



Water at Yalata, 2009, 93 x 44cm ochres on bark #3589Y

MULKUN WIRRPANDA & BARRUPU YUNUPINGU  
**HOMELANDS**  
3 DECEMBER 2009 - 30 JANUARY 2010



THE CROSS ART PROJECTS



Barrupu resides at Yirrkala and worked as a nurse at the Yirrkala Clinic and Hospital from the 1960s until its closure in 1975. Most days Barrupu and her closest sister Nyapanyapa use a deck at the Art Centre, on the site of the former clinic, as a studio. Nyapanyapa won the 3-D Award (with a painting and video) at the prestigious Telstra Annual at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in 2007. Barrupu's work was honoured with a solo exhibition at the Art Centre for 2009 Garna Festival with the National Gallery and Art Gallery of NSW acquiring works. Barrupu's other siblings include Australians of the Year Galarrwuy and Mandawuy Yunupingu and Telstra Award winner Gulumbu Yunupingu.

Barrupu's chains of rough diamonds resemble paintings by her father Munggurrwuy and his brothers of the 1940s. The totemic significance of fire to the Yunupingu family of the Gumaj clan is paramount: the clan language, Dhuwalandja, is itself the tongue of flame. This language cuts through all artifice. It incinerates dishonesty leaving only the bones of the truth.

Barrupu Yunupingu (b. 1948) paints Ancestral Fire: the *miny'tji* of the Gumaj clan embodying *gurrtha* or fire and place. The diamond design represents fire: the red, flames; the white, smoke or ash; the black charcoal; the yellow, dust. The structure connects the clans of this sequence of ancestral events.

## Barrupu Yunupingu

shores of Blue Mud Bay and ignited the legendary *Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country* touring exhibition (collection National Maritime Museum.)

In August 2009 the High Court of Australia ruled the Territory Government could not grant commercial fishing licenses to work in areas within the intertidal boundaries of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, hailed as the most stunning decision since Mabo in 1992. Only understanding of the patterns and designs underlying Sea Right or Native Title can deliver equality, not sustained race-based measures like the top down intervention.

## Acknowledgements

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Thanks to Wenona Matthews project intern.

**Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre & Museum**  
[www.yirrkala.com](http://www.yirrkala.com)

This is one of Australia's premier art centres known for its integrity and dynamism. It is located in the Aboriginal community of Yirrkala in northeastern Arnhem Land and services twenty-five homeland centres. The renowned artist Djambawa Marawili (Sydney Biennale 2006 and Moscow Biennial 2009) chairs the Centre.

## Northern Territory Intervention

The ‘national emergency’ and moral panic has dragged on with the media and public losing interest. The Government is quietly altering the discourse and the Intervention is now called Closing the Gap Northern Territory. The findings in the latest Government progress report on the Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention are damning of its effectiveness. Professor Jon Altman from the Australian National University calls the findings “extremely disappointing”. The Report shows that violence is up, malnutrition is up and truancy is up.

Altman asks can statistical goals, even if endorsed by COAG, ensure outcomes if not negotiated with the purported subjects? The Productivity Commission raised this question as COAG was signing off on the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap). The Agreement locks in an approach agreed by the Commonwealth and States and Territories for the next decade, unfortunately decided during an interregnum when there is no national Indigenous representative organisation with whom to negotiate.

The Rudd Government should seriously consider the Productivity Commission's advice on what works: partnerships, bottom up rather than top down approaches, good governance – including by governments – and sustained support on an equitable needs basis.

**Northern Territory Intervention**  
ANTaR [www.antar.org.au](http://www.antar.org.au)

Jon Altman, *Crikey*, 9 November 2009. The Report was posted by Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on 22 October 2009. See [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)

Mulkun's paintings therefore have dual purposes: as spiritual objects and title deeds. Mulkun was one of the artists representing 15 clans who resolved to educate strangers about Yolnu law and depict Yolgnu ritual life: the art, ritual and sacred objects associated with each clan. This was a response to an illegal fishing camp at the ancient home of *Baru* on the

Mulkun Wirrpanda's exhibition *Dhakiyarr vs The King* at The Cross Art Projects in 2007 (her first solo show) was set against the background of the Federal Government's intervention into Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Her father is the great Yolgnu leader Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda. The show and accompanying talks highlighted the ongoing struggle for equal rights. In 1933 Dhakiyarr successfully appealed to the High Court against a murder conviction, affirming the right of Aboriginal people to a fair trial. (Dhakiyarr vanished in questionable circumstances on the day of his release in Darwin.)

In the *Water* group, fine lines render the balance of fresh and saltwater as the vast flood plains are cleansed, renewed and touched by the first rays of the morning sun. These flowing waters carry the Ancestors, connecting the land to sea. *Honey* is group of stark geometric paintings formed by a diamond shaped *miny'tji*, rendering her mother's country and recalling a now defunct clan (massacred by Europeans). In the wild honey cycle red diamonds contain cells filled with honey but also represent fire and the creative actions of Ancestral beings.

Mulkun Wirrpanda (b. 1945) resides at her clan estate near Blue Mud Bay in northeastern Arnhem Land and has profound knowledge for the Dhud'i-Djapu clan of the Yolgnu people of the sea. She is a leader and innovator, one of the early painters of works without figurative imagery within the *miny'tji*, the sacred clan designs until recently restricted to ceremonial use.

Her considered painterly touch depicts 5 sites on Dhurupup! at the heart of an environmental and symbolic system representing the generative world. Every mark is purposeful. Complementary paintings set out the correct lineage of her clan moieties: Dhuwa and Yirritja, water and honey.

## Mulkun Wirrpanda



MULKUN WIRRPANDA  
& BARRUPU YUNUPINGU  
**HOMELANDS**  
3 DECEMBER 2009 - 30 JANUARY 2010



*Gurtha*, 2009, 80 x 34cm ochres on bark #3382N

### HOMELANDS

MULKUN WIRRPANDA: *Water & Honey*  
BARRUPU YUNUPINGU: *Fire*

CURATED BY ANDREW BLAKE  
with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre

EXHIBITION: 3 DECEMBER - 30 JANUARY 2010  
*January viewing by appointment*



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