



September 11, 2015

Dear Friends,

It's been a busy couple of months for us here in Broome, we hope you enjoy this latest update on Kimberley events and art developments!

Philippa & Geraldine



Image credit: Artist Mary Puntji Clement discussing with DRS Coordinator, Philippa Jahn at Kira Kiro

Art Centre, Kalumburu © AGWA 2015

Kalumburu Field Trip

July 5th saw us flying to the East Kimberley in preparation for a week in Kalumburu filming senior artists in collaboration with FTI's Indigenous Community Stories

project. Desert River Sea first enjoyed this partnership last October with artists from Kununurra, Warmun and Halls Creek. That experience taught us to expect the unexpected in the most wonderful ways, and this trip certainly didn't disappoint.

Located on the far north Kimberley coast, Kalumburu is accessible by dirt road during the dry season but the drive is arduous and arrival at the community on time and without incident is not guaranteed. We chose the one and a half hour trip on the weekly mail plane from Kununurra instead, an adventure in its own right. From the air the country is varied and spectacular and time passed quickly scanning for emergency landing sites and sick bags as the little aircraft bucked in the thermals. The trip out included a stop at Wyndham to pick up one of the Kalumburu artists, however she did not appear – the first 'best laid plan' to go awry – and we had to leave without her. The return trip afforded a break at the Mitchell Plateau air strip, which is graced by a dirt-floored shade cloth shed ambitiously named, in laconic Kimberley style, the 'Mitchell Plateau Airport Arrival and Departure Lounge'.

After arriving we dropped our minimal gear into our rooms at the Kalumburu Mission dongas then set off to the Kira Kiro art centre to see the artists and discuss plans for the week ahead. The infrastructure here is modest to say the least; painters happily work in conditions which many others would reject. The studio and gallery space, essentially a partitioned shed, is too small to accommodate the artists and their proliferation of work. The building is not protected from climate extremes, dust or insects, plumbing is not guaranteed to work and the essential tea supplies are erratic. The tenacity of the senior women ensures that artistic activity persists however. We were overwhelmed by a warm welcome and the proud explanation of the works displayed on every available surface. A jumble of brushes and take-way containers filled with dense hues of mixed ochre pigment cluttered work tables which, encrusted with six years' accumulation of paint, are evidently also used as convenient canvases and palettes. In years to come an art historian could analyse a cross-section of the tops of these tables and come to some interesting conclusions!

Due to arrive the same day, the three-person film crew were driving in from Kununurra with all their equipment as well as the entertaining Mary Teresa Tailor, another Kalumburu artist unexpectedly caught in town. After blowing a tyre they had to overnight en route at Drysdale River Station however and didn't arrive until the following morning. Scheduling began to unravel but Desert River Sea undertakings are nothing if not flexible, and everything seems to work out in the end. We commenced filming that afternoon.

Betty Bundamurra gamely agreed to be the first interviewee despite, like the other artists, being quite unfamiliar with the filming process. As well as being a prolific painter Betty is also the main arts worker at the centre, responsible for its

administration when a coordinator is not present. She is quietly-spoken but extremely articulate, and once her nervousness passed she interviewed like she'd been doing it all her life, explaining her paintings and aspects of art practice at the community. After sitting on the sidelines observing, Mary Puntji Clement then agreed to sit in front of the camera while working on one of her large intricate canvases. Mary is the most senior of the art centre painters and while poor health sometimes precludes much physical activity, she occupies her place in the art studio nearly every day. She starts a new painting as soon as she finishes the last, never short of ideas and always encouraging the younger women who venture in when other responsibilities allow. She too spoke about her life and her painting until, just as she was starting to tire, the town 'disco' at a house nearby cranked up the volume for the rest of the afternoon and made further filming impossible.

The next day we were woken early; a tame (read: 'quite assertive') broilga named Lanky was growling outside our rooms hoping for cereal. An open door was as good as an invitation to the bird, which would stride in, inspect for hidden snacks and deliver a lightning peck if none were forthcoming. Once we'd learned to run when his gimlet eye fixed on us from close range, we became quite fond of him, especially after witnessing his hopelessly clumsy landing technique and his ability to impersonate a stork.

Mary T. Taylor's star turn was next. Once her reticence passed she too proved a wonderful interviewee. 'Shy' is not exactly Mary T's middle name – she is a great character as will be evident in her edited film segments. We then took a break from recording to turn our attention to six large collaborative panels currently stored in the mechanical workshop behind the art centre. These are a product of a new employment program which is replacing previous Centrelink arrangements. The art centre has been included in this as a means of both increasing logistical and financial support to the under-resourced centre, as well as providing meaningful employment opportunities to younger people in the community. To this end Marion Shaw, the coordinator of the program, assists with the operation of the art centre two days a week. Guided by the older women, the painted panels jointly produced by the younger women were one exuberant result of this program.

The huge plywood sheets were manoeuvred out to the art shed to collective gasps. As a first attempt at collaborative work by largely inexperienced painters they are striking. As Mary Puntji explained, it is possible to see the progressive development between the first and last panels. Two participants, Cathy Bundamurra and Mary Undalghumen, were filmed explaining the content of the paintings, the process of producing them and the positive effect on the people involved. Their enthusiasm was infectious, which was probably why we somewhat rashly decided to load two of the panels into the back of a troopie and take them to nearby *Malinjarr*, the gorge area of the King Edward River, for further filming. Betty and the two Marys came too, always happy to take any chance

to get out bush. They insisted we follow the convention for newcomers and splash ourselves in the river to introduce ourselves to the spirits of the place, (if not the

crocodiles). The resulting photographs were worth the effort. We also obtained some moving footage of the women sitting on rocks above the paintings, silhouetted against a cloudy sky. The day was completed by an invitation to dinner with the Women's Group at the new women's centre; stew, home-made bread and rice pudding by the light of a fire, followed by traditional dancing to a scratchy 60-year old recording of Kalumburu songmen – the deceased relatives of those women present.

The next morning we had the great pleasure of chatting with Kalumburu matriarch and renowned artist Lily Karedada. Lily first came to prominence as a painter and craftswoman in the early 1980's; images of works held by the State Gallery can be viewed in the State Art Collection section of this website. Along with husband Jack and in-laws Manila, Louis and Rosie Karedada, she helped establish a strong painting and crafting practice still maintained by their descendants today. We had hoped to film Lily, however she is now quite frail and as we were not convinced she would fully understand what was being asked of her we, decided against it.

Meanwhile, thanks to the efforts of a helpful DRS contact, the artist missed at Wyndham air strip had arrived in the community. We scooped Gwen Clarke up with the others and drove out to Marragarra, a beach some 15 kilometres out of town, where she was interviewed under an imposing boab tree by the shore. This was a challenging shoot for us all; there was some talk that taking the painted Wanjinas to the river the previous day had stirred up the wind and eventually we had to stop filming to avoid being blown away. Everyone piled into the vehicles with the unused fishing gear and we headed back to town to film at the new HACC (Home and Community Care) centre instead. The attraction here is the collaborative mural painted by senior artists, originally a series of works on paper now reproduced in enlarged form on aluminium panels. As Betty Bundamurra explained to camera, these figurative works weave local cosmological themes with depictions of landforms, flora and fauna of the Kalumburu area. Mounted on an external wall they mirror the floodplain and the distant hills to the south of the community and are source of great pleasure and pride for the artists involved.

The following day our attention shifted away from the art centre to the local rock art. Guided by Betty's husband Dennis, one of the locals who can speak for country in the immediate vicinity of Kalumburu, we were taken to two sites of local importance. The significance of the imagery and the specific sites were enlivened for us by stories of the lived experience of them for the Bundamurra family. The imagery at these sites occasionally appears in the contemporary art at the art centre, as does much of the rock art of the region. The younger artists in particular replicate Kiro Kiro (Gwion) figures

and Wanjina in their work while more experienced painters, who also reference rock art, have become much more experimental in their depictions.

That night we were lucky to watch the older women dancing with a group of excited younger girls to celebrate the end of NAIDOC week. A fire was lit next to the old basketball court in the centre of the community while everybody was painted up with ochre. As the music started an audience slowly drifted in from the shadows. Any residual tiredness left us as we watched the joy on the kids' faces reflected in the expressions of the older women who, despite logistical difficulties, had managed to pull the event together.

The overwhelming impression remaining from this trip was of the resilience of many of the senior people at Kalumburu, and their hopes for forging a positive future for their families and their community. The role of art-making in this endeavour can't be underestimated; its adequate resourcing essential. People are literally calling up a future as well as a past in their painting. We hope that the short films resulting from this week help to illustrate this for those further afield and go some small way to supporting change.

Our thanks to Marion Shaw for the loan of a vehicle during our visit, as well as assistance with artist liaison. We'll keep you notified when the films are edited and uploaded to our website. Meanwhile, go to <http://desertriversea.com.au/art-centres/kira-kiro-art-centre> to see some of the artwork which originates from this feisty little art centre, in the middle of 'nowhere' but at the centre of everything!

And finally, our acknowledgement of the warm welcome and generosity of the people of Kalumburu, particularly Mary Puntji Clement, Mary Teresa Tailor, Betty Bundamurra, Gwen Clarke, Doreen Unghangho, Gertrude Waina, Cathy Bundamurra, Mary Undalghumen, Dennis Bundamurra and Kevin Waina.

KIMBERLEY ABORIGINAL ART TRAIL MAP

A SELF-DRIVE GUIDE TO CENTRES OF CONTEMPORARY ART MAKING



Image credit: DRS Kimberley Aboriginal Art Trail Map

Putting Kimberley Art 'on the map'

Desert River Sea is proud to launch the Kimberley Aboriginal Art Trail Map, a self-drive guide to centres of contemporary art making.

This free map is available in hard copy brochure format as well as a downloadable PDF from our [website](#). It is presented as an attractive and comprehensive resource including all necessary contact information on twelve Aboriginal Art & Women's Centres which welcome visitors across the Kimberley.

This DRS initiative was designed to further support the work of under-resourced Kimberley art centres during a challenging economic climate for the promotion and sale of artwork. It is also intended to encourage visitors from outside the region to meet locals and experience for themselves the origins, value and significance of art-making here.

Statistics show a high proportion of visitors to the Kimberley are keen to experience some aspect of Aboriginal culture and while the arts field is often the most accessible, cohesive Kimberley-wide information is sometimes hard to find. The brochure will be made available to a broad audience at art centres, Visitor Centres and other outlets across the region.



Image credit: (L to R) Sign for DAAF outside the Darwin Convention Centre, visitors at the Desert River Sea booth & the Waringarri Dancers performing at DAAF © AGWA 2015

Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair 2015

NATSIAA is just one of many arts-related events which draw visitors to Darwin during its annual festival in August. A particular drawcard for lovers of Indigenous art is the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF), now in its ninth year. Held over three days in the Darwin Convention Centre at the picturesque Darwin waterfront precinct, a record 9,600 visitors attended to view artwork displayed by 54 art centres from around the country. Visitors included Chinese and US delegations, curators, industry specialists, gallerists and collectors.

Desert River Sea returned to DAAF this year with an industry stand which, aside from promoting the project (and giving us way too many opportunities to be tempted by the beautiful work for sale), enabled us to gain insight from artists and visitors on the impact and significance of the event.

The Kimberley was represented this year by Nagula Jarndu (Broome), Marnin Studio (Fitzroy Crossing), Warlayirti Artists (Balgo), Warmun Art, Mowanjum Aboriginal Arts & Culture (Derby), Waringarri Aboriginal Arts (Kununurra) and Kira Kiro Arts (Kalumburu). The Kira Kiro stand was set up and managed by artist Betty Bundamurra and her husband Dennis. The works on canvas and paper in the diverse styles originating from this art centre looked stunning set against the black partitions of the display and both Bundamurras were kept busy discussing them with the constant stream of visitors. Betty was particularly pleased to receive a large commission on the last day. They also fielded requests for Kalumburu exhibitions from esteemed gallerists in Alice Springs and Sydney who, like many others from the commercial sector of the industry, had attended seeking interesting new work.

Nagula Jarndu and the Marnin Studio attended DAAF for the first time. Both organisations are women's resource centres working principally with textiles and both have benefited from partnerships and a professional development project with Perth artist Megan Kirwin Ward. Their displays proved highly attractive to visitors, drawn by glowing lengths of vegetable-dyed screen and block-printed silk and cotton. On the final day DRS Visual Arts Leadership program participant Amanda Smith, who has

been working as the assistant studio coordinator at Marnin, gave us more insight into what DAAF has meant to them...

By the last day, the women had nearly sold out of their beautiful silks and had also taken 300 back orders for these and other product lines. After noticing Amanda modelling her own dyed silk top a Darwin designer had also initiated discussions for a business partnership. Amanda was interviewed by a television crew surrounded by her colleagues, something she was a little nervous about but nevertheless stepped forward to be Marnin's spokesperson. Buoyed by their success, the women were itching to get back home and start working with renewed vigour. They are also keen to find ways to share their skills with other Kimberley women. Several generations work together at the studio; Amanda herself works with her aunt, who overlays her prints on to Amanda's dyed fabrics.

They would like to encourage more young women to participate in Marnin activities, however their efforts have been heavily impacted by funding cuts and despite the hard work and evident success of the studio program, its future is not assured. Amanda herself has lost her paid position there for this reason and the full-time coordinator will also have to leave unless assistance can be found. In this setting, the positive client

feedback and injection of funds provided by their art fair presence (despite the high costs associated with the logistics of attending) is all the more critical.

Commerce is of course high on the agenda for both art centres and visitors.

Opportunities to engage directly with buyers are limited for many centres, which are often located off the beaten track and rely on seasonal visitors, online portals and work sent to the cities for the bulk of their sales. The majority of centres are funded for basic operational needs but depend on sales income for the wide range of other community activities which they support. For artists, sale of artwork often represents their only opportunity to participate in the mainstream economy in a personally meaningful way, if at all.

This is not to imply (as some assert) that artists are passively churning out formulaic work to meet the demands of a market greedy for a piece of Aboriginal culture, yet rarely benefiting long term from the economic return. Certainly questions can be asked about the ongoing disadvantage of remote communities after several decades of a generally buoyant market for the art which originates from them, but the reasons for this are complex. From a community perspective however, producing art for sale is underpinned by factors quite distinct from commercial incentive. They could be summarised as: assertion of identity, desire for peaceful and social occupation, animation of memory (particularly family and country), and rejuvenation and

transmission of culture. All of these factors are affirmed when the art is acknowledged by others.

Participation in a tightly organised event such as DAAF, designed specifically to support the broad aims of art centres and artists, can be particularly empowering. Intermediaries are not required and the geographic and social gap between remote artists and others is temporarily closed. Art centre displays are no longer dominated by piles of canvas on trestle tables; strategies for centre representation vary from minimalist displays of the work of senior artists to sophisticated profusions of experimental emerging work.

So whilst the sales generated at DAAF this year are expected to contribute over two million dollars (a steep increase from last year) directly to art centres, the reason why the 200 Indigenous artists, artisans and arts workers were smiling broadly at the convention centre was mostly because they were having a *deadly* time reconnecting with their far-flung peers and engaging with fascinated buyers in a visually vibrant, highly energised atmosphere.

Next year is DAAF's tenth anniversary. Plans are already being hatched for a stimulating event set to include dance, music and a fashion parade featuring the developing field of Indigenous textiles.

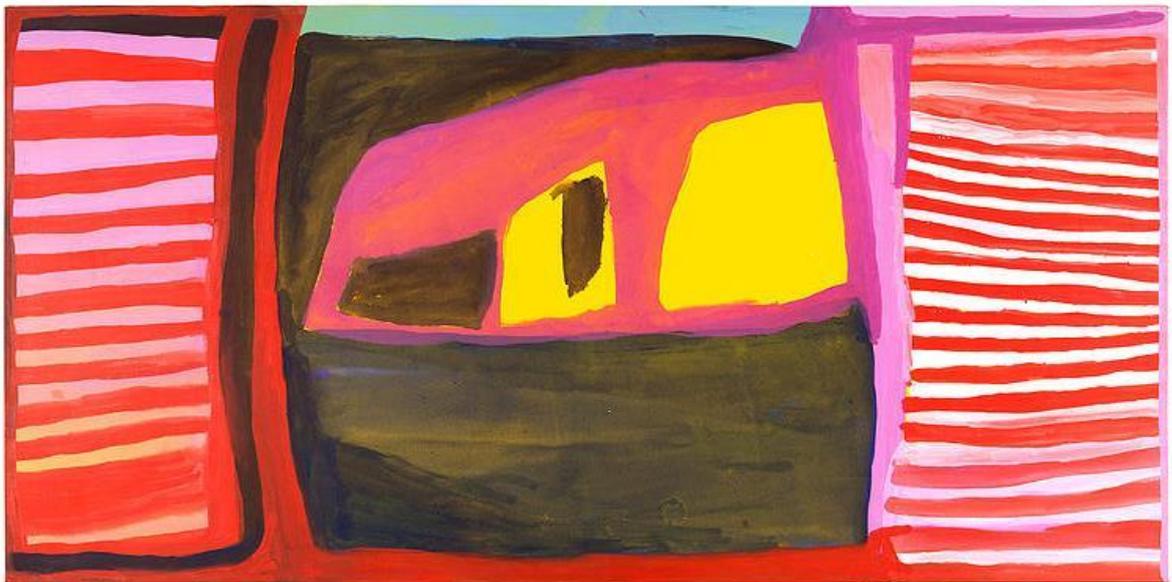


Image credit: Jukuja Dolly Snell, Kurtal 2015 acrylic on canvas © Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency 2015

Jukuja Dolly Snell and Daniel Walbidi featured at the 2015 NATSIAA

'That's my Kurtal, now! As long as I've been born there, that one, Kurtal. Not from another jila, no! One jila.' (Jukuja Dolly Snell)

This year saw the 32nd incarnation of one of the major events on the national Indigenous arts sector calendar: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) hosted by the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin.

This year the event was a little less divisive than usual, perhaps as a result of the decision to select fewer finalists. Whilst the resulting hang is always contentious certainly the works of the 65 finalists were of a strong interest, despite suffering considerably from the limitations of the exhibition space. As judge Cara Pinchbeck stated, *“It really highlights the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art around the country; artists are working in so many different ways with different perspectives and different mediums. I think that’s what’s exciting for Australia – the practice is dynamic and changing.”*

The Kimberley region in particular had reason to celebrate in 2015. Firstly, our congratulations go to finalists Rusty Peters, Phyllis Thomas, Mabel Juli and Rammey Ramsey from Warmun. Also to Jakayu Biljabu, and especially Jukuja Dolly Snell from Mangkaja who was awarded the major prize for her acrylic work *Kurtal*. This magisterial canvas shows her birthplace, a *jila*, or ‘living water’ of deep cultural significance to the Walmajarri people of the Great Sandy Desert. The work was ‘created following a major trip back to Kurtal in 2014 with four generations of her family. The canvas depicts the site itself, the *jilji* (sand hills) surrounding it and *kutu-kutu*, the lines of cloud that herald the onset of the wet season. The blue line signifies the direction to enter the site, an important protocol given the power of *jila* Kurtal. The vast central areas of colour are Dolly’s father Lawa-Lawa who, when he died, came to rest in the *jila* as the spirit of Kurtal. *“That’s my Kurtal, now! As long as I’ve been born there, that one, Kurtal. Not from another jila, no! One jila.”* (Mangkaja website).

Viewing the work was an awe-inspiring experience, such was the authority of Snell’s composition and luminous application of colour. The aesthetic response is measurably deepened by some awareness of the background to the painting and the determination and resilience of her people in protecting the significance of its subject. Her husband Spider Snell is the most senior custodian for Kurtal; to learn more we recommend viewing the film *Putuparri and the Rainmakers*. The highlight of the awards ceremony, held at sunset against a backdrop of pandanus and the Arafura Sea, was watching Snell receive her award accompanied by her granddaughter, great-granddaughter and infant great-great-granddaughter.

Secondly, our congratulations also go to Daniel Walbidi who, alongside Director of the National Gallery of Victoria Tony Ellwood and Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales Cara Pinchbeck, was invited to be part of the NATSIAA judging panel.

DRS Visual Arts Leadership Program participant Walbidi, a widely recognized Yulparitja artist from Bidyadanga in the West Kimberley, won the General Painting Award in 2014 with his work *Wirnpa and Sons*. The inclusion of an artist such as Walbidi on the panel is a critical move as it adds the often missing dimension of remote perceptions and sensitivities to the judging process. This approach was evident when we asked Walbidi how he went about choosing the final works; his response was concise; *"I just chose what felt right in my heart"*. Walbidi explained that the selection process was very much a collaborative effort with some artworks being repeatedly reviewed and deliberated over before the entire panel reached consensus. Walbidi says Jukuja Dolly Snell's winning work immediately spoke to all the judges however.

Walbidi's perspective as one of the previous award winners arms him with unique empathy on the subject of an artist being singled out as a 'winner', the resulting benefits and pressures with which he is well acquainted. Following his own win last year Walbidi's profile increased so dramatically that he now struggles to meet the demands of a waiting list for his paintings - works which take a long time to complete, especially alongside obligations to a young family and his community.

When we raised with him the issue of perceptions of an urban vs. remote divide in the context of the award Walbidi responded with a respectful and inclusive outlook; *"at the end of the day, it's all art"*. From the way he talks about the judging experience it's evident that this was not a task taken lightly. Walbidi's experience of the process taught him something too; he explained how it was interesting from his point of view as an artist *'being on the other side'*. He learned a lot about other people's perception of Aboriginal art and now has a better understanding of the audience. It will be interesting to see the influence of these new insights, especially at a time in his career when he is experimenting with new processes and media working for the first time on installation artworks.

When asked if he'd be on an art award judging panel again he quickly responded *"Yes!"* After a short pause he then added a wry *"in a few years' time after I recover"*.



Daniel Walbidi



*Image credit: (L to R) Marylou Divilli & Barrdbarrd Marni, Ngarrdi (Barramundi shaking herself)
Woodblock Print © Mowanjum Aboriginal Art & Culture 2015, Petrina Bedford with wood block print
depiction of an Arawadi figure in the Mowanjum studio & Engraved boab nut by Petrina Bedford. ©*

AGWA 2015

Mowanjum Daytrip

Desert River Sea currently has a focus on the North West Kimberley. Having recently visited Kalumburu, Mowanjum Art & Culture Centre near Derby was next on our field trip itinerary. This visit was short, as it was made at an hour's notice to catch the last day of a woodblock printing workshop - a rare spontaneity possible because Derby is just two hours' drive from our base in Broome. We look forward to returning soon, such was the warm welcome and generosity shown in sharing art centre activities with us.

Mowanjum has been placing increasing emphasis on studio development and embarked on a 12 month plan for workshops on new media and techniques, as well as a rejuvenation of traditional craft practices and materials. Earlier this year Basil Hall conducted a successful woodblock printing workshop, and now that a press has been purchased this has been followed up with this week's 'mark-making' workshop with artist/ master craftperson Terry Baker from NSW. People were busy finishing off pieces when we were there. Some had carved blocks for printing and the results were already rolling off the press. Others were experimenting with relief carving and painting pine panels to stand as pieces in their own right. Earlier that week some of the men had gone out bush to cut a particular native softwood tree for use in this way and the freshly cut panels were curing on the studio verandah awaiting future use.

Wood incising is not a new technique for Mowanjum people, for whom engraving boab nuts and wooden implements such as shields for their own use and for exchange and sale, has a long history. Wood-block printing is a logical choice for extension of pre-existing skills into a new medium. The success of these workshops has been borne out by the fact that while we were there prints were being sold as the ink was drying. We sat down with Mary-Lou Divilli to discuss her involvement...

Mary-Lou identifies as Nyikina and Ngarinyin, both from her mother's side. She lives at Tjarramba (Pandanus Park) community located on the Fitzroy River fifty km south of

Derby, and comes in to Mowanjumb to work half each day at the media centre and archive. She has young children and does most of her own artwork at home on weekends. She says the main reason she paints is to learn more about culture and is inspired by the older people – she likes the way they tell stories and sing. Commercial gain is not a motivating factor; she wants people to know her work, and through it her identity.

Not limited to working in one media, a photograph Mary-Lou took is currently hanging in the Shinju Art Prize exhibition and she also loves to paint. She prefers ochre to acrylic when working on canvas as she loves the colours of earth pigments and the effects they produce when mixed together. She paints mostly animals such as possum and her totem animal the saltwater barramundi, but also enjoys painting stories.

Mary-Lou says she likes to work in a spontaneous style; *“a little bit rougher like the rock art. I like to experiment in my art, to try to make it look different.”* We watched her apply different pigments to a carved panel depicting a Wanjina head and two snakes as she explained her intention to sand this back to reveal complex layers of colour. Her reference for this image was an old photograph of a Ngarinyin rock art site taken during the Frobenius Expedition of 1939, when German anthropologists visited the North West Kimberley for research into Aboriginal culture. She had also just completed engraving a wood block impression of a fish, another rock art motif from her mother’s country. She used a small craft drill for some of this but preferred the hand tools, as she said they gave her more control and are best for the detail she was seeking. This striking image had already been printed and she was really happy with the result of her first effort in this medium.

Leaving Mary-Lou to continue her work, we then chatted to Petrina Bedford. Petrina is only seventeen and can claim two major Kimberley painters (now deceased) as grandparents – Nyunkuny Paddy Bedford on her father’s side and Jack Dale Mengenen on her mother’s, but already has established herself as a dedicated artist in her own right. Remarkably, she first exhibited paintings at a commercial gallery in Perth at age twelve, when three of her canvases were hung alongside the work of her maternal grandfather.

The oldest of seven girls, Petrina has Gija affiliations on her father’s side and Ngarinyin on her mother’s and lives at Imintji community 230 km east of Derby along the Gibb River Road. She was exceptionally close to her maternal grandfather, who passed away two years ago. He first encouraged her to paint as a young girl; *“painting makes me sad because I think about him, I miss him a lot. But it also makes me feel close to him. I think he might be proud of me now”*. She was clearly greatly influenced by her grandfather who, she says, took a special interest in her. At lunch, she managed to completely distract us from eating with her softly spoken yet highly expressive

renditions of stories from Ngarinyin country.

Petrina uses her own style when painting, but the subjects she turns to are similar to her grandfather's; Wanjina and classical stories relevant to her family. She loves to experiment with pattern, very evident in her boab nut carving, a technique at which she excels. Her painting style is looser than her carving in which her mark making, when using just a sharp pen knife, can be exceptionally detailed and precise. Her skills in wood engraving were immediately reflected in her first wood block print, a refined depiction of an Arawadi figure (see image above).

Before returning to Broome we managed to spend time with staff member Maitland Ngerdu who demonstrated the use of the Storylines database. Developed in partnership with the State Library of Western Australia, this assists in *'the digital return of photos and other materials directly to Aboriginal families, communities and people...*

The [Ara Irititja](#) software which the system is based on allows objects, people, places, stories, plant, animals and technology to be tagged and linked within the system to create vast knowledge profiles which reflect the many languages, stories and perspectives of Aboriginal Western Australia. Storylines is uniquely capable of adhering to cultural protocols, and supports media types including video and audio.'(SLWA website). Maitland is clearly passionate about his work and thanks to him we gained a fascinating insight into the value of this database to the Mowanjum art centre and community. Several thousand historic photographs from a number of sources have been uploaded with their documentation an ongoing process. Not only have families been able to identify and reconnect with images of their own histories, but photographs of early cultural practices are a valuable resource for artists.

We look forward to returning to Mowanjum in the near future for further documentation of these and other new developments. Desert River Sea will keep you posted.



Image credit: DRS Display at AGWA, Perth, August 2015 © Bo Wong, MetaPhoto

DRS Display at AWGA

From the 18 July - 7 September 2015 AGWA exhibited a temporary Desert River Sea; Kimberley Art Then & Now Display. The display highlighted a selection of Kimberley

artworks from the State Art Collection from the four regions of the project. Screened alongside the artworks were three short films; artists' stories captured in the East Kimberley during the 2014 collaboration with FTI's Indigenous Community Stories.

The display proved popular with the public in Perth, with some visitors feeling compelled to convey directly to AGWA staff how delighted they were in viewing these Kimberley treasures from the State Art Collection and commenting on how uplifting and positive the display was. The overwhelmingly encouraging interest in the exhibit saw a steady stream of people in the display area as soon as it opened. Visitors were further engaged by the video footage and moved by the insights offered via this medium screened alongside the artworks. It was noted by AGWA staff that people were spending more time than normal in the display area.

Since this introductory display in the gallery there has been a surge of interest in the project and an increased interest in the planned 2018 exhibition. The clear message we've received is that a large audience is eager for a comprehensive showcase of the art of the Kimberley.



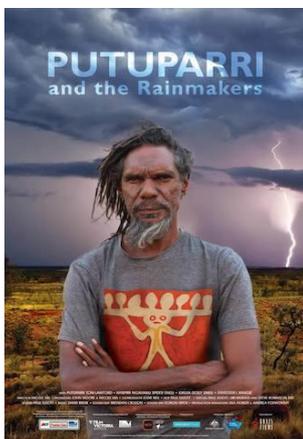
Image credit: Artist, John Prince Siddon and Mangkaja Arts Studio Coordinator, Wes Maselli at the WAIAA opening at AGWA, Perth July 2015 & Artwork Untitled by John Prince Siddon © John Prince Siddon courtesy Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency 2015

John Prince Siddon at the 2015 WAIAA

In July the Western Australian Indigenous Art Awards celebrated its sixth year, this biennial event hosted by AGWA is the richest Indigenous art prize in the country and one of the most prestigious events in the Australian Indigenous arts calendar. 14 finalists were selected and each artist was invited to show a body of their work allowing the audience to get a clear impression of each artist's style, practice and aesthetic.

This year the finalists included Walmajarri artist John Prince Siddon from Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley. Siddon, who paints at Mangkaja Arts, paints on board, boab nuts, coolamons and on found objects. His vibrantly animated realistic style of painting sees his artwork depict scenes of landscape, pre-contact life in the desert, animals and sometimes aggressive narratives of animals fighting each other for survival; with snakes being a prominent reoccurring motif. Click [here](#) to see John Prince Siddon's artist profile on the Desert River Sea website.

You can catch the work of John Prince Siddon as well as the rest of the WAIAA exhibition at AGWA showing now until the 12th October 2015.



Putuparri and the Rainmakers

Last week Desert River Sea made a quick trip to Fitzroy Crossing where we spent many satisfying hours at Marnin Studio and Mangkaja art centre. The main purpose of the visit however was for the Kimberley premiere of documentary *Putuparri and the Rainmakers*. The screening took place at a vacant lot across from the art centre, no red carpet but plenty of red pindan covered with tarpaulins for the audience to sprawl on. Around 400 locals crowded in for a feed of killer and salad, followed by

dancing and the film itself, shown on a large inflatable screen with a slow leak. The night was utterly memorable; thanks to the dedicated staff from Mangkaja and volunteers who worked tirelessly over a very long day to ensure its success...

The film:

In 1994 a small group of senior Walmajarri men from Fitzroy Crossing made a long-overdue return to their most significant law place; to Kurtal, a *jila* (living water) in the Great Sandy Desert. It had been some forty years since they had last visited to sing and maintain this site. Whilst the visit was prompted by the requirements of a native title claim process, the men were deeply concerned that the site would be forgotten to their descendants and that the creator snake which enlivened the place would leave or die. Little did they realise that this return would subsequently form the heart of a powerful feature length documentary filmed across the last two decades, now ready for mainstream release.

The original group included senior Mangkaja artists

Nyirpirr Spider Snell and Ngarralja Tommy May, as well as a young Putuparri Tom Lawford and his grandfather, now deceased. Lawford took a video camera on that trip and used it for the first time, recording the emotional return of both countrymen and water to the site, and the ceremony which induced the latter. These older men were known as the Rainmakers.

Accompanied by film-makers, the group revisited *Kurtal* with women and younger family members in 2002, 2007 and 2014. They recorded rain-making ritual, environmental changes in the area, and the often heart-breaking responses of the older people to the difficulty of maintaining a physical and metaphysical connection with their homeland. It became evident that the story of these trips was interwoven with the story of Tom Lawford's journey to manhood and beyond that, to the loss of the older generation and the struggles of the younger to take their place in a world vastly changed over the last century.

In absentia, painting has been a significant way of expressing the intensity of this relationship to *Kurtal*; Tommy May, Spider Snell and his wife Dolly have brought this subject alive on canvas over many years. All participated in the painting of the landmark Ngurrara Canvas, instrumental in the success of the native title claim of the same name and on which Spider danced *Kurtal*. They are sustained by the belief that when they die, their spirit will return to the site. Spider and Dolly now live at the aged care facility in Fitzroy Crossing. Spider no longer paints and, after one final visit made by helicopter last year, has seen *Kurtal* for the last time. Dolly recently won the major prize at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Art Award in Darwin. The canvas is authoritative and luminous, the subject: her birthplace, *Kurtal*.

Postscript:

Putuparri and the Rainmakers was recently awarded the \$100,000 main prize at CinefestOZ. It screens nationally from October 1.



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