

CAIRNS ART GALLERY

27 JUN –
4 OCT 2026

BRUSH *WOMEN PAINTERS*

ARTWORK LABELS

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI



Sally Gabori. © Photograph: Anita Ruthling Klaussen

“This is my land, this is my sea, this is who I am.”

—Sally Gabori

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (c. 1924–2015) was a Kaiadilt artist from Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. Her Kaiadilt name, Mirdidingkingathi, means ‘born at Mirdidingki’, a place on Bentinck Island, while Juwarnda refers to her totem, the dolphin.

Gabori spent her early life on Bentinck Island, where the Kaiadilt people lived a traditional way of life, fishing, gathering shellfish, and harvesting food from the island’s coastal environments. Following devastating cyclones and food shortages, the Kaiadilt people were relocated to the Mornington Island Mission in 1948, where Gabori and her community lived for the remainder of their lives.

Gabori began painting in 2005 around the age of eighty-one through the Mornington Island Art Centre. Her paintings draw on memories of places on Bentinck Island of deep personal significance to the artist: her husband’s place, Dibirdibi Country; her father’s place, Thundi; her own Country, Mirdidingki; and the first outstation, Nyinyilki. Working with bold colour and expressive brushwork, she developed a highly individual style that was unlike any other in Australian art.

Over the final decade of her life, Gabori created an extraordinary body of work—approximately 2,000 paintings—which continues to bring renewed visibility to Kaiadilt culture, language, and peoples. Today, she is remembered as one of the foremost artists of her generation.

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally GABORI

Kaiadilt

1924–2015

Ninjilki 1

2008

Ninjilki 2

2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia Collection. Gift of Susan and Michael Armitage through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2016. Donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program

Ninjilki 1 and *Ninjilki 2* depict an important natural site on the south-eastern corner of Bentinck Island, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Distinguished by a permanent freshwater lagoon, it is a place where the artist recalls catching barramundi and scooping freshwater with Baler and Trumpet shells. In 2008, following the Kaiadilt Land Rights victory, an outstation was established here, often referred to as the ‘main base’, where Gabori and her family returned whenever possible. Gabori’s paintings of *Ninjilki* are animated by memories of people and places from this area and hold personal, familial, cultural, and political significance. In the artist’s own words, ‘*Ninjilki*, or main base, is where we built the outstation when we got our land back. This is why we call it the main base as well.’

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally GABORI

Kaiadilt

1924–2015

Dibirdibi Country

2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Cairns Art Gallery Collection.

Purchased, 2024 with funds from the Cairns Art Gallery Foundation

Dibirdibi Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Ms Margaret Emmett

Dibirdibi Country

2009

Synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Mr Alex Seton

Dibirdibi Country

2007

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Mr Cameron McIndoe and Mascha Moje

In *Dibirdibi Country*, the artist has painted the ancestral lands of her late husband, Kabararrjingathi Boltoko Pat Gabori. Gabori's representations of Dibirdibi Country are a recurrent subject in many of her paintings and are associated with the Rock Cod Ancestor. As the artist states,

This is my husband's Country on Bentinck Island. Near the coast, there is a large saltpan that covers a large part of his Country. There are mangrove swamps and rock outcrops scattered across the saltpan.

Drawing on cultural memory, Gabori uses bold abstract forms and colours to map memories, cultural stories, and sites on Country.

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally GABORI

Kaiadilt

1924–2015

Makarrki

2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Mr Geoffrey Clark

Makarrki is a place on the northern side of Bentinck Island and was the traditional Country of Gabori's older brother, Makarrkingathi Dingkarringathi Thuwathu Bijarrb King Alfred, an important Kaiadilt warrior and leader. The head of the Makarrki River was a significant hunting ground, where the artist often recalled her brother (or brother-in-law), Tarurukingathi Kulkitji (Buddy), wrestling with dugongs. As the artist recounts,

Makarrki is a very special place ... [with] a big river that runs through it ... This is where dugong and turtles come on a high tide ... making it easy for the men to catch them.

NAOMI HOBSON



Naomi Hobson. Photograph: Jacky Kao

"It is my love of creating new art and my Country that inspired me to become an artist. The colours and patterns of nature itself, stories from the past, the unique transformation of the land over the seasons . . . and my own special places that are etched in my memory—these are places I regularly visit."

—Naomi Hobson

Naomi Hobson (b. 1978) is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, photography and ceramics. She resides on the banks of the riverbeds where her grandparents were born, in the township of Coen, Cape York Peninsula. Her grandfather named her Yikan after the hoop pine that grows in abundance on her mother's Country in the McIlwraith Ranges, a place that continues to inform her artistic practice.

Hobson's grandfather was employed as a stockman for a non-Indigenous pastoral family, while other local Indigenous people worked as farmhands (undertaking cooking, cleaning, gardening, babysitting) for no financial reward. Her family have been active in Indigenous land rights and reform movements. Through her art, Hobson continues her family tradition of political and social engagement.

Beginning her professional painting career in 2009, Hobson has developed a distinctive visual language characterised by vibrant colours, layered compositions, and intricate mark-making. Her works are inspired by the seasonal rhythms and cycles of Cape York, from the arrival of the wet season rains to the transformation of the land following bushfire season. Rather than depicting specific sites or places, her paintings evoke the sensations, movements, and rhythms of the shifting landscape over time.

Naomi HOBSON

Kaantju/Umpila

b. 1978

Calling of the Palm Cockatoo

2024

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

MECCA Collection

Calling of the Palm Cockatoo is the artist's largest work to date. Painted from her home studio, the work captures the movement and rhythm of the natural environment.

As the artist explains,

I have always felt a deep curiosity about the complex links between all living things and how fragile, dependent, and balanced our world needs to be. And so much of what I see exists in its own beauty and power. My people have always been a part of the balance; we still contribute to it, and we receive its offerings. For me, this painting is an unveiling of the preciousness of nature's work.

Naomi HOBSON

Kaantju/Umpila

b. 1978

After the fire

2018

synthetic polymer painter on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Purchased with funds donated by Elizabeth Foster, 2018

Bushfire Came Through Here

2023

acrylic on linen

Collection of Seamus Quick and Sabrina Meier

Naomi Hobson's paintings celebrate the regeneration of her Country through fire burning, as she explains,

To manage our Country and maintain its ancient cultural integrity, every year in the early to middle dry season and then later after the first storms, we still do mosaic burning. This keeps our Country clean and alive, refreshed and enticing for new life to thrive. These paintings are my expression of this massive landscape change that comes with the burning seasons. What at first looks barren, burnt and finished of life, is simply a new beginning that rebounds almost instantly with dynamic abundance.

Smell of Rain

2024

acrylic on linen

Cairns Art Gallery Collection, Purchased Cairns Art Gallery, 2025

A moment just before the rain clouds cover the sky. There is still hope for some sunlight as a few rays manage to shine through the darkness of the indigo sky as the sun sets. This is one of the amazing experiences about living up north —the weather, the smell, the feeling and sound. The sound of grasshoppers, and birds chanting through the forest. As the humidity rises, so does the chance of a rainstorm. You can smell the rain coming, it has fallen on the hills in the distance, coming in from the east coast, rolling in on the sea breeze. As the rain start to fall, it mixes with the fallen amber coloured leaves and warm dust, swirling with the wind. This is the smell of rain.

– Naomi Hobson,
Artist Statement, 2024

Naomi HOBSON

Kaantju/Umpila

b. 1978

Big Sky

2019

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Shepparton Art Museum Collection. Purchased with assistance of Carrillo and Ziyin Gantner, 2019

Big Sky depicts a dramatic sky in the cool of a spring afternoon, when refreshing colours burst against the rolling hills backdrop of Wathada (Blue Mountain), an important cultural site for Southern Kaantju peoples.

In the artist's words,

This is the cultural hearth for my people. The cloudless sky meets the land to give an open vastness that we call Big Sky Country. The gestural shapes represent the family of eucalyptus trees, sacred waterholes, and massive boulders at Wathada that signify our ceremonial presence and rituals. My brushstrokes are thickly applied and add a sense of movement to the sky. In this painting I am sharing what I see and feel, and through the appreciation and understanding of what we have, I hope it can inspire others to live more profoundly.

Wild Lagoon

2018

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Stephen & Debbie Kelly

JANET KOONGOTEMA



Janet Koongotema. Photograph: Gus Davidson. Image courtesy of the artist, Wik and Kugu Arts Centre and D Lan Galleries

"I can sit and paint all day. This is the way I tell stories. I still like to weave but I have been focused on painting for a while now. Painting is a way for me to teach people about my Country. My Country is a very colourful place and full of life. I must tell other people to respect the Country too."

—Janet Koongotema

Janet Koongotema (b. 1938) is a senior Elder of the Winchanam Clan and a highly respected custodian of important cultural and creation sites near Aurukun. Following the early loss of her mother, Koongotema was raised by her aunty Topsy Warmane, from whom she learned traditional weaving techniques. For much of her life, she produced finely crafted dilly bags, fishing nets, and pandanus bowls, maintaining and passing on important cultural knowledge through these practices.

Since taking up painting in 2010, Koongotema has adapted the skills, rhythms, and visual sensibilities developed through weaving into a distinctive painterly practice. Her works depict significant sites across her Country, including Waank Aw (Woven Bag Story Place) and Moun.aw (Archer River Story Place), locations associated with ancestral narratives and striking natural colour formations.

Koongotema's paintings are characterised by bold colour relationships and expressive compositions that celebrate both the physical and spiritual dimensions of place. Her totems—including Kang-Kang (White-breasted Sea Eagle), Minh Themp (Burdekin Duck), Minh Koon (Black Duck), and Maiariki (Waterlily)—feature prominently throughout her work, reflecting her role as a custodian of cultural knowledge and her enduring connection to Country.

Janet KOONGOTEMA

Wik-Mungkan

b. 1938

Moun.aw – Archer River story place

2024

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Cairns Art Gallery Collection. Purchased 2025

Here the artist has painted the sacred Aak Puulwuy (Story Place) called Moun.aw, located along the Archer River, a place of high cultural significance to the Winchanam clan and only accessible to Traditional Owners.

Moun.aw is one of the most beautiful places on my Country. The sand is really white, and the water is really clear and fresh. You can see all the fishes like barramundi, catfish and red snappers swimming around. Moun.aw is really good, but you have to be careful when the tide comes in ... not just because of Pikkuw (the crocodile), but because of the fairies that live there. They protect this place.

— Janet Koongotema

Janet KOONGOTEMA

Wik-Mungkan

b. 1938

Aak Chaim – Archer River Country

2023

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Imelda Willis

Aak Chaim is a place on my Country along the Archer River. It's very cold there. Chaim, that's the main place where the old people stayed. I went there with my sister, Dawn, many times. We went right up the river until we got to Chaim. When we arrived, I said to her "all the lilies have good colours and smell good". We like that place, so we camp there a lot. Chaim has a big swamp with plenty of brolga, duck, minh ko'an (magpie geese). There is a duck story there too. That's my totem. We call the duck "minh themp". "Min.a!" (really lovely) I said to Dawn as we arrived at Aak Chaim. We smelt that place. So many lovely flowers smelling really good. There are lots of alligators (crocodiles) down at the river so you must be careful getting there.

– Janet Koongotema

Mo'iam – Archer River

2022

acrylic on linen

Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection. Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 70th anniversary appeal 2023

Mo'iam is a sacred Story Place and is very important for me and my family. My father, Edward, showed it to my sister, Dawn, and me when we were little girls. In those days, my father would sometimes take us to our Country when he was working as ringer mustering cattle. He would work from the outstation on our Country. We visited Mo'iam from time to time. We would travel a long way up the main Archer River and turn off up a long narrow creek to get there. When we arrived, we could see many different colours in the Land, even the colour of gold. The water up there is very clear, and there are fish everywhere including Mullaway. I loved collecting ant bed from this place to use for cooking our fish. There is also lots of white sand there which helps for cooking lots of fish on the fire. The food from this place makes me healthy. Aak min.a! [This is a lovely place!]

– Janet Koongotema

MAVIS NGALLAMETTA



Mavis Ngallametta. Photograph: Martin Browne

"I paint my Country—the places where we camp, fish, collect ochre and clay, and the beach hibiscus that I burn to make charcoal. My paintings tell my grandchildren and their grandchildren the stories of those places and what we do there, the animals and birds and fish that live there, the plants that grow there."

—Mavis Ngallametta

Mavis Ngallametta (1944–2019) was a Putch Clan Elder and cultural leader of the Wik and Kugu peoples of Aurukun, on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. Although she only began painting at the age of sixty-four, she quickly established a national reputation for her expansive depictions of the swamps, lagoons, and coastal environments surrounding her community of Aurukun.

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 using cabbage palm, pandanus, and ghost nets, she began painting in 2008 following a women's art workshop facilitated by Gina Allain at the Wik and Kugu Art Centre.

Working with acrylic paint as well as natural ochres, clays, and charcoal that she collected herself, Ngallametta developed a distinctive style that gained national recognition. In 2013, she won the Telstra General Painting Award, and in 2018 she received the Australia Council's Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement. Over the final decade of her life, Ngallametta created a remarkable body of large-scale paintings, some of which are presented here. These works continue to celebrate the culture, history, and landscapes of western Cape York.

Mavis NGALLAMETTA

Kugu-Uwanh people, Putch clan
1944–2019

The Mouth of the Kendall River 2

2015

ochres and charcoal with synthetic polymer paint binder on canvas

Cairns Art Gallery Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Mavis Ngallametta, 2018

The Mouth of Kendall River 2 depicts the pristine region surrounding the mouth of the Kendall River, south of Aurukun, of which the artist was a traditional owner. Using materials sourced from Country, Ngallametta captures the region's distinctive cliff formations and the striking meeting points between the deep red hues of the bauxite-rich soil and bands of contrasting white clay. The artist often combined multiple perspectives, weaving together macro and micro views of the coastal wetlands developed through her intimate knowledge of the area.

This is Kendall River, my Country, my homeland... Looking from north to south, you can see the area called Pundum. Pundum means people jabbering together. This is where people from further south used to gather—people from the Holroyd River, Christmas Creek and Breakfast Creek met here on their way to the large camp at Kutchendoopen... You can see this place when flying over in a helicopter or plane.

— Mavis Ngallametta

Mavis NGALLAMETTA

Kugu-Uwanh people, Putch clan
1944–2019

Middle Swamp

2016

natural ochres and charcoal with acrylic binder on linen

Collection of Gina and Guy Allain

Little Swamp

2018

natural ochres and charcoal with acrylic binder on linen

Collection of M. Paris

Birds on the Beach at Ikalath

2012

natural ochres and charcoal with acrylic binder on linen

The Kingdon Rowe Collection

Ikalath is the traditional Country of Ngallametta's adopted son, Edgar, and is a place she painted regularly. The artist would often travel to Ikalath with her family by boat to collect white clay for use in many of her paintings. In this work, Ngallametta depicts migratory birds gathered along the shoreline at Ikalath. Viewed from the perspective of a boat, or dinghy, travelling along the coastline, the painting evokes a strong sense of place and movement.

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

Mavis Ngallametta produced a number of works depicting the Pamp (swamps) surrounding Aurukun. These vivid paintings challenge the negative perceptions of swamps as stagnant and devoid of life, by presenting them as vibrant, life-filled freshwater lagoons that emerge during the wet season. In the artist's own words:

Behind the school area in Aurukun are three swamps in a row. This one here is the End Swamp. There are lots of flowers here—big ones, little ones, lots of them, all different colours. There are also many birds—black ibis, white ibis, white cranes, little birds, all kinds. You can also see plenty of pigs at End Swamp.

— Mavis Ngallametta

SAMANTHA HOBSON



Samantha Hobson. Photograph: Mick Richards.

"We are Sand Beach people, and we grew up living off the reef. There are hundreds of reefs off Lockhart River, some close enough that we can easily reach them by boat. The reef represents our lifestyle, and the colours I use in my paintings are strong and vivid because my memories are filled with the bright colours of life on the reef."

—Samantha Hobson

Samantha Hobson (b. 1981) is a Kuuku Ya'u artist from the community of Lockhart River. She began her artistic career with the Lockhart River Art Gang, a group of artists in their late teens and early twenties who rose to prominence in the 1990s. Among others, the group included Rosella Namok, Fiona Omeenyo, and the late Silas Hobson, and they quickly gained national and international recognition.

Hobson's early paintings explored themes of violence and alcohol abuse, with the artist often using a broom and other unconventional materials to reflect the physical realities of remote community life. Her later paintings, while retaining her signature 'drip technique', focused on the reefs, beaches, and tropical waters of Cape York. Through vibrant colour, fluid mark-making, and expressive brushwork, she captures the movement and brilliance of the marine environment—the flash of fish beneath the water, the colours of coral formations, and the shifting specks of light during grass fire season.

Samantha HOBSON

Kuuku-y'au

b. 1981

Burn grass season: night time coming

2001

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria Collection. Gift of Joanne Lagerburg and Stephen Swift through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009

In this work, Hobson depicts the annual burning season, when carefully managed fires renew the landscape and encourage fresh growth. Burning also assists hunting by attracting animals to new vegetation and making tracks easier to see. Against an evening sky, flickering flames move across the Country, transforming the landscape as day gives way to night. Hobson's expressive painting captures both the beauty and the power of fire, reflecting the deep cultural knowledge held by Indigenous peoples across eastern Cape York, who continue to care for and maintain the health of Country through traditional fire management.

Samantha HOBSON

Kuuku-y'au

b. 1981

Bust 'im up

2000

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria Collection. Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance of the Joan Clemenger Endowment, Governor, 2000

Bust 'Im Up

2001

synthetic polymer paint and glaze on canvas

Collection of Vivien Anderson and Gilles Terrier

Bust 'im up reflects Hobson's response to the devastating impact of alcohol-fuelled violence within her community. Having experienced domestic violence herself, Hobson channelled her anger, grief and resilience into the act of painting, attacking the canvas with a broom loaded with paint. Painted when she was eighteen years old, the work demonstrates the artist's instinctive ability to capture the realities of remote community life through her art. Hobson uses colour as a powerful means of conveying these experiences. In the artist's own words: 'The red stands for the blood, the blue for the bruises.'

Calm night...down at the beach

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria Collection. Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

This monumental painting celebrates the natural splendour of Cape York and showcases Hobson's dynamic and expressive approach to painting. Using sweeping gestures, layered colour and energetic mark-making, Hobson evokes the sensory experience of camping on the beach on a calm, clear night. The shimmering surface of the water reflects moonlight and starlight, while rhythmic splashes of white paint evoke the gentle movement of waves breaking onto the shore. Drawing on personal memories and experiences of the beach, the artist captures a moment of stillness and contemplation.

Samantha HOBSON

Kuuku-y'au

b. 1981

Bush Fire

2002

synthetic polymer paint and glaze on canvas

Collection of Vivien Anderson and Gilles Terrier

People burn fires during the dry season from November to April. They burn it for new growth and sometimes they burn it for hunting as well, to bring out the animals, or sometimes just so they can see the animal tracks. Young kids sometimes burn for no reason, but the old people get mad with them.

— Samantha Hobson

Artist interview with Samantha Hobson and Rosella Namok

2026

digital video and sound, 4:12 min

Filmed and edited by Phisch Creative

Narrated by Samantha Hobson and Rosella Namok

Courtesy of the artists, Fireworks Gallery, IES College and Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF)

Artist interview with Naomi Hobson

2026

digital video and sound, 4.54 min

Filmed and edited by Phisch Creative

Narrated by Naomi Hobson

Courtesy of the artist and Jacky Kao

ROSELLA NAMOK



Rosella Namok at Quintel Beach, Lockhart River. Photograph: Kerry Trapnell.

"When I paint in my studio, I always feel for home. It's where my Mum is back there as well as all my family ... That's why I do a lot of painting about home. I paint from my memories mostly. Wet season, dry season. It's everywhere back home in the Cape."

—Rosella Namok

Rosella Namok (b. 1979) is one of the most celebrated artists to emerge from the Lockhart River Art Gang, alongside her cousin, Samantha Hobson. Namok began painting as a young girl, helping her father decorate the bodies of dancers with ochre in preparation for malkari (dance ceremonies). Using her fingers, she applied body paint to create ceremonial designs. These early experiences laid the foundation for her distinctive painting practice, which continues to involve the direct application of paint to canvas by hand.

Her paintings are inspired by memories of her Lockhart River 'Sandbeach' Country. Informing her visual language are traditional body-paint designs, the rippling patterns left in the sand by tidal movements, and the marks drawn by her Elders in the sand. Namok frequently uses lacquered paint or combines matte and gloss acrylics to create richly layered surfaces. Working with brushes, scrapers, and her fingers, she builds textured compositions that convey movement, depth, and atmosphere.

The subjects of her paintings often reference the clan groups of the Lockhart River region and the two moieties that underpin local social organisation: Kaapay and Kuuyan. She is also renowned for her depictions of rain sweeping across the sea, moonlit horizons, and the waterways and waterholes of her Country.

Rosella NAMOK

Aangkum (Ungkum)

b. 1979

Yippay Kungkay

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Arthur and Suzie Roe

Big wet 'ere come

2005

acrylic on canvas

Collection of Arthur and Suzie Roe

Morning Rain Ya Come

2023

synthetic polymer on canvas

Japingka Gallery Collection

Rosella NAMOK

Aangkum (Ungkum)

b. 1979

Sunset Rain

2019

acrylic on linen

Collection of Hans Sip

Here the artist uses long, splashed lines of paint applied with a stick to evoke heavy rain, movement, and the atmosphere of a tropical storm. The accompanying story recalls being caught in a sudden downpour while fishing at Angkum. Although the storm prevented cooking on the beach, it was a successful fishing trip, ending as the sun was setting.

Sitting in a boat fishing at Angkum...a big storm poured straight down on us. Was good fishing, we caught heaps of fish but couldn't cook on the beach. Had to wait to go home. Afternoon time...sun just about to go down.

— Rosella Namok

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

In 1997, Namok began experimenting with expressing personal experiences and emotions through her art. Created shortly after the birth of her first child, this painting reflects the demands of early motherhood. Sweeping brushstrokes in purple, pale pink and white create an energetic composition that conveys movement and urgency. The rapid application of paint suggests the artist's distracted state as she cared for her crying newborn. The title, *Bubba He Cries I Can't Think*, captures the exhaustion and emotional intensity of balancing motherhood with creative practice.

Mangroves . . . smokey sky

2003

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Cairns Art Gallery Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Geoff and Fran Barker, 2005

Rosella NAMOK

Aangkum (Ungkum)

b. 1979

Sydney

1999

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Cairns Art Gallery Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Geoff and Fran Barker, 2005

Ngaachi Kincha - Them Young and Old Ones

2004

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Catherine Stewart

Ngaachi Kincha II (Bora ground)

2000

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria Collection. Gift of Andrew Baker, 2008

Ngaachi Kiincha (Bora Ground) represents a sacred ceremonial site of great cultural importance. Namok explains that Ngaachi Kiincha is a restricted place connected to Bora ceremonies, where important cultural knowledge and traditions are maintained. She emphasises that it is a powerful and dangerous place that should not be spoken about in detail or entered without permission. The work also recalls the tradition of women and men painting their bodies and faces with clay for ceremonies, highlighting the continuing strength of cultural practices despite the disruptions of mission life. The artist has said:

All the women get painted up with this design on their face, it's strong. They used to paint their face over at the old mission using traditional clay.

— Rosella Namok

BIRRMUYINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA



Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha. Courtesy of Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne.

"I was born on Bentinck Island at a place on the northern side called Bilmee. We lived in humpies then—no clothes, nothing at all. I learnt to hunt from an early age, how to fish and collect shellfish, how to gather foods from the bush. I was young when the Europeans came in 1948 to take us away from our home and forced us to live on Mornington Island in the dormitory in the mission there."

—Netta Loogatha

Netta Loogatha (1923–2018) was a senior Kaiadilt woman from Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria and one of the founding artists of the Kaiadilt painting movement. Like many of her generation, including her sister the late Sally Gabori, she experienced the profound disruption caused by the relocation of the Kaiadilt people from Bentinck Island to Mornington Island during the mid-twentieth century.

Loogatha began painting later in life through the Mornington Island Art Centre, where she joined fellow Kaiadilt women in translating cultural knowledge and memories of Country onto canvas. Her works draw upon an intimate understanding of the islands, reefs, tidal systems, and ancestral places of the Kaiadilt homelands.

Characterised by bold colour, rhythmic forms, and a strong sense of spatial movement, Loogatha's paintings map both physical and cultural landscapes. Through memory and lived experience, she recorded places of significance that remained central to Kaiadilt identity despite decades of displacement.

Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta LOOGATHA

Kaiadilt

c. 1942–2022

Bildi

2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia Collection. Gift of Susan Armitage through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2021. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

Bilmee

2007

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia Collection. Acquisition through Tarnanthi: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art supported by BHP 2020

Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta LOOGATHA

Kaiadilt

c. 1942–2022

My Country

2019

synthetic polymer paint on belgian linen

Collection of the Estate of the artist. Courtesy of Cooee Art, Sydney

My Country

2019

synthetic polymer paint on belgian linen

Collection of Sarah Ballhausen

Sweers Island

2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Collection of Julie Frederico

THUNDUYINGATHI BIJARRB MAY MOODOONUTHI



Thunduyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi. Courtesy of Mornington Island Art, Queensland

"I like to paint the rocks that are all over the beaches at Bentinck Island. I also like to paint my body stripes or tribal scars us Bentinck ladies have on our bodies."

—May Moodoonuthi

May Moodoonuthi (c. 1929–2008) was a senior artist from the Wellesley Islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Born at Thunduyingathi on Bentinck Island, she belonged to a generation of women whose lives were profoundly shaped by the relocation of the Kaiadilt people from their ancestral homeland to Mornington Island during the mid-twentieth century.

Like her contemporaries, Moodoonuthi began painting late in life through the Mornington Island Art Centre, joining a remarkable group of Kaiadilt women whose paintings transformed contemporary Australian art. Among the most important subjects in Moodoonuthi's work is Burrkunda, a Kaiadilt term referring to the body scars traditionally carried by Bentinck Island women. These scars were created during periods of mourning and embodied enduring connections to family, kinship, and loss. Through intersecting lines, layered patterns, and richly textured surfaces, Moodoonuthi translated these bodily markings into abstract painted forms. Her paintings evoke both the physical presence of scarification and the emotional and cultural histories embedded within them.

Moodoonuthi's Burrkunda paintings presented here speak to broader themes of resilience, identity, and cultural continuity. Through her distinctive visual language, she preserved and shared important aspects of Kaiadilt women's knowledge and experience, ensuring these stories remain visible for future generations.

Thundiyingathi Bijarrp May MOODOONUTHI

Kaiadilt

c. 1929–2008

Burrkunda

2006

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Art Gallery of South Australia Collection. Gift of Rick and Jan Frolich through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2018. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

Burrkunda

2007

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Private Collection, Melbourne