PEGGY GRIFFITHS
& JAN GRIFFITHS
COUNTER FORCES:
FIRE + WATER
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Exhibition runs 21 July – 8 September 2018
The Cross Art Projects

Two women, two generations and two disciplines combine in this exhibition to capture history, land, spirit and contemporary Mirriwoong culture of the East Kimberley in painting and ceramics.

Mother and daughter, Peggy and Jan Griffiths from Kununurra in Western Australia, unite in a celebration and contemplation of the counter forces of fire and water, both crucial to the lives of these Indigenous women, still living on their Country in the remote East Kimberley.

Peggy Griffiths says, “I know my culture is alive ... you see it in the wind as it moves across the country...”
(Interview with Warringarri Aboriginal Arts, 2015)

Presented by:
Warringarri Aboriginal Arts

Cover: Installation view, Counter Forces: Fire + Water. (Centre) Jan Griffiths, Fire bowl (5653-18). Porcelain, underglaze decoration, glaze, 22 cm D x 6 cm H

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Peggy Griffiths' acclaimed paintings often depict the ethereal early morning light and the movement of wind and water — the breath of the land that she wakes up to each morning. She has exhibited for almost three decades and draws her subjects from the traditional Country of her mother and grandfather, Larrgarn, the concave curves of Keep River gorge in the wet season as the rains transform her Country, filling billabongs and burgeoning creeks and Jalin (Beasley Knob), a looming and stark presence commanding respect and veneration. Her carefully hand-mixed ochres (earth pigments) convey the translucent tones of light as it plays with her signature motif of jewel-like clusters of spinifex and grass.

Peggy now transfers her delicate imagery onto platters and bowls. In particular, the artist expresses the celebration of bush tucker through the abundant patterning of Jilynbeng or 'Bush Cucumber', often found along the river and creek beds. This important bush food, along with the water lily, can be cooked and consumed in many ways and is generously found after the wet.

Many have noted the transfer of a dancer's fluidity into the outlines of Peggy Griffiths paintings: moving to express energies seen and unseen. In this way Griffiths imbues her images with the spirit and movement of her Mirriwoong country — as artist and dancer she keeps culture alive for the next generation. Peggy Griffiths is a founding artist of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts and has worked as an artist since 1985 as well as raising five children. She is a backbone of the Contemporary Aboriginal-run visual arts and culture network and has been a chairperson and representative of the art centre for nearly two decades and served as a board member of ANKA. She and her husband the late Mr Griffiths are respected throughout the Victoria River and Kimberley regions of Western Australia.

Jan Griffiths has also learnt from her renowned parents, Peggy Griffiths and the late Mr Griffiths artist founder members of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra, and conveys her parents’ stories in a modern style: ochre paintings, porcelain bowls and platters, that examine the cycle of fire and rain that occurs in the Kimberley during the dry and wet seasons; fundamental processes to the health of the living land. Jan Griffiths who was born in Kununurra and studied in Broome, has worked as a journalist in Kununurra and has been painting for several years.

Jan explains: “In the early days Aboriginal people knew when to do a burn off, before the rain set in to allow the new shoots of bush life to come alive. Burning off is special and is a traditional way to keep our country alive, strong and full of beauty. We are one with the country and if we look after the country, the country will look after us. So by doing a burn off and setting the country alight we are helping to germinate the ground. When the rain comes and waters this country, it will bear fruit, bush vegetables, wild berries, nuts and many other bush foods. Today we do a bush burn off with the assistance and guidance from the Keep River National Park Rangers.”
The Kimberley schools of contemporary art are internationally renowned, particularly for ochre paintings, prints and now ceramics. Increasingly new media are added to the mix. Peggy and Jan’s ceramic works are the outcome of a series of experimental exchange residencies in 2017: in Adelaide with facilitator Gus Clutterbuck at the JamFactory Studio; at Midland Junction Art Centre Workshop with Bernard Kerr; and in Perth at the Mundaring Art Centre. These outcome of these residencies were presented as the spectacular joint exhibition Yirrb/Together at JamFactory Adelaide for Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts 2017.

Warringarri was established in the early 1980s by senior artists of the region and, like most community run art centres, is actively engaged in training the next generation of artists through workshops, residencies and community art projects. The broad stylistic tradition known as East Kimberley divides spaces by colour and form and represents both the ground and the elusive skies, cloud forms and sometimes starry skies that often celebrate important dreaming sites and stories, and mark the boundaries between Mirriwoong and Gadjerrabeng people.

**Dedication**

This project is dedicated to the memory of Mr Griffiths: husband, father and eminent lawman, artist, choreographer and a founder of Warringarri Arts. Mr Griffiths’ paintings and sculptural installations and performance express the natural and spirit world. His performance piece Bali Bali Balga (31 March 2017) was a highlight of The National (2017) at Carriageworks in Sydney.

Warringarri aboriginal arts

Jan Griffiths, Lightning (1840-18), Porcelain, underglaze and sprigged decorations, glaze, 37 cm D x 1 cm H
Jan Griffiths, Rebirth (5838-18). Porcelain and underglaze decoration, glaze, 35 cm D x 1 cm H

Installation view. Jan Griffiths ceramics
Installation view: (Left) Jan Griffiths, Untitled (5791-18), 60 x 60 cm, natural pigment on canvas. (Left) Peggy Griffiths, Daybreak (5510-17), 130 x 125 cm, natural pigment on canvas. (Top right) Peggy Griffiths, Jalin-Beasley Knob (5430-17), 60 x 60cm, natural ochre and pigment on canvas. (Bottom right) Peggy Griffiths, Jalin - large (5557-17), White raku, underglaze and carved decoration, 60cm L x 11cm W x 22cm H.
Peggy Griffiths, *Jalín* (S5557-17). White raku, underglaze and carved decoration, 60 cm L x 11 cm W x 22 cm H

Peggy Griffiths, *Flying Fox Springs* (S701-18). 60 x 60 cm, natural ochre and pigments on canvas.
Peggy Griffiths, Largen (5576-17), 130 x 135cm, natural pigment on canvas

Closeup: Peggy Griffiths, Largen (5576-17), 130 x 135cm, natural pigment on canvas
Installation view: Peggy and Jan Griffiths ceramics

Closeup: Peggy Griffiths, Jilybeng and Keep River platter (large) (5844-180). Porcelain, underglaze decoration, glaze, 31 cm D x 1 cm H
Front: Peggy Griffiths, Waterhole Plate (5771-18). Porcelain, sgraffito and underglaze decoration, glaze, 42 x 3 cm

Closeup: Peggy Griffiths, Jilynbeng platter (5841-18). White raku, sgraffito and underglaze decoration, glaze. 37cm D x 1 cm H

Centre: Peggy Griffiths, Jilynbeng bowl (5834-18). Porcelain, 12 cm D x 10 cm H

Front: Peggy Griffiths, Waterhole Plate (5771-18). Porcelain, sgraffito and underglaze decoration, glaze, 42 x 3 cm
Peggy Griffiths, Water Lily bowl (5564-17). Dark stoneware, carved and underglaze decoration, glaze, 38 cm D x 17 cm H

Peggy Griffiths, Larrgin Lamboong (5769-18). Stoneware, sgraffito and underglaze decoration, glaze, 47 cm L x 32 cm W x 8.5 cm H
Installation view: (Below) Jan Griffiths, Water Lily Avel (5564-17). Dark stoneware, carved and underglaze decoration, glaze, 38 cm D x 17 cm H. (Above) Peggy Griffiths, Larrgen Lamboong (5769-18). Stoneware, sgraffito and underglaze decoration, glaze, 47 cm L x 22 cm W x 8.5 cm H
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