



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

The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkṇu Yunupinju and Her Sister

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



22 November 2021: NGV kids presents an all-ages exhibition, *The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkṇu Yunupinju and Her Sister*, which celebrates the vibrant culture and community of the Yolṇu people through the work of two pioneering artists and sisters. The exhibition will introduce young audiences to Yolṇu art, culture and language and provide an opportunity for children and families to learn more about and engage with the rich culture from North-East Arnhem Land - known to be one of the oldest living cultures on this planet.

Known for their vibrant artworks and arresting depictions of their personal stories, Ms N Yunupinju and her sister Eunice Djerrkṇu Yunupinju are each award-winning artists in their own right. In the exhibition, Ms N Yunupinju's work focuses on the land, depicting creatures including geckos, turtles, and lizards, as well as incorporating intricate and abstract design elements. Djerrkṇu focuses on the sea in her vivid depictions of mermaids, representing the story of her conception as a spiritual mermaid, all rendered using a combination of natural earth pigments and reclaimed toner ink from discarded printer cartridges.

A highlight of the exhibition will be a floor-to-ceiling installation of seventeen of Ms N Yunupinju's colourful screenprints, linocuts and lithographs representing geckos, turtles and lizards, which have informed the interactive spaces in the exhibition. Inspired by these works on display, children can explore and along the way learn the names of animals and how to count to five in Yolṇu Matha, the language of Yolṇu people, in a creative counting game. A specially produced film will also allow children to learn how bark is collected and prepared for painting, and be inspired to create their own digital bark paintings, choosing from a colour palette of Ms N Yunupinju's natural ochres, or Djerrkṇu's vivid and paints repurposed from disposable printer ink cartridges.

Inspired by Djerrkṇu Yunupinju's *I am a mermaid* 2020, a story in which her spirit appears to her father as a mermaid and signals her conception, children learn about birth and creation, and can draw a portrait of themselves within a three-dimensional scene on a take home pop-up card. For younger audiences, a circular lounge filled with cushions shaped as maypal (shellfish) will invite children to play and sort the shellfish into a few of the many different species found on Country.

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The exhibition has been developed alongside Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, an arts centre located in Yirrkala, approximately 700 km east of Darwin. The exhibition has also been developed in collaboration with award-winning Yolŋu artist, author and filmmaker Siena Mayutu Wurmarri Stubbs, who is also the granddaughter of these Yunupinu sisters. Siena's voice can be heard throughout animations inside the exhibition, helping children to pronounce words in the Yolŋu Matha language. Siena has also collaborated with NGV on the new NGV kids' publication *123 Turtles and Geckos*, which takes young readers on a counting adventure across Country with Siena and her grandmother, Ms N Yunupinu.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: 'We are delighted to share this experience for children and understand the importance of connecting young Melbourne visitors with one of the many rich First Nations cultures in Australia. We hope the work of the two sisters and artists will inspire the next generation of young artists, and foster a deep and continuing connect with First Nations culture.'

The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkŋu Yunupinu and Her Sister runs alongside *Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala* which is a major ground floor exhibition at presenting the work of eleven artists from Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre. The exhibition celebrates the NGV's extraordinary collection of bark paintings and larrakitj (painted hollow poles).

The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkŋu Yunupinu and Her Sister is presented by the National Gallery of Victoria in collaboration with Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre and is on display from 17 December 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](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au).

This exhibition has been developed by the NGV and Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre. *The Gecko and the Mermaid: Djerrkŋu Yunupinu and Her Sister* is generously supported by the Packer Family and Crown Resorts Foundations, City of Melbourne and Spencer Ko.

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IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nbpbo7rr14jdujb/AAAWmrJg6wS1WFuC56Xamuzma?dl=0>

IMAGE CAPTION:

(left)

Eunice Djerrkŋu Yunupinu

New Generation 2021

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

169 x 76 cm

© Djerrkŋu Yunupinu, courtesy of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala

(right)

Ms N Yunupinu

B̄aru ga Ganytjurr 2007

colour screenprint, ed. 23/28

76.0 x 56.0 cm

Proposed acquisition

© Ms N Yunupinu, 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

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

0448 289 795 | amy.silver@ngv.vic.gov.au

Bonnie Horne, Media and Public Affairs Officer, NGV

0448 369 260 | bonnie.horne@ngv.vic.gov.au

Briana Tomasino, Media and Public Affairs Officer, NGV

0408 333 399 | briana.tomasino@ngv.vic.gov.au

PARTNER

