

Nomad Art in conjunction with Injalak Arts present

MANME MAYH: GARDENS OF THE STONE COUNTRY II

July 2013

An exhibition featuring a unique style of painting, which draws upon rock art traditions of western Arnhem Land and highlights cultural associations to bush foods (manme) and plants (mayh).

Allan Nadjamerrek
Gavin Namarnyilk
Samson Namundja



Manme Mayh: Gardens of the Stone Country II

Manme Mayh: Gardens of the Stone Country II explores the links between Indigenous cultural heritage, environment and aesthetic traditions of artists from the Stone Country of western Arnhem Land through food and plants (manme) and animals (mayh).

The artists selected for this project represent a small and unique group of artists who are actively maintaining the distinctive practise associated with the traditions of rock art painting in western Arnhem Land and the knowledge it purveys.

The Stone Country of Western Arnhem Land also known as the plateau country runs into Kakadu National Park joining the people of both lands. The rocky outcrops of the escarpment dominate the landscape while adjacent floodplains, permanent rivers and billabongs are abundant with life of countless species of animals and plants.

Manme Mayh: Gardens of the Stone Country focuses on the native plants and animals integral to the culture and traditions of the Kunwinjku speaking people. The exhibition highlights cultural associations the Kunwinjku people have with species that include the fruit bats, the kangaroo, black wallaroo, Oenpelli python, water lilies, crocodiles, turtles, fishes, yams, and other plants that provide both food and tools.

Manme Mayh: Gardens of the Stone Country is in the memory of renowned artist and clan leader Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO (dec).



Nomad Art Gallery
Parap, NT
08 89816383
gallery@nomadart.com.au

Western Arnhem Land

Djurrih Kawokbebme, the southernmost waterfall on the Liverpool River. The Mok clan estate, Ankung Kunred – Wild Honey Country – ends some ten kilometres upstream.

Photo courtesy of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT).



Billabong

Allan Nadjamerrek

Allan Nadjamerrek has painted a variety of plants and animals that are common in the billabongs and estuaries of Western Arnhem Land.

At the top of the picture is the Black Bream (Dunbuhmanj). Below that are Long Necked Turtle, (Ngalmanjiyi) File Snake, (Kedjebe) and water Lily, (Mandem). Kunwinjku people were traditionally reliant on hunting and gathering and the wetlands provided a broad range of foods.

Utilising natural resources still play a big part in contemporary life in Gunbalanya and its outstations. All the fish and reptiles painted are edible.



Ngalmangiyi – Long Necked Turtle

Allan Nadjamerrek

Various edible fish and reptiles are found in the billabongs, water courses and wetlands that occur throughout western Arnhem Land in the 'Top End' of Australia.

The long-necked turtle, (ngalmangiyi) has rich white flesh and is also sought for its eggs, which are laid in mud.

Women are often seen hunting the turtle with sharp sticks (kunkarninj) that are used to prod the mud. The best times for hunting turtle are the six or so months after the monsoon season (Kudjewk) that occurs in the beginning of the year.



Yam

Gavin Namarnyilk

There are two main types of yams eaten in Arnhem Land, the long and the round.

The long yam (karrbarda), *Dioscorea Traversa* is a large, elongated vegetable, which can be eaten as soon as it is dug up. It is easy to find owing to the love-heart shaped leaves, which are attached to its tendrils.

The round or 'cheeky' yam (mankinjdek) is poisonous unless it is soaked in water for a number of days after having been cut, to let out the toxic substance.



Lambalk - Sugar Glider

Gavin Namarnyilk

Arnhem Land is home to an amazingly diverse range of fauna.

Depicted in this painting is one of the more unusual animals that live in the Arnhem Land, Sugar Gliders, (Lambalk), *Petaurus breviceps*. They are nocturnal and frequent the woodland regions. Lambalk are not a food source for the people because of the lack of meat.

In this painting the artist has shown the Lambalk in fine single, parallel rarrk (hatched marks) according to his style.



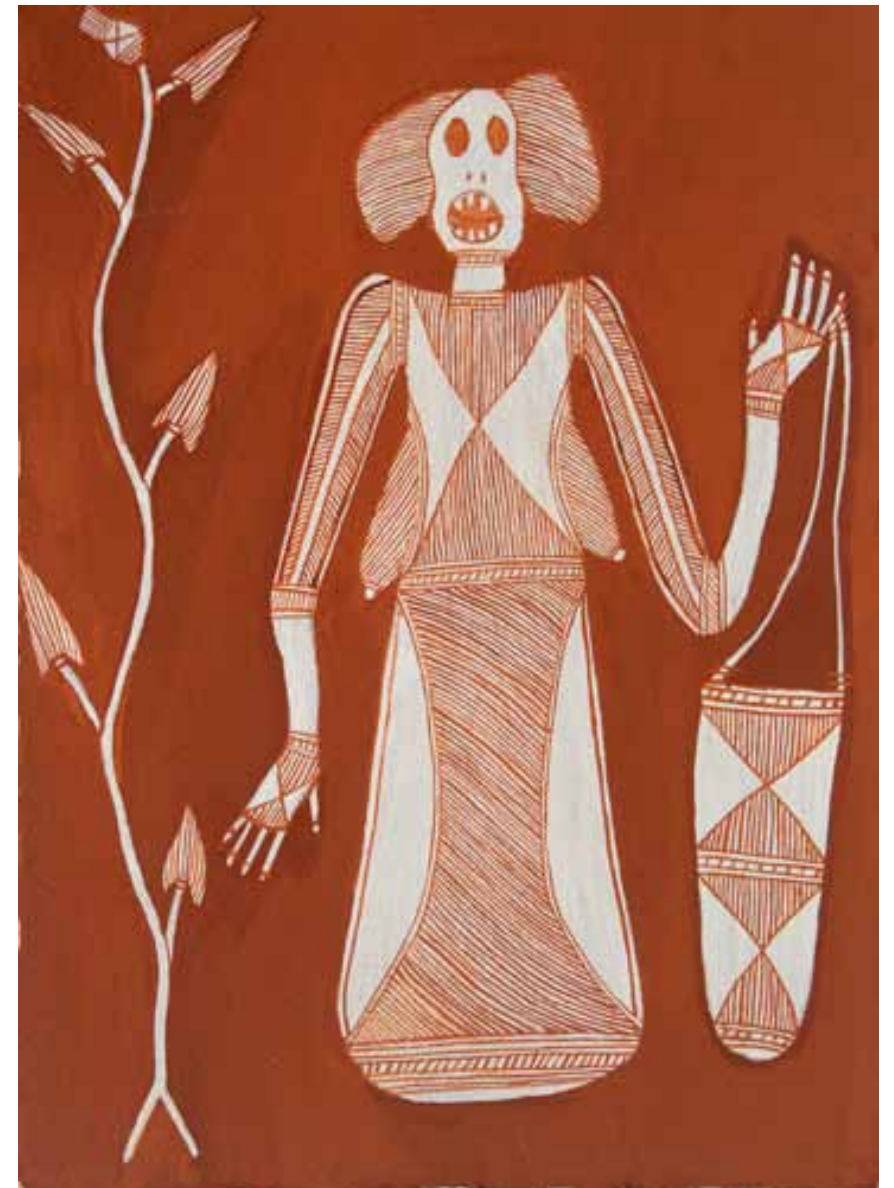
Wakewaken - Sugar bag woman

Gavin Namarnyilk

The painting depicts a Sugarbag or Native Honey Woman (Wakkewakken) from country east of the Mann River. The plants are manwak, a fruit bush.

These Wakkewakken originally lived under a paperbark tree in a creek which has very cold water. They left their underwater home and moved around the country gathering bush fruit, which they placed in their dilly bags (burlbe). Wak, the black crow, became angry that they were stealing from his country so cut them in half with a stone axe. They then became mankung, the honey of native bees. They also left their imprint as a rock painting in the artist's Sugarbag Dreaming (Mankung Djang) country.

In earlier days when Aboriginal people from this region wanted to ensure that sugar bag would be plentiful each year they would pull up the water weeds near the base of the paperbark tree where the Wakkewakken resided.



Ngalyod, Kumoken dja Dunbuhmanj

Allan Nadjamerrek

The artist has painted the Rainbow Serpent (Ngalyod), Black Bream (Dunbuhmanj) and Freshwater Crocodile (Kumoken).

Ngalyod is regarded as a most important ancestor spirit in Western Arnhem Land. In the Dreamtime she assumed a range of animal forms including snake, kangaroo and crocodile and at times transformed herself from one to the other, or into a combination of each. It is believed that as a serpent she tunnels underground using barbed extensions from her head and the bony protuberance from her neck as aids. It is believed that Ngalyod dwells in various billabongs in Arnhem Land today, sometimes swallowing bininj (the Kunwinjku term for Aboriginal people) as punishment when they break traditional laws. She is often depicted with the leaves of the mandem (water lily) protruding from her back.



Namarrkon – Lightning Man

Allan Nadjamerrek

Namarrkon, Lightning Man is an important ancestral being in the mythology of the Kunwinjku people of western Arnhem Land.

This spirit helped create the country during the Dreamtime. Namarrkon creates thunder by throwing stone axes down onto the earth. These axes can be seen protruding from various parts of his body, particularly the joints. An arc of lightning encircles his body.

Namarrkon is especially active during December, when the season of kurnumeleng is characterised by spectacular pre-monsoon storms and then from January to March during kudjewk the 'wet' season. Namarrkon is also a guardian of the laws.



Balakandjalan

Gavin Namarnyilk

Balakandjalan, or Nakurrurndilhba, is a devil-like spirit with a head is like a kangaroo. He lives in a hollow tree. He walks around with his cheeky black snake, and eats raw snakes.

We can't see him with our own eyes. The only people who can see him are "Clever People", traditional healers.



Kornobolo - Agile Wallaby

Allan Nadjamerrek

The artist has depicted the Agile Wallaby (Kornobolo), *Macropus Agilis*. They are popular game amongst the Kunwinjku people of Western Arnhem Land.

The male of the species is called Warradjangkal, while the female is known as Merlbbe. The Kunwinjku language often has different terms for male and female macropods, and artists always distinguish between the two in their paintings.

Another term for Kornobolo is "Njamdjorrdjorh", which literally means "Get a big belly". This particular work is of Merlbbe, the female Agile Wallaby.



Nabarlek - Rock Wallaby

Allan Nadjamerrek

The artist has depicted the Little Rock Wallaby (Nabarlek), *Petrogale Concinna*.

Rock wallabies often feature in rock art and bark paintings and are significant animals in Kunwinjku culture. They are prized game as well as being totems for some clans.



Naderr - Emu hunter

Gavin Namarnyilk

Naderr is a spirit which lives in the stone country and likes to hunt emus. The Western Arnhem Land stone country people call the emu 'kurdukadji', whereas the general Kunwinjku word is 'ngurrurdu'. The emu, *Dromaius novaehollandiae*, belongs to the Wurrbbarn clan.

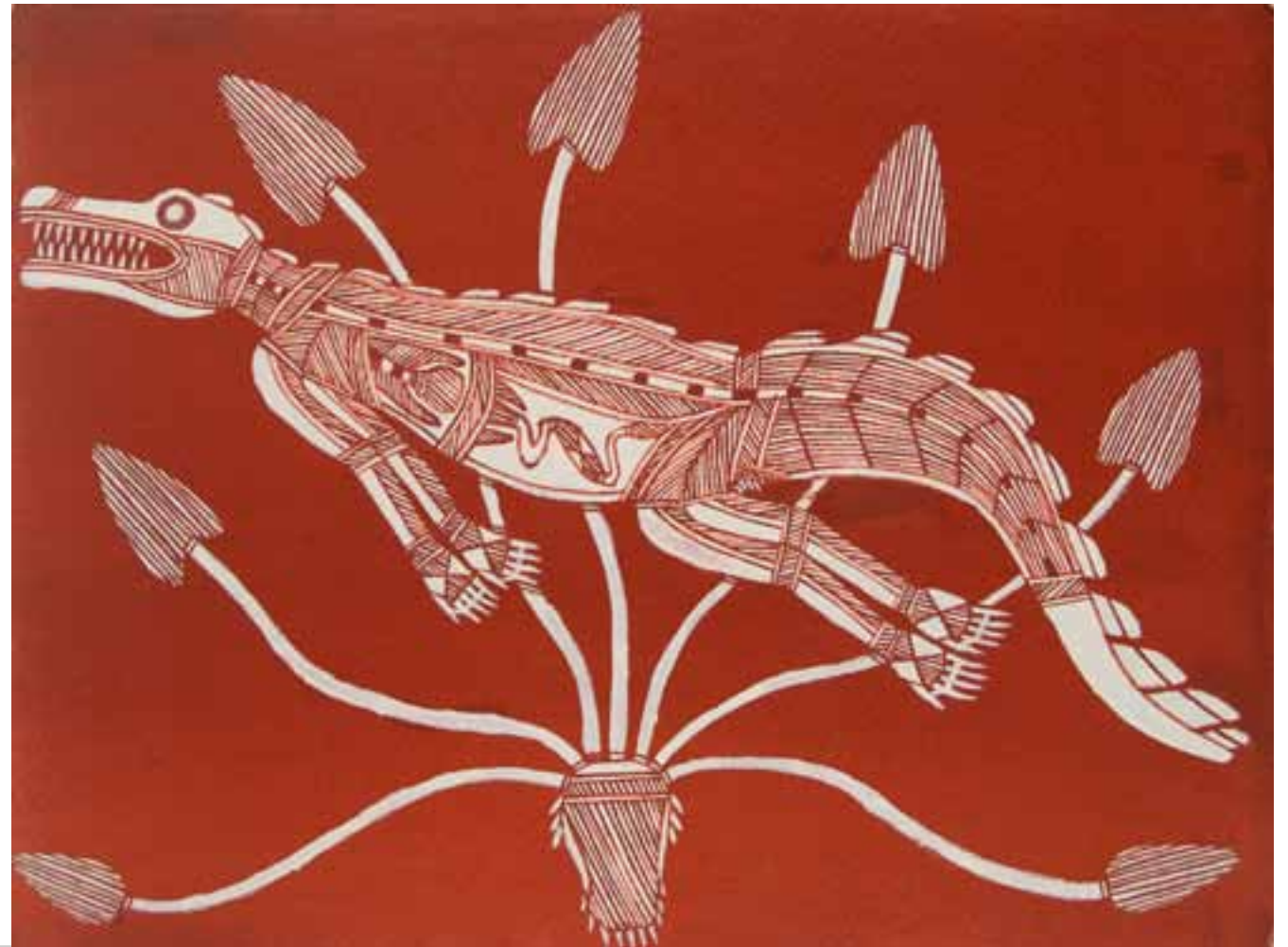


Kinga - Saltwater Crocodile

Allan Nadjamerrek

The reptile painted by the artist is very significant to Kunwinjku life and culture. The saltwater crocodile (kinga) is a highly respected and feared animal that has significance as a food source and as totem to many Aboriginal People (bininj) in Arnhem Land.

Although known as the saltwater crocodile, kinga are estuarine and can be found throughout the watercourses and billabongs of Arnhem Land. The kinga has been painted in the classic Kunwinjku "x-ray" style, with internal organs showing, which indicates its food value.



Ngalkunburriyaymi

Gavin Namarnyilk

This painting refers to a sacred site near Kamarrkawan on the Mann River. There the footprints of the Yawk Yawk or Ngalkunburriyayimi are visible on a rock, and can be called upon for the increase of fish and game.

Ngalkunburriyayimi are transformational manifestations of Ngalyod, the Rainbow Serpent. They are depicted as people with fish tails, and live in the freshwater streams of the stone country.



Mimi Spirits and Karrbarda (Long Yams)

Samson Namundja

According to the Kunwinjku people of western Arnhem Land, Mimi spirits were the original spirit beings, who taught Aboriginal people many of the skills they needed to survive in the bush.

They taught humans how to find Long Yams (karrbarda) using digging sticks (kumkanin). The best time of year to get long yams is in Bangkerreng, the late wet season, because the ground is soft and there are lots of heart shaped leaves visible above the ground.

Mimi Spirits carry various other implements, including fire sticks (kundjakkorl), dilly bags (djerrh) and stone axes (karramalk).

