By the Stars, Wind & Ocean Currents

Part I: Yolngu / Makassan Crossings
Dhuwarrwarr Marika, Bulthirrirri Wununmurra & Nawurapu Wununmurra

30 NOVEMBER TO 1 FEBRUARY 2020
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Proudly presented by The Cross Art Projects and Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre
“Yolngu invited the Makassan people to their camp and explained to them who they were. Makassans explained who they were and why they came. In their heart they were Yolngu people. The Makassan taught the Yolngu their song and traditions and the Yolngu taught the Makassan their culture and law and tradition.”

-Dhuwarraw Marika
(Artist statement, Telstra National Indigenous and Islanders Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory, 2019)
About the exhibition
Jo Holder

By the Stars, Wind & Ocean Currents garners the notion of reciprocity inherent in the term ‘exchange’ or trade between the monsoon coast of northern Australia and the Indonesian archipelago. The ‘open archipelago’ has passed from living memory but memories of extended families, grave sites, rock art and ceremonies survive. Dhuwarrrwarr Marika’s father Mawalan Marika, for example, painted depictions of the Makassan people in the 1940s and spoke some Makassan language (Malay). The exhibition By the Stars, Wind & Ocean Currents presents powerful bark paintings, larrakitj, prints and works on paper by the following generations: Dhuwarrwarri Marika, Nawurapu Wunungmurra and Nawurapu’s granddaughter Balthirrirri Wunungmurra (in her debut exhibition), who continue to draw upon this fascinating counter-history.

This is the first in a series of exhibitions by contemporary artist networks in the region to be held during 2020 that present a complex narrative involving many world civilisations to defy the singular ‘discovered by Captain Cook’ story.

To some, including academic Regina Gantner, “The telling of the Makassan stories has become an act of resistance. It refuses to allow a government decision to sever the link to Makassar, Timor and Sama Bajo places.” Other scholars working in anthropology and archaeology and curators of a few museum and permanent exhibits keep the flame burning. The standout museum exhibit is acknowledged as historian Peter Spillett’s epic counterpoint to the 1988 Bicentennial of British annexation: a reconstructed prahu called Hati Marege / Heart of Arnhem Land made for a voyage from Makassar to make landfall at Galiwin’ku and Yirrkala (now in the Maritime Museum: Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory). Spillett also worked with Yolngu to re-connect family lines across the archipelago.

In 1947, senior ceremonial leaders at Yirrkala produced hundreds of vibrant crayon drawings compiled by anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt (now at the Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of Western Australia). Dhuwarrwarri Marika draws inspiration from her father Mawalan Marika’s work entitled Makassan Swords and Long Knives (1947) which is featured in the exhibition catalogue Yirrkala Drawings (AGNSW, 2013). The swords can be seen as symbols of the relationship that Yolngu shared with the seafaring Makassans. In the 1960’s, Mawalan Marika was also a key informant for Campbell Macknight whose doctoral research on the trepangers is published as The Voyage to Marege: Macassan trepangers in northern Australia (1976). In this classic work Macknight presents “Australia’s first modern industry”.

Yolngu oral, dance and visual traditions are emphatically alive today: in 2015 Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre initiated an ongoing Makassan/Yolngu history exchange project. Artist and senior law man Nawurapu Wunungmurra traveled to Makassar in 2015 and his batik – a collaboration with batik artisans from Pekalongan in Central Java – was presented to the Textile Museum in Jakarta in 2017. Nawurapu Wunungmurra’s bark paintings and larrakitj show the distinctive glyph-like monsoon clouds, winds and ocean currents of the complex monsoon system that powered the trade. These dynamic sea passages were sailed by expert captains on prahu with multi-cultural crews – Makassarese, Butonese, Bugis, Bajau, Madurese and ‘Koepangers’ from Dutch Timor. They crossed the deep channels of the archipelago via Timor to the northern Australian coastline, guided by the stars or a small compass.

Strategically located between western and eastern Indonesia, Makassar was the centre of Gowa Sultanate which adopted Islam (in 1605) with its sword belts and talismanic discs. The sultanate was then conquered by the Portuguese. There is much that is alive and open to interpretation about the trade. Dates differ with some researchers citing trade beginnings using the records of conquest by the Dutch East India Company (c. 1669), while others cite navigators Matthew Flinders or Nicholas Baudin (1803). Dhuwarrwarri Marika’s Milnurr (2019) depicts a “Malay Road” as described by Flinders.
At the onset of the northwest winds that usually arrive in December, a fleet of 50 or more prahu annually left Makassar in South Sulawesi. After ten or so days they would make landfall on Marege – the coast from Melville Island to Arnhem Land – and down into Yanyuwa traditional country in the Gulf of Carpentaria – a distance of over 1000kms, or alternatively they turned towards Kayu Jawa (the Kimberley). All are lands and waters occupied by Aboriginal nations, and the two groups entered into a series of reciprocal negotiations for the right to spend 4-5 months collecting and processing trepang. Local communities were thus linked to an international trading network. At the conclusion of their stay, Trepan fishers returned home again via Timor with the southeast trade winds.

Federation cut twentieth century Australia off from the world with taxes, charges and the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), which formed the basis of the White Australia Policy and an aggressive nation state. Makassan trepangers were outlawed at the urging of missionary groups and through greed to establish a second Singapore. The last voyage took place during the 1906–07 wet season when people who had sailed the waters for generations were summarily evicted.

Academic Marcia Langton notes, “The trade was absorbed as innovations in philosophy and practice in the performing and visual arts.” Material items traded included dugout canoes, woven fibre sails, steel knives and other metals, hooks, fishing lines, beads and metals as well as tobacco, cards, money and alcohol. Returning prahu added pearl, tortoise shell and artefacts to their valuable cargo of smoked trepang. Woven cloth, another traded item, remains important in Yolngu and Tiwi welcoming and mortuary ceremonies. Makassan and Malay influences live on in language, ceremonies, songs, dances, art works and museum objects. Makassan pidgin became a lingua franca along the north coast, not just between Makassan and Aboriginal people, but also between different Aboriginal groups.

Along the shore the Makassans left tamarind trees and lines of stone to support cooking pots to boil, smoke and cure the flesh of the trepang which was used as a delicacy in a soup and considered by the Chinese an aphrodisiac. Trepang fishing in some areas also led to the development of property rights which determined the right to capture trepang. Ancestral coastal estates extend well out into the sea and include the near-shore making trade history relevant to mounting legal arguments about native title. In 2008 the High Court made the Blue Mud Bay decision granting traditional Yolngu owners exclusive native title rights to the intertidal zone. First Nations people once again control access to the waters of a major fishery. Indigenous art and exhibitions such as Saltwater (1999) and Dalkiri: Standing on their names (2010) have helped non-Indigenous people to understand how the law codifies and maps obligations to the land, sea and sky.

It is now time to survey the 250th anniversary of the landing of James Cook and crew at Botany Bay. The significance of the Hati Marege / Heart of Arnhem Land and the prahu’s subversive overturning of the foundational narrative of Captain Cook and the Endeavour and the unilateral British land claim has not been lost: from Johnny Bulunbulun and Maningrida dancers performing in Makassar (1993) to the ongoing Makassar-Yirrkala Artist Exchange begun by Nawurapu Wunungmurra in 2015, northern Australia looks to a poly-cultural future.

By the Stars, Wind & Ocean Currents provokes us to look to all the seafaring comings and goings from the north through the straits between the islands of the archipelago, by representatives of all world civilisations.

In a political region of closed borders with its parlous state of minorities, can art continue to open up new routes for dialogue?

By the Stars, Wind & Ocean Currents grafts an ancient trade route to offer another dimension of mercantile success and cultural complexity. The past retains an inevitable trajectory towards a closer relationship despite the militarisation of borders.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artwork Details</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Munurru, 2017, 217 x 59 cm (33228)</td>
<td>$ 5620</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Gapu ga Gekit, 2016, larrakitj, 233 cm (1854-16)</td>
<td>$ 4750</td>
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<td>3. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Munurru, 2017, 51 x 151 cm (3327V)</td>
<td>$ 3890</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Munurru, 2017, 123 x 45 cm (3322F)</td>
<td>$ 3890</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Garapa, 2017, larrakitj, 213 cm (4797K)</td>
<td>$ 3630</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Dhuwarrwarr Marika, Milnurr, 2019, 77 x 62 cm (3581A)</td>
<td>$ 2160</td>
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<td>7. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2019, 97 x 48 cm (4681-19)</td>
<td>$ 2420</td>
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<td>8. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2019, 110 x 54 cm (1885-19)</td>
<td>$ 2420</td>
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<td>9. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Garapa, 2017, larrakitj, 185 cm (44692)</td>
<td>$ 4035</td>
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<td>10. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2019, 110 x 47 cm (3808-19)</td>
<td>$ 2420</td>
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<td>11. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2019, 127 x 37 cm (4120-19)</td>
<td>$ 2160</td>
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<td>12. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 54 x 131 cm (2316-19)</td>
<td>$ 3025</td>
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<td>13. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2017, 122 x 43 cm (1438-17)</td>
<td>$ 3020</td>
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<td>14. Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Njurpiya Octopus at Gurrumuru, 2017, 140 x 58 cm (3364H)</td>
<td>$ 3020</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra, Wunupini, 2019, 56 x 112 cm (6070-19)</td>
<td>$ 3020</td>
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Nawurapu/Watungmara, Composing (larrakitj), 2017 (detail)
Dhuwarrwarr Marika
Swords/Serpents
2019
162 × 75 cm (1823-19)

Dhuwarrwarr Marika
Gap’kurr, Njinda, Nukalya
2019
150 × 45 cm (1438-19)
Dhuwarrwarr Marika
Makassan Swords & Long Knives
2019
91 x 35 cm (4608-19)

Dhuwarrwarr Marika
Makassan Swords & Long Knives
2019
132 x 72 cm (920-19)
Dhuwarrwarr Marika, Makassan Swords & Long Knives, 2019 (detail)
Dhuwarre Marrka
Yalanbarra
2019
138 x 72 cm (45.2 x 28.3)
Dhuwarrwarr Marika

The Marika family are highly regarded as gifted artists and able educationalists, cultural ambassadors, environmentalists, and activists. Dhuwarrwarr is sister of Wandjuk, Baynul and Banduk Marika. Their father Mawalan was the Rirratjinu ceremonial leader who in 1935 welcomed anthropologist Donald Thompson followed by missionaries to set up on his land, creating the beginnings of modern day Yirrkala.

Dhuwarrwarr Marika (born c.1946) is the first Yolnu woman authorised to paint sacred designs on her own. Dhuwarrwarr's first career was in nursing (at Yirrkala, Darwin and then Sydney). On returning home she focused on her artistic gifts learning basketry from her mother and aunt and painting from her father Mawalan who was steeped in the mythology of his people.

Mawalan worked with Europeans but never lost his fondness and respect for Makassans and stressed the importance of the relationship between Yolnu and these allies. Dhuwarrwarr Marika recounts, “…The Makassan taught the Yolngu their song and traditions and the Yolngu taught the Makassan their culture and law and tradition.

Mawalan 1 and his brothers were all accomplished artists and passionate advocates of Indigenous rights. It was their involvement in the historic Gove Land Rights Case that led to the passing of the first land rights legislation in Australia. Dhuwarrwarr Marika continues this work in education and on committees and as an executive member and women’s council representative for the Northern Land Council.

She says: “I’m teaching my brother’s children for all the painting as well as my children. I used to ask them to come and watch me. I use my own colours from the shore - the yellow and the red, just a rock, and the black, bayana (not) charcoal. Like my brother (Wandjuk), I sometimes mix yellow and black to make green. I used to go and get it in a bucket and mash it up and leave it in the sun to dry.”

Dhuwarrwarr Marika has participated in group shows since the late 1980s and is represented in most Australian state galleries. In 2010 the National Museum of Australia presented Yalangbara: Art of the Djang’kawu an exhibition of artworks by the Marika family exploring the journey of the Djang’kawu ancestors.

Biography courtesy Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre
Nawurapu Wunungmurra

Nawurapu Wunungmurra (b. 1952-2018) was the eldest son of the late Yangarriny Wunungmurra, the 1997 Telstra National Aboriginal and Islander Art Award overall First Prize winner. Yangarriny was one of the artists of the legendary Yirrkala Church Panels. He had been trained in the school of this old man (who was the first Aboriginal artist to have his copyright recognised in an Australian court) from an early age, at first assisting his father and then in his own right. On his father’s passing Nawurapu stepped into his role as a senior Yirritja moiety elder with his brothers. His ceremonial responsibilities required him to move between the homeland centres of the Miwatj region, North East Arnhemland and even beyond into Central Arnhemland. He lived at Yirrkala, Gurrumurru, Gangan, Gapuwiyak and Wandawuy in his later years.

Nawurapu participated in all the major Yirrkala exhibitions in the 1990s and held his first solo show at Sydney’s Grant Pirrie Gallery in 2004. In 2006 the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory purchased Nawurapu’s entry to Telstra National Aboriginal and Islander Art Award. He became renowned in the contemporary artworld for his sculptural installations of mokuy (Yolngu spirit figures), the first set being purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery in 2008. His bronze mokuy figures are also installed at the heart of Darwin’s Waterfront by the Northern Territory Government.


Biography courtesy Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre

Left: Nawurapu Wunungmurra, Wanupini, 2017 (detail)
Bulthirrirri Wunungmurra

Bulthirrirri is an emerging artist and the granddaughter of great painter and sculptor Nawurapu Wunungmurra). Under the guidance of her grandfather (recently deceased) Bulthirrirri is following and maintain her family’s rich heritage through her own hand.

Biography courtesy Buku Larrnggay Mulka Centre
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