In our creation story Balambala is the place where they are making yidaki and they were blowing the yidaki in each direction to Baraltja which is for the Bitharrpuyṇu Mokuy and Gulguḷmi Mokuy which is coming from another Maḍarrpa clan, from a place called Gayngarra next to the Baykultji area, and also to the Baykultji which is the Nṇḍurrpuyṇu Mokuy and also this way down towards Bokuy where the turn off is to Bāniyala. That's where a place called Bokuy is. And that's where, from Balambala it was calling, blowing yidaki, Gan'bulapula mokuy making the yidaki and also making very special things, what they call yuwan [ceremonial object/yam] and calling to each Country, to bring all the different spirits together where they have been having ceremony there in Balambala. I have a recording there from my grandfather talking about what I am talking about.

KM So this story, although Mr Wunṇmurra made sculptures and paintings, this story exists before him and will continue to exist way beyond him.

YG Yo.

KM Can you talk a bit about Mr Wunṇmurra's work and how it relates to the songs of Garrapara, Muṇurru and the journey of the spirit?

YG Well, we always tell it straight and always put it into our artwork or into our ceremony and into our words, talking about the Country which is the saltwater Country, and as the water's coming in

and out, rushing and bringing new things, new life, to the Country, and that comes up to the shore where the land is. That's where our bones go back to Country, to the ground, to the soil, like yinapuyapu.

KM And the spirit?

YG Back to the Country where the deceased person belongs or is coming from.

KM It's like a cycle yeah?

YG Yeah, it's a cycle we go back to and when someone passes away, a beloved one passes away, that person also keeps coming to that family and be with them, but we all know they go back to where they are coming from.

KM Can you do a couple of lines of that manikay, of that song?

YG When we go out to the ocean, we caught some fish, then we go back to the land, to the shore and we start to eat that fish and we put that fish back to the Country. That is the way to put that fish back to that, to the ground. We are putting all those bones, flesh back to that, to the ground.

KM Same like in the Bāpurru [funeral ceremony] way.

YG Same like Bāpurru.

Yinimala Gumana is a Yolŋu man of increasing authority, cousin of Nawurapu Wunungmurra and member of the Dhalwaŋu clan. Gumana has been anointed as a future Dalkarra/Djirrikay (leader of Dhuwa and Yirritja ceremonies). He is a practising artist and member of the managing committee at Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, where he was also elected Chairperson in 2011. Gumana is co-curator of the exhibition *Madayin* at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.

Kade McDonald is the Executive Director of Durrmu Arts Aboriginal Corporation and was the Coordinator of Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre for six years. McDonald is the Australian project manager and a co-curator of the exhibition *Madayin* at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.

Cat. 19
Nawurapu Wunungmurra
Garrapara (detail) 2012





From far left to right:

Michael Needham

Interstice 2017

Nawurapu Wunungmurra

Mokuy 2012

Richard Lewer

Crucifixes 2018

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020

Photo: Ian Hill




Cat. 10
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes 2018
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill



Cat. 10
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes (detail) 2018



Cat. 9
Richard Lewer
*As a bald man, I miss going to the
barber 2019*



> Play audio

Voices and footsteps echo and decay from room-to-room.
Cool, dry, filtered air circulates, constantly moving
around your body.



Cat. 13
Michael Needham
Interstice 2017

Cat. 12
Michael Needham
Monument to Muther [sic] 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art
Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill



Cat. 12
Michael Needham
Monument to Muther [sic] (detail) 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill



One foot on the ground, one foot in the water

Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, Nawurapu Wunurmurra

Curated by Travis Curtin

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Cover: Nell, *Mother of the Dry Tree* (detail), 2017, acrylic paint and mixed media on linen, wood, 296.5 × 223 cm. Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney.

Photo: Jenni Carter

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