



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

MEDIA CONTACTS: MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NGV  
MARION JOSEPH | 8620 2346 | 0427 147 999 | MARION.JOSEPH@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU  
AMY SILVER | 8620 2299 | 0448 683 945 | AMY.SILVER@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU  
BONNIE HORNE | 8620 2166 | 0448 369 260 | BONNIE.HORNE@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU  
BRIANA TOMASINO | 8620 2237 | 0408 333 399 | BRIANA.TOMASINO@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU

## Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala

NGV International | 17 December 2021 – 25 April 2022 | FREE



**17 August 2021:** *Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala* is a major ground floor exhibition at NGV International that celebrates the NGV's extraordinary collection of bark paintings and larrakitj (painted hollow poles) by women artists working out of the Yolngu-run art centre, Buku Larrngay Mulka Centre (Buku), situated in Northeast Arnhem Land.

Before 1970, no Yolngu women painted sacred themes on bark or larrakitj in their own right; however, in recent decades, a number of women artists have taken to these media, becoming renowned both nationally and internationally for daring and inventive works that challenge tradition. The NGV has been acquiring important works on bark by artists from Buku for more than two decades, establishing one of the most significant collections of work by Yolngu women artists.

Buku is located in a small Aboriginal community called Yirrkala, which is approximately 700 km east of Darwin. According to the staff at Buku, under Yolngu Law the 'Land' extends to include sea, and both land and sea are connected in a single cycle of life which Yolngu people celebrate through their songs, sacred designs and art. Both Yolngu men and women are known for channelling this unique world view into innovative works of art.

The exhibition begins with the significant bodies of work by the sisters Nancy Gaymala, Gulumbu, Barrupu, Ms. N. Yunupingu and Eunice Djerrkngu Yunupingu. In this first space, audiences will encounter stories about Yolngu conceptions of the universe, fire, and creation, as well as bold contemporary paintings that explore rhythm, tonality and gesture.

In the second gallery space, visitors will encounter other significant works by artists from the Community. Amongst these are optical illusions by Dhuwarrwarr Marika; waterlilies by Malaluba Gumana; monochromatic stars by Naminapu Maymuru-White; bold visions in pink and blue by Nonggirnga Marawili and Dhambit Mununggurr; as well as the last produced paintings by the late master painter, Ms Wirrpanda.

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A highlight from the exhibition is a newly commissioned large-scale, floor-based work by Naminapu Maymuru-White depicting Milngiyawuy, also known as the Milky Way or River of Stars. Maymuru-White's work extends across the entire floor of Federation Court and has been developed in collaboration with the NGV. This work is complimented by a multimedia cinema on the mezzanine floor, where audiences can sit and listen to the artist recounting her story of the work, a deeply moving story that is connected to the mortuary rites of the Manggalili clan whose deceased souls are turned into stars.

Three recently acquired bark paintings by Eunice Djerrkngu Yunupingu titled *I am a Mermaid* will also be on display. These vivid and technicolour paintings tell the story of the artist's conception. The paintings illustrate how Yunupingu's unborn spirit visited her father in the form of a mermaid, and how her father tried to spear the mermaid, believing the spirit to be fish. He then fell asleep and upon waking, Yunupingu's mother confirmed with her husband that she was with child, thus bringing their daughter into the world.

A further highlight is Dhuwarrwarr Marika's *Birth of a Nation*, which was recently included as a finalist in the 2020 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. The designs in Marika's work contain within them the identity of the coastal place known as Yalangbara. Yalangbara is the fabled landing site of the Djang'kawu Sisters, the major creator beings who arrived there from their mythical island Burralku.

Also on display is a collection of larrakitj, including nine recently acquired 'pink poles', painted by Nonggirnga Marawili. Each of Marawili's works have been rendered in an arresting array of pink tones produced by mixing recycled printer cartridges with earth pigments and ochre. Signalling a daring departure in both technique and colour, Marawili's distinctive larrakitj feature the sacred cross-hatched design for the freshwaters of the Djapu clan, whose ancestors hunted using woven fish traps. Marawili's works are to be presented amongst a selection of larrakitj within a mirrored room, creating the illusion of an infinite grid. Larrakitj were traditionally used by Yolngu people as a type of coffin or bone container placed following a ceremony as a memorial to a deceased person after death.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: '*Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala* is a major exhibition that celebrates the NGV's especially rich collection of works on bark. The exhibition brings together some of Australia's great singular master painters and we are extremely grateful to each of these artists for sharing their important and sacred stories with Melbourne audiences.'

Sarah Ravis, Managing Director, MIMCO, said: 'MIMCO is delighted to continue our longstanding partnership with the NGV, by supporting the upcoming *Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala* exhibition. This exhibition is like no other, celebrating the diversity and depth of Indigenous Australian culture, specifically highlighting these tremendously talented Yolngu Women. As an Australian Brand, we wholeheartedly believe we have an important role to play in the storytelling of our rich and diverse heritage. We are grateful to be able to showcase, not only these breathtaking works on bark, but also the journeys and stories of the Yolngu women themselves.'

*Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala* is presented by the National Gallery of Victoria in collaboration with Buku Larrngay Mulka Centre and is on display from 17 Decemeber 2021 to 25 April 2022 at NGV International, 180 St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Entry is free. For further information, please visit the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](http://NGV.MELBOURNE).

This exhibition has been developed by the NGV and Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre.

#### **NGV KIDS EXHIBITION: The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkngu Yunupingu and her sister**

Coinciding with *Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala*, NGV Kids presents an all-ages exhibition, *The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkngu Yunupingu and her sister*, that celebrates the vibrant culture and community of the Yolngu people through the work of two artists and sisters, Ms. N. Yunupingu and Eunice Djerrkngu Yunupingu. The interactive exhibition will introduce young visitors to the two sisters, their art works and Yolngu culture and community through a custom-designed space featuring hands-on and multimedia activities produced especially for this exhibition.

*The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkngu Yunupingu and her sister* is generously supported by the Packer Family and Crown Resorts Foundations and Spencer Ko.

#### **ABOUT BUKU LARRNGAY MULKA CENTRE**

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre is the Indigenous community controlled art centre of Northeast Arnhem Land. Located in Yirrkala, a small Aboriginal community on the north-eastern tip of the Top End of the Northern Territory, approximately 700km east of Darwin. In 1976, the Yolngu artists established Buku-Larrnggay Arts in the old Mission health centre as an act of self-determination coinciding with the withdrawal of the Methodist Overseas Mission and the Land Rights and Homeland movements. In 1988, a new museum was built with a Bicentenary grant and this houses a collection of works put together in the 1970s illustrating clan law and also the Message Sticks from 1935 and the Yirrkala Church Panels from 1963. In 1996, a screen print workshop and extra gallery spaces was added to the space to provide a range of different mediums to explore. In 2007, The Mulka Project was established to house and display a

collection of tens of thousands of historical images and films as well as creating new digital product.

The expanded Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre now consists of two divisions; the Yirrkala Art Centre which represents Yolngu artists exhibiting and selling contemporary art and The Mulka Project which acts as a digital production studio and archiving centre incorporating the museum.

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**IMAGES:** [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5mda4m5duan1pvy/AAArKTwrK\\_oHWJS97hEH2GxZa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5mda4m5duan1pvy/AAArKTwrK_oHWJS97hEH2GxZa?dl=0)

**IMAGE CAPTION:**

**Nongirrŋa Marawili**

*Baratjala* 2019

earth pigment and recycled print toner on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus sp.*)

90.0 x 115.0 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2020

© Nongirrŋa Marawili Marawili, courtesy of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala

**Mulkun Wirrpanda**

*Dädi ga Guŋdirr* 2020

earth pigments on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus sp.*)

201.0 x 90.0 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2020

© Mulkun Wirrpanda, courtesy of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala

**Dhambit Munungurr**

*Bees at Gängän* 2019

synthetic polymer paint on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus sp.*)

194.0 x 117.0 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Purchased with funds supported by the Orloff Family Charitable Trust, 2020

© Dhambit Munungurr, courtesy of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala

**Media Contacts:**

**Marion Joseph, Associate Director, Media and Public Affairs, NGV**

0427 147 999 | [marion.joseph@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:marion.joseph@ngv.vic.gov.au)

**Amy Silver, Senior Publicist, Media and Public Affairs, NGV**

0448 289 795 | [amy.silver@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:amy.silver@ngv.vic.gov.au)

**Bonnie Horne, Media and Public Affairs Officer, NGV**

0448 369 260 | [bonnie.horne@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:bonnie.horne@ngv.vic.gov.au)

**Briana Tomasino, Media and Public Affairs Officer, NGV**

0408 333 399 | [briana.tomasino@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:briana.tomasino@ngv.vic.gov.au)

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EXHIBITION PARTNER

MAJOR PATRON

SUPPORTERS

**B U K U**

LISA FOX



**MIMCO**

**Dulux**

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**CREATIVE VICTORIA**