



# SEVEN SISTERS

Barrupu Yunupingu  
Dhopiya Yunupingu  
Dorothy Djakanngu Yunupingu  
Gulumbu Yunupingu (dec)  
Djerrkngu Yunupingu  
Nyapanyapa Yunupingu  
Ranydjupi Yunupingu

Djaka! Mokuywu buku djinawangur!  
Yaka Yolngu nhangu!

Eight etchings including one collaborative work  
presented by



Nomad Art Gallery



Buku-Larrnggay  
Mulka Print Space



Basil Hall Editions



## THE PROJECT

Seven Sisters celebrates the ancestry of the seven Yunupingu sisters. The sisters come from Nhulunbuy in North-east Arnhem Land. Their clan is Gumatj. Their father is Munggurrawuy Yunupingu (deceased), former tribal leader of the Gumatj people of Yirrkala. He was a politician, a singer, dancer and an artist. The Yunupingu family has also distinguished themselves as Yolngu leaders in politics and the arts. Other siblings include Australians of the Year Galarrwuy and Mandawuy Yunupingu.

The aim of the Seven Sisters project was to produce seven individual artworks and one collaborative piece. Basil Hall Editions and the printmakers at Yirrkala - Annie Studd, Ruby Alderton, Dhapanbal Yunupingu and Barrata Marika co-ordinated the etching process and aided the sisters in developing their etching plates. The works have been editioned at Basil Hall Editions in Darwin

The project ran for one week in October 2011 when the seven sisters came to the courtyard at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka and worked everyday. The printmakers etched the plates in acid and produced working prints for the artists to approve.

On the morning of the first day the sisters came together and talked the story of the Seven Sisters, the constellation in the sky. This was filmed by The Mulka Project. The story has importance to the Yunupingu sisters as to all Yolngu.

Using this as inspiration the artists were each give a single square of acetate and paint and sent to different corners of the art centre. There they each individually - and without any influence from their sisters - painted a single star. The variation in the stars is at once both remarkable and lovely. The seven stars individually fashioned were combined for the collaborative plate.



*Gulumbu, Barrupu, Dhopiya, Djakanngu and Nyapanyapa in the courtyard*



*The seven stars drying in the sun*

## THE STORY

The Djulpan story is about seven sisters who went out in their canoe called Djulpan. During September onwards, they go hunting and always come back with different types of food; turtles, fish, freshwater snakes, yams and berries. They can be seen in the sky of a night, seven stars that come out together. Known in English as the Pleiades

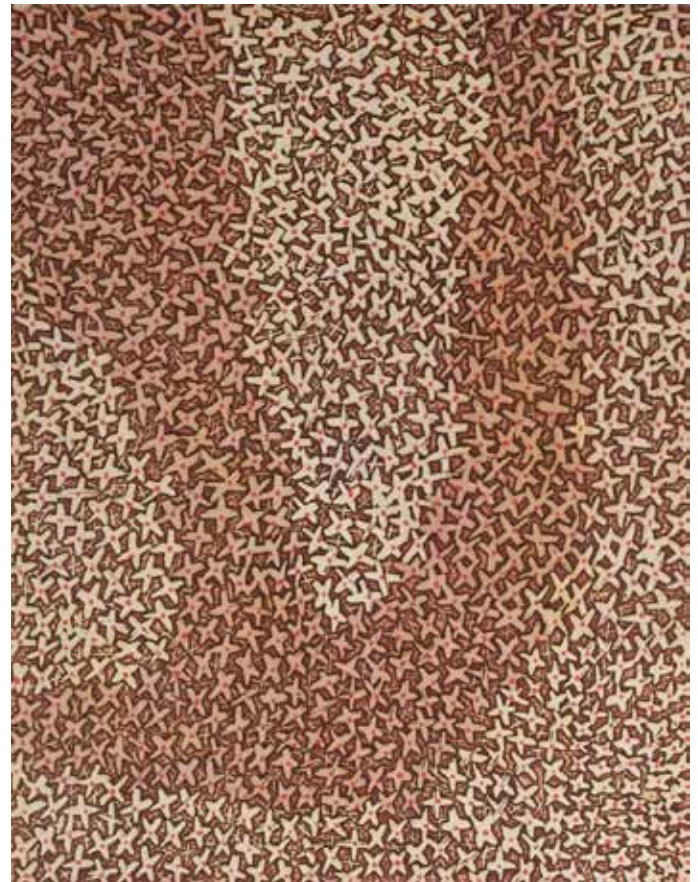
The stars come in season when the food and berries come out, the stars will travel through the sky during that month until the season is over and they don't come out until the next season. Yunupingu's father told her about these seven sisters in a canoe, and the three brothers who came behind them, following them (Orion's belt).

They travel west. There are special stars in the sky which Yolngu call wishing stars. They give Yolngu bush tucker; they multiply the foods in the sea – that's why Yolngu are happy to see them. That's what Yunupingu's father told her.

The Djulpan make it to their home over the northern horizon and then cook their food. The smoke from their fires is sometimes visible. This appears to be a reference to actual visibility of such extreme events in Irian Jaya as volcanoes, dust storms and severe bushfires. Smoke or dust from such rare events is also mirrored in certain cloud formations that appear after the Sisters have left the sky. It is only then that the Yolngu of this dimension can set their customary annual fires. If fires are lit before this the Djulpan will become sad and jealous and cry. Their tears in the form of un-seasonal rain will extinguish the presumptuous fires.

When she looked at the stars, Gulumbu Yunupingu (dec) thought about the universe, all around, and about every tribe, every colour. In every corner of the world people can look up and see the stars. This was Gulumbu's vision – in her art, she focused on the link between all people everywhere. The link between people on earth and stars

in the sky – it's real. Gulumbu linked this to the idea of Garma, where people from everywhere and of all different groups come and relax, look up and see the stars. The major proponent of this story in art history is Munggurawuy Yunupingu who painted it on bark. He was a legendary artist and political leader and father to these seven sisters as well as two Australians of the Year- Galarrwuy and Mandawuy.



*Ganyu etching by Gulumbu Yunupingu (dec), part of the Custodians folio of etchings, © 2008.*



## THE SISTERS



*Gulumbu*



*Nyapanyapa*



*Barrupu*



*Ranydjupi*



*Dhopiya*



*Djakanngu*



*Djerrkngu*

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## THE PROCESS

To create an etching plate several processes can be applied. Etching is a resist procedure, which means that any surface covered by an acid-resistance medium will remain with its original surface and anything without an resistant medium will be etched away by the acid. The smooth surface is 'bitten' by the acid and the incised area holds the ink.

Creating prints with this technique allows the artist to produce depth within the surface area. Coloured ink is applied once the plate is fully etched. It is then put through a printing press at high pressure to transfer the image onto paper. At the printing stage colour can be manipulated to enhance the artwork. For the Seven Sisters project the different techniques used included the following:

- Photographic exposure - where an image is painted on acetate and then exposed onto a photo sensitive coating before being etched in acid. More applications can be applied after this initial step.
- Bitumen Paint - painting directly onto the zinc plate the bitumen paint resists the acid and can be applied in several layers over the top between dipping in acid to create depth.
- Sugar Lift - painting directly onto the plate using a sugar syrup. The plate is then covered with a thin layer of bitumen and the sugar lift is dissolved in hot water. The surface where the sugar syrup was applied creates a line to be etched in the acid. This is used when the brush-work needs to be a positive mark.
- Spray Paint - applied in a thin layer the diffused paint creates a surface that catches the ink and gives the art work tonal areas this can also be achieved with aquatint process.





# PHOTOS



# PRINTING

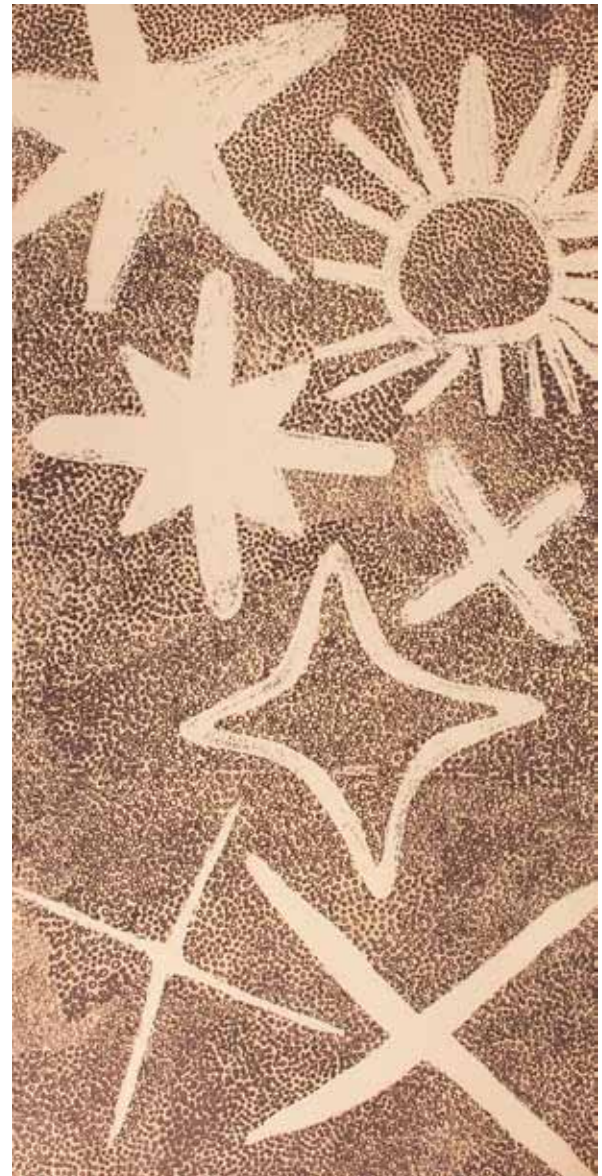




## THE SEVEN STARS

This work was made by each of the seven sisters, all creating their own star separately at the very start of the project. After gathering and talking together about the story of the seven stars, they sat apart and painted their own personal star onto acetate. These individual stars were arranged on the etching plate. Nyapanyapa Yunupingu supplied the background imagery again using acetate but this time with a small paint pen.

The collaboration of these stars is now a constellation. Each star is as unique as the different personalities of the seven sisters which go to make up this formidable unit.





## DHOPIYA YUNUPINGU

There were many processes applied to this artwork. Dhopiya started by painting the outline of all the harvest and the seven sisters in their canoe using bitumen paint. This was etched and then all the paint removed. She then used a sugar lift to paint the lines and dots in the background. Once this was etched she used acetate and drew the white outlines and details in each of the illustrated animals and harvest. Her final step was to paint dots onto another acetate, which sit along the lines of the background.

Dhopyia is married to Djalurruwiwi, a senior lawman for the Galpu clan and world renowned yidaki specialist. She often assists him with finding and making yidaki and paints most of them. She is very experienced with yidaki identification and making and is a very skilled yidaki maker in her own right.

After decades living at Gunyungara, Djalurru and Dhopyia relocated to his own Galpu clan land at Galaru in 2006. They now live at Butjumurru. Dhopyia has travelled with Djalurru to Germany, Asia, the United States and Dubai.



## RANYDJUPI YUNUPINGU

To create Ranydjupi's print she first painted onto acetate which was exposed onto the plate. The exposure worked well enough to create the initial image onto the plate. Then Ranydjupi used bitumen paint and spray paint to slowly cover the details such as the raindrops, the fire, the clouds and the canoe. In between each layer the plate was etched. This technique was applied to add the textural tonal variation as she added detail to the plate.

As the seven sisters paddle in their canoe they see the fire that has been started and the rains coming to put out the fire. It is their tears.

Ranydjupi Yunupingu is a Gumatj woman who lives at Wallaby Beach. She has produced prints at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Printspace. She works at the Mulka Project as a Cultural Director.





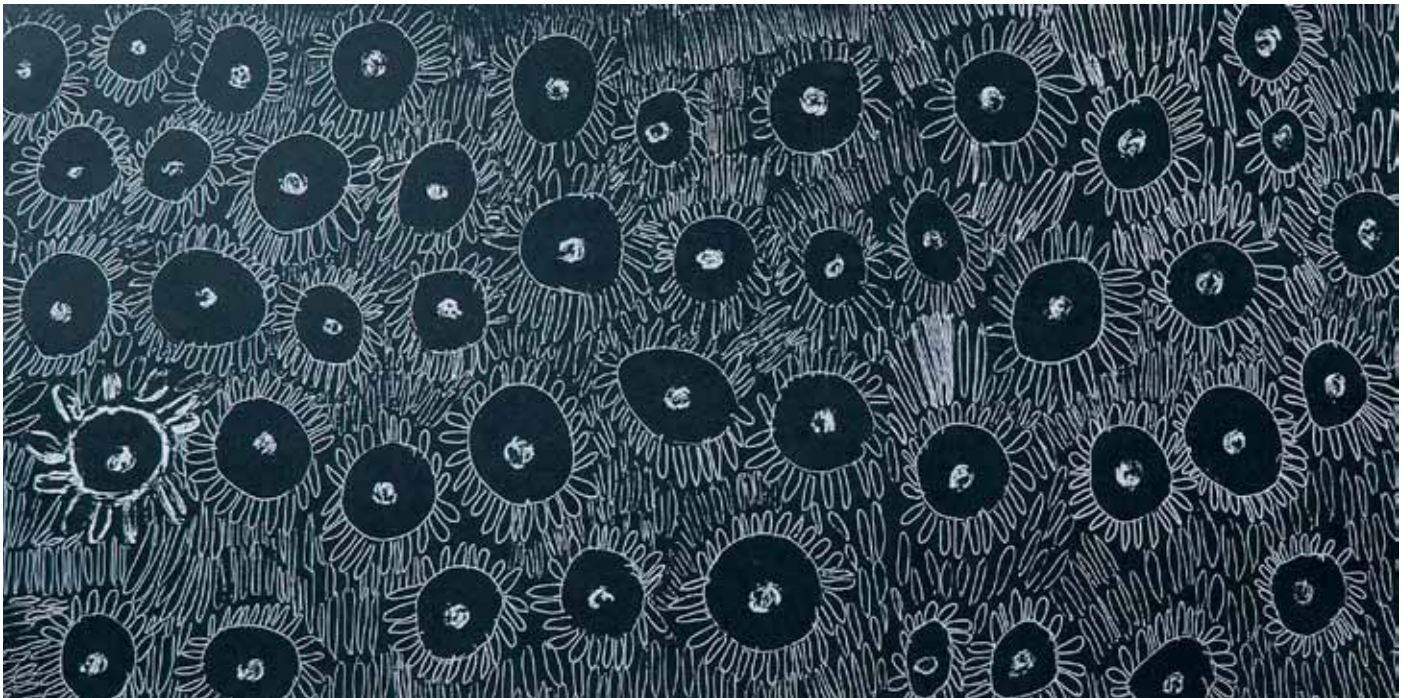
## NYAPANYAPA YUNUPINGU

Nyapanyapa has recently been producing works on acetate using a paint pen. For the seven sisters project she drew again onto acetate using a white paint pen. This drawing was then exposed using a photographic process onto a plate and printed.

Nyapanyapa's work has been more valued for the spontaneity and texture of her hand. She expresses her capacity to live in the moment in the freeness of her mark making. There is no calculation or even regard for the audience. The final appearance is almost random. The works are an expression of the movements of her hand, as they happen on that particular day.

Nyapanyapa's prints, especially her whacky and boldly coloured screen prints have been a hit for many years. Her editions have been in many exhibitions around the world. She started to paint on bark in 2007. Shortly after this she was exhibited in the Telstra Award and accepted to hold her first solo exhibitions at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery and Nomad Art Gallery in 2008.

In 2012 Nyapanyapa was selected to exhibit her 'Light Paintings' at the 18th Biennale of Sydney and was featured in the Second National Indigenous Art Triennial at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.



## BARRUPU YUNUPING

Barrupu's print is made by two separate plates that are printed one over the other. The first was painted with bitumen paint and etched as was the second. The design behind the harvest shapes is Gurtha - Barrupu signature design, the Fire of the Gumatj clan.

The Gurtha (fire) is called Liltji or Lirrwi. After the fire has burned down just the black ash is left. The name of the ashes left behind after the cooking fire dies is Gikawarra.

Barrupu Yunupingu always paints the designs of her Father - Munggurrawuy Yunupingu - exactly how she remembers him doing it.

Her individual signature style has however developed since 2007 and earned her the support from the art centre where, together with her sister Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, she comes to paint everyday since 2008.

Barrupu is a daughter of Munggurrawuy. Her siblings include Australians of the Year, Galarrwuy and Mandawuy as well as Gulumbu Yunupingu who is a Telstra First Prize Winner. Her closest sister is Nyapanyapa with whom she has worked as a print artist through Buku-Larrnggay Mulka since 1996.





## DJAKANNGU YUNUPINGU

Djakanngu's print has been created by applying layers of bitumen paint. She had the plate etched in the acid three times and each time more raindrops were painted on until almost no original plate could be seen. This results in depth of tone and colour within the single surface. She tells the story of the harvest with all animals and bush tucker illustrated.

Djakanngu is a practising artist, daughter of Mungurrawuy Yunupingu and sister to artists and leaders like Gulumbu, Mandawuy and Galarwuy Yunupingu. Like her sister Barrupu she has done many bark paintings and also woven mats and baskets. She grew up at Biranybirany with her family. That is where she learnt all the stories to show us in her different art forms. She has attended and helped people at workshops like the Garma Festival. She has taught a lot of people how to do things and what to paint.



## DJERRKNGU YUNUPINGU

Djerrkngu produced her print entirely with bitumen paint and spray paint. Painting directly onto the plate she tells the story of the seven stars in the sky and her seven sisters beneath them. The harvest behind depicts the bush yams that grow at this time of year which are an important food source for the Yolngu.

"When I was small I worked ironing and sweeping and doing housework. I also worked at the Yirrkala hospital and I worked in the kindergarten with the children teaching Yolngu stories. I worked at the women's resource centre learning cooking.

I am a new artist, but I picture these stories that were told by my father. I learnt from my mother she was a very good hunter, weaver and a good mother. I was born on Inglis Island near Mata Mata community. When I was a baby my parents took me back to Yirrkala. I had one brother and three sisters. I am the widow of Roy Marika"  
Djerrkngu Yunupingu





## GULUMBU YUNUPINGU (DEC)

Gulumbu's print was created entirely through using an etching tool. An etching tool is a sharp pointed metal pen that scratches into the surface of the plate. A protective coating remains on the plate during this process but once etched is cleaned off.

Gulumbu's plate tells the story of not only the Seven Sisters in the canoe but also the three men who take orders from their boss the Thunderman. Gulumbu was most insistent that her plate be scratched and have no further embellishment or decoration. "This is the way we tell our stories in the old days. Now it is all decorated - but not then."



## IN MEMORIAM

### **Gulumbu Yunupingu (c. 1943 – 9 May 2012)**

Gulumbu Yunupingu passed away during the final phases of the Seven Sisters project at her home in Gunyangara (Ski Beach). She will be greatly missed by all who new her.

Gulumbu Yunupingu lived at Yirrkala as a child. She went to school in the old Mission house, until she got married to the great artist Mutitjpu Mununggurr (dec). She had four children.

Gulumbu studied as a health worker with Miwatj health. She had a great knowledge of bush medicine and plant uses. She worked closely with Galarrwuy Yunupingu at the Garma Festival working towards the education of non-indigenous people.

As an artist Gulumbu worked in many mediums including pandanus weaving, painting on barks, larrakitj (funeral poles) and yidaki.

She was also an experienced printmaker in screenprinting, etching and collagraph having works featured in Darwin at the Gapan Gallery. At the Garma Festival where her prints sold out in the first day.

Her art has been widely exhibited all around the world. In 2000 her work was represented at World Expo in Hannover, Germany with an installation of many small barks depicting the seven sisters constellation.

In 2004 Gulumbu won First Prize at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) with a stand of larrakitj (funeral poles) depicting the Garak (the universe), a work that combined tradition Yolngu patterns with modern designs.

In 2006 her work featured as part of the Quai Branly Museum restoration in Paris.

In 2012 her memorial poles were the centre piece of 'Marking Time' an exhibition featuring major works by eleven Australian and international artists at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Also in 2012 her painting on wood Garrurru (Sail) was installed at Canberra's Australian National University.

Gulumbu Yunupingu was a thoughtful, inspiring, open-hearted and compassionate human being. She will be remembered for her contribution to her community, art and humanity.





## **Buku Larrnggay Mulka**

Buku Larrnggay Mulka has a long and proud history as one of Australia's premier Indigenous art centres and printmaking studio. The artists have established a worldwide reputation for excellence, having won many of Australia's major Indigenous art prizes. The sacred art of this region details the spiritual forces behind the creation and continuing identity of the fresh and saltwater country of the Miwatj region of north-east Arnhem Land.

Buku Larrnggay Mulka is one of the few art centres in Australia to establish and maintain a dedicated print workshop, which is staffed by Indigenous printmakers. In the last fifteen years the Centre has produced a wide range of linocuts, screen prints, etchings, lithographs, and collographs. While the artists are respectful of the discipline of miny'tji (sacred design) the nature of the printmaking process has allowed them to experiment more freely with colour, imagery, concepts and design without compromising their spiritual identity.

Many of the artists who have worked in the print workshop are women who have been leaders in innovation and change. At the forefront have been the senior women of the Yunupingu family led by Gaymala (deceased), Gulumbu, Nyapanyapa and Barrupu Yunupingu.

## **Basil Hall Editions**

Basil Hall is Director of Basil Hall Editions (BHE) in Darwin and is a Master Printmaker with a national reputation. Basil Hall has been working with the artists and arts workers at Buku Larrnggay Mulka for the past 15 years and has assisted and mentored the development of the Buku Larrnggay Mulka print workshop.

Through successive workshops he has helped senior Arnhem Land artists to develop increasingly more complex and sophisticated prints and apply new techniques and at the same time train younger Indigenous technicians in the craft of printmaking.

The Seven Sisters were printed at Basil Hall Editions by printers Basil Hall, Nena Zanos Merren Sierakowski and Natasha Rowell

## **Nomad Art**

Nomad Art has a long-standing relationship with Buku Larrnggay Mulka and Basil Hall Editions. Nomad Art has exhibited prints with Buku Larrnggay print workshop since 2006 and is proud to be associated with one of the Northern Territory's premier print studio's.

## **Seven Sisters will be exhibited at the Ganyu Gallery as part of the 2012 Darwin Festival**

**Civic Park, Darwin**

**Nightly 6 - 10**

**10 - 26 August 2012**

Contact Nomad Art for further information:

[www.nomadart.com.au](http://www.nomadart.com.au)

08 89816382

## **Specifications:**

The image size of each print is 100 x 50 cm

The paper size is 120 x 80 cm

Seven Sisters are editions of 20

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