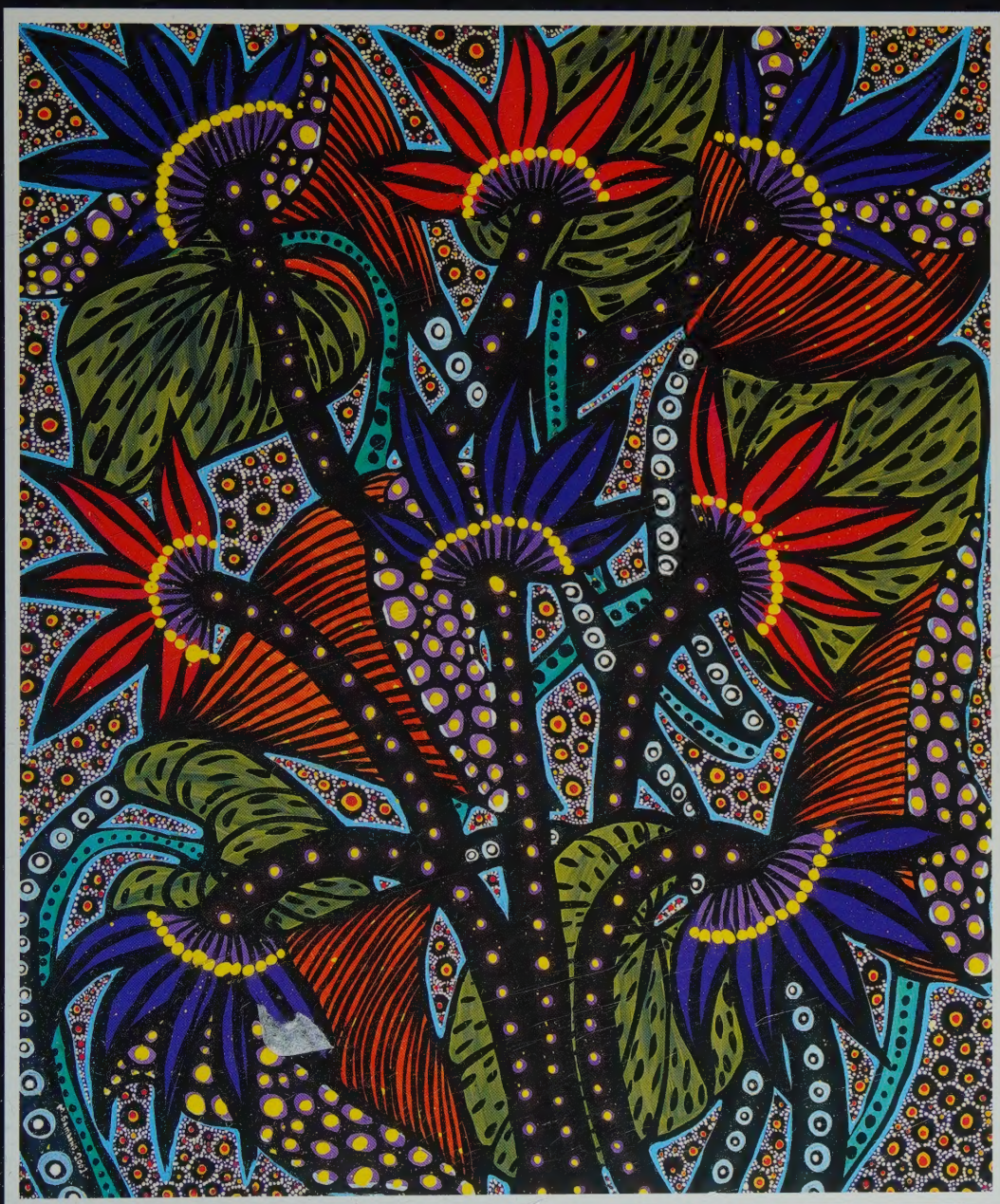


The Spiritual Art of the Aboriginal People from
Australia's Daly River region

DADIRRI

the spring within



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the spring within

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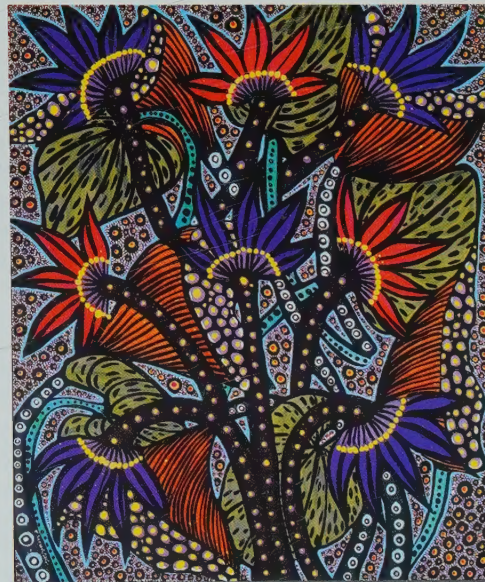


“Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful: for beauty is God’s handwriting
.... a wayside sacrament.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Spiritual Art of the Aboriginal People from Australia’s Daly River region

DADIRRI the spring within



Lotus

Marita Sambono

Merrepen Arts, Nauiyu 2000

Tall lotus flourish in the billabongs of the Daly River region. When the beautiful petals fall, the seed pods expand to supply delicious nuts. The large leaves provide shelter for turtles and fish and a resting place for many birds.

Eileen Farrelly

First Published by Terry Knight and Associates, Darwin NT Australia, in 2003.
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Eileen Farrelly
Perth, 2003

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DADIRRI -THE SPRING WITHIN



Mercia Wawul, b. 1924
photo Patricia Marrfurra McTaggart

Ngan'gikurunggurr means "Deep Water Sounds" and is the name of my mother's tribe. The word can be broken into three parts. *Ngan'gi* means word or sound, *kuri* means water and *gurr* means deep. So, the name means "Deep Water Sounds" or "Sounds of the Deep". This book is about tapping into the deep springs within us.

Many Australians understand that Aboriginal people have a special respect for nature. The identity we have with the land is sacred and unique. Many people are beginning to understand this more. Also there are many Australians who appreciate that Aboriginal people have a very strong sense of community. All persons matter. All of us belong and there are many more Australians who understand that we are people who celebrate together.

What I want you to know about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language it is the quality called *dadirri*.

It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.

Dadirri recognises the deep spring inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call "contemplation".

When I experience *dadirri* I am made whole again. I can sit on the river bank or walk through the trees. Even if someone close has passed away I can find peace in this silent awareness. There is no need for words. A big part of *dadirri* is listening. Throughout the years, we have listened to our stories. They are told and sung, over and over, as the seasons go by. Today, we still gather around the campfires and together we hear the sacred stories.

As we grow older, we ourselves become the storytellers. We pass on to the young ones all they must know. The stories and songs sink quietly into our minds and we hold them deep inside. In the ceremonies we celebrate the awareness of our lives as sacred.

We take part in ceremonies. I love to see the painted bodies and to watch the dancers. I like the sound of the didgeridoos and the clapsticks. I never feel alone in ceremonies. Sometimes at a corroboree, before the dancing has begun, we sit and listen as the song-men or song-women begin the story. Everyone is relaxed. We feel secure and happy. We are together and it is good.

We watch the bush foods and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly.

We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings. The right time must be present. Everything must be done in a proper way. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes hours will be spent preparing the body before an important ceremony.

We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more urgent than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for.



'As we grow older, we ourselves become the storytellers. We pass on to the young ones all they must know.'

The contemplative way of *dadirri* spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again. One of our ceremonies that bring about this wholeness is the Smoking Ceremony.

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for Him to make His word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of *dadirri* (that deep listening and quiet stillness) His way will be clear.

We are river people. We cannot hurry the river. We need to move with the current and understand its ways.

We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us – but waiting with us as we find our way in the world.

My people are used to the struggle and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves had to spend many years hearing about the white man's ways. Some of the learning was forced, but in many cases people tried hard over a long time to learn new ways.

We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he has to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time to listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things we have always longed for – respect and understanding.

I never get tired of going back to the bush. My relations have told me about the origins of these places. This history of my ancestors has real meaning for me. I learnt about a trading trail, a track that neighbouring tribes used to follow, the place of our ceremonial grounds. All these places mean a lot to me. They are part of me. All the bush is part of my life.

I was born under a tree. My mother showed me the place. She showed me where I used to play and where I would hunt for wild honey. The feeling I have for this space is very special. The place where I was born – it's me.

To be still, brings peace – and it brings understanding. When we are really still in the bush, we concentrate. We are aware of the anthills and the turtles and the waterlilies. Our culture is different. We are asking our fellow Australians to take time to know us.

I believe it is not just twice as hard, but four times as hard, for an Aboriginal person to achieve anything in our country.

Life is hard for my people. Good and bad things came with the years of contact – and with the years following. People often absorbed the bad things and not the good. It was easier to do the bad things than try a bit harder to achieve what they really hoped for.

I think it is something like a whirlwind. We might get caught in it, but after, we come out “all fluffed up”. We think, “I got through! I made it”.

But some people get caught and stuck. They might feel trapped; or they might drop out. They might suicide. In a way, my people are going through this whirlwind all the time. So we are asking that our fellow countrymen will come and learn and listen and wait with us. This will encourage us and lighten our burdens.

And we know that our white brothers and sisters in this land, themselves, carry their own particular worries. We believe that if they let us come to them – if they open their minds and hearts to us – we may lighten their burdens. There is a struggle for us; but I believe we have not lost our spirit of *dadirri*. It is the way we strengthen and renew our inner selves,

I would like to conclude this by saying that there are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The sound of the word - Jesus.

And I believe that the spirit of *dadirri* that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves but also within our whole nation.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Naiyu, 2003

FOREWORD

When I was stationed at Daly River in the early seventies, I discovered that Miriam Rose, a trained teacher and a promising young artist, wanted to use art as a way of strengthening cultural identity as a foundation for education. This was a novel concept because there was hitherto no tradition of art being practised in the community, other than ceremonial body painting.

She saw art as a way of integrating her Christian faith and tribal story into a genuine expression of culture. Specifically, it was to be a type of art that drew its inspiration from the stories, myths and symbols of the culture.

Yet, precisely, herein lay her problem. In the school, Miriam was teaching both boys and girls. Traditionally each group, the boys and the girls, would be instructed in due course by appropriate seniors in what was "Men's Business" and what was "Women's Business". In some ways, being a woman put her at a disadvantage. To solve her problem she went about asking discreet questions of appropriate people, with respectful diplomacy, as to what could and could not be painted.

It was only after a long period of questioning and "making sure" that she developed her own distinctive art form. This, too, gave encouragement to others to establish their own interpretive modes in the Women's Centre that she and the other women had established for their mutual benefit. It was at this stage that Eileen Farrelly was invited to the community to help establish the Centre.

The art blossomed and Merrepen Arts Inc. was formed as an artists' cooperative. This not only brought the artists, now both men and women, together but it inspired them in their specific field of art. It was a place where they heard the stories of the old people, where they shared their stories, and later shared by speaking in and through their stories. It became a place where people developed a pride in themselves and their culture.

In time the Annual Merrepen Arts Festival was established. It was one time in the year when people in ever increasing numbers came to the Daly to appreciate and purchase the art on display. Today the art is displayed and sold in the permanent Merrepen Arts Gallery and a great cultural festival revolving around the art has become an annual event.

The artists are firm believers in the power of symbols. Symbols, they maintain, have the ability to draw their power from the very roots of their culture. By listening to the myths and stories and by sharing their particular stories, the artists allow the symbols to emerge in their paintings. Often these symbols demonstrate the power to express the inexpressible. They are an effective way of enculturating the good news of the Christian Gospel.

Significantly, Pope John Paul told the aboriginal people on his visit to Alice Springs in 1986 that the Church in Australia would not be a truly Australian Church until the aboriginal people had made their essential cultural contribution. This book represents the efforts of the Daly River Merrepen Arts Painters. May it be some very special part of that essential aboriginal cultural contribution.

John Leary M.S.C.
St Mary's Cathedral, Darwin
March 2002



*St Francis Xavier Church,
Nauiyu*

INTRODUCTION

This book comes to you from the painters of Daly River. It is an offering towards greater understanding. Our spiritual heritage is deep inside. For a long time we concealed much of it – kept it from those who did not value or respect it. Times are changing. People are anxious to learn and accept what we have to offer.

works are very precious and very important. Some of them have died while we have been thinking and talking about this book. Some of their paintings are included. As we painted, we talked. We talked about the old times before the miners and the farmers and the cattlemen came. We wondered what life would have



*l-r: Molly Yawalminy,
Mercia Wawul, Mabel
Nglangowuk, Topsy Wiya,
Trixie Jimarin.*

photo © S. Daily

We have a particular place in history. There are still some of our elders who can help us experience our traditions, know where we belong, explain our Dreamings and pass on precious myths and legends. Our language is still strong.

We have experienced the good and bad of European settlement. We are children of the Mission. It is in a special way that we want to tell our story.

About fifteen years ago, a group of us got together to set up a women's place where we could help and strengthen each other. Some wanted to study to help their children, old ladies wanted to know how to write their names and we all felt that there could be other skills we could learn, something to do in our spare time.

At school we used to paint and draw. Perhaps we might do this again. We needed boards, brushes, and paints. Once we had these there was no stopping us. We had a new freedom.

It seemed as if all the things we needed to say, all the stories we wanted to tell which could not be put into words and written down could be expressed through our brushes.

We sat around and asked our elders to tell us stories. The children would listen and watch as we painted. We could record our Dreamings. There is so much to recall, to remember. Even today we can be reminded of stories, long forgotten until something occurs to bring them to mind.

One wonderful thing is that old people who have never painted before have been encouraged to try. Their

been like for our ancestors. They would have known the river, the hills, the trees, and the animals that we live among today.

We talked about more recent times. Mothers and grandmothers told us about coming off their homelands to work on the peanut and cashew farms; fathers and grandfathers became cattlemen. Then came the Mission.

Many of us as children lived in the dormitories at the mission and went back to our families at weekends and holiday times. We went to school, were taught to read and write and learnt about Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We were baptised, made our First Holy Communion, were Confirmed. When we went back to the camps our elders listened to what we were saying. It did not seem so very strange to them.

The old people had their practices ensuring spiritual strength, healing and forgiveness. They loved the celebration of the cycles of the season and the cycles of their own humanity.

And this is what we want to tell you about. Our paintings opened the way to our past, our present and our future. This book is a gift to you. We hope that you will accept and value it. Maybe, as you think about it, you will find Dadirri- the Spring Within.

It is through our paintings that we shall tell you where we stand at the beginning of the third millennium. We have taken the Christian message to our hearts and made it our own. We have not forsaken our Aboriginal heritage but rather used it to enrich the message of the Gospel.

naiiyu daly river



A section of Maureen Warramburr's painting,
stylised in embossed copper



A day in the life of Naiiyu
Maureen Warramburr
Warramburr 1999

NAUIYU - DALY RIVER

The 'Daly' has a relatively short history in terms of white settlement. In August 1865 Colonel B. T. Finnis came from South Australia, surveying the western coast of South Australia (later, that became the Northern Territory). He sailed into Anson Bay and explored the upstream reaches of a large river that he named the Daly in honour of the Governor, Sir Dominic Daly. That is the beginning of the commonly recorded white contacts on the Daly.

Within twenty years farming began. The discovery of copper brought miners to the area. Access was difficult and mainly by river.

Jesuit missionaries arrived in 1886. They made three attempts to found settlements: Uniya, Hermit Hill and New Uniya. Despite their valiant efforts, crop failures, floods, malaria and other fevers, the nomadic nature of the Aborigines and difficulties of communication (three weeks overland from Darwin) forced the missionaries to abandon the last foundation in 1899. The lonely remnant of a chimney on a hill stands as a reminder that these remarkable Jesuit Fathers were the first to bring the Christian story to the Daly River.

As development increased many Aboriginal people came from their homelands to work on farms, bringing their children with them. Some of the settlers also formed permanent relationships with tribal women. Education for the children became a critical issue. Health of the aborigines was also a major concern because diseases such as leprosy, hookworm and various fevers were prevalent. It was not until 1954 that growers on the Daly approached Bishop O'Loughlin to ask for a school to be built and a Rural Health Clinic to be established.

Bishop O'Loughlin approached the N.T. Administrator for assistance in solving this problem. (There was already a Catholic Mission on the coast at Port Keats, 200 km away). The Bishop met with the Daly residents and thus began a new chapter of the Daly River story. It was now more than fifty years since the Jesuits had left.

In 1955 the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, with volunteers, undertook the task of building accommodation, work sheds, clinic, church, convent school and an airstrip. In January 1956, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart arrived. Dormitories were set up for the children who stayed at the Mission during the week. Adults today recall their memories of dormitory days, mostly good.

Much has happened since then although the Mission influence is still important. There is a resident Catholic Priest. The school now has a qualified Aboriginal Principal, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (PhD, BA, Dip Ed, MA, AO) and is administered through the Catholic Education Office. There is a Leadership

Centre much used by groups, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for retreats, meetings and by those who simply need a quiet time by the river.

In 1988 the Community was incorporated under the Local Government Act with the name Nauiyu Nambiyu (*coming together in one place*). It is administered by a Council Clerk under the direction of an elected Council of seven members. A non-aboriginal may be elected to the council, provided he/she meets with the residency requirements. The name has since been shortened to Nauiyu.

Coming from a number of different homelands, those who have settled in Nauiyu have brought with them at least ten different languages with Ngan'gikurunggurr predominating. The traditional owners of Nauiyu are the Malak Malak people.

Homelands are still very significant, their traditional owners visiting them as often as possible. The outstation movement has resulted in some permanent settlements being established in the homelands.

In January 1998 Nauiyu was completely devastated by floods. Water rose to ceiling height and all facilities were put out of action. Irreplaceable records of artwork were lost. It is a credit to the spirit of the people together with emergency help from many agencies that the Community, one year later, was functioning to capacity.

A Day In The Life Of Nauiyu



A day in the life of Nauiyu
Maureen Warramburr
Warramburr 1999

This painting has so many of the elements that make Nauiyu a beautiful place in which to live. You can follow the story from the top left hand corner. The sun shines on the green river in which a stingray and turtle are swimming. In the centre, look on the side of the river to see a crocodile with its eggs. As night comes on, the stars and moon are shining. Continuing clockwise, see the long legged Jabiru. Further on there is a heart-shaped yam with its climbing leaves and flowers. Small animals live among the grasses. A goanna, spider, caterpillar, dragonfly are in the scene. The blue billabong has waterlilies on its surface and birds in the water. The twenty-four hours are complete.

dreamings



"We are part of our land, the
landforms, the trees, the animals, and
the language."

Gracie Kumbi
Kumbi 2000



DREAMINGS

We are *putymeme*, born from the earth before time began. We are part of our land, the landforms, the trees, the animals, and the language.

Each family group has a special place and our Dreamings are there. We may share our language with our neighbours and we may marry those from another country, but our Dreamings are always our own. They come to us through our fathers.

MALFIYIN DREAMING



Gracie Kumbi
Kumbi 2000

courtesy Isobel Harrison

Malfiyin lies about a two hours drive away from Daly River. The river that runs through it is a branch of the Moil. Our family group comes from there. We have several Dreamings – Pelican (*burra*), Chicken Hawk (*angar:pipti*), King Brown (*anganisyni*), Water (*kuri*), Bittern (*agiminy*), Sandfrog (*aniyen*) and the stars (*ngannnime*). Our Dreamings are closely related to the physical features of that country.

Special permission was obtained from an elder to visit Malfiyin with a small group of traditional owners. The photographs (right) identify some of our Dreaming sites, and some were painted by Kumbi.

Kumbi's mother, Molly, tells this story:

Pindiyn, a good spirit lives there. He has a large stomach. He lives in a cave on the side of a mountain. Chicken Hawks also live in this cave. It is a Creation place. Sometimes on the peak a light can be seen. There is a waterfall —this flows into a river. At the fork of the river one arm joins up to Kareding and the main arm joins up to Malfiyin. The fork is the place of Bittern — on one bank is the one with the good eye, on the other, the blind one. It is here that Black Bream swim in the river. There is a mountainous place where the Star Dreaming is found. From here you can look down on Yambeing and the Pelican Dreaming. This is the line that begins another country for another family group.

At the foot of the hill where the creek of Malfiyin comes from, there are two holes made by the Bitterns. Water passes underground, forming a tunnel between the holes. Molly says that she had been told that, long ago, a small boy fell into one of the holes and came out unconscious from the other. The older people lifted him up by the legs and left him on an ant's nest, which eventually woke him up.

Miriam adds to this:

The Moil River begins from a spring in the Wingate Ranges. As the Moil makes its way down the mountain and runs into the flood plain below, there are many special places. We call them Creation places. It is where things begin or where they come from.

Our Dreamings have special places on the River. We believe that there is a place where an animal or a bird has a Creation place. They are responsible for creating that particular area.

These things have a story. For example, during flood time, the female Pelican made her way on a paperbark raft up from the flood plain to lay her eggs. At the foot of the mountains the river formed a whirlpool. Pelican got caught in it and almost died in the raging water. She managed to make a landing and stumbled up the rocky outcrop. She sat down and laid her eggs.

The moment she finished laying, Pelican and her eggs turned into stone. You can see Pelican and her eggs today. We visit this place as often as we can with our children and tell them the story.

The family group of Malfiyin has a little spirit person we call *Tjirrity Mamal*. He looks after the land. Our people say he's harmless.

The animals and plants that have formed Malfiyin are part of the landscape and we belong to them. We believe we are the Pelican, Water, King Brown, Maggie Geese and the others. They are our Dreamings. Other birds and animals live there. We only claim the ones that come from Malfiyin.

Below: Pelican Dreaming
Bottom: Black Bream Dreaming



photos courtesy Mark Crocum

We also have a Conception Dreaming. Before a woman becomes pregnant there may be an unexpected event. For instance, I may catch lots of turtles when no one else is catching any. This might go on for some months. Then someone in the family announces that she is going to have a baby. Then the luck of catching turtles runs out. When the baby is born, the relations check the baby's body for birthmarks. They give the baby a Dreaming, maybe a turtle or barramundi. These are not as important as those that come from the Homeland.

To me, Angels are Jesus' Conception Dreaming, given to Him when Gabriel told Mary she was with Child. His Dreaming is the Star of David, the sign to which His people belong. He owns a bad spirit, the Devil.

The sign of the Fish represents Christians to me. That is like Aboriginal people belonging to animals or a fish. God also has good spirits that look after His Kingdom. Aboriginal people, too, belong to spirit people who, in their country, look after the land.

MERREPEN DREAMING

I am Philomena Mulvien. *Merrepen* is the Ngan'gikurunggurr name for the fan palm that grows in the area. It is also the name of our traditional homeland. This is the Dreaming of that country.

When you go out to that country, not far from the houses, there is a hill – not a very big one – a small



Philomena Mulvien
Mirenni 1999

one. You can see the track of the Merrepen Dreaming looking for a place to stay. It found its place near the hill. The Dreaming of that Merrepen is the mother one (*Falmi Merrepen*). It carries its child on its shoulder. The one standing opposite is *Yerridi Merrepen* (man).

The leech is my family's Dreaming. Merrepen told Leech (*Adiny*) to go and live in the swamp. As he moved down from the top of where the outstation is now, he made holes in the grass, moving through the swamp, making waterholes as he moved in and out of the ground and settled down in the billabong (*Adiny Kirim*). Leech has been there for a very long time. When we went out I heard stories from my Daddy as we walked on the grass. They pull up the grass and people can drink water from the holes.

Philomena's sister, Anne Carmel, also tells about that Dreaming:



Anne Carmel Mulvien
Newi 1997

My Dreaming is Merrepen, the Fan Palm. In my painting the black circle represents the Merrepen Dreaming. Around are the Little People. The white circle and the Little People are my Mum's Dreaming, the Water Python. At the top, the four circles represent the Leech Dreaming and the lines show the tracks of Merrepen and Leech. I put my Mum's Dreaming in because she is married to my Dad.

Our great-great grandfather came to Merrepen from Nardirri. There are Little People there but they speak a different language from those at Merrepen or Ferriderr. Little People do not like strangers coming into their country. They smell their sweat and could hurt them. That's why it is important to be properly welcomed into a new country.

I often hear them talking. One day we went out hunting getting sugarbag from an antpit (anthill). There was lots of it there. We saw some strangers. Next day when we went out to get some more honey it was all gone. The Little People had hidden it.

PAPANGALA DREAMING

Blanket Lizard is our name for the Frilled Neck Lizard. He also wanted to go and live with Merrepen. But Merrepen said to him, "Go and live at the top of the hill where it is called Papangala". Merrepen said to him, "Even though I told you to leave, we will always look after each other".



Margaret Parry
Puleli 1994

NINYTI NINYTI DREAMING

Blanket Lizard was originally at Papangala but he had an argument with the Evil Spirit who did not want him to live there. So he went away and made his own camp at Ninyti Ninyti. At that place there are two large baobab trees and he lives behind them. They stand like sentinels in front of a fortress, preventing the Evil Spirit from coming in.



Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 1987

THE SPIRIT PEOPLE – WARRAKUNTHA

This is the story of the Little People who look after my Father's country – Ferriderr. The Moil River runs through it.

At night you can see the lights of the paperbark torches that the Little People carry. When a person from another country goes to Ferriderr he must be welcomed in a special way by having water put on his head by the elders. If this is not done, the Little People can drag the visitor away from his camping place. I know people who had this happen to them.



Dorothy Sambono
Nurra 1987

Two white circles at the corners of my painting represent the Sores Dreaming. I put them there to mark the boundaries of Ferriderr. Two large brown and white circles are the holes in the river where the Sores Dreaming lives. If strangers swim there they can get sores or their hair will fall out. However, the Little People look after us.

At Ferriderr, a plain stretches into the distance from the river, right out to a range of hills. There are small holes in the plain. The fine black and brown lines are the smoother parts.

We have other Dreamings. An important one is the Emu Dreaming. A long time ago, the Emu came underground from Palumpa. The tunnel came out near a tree beside the Moil River.

NGAMBU NGAMBU DREAMING

Ngambu Ngambu is my country. A stream, part of the Moil River, runs through it, making a series of billabongs. It holds the Watersnake (*Emire*) Dreaming.

There are 'itchy trees' beside the water and two big Leichardt trees (*yerrnganmimbi*). The Bloodwood tree there is part of my Dreaming and the sand holds a Menstruation Dreaming.

Mary Kanngi
Kanngi 1994



LAFUGANNYI DREAMING (i)

This is the Dreaming of my husband, William, along the Fish River.

Long time ago, the Good Eye and the Bad Eye went hunting for sugarbag. They found the honey in a gum tree and started to cut down the tree. One of the chips went into the eye of the Bad Eye and made it sore. He couldn't see any more.

In this country also flows a creek. The Bad Eye says to the Good Eye that he is going to live upstream and the Good Eye has to live downstream now.

Today the Dreaming is still at this place. When people go hunting, they call out to the ancestors to provide them with food. If they don't call out, they won't find anything to eat. When they call out they listen to the birds, especially the pigeons or doves. They tell them if they are welcome or not. Those birds are sitting on the branches of the gum tree.

There are Mermaids living in the water. They call out at night. You can hear them. It is not safe for young boys to be alone because the mermaids may try to take them into the water.



Louise Pandella
Pandella 2000



Violet Parry
Tchululuk 1990

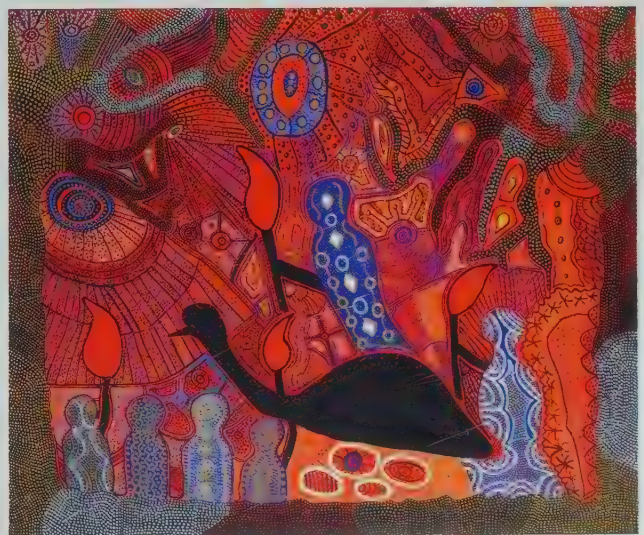
LAFUGANNYI DREAMING (ii)

This is Violet's Dingo Dreaming. At Lafugannyi there is a cave in the side of a hill. In that cave there lives a Dingo. He has been there for a long time. People are frightened to go there.

There are lots of dingoes and other animals in that place.

EMU DREAMING – FERRIDERR

When we go out to our homeland we sometimes see the Little People, carrying torches made of paperbark. They talk to each other. The Emu is our Dreaming. They love to eat the nuts of Zamia Palms.

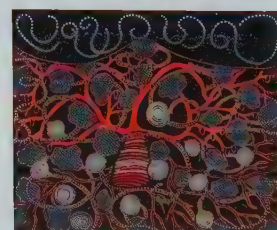


Beatrice Wumbungyi
Wumbungyi 1990

storytelling



“We are going to tell you some of the stories we were told as children.”



Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 1994

STORYTELLING

Until very recent times our people could not read or write in the sense that European people understand. But we communicated in many other ways. We have always loved telling stories.

Our elders teach us through these tales. As we sit around campfires at night we listen, laugh, feel frightened, and hear about things that happened long ago. We see the results of disobedience, mischief, selfishness, jealousy, greed, wrong marriage, and betrayal, but we also learn about things of which we can be proud.

Most of our stories come from our parents and grandparents and they heard them from their old people. But if something new happens there will be a story about it.

We are going to tell you some of the stories we were told as children. When we write the stories down they may seem long because as the old people tell them they repeat things, over and over, and use lots of actions to bring them alive.

Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 1994



Mercia Wawul tells stories through her painting. Naiyu 2003.

THE ROCKS THAT FELL FROM THE SKY

Long, long ago, back in the Dreamtime, a group of Aboriginal people lived near a creek. They were very happy. One day, some children asked their parents if they could go out and look for 'green plums' and berries.

Before they set out, the elders of the tribe warned the children that when they found a tree, which had ripe plums, they could eat the plums. But when they finished, they were not to throw the seeds around but should place them carefully on the ground.



The children asked why. The elders told them that if they did not do this, something very bad would happen.

After a while the children set out. They walked and walked until some of them called out that they had found some plums. The other children ran and started eating them. They made sure that no seeds were thrown around but placed carefully on the ground.

In the group was a small child. He had forgotten the warning. He threw the seeds everywhere. The other children saw him. They were frightened. Suddenly there was a loud rumbling sound. The children looked up and saw these rocks. They ran screaming but the rocks fell on them. Two girls tried to climb a tree but the rocks fell on them too.

Back at the camp the people began to worry for them. They came looking for them. All they could see were rocks on the ground with blood everywhere.

Today you can see those rocks at Tom Turners Crossing near Peppimenarti.

In the painting the children are represented by circles. If we painted real figures this disaster might happen again.

We love the 'green plums' and collect them when they are ripe.

THE LITTLE BAT AND THE MERMAIDS



Benigna Ngulfundi
Tinkem 2000

My Aunt Nancy Wudiyerr gave this story to me.

A long time ago there were three mermaids who lived together in a camp. There was a man they wanted for their husband but he did not want them for his wives. To get away from them, one day he said to them, "I'm going out hunting." He took his spears, his woomera and his dillybag. He went a long way to a rocky hill.

He saw a rock kangaroo. He speared that kangaroo and made a hole in the ground at the bottom of the hill to roast him. When he had covered him up he lay down to sleep with his hands behind his head and his legs in number 4 position.

The three mermaids had followed behind. He did not like them sitting around and doing nothing. From the top of the hill they threw stones down to tease him. He stood and swore really badly. He said, "I don't know why this mob keeps following me." After he got up he dug out the kangaroo and started eating it. They were giggling and making fun of him.

He said to himself "I want to move on." He collected his spears, his woomera and his dillybag and drank and drank lots of water. He was full. They called after him, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going home." "No" they said, "you come this way."

To each other they said, "We're going to kill him." They got string from the fig tree and made a really long rope. They said, "You climb up that rope." He climbed up and they pulled him up and let him down several times. They teased him. At last, when he got right near the top, they cut the string and the man fell down on the rocks.

His body broke into little bits that became the Little Grey Bat. He flew into a cave and lived there forever.

HOW THE MERMAID GOT HER TAIL

Long, long, ago in the Dreamtime, a young Aboriginal girl was walking along in the Dry Season. She came upon a billabong that was almost dried up. In the mud she saw a Barramundi gasping for breath. She picked him up and took him along to the river to wash off the mud. When she had done this, she held the Barramundi in her arms, trying to keep him for herself.

However, the Barramundi wanted to get back into the water. He struggled. She held him tight but he was stronger. In trying to escape he pulled her into the

Bernadette Tyilngilin
Tyilngilin 1994



river. In the tussle, scales from the Barramundi rubbed off on to her and she became a Mermaid.

We have lots of stories about mermaids. They come from different parts of our country. Some people say that they are very ugly with teeth like sharks. In some places you can hear them singing at night.

THE MIC MIC (WATER RAT)

Water has always been important for us. We are lucky that we have our big green river, but in the Dry Season the billabongs dry up and we may have to dig for water if we are away from the river.

Afterwards, two Brolgas came along and said to him, "Can we borrow your axe?" He hid it behind his back and threw it into a bush. He said to them, "I have no axe." The two brolgas whispered to each other. "We've got to play a trick on him." They said, "What we will do is go and drink up all the water." And they did.

He went back, took up his axe and went on another road. The two Brolgas took all the water and put it in a huge bottle tree up on the hill.

After that, Water Rat was thirsty. He ran and tried diving into the billabong but all the animals were laughing at him when he landed in the mud. He said to the animals that the Brolgas were singing corroboree up on the hill making fun of him



Benigna Ngulfundi
Tinkem 1999

We have been told different stories about what happened when Dreamtime animals stole water. Sometimes it was just to make mischief but 'payback' for selfishness could also be a motive. The water was always recovered and the animals who stole it seemed to be sorry for the trouble they had caused.

Sandfrogs hibernate in the ground among the roots of trees. When dug up, their bodies are swollen with fluid. They are delicious to eat when we dig them up and cook them. Sugarbag is the honey made by native bees. It is stored in the trunks of trees or in anthills.

Benigna was told this story by her Aunt:

A long time ago, back in the Dreamtime, there lived a Mic Mic (water rat). He said to himself, "I'll go and look for sugarbag." He had a good axe for himself. He went away in the morning. He was eating lots of sugarbag.

All the animals went up and said, "Where is the water?" But the Brolgas took no notice. The animals said to each other, "Go and get the Sandfrog." (He was sleeping in number 4 position). He was the only one with a spear.

When they woke him up he said, "Leave me alone." But they said, "We have no water and you are the only one who can help us." He said, "Alright, I'll do it."

He crept up to the Brolgas and marked the tree, straight up. He speared the tree and all the water came out.

The Brolgas, full of shame, flew away and did not come back. All the animals were happy. The Mic Mic dived into the water.

SAVING THE FIRESTICK

Long, long ago back in the Dreamtime some people were having a corroboree. Women and men were dancing. They were enjoying themselves. The Rainbow Serpent was among the dancers. He was not a good man because he wanted to take two of the women he was dancing with. He had fallen in love with them. The two women were not the right skins.

Gracie Kumbi
Kumbi 1994



He got very angry and while the corroboree continued through the night, the Rainbow sneaked away and stole the Firestick. He was going to drop the Firestick in the water. The Eagle saw him and came straight down and took the Firestick and threw it on to the land. As he did that, everything became quiet.

The land began to burn and all the people turned into animals to escape the fire. If the Rainbow Serpent had taken the Firestick under the water everybody would be eating raw meat.

THE BAT AND THE RAINBOW

A long time ago there was a Bat. He lived in a cave in the hills. He was a good dancer and all the animals and birds that lived in the bush near the billabong liked him.

Rainbow Serpent lived there too. He was very pretty. He had beautiful colours on his body. But the only thing wrong with the Rainbow was that he was very, very lazy. He slept from sunrise to sunset and did nothing. All the animals and birds that lived near the

billabong went hunting for food and were always busy doing something. They did not like the Rainbow.

Every evening Bat used to paint himself with ochre and fly down to the billabong and join in the corroboree that the animals and birds used to have every night.

They were always happy to see Bat. Rainbow did not like him. Rainbow knew that Bat had two promised wives. They were the two Whistle Ducks that lived near the billabong with the other birds. Rainbow reckoned that he was better than the Bat because he was more beautiful. That night Rainbow told himself that he would marry the two Whistle Ducks.

So, next day, the Rainbow took the two ducks and made them his wives. That evening someone told Bat what Rainbow had done. He was very angry.

After the dance he went home. Next day, early in the morning, he flew out of the cave. He gathered some flint stones and flew back to the cave and started making two spearheads out of the flint stones.

When Bat had finished making the two spearheads he wanted to see if they were sharp enough.



Vivianne Gilbert
Miway

Birds flapped their wings and that was the first time they ever flew. That's why they fly today. The two Whistle Ducks flew off with all the birds too.

Bat flew away back to his cave and that's where he stays now.

Rainbow fell into the billabong and died. But his spirit comes out when it rains.

He picked up one of the spears and cut off some of his own nose. But he reckoned that one was not sharp enough. Then he picked up the other one and did the same thing. That one was not sharp either. By this time his nose was bleeding. Bat did not care. He wanted his wives back. He flew out of the cave again and this time he flew up to the highest hill where he knew where there was a piece of flint stone sticking out of the ground.

He snapped it off and flew back to the cave. He made another spear out of it. This time when he tested it, it was sharp. Bat cut his nose right off this time. (That is why he has a flat face today). When Bat finished putting the spear together on to a straight bamboo it was nearly time to get ready to go down to the billabong for the dance. Bat flew off, all painted, and the spear in his hand. Just before he got to the dancing place, he hid the spear.

Everyone cheered as he came flying down. Rainbow did not take any notice of Bat and the animals cheering him on the dancing ground.

All the animals, birds and the Bat danced. Whistle Ducks clapped to the beat of the dancers, singing sticks and the didgeridoo.

Rainbow just sat there.

Everyone danced nearly all night. Then one by one, the animals and birds went to sleep. Rainbow and the two Whistle Ducks were asleep a long time ago.

Bat went to sleep for a little while and woke up. He listened to see if everyone was asleep. When he was sure, he crept away to where he hid his spear.

He flew high towards the sleeping animals, birds and the Rainbow. He took aim and threw the spear at Rainbow. A cry came from Rainbow. Everyone woke up. They were frightened. Animals ran in all directions.

THE TURTLE AND THE PORCUPINE

Porcupine and Turtle were two friends who camped together. One day Turtle said, "There is no food." So Porcupine agreed to go out and hunt for some. Turtle stayed behind to look after Baby Porcupine.

Porcupine had to go a long way to find food. Night came and she had not returned. The next day Turtle became more and more hungry. He looked and looked at the little porcupine. He said to himself "I will eat Baby Porcupine."

Next day, very tired, Porcupine came back to camp. "Where is my Baby?" she said. When Turtle told her what he had done, Porcupine became very angry. She began to throw rocks at Turtle. He then picked up his spears and threw them at Porcupine. The rocks hit Turtle's shell and the spears hit Porcupine's back.

That is why turtles have marks on their shells and porcupines have spines on their backs.



Marita Sambono
Diyini 1995

healing



"The symbolism of the powers of the ironwood in forgiveness, healing, protection and spiritual strength...."

Philomena Mulvien
Mirenni 1987



HEALING

The power of the Faith Healer or Witchdoctor (*Wananggal*) is still respected today. In some communities he forms part of the medical team.

BONE POINTING

When people get sick in our Community there are times when they don't want to go to our Rural Health Centre. That's only because they know that whatever they will be given won't help them. The sickness I'm talking about here is if they are told that they are going to be sung to death or have a bone pointed at them. The story of this painting is about bone pointing.

The sick person has asked a faith healer to come and cure him because he's heard that an enemy has pointed a bone at him. One side of him is in pain and he's feverish all over.

He lies down and the faith healer prepares himself for the session to begin. He gets two branches with leaves of ironwood and a paperbark dish. Then he sits cross-legged beside the sick man. First, he rubs his scent over the area where the man is in pain. Then he fans him with the ironwood leaves. Then just before he's finished fanning the sick man, he does a big whipping motion with the branches just above the sick man. That's the sign used to say the man will be well again and the bone is out and it's in the paperbark container. The sick man has to believe in the faith healer. Otherwise he can will himself to die.



Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1993

THE FAITH HEALER

Mary has painted a traditional event. Her family has brought a young woman along to the witchdoctor. Around his neck, the healer has a woven bag holding magic items. From his nose, two twisted reeds project as a sign of his office. Alongside him are various objects that he may use.

He will give secret instructions to the family. They leave, secure in the belief that a cure will result.

Mary Leahy
Pumbum 1996



BOTH WAYS TO HEAL THE SPIRIT

Healing takes place in many ways. Here I have expressed the duality, which many Aboriginal people experience. In the western form of prayer (rosary beads) people recognise that God is the greatest Healer of all. This is true for many Aboriginal people but they also have their own traditional customs.

They know that certain tribal members have a special power. This can be transmitted through the laying on of hands.

Branches of the ironwood tree, warmed over a fire, release an essence that has a healing effect, particularly for those who are emotionally depressed. It can help to break the spell for those who, believing themselves to be 'sung', can will themselves to die.

I have painted the central figure in such a way to indicate that the whole body is involved when healing takes place. In the lower part of the painting I have used mainly browns (sadness and depression or pain) while the brighter colours at the top indicate spiritual and temporal release as a result of the healing.

This painting was presented to HRH Prince of Wales during his visit to Darwin in February, 1988.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 1987



IRONWOOD

(*Erythrophleum chlorostachys*)

Throughout this book, the use of the Ironwood for ceremonial purposes is constantly referred to. The tree is found from Queensland to the Kimberley and can grow up to 17 metres in height. In the book, "Aboriginal Plant Use From the Daly River Area", Patricia Marrfurra and elders record this information.

The leaves are used as a wash. In the past, thin dried stems were heated and used to pierce the nasal cavity. The hard timber is used to make boomerangs, fighting sticks and clap sticks. The young plants are called *Kinimmanggini* and the stems are suitable for making digging sticks. Large trees are called *Mawuny*. The roots are used to make spear heads.

The exuded sap may be collected from the stems and branches and eaten. It is sticky and slightly sweet like commercial toffee. The roots are heated on a fire and the resin that comes out is used as a cement to fix pegs on woomeras and heads to spears. It is also used to plug holes in dugout canoes. When the resin cools it is very hard.

The wood is very good firewood. However, care must be taken in cooking on the fire as it is somewhat poisonous and could contaminate food.

Leaves are placed on a bed of ashes and coals to create smoke that is used during the final cleansing stages of funeral ceremonies. Newborn babies are held in the smoke to protect the baby from evil and give spiritual strength.

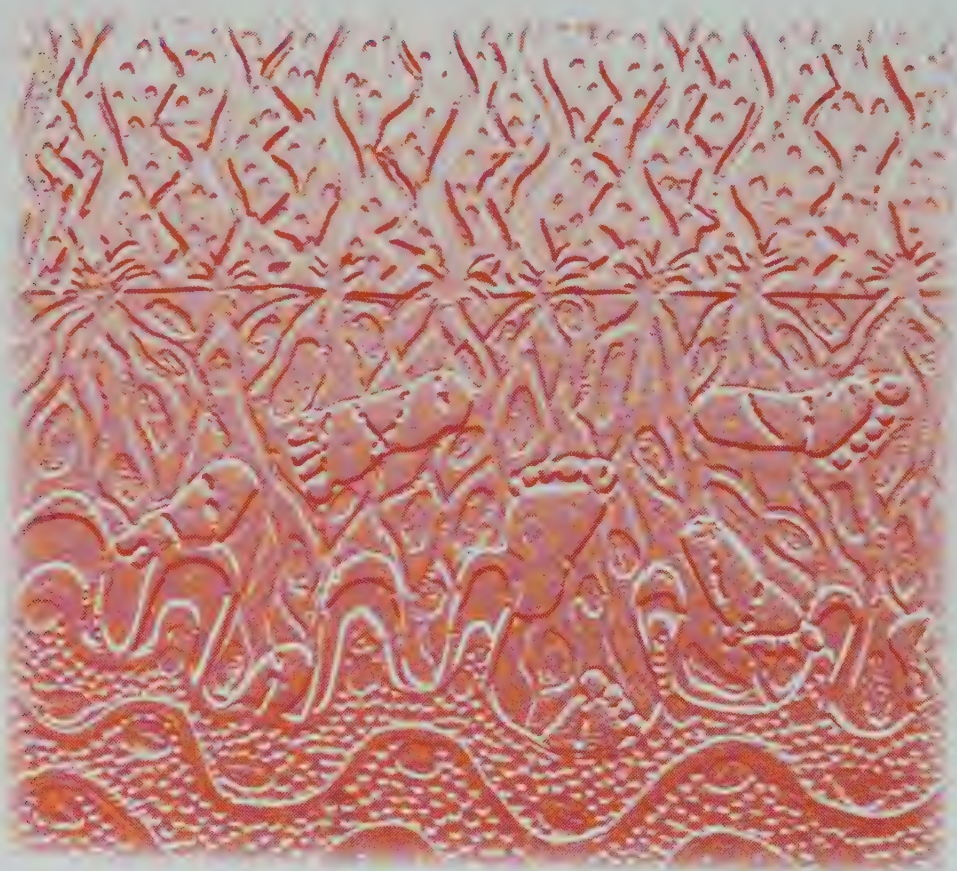
The symbolism of the powers of the ironwood in forgiveness, healing, protection and spiritual strength is often transferred to give meaning to the Sacraments and other rites in the development of a relevant aboriginal liturgy.

This painting was featured in Traditional Bush Medicines -An Aboriginal Pharmacopoeia (Greenhouse, 1988)

Philomena Mulvien
Mirenni 1987



customs - life cycles



"Signs and portents are important.
To understand our painting you
should know something about us."

Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1998



CUSTOMS - LIFE CYCLES

We no longer carry out many of the customs of the past but we still know about them. Perhaps we have been discouraged from performing them. Perhaps we realise that they were meant for another time, another set of values. Some have been affected by the changing role of women in society, some by changes in white man's law, some because of the introduction of clinical medicine. However, we still hold and practice some customs.

Signs and portents are important. To understand our painting you should know something about us. We experience love, anger, worry, and happiness. Our feelings come from deep inside, from our belly (*dege*) to chest and heart (*damadi*), to our head (*pipiri*).

We sense future events. We look to signs – a line of white, woolly clouds in the sky or a kookaburra calling mean bad news.

We know *wurrgurru*, the evil spirit. When a person is ready to die, he hangs around and waits for that person so that he can take his spirit away. Then there is *adida* – he can smell the body from a long way off. We burn the body to prevent this.

Buymen, the grey spirit, looks after the land. He lives in the banyan tree. If you cut down a tree he will turn into another shape. He is a bad luck spirit.

When we go hunting or fishing we call loudly to the spirits. They answer and it is the pigeons that become happy and call out letting us know that it is all right. Pigeons represent our ancestors.

We talk to the trees, knock on their trunks and let them know that we are there.



Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 2002

TRADITIONAL BIRTH

Molly Yawalminy talked to her daughter, Yambeing, about giving birth in the not too distant past. Yambeing painted the story. As they were explaining the painting to me, Molly's eldest daughter Marrfurra was sitting with us. Marrfurra's birth had been a traditional one, taking place in the bush not far from where we were sitting. Molly's other children were born either in the clinic at the Mission or in Darwin Hospital.

The painting is set in a background of night and day. While the mother was in labour a fire would be made up with wallaby droppings (*Nekin womangal*) and Paperbark (*wasari*) – a firestick (*Palayin*) was used to light it. She would sit with her back to the fire for warmth, rubbing her back to ease the pain. When the baby was born, the cord was cut with a mussel shell (*afurra* or *asyilfisyilfi*). The babe was laid on a sheet of paperbark (*wasari*).

The afterbirth was put up in a pandanus (*yerrgi*) to prevent animals eating it. Grass (*wurrgarrej*) was used to clear away any blood. When the umbilical cord (*deterdî*) had dried it was placed carefully in a snail shell. It would then be carried around for a long time in a dillybag kept by the old people.

If there should be an *akaka* bird around it was necessary to keep the baby quiet because the bird might be annoyed at the baby's crying and steal its spirit.

A pregnant woman was not allowed to eat goanna eggs (*amudi*) in case the baby was born with 'flat' legs.

In the background of the painting are fine black lines. They are the strings of the banyan tree (*fingi*). People were afraid to go near it because a devil lived in it.

PROTECTION

A mother holds her baby over a fire of ironwood branches and leaves. She takes water into her mouth then spits it on to the baby's eyes. The water and smoke will drive away evil giving her child strength of body and spirit.



Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1998

A GIRL MUST BE HUMBLE

As soon as a girl baby was born, the grandmother would be expected to tie a length of spider web tightly around the top joint of the child's index finger. The joint would soon fall off. This was to make her 'humble'.

Marita Sambono
Diyini 1998

This happened to Marita's mother, Mercia.



FROM BIRTH TO MANHOOD

This painting depicts the cycle of a male from birth through to manhood. In the lower section there are two freshwater mussels. The shells of these have long been used by aboriginal people for severing the umbilical cord, thus bringing the baby to his first experience of independence from his mother.

After birth, the purification ceremony takes place when fire and smoke cleanse the baby before he is anointed with the sweat of the older members of the tribe. This will cleanse him in mind and heart as he approaches the various stages of initiation preparing him for manhood.



Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 2000

Through the training and guidance of the older men, he learns skills for survival and so passes into full adulthood when he is ready to take up his role of leadership among his people. The mother-of-pearl shells, which he is given at this time symbolise this leadership. They are also his means of independence as he uses them to trade with other tribal people of close kinship.

These mother-of-pearl shells could also be symbolic of the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments through which, as an Aboriginal Christian, he will survive in his spiritual life and achieve spiritual leadership among his people.

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Aboriginal customs were in many ways different from western culture, but the bonding of woman to man was, and still is, a matter of strict procedures. 'Skin Groups' must be right, that is, permissible within tribal law. Often a child would be 'promised' to an older man even though she might not go with him for many years.

Pumbum has painted a traditional wedding ceremony. The woman is presented to her husband by an aunt. An uncle sits nearby. The woman brings gifts to her husband; fish and turtle from the river. The man is supported by a relative. The marriage bed of grass (on the left) has been prepared. It is a joyful occasion. Both families are dancing to the music of the didgeridoo. Pumbum says that when she was a child she hid behind some bushes to watch a ceremony when she was not supposed to.



Mary Leahy
Pumbum 1995

A WRONG MARRIAGE

This is a story told to children, warning them about the consequences of disobeying tribal laws.

Brolga was a beautiful young girl who lived with her tribe. She was 'promised' to Old Man Pelican. Each day he used to bring her fish. She did not like him and would not eat the fish.

Brolga had fallen in love with a handsome young man, Stormwind. Her mother told her that she could not go with him because he was from the wrong tribe.

One day, Brolga was out camping with the women. At sunset, she was singing and dancing on top of a sandhill. Suddenly, Stormwind swept down and carried her away. The women cried because they knew that they would never see her again. The next night, out on the plain, they saw a big grey bird dancing. They knew it was Brolga.

Even today you never see a brolga and a pelican in the same billabong.



Benigna Ngulfundi
Tinkem 1996

FALLING STAR

When we watch the sky at night we often see a falling star. We know then that something serious is about to happen. We watch the direction of the star trail and soon after expect to hear news of a death or accident in the area where it is expected to burn out.

The painting shows people watching the bright object as it appears over the top of a hill. A shower of lights falls to earth as it goes by. The small circles at the top are the ordinary stars in the sky.

Mercia Wawul
Wawul 1988



DEATH AND BURIAL

If a crow or kookaburra calls in a particular way or at a certain time, we know that we will soon hear bad news – often about an accident or death. When a person dies, smoking ceremonies are held in places where that person has lived and worked and over tracks where he has travelled. Nowadays, a burial takes place in our Community cemetery or the body is taken back to the deceased's traditional homeland.

It was not like that in the past. A body might be wrapped in paperbark and placed in a tree to protect it from animals. Months later, the bones would be collected and placed in a hollow log or buried. Another way was to place the body on a platform with a fire underneath until there were only dried skin and bones. The skin would be peeled off, wrapped and kept. The bones could be put in a hollow log or buried.



Mary Leahy
Pumbum 1999



EYES

When a person dies, the people say that they “have eyes for him”. This means that they can still see him even though he is not physically present.

Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1998



GRIEVING

The burial of the body is not the end. Our grieving takes much longer – over months or a year or two. When the time is right, relatives and friends come from far and near.

We wash ourselves with ochre. Clothes and belongings of the dead person are placed in a pit, covered with ironwood branches and burnt. The smoke is a sign of release from any pain associated with the death. There is forgiveness for those who may have been involved in the death and comfort and healing for those left behind. A corroboree followed by a feast brings to completion the life of the deceased.

However, if there are any suspicions that the death was not natural, ‘payback’ may take place. Isyifunma has described this. In the smoke rising from the fire may be seen the figure of a snake. He will move off to find the culprit. Clouds of a certain shape in the sky a few days later will indicate that punishment has been carried out.

In the painting, the white circles represent the people attending the ceremony. Clothes are burnt. The patterns above are meant to show that retribution can take place in the light of day or the dark of night.



Isyifunma 1989
Mona Burns

NERINYTYI

This is my mother-in-law's country, not far from Merrepen. There are two bottle trees beside a swamp. Water from the swamp goes to Papangala Creek. There is a big hole there where the shadow spirits of the dead people go.

Philomena Mulvien
Mirrenyi 1999



Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1998

MOTHER EARTH WEEPS

Dede in my language means 'a place'. Most of all it is a word for Mother Earth. It's not only people who weep for their loved ones who have passed away. The Mother Earth also weeps at the loss of her custodians.

She shows her grief by displaying bright colours during the evening sunset. The colours are orange and pink. There are also grey clouds. They represent the tears that she is shedding. When this happens, the elders can feel her in their hearts and minds and they also grieve with her in silence.



FOOTPRINTS IN THE SANDS OF TIME

Water plays a special part in our culture. It is seen as a healing thing of mind and heart. By this I mean that when there have been a lot of deaths in the Community, the people can feel that the spirits of the deceased are still around.

If the river rises and floods the place it is good because it washes away the footprints in the sand of those who have died.

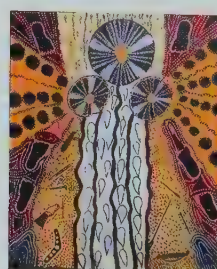
Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1998



parallels



"....this custom of her people was like John baptising Christ...."



Brigid Kikitin
Marrenytya 1997

PARALLELS

Some of our stories from way back are very like those we have learnt from Bible stories.

RITE OF ENTRY

Special ceremonies must be carried out when we go into another country or when strangers come into our homelands. Custodial elders suck in water and spray it out over the head and body of the visitors. This protects them from any evils that could befall them or from the "Little People" who might frighten them.

Brigid was thinking that this custom of her people was like John baptising Christ or Christian baptisms welcoming people into a Church family. At first glance this painting could be a representation of the Trinity but Brigid did not have this in mind.



Brigid Kikitin
Marrrenytya 1997

CALMING THE STORM

Matthew 8, 23-27

Jesus got into a boat and His disciples went with him. Suddenly a fierce storm hit the lake and the boat was in danger of sinking. But Jesus was asleep. The disciples went to him and woke him up. "Save us Lord!" they said, "We are about to die!"

"Why are you so frightened?" Jesus answered. "What little faith you have!" Then he got up and ordered the winds and waves to stop, and there was great calm.

Everyone was amazed. "What kind of man is this?" they said. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"

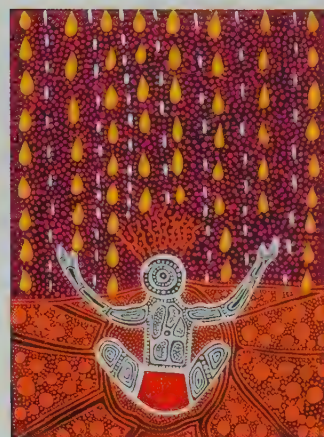
Good News Australia

From the Good News Bible. Aust. Centennial Edition

Kitty tells this story:

A tropical storm is frightening people. Heavy rain is falling. Strong winds are blowing, breaking the tops of trees. Lightning flashes. A man with important powers sits in the rain, singing to make the storm less dangerous so that no one gets hurt. He is 'healing' the rain, ordering the wind to cease.

He breathes deeply of the air around him, taking it right down into his stomach. When he breathes out some of his spirit is carried away to calm the storm.



Kitty Kamarrama
Kamarrama 2001

THE SAND GOANNA

Benigna was given permission to paint this story by an aunt who has since died.

Long, long ago there was a man who was really sick. Crow was looking after him and stroking him with his beak. Turkey came walking through the billabong. Crow asked Turkey to get some water for the sick man. Turkey came back carrying the water but Crow said, "Too late, he's dead." The man had been screaming. Crow had helped him 'go' by pinching his nose and placing his hand over his mouth. (Crow appeared to be helping the man but he was evil and black inside).

Crow and Turkey buried the man. In the grave he turned into a sand goanna. In the painting it is the same Spirit Goanna who is shown in several positions as he scratched around, digging holes as he tried to reach the surface.

Benigna explained the halo effect around the heads of each goanna. She said that the traditional story reminded her of the death and resurrection of Jesus who is often portrayed with a circle around His head.



Benigna Ngulfundi
Tinkem 1994

aboriginal christian vision



"....our paintings..take the place of words."

Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 1998



ABORIGINAL CHRISTIAN VISION

Christianity is new for us. After more than one hundred years, the Jesuits had long been forgotten. In 1936 a Mission was set up at Port Keats (Wadaye) 200 km away on the shores of Joseph Bonaparte Gulf. We are related to the people there and as travellers moved between homelands they talked about some of the things the Missionaries were saying.

Then our own Mission was built. In our own way we understood what the Fathers and Sisters were telling us about Jesus, but He lived in a far-away country and moved among white people dressed in strange clothes. That was what we saw in pictures, in books and in statues in the Church. Why couldn't He be like us? Why couldn't His country be our country?

We take part in Church ceremonies. But remember, in times past we had our ceremonies too. We had ceremonies when we were born to give us strength and protection. We had ceremonies when we became men and women, ceremonies to protect us when we ventured into strange country. When we died we were mourned in a special way. We had good spirits and devils.

Instead of wearing white dresses and veils or shirts and ties for our ceremonies, we painted our bodies. We used red and yellow ochres and white clay in symbolic designs. We painted on bark or on rocks and used song and dance to tell our Dreamings, our myths, our stories. Our statues were the landforms of our Dreamings.

Now is the time to make the Christian truths our own. We do not want to change those truths but we want to explain them in a way that makes them real to us and to you as we experience them in our own lives. Hence our paintings that take the place of words. We have not been told to paint in the way we have. It is from our hearts.

THE STORY OF CREATION



Dianne Warloo
Nganmuy 2001

Long ago, back in the Dreamtime, the world was dark and there was no life. First of all, God said, "let there be light." After that He ordered the water to go back so that there was dry land. But the land and sea were empty.

So God commanded to the earth to produce trees and grass and flowers and fruit. And after that, He put the sun in the sky during the day and the moon and the stars twinkling at night.

But everything was so silent. Then there were fishes in the sea and birds and animals on the land.

Last of all, He made Adam and Eve. Everything was wonderful until the Devil came along in the shape of a snake. He tempted Adam and Eve and they had to leave the Garden of Eden.

Annunciation

Luke 1:26-28

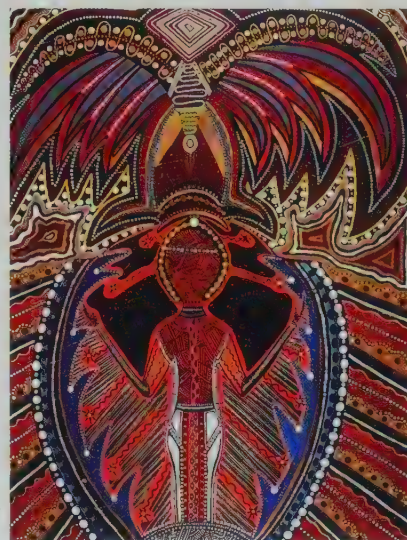
..... God sent the Angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. The girl's name was Mary. The angel came to her and said: "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

New Testament, from the
Good News Bible

ANNUNCIATION

The power and wonder when Mary is told that she will be the Mother of the Saviour shows through in this painting. The sweep of the Angel's wings signifies a sense of real protection.

It means a lot to us that Jesus came into the world as a little baby. We know how Mary must have felt when she and Joseph were on their way to Jerusalem, trying to find a place where the Child could be born. Some of us, whose paintings are in this book, have been born in the bush, maybe under the open sky with the stars shining above, maybe with only a bough shelter to keep off the sun and the rain. So it is that, in different ways, we have given our own thoughts to the birth of Christ.



Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 1993

THE THREE HUNTERS

Three hunters went hunting for bush foods and animals. After a long walk they found some. One of the old men suggested they make camp that night and leave early the next day. They were telling stories around the campfire when two of the hunters saw a really bright star amongst the other sparkling stars. They got up and moved towards it. When they got closer they saw a baby in a paperbark coolamon. The hunters gave all their food to the family and left that night.



Gracie Kumbi
Kumbi 1999



Monica Mushiwan
Mushiwan 2000

A SPECIAL CHILD

I think of Jesus at Christmas time, lying in a paperbark basket, bringing new life into the world because He was the one sent to save us. The six figures represent Mary and Joseph in the middle with the Three Wise Men and an Angel.



Suzanne Nurra
Nurra 1989

CELEBRATION

This is a joyous painting celebrating the birth of this special Child in a truly Aboriginal way.



Christina Yambeing
Yambeing 1998

PROPHECY FULFILLED

Probably the inspiration for this painting came from a past memory when Yambeing was told of the Revelation to John. The Woman who had the moon under her feet and who wore a diadem of twelve stars is now Mary with Joseph and Child in the moonlight, surrounded by those stars.

Yambeing was almost a Christmas child herself being born on December 23rd. She has great empathy with the Nativity.

CHRIST IS BORN

In the centre of my painting is Jesus, held in a paperbark crib. Diagonally from the top left is a wave of fine dots and seeds. They represent the way in which rain brings new life to the earth just as Jesus is new life for us.

The wave from the top right is a new rainbow, again reminding us of Jesus. I have painted the centre circle in colours of white, red, brown, black and yellow. This is to show that He was born for you and me and all the people of the earth.

The snake is the symbol of the Devil who tempted Adam and Eve. We too, yield to temptation and sin against God.

The Cross means that Jesus died for us. The red rays from the centre symbolise the Resurrection of Jesus.



Dominica Mullins
Katyrir 1991

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES

At the Centre is Christ.

In black and white around Him are people listening to His words. The yams, which for Aboriginal people take the place of bread, form the next circle. Then I have put in the fish.

Going back to the centre around Jesus are the twelve baskets of food left after the feast.

The rays reaching out to the edge represent the news, which was carried away by those who had witnessed the miracle.

Perhaps the real miracle was that people shared the food they had with them just as we Aboriginal people do with our families and friends.

Marita Sambono
Diyini 1992



THE LAST SUPPER

Here we have a traditional representation of the Last Supper. Dianne has left one face blank – that of Judas.

Dianne Tchumut
Ferriderr 1988



EUCCHARIST

The leaves of a yam twine round the Cross with the tuber (bread, Body) in the lower part. A coolamon, traditionally a water carrier, collects the Blood of Jesus. The base of the Cross becomes the top of a firestick. The sacrifice of Calvary is as a fire bringing spiritual gifts to enlighten the world.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 1987





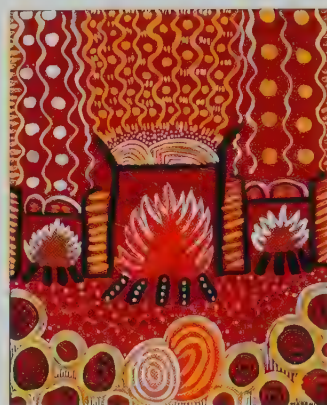
Anne Carmel Mulvien
Newi 1992

EUCCHARIST

Perhaps this is the way many Australians see the Eucharist – the Priest holding the Host aloft at Mass.

CRUCIFIXION

Molly has transferred a traditional way of disposing of a body to the death of Jesus. She has included the thieves who were crucified along with Him.



Molly Yawalminy
Yawalminy 1990



Marita Sambono
Diniyi 1992

RESURRECTION

The concentric circles at the top of the painting represent the three days in the tomb before Jesus rose from the dead. The firestick is the symbol of Christ, the great healer. The smoke from the heated ironwood seeds is an outward sign of spiritual strengthening.

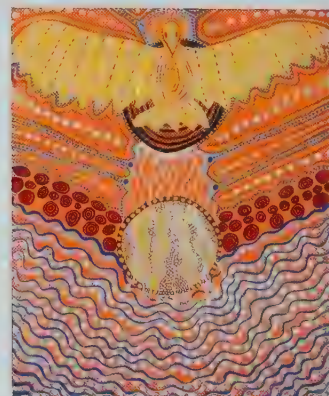
The lower part of the painting is dark. Light comes from the Resurrection.

PENTECOST

When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place. Suddenly, there was a noise from the sky that sounded like a strong wind blowing and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire that spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Good News Australia
Acts2, 1-4

In Nauiyu some people may speak several languages and 'hear' others. So the mystery of Pentecost does not seem unusual to us.



Anne Carmel
Mulvien
Newi 1993

THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

1. Annunciation
2. Visitation
3. Birth of Jesus
4. Presentation in the Temple
5. Jesus is found in the Temple.

A clockwise study of the symbols clearly defines the decades of the Rosary. Circles represent people.

1. Beginning at lower left, the Angel announces to Mary that she is to become the Mother of God. The inner circle is the Child in the womb.
2. Following the beads clockwise: Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. Both are pregnant.
3. At the top: Christ is born to Mary and Joseph.
4. Next: The Child is presented in the Temple and meets Simeon.
5. Finally: as a twelve year old, Jesus is found talking with and listening to the elders in the temple.

Marita Sambono
Diyini 1997



UNITY

In the Church at Daly River is the Pulpit Painting. The strong symbolism of this painting expresses the need for unity not just in Aboriginal culture but in every culture throughout the world.

1. Top – The Dove. God's Spirit over all. The beginning. The Alpha.
2. Bottom – The triangle represents the Trinity. The end. The Omega.
3. General outline - The chalice with a cross above it and the host in a central position in the palm of the hand. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is the renewal of Calvary.
4. The Hand - With its five spreading fingers is the hand of Christ. The middle finger is elongated to accentuate where all should be going, firstly to a unity in God here among men. This unity is signified by the small symbol at the end of the middle finger. It is a small and fragile unity in the human sphere. The final and perfect unity comes only at the end, in the Godhead (symbol of the triangle).
5. Palm of the hand - The circle in the palm, apart from representing the host, also represents the wound in Jesus' hand and so, with the cross above, gives more significance to the Passion.
6. The four fingers – The four stretched out fingers represent the four Gospels going out to all peoples of all nations and colour.
7. The Dove – The hand merges into the Dove so the Gospels go to all peoples under the impulse of the Spirit. This should produce unity.

8. Ten Commandments – Under the wings of the Dove and merging into the hand are the Ten Commandments. These are all summarised and fulfilled in Our Lord's own great command of love. This indeed, again under the influence of the Spirit, should produce unity according to His wish "that all may be done".
9. Chalice and Host – Developing out of the bottom triangle at its base is the chalice with the host above it. We are all made one "in one cup and one bread".
10. Perimeter – The dots around the perimeter of the whole figure represent God's encircling, loving providence that should make us one, being all his sons and daughters.

Fr. O'Leary and Miriam-Rose
Ungunmerr

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 1980



land as sacrament



"We are born, live and die in
the cycle of our land."

Mary Kanngi
Kanngi 1994



LAND AS SACRAMENT

Power for our people comes from the land. Our very languages come from the land. Most people speak Ngan'gikurunggur that means the story of deep water. It is the language of the swamp people who live in the lower reaches of the Moil River. Some speak Ngen'giwumirri which means the story of the cloud and the sun. It is the language of the people of the high mountains - those who live in the hills.

For us, the whole landscape is sacramental. Just as the church has its seasons with different colours for different periods of preparation, forgiveness, healing and celebration, so we Aboriginal people live in harmony with the seasons of our land. We know when the rains are coming, we know when we can go hunting, and we know which plants are ready to supply food.

Our spiritual life is united with our land. When a babe is born, we use fire and smoke to symbolise spiritual strength and protection for the child.

The landscape, the freedom and the wide open spaces heal us. There is nothing to stop us from absorbing the freshness of our surroundings, to clear away things we might be worrying or upset about.

There is communion between us and our land. Miriam explains this: "I can't get satisfaction out of praying in the church. I can talk to God, feel His presence in the wind, in the beauty of the landscape. I can feel His presence in the freedom of watching the birds, the animals, fish swimming around in the water. I find flowers blooming where there is no water - Someone is looking after them. God is for me in the beautiful sunset or in dewdrops on cobwebs as the sun rises."

When the time is right there are special initiation ceremonies for boys and girls to help them to become strong adults, confirming them in laws handed down by the elders.

Welcome ceremonies have always been carried out for strangers coming to a new country. Traditional landowners splash water on the heads of visitors. The water falls from their heads into the creek or river or billabong. Their presence is carried through the land to let our ancestors know that we welcome them. Pigeons call out to show that the ancestors are happy.

We are born, live and die in the cycle of our land. Our paintings reflect this.

DRAGONFLY TIME

A lady, who died in 1998, aged 80 years painted this image. We have included it in her honour. When dragonflies emerge from their chrysalids and fly about in their thousands we can be sure that the Wet Season is finishing. Soon we will be able to move about in our country. We can go hunting again; visit our Dreaming places.



Topsy Wiya
Niya 1987

THE DRY SEASON

When the 'Dry' comes we search for food we cannot reach when there is water everywhere. As time goes on the billabongs begin to dry up. Now, those animals that depend on water gather closer and closer, sharing the vanishing supply. If we are hunting, this makes it easier for us. Soon, however, some of the animals burrow into the mud, awaiting the rains at the end of the year. Birds migrate, insects lay their eggs and die while other animals aestivate or retreat to the big river.



Aaron McTaggart
Kinganu 1999

Mabel Nglangowuk
Kaninytyangu 1998



THE KAPOK TREE

As the humidity begins to rise at the end of the Dry season, the great Kapok (*Bombax*) trees along the edge of the river burst into bloom. Their red blossoms attract hundreds of beautifully coloured birds that make a deafening noise.

Then the blossoms begin to fall. Large green pods are formed. The pods break open and a rain of seeds with silken umbrellas fall to cover the ground and drift along the river.

Then we know that the time is right. Carefully we search along the riverbank. Crocodile nests are raided to give us a feast of eggs.



CICADAS

At 'build-up' time when clouds begin to gather, a strident calling is heard. Drawn out by the sun, cicadas emerge from their hibernation in the trees. The white droplets around the edge represent the sweat (humidity) that is increasing at that time.

Catherine Arriuu
Bamul 1999

THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH

It is no wonder that we love our land; it nurtures us. Look at the bounty of plants, fruits, roots, nuts, and seeds that it provides. Whatever the season of the year there is food for us.



Bidly Lindsay
Ruth 2001

NAMBATU'S COUNTRY

Jimmy is the senior elder in the Nauiyu Community. Jimmy and his wife Agnes love to spend time in his country. They take children with them and set up camps beside small streams. In the billabongs they fish for turtles and black bream. There are lots of spider webs. As well as many small ones, Jimmy has included one with a very large spider (brown circle) in the centre. Other shapes represent the trees and flowers in his homeland.



Jimmy Nambatu
Nambatu 1999

WATERLILIES

With the heavy flooding rains, the waterlily withers and then lies dormant. At Easter time, as the waters begin to recede, new life emerges with the appearance of beautiful flowers followed by the development of nutritious seeds. These are seasonal plants and part of the cycle where nature reveals itself in all its nurturing and strengthening beauty. There is always food in abundance for those who know where and how to find it.

This is very symbolic of the Christian life. Jesus said: "unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single seed. But if it dies, it produces plenty of food". In Jesus' own life, we see the season of his bitter suffering culminating in His death on the Cross, after which he was enclosed in the dark tomb for three days. Then at Easter time, He rose to new life, and this is the new life He shares with us to strengthen and heal us. This life is nourished by the gift of Himself in the Eucharist.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 2000



BIRDIE – BIRDIES (PIGEONS)

Mercia Wawul is one of the oldest ladies in our Community. She shows her delight in the wonderful bird life that surrounds her. Pigeons are an important bird – their calls can be interpreted as a welcome or as a warning.



Mercia Wawul
Wawul 2001

Mary Kanngi's passion for her land is expressed in her paintings. It is through them that she connects her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to their heritage. They sit around as she paints, listening to her stories. Without being aware of it, they are absorbing knowledge of their cultural identity and their relationship with their country.

RED LILY BILLABONG

Red Lily Billabong is close to the community, filled with waterlilies and lotus and a haven for turtles, birds, leeches and fish.



Mary Kanngi
Kanngi 1994

WURRSYINI – THE GRASS WHICH BURNS

This painting emphasises the effect of a bushfire. When fire spreads through the grass it leaves the bush clean. The black background shows the burn. In a few places brown gravel shows through. There are yellow flowers but they are dry, dessicated. Dead leaves have fallen to the ground.



Mary Kanngi
Kanngi 1996

the future



"Aborigines....have the resilience to survive and keep their customs and culture alive."

Marita Sambono
Diyini 2002



THE FUTURE

MY ANCESTRAL ROOTS ARE SLOWLY DYING

Our people look at the future with so many mixed feelings. Marita, a young mother with strong traditional links, worries for her children. In her own words and through her painting she expresses her sadness.

The footprints in the centre represent us following in the footsteps of our ancestors, accepting the knowledge and culture that has been handed down to us. It is our duty to pass on this knowledge and culture to the next generation.

This applies not only to our own groups but also to other language groups and tribes (circle of many colours).

The outer yellow circle is the cycle of life including the traditional owners of the land. They have travelled through many wetlands and countries. They have climbed many hills and rock countries, and walked for many days and nights to reach the end of the journey.

Aborigines have proved that they have the resilience to survive and keep their customs and culture alive. But sadly we are losing our grip. Our people are floating in a space and they do not know where they are going to land. The knowledge that has been handed down through generations is now slowly dying.



Marita Sambono
Diyini 2002

SHATTERED MAN

I am angry at what has happened to many of my people.

This man has blacked out everything – his traditions, language and culture. He is more involved in alcohol and other distractions around him (the hands pulling him down). He is dark within himself.

At the top of the painting everything is bright. That is where he should be – remembering the ways of his ancestors and using that knowledge to enrich his life and moving forward, strengthened by the Spirit, to a life full of hope.



Patricia Marrfurra
Marrfurra 1991

I would like to share some beliefs that come from the old people:

At the first sound of thunder, old people look in the direction from where the sound is coming. They say they feel grief in their hearts. While they are looking towards the sound of thunder they think about all the sad things and bad times over the years.

Then come the first raindrops that wash the earth. When the new grass grows and flowers bloom, it is the start of the new life cycle. Also when a new baby makes its first move, either by standing up to take its first steps to walk or by rolling over on its tummy, it is a happy feeling if this happens at the time when the thunder and rain come. It is time to forget and start over again. Life never ends, it continues.
Marrfurra.

RECONCILIATION - PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER

This painting was commissioned for St Joseph's church, Katherine, NT.

Miriam explains it:

At the bottom of the painting is a fire surrounding the base of the cross. The firestick, forming the upright of the cross, moves through the Eucharist represented by the yam, which is an important source of food for Aboriginal people - the Eucharist being the spiritual food given to us by Christ.

The top rim of the Chalice forms the transverse of the cross... the chalice is represented by a "pufiny" which is our traditional paperbark container used to catch water and carry babies.

The rays at the top of the painting symbolise Christ's Resurrection. Radiating from the fire are the symbols of reconciliation - clouds of smoke that cleanse and transform people's lives.

In the lower right hand corner the people are in shadow as they continue to search.

As Christ purifies all people in the Eucharist, acceptance of each other in Christ becomes a reality.



Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
Ungunmerr 1994

FOLLOW YOUR STAR

There is so much we can share with you. This is what we have tried to do in this book. We are a spiritual people. We have accepted the challenge of the Christian message and made it our own in a special way. We have offered you the insight of *dadirri*, the deep spiritual spring that is within all of us if we take the time to find it.

At night we look up into our clear skies and see a million stars - sometimes a bright 'shooting star', a message star. As we move into our third millennium may each one of you find a star that you can follow to achieve happiness and fulfilment.

Perhaps you might sometimes give a thought to the men, women and children of our small Community of Nauiyu who are following their stars into a future that will hold both good and bad.

May the Spirit of our land be with you.



Marita Sambono
Diyini 1997

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Not all the artists have been illustrated.

Catherine Ariuu (1947)
Bamulying

Catherine was born in the bush near Daly River. She was one of the first children to come to the newly established Mission school. She takes inspiration for her paintings from the land around her and her Dreamings. She likes to go hunting and to collect bush foods.

Mona Burns
(1951 - 1990)
Isyifunma

Mona began to paint when the Women's Centre opened in 1987. Traditional stories were her choice of subjects. Unfortunately her life was cut short by illness. Her talent was inherited by her daughters whose paintings are displayed in the gallery at Merrepen Arts.

Vivianne Gilbert (1996)
Miway

Vivianne is an exuberant painter, particularly of bush animals. Her artistic skill extends to silk painting, lino block printing and silkscreen designs. She comes from Tipperary Station. Her father was a very experienced stockman. She went to school at Daly River where she now lives. For recreation she loves to take her three daughters fishing.

Gracie Kumbi (1967)
Kumbi

Kumbi is noted for her delicate brush work. Her paintings of flora and fauna are very much sought after. Christmas themes in an Aboriginal mode are among her favourite subjects. She is skilled in painting on silk, batik, screen-printing and etching. In her spare time she hunts for turtles and goanna. She loves fishing. On New Years Day (2003) she became the proud mother of a much longed for daughter.



Kitty Kamarrama (1944)
Kamarrama

Kitty began painting when the art centre first opened. As a young woman she worked on local farms and also learned to skin crocodiles. She made dilly bags from Merrepen palms, originally as part of the needs of bush life; now people who regard her bags as works of art appreciate her weaving skill.





When she began to paint in 1987 Mary adopted an unique style. Her land was everything to her. She recorded the birds, trees and flowers in all seasons. What was different was that she painted as if she was looking down on the earth from above. Her works are sought after nationally. In the past she has been a fine weaver of baskets, mats and bags. Not as active now, she has been responsible for passing on traditional songs and dances. Her daughter is Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, a well-known artist and school principal.

Mary Kanngi (1925)
Kanngi



Born on Tipperary Station, Brigid was one of the first children to be educated at the Mission. Later, she worked for 39 years as a preschool teacher in St Francis School. She paints the country and customs of her people. She makes and decorates artefacts from wood and bark. She has a delightful sense of humour as she relates stories of the early Mission days.

Brigid Kikitin (1949)
Merrenyrya



Mary paints in a naïve style always passing on knowledge of stories and customs. Her mother, Mary Kunngi, and her sisters, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr and Louise Pandella are also artists, each with a very different style. Mary is a weaver of large mats.

Mary Leahy (1940)
Pumbum

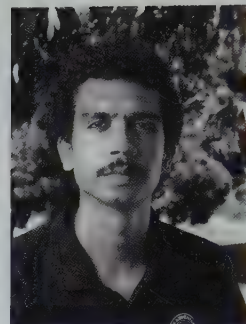


Unlike many of the Daly River people whose homelands are elsewhere, Bidy has lived all her life on the Daly – a member of the Malak Malak tribe. She has worked with the Conservation Commission in recording the ethno botany of her country. Her painting from this exercise is included in this book. She remembers stories of the early Jesuits and has recorded this on canvas.

Bidy Lindsay (1940)
Ruth

Aaron McTaggart
(1981)
Kinganu

Aaron is the fourth generation of a family of artists who work from Merrepen Arts. He graduated from St John's College in 1999. The following year he sailed from New Zealand on the 'Young Endeavour' as one of only two Aboriginal people on the journey. Aaron said that the voyage helped him mature as a person and to work as one of a team. He has always painted, watching his mother, Patricia, at home. One of Aaron's early designs of dragonflies was licensed to Community Aid Abroad for publication. He is studying for his Associate degree in Art and Design at the Charles Darwin University.



Patricia McTaggart
(1959)
Marrfurra

In her paintings Marrfurra covers a wide range of subjects - religious, cultural, flora and fauna. She sees her role in her culture as linking the past with the present. Her interest in language has led her to obtain an Associateship in linguistics. She is currently about to publish a dictionary of Ngan'gikurunggurr, the most used language in the Nauiyu community. She is in the process of translating St John's Gospel into Ngan'gikurunggurr. She has liaised with the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Elders in the community in the production of a book on the ethno botany of the region. Her paintings of the Stations of the Cross hang in the Anglican Cathedral in Darwin.



Dominica Mullins
(1960)
Katyirr

Dominica began painting as a child at school. Her style has matured into one noted for its fine detail. The stories she learned at St Francis Xavier School have influenced her choice of painting subjects incorporating an Aboriginal Christian vision. However, she has not forgotten traditional myths and legends of Ferriderr, her homeland on the Moyle River. Her father was a senior elder of that country.

Ann Carmel Mulvien
(1967)
Newi

Ann has worked at the Women's Centre, now Merrepen Arts, since its beginning in 1987. She is a deep thinker and diligent worker who will spend hours on her paintings. She has a strong affinity for her father's country, Merrepen. Her paintings are strongly influenced by this connection. Her Christian beliefs are also mirrored in her work. As well as painting Ann Carmel is adept at batik, silkscreen printing and etching.



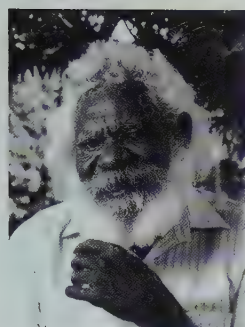
Philomena Mulvien
(1969)
Mirennyi

Philomena completed her high school education in Rockhampton, Queensland. She then worked at the Women's Centre. She remembers much about her country, Merrepen, and the stories her father told her. Her paintings are important because they preserve that knowledge. Her work is fine and detailed.



Monica has painted only occasionally, much time being devoted to caring for her now deceased invalid mother and concentrating on gaining her BEd degree. She now teaches at St Francis Xavier School and helps the children with their artwork.

Monica Mushiwin
(1959)
Mushiwin



Jimmy has been painting for a long time, and his barks may have been collected by Prof. Stanner before WW2. He has worked as a stockman and on tobacco and peanut farms and he helped to build the Daly River airstrip. He makes artefacts such as boomerangs, spears, and didgeridoos and paints them. He is now the senior elder in the Nauiyu community. He sings at corroboree and teaches dancing to the men.

Jimmy Nambatu (1930)
Nambatu

From the day the Women's Centre opened, Mabel was there. Her first wish was to learn to write her name (which she accomplished). She became interested in screen print design but when paints, boards and brushes became available she launched into a twenty-year career as a noted painter. Her style was her own. She concentrated on the land that she loved with its trees, flowers and waters. She often spoke of her life in the richness of her own country with its fruits, fish and other animals. Sadly, she had no children by her three husbands. She was a great lady.

Mabel Nglangowuk
(1934 – 1998)
Kaninytyangu



After completing her education at Kormilda College, Darwin, Benigna studied as an external student at Edith Cowan University. She holds a certificate in Office Skills and was President of Merrepen Arts Inc. from 1990 – 1997. She is currently a member of Nauiyu Community Council. Benigna is a fount of knowledge about past Aboriginal customs. She is noted for her gloriously coloured large paintings of traditional stories.

Benigna Ngulfundi
(1964)
Tinkem

Suzanne Nurra (1948)
Nurra

Suzanne was one of the new Mission school's first students. When the Women's Centre was established she reawakened her interest in learning. She holds a BEd degree and teaches at her old school. Her paintings mainly depict Dreaming scenes and bush life.



Louise Pandella (1957)
Pandella

Louise was born at Unbal on the banks of the Daly River. She went to school at the mission. Whilst raising her seven children, she obtained her BEd and teaches at St Francis Xavier school. She paints her own and her husband's family legends, as well as religious stories.



Margaret Parry
(1925 – 2001)
Puleli

Margaret came from Peppimenarti. She married into a powerful family. Her husband was awarded an AO for his work for his people. Margaret painted the animals and land of her country in a clear and simple style.

Violet Parry
(1930 – 1998)
Tchululuk

Violet came to Daly River from Tipperary Station. She began to paint around 1990. She collected her materials from the art centre, using the wheelchair to which she was confined and lay on the floor to work. Her themes were mainly Dreamtime stories from her country at Lafugannnyi.



Dorothy is another 'bush baby'. Her father was a senior Elder of her country, Ferriderr. She is steeped in the lore of her land. One of her paintings of that country was accepted for display in the National Aboriginal Art Award. She painted when she was a child at school at Daly River.

Dorothy Sambono
(1963)
Nurra



Marita is renowned for her religious paintings that show depth of understanding. She loves to put the lilies of the billabongs and the birds and animals of the area on canvas. Her skill includes beautiful works on silks, batik and etching.

Marita Sambono (1968)
Diyini

The source of Dianne's painting style is a puzzle. It is almost Byzantine in execution. Her painting of the Last Supper has received much attention. Dianne completed Introductory Studies at Edith Cowan University. Her office skill has been put to good use at her outstation, Wudikapildiyerr.

Dianne Tchumut (1961)
Ferriderr



Bernadette was born in Sydney and returned to her Malak Malak country along the Daly River when she was a child. Traditional stories are her choice of painting subject. At Merrepen Arts she prefers to take part in batik and etching.

Bernadette Tyilngilin
(1972)
Tyilngilin

Miriam-Rose
Ungunmerr Bauman
(1949)
Ungunmerr

Miriam was born near the Daly and raised in Adelaide River. She returned at the age of fourteen. By the early '70s her remarkable painting talent was becoming recognised and she taught art in Melbourne. She is now the Principal of St Francis Xavier School and holds her MA, BEd, and an honorary PhD. Her paintings show her deep understanding of the elements of Christianity, her Aboriginal history and her affinity with the land in its sacramental character.



Dianne Warloo
(1977 – 2002)
Nganmuy

Dianne was part of a large extended family. It is sad that her early death prevented her from reaching her obvious potential. She loved to work in the Merrepen Arts Centre, taking part in the activities of batik and screen-printing.

Maureen Warramburr
(1946)
Warramburr

As a child Maureen lived in the bush. As she grew older she worked on a peanut farm. Later she came to the Mission and worked in the school and as a health worker. She began painting about fifteen years ago, her favourite subjects relating to the land and past customs. She is also a weaver of dilly bags.



Mercia Wawul (1924)
Wawul

Mercia is the oldest lady in the community and the doyenne of four generations of artists. Before she came into the Mission she had long experience of working on cashew, peanut and tobacco plantations. She paints the animals and plants of the land she walked over as a young person. These days she sits on her veranda weaving the coloured fibres of the Merrepen palm when she isn't painting.



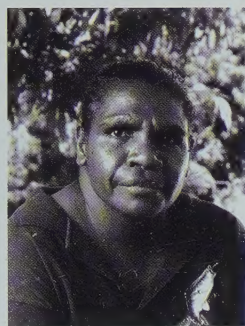
When the Women's Centre opened Topsy was there with the other older ladies trying to learn to write her name despite her arthritic fingers. Similarly she tried to paint. It was in collecting bush fruits, fishing, and catching turtles that she was happiest, particularly so when passing on her knowledge to younger people.

Topsy Wiya
(1908 – 1998)
Naya



In her painting Beatrice is most comfortable when painting her country, Ferriderr. The Emu is her Dreaming and very important to her, as are the 'Little People' who carry their paperbark torches at night.

Beatrice Wumbunji
(1950)
Wumbunji



Christina's paintings range from detailed studies of traditional culture and broad interpretations of environmental concerns to interpretive renditions of her Aboriginal Christian vision. Christine brings a fresh, individual approach to any subject that concerns her.

Christina Yambeing
(1966)
Yambeing



Molly is a legend. She has four daughters: Marrfurra, Yambeing, Ngulfundi, and Kumbi, each of whom is a talented painter. Molly is a great hunter, possessing an energy often missing in younger people. She is a Custodian of knowledge about customs and culture. She paints and enjoys batik but her greatest strength is in her weaving.

Molly Yawalminy (1944)
Yawalminy

About the author.....

Eileen Farrelly - The writer and gatherer of stories.

Eileen Farrelly was born in 1923 in Sydney, NSW. Her life was extraordinary from the beginning. She grew up at White City where her father was curator of the tennis courts. She graduated in Science from Sydney University in 1944, a time when it was not fashionable for women to enter science.

A long and varied career began: firstly in Dietetics in NSW, then as wife, mother and Nurse Educator (Dietetics) in Darwin, Northern Territory.

Eileen's husband became seriously ill and this necessitated a family move to Perth, WA. While bringing up their four children and nursing her sick husband Eileen embarked on a long and distinguished career teaching high school science. For many years she was Deputy Principal of a very large co-educational private school in Perth.

Following retirement, she decided to fulfil her life long dream of working with Aboriginal people in the field of education, and later, in art. Eileen first went as a volunteer Adult Educator to Balgo Hills in The Great Sandy Desert, WA, and then in 1986 accepted an invitation to work at Daly River in the NT. There she initiated, with the women, the thriving organization that has become Merrepen Arts Inc. She still commutes regularly to both places as well as maintaining a vibrant and active interest in the Arts.

Eileen's rich background in Aboriginal Art, her skill, and her empathy with the artists of the Daly make her the perfect person to bring together this scholarly work of art and story. It is a beautiful gift from the artists of the Daly to us, the newer peoples of Australia.

Sr Jan Niall IBVM
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