
MORNINGTON ISLAND ART

Mirndiyan Gununa Aboriginal
Corporation

Legacies Living On:

Commemorating

Goobalathaldin

Dick Roughsey and

Mirdidingkingathi

Juwarnda Sally Gabori

Legacies Living On:

Legacies Living On articulates the intertwining dreaming and storylines of both the Kaidildt, Yangkal and Lardil people now based at Gununa (Mornington Island) in the Gulf of Carpentaria, paying homage to the leading modern artists from their respective clans.

This exhibition is dedicated to honouring and celebrating the continuing legacy and impact of the late great abstract painter Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori who in her 80s, inspired the current group of exhibiting Kaidildt artists, Amy Loogatha, Elsie Gabori, Dolly Loogatha, Agnes Kohler, Ethel Thomas, Betty Williams, Amanda Gabori and Dorothy Gabori toward their successful artistic careers depicting the skies, rocks, birthplaces and Country of Bentinck Island through vibrant acrylic paintings.

In dialogue with Lardil contemporary artists Joelene Roughsey, Roxanne Thomas, Renee Wilson and John Williams continue to paint Lardil Dreaming and pay homage to the late Lardil artist Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey and his rich artistic legacy.

The exhibition shows that the abiding influence centred on deep ties to Country of the two late Elders is stronger than ever, and that their ground-breaking work underpins the creativity of the MIArt Studios.

The exhibition reflects the MIArt Studio environment, a place of shared culture and creativity, a place where stories are told and memories are kept alive. Joyful and exuberant most of the time, but tinged with the sadness of personal and family histories dating back.

Country is the location as much as it is the heritage and the abiding subject matter of the artists.

These artists confidently tell their stories about their families' deep-rooted connections to the 'old people'. This results in works of outstanding beauty and clarity, because culture is strong and central to everything.

A memorial tribute to MIArt's much-loved senior artist, the late Ethel Thomas, features a collaborative painting by Ethel and her sisters, Amy Loogatha, Dolly Loogatha and Elsie Gabori, to honour Ethel's lasting contribution to the cultural expression and MIArt's movement, a shining testament to the enduring legacies of great Elder artists from this region.

This exhibition is presented at NorthSite Contemporary Arts and has been developed in collaboration with Mirndiyan Gununa Aboriginal Corporation, Mornington Island Art

AGNES KOHLER

Kayardild 1952

Mirraa Kamarra

2020

acrylic on Belgian linen

198 x 198 cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"There are different coloured rocks that can be found on Bentinck Island and in our Kayardild language we call them Mirraa (pretty) Kamarra (rocks)."

AMY LOOGATHA

ELSIE GABORI

DOLLY LOOGATHA

ETHEL THOMAS

Kayardild collaborative work

Nyinyilki Ngurruwarra

2020

acrylic on Belgian linen

198 x 198 cm

Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"This is the stone fish trap at Nyinyilki, we call the stone fish trap Ngurruwarra. It's just down from the outstation."

DOLLY LOOGATHA

Kayardild 1946

Turtle Story

2021

acrylic on Belgian linen

197 x 197 cm

Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"In our Kayardild language we call the sea turtle Bangaa, dugong Bijarrb and sword shark Thaburruru. Bangaa is my dreaming, Bijarrb is our clan totem for Rukuthi people and my fathers' name was Thaburruru - he was a great leader and family man. The Bangaa is important in our culture as food and it has sacred places on my Bentinck Island - you have to be careful when you visit, always take an owner of Country when you visit there. At Kombali River there's a turtle that appeared after the McKenzie Massacre. The Elders say McKenzie's daughter had fallen and drowned in the river and her spirit became a turtle and today if you go to Kombali you may see the turtle. It's a very sacred place for all our people not only because of the Turtle Spirit but what had happened during McKenzie's time on Bentinck - a lot of our people were killed on that very Country."

AMANDA GABORI

Kayardild 1966

My Father's Country

2021

acrylic on Belgian linen

198 x 198 cm

Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"My Dad was born on the edge of Kabararri south of Bentinck Island. He carries the name Kabararrjngathi, his Country - that's why he is called "Gabori", the English corruption of the place name. There are lots of grasses there called malbaa that the women used to gather to make woven grass bags called mijilda."

BETTY WILLIAMS

JOHN WILLIAMS

Lardil collaborative work

Emu in the Sky and Thuwathu

2021
acrylic on Belgian linen
198 x 198 cm
Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

Top Story: "Emu and crocodile are up in the Milky Way with Kangaroo and Shooting Star. The shooting star represents Thuwathu the Rainbow Serpent's eye and it's a warning sign that someone is going to get very sick, you don't point at it and put out the fires if you see it because someone is sick. People who have dreaming like these totem spirits their spirit go up to the sky when they die. Lardil people still believe this today and they tell people about where they'll go when they die."

Bottom Story: Is how Thuwathu the Rainbow Serpent remained on the earth - his resting place is on and in the land and sea. His spirit is in sacred places and people can get sick if they mix sea and land food, make sure you wash hands before entering water otherwise you get malgary. We still believe in this, it's a part of our culture amongst the people of the Wellesley Islands - this story is the same all over!"

ROXANNE THOMAS

RENEE WILSON

Lardil collaborative work

Ngithan Nyerrwe Dulka

2021
acrylic on Belgian linen
278 x 281 cm
Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"Ngithan Nyerrwe Dulka in my Lardil language means My Home. Bibad is on the eastward side of Mornington Island it's our traditional homeland. The white and blue represents the fish traps that are along the river mouth that our family over the generations have built to feed our people with sea food.

The pattern in the middle represents the river itself winding its way across country bringing with it crabs, fish, shell food and anything else that would live in the mangroves. The last bit of the painting is the ochre-coloured salt pan with its pretty rocks scattered across the landscape with the mangroves separating it from the river and land!"

AMANDA JANE GABORI

DOROTHY GABORI

Australian born 1970

Our Mother's Country

2019
acrylic on Belgian linen
195.5 x 196.5 cm
Courtesy of the Artists & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"This artwork is about our Mum, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori. She was taken away from her country, but she never lost her creative roots.

Her art is bright and light, just like the land she was born in, Mirdidingki, on the south side of Bentinck Island.

This is her Country, where the Big Lake is!"

DOROTHY GABORI

Kayardild 1959

Nyinyilki Ngurruwarra

2021
acrylic on Belgian linen
198 x 198 cm
Courtesy of the Artist & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"This artwork is of the stone fish traps on Bentinck!"

JOELENE ROUGHSEY

Lardil 1982

Thuwathu and Marnbil, Djin-Djin and Dewallewal

2021

acrylic on Belgian linen

198 x 198 cm

Courtesy of the Artist & Mirndiyan Gununa,
Mornington Island Art Centre.

"This fellow made a humpy, this fellow, Thuwathu, the Rainbow Serpent. And his sister, his sister Bulthuku (Shore Bird), was there. She was there. He made a humpy, and was going around hunting, with the people. A big wind came and overtook the people. All these people. This fellow Rainbow Serpent, his humpy was a huge humpy. His sister Bulthuku was sleeping nearby, with her child. A little child. Jindirrbu (Willy-Wagtail) was its name. The rain was coming, rain in the distance, at night.

Sheet lightning appeared. There was rain in the distance. A big rain, off in the distance. At night it overtook the people. The child got cold. This person's, Bulthuku's.

'Hey, brother! Take my child. The rain has gotten here. It's started falling! 'Mmmmmm ... no. This is for my head, this place in the east!

She went back west ... she went back west, the sister. The sister and the niece. She covered the child with a little paperbark and made a fire. 'Hey, brother,' she went back east, 'Hey, brother, take my child. This rain has gotten big. It's started falling. It got big! 'Mmmm ... this is for my, my shins, this place here in the east!

She goes back; it's no good. She keeps covering the child over, in the west, with the paperbark. She keeps trying. It's no good.

'Hey, brother, my, my child has started dying, our little child, brother, she's started dying! 'Mmmm, this is for my ribs, this place in the east, I won't give it to you!

'You have a big humpy, brother!

But he doesn't give her anything. She goes back west. She builds a fire.

'It's no good, my child has died!

The little child, Willy-Wagtail. And she goes back to the east, in a rage, and makes a bark torch. She burns it in the west. She will sit there now and burn her brother's humpy.

She burns it, now. Right around, she burns it right around. He's fast asleep, just snoring away. The flames are huge. He's burned badly, Rainbow Serpent, inside the humpy. He writhe in agony. He'll writhe in his death throes, there. He'll writhe in agony there, he'll cry out as he writhe in his death throes. He's dead now. He sings as he comes out every which way. He speaks, and sings, in the places he goes, there to the north, he sings and leaves his own sister behind."

"The first men and woman to come to Mornington Island were Marnbil, Djin-Djin and Dewallewal. Djin-Djin was married to Marnbil and Dewallewal is Din-Djin's uncle. These three made the land, creating all the rivers, hills, animals, trees, wells, making fish traps. They gave each animal a sacred place, and name, and made ceremonies for them, so that they could be protected.

Now Dewallewal did not have a wife of his own so he decided to steal Djin-Djin, thinking that Marnbil wouldn't know. Marnbil knew that Dewallewal had broken the law and he knew that he had stolen Djin-Djin, so he had to kill him. That was the law.

Marnbil wounded Dewallewal with a spear. Dewallewal shot straight up into the sky like a whirly wind, still with the spear stuck in his back and cursed man to die from all things. Before that, man had been immortal, but Dewallewal's curse meant that they would die."

Today on my Great Grandfather's Country, Barakiah, top end of Mornington Island there are three rocks, symbolic of Marnbil, Dewallewal and Djin Djin. These rocks are surrounded by sand and is a very sacred site to our people."