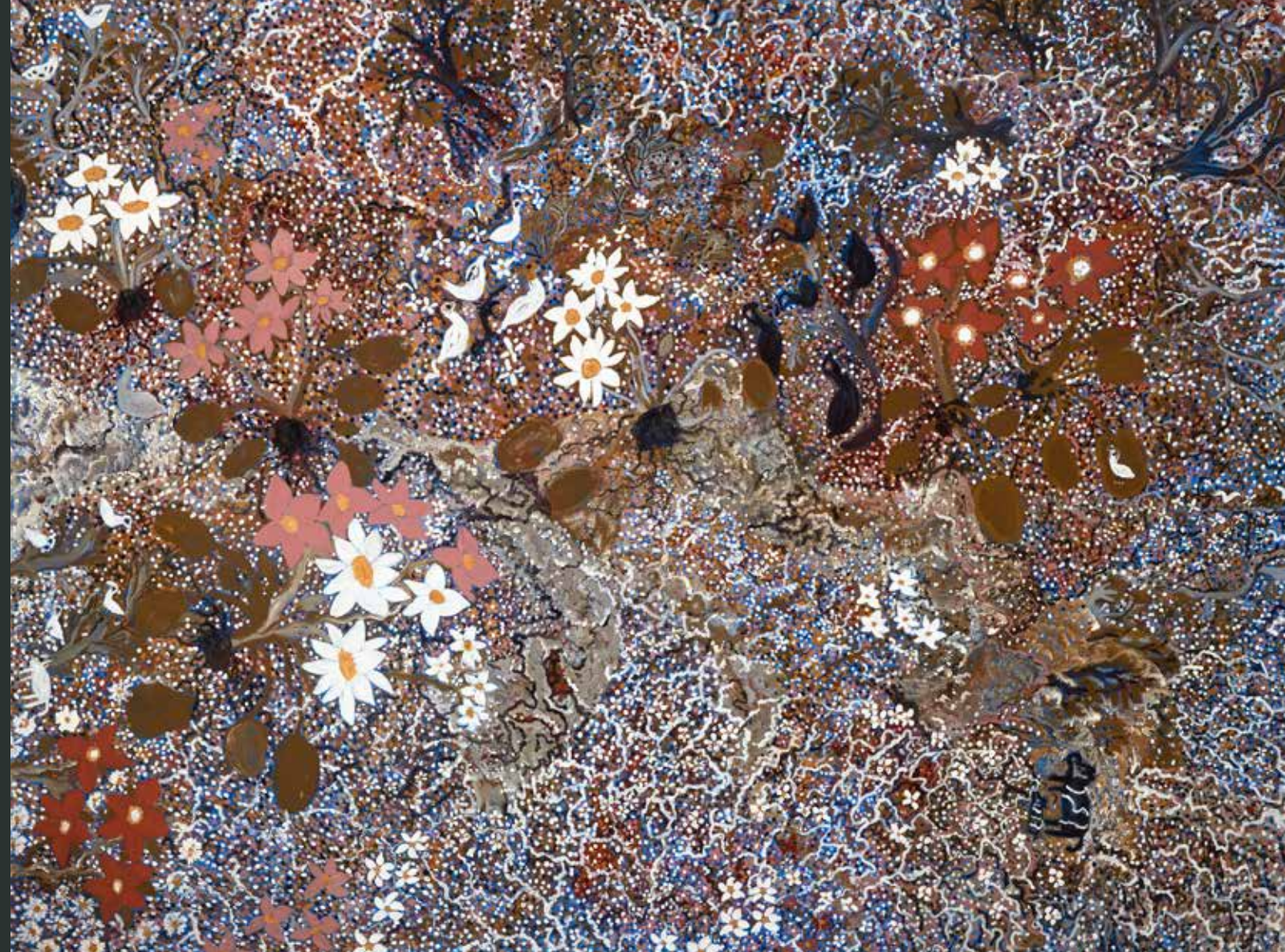


Similarly, artist Janet Koongotema, a senior Elder of the Winchanam Clan, came to painting in 2010, bringing with her a sophisticated understanding of woven form developed through decades of making dilly bags, baskets, and ceremonial objects. This deep knowledge of fibre practice is carried directly into her paintings. Repeated linear marks, interwoven patterns, and rhythmic brushwork evoke the physical processes of weaving while simultaneously mapping Country from multiple perspectives.

Further west, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, senior Kaiadilt women Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and Thunduyingathi Bijarrib May Moodoonuthi began to develop a painterly language unlike any other in Australia. As Professor Nicholas Evans observed, their work ‘stemmed from a culture of seeing more than a culture of painting’. Painting with acrylic without an established tradition of painting on canvas, these women approached the medium with remarkable confidence and intuition.

Gabori, who began painting at the age of eighty-one, transformed memories of Bentinck Island into compositions that dissolve the boundaries between abstraction and landscape. Rather than describing Country through symbolic convention, she employed bold colour, sweeping gesture, and monumental scale to evoke places of deep significance. As curator Judith Ryan observed, Gabori was ‘an artist’s artist’, unconstrained by ethnographic expectation. Her paintings reveal the extraordinary capacity of paint to communicate memory, loss, and belonging through an intensely personal visual language.

Across *Brush*, painting emerges as far more than a means of recording Country. It becomes a language through which women articulate identity, cultural authority, and lived experience. Whether through Hobson’s expressive brushwork or Gabori’s expansive fields of colour, each artist has developed a painterly vocabulary that is unmistakably her own. Collectively, these works affirm the central role of women in shaping contemporary Australian painting, demonstrating that innovation within Indigenous painting practice lies not in a shared aesthetic, but in the extraordinary individuality of each artist’s hand.



27 Jun –
4 Oct 2026

BRUSH WOMEN PAINTERS

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INSIDE IMAGE:

Rosella NAMOK
Aangkum (Ungkum)
b.1979, Cairns, Queensland
Bubba... he cries... I can't think 1997
synthetic polymer paint on paper
Cairns Art Gallery Collection.
Gift of the Lockhart River Art Gang, 2005

COVER IMAGE:

Mavis NGALLAMETTA
Kugu-Uwanh people, Putch clan
1944-2019
End Swamp 2017
ochres and charcoal with synthetic polymer paint binder on canvas
Collection of Mr and Mrs Brett and Belinda Robson
Image courtesy: Martin Browne Contemporary, Sydney

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A Language of Their Own

- Shonae Hobson
Consultant Curator

Brush: Women Painters brings together a multigenerational group of eight artists from Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria in Far North Queensland, who have developed some of the most compelling contemporary painting practices in Australia. These women have forged singular visual languages through which cultural knowledge, lived experience, and personal expression are inseparably intertwined. Their works communicate profound cultural and spiritual understandings of Country, seasonal patterns, and sacred Story Places, while also reflecting the realities of life in remote communities. Through colour, gesture and mark-making, painting becomes both a vehicle for cultural continuity and a means of individual expression.

For many, painting began as a predominantly self-taught practice, cultivated through a series of art centre-led painting workshops that encouraged women to translate their ancestral stories and knowledge of Country onto canvas. The result is an expression of contemporary Indigenous art that differs markedly from other Indigenous painting movements, not through adherence to a shared style, but through the remarkable diversity of individual artistic voices.

Connected by shared geography, kinship ties, and histories of displacement and adaptation, the artists presented in *Brush* each possess a unique painterly vision. While united by deep cultural connections, no two artists approach the canvas in the same way. Some employ vigorous, expressive brushwork to convey emotion and movement; others construct intricate surfaces through rhythmic pattern, layered colour, or expansive fields of paint. Together, their work demonstrates that contemporary Indigenous painting from the Far North is defined by the richness of its many approaches, not by a single aesthetic.

Along the east coast of Cape York, painting on canvas emerged in the mid-1990s as a new form of creative expression through which a younger generation of artists could articulate lived experience while translating cultural knowledge and stories passed down from their Elders. For Lockhart River and Coen artists Samantha Hobson, Rosella Namok and Naomi Hobson—who are all connected through their saltwater Country—painting records lived experience as much as cultural memory. Although they share the same kinship systems and cultural narratives, each has developed an unmistakably distinct painting style.

The earliest work in the exhibition, *Bubba...he cries... I can't think* (1997) by Rosella Namok, captures the immediacy of painting as both an emotional and physical act. Created shortly after the birth of Namok's first child, the work reflects the competing demands of early motherhood. Sweeping brushstrokes of purple, pale pink, and white move rapidly across the work, creating an energetic composition that conveys urgency and exhaustion. Rather than depicting a recognisable landscape or narrative, Namok allows the paintbrush itself to communicate emotion.



Samantha Hobson likewise uses painting to confront the complex realities of remote community life. *Bust 'im up* (2000) responds to the devastating impacts of violence within her community. Having experienced domestic violence herself, Hobson transforms anger, grief, and resilience into an intensely physical act of painting, applying paint with a household broom rather than a conventional paintbrush. The resulting marks possess an immediacy and force that mirror the emotional weight of the subject matter. Painted when she was only eighteen years old, the work reveals an instinctive understanding of colour and gesture as expressive tools. As Hobson explains, 'The red stands for the blood, the blue for the bruises.'

On the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, senior women in Aurukun began painting on canvas in 2008. Among them was Mavis Ngallametta, an Elder of the Putch clan and respected cultural leader of the Wik and Kugu people. Her luminous depictions of pamp (swamps) challenge perceptions of wetlands as stagnant pools of water, instead revealing them as vibrant freshwater environments rich with life. Ngallametta grew up in the dormitories of the Aurukun Mission, where she learned traditional weaving techniques from her mother and aunties. Long recognised for her mastery of weaving with cabbage palm, pandanus, and ghost nets, she turned to painting following a women's painting workshop facilitated by Gina Allain at the Wik and Kugu Art Centre. Rather than abandoning her fibre practice, she translated its intimate knowledge into paint, creating images grounded in the tactile traditions of weaving.