



**Fiona Hall**

*Burning Bright*

Blue Mud Bay, Arnhem Land, 2009/10

Folio of six etchings

Photography by Peter Eve





*Pandanus - Gunga 50 x 66 cm*





*Cycads - Ngathu 50 x 66 cm*





*Casuarina - Mawurraki* 50 x 66 cm





*Fan Palm - Dhalpi 50 x 66 cm*





*Mangrove - Wälm* 50 x 66 cm





*Brachychiton - Nanungguwa* 50 x 66 cm



## Burning Bright

Our journey began with a dance: in this ceremonial way the Blue Mud Bay community welcomed us to their country. Over the following days as they showed us around they unfolded for us the living map of their land and sea, which charts Yolgnu culture and embodies Yolgnu ancestry. We learned that their homeland is a story place; it is the larder and the medicine chest, the almanac and vast encyclopedia. We saw that their sea and land and sky are home to many creatures, and learned they harbour sacred places where past and present are manifest, perpetually.

The time when we visited was the lead-up to the Wet. The last of the burning was in progress, washing the land with fire in readiness for the rain. Some of the plants were already pushing out fresh new growth and bursting into flower, eager to get a head start. I felt that I could hear them singing out to the rains to hurry up and come.

Not long before traveling to Blue Mud Bay, I listened to Djambawa Marawili sing a song of his country to his bark paintings at an exhibition in Moscow. I didn't know the words of his song, but I sensed that through his singing his saltwater world flowed into the space around them, easing them into a strange land and culture, for his paintings and their stories were very far from home.

For each of us, home is a place that is not only fixed on a map but floats along the tributaries of our consciousness. The place I come from is, I think, located somewhere on the ebb tide of the world at large, a place in a culture in a continual state of flux, drifting without an anchor. It is a place which is sharing less and less of its space with its kindred plants and animals, and which is inundated time and again by the tidal waves of its own gross superfluities. Too often the world I belong to absolves itself of guilt and responsibility for its actions by washing away the traces of its murky history. I have a sinking feeling that I'm from a society that is now foundering out of its depth, which laid down its foundation on quicksand.

I learned at Blue Mud Bay that Yolgnu culture is a fluid one, with a deep knowledge of and respect for the source from which it flows. A tide of goodwill from the community there invited us to walk and sit together to create Djalkiri. In the slipstream of this collaboration our different worlds are flowing together, making ripples on the surface where our cultures meet. I think I see a shimmer on the horizon.

Fiona Hall, 2010





A Nomad Art Production

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**NOMAD ART DARWIN**

Vickers Street Parap  
Phone: 08 8981 6382

**NOMAD ART CANBERRA**

Shop 11 M Centre  
Palmerston Lane Manuka ACT  
Phone: 02 6162 1512

**e:** [gallery@nomadart.com.au](mailto:gallery@nomadart.com.au)

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