ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND, ONE FOOT IN THE WATER
La Trobe University proudly acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which its campuses are located in Victoria and New South Wales.

This catalogue was produced by La Trobe Art Institute on the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people of the Kulín Nation. We respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and their Elders, past and present.
ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND, ONE FOOT IN THE WATER

Curated by Travis Curtin

Catherine Bell
Timothy Cook
French & Mottershead
Mabel Juli
Richard Lewer
Sara Morawetz
Michael Needham
Nell
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra
10  Foreword
   Bala Starr

16  Dying, a conversation worth living
   Travis Curtin

42  Garnkiny Ngarranggarni
   Mabel Juli

48  Garn’giny, death and rebirth
   Mabel Juli interviewed by Dominic Kavanagh

76  Purukuparl story
   Pedro Wonaeamirri

88  Pukumani
   Pedro Wonaeamirri

102 Manikay: the song knows the destination
    Wukun Wanambi

114 Bäpurru
    Yinimala Gumana in conversation
    with Kade McDonald

140 Catalogue of works in the exhibition

144 Short artists’ biographies
Cat. 1
Catherine Bell
Final resting place 2018–20
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Foreword

Bala Starr, Director La Trobe Art Institute

One foot on the ground, one foot in the water is the fifth exhibition La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) Curator Travis Curtin has organised for our Bendigo galleries. At first glance, the intimate scale of the exhibition seems to belie the depth and scope of research, exchange and close looking that Travis has undertaken over the last year. It has been an ambitious undertaking.

The exhibition and this catalogue offer an opportunity to consider artists’ perspectives on experiences that are both commonplace and unknowable. In conceptualising and organising the project, Travis Curtin has set La Trobe Art Institute the task of testing what art and writing can do to illuminate our understanding of mourning, grief and loss. At a time when many of us are experiencing complex feelings about the fragility of life, Travis asks how an art exhibition can offer new insights into death and dying. A key curatorial premise of One foot on the ground, one foot in the water is that an exhibition itself functions as a kind of transitional zone or in-between space, where artists and viewers (and the curator too) can speculate about assumptions, propose ideas and consider the interrelationships between artworks and indeed between cultures.

Thoughtfully installed in two galleries, three adjacent enclosed courtyards and the LAI entrance area, One foot on the ground, one foot in the water presents more than 20 works by 11 artists across several generations who are respectively based in London, the United States and three Australian states. It presents diverse cultural
material. Fifteen works in the exhibition reflect La Trobe Art Institute’s aim to centre and highlight contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, ideas and practices in our programs. We are especially proud to present a group of five mokuy (spirit figures) and a Jarritj (memorial pole) by the late Yolŋu artist Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra held in the La Trobe University Art Collection. The works of Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra, along with works by senior Gija artist Mabel Juli and Tiwi artists Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri from the geographically and culturally distinct regions of the East Kimberley and Tiwi Islands respectively, have been brought into dialogue with works by seven non-Indigenous artists.

LAI is La Trobe University’s hub of arts practices and cultural collections, tasked with fostering artistic and intellectual exchange. In this our partnerships are key. We gratefully acknowledge the organisations that have supported us to realise this project. We thank NETS Victoria, which assisted the catalogue through its Exhibition Development Fund 2020 supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria. We are grateful to sound and video artist Jacques Soddell and Bendigo Tech School, hosted by La Trobe University, for producing the technology and advising on the installation of work by French & Mottershead, and to Chapman & Bailey, which supported the presentation of the three tutini (Pukumani poles) by Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri.

Our deep gratitude goes to the participating artists, Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, and the family and representatives of Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra. We thank all lenders to the exhibition and the gallerists and art centre staff who so generously shared information and advice with our curator. In particular, we thank the community of Milikapiti, staff and artists at Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, for generously hosting Travis Curtin during his research visit in late 2019.

We warmly acknowledge the contributions of writers Yinimala Gumana, Mabel Juli, Dominic Kavanagh, Kade McDonald, Pedro Wonaemirri and Wukun Wanambi. Dominic Kavanagh, Will Heathcote and Hannah Raisin, Kade McDonald and Will Stubbs generously provided editorial support and advice. We extend our gratitude to Frances Kofod who transcribed and translated the Gija spoken by Mabel Juli.

In bringing together this catalogue, Travis Curtin worked with graphic designer Tristan Main to devise a special document in parallel with the exhibition. We thank Tristan for his care, patience and attention to detail. And finally I thank the whole LAI team for their dedication and commitment to this project, to enabling experimental creative practices and to inviting visitors’ inquiry through art at View Street and in this catalogue.

Bala Starr is Director, La Trobe Art Institute
Cat. 1
Catherine Bell
Final resting place (details) 2018–20
The immediacy of loss is one of the most difficult experiences to articulate in words. One foot on the ground, one foot in the water tests what an art exhibition can do to express the complexities and mysteries of the emotional experiences surrounding death and loss that reverberate through time.

In his 2008 book, *Art and death*, Chris Townsend suggests that rather than coming to terms with our own death, ‘it is the deaths of others that lay claim to us, as witnesses’. Townsend proposes that ‘there is a degree to which, as Jonathan Strauss argues, death is “a fiction derived from other experiences of loss, most significantly that of other people”’. As quoted by Townsend, Strauss has stated that ‘my death is an awareness of myself that I can only have through the idea of others who will survive it, and it is in this sense a blind spot in my self-knowledge’.¹

My personal experience of loss has been an overwhelming sense of present–absence. We found grief contained many things – happiness, empathy, commonality, sorrow, fury, joy, forgiveness, combativeness, gratitude, awe, and even a certain peace. For us, grief became an attitude, a belief system, a doctrine – a conscious inhabiting of our vulnerable selves, protected and enriched by the absence of the one we loved and that we lost.

[...] in time, there is a way, not out of grief, but deep within it.


Most vivid in my memory is the shock at just how quickly she slipped from being her beautiful cognisant self to being presently absent. Her body lying on the hospital bed in front of me. But not there at all. A vessel for life, finally no longer capable of supporting it. A container emptied of its essence.

I was asleep in the next room when Anna died. When I entered the room, I could no longer feel her in it. She was absent. Her life had finished. Nothing could have prepared me for the finality of that moment. Nothing could have prepared me for the sense of absence when it was all over, despite being acutely aware of the drawn-out process of her body shutting down over the course of her final weeks. Anna desperately wanted to live to the end, right up until her last shallow rattling breath, drawn as Nick Drake’s album *Five leaves left* (1969) played softly through the speaker in a corner of the room. When I entered, the song ‘Saturday sun’ was playing. I think it was around 5:00 am. I’m foggy on the details. Being at the hospital no longer made sense. I was no longer needed there. Together with her family I packed up Anna’s things and drove home. Home, another vessel emptied of meaning and the significance it once held when we were both in the world to share it. Layers and layers of things to grieve for. Layers and layers of things to let go of or hold on to.

Anna had a small family funeral and burial at Lilydale Cemetery, northeast of Melbourne, where her grandparents are also buried. This was followed by a large memorial service in Williamstown by the
memento mori (reminders of inevitability) towards lived experiences that have a lasting legacy. It offers experiences that stimulate broader discussion around death and dying; experiences that bring the living together.

Throughout the exhibition, singular and repeated forms reinforce the reality of death as both an individual and universal experience. Sara Morawetz’s March 17 (2020) presents an unconventional memorial dedicated to Peter Morawetz, who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident 32 years ago while in the process of selling his motorbike to pay to legally become her father. Morawetz’s artist’s book catalogues the objects that were in Peter Morawetz’s wallet at the time of his passing. The book documents her deeply personal experience of loss, the act of making itself a form of grieving. As Morawetz identifies, the wallet’s contents are the ‘unremarkable ephemera of a 28-year-old man – made invaluable by his absence’. March 17 captures an intangible essence beyond physical presence.

Nell’s Mother of the Dry Tree and With things being as they are . . . (both 2017) have also been created in the context of grief following the artist’s loss of her son, Lucky, due to stillbirth in 2012. These works feature recurring images of large and small egg-shaped forms, ceramic sprites and glass ghosts, open-mouthed and open-eyed, suggesting a state of shock. Throughout Nell’s installation, mother and child are disconnected from one another, but close nonetheless.
Referring to these works, Nell has stated:

In my painting the mother and the child are separated, as if calling to each other. I had a stillborn baby boy [ . . .] and it was, goes without saying, incredibly traumatic and changed my life irrevocably and it really changed my art practice too. I made a commitment to make art about my life, a long time ago and now this little spirit’s very much in my work [ . . .]. My arms ached afterwards and so I wanted to make these little vessels or little spirits that I could hold in my arms.¹

With this body of work, Nell shares with the viewer the little sprite who ‘passed through’, who will forever dwell in her heart and mind and perhaps continue to reappear at times in her works of art.

These personal expressions of loss contrast with the repeated forms of Richard Lewer’s Crucifixes (2018) and Catherine Bell’s Final resting place (2018–20). Both these works use repetition to depict the interlinking of discrete individual experiences through our shared humanity.

Lewer has previously referred to the symbolic ambiguity of the cruciform, stating ‘the crucifix, to me, is an unmistakeable visual representation of absolute vulnerability, with its twisted human form

evidence of extreme physical suffering, whereas for others, it offers a beacon of hope, as with death there is always the opportunity to transcend this life to a better place’.⁴ Lewer’s work embodies this ambiguity and locates it in the viewer’s reading of the work, questioning the universality of iconography associated with death and dying. Similarly, Mabel Juli’s Garnkiny Ngarranggarni (2020) in proximity to Nell’s A cross (2017), draws into question Eurocentric readings of the cruciform, reminding us that iconography is a cultural construct and that forms are capable of embodying a multitude of meanings.

The repetition in Lewer’s 52 crucifixes contrasts with his painting As a bald man, I miss going to the barber (2019), a singular representation that draws our attention to the small ways we endure and survive embodied experiences of loss over the course of our lives.

The relationship between the individual and the universal significance of mortality resonates in Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri’s carvings, Purukuparli (2020) and Waiyai (2020), and their roles in the Purukuparli story recounted in this catalogue by Pedro Wonaeamirri. The Purukuparli story explains the origins of mortality from a Tiwi perspective in the death of Purukuparli and Waiyai’s son Jinani, during Parlingarri (olden times). In his second essay, Wonaeamirri outlines the significance of Pukumani and the Pukumani ceremony in Tiwi culture.

In the exhibition, tutini (Pukumani poles) carved by Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and animated with jilamara (designs) by Timothy Cook, are exhibited alongside Cook’s iconic representations of Kulama, which refer to the men’s initiation ceremony and annual celebration of life, as well as Japarra (the moon man) and his role in the Purukuparli story, exemplifying the inseparable link between life and death in Tiwi culture.

In late 2019, I visited Timothy Cook, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri and Pedro Wonaemirri in Milikapiti on Melville Island. On the second last day of my stay an old man passed away. Timothy and I had been talking about Jinani the day before and he said to me, ‘That old man died. Jinani died. Then we all go follow like that’. The Purukuparli story has been told countless times, by different people in different ways. The death of Jinani, the first in Tiwi culture, has resonated for generations of Tiwi and is a unifying force that brings people together through the universal experience of dying – ‘we all go follow like that’.

Throughout the exhibition, organic materials encourage us to consider states of permanence, impermanence and transitional phases in-between. Wood and natural earth pigments feature prominently, as in Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri’s tutini (Pukumani poles), Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri’s carvings, Purukuparli and Waiyai, Mabel Juli’s Garnkiny Ngarranggarni in natural earth pigments and charcoal – the residual carbon of burnt wood and other organic matter – and Nawurapu Wunun’murra’s larrakitj (memorial poles).
Garrapara (2007 and 2012) and Mokuy (2012). In ceremonial contexts, larrakitj in Yolŋu culture and tutini (Pukumani poles) in Tiwi culture are left to deteriorate in the elements (sun, wind, rain and saltwater) following the conclusion of the respective ceremonies that perform the function of seeing the spirit of the deceased safely on its way.

Just as the larrakitj returns to the earth, decomposing in the elements, Wunuŋmurra’s larrakitj represents the cyclical journey of the spirit from a Yolŋu perspective. The miny’tji (sacred clan designs) on Wunuŋmurra’s larrakitj represent the sea at Garrapara, a Dhalwaŋu clan estate, coastal headland and bay area within Blue Mud Bay, in Northeast Arnhem Land. The wavy design indicates a Yirritja moiety body of saltwater in Blue Mud Bay called Muŋurru. It is here that the ‘water (soul) transmogrifies to vapour, entering the “pregnant” waŋupini (storm clouds) which carry the life-giving freshwater back to the start of the cycle’.5

As Will Stubbs identifies in his essay ‘Water, kinship and the cycle of life’ in Larrakitj: Kerry Stokes Collection:

Water is paramount because each person has the water from which they have sprung, within […] The purpose of many Yolŋu ceremonies is to guide the spirit through the cycle and through the water – to return the spirit back to the reservoir of origin.

There is a sense that the spirit doesn’t want to leave. The body has components: the spirit, the flesh and the bones. The flesh melts away shortly after death; the bones are geologic, and must return to the land through the agency of larrakitj. That leaves the eternal spirit, which must find its way through the waters, back to the reservoir of the communal soul. That resides in sacred springs or rivers, and it must be assisted in that progress, guided by rituals and music, patterns and dancing.\footnote{Will Stubbs, ‘Water, kinship and the cycle of life’ in Larrakitj: Kerry Stokes Collection, ed. Anne Marie Brody (West Perth: Australian Capital Equity, 2011), 39.}

Ephemeral materials also feature in Catherine Bell’s Final resting place (2018–20), consisting of 100 vessels crafted from biodegradable floral foam by participants in her Facing Death Creatively workshops. The workshops provide a forum for public mourning through, as Bell states, bringing the living together to use ‘ephemeral materials to think about impermanence’. They are a catalyst for discussing mortality and the participants’ final resting places.

The act of carving is a reductive process. The creation of a new form by rubbing away or removing layers provides a gentle metaphor for loss and letting go, a change in state or shedding of form. Bell’s choice of biodegradable floral foam reflects her interest in processes of decomposition and the return of materials to natural elements: earth, water and gas. These vessels also correspond to our corporeal existence and the body as a ‘carrier’. Bell links their functional form to the way the human body holds water. The floral foam holds water to sustain life for flowers ‘yet is paradoxically the grave to those flowers’.\footnote{Catherine Bell, ‘Facing Death Creatively’ (La Trobe University Creative Arts, Visual Arts and Law School, 7 October, 2020), online workshop.}

Nell also incorporates organic materials in With things being as they are . . . (2017). Japanese igusa tatami mats woven from soft rush straw, chicken skin, eel skin and stingray skin are all former living things, repurposed and given life in another form.

French & Mottershead’s Grey Granular Fist (2017), from the series Afterlife, presents an opportunity ‘to experience the afterlife of your body’. The work makes exhibition visitors acutely aware of the organic materiality of our own bodies, introducing the notion of the life cycle and the sometimes uncomfortable alliance between life and death. Sound inhabits the liminal space in-between tangible and intangible experiences. Here it is grounded in the embodied experience of sitting in a wooden chair where the materiality of the listener’s body (their physical weight) triggers the audio. Andrew Mottershead has commented that, ‘the [Afterlife] series stems from a combination of personal fear connected to dying alone and not being found, and also a curiosity about the science of decomposition and decay […] It’s all about the life that occurs after that last breath, about the process of transformation and renewal’.\footnote{Hannah Reich, ‘Dark Mofo: Festival-goers experience death, decay and degloving on River Derwent in audio work “Waterborne,”’ ABC Arts, 23 June, 2018, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-23/dark-mofo-waterborne-audio-tour-river-derwent-body-decomposing/9988448.}

\cite{stubbs2011}
Michael Needham’s *Monument to Muther [sic]* (2020) evokes a sense of permanence through its weighty cast-iron bulk and looming 3.3 metre height. The exaggerated degree of ornamentation for an ambiguous mourned subject provides a layer of sardonic humour, and, as Needham states, the work overplays ‘formal posturing as a means of questioning implicit and often justifiably guarded sentimentality around loss’. In this context, Needham’s signature discarded plastic cemetery flowers offer further irony, as flowers provide an earthly reminder of the beauty and impermanent nature of life, meaning that is undermined by their plasticity and permanence. Nonetheless they imply that an offering, an embodied grief process, has taken place.

The monument elicits an uncomfortable presence in the Australian landscape, an intentionally jarring interplay between the sacred and the profane. This is further enhanced by the strangeness of the landscape Needham has created in the La Trobe Art Institute courtyard. The monument is installed on a bed of sandy earth littered with twigs and scatterings of casuarina needles and seedpods that remind us of the life cycle; former carriers of life are now discarded vessels, left to decompose on the surface of the earth.

Mortality is imposed on all of us eventually. *One foot on the ground, one foot in the water* ultimately tells a story of finality and legacy through art as a form of ongoing life beyond life itself. In death, the body continues to merge with the life cycles of other humans, living
things and processes. The cycle continues and we are undeniably a part of ‘life that exists beyond life itself’.9 The essence of a person, whatever name you give it, continues to resonate in present-absence.

Art and other forms of cultural expression play a major role in the way we respond to death. There is solace to be found in art, music, words and ‘deep within grief’, as Nick Cave writes in response to questions about finding meaning from tragic loss.10 Art provides a means of connecting with one another in order to make sense of our own experiences. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes that, ‘In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces […] Paul Klee’s famous formula – “Not to render the visible, but to render visible”’.11

The works presented together for the first time in this exhibition offer a unique group of intercultural perspectives on death, dying, loss and grief. It is my hope that One foot on the ground, one foot in the water echoes and reverberates in a poetic way for its viewers in much the same way that someone remains with us as a series of traces in memory or echoes in objects that carry the mark of their being after they are gone.

11 Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 56.
TRANSFER
New South Wales, Australia

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF MOTOR VEHICLE

Mr. Peter Morawetz
JWatson St, NSW
NEW LANGUAGE
2304

Registration No. 937055
Plate No. L880-230
Issued for 27/3/88

Model Year 1988

Registration Expired 27/3/88

Transfer Fee $33.80

New Vehicle, $2490.00

STATEMENT: $33.80

SANDWAX AUTO 100 OF SANDWAX

DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR TRANSPORT

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Be Wary: Upon sale of the vehicle, the person or organization providing the vehicle must take reasonable steps to ensure that the vehicle is in a satisfactory condition. If the vehicle is not in a satisfactory condition, the person or organization must take reasonable steps to ensure that the vehicle is in a satisfactory condition.

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NEW LANGUAGE AUTO 100 OF NEW LANGUAGE

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Well this the Dream by Wardel and Garnkiny (star and moon). That’s what my mother and father told me about that Dream. The moon sits in the east. The star sits on top of the hills, the moon came and climbed that hill. That moon loved his mother-in-law, but they told him he couldn’t love her and to go away. He left with shame and climbed up the hill and he was looking from on top [of the hill]. He told all the people that they were going to die. He said that he would be the only one living. He cursed those people, saying that he would be the only one coming back alive. He told them, while they were sitting down, ‘you are all going to die and I will be still alive, coming out. Every month I will rise from the dead.’ They all died and he was the only one that stayed alive. He came back as the moon every month.

This is Yarin Country in Darrajayin (Springvale Station), south of Warmun, Mabel Juli’s traditional Country.
Mabel Juli at Garn’gin, Darrajayin, 2011
Courtesy of Warmun Art Centre
Photo: Frances Kofod

I am talking about the Dreamtime moon story. I am talking about this Dreamtime moon. I say for him, ‘This moon is a Dreamtime, and I’m talking for him.’ My brother, a Dreamtime thing. He is Joowoorroo skin, I call him ‘brother’.

Garlmi nginini goorndarrim. Nginyjiny, goorndarrim garlmi wanemayinde, yilag, Garn’gin ngenengga yilag Darrajayin, yilag. Place called Garn’gi again.

He was catching fish by pushing grass through the water. This one [the moon when he was a man], was catching fish by pushing grass through the water, down there, at the place called Garn’gin in Darrajayin Country. The place is called Garn’gin, the place of the moon, too.
When someone passes away in Gija culture what happens to them?

Anybody, yeah, where they die? Nang-ngarri boorrouwoonbe. They come back la, they come back la people you know when. Jarriny, you know jarriny? They come back, jarriny, baby. Like my son. Son bin passed away, my young son. And he Michael, Michael Malgil, bin come back, that’s my son him come back.

Yes, when they die? When they die, they come back, they come back to other people, they are reborn. ‘Jarriny’ is the spirit that is reborn. Yes you come back as a reborn spirit with another mother. They have the same skin name when they are reborn. Like my son [Leo Juli]. My young son passed away. And now he is Michael Malgil. Michael Malgil is my son who came back.

What happens to the body when someone passes away?

Yeah. They put em, they put em paperbark, sometime they, with a blanket, wrap em up. They put em la rock. Sometime they bury em la ground. Nawane, walig bemberrilinbe yiligin nawane. They got big mob everywhere. And they put em ola rock now, ngarrgale rerr finish. Jamboorn, ngarrgalem dambi la that, they put em ola rock you know la hole. Same way like ngaboony, where they bin put em in a thing. And ngaboony bin come back laive igen.

They used to put them in paperbark, sometimes they used to wrap them in a blanket. They put them in a rocky place. Sometimes they bury them in the ground. Or they put them inside a cave. There are lots of burial places everywhere in Gija Country. And they put lots of rocks then, they drag stones there, done. They heap up those stones at that, they cover the hole with rocks. The same way as Jesus, when they put him in that thing. And Jesus came back alive again.

That what ngaboony bin do. They in bury im la nawan, walig la im la nawan. Im bin there for, couple a days, I think three days, and his mum and his Aunty bin go and look in that place. ‘He not there, where him?’ He was standing behind. So they bin look back ‘Oh here!’ They never touch him, nothing. They just leave em. That’s what, that’s the ngaboony way now.

That’s what Jesus did. They buried him in a cave, put him in a cave. He was there for couple of days, I think three days, and his mother and Aunty went and looked at the place [Mabel has interpreted Mary Magdalen as an ‘Aunty’]. ‘He’s not there, where is he?’ He was standing behind. ‘Oh here’ [they said]. They did not touch him, they just left him be. That’s the Jesus way now.

Same way like my grandpa, la Springvale you know, they bin clean, knock all them rock. Well my grandpa was there la that rock. They bin clean em out now my jaja. I can’t find em my grandpa now. My grandpa we, that side rock, you know that rock place one like this,
they bin jis, chuck em down there, and chuck ola big, big mob rock la im. That’s what they bin do la my grandpa. And they bin knock em down now. They bin go do mining there now. He finish. You can see all a rock everywhere laying down. Big hole there now.

The same as my grandpa at Springvale you know. They [granite miners] graded that place, knocking all the rocks. Well my grandfather was buried among those rocks. They cleaned out my grandfather, I can’t find my grandpa’s burial place now. My grandfather you know that rocky place like this, they put him down there and put lots of big rocks over him. That’s what they did to my grandfather. And the miners have knocked that place down now. They did mining there and the place is ruined. You can see all the rocks lying down everywhere. There is a big hole there now.

DK How do Gija people say goodbye or mourn someone who has passed away?

MJ They cry now. But early days, people you know, when they bin lose, and, only all the boy go, got that body, all the girl not gonna go. Not girl, no, only all the boy go. They bury em that man or woman, and girl stop la home. When they see the man come back, after that for that, bury em ola dead body now, and they cry now, all a girl cry la camp. See? Law, you know, early days. But not this time, everybody going. No, you can’t see. Or might be some people can look, not like me. Put a smoke, inside. We bin want em for jarriny you know. They come back jarriny.

DK Do you have any personal thoughts about dying?

MJ I don’t worry. I don’t want to worry. I know my, where this, where this, tell old ngaboony, that’s all we talking to ngaboony. Pray la ngaboony everyday, every night, that’s what we do. We don’t think about for nhang, for die. You get a kangaroo or might be you get sugarbag, big mob sugarbag, you come back jarriny thadan. Might be that girl when he eat em that kangaroo, and he vomiting, where first feeling come out. See, he come back. Even gardiya. We bin have ola gardiya here, ola missus we bin have, they bin get jarriny here too. They wanta know bout that, jarriny. He’ll come out la you. You can call em he right, he finish he come back. Come back jarriny. My daughter bin lose he might come back la somebody, my daughter. Come back la somebody there.
I don’t worry. I don’t want to worry. I know me, when this, we tell God, that’s all. We speak to God. Pray to God every day and every night, that’s what we do. We don’t think about dying. Sometimes when the mother eats kangaroo or sugarbag, you are reborn from that thing. Maybe that woman when she eats the kangaroo and she vomits [as a result of morning sickness], then she knows she is pregnant and a spirit has come back to her. Even white people. We have had lots of white women come here and they became pregnant with the reborn spirits of old people. They go swimming at Winniba Spring and find babies there. They want to know about that, spirits being reborn. It comes out to you [appears]. You can say the name, the time of restriction is finished, once he comes back. Came back, spirit reborn. My daughter died, she might come back to someone [as a baby]. Come back as a baby to someone there.

Note on translation:

There are multiple spellings for the moon in Gija. Garnkiny and Garn'giny are both used in this catalogue. ‘Garnkiny’ is an older spelling, ‘Garn’giny’ is more recent.

Until March 2020 the Gija spelling system used ‘ng’, ‘ngg’, ‘nk’ and ‘rnk’ to distinguish the pronunciation of words like wangala, wangga, wanggarnal, warnkam and wankil.

When Frances Kofod visited the Purnululu Association School at Woorreranginy, Frog Hollow, in March 2020, the Gija school staff asked that instead of ‘nk’ and ‘rnk’ the spelling system should use ‘ng’ and ‘rn’. This is because the sound in the middle of the word really sounds more like a ‘g’ in English.

The ‘ny’ suffix at the end of Gija words that have stems ending in vowels indicate masculine singular gender. The moon was a man in the Ngarranggarni, so the word ends in ‘ny’.

Gija nouns can replace the gender suffixes with a locative ‘n’. ‘Garn’gin’ means ‘in, at, on the moon’ or ‘the place of the moon’.
With things being as they are ... 2017
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Cat. 16
Nell
Sprite resting in hat 2017

Cat. 16
Nell
Mother and Child #2 2017
Cat. 16
Nell
BYE-bye 2017
Cat. 16
Nell
I AM Passing through 2017
BYE-bye 2017
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Cat. 16
Nell
SWEET dreams BABY… 2017
Cat. 16
Nell
A cross 2017

Cat. 16
Nell
The sound of A face 2017
With things being as they are... 2017

Background, left to right:
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Waiyai 2020
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Kulama 2014
Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy
Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Left to right:
Nell
With things being as they are ... 2017
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukuparli 2020
Wayai 2020
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
A long time ago before there were many people on earth, there was a place called Yimpinari, on the eastern side of Melville Island. On this place there lived a small family: Purukuparli, Waiyai and Jinani. Purukuparli’s brother Japarra was staying not far away on the other side of a creek. At that time, they were the only people on earth.

Purukuparli was a very important man to the Tiwi. He is the idea of a great man, like a cultural leader, strong and heroic. He introduced the Pukumani ceremony to all the people that have their home on the Tiwi Islands, north of Darwin. This story is of a time in the past that we call Parlingarri (olden times), before death came to the islands and when the differences between human, animal and Country were less clear. It was long time ago, in fact, Purukuparli’s mother Muntankala who had brought light to the earth, she was the first to come up from the underworld with three children in a tunga (bark bag) on her back. We believe that as she crawled in the dark, she created the ocean straight between the two Tiwi islands with her body and then left her son Purukuparli and his two sisters on the dry sand.

Some years later, Purukuparli, Waiyai and their baby Jinani lived in a bush camp at the place called Yimpinari. One morning Waiyai said to Purukuparli, ‘I’m going out to get some yinkiti [food] and kukuni [water].’

She put her son down under a shady tree and then went out in the bush alone searching for that yinkiti. While she was away, she saw Japarra and instead of looking for food she went off to make love

Old Tiwi songline.

Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma punjami, Ngawulayapunjami japumpunuma, punjami, pumpi, wiya

Purukuparli calling out telling the world:
‘now my son is dead, now we all have to follow him’. 
He put his son back down under that tree and picked up his spear in anger and said, ‘miyuwarrimi’, which means ‘me and you fight’.

Japarra then picked up his own spear. Purukuparli threw his spear and first missed his brother. He then picked up a fighting stick and hit the side of Japarra’s forehead. Japarra did not fight back, but when Purukuparli threw that fighting stick and hit him, Japarra said: ‘waya juwa’ (finish) and put his fighting sticks down. He started singing to himself. Purukuparli stopped the fight and everything else was quiet. As Japarra was singing and dancing, he started flying up off the ground. He was a powerful man too, that moon man. He kept flying up far into the sky that covers the earth and that is where we see him today. Whenever there is a full moon we can still see the mark on his face where he got hit by his brother – the right side of his forehead.

The next morning where Purukuparli was staying at that bush camp near the beach, a pelican and egret came to meet him. Before these characters were birds, they were human. This was Parlingarri, a time when humans could change into animals. The birds had heard that Purukuparli was going to hold a ceremony for his son’s death. From Parlingarri to today, birds are still considered messengers for the Tiwi people; for my tribe the white cockatoo is a messenger for us.

After hearing about the ceremony, the pelican and egret offered feathers from their own bodies to make ceremonial ornaments such
she transformed into the curlew bird. Like the way the lessons of this story follow our people, the curlew continues to cry out at night. We hear her when it is dark at night-time. Calling out and searching for her dead son. Looking around for him under the light of Japarra – the moon.

This story of Purukuparli, his wife and son, is important to Tiwi life and culture. It teaches lessons about life and is also the beginning of our ceremonial culture. Since the time when Purukuparli danced his dead son into the sea at Yimpinari, the Tiwi people have come together for the Pukumani ceremony – to sing, dance and farewell the spirit of our family so they can be at rest back on Country. Pukumani ceremony is a grieving ceremony, but it is also a celebration of life. Every dance has a song. The song and dance are how you connect to the land and the spirit of the deceased person. To let go and say goodbye, see you next time on your Country.

As Purukuparli was dancing and singing in the ceremony, he was moving down the beach toward the sea.

‘Ngawulayampanjami punjamimi jumpunipunuma punjanimi’ – ‘We all have to follow,’ he was singing.

He picked his son up and as he walked, he stomped a beat into the ground with his feet and was singing to himself. This was to let the world know that everyone to come after this ceremony were to follow him.

‘You will all have to die and follow my son,’ he sang.

As he carried his son into the water it got deeper and deeper and the winga (saltwater) came up until they both disappeared under the surface – that was it.

Waiyai continued to cry and mourn for her deceased son. She was ashamed of herself and what she had done. Like today, partners can become ashamed. This was a lesson for that lady, that whole family and for all Tiwi. Then ashamed of herself, as she continued to cry, she transformed into the curlew bird. Like the way the lessons of this story follow our people, the curlew continues to cry out at night. We hear her when it is dark at night-time. Calling out and searching for her dead son. Looking around for him under the light of Japarra – the moon.

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Resource for spelling and translation:

Pedro Wonaeamirri is a senior Tiwi cultural leader with significant knowledge of the ‘hard’ Tiwi language and the songs and dance important in Tiwi culture. Wonaeamirri grew up in Pirlangimpi (Pularumpi) on Melville Island, where he was born in 1974. He was educated in Darwin and returned to the Tiwi Islands in 1989, moving to Milikapiti in the same year that Jilamara Arts and Crafts was incorporated, where he currently practices as a senior artist.
Cat. 17 and cat. 18
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukparli 2020
Waiyai 2020

Cat. 18
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Waiyai (detail) 2020
Cat. 17
Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Purukupari (detail) 2020

Cat. 6
Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
When a Tiwi person dies, a time called Pukumani begins. At the start there is a smoking ceremony to cleanse areas where the person lived and worked; the funeral when the body is buried; then after some time a small ceremony to start the making of the tutini (Pukumani poles); and finally the main Pukumani ceremony where the spirit is put to rest.

Six months or a year after a person passes, the family of the deceased begin to organise the Pukumani ceremony. During Pukumani, we do not use this person’s name, even people who hold that name are called by their middle name. The Pukumani ceremony marks the end of this time, six months or a year after the funeral. After the main ceremony the name comes back and Pukumani for that person is over.

The nieces and nephews who are the close family from the father’s side (in Tiwi way these are also the children, like ‘son’ and ‘daughter’) first organise a small ceremony to start things off. This little ceremony is sometimes organised four weeks before the main ceremony – this is the beginning. The sons and daughters dance with a tomahawk, lighter and white ochre. When dancing they give these things to the workers for the main Pukumani ceremony – these workers are always the in-laws of the deceased. There is a special dance for the giving of the tomahawk, lighter and white ochre – each has their own separate song and dance.

Culture is always changing and moving forward, this is my grandfather’s songline about the sound of the first bulldozer coming to make roads on Melville Island for the first time.

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1 Today we give modern-day lighters, but before lighters they used to give out boxes of matches and long before that fire sticks. When we say lighter, we mean fire as a gift to the in-laws.
It is the in-laws who are commissioned to make Pukumani poles and do all the work in preparation for the final ceremony. When they are given the tomahawk these workers go out and cut the timber for making the tutini and shelter. The tomahawk is to cut the wood and the lighter is to burn and prepare the wood. It is also used to burn the yellow ochre and make the red colour. The ochre is to paint the poles, tunga (bark bags) and the bodies of the dancers.

When the close family are ready, they ask the workers to begin making the shelter. Close family we call warnatawi, which means father and aunty of the deceased person. It has been very important since Parlingarri (olden days) until today, that the close relatives do not work, because they are in Pukumani. It is taboo and they are grieving. During the time between the little ceremony and main ceremony, close family should observe grieving behaviour. In Parlingarri, close family could not work, travel anywhere or go hunting and warnatawi are even forbidden to touch food.

The workers prepare an area for the ceremony that has been selected by the close family. For example, when I organised a Pukumani ceremony for my son, I selected a space next to my house, in a spot where you can see over the ocean to our Country, then my son’s in-laws built a shade there. They start by collecting materials to build the shade. This includes forked timber lengths that we call rails or in Tiwi language, ‘bubliey’. We put six or nine of these upright in the ground in a square shape as posts to support straight rails hung between these forks. Once the wood frame is built then we use arliba (coconut leaves) to cover the top and create the shade under which we will yoi (dance). The workers then collect sand from the beach to prepare the ground under the shade. We do this for dancing and also to remember Purukuparli, who danced down the beach towards the sea with his baby Jinani during the first Pukumani ceremony. The commissioned tutini are placed upright in the ground at one end of the prepared area. Once the workers have finished the poles, built the shade and prepared the ground for dancing, the ceremony is ready to begin.

Always in preparation for the ceremony we do jilamara – body painting. We always use natural ochres from Melville Island to paint ourselves: turtiyangini (white), tunuwuni (black charcoal), arrikininga (yellow) and yarringa (red). The red is yellow ochre that we have cooked on the fire. The design goes on the poles, tunga (bark bags) that are made for the ceremony and the bodies of the family. The body painting, the ceremonial ornaments like the pamajini (armband), and tokwayinga (feather ball) are used to disguise ourselves from the spirit of the dead, ‘mopartiti’. When we are dancing all painted up, we are disguising ourselves from the spirit world. That is the meaning of the word jilamara: design that we paint on ourselves to disguise ourselves. Now we use these design styles to make art at the art centre and still for ceremony as well. When individuals are all painted up the designs are never the same. Each person has their own unique jilamara that is based on how they connect to the deceased and other things, like their animal totem.
The ceremony always starts in the morning with a smoking for cleansing the area before entering the dancing area. We burn the kutukuni (ironwood) leaves and circle the smoke together as a group calling out to the deceased spirit. The dancing goes all day and finishes in the afternoon. Everyone takes part in the ceremony in different ways. Some family members are like leaders and they call out to different groups to come forward and dance. Everyone on the Tiwi Islands is given an animal totem at birth based on their father’s family. For example, a leader of the ceremony can call all people with brolga totem to come forward and dance jilarti (brolga). The ceremony continues with dancers coming forward and dancing different totems to the rhythm of the whole group clapping their hands together as one. The groups dance towards the Pukumani poles and sometimes the family will put a photo of the deceased person on one of the poles for everyone to look at as they sing and dance. When there is a ceremony there is always a singer chosen who is a strong cultural leader, who knows all the different songlines. Totem dance is different to the dance of how you are related to the deceased person. Then when you dance that connection song, the totem comes in with a separate song. Dancing for a funeral is often shorter than when we dance for Pukumani; it is always much longer and about our totem, as well as how we are related to the deceased. In a funeral you cannot dance for your mother, or your uncle (mother’s brother) or your brothers and sisters from your mother’s tribe. Dancing for Pukumani ceremony is different. The Pukumani ceremony is for everyone to dance and get involved and connect with the spirit of the deceased – to let go of that person and finish the grieving process.

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The in-laws help throughout the ceremony, continually smoothing the sand area with a rake for the next round of dancers. At the end of the yoi (dance) in the afternoon, the in-laws are paid for their work by the immediate family. Before they had money, long time ago they used to give ceremonial ornaments, spears and sometimes young women – now it is just money. One at a time the in-laws collect money from the family. With a special song and special dance, they come forward at the end of the ceremony and collect their pay. When these arrangements finish, the warnatawi (immediate family – father and aunty) can eat and touch food again – it means no more Pukumani. All the family then have yinkiti (food) together.

In Parlingarri (old times), the poles were always taken to the grave on that same day. Now sometimes on the same day or next day the in-laws take the poles from their place under the shade area. They are taken to the person’s grave site and erected around the grave. The poles are left in this spot in the bush. No tribe or clan group can repaint or replace another pole; they are left to age over time.

I had ceremony for my mother, then I had ceremony for my father and now I have had one for my son. I was the leader of these ceremonies because of my close relationship to these family members. Like for my ceremony, I grieve in sadness but also remember and just let it all go, all the time remembering. For the Tiwi, Pukumani ceremony is about letting go, but always remembering. We believe that it is a way to send the spirit back to their Country. From then and forever, whenever we
go to this Country we always call out to the spirits of those relatives and let them know we are entering their place. We say hello, let them know why we are there and introduce any visitors we might have with us. They are at rest on Country, but always there. If we don’t call out to them, then we believe something bad will happen.

Resource for spelling and translation:
Kurrumgarimily
Photo: Will Heathcote
Foreground, left to right:
Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2007
Garrapara 2012

Background, left to right:
Patrick Freddy
Puruntatameri
Purukupari 2020
Waiyai 2020
Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
Timothy Cook and Patrick
Freddy Puruntatameri
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
From far left:
Cat. 21
Nawurapu Wunuymurra
Garrapara 2007
Cat. 22
Nawurapu Wunuymurra
Garrapara 2007
Cat. 21
Nawurapu Wunuymurra
Garrapara (detail) 2007
Death is related to life, life is related to death. The manikay (sacred song) is related to the Country. It doesn’t matter if you are gapu (water) Country or land Country, the manikay belongs to that place. If we sing about water, we can connect the people to that place. We can know where it [manikay] comes from.

We can complete the whole manikay cycle with the Bäpurru (funeral). How do we know the story? Through the songline.

We can say: this song is about the wind and this wind can cycle around the body and move around to find the destiny and where it will be. The wind will pick the spirit and relocate it to his Country or place of destiny. The song knows the destination of the deceased’s resting place.

**Wind**

Wata marrtji burrburryun garrminydi,
Wata marrtji burrburryun gunđa nyurrunyurru,
burrburryun wata dhukuyuna,
burrburryun wata garrminydi wukidi ga djok-Marrakulu Wukidi.

The wind cycle, north, east, south and west has blown across Marrakulu Wukidi (resting place for Dhuwa moiety – Djapu, Dhudi Djapu and Djambarrpuyŋu clans).

When we do this, everything allows a natural way for the deceased to lay down quietly and be at one.
The gurrṟuṉu (relationship) system, allows the family groups to come in, the Māri (grandfather/grandmother) comes in and takes over the element of moving the deceased. When Māri controls the time and moves the body then the other Yolŋu can come in (to ceremony) with bilma (clapsticks) and manikay to assist the Bāpurru.

The ḋarrakitj (hollow log coffin), before, the old people used to keep the bones in the ḋarrakitj. The bones would go into the ḋarrakitj. This is the old times but the song hasn’t changed. Nothing has changed. From the beginning to today.

We still plan the ceremony through Māri as we always have. The Māri is responsible for all the things relating to the deceased.

Yolŋu can sing the manikay to bring the life of the spirit back to the Country and into the people of his clan so other people can be attached with the spirit as well, as we continue to move along the songline.

That songline is the Guwak (nightbird, Koel Cuckoo) and it tells where the spirit can go down, for Dhuwa that is Guwak, a bird.

Guwak nightbird
Burrkun yaliyali wayimbaba dilimdilim liya ḋathi ḋarra yurruru dhiyaku dharpatjiwu marawili wulŋultji’wu.

The night bird (Guwak) cries at Djarrakpi telling that someone passed away. The bird flew to Yilpara, Gängän and to different places letting people know and continues, the spirit went back on their journey, until it reaches the homeland where the deceased is resting in their home ground.

The water – the cloud touches us and we can cry, cry along the songline. The journey begins from where we hold it, then it travels across the sky, the water and the Country. He goes back to his own land. The spirit will find its destiny. If I die my spirit goes back to my Country, Gurka’wuy (Trial Bay).

It’s more about the spirit and its resting place in his Country. The spirit and body cannot move without song. The body can be here (Yirrkala) or anywhere but the spirit will go back to its rightful resting place, like for me its Gurka’wuy.

As the deceased is resting in peace and quiet, then we can sing the song cycle of the manikay, this is where the destiny of your spirit goes back into your Country. So when we say:

Wulata, Wulata, rol_mi, rol_mi marrŋal maypa gapu dhal_irr’yuna.

The spirit of deceased women or men returned from his/her journey to their Country.
The maŋan (cloud) sung by Djapu clan also tells the story of the deceased, people going back to their home.

When we bring the l_arrakitj it represents the image of the deceased who has passed away. For Dhuwa or for Yirritja it’s the same thing. We don’t hide it, we put it up. It is the image of everything we see and for where the spirit goes.

This is the memorial. We see this as a l_arrakitj but also as the songline, the place and the journey of the deceased.

You can sing the manikay of the journey. This is the beginning of the cycle of the journey.

Sun going down . . .
Walirr nhaŋal dhunbiryuna nyikthuna gulaŋthu warrarra dhunbiryuna.

As the sun is going down and changed colour to red or orange, the spirit is on their way to their Yirralka (homeland)

Honey (Yarrpany)
Rakiny malka ŋalyun yolŋu’wal mokuy’wal,
Murruymurray’urr ŋayi gularrwaŋa yothun mirmir’nha mandhulba.
Yothu gularrwaŋa barrku djalkthurr bala Gurkawuy’il ga barrku djalkthurr Gowutjurr Raymangirr.

When the deceased one is resting, the special white string hanging above the deceased represents the Dhuwa Guku (honey).

The song continues and also the bees. The bees started their journey from Gurka’wuy and stopped at Raymangirr. From Raymangirr they flew again to the Wagilak tribe.

Our manikay never ends, it has been passed on from generation to generation. The manikay knows our destiny, it knows the destination.

Wukan Wanambi is a leader of the Marrakulu clan (Dhuwa moiety), an award-winning artist and Director of The Mulka Project, the media centre at Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala. Wanambi recently exhibited with La Trobe Art Institute in unbranded (2019) and worked as curatorial consultant on the exhibition Miwatj (2018). He is a co-curator of the exhibition Maŋayin at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.
Cat. 20
Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra
Mokuy (details) 2012
Cat. 20
Nawurapu Wunungmurra
Mokuy (details) 2012
Yinimala Gumana  When someone has passed away, family or relatives participate in Yolŋu ceremonial way, the deceased person goes back to where they come from or where they are coming from and that’s why Yolŋu, every family or relative goes and participates in ceremony.

Kade McDonald  So when you say ‘where they come from’ do you mean their ceremonial place?

YG  Yes ceremonial place, like from every significant place where they have promised land.

KM  When you are talking about the family and the community response, are we talking about the fact that they also have to get together to coordinate the roles and responsibilities?

YG  Yes, to coordinate and also to mourn them, the deceased.

KM  Is that the same response for Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties?

YG  Yes, both for Dhuwa and Yirritja and to make sure people from the two sides of Dhuwa and Yirritja always have to work together.

KM  Like the custodian or the djungayana [caretaker, manager or custodian who inherit rights and responsibilities to land and ceremonies via their mother’s clan].

YG  Yes Djungayana or Waku-wayaŋu [sister’s son, designated handler of bodily remains], could be, Gathu-wayaŋu [the proper patrilineal great grandfather’s clan]. They all have to work together to coordinate the ceremony.

KM  Do clans do it differently?

YG  Clans do it differently and according to their cultural protocol, like songlines or sand sculptures and there could be other objects that they make, or display and put in place, like ceremony and song. But the ceremonial song cycle they have to do goes from the start, from the beginning, as you know, from the horizon, from where the horizon is coming up and all the way down towards the inland
Country. The sand sculpture [yinapunapu] that I mentioned is very important for the person, because that is the way it goes down deep into the ground. It opens the way for that person to go deep in the ground because our bundurr, bones, will go back to the Country, where we are coming from.

KM So your bones will return back to the Country?

YG Yes, the bone and also the flesh. The spirit will go back to the Country too, to where they have been going through, where they have been moving through, along the coastal area or along the inland Country.

KM So the spirit goes back to their ancestral birthplace?

YG Yo [Yes].

KM So for the spirit to go back, for the soul to return to the ancestral domain, is it essential that the appropriate songs, manikay [songlines] and buŋgul [dance] are practised?

YG Yeah, through the song cycle and ceremonial way of putting the person back to the Country.

KM Who organises those ceremonies, when you talk about the custodian or the djungaya?

YG The main person in my clan. My clan have to decide, or the other relatives, like Gutharra [maternal grandchild] or Märi [maternal grandmother] or other relatives, family members. But the owner who runs that particular ceremony, he is the one to give the responsibilities and authority to djungaya mala [caretaker (of the clan)] or to any other relatives like Waku-waŋanu [sister’s son, designated handler of bodily remains] or Ngandi-waŋanu [the proper mother clan], mother and child.

KM Is it important that all the appropriate people participate in this ceremony?

YG Yes of course, in our world, we always go and participate, all Yolŋu mala [clan or clans].

KM When you talk about these ceremonies is it less about the individual and more about a community as a collective of people, that help take that individual’s spirit back to its ceremonial birthplace?

YG Yeah.

KM Like a whole clan, like gurrutu [kinship or Yolŋu foundation] in a way?

YG Yeah.

1 For a detailed description of gurrutu see Nici Cumpston, ed., Tarnanthi: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2019).
YG Yeah, all clan, gurrutu.

KM Everybody has their purpose and their responsibility in that Yolŋu law.

YG Because of gurrutu. Without gurrutu we aren’t connected to each other, we aren’t connected to the Country and the clan estates.

KM In a way you could say that each person has a greater sense of community in their role, rather than like balanda [non-Indigenous person] where it’s about the individual, this is about everybody having a purpose yeah?

YG Yes.

KM And that purpose is defined through gurrutu?

YG Yes. Way back, very very way back. Way back when the old people were here, and when someone died, they put that person into the platform shelter and leave it for another couple of months or years and then they go back and then they make big ceremonies and sand sculpture and cut hollow log and put the bones back to the larrakitj [hollow memorial pole]. Then they put that person back to their Country, but also other areas, when they die in another area and they will make the ceremonial connection to that Country where that person is coming from.

KM And then after that, many years later, the ceremony of the larrakitj is practiced yeah, or months later. Can you tell me a little bit about what is the purpose of the larrakitj and what was its role, or what is its role still? Not about the art, but about the time when it was used for burial.

YG Well, the purpose of the larrakitj, the way our old people used to use it, way back when there was no coffin, that’s why they made the larrakitj, to put the persons bones into the larrakitj. That is the purpose, so that person can go back to their Country and they make clan designs to go with it, miny’tji [clan designs or patterns].

KM That miny’tji, that clan design, does that relate to that person who has died?

YG It has to be coming from a very close relationship, like Märi [maternal grandmother] and Gutharra [maternal grandchild] or the owner like Walkur [great grandchild, patrilineal line], what we call Walkur.

KM When the ceremony is happening, do the people participating in the ceremony have designs painted on their body or gapan [white clay] on their forehead? If so, how does that relate to the funeral ceremony?

YG They put white clay all over the body and also red ochre as well. That is the very important thing that Yolŋu people use so they can go
and mourn, and they can go free and close to that area where they are having the Bäpurru [funeral ceremony]. It protects them in a way.

KM But now when we go into the art centre and we see larrakitj being painted by different artists including yourself and other people like Gunybi Ganambarr pushing the boundaries, how do you see that transition now? How has the purpose of the larrakitj changed to serve a contemporary art function? Does it still represent the same thing?

YG Yes, it still represents the same thing through gurrutu and through that person who does the painting and puts that miny’tji on the larrakitj, according to gurrutu you know, because they want to describe that Country you know through the miny’tji.

KM I mean they’re not just beautiful patterns are they? They’re still related to –

YG They’re still related to that Country and to the ceremony and to gurrutu. What they call that Country, for example, what I have to call my clan or any other clan next to us, you know? I can call it Njandi [mother] or Waku [nephew], or it could be another relative.

KM What was your relationship to Mr Wunuŋmurra?

YG He is my cousin and we are both Dhalwaŋu, and we are both speaking one language, but two homelands, Gurrumuru and Gängän, and also Garrapara. We all share in the expertise together, all of us, all Dhalwaŋu people. And the person [Mr Wunuŋmurra] is my cousin and I have my family here with me, from his side. Like my wife, I married one of his nieces.

KM He was a good man huh?

YG Yo. He was a good man and his father was a very great artist and he was a law man as well, and humble and gentle man. And he was a knowledgeable man.

KM Any thoughts on Mr Wunuŋmurra’s work on his mokuy or bark paintings?

YG Mokuy is the spirit woman, also I didn’t mention the spirit woman lives in that Country too at Garrapara, the other one right in the land, right in the middle of the area there near Baraltja, what they call Balambala, between Gängän and Baraltja, a place called Balambala. That’s where the other spirit lives on that Country too and also around in this area where the mokuy is. What does it say about this work?

KM It says that these are happy spirits. They are going home. The spirits come in together Dhuwa and Yirritja to the sacred ground called Balambala, past Gängän, the other side for all the mokuy to get together.
YG That’s the place that I mentioned, Balambala. In our creation story Balambala is the place where they are making yidaki and they were blowing the yidaki in each direction to Baraltja which is for the Bitharrpuŋyu Mokuy and Gulgulmi Mokuy which is coming from another Maddrpa clan, from a place called Gayngarra next to the Baykultji area, and also to the Baykultji which is the Nundurrpuŋyu Mokuy and also this way down towards Bokuy where the turn off is to Baniyala. That’s where a place called Bokuy is. And that’s where, from Balambala it was calling, blowing yidaki, Gan’bulapula mokuy making the yidaki and also making very special things, what they call yuwan [ceremonial object/yam] and calling to each Country, to bring all the different spirits together where they have been having ceremony there in Balambala. I have a recording there from my grandfather talking about what I am talking about.

KM So this story, although Mr Wunuŋmurra made sculptures and paintings, this story exists before him and will continue to exist way beyond him.

YG Yo.

KM Can you talk a bit about Mr Wunuŋmurra’s work and how it relates to the songs of Garrapara, Muŋurru and the journey of the spirit?

YG Well, we always tell it straight and always put it into our artwork or into our ceremony and into our words, talking about the Country which is the saltwater Country, and as the water’s coming in and out, rushing and bringing new things, new life, to the Country, and that comes up to the shore where the land is. That’s where our bones go back to Country, to the ground, to the soil, like yŋapuŋapu.

KM And the spirit?

YG Back to the Country where the deceased person belongs or is coming from.

KM It’s like a cycle yeah?

YG Yeah, it’s a cycle we go back to and when someone passes away, a beloved one passes away, that person also keeps coming to that family and be with them, but we all know they go back to where they are coming from.

KM Can you do a couple of lines of that manikay, of that song?

YG When we go out to the ocean, we caught some fish, then we go back to the land, to the shore and we start to eat that fish and we put that fish back to the Country. That is the way to put that fish back to that, to the ground. We are putting all those bones, flesh back to that, to the ground.

KM Same like in the Bäpurru [funeral ceremony] way.

YG Same like Bäpurru.
Yinimala Gumana is a Yolŋu man of increasing authority, cousin of Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra and member of the Dhalwaŋu clan. Gumana has been anointed as a future Dalkarra/Djirrikay (leader of Dhuwa and Yirritja ceremonies). He is a practising artist and member of the managing committee at Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, where he was also elected Chairperson in 2011. Gumana is co-curator of the exhibition Madayin at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.

Kade McDonald is the Executive Director of Durrmu Arts Aboriginal Corporation and was the Coordinator of Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre for six years. McDonald is the Australian project manager and a co-curator of the exhibition Madayin at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA.
From far left to right:
Michael Needham
Interstice 2017
Nawurapu Wununmurra
Mokuy 2012
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes 2018

Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Cat. 10
Richard Lewer
Crucifixes 2018
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
As a bald man, I miss going to the barber 2019
Voices and footsteps echo and decay from room-to-room. Cool, dry, filtered air circulates, constantly moving around your body.
Cat. 13
Michael Needham
*Interstice* 2017

Cat. 12
Michael Needham
*Monument to Muther [sic]* 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Cat. 12
Michael Needham
Monument to Myther (sic) (detail) 2020
Installation view, La Trobe Art Institute, 2020
Photo: Ian Hill
Catalogue of works in the exhibition

Dimensions are given as height before width followed, where applicable, by depth. Where a style other than minimal capitalisation is used for artwork titles, capitalisation reflects the artist’s preference.

Catherine Bell
1. Final resting place 2018–20
100 vessels hand-carved from floral foam, 100 digital photographs, digital photo display installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Timothy Cook
2. Kulama 2014
natural earth pigments on linen
183 × 243 cm
Arthur and Suzie Roe Collection

3. Kulama 2013
natural earth pigments on linen
200 × 220 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti, and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne

Timothy Cook and Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
4. Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood
238 × 27 × 22 cm

5. Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood
204 × 28 × 19 cm

6. Tutini (Pukumani pole) 2019
natural earth pigments on ironwood
210 × 17 × 31 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti

French & Mottershead
7. Grey Granular Fist 2017
chair, sensor, audio player, directional speaker, sound
sound: 24 mins
installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artists

Mabel Juli
8. Garnkiny Ngarranggarni 2020
natural earth pigments and charcoal on linen
120 × 180 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Warmun Art Centre, WA

Richard Lewer
9. As a bald man. I miss going to the barber 2019
oil on copper
diptych: 120.5 × 142 cm

10. Crucifixes 2018
fired stoneware
installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist, Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney and Singapore, and Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide

Michael Needham
12. Monument to Muther [sic] 2020
steel, cast iron, epoxy resin, enamel, electric candle lights, sand, artificial flowers
330 × 100 × 120 cm (monument), installation dimensions variable

13. Interstice 2017
antique window frame, dental plaster, steel, acrylic
169 × 160 × 12 cm

cast iron
8 parts, each 50 × 15 × 15 cm (approx.), installation dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Sara Morawetz
11. March 17 2020
artist’s book (accordion fold)
artist’s proof from an edition of 32 plus 3 artist’s proofs
24.1 × 31.5 cm (fully extended), 24.1 × 24.1 × 0.6 cm (closed)
Courtesy of the artist
Nell

15. **Mother of the Dry Tree** 2017
acrylic paint and mixed media on linen, wood
296.5 × 223 cm

16. **With things being as they are ...** 2017
13 parts; installation dimensions variable

A cross 2017
eel skin, fabric paint on cotton, wood
37.3 × 19 × 0.8 cm

BYE-bye 2017
earthenware, enamel paint
22 × 14 × 14 cm

Fly 2017
plastic
2.5 × 2.5 cm

I AM Passing through 2017
earthenware, enamel paint
63 × 44 × 45 cm

I can see you, can you see me? 2017
wooden stool, hand-blown glass, gold leaf,
varnish, shellac, polyester, polyurethane
70 × 31 × 31 cm

Japanese bell date unknown
brocade cushion, brass, plastic, wood, leather
19 × 16.5 × 16.5 cm (bell and stand),
18.5 × 2 × 2 cm (beater)

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri

17. **Purukuparli** 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood,
cockatoo feathers
98 × 14.5 × 12.5 cm

18. **Wayai** 2020
natural earth pigments on ironwood,
cockatoo feathers
93 × 14.5 × 22 cm

Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra

19. **Garrapara** 2012
natural earth pigments on stringybark
292 × 17.5 × 16 cm
La Trobe University Art Collection
Purchased 2013, L TU2458

20. **Mokuy** 2012
natural earth pigments on kapok
261.5 × 37 × 45 cm,
(a) 261.5 × 18 × 35 cm,
(b) 201 × 6 × 9.5 cm,
(d) 198 × 7 × 17 cm,
(e) 149.5 × 11 × 18 cm
La Trobe University Art Collection
Purchased 2013, L TU2459

143
Short artists’ biographies

Catherine Bell
Born Sydney 1969
Lives and works Melbourne

Catherine Bell is a multidisciplinary artist and Associate Professor (Visual Arts), Australian Catholic University. Bell’s practice-led research focuses on the generative potential of grief, loss and memory in a creative context. In recent times, she has located her practice within an archive and healthcare setting. Bell has generated a growing body of work from her workshop series, Facing Death Creatively (ongoing since 2018).

Bell has participated in artist residencies in the oncology ward and Caritas Christi Hospice at St Vincent’s Hospital, Melbourne. During her residencies Bell further developed the Facing Death Creatively workshops with patients and staff, encouraging discussion around death and dying.

Bell holds regular solo exhibitions with Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. Recent group exhibitions include Craftivism, Shepparton Art Museum, Vic, and regional tour (2018–20); Pairs, Firstdraft, Sydney (2018); and Ceremonial, Craft Victoria, Melbourne (2016).

Catherine Bell is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

Further reading


Bell, Catherine. The remains of the day. Fitzroy, Vic: Sutton Gallery, 2014.

Bell, Catherine. We die as we live. East Melbourne, Vic: St Vincent’s Private Hospital, 2017.
suttongallery.com.au/artists/catherine-bell

Timothy Cook
Born Melville Island, NT, 1958
Lives and works Milikapiti, Melville Island, NT
Tiwi
Skin group: Marntupuni (House Fly)
Dance: Tartuwali (Shark)
Country: Goose Creek

Timothy Cook is a senior Tiwi artist who has been creating paintings, prints and carvings at Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association for over 20 years. Cook favours the ‘old designs’ learnt from his elders. He paints exclusively with natural earth pigments sourced from various locations near his home in Milikapiti, Melville Island.

In recent years, Cook has become one of the most iconic Tiwi artists to paint the Kulama (coming of age ceremony) design. The Kulama and the Pukumani (mourning) ceremonies are the two major Tiwi cultural ceremonies that involve painting jilamara (design) on the body, kawakawayi (song) and yoli (dance). The Pukumani ceremony also involves commissioning, carving and painting tutini.

Cook has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions since 1997 and his works are held in significant public and private collections. He was awarded the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2012 and has been shortlisted for many other awards, including the Wynne Prize (2020) and the Hadley Art Award (2019).

Timothy Cook is represented by Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association, Milikapiti, and Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney.

Further reading


jilamara.com/artist/timothy-cook
aboriginalpacificart.com.au
Mabel Juli
Born Five Mile, near Moola Boola Station, WA, c. 1932
Lives and works Warmun, WA
Gija
Skin group: Nyawuru
Ngarranggarni: Emu and Echidna

Mabel Juli is a Gija Elder and senior artist currently working at Warmun Art Centre in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. Juli is a strong Law and Culture woman and an important ceremonial singer and dancer.

Juli started painting in the 1980s with the encouragement of celebrated Warmun artists Queenie McKenzie, Madigan Thomas and Rover Thomas. She has created a body of work characterised by bold, minimalist compositions in natural earth pigments and charcoal, depicting subject matter informed by her detailed knowledge of the Ngarranggarni passed down from her family. Juli primarily paints Garnkiny doo Wardel (Moon and Star), which explore the subjects of forbidden love, kinship and the origins of mortality from a Gija perspective.

Juli has exhibited in numerous solo exhibitions and hundreds of group exhibitions. Her works are held in significant public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas. She is an eight-time finalist in the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

Mabel Juli is represented by Warmun Art Centre, WA.

Further reading

frenchmottershead.com
Richard Lewer
Born Hamilton, New Zealand, 1970
Lives and works Melbourne

Richard Lewer is best known for paintings, videos, animations and drawings that explore extreme events, crime scenes, illness and the difficult or repressed aspects of our history and society. Lewer’s works are accessible and their subjects familiar, but they have a critical edge that probes what is beautiful and sinister about our society while avoiding moralisation. Lewer is concerned less with concrete facts than with the way places can become repositories for the psychic residue of extreme events, painful activities or fears.

Lewer has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally. His work is included in many significant private, museum and university collections in Australia and New Zealand.

Recent solo exhibitions have been held in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Auckland, Jakarta, Perth and Canberra. Lewer has been awarded numerous prizes including the 5th Basil Sellers Art Prize (2016), the City of Albany Art Prize (2015), the Blake Prize (2014) and the Black Swan Portraiture Award (2013).

Richard Lewer is represented by Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney and Singapore; and Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide.

Further reading


richardlewer.com
sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/richard-lewer/bio
hugomichellgallery.com/portfolio/richard-lewer

Sara Morawetz
Born Newcastle, NSW, 1982
Lives and works Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

Sara Morawetz is a conceptual artist who uses a range of media to examine the systems and structures that measure experience. Morawetz investigates concepts such as time and distance to explore their physical and emotional potential.

Recent projects involve collaborations with scientists from institutions including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the USA National Institute of Standards and Technology. Her work has been exhibited in Australia and internationally, including at the Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris; Australian Consulate-General in New York; Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival Chicago; Open Source Gallery, New York; and Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.

Morawetz has received numerous awards and prizes including the Churchie National Emerging Art Prize (2016), the Moya Dyring Studio Scholarship (2018), the Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship (2018) and the Terrence and Lynette Fern Cité Internationale des Arts Residency Fellowship (2020).

Further reading


saramorawetz.com
dominikmerschgallery.com

149
Nell
Born Maitland, NSW, 1975
Lives and works Sydney

Nell’s practice traverses performance, installation, public art, video, painting and sculpture. Her art probes apparent binary oppositions: light and dark, life and death, happiness and sadness, popular culture and the sacred. Nell has developed a distinctive aesthetic and body of iconography over the past two decades. Key themes of her practice include religion, spirituality, philosophy, sex, rebirth, mortality and rock ‘n’ roll, her first and enduring passion.

While the extremes of human existence are immediately perceptible in her works, often communicated through a black and white palette, the experience of living in the ‘in-between’ is of central importance.

Over the past two decades, Nell’s works have been included in over 250 exhibitions in Australia and overseas.

Nell has participated in numerous residencies and delivered major public art commissions, including *Eveleigh Treehouse* (2019) and *Happy Rain* (2019), Sydney. She was a 2020 Carriageworks Studio Artist and her works are held in significant private and public collections throughout Australia and overseas.

Nell is represented by STATION, Sydney and Melbourne.

Further reading


michaelneedham.com.au

Michael Needham
Born Victor Harbour, SA, 1977
Lives and works Kyneton, Vic

Michael Needham’s practice fuses drawing, object-making and sculptural installation that responds to specific sites and cultural contexts. His work explores myth, belief and residual melancholia in the contemporary psyche, focussing on uncanny sensibilities around mimicry and memorialisation. Needham’s works are often remnants of a corporeality no longer present, mimicking historical forms in unfamiliar contexts as a form of reflective critique.

Needham’s new work, *Monument to Muther (sic)* (2020), developed for this exhibition, indicates a critical shift in his methodology. It offers humour as a counterpoint, capable of both softening and compounding his work’s weightier associations: death, melancholia, the legacies of colonialism and its imposing presence in the Australian landscape.

Needham has exhibited in numerous Australian group and solo exhibitions and has also exhibited in Italy and Japan. His work has recently been shown in Bendigo, Ballarat, Broken Hill, Lorne, Melbourne, Kyneton, Mildura and Hobart.

Further reading


michaelneedham.com.au
Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra
Born Miwatj, Northeast Arnhem Land, NT, 1952
Died Nhulunbuy, NT, 2018
Yolŋu
Clan: Dhalwaŋu, Narrkala group
Moiety: Yirritja
Homeland: Gurrumuru

Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra was the eldest son of the late Yangarriny Wunuŋmurra, the first Aboriginal artist to have his copyright recognised in an Australian court and the recipient of the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) first prize in 1997. From an early age Nawurapu assisted his father. As his own spiritual authority increased, he produced works in his own right.

Following his father’s passing, Wunuŋmurra stepped into a senior role with his brothers. His ceremonial responsibilities required him to move between the homeland centres of the Miwatj region, Northeast Arnhem Land and beyond into Central Arnhem Land. In his later years he lived at Yirrkala, Gurrumuru, Gän_gän, Gapuwiyak and Wändawuy.

Wunuŋmurra was involved in all major group projects stemming from Yirrkala in the 1990s and since 1995 he has exhibited widely in group and solo exhibitions throughout Australia. In 2015 he travelled to Makassar, where a batik from one of his paintings was presented to the Indonesian Textile Museum.

Wunuŋmurra’s works are held in private and public collections throughout Australia and overseas, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Further reading

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri
Born Darwin, NT, 1973
Lives and works Milikapiti, Melville Island, NT
Tiwi
Skin group: Miyatini (pandanus)
Dance: Jurrukukini (owl)
Country: Munupi

Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri has contributed to the development of Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association since the late 1980s. Puruntatameri learnt to carve from his father, Paddy Freddy Puruntatameri, a highly respected and renowned carver. His father taught him which timber to use, how to make spears and how to source ochre and make red pigment by heating yellow ochre.

Puruntatameri is well known for his skillful carvings of his totem Jurrukukuni (owl). His works are held in many major collections throughout Australia, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

Throughout his career, Puruntatameri has participated in major Australian group and solo exhibitions. He has recently been commissioned to make tutini (Pukumani poles) for Paralika tutini Jilamara (2019), a major group exhibition of Tiwi tutini at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and NIRIN, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2020).

Further reading
One foot on the ground, one foot in the water

Catherine Bell, Timothy Cook, French & Mottershead, Mabel Juli, Richard Lewer, Sara Morawetz, Michael Needham, Nell, Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri, Nawurapu Wunuŋmurra

Curated by Travis Curtin

Published by La Trobe Art Institute, La Trobe University, on the occasion of the exhibition One foot on the ground, one foot in the water, presented at La Trobe Art Institute from 10 November 2020 to 17 January 2021.

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ISBN: 978-0-6484275-1-3


Design by Tristan Main

Cover: Nell, Mother of the Dry Tree (detail), 2017, acrylic paint and mixed media on linen, wood, 296.5 × 223 cm. Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney. Photo: Jenni Carter

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This exhibition has received assistance from NETS Victoria’s Exhibition Development Fund 2020 supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria