



art + soul

Education kit

Art Gallery of New South Wales
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ART
GALLERY
NSW

art + soul

art + soul explores the creative cultural wealth of Indigenous Australia through three conceptual themes – ‘home and away’, ‘dreams and nightmares’, ‘bitter and sweet’ – that encompass the diverse ways in which many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have lived and continue to live; these themes are located at the core of Indigenous artistic practice and unite artists across the country. In translating their culture for the world the artists of *art + soul* create a unique and unparalleled vision, empowering their communities and honouring their ancestors and their country.

home + away

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders call all corners of this country home yet throughout Australia’s history Indigenous people have been actively dispersed from their homelands, invaded, removed and massacred to make way for the colonial project. Beginning in 1788 with the establishment of Sydney, the frontier was relentless and, as it moved, it compromised traditional life and cast Aboriginal people to society’s fringes. Contemporary experience is dominated by the physical and psychological return to country and culture, as witnessed in the outstation movement and the assertion of land rights, and illustrated in the growth of art movements.

The British colonisation of Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania), established 1803, saw the attempted genocide of traditional land owners in order to justify the myth of *terra nullius*. In defending their country Aboriginal people were subjected to the Black War, an unimaginable violence which forced people from their homelands to isolated islands off the Tasmanian coastline; here, they fervently held on to their cultural practices. Under alleged government protection people were exiled to the Wybalenna mission on Flinders Island in the Bass Strait and this site and its history are the seminal subjects of Ricky Maynard’s 2005 black-and-white photographic series *Portrait of a Distant Land*. In the evocative image *Broken heart* we see a self-portrait of Maynard – his back towards us, knee-deep in water, looking out at the horizon. Here Maynard honours his ancestors, who, banished to Wybalenna, passed away facing southward to their beloved homelands.

The exile of Aboriginal people continued throughout Australia’s history. In the 1980s a small family group of Pintupi people from Central Australia lived a relatively traditional life by actively avoiding government patrols. This group included Yukultji Napangati, who was about 14 years old when her family came into the outstation of Kiwirrkura. Here they were reunited with their extended family, many of whom had recently established Kiwirrkura in order to escape the harsh conditions in the government-controlled community at

Papunya. Outstations like Kiwirrkura and Walungurru (Kintore), further east, enable Pintupi people to live on their land, allowing for a connection to country that provides the cultural stimulus for art, which, in turn, offers the means for people to remain on country. Napangati has become an important part of this movement and in her paintings she recalls her ancestral homelands.

dreams + nightmares

The colonial nightmare severely compromised traditional practices. People were forcibly removed and dispersed from their country, the cornerstone to their culture, to make way for the pastoral industry: children were taken from their mothers and loving families, their culture denigrated, making Aboriginal people strangers in their own land. From the devastation of colonisation artists have been at the forefront of continuing age-old practices, techniques and concepts, while others establish contemporary expressions and frameworks, enriching tradition and preserving cultural content.

The rich Coorong country of South Australia, where the Murray River runs into the sea, is home to the Ngarrindjeri nation. In the 1830s colonisation of the region officially commenced and the agricultural industry, using detrimental farming practices, has since destroyed much of the environment, resulting in massive cultural incursions. Responding to this nightmare, artist Yvonne Koolmatrie actively retrieved traditional Ngarrindjeri weaving practices, thereby maintaining cultural knowledge and drawing attention to the degraded Coorong riverland, where once the sedge grass essential to her weaving grew in profusion. Instructed in 1982 by elder Aunty Dorothy Kartinyeri, who before passing away taught her the basic coil bundle stitch, Koolmatrie works with museum collections, researching woven forms collected from her ancestors to guide and inspire her. Today she creates traditional eel, yabby and duck traps, egg scoops and baskets, along with many contemporary forms.

The process of cultural revival also occurred in the East Kimberley community of Warmun in the 1970s when the late artist Rover Thomas initiated the Gurrir Gurrir joonba, or public performance. The Gurrir Gurrir is a contemporary continuation of the Ngarrangarni, a Gija term for the creation or dreaming. Thomas directed this joonba, engaging singers and dancers to perform while carrying ochre-painted boards. Intimately linked to the cultural resurgence of the local Gija people, the Gurrir Gurrir marks a cultural turning point, an important return to traditional values that had been exhausted after years of cultural oppression. It became the catalyst for the vibrant Warmun art movement and artists soon painted boards independent of the Gurrir Gurrir, with Thomas leading the way. His seminal painting *Two men dreaming* c1985 contains the hallmarks of the movement – deep open fields of ochre, highlighted with a tracery of white dots.

bitter + sweet

Within the heartache and bitterness of Australia's history, which has cast Indigenous communities among the nation's poorest, Indigenous artists have championed a movement that has captured the attention and imagination of audiences worldwide. Art has become a primary mode of engagement with these issues. Against the odds, many artists create work so that their culture may be understood and in the hope that past actions will never be repeated. At the same time, artists provide a platform for asserting and preserving cultural knowledge, techniques and concepts.

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala's Mara people waged a lengthy war with invading pastoralists for their country at the turn of the 20th century, only to be vanquished to missions and town camps. The pastoral industry further exploited Aboriginal people in remote and rural regions with often unpaid employment, and as a young man the late Munduwalawala became a stockman. While driving cattle through Central Australia, Munduwalawala met the well-known Aranda artist Albert Namatjira (1902–1959) and was inspired by his use of colour and his style. In the 1980s Munduwalawala began painting and like Namatjira he helped establish a powerful new movement. His flamboyant artworks celebrate the country inherited from his grandfather, land centred around the Limmen Bight River, and proudly announce his enduring role as djungkayi, or custodian.

Analysing the processes and long-reaching effects of colonisation, paralleled with enduring cultural traditions, was central to practice of the late Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi photographer Michael Riley. These seemingly dichotomous concepts are brought poetically together in his photographic series, including *Sacrifice* 1992, *flyblown* 1998 and his final work *cloud* 2000. Riley used images of country, including water and sky, as metaphors for cultural and environmental damage – the earth is cracked and native animals are road kill – yet these artworks are immensely beautiful; they are bittersweet. In *cloud* cultural imagery sits against the emblematic Australian blue sky: a cow and bible are seemingly tossed into the sky while Indigenous icons float effortlessly – the boomerang captured on its symbolic return and the feather, a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi 'messenger', magically poised, referencing the potent culture which it represents.

Whether artists create work to maintain a connection to country; to dream beyond the colonial nightmare; or to distill sweet memories from bitter experience, all are champions of their culture who create a new visual language to carry their traditions into the future.

Jonathan Jones

Curator of Aboriginal programs

KEY TERMS

country: an all-encompassing term which includes land and sea, the sun and moon, plants and animals, fire and water, all of which have been created by the epic journeys and actions of the ancestors.

outstation movement: the period in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Aboriginal people were given support and the infrastructure to move back to their traditional country and away from government-controlled settlements.

History Wars: a debate regarding the interpretation of events in the British colonisation of Australia, in particular these events' impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures.

self-determination: the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

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Websites

- www.abc.net.au/tv/artandsoul
- www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

NOTES

1. In Perkins 2010, p 74
2. In Perkins 2010, p 85
3. In Perkins 2010, p 159
4. In Rover Thomas et al, *Roads cross: the paintings of Rover Thomas*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 1994, p 24
5. In Perkins 2010, pp 244–245
6. In Perkins and West (eds) 2007, p 326

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cover: Michael Riley *Untitled (feather)* 2000 (detail) from the series *cloud*

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Art Gallery Road, The Domain, Sydney, NSW 2000 Australia
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education

home + away



RICKY MAYNARD born 1953
Ben Lomond / Cape Portland, Flinders Island,
Tasmania, South-east region

Broken heart 2005, from the series

Portrait of a Distant Land

gelatin silver photograph, selenium toned
42.9 x 41.2 cm

Purchased with funds provided by the Aboriginal
Collection Benefactors' Group and the Photography
Collection Benefactors' Program 2009

© Ricky Maynard. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney



YUKULTJI NAPANGATI born c1970
Pintupi, Kiwirrkura, Western Desert region

Untitled 2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153 x 183 cm

Don Mitchell Bequest Fund

© Yukultji Napangati. Licensed by Aboriginal Artist Agency

My mother's country, Marrapinti, that's what I paint about. The ancestors were coming this way and they entered the place called Wilkinkarra [Lake Mackay]. I paint that and the place Ngamina, Wirrulinga. Yukultji Napangati¹

On this Mission of Wybalenna in Flinders Island, George Augustus Robinson brought our ancestors over here to set up the Friendly Mission, which in fact became a death camp, not only at the hands of soldiers, but from broken hearts from being away from country. Ricky Maynard²

Ricky Maynard and Yukultji Napangati, like many artists, create work based on the concept of home – a sense of place that sadly is often generated by separation. Maynard recalls the lives of his ancestors, massacred and banished from their traditional Tasmanian homelands to become refugees, isolated at Wybalenna mission in the Bass Strait, while Napangati, from the remote outstation of Kiwirrkura deep in the heart of her Pintupi homelands, paints the country of her birth. Both create art as means of maintaining their connection to country, of recalling history and honouring their ancestors, and through their practices Maynard and Napangati share their knowledge and experiences with the world.

K-6 ACTIVITIES

- **Look** at *Untitled* 2005 by Yukultji Napangati. **Describe** and **count** the colours and patterns you can see. **Notice** the lines and ridges created by the repetition of lines. What does this painting tell you about the artist's country? Keeping your eyes on the painting, **move** your head from side to side and up and down. What visual effects does this create? **Create** your own powerful optical effect using repetition of patterns and lines.
- **Find out** about the Western Desert and **compare** it to where you live. **Make** a series of paintings showing that place. **Choose** a natural or constructed surface from your environment and **study** it closely using a magnifying glass. **Make** a detailed drawing of what you see and then enlarge it on a photocopier. **Create** multiple copies and **glue** them onto a large sheet to make a field of patterning. **Discuss** how this image relates to your original drawing.
- **Locate** Napangati's home of Kiwirrkura and Ricky Maynard's home of Flinders Island on a map and look at satellite photos. **Find out** about the climate, vegetation and bush foods of each region. **Create** a map of one of these regions including the location of key communities such as Papunya, Wirrimanu (Balgo), Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff) and Walungurru (Kintore) in the Central and Western Deserts or Cape Barron Island, Great (Big) Dog, Little Dog and Vansittart Islands off Flinders Island.
- Napangati and Maynard have both made artworks based on their home. What does home mean for you? How do you feel when you are far away from home? **Make** a painting showing your home and the important things about it. **Consider** the saying 'home is where the heart is'. In class **discuss** its meaning. **Develop** a picture or diorama which represents your home. **Write** a short description to present with your piece and have a class exhibition.

7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- **Look** at *Broken heart* 2005 by Ricky Maynard and **describe** what you see. What can you infer from the title about the meaning of this work? Maynard has talked about the process of creating this photograph, 'I walked all down the coastline for kilometres trying to work out how I could actually portray the way those people would have felt'. Who are the people he refers to? Why did he think they felt broken-hearted? **Write** a poem communicating the idea of exile. Why did Maynard make the image as a self-portrait?
- **Study** *Untitled* 2005 by Yukultji Napangati and **describe** its mood. Is it static or dynamic? How does the use of colour and line create rhythm and energy? **Describe** how the visual power of this image evokes the vastness of country and the power of culture. **Create** an artwork which employs patterning and repetition to express the idea of power and celebration. **Research** the evolution of women's art in the Western Desert. Why did women begin painting later than men?
- **Research** the Western Desert art movement beginning with the exodus of Pintupi people from their desert homes to the government-run mission of Papunya from the 1950s, to the later formation of the Papunya Tula Artist Cooperative in 1972. **Investigate** the part played by artists Timmy Payungka Tjapangati and Uta Uta Tjangala in advocating the return to country in the late 1970s with the outstation movement. **Trace** the creative output once artists returned home and the resulting cultural renaissance. How does this new confidence, expressed through scale, colour and composition, relate to peoples' return home? **Research** the ways that the art centre Papunya Tula Artists has developed after the permanent return of artists to their homelands.

dreams + nightmares



ROVER THOMAS 1926–1998
Kukatja / Wangkajunga, Western Desert region,
Warmun (Turkey Creek), Kimberley region

Two men dreaming c1985
natural pigments on canvas board
91 x 61 cm
Purchased 2000
© Estate of Rover Thomas. Warmun Art Centre



YVONNE KOOLMATRIE born 1945
Ngarrindjeri, Berri, Southern Riverine region

Eel trap 1997
sedge rushes (*Lepidosperma canescens*)
59 x 168 x 59 cm
Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary
Aboriginal Art 1999
© Yvonne Koolmatrrie, courtesy of Aboriginal and Pacific Art

I run workshops to educate people ... to tell them how important it is to keep my culture alive. If I don't it's going to be lost. It's my commitment to this material [sedge rushes] ... I can picture [my ancestors] all under the tree, all gathering, talking, sitting in a group, grannies, daughters, you know. Yvonne Koolmatrrie³

We've got that corroboree now, biggest culture. I can go anywhere, take this corroboree, Krill Krill [Gurrir Gurrir], I can go to Perth, from there to Melbourne, anywhere. Rover Thomas⁴

Aboriginal life was forever changed with colonisation, which brought on the attempted genocide of the world's oldest living culture. From within this nightmare artists have led a cultural renaissance, preserving age-old knowledge and channelling traditions into contemporary forms and expressions. For artist Yvonne Koolmatrrie the continuation of Ngarrindjeri weaving, against cultural and environmental obstacles, is the driving force of her practice and celebrated today in her elegant woven forms, while the flourishing painting movement of the East Kimberley, which reinvigorated the local Gija culture, commenced with the creative force of the late Rover Thomas and the Gurrir Gurrir joonba. This contemporary movement has provided the platform for artists to engage with new audiences, carrying traditional expressions into the future.

K-6 ACTIVITIES

- **Look** at *Two men dreaming* c1985 by Rover Thomas and **list** the colours and shapes you can see. This painting shows a man with his boomerang and fighting sticks next to a waterhole that contains 'sweet' water. **Find** these elements in the painting. Can you see the moonlight reflecting on the man? **Look** closely and **describe** the texture of the painted surface. Why are there bumps, grains and grit? What do you think the paint is made out of? Are you looking at this country from the ground or the sky?

- Why do you think Thomas chose black for the colour of the waterhole? **Find** images of lakes, rivers, billabongs and the ocean in the moonlight. **Describe** the colour of water in these images. Is it always black? **Make** a drawing or painting of water in the moonlight which shows reflections of light.

- Thomas painted from memory. **Describe** a place you know well, how it looks and what you like or dislike about it. **Make** a painting or three-dimensional representation of this place. **Present** your work and photos of the real place to the class and **discuss** the differences.

- **Look** at *Eel trap* 1997 by Yvonne Koolmatrrie and **describe** its colour, texture and shape. Is it two-dimensional or three-dimensional? How do you think it was made? What does this object remind you of? **Select** a small area, **observe** it closely and **make** a detailed drawing of the pattern and texture. **Explain** how this eel trap would work. **Find out** about other fishing and farming technologies developed by Indigenous Australians.

- **Map** the extent of Ngarrindjeri country, including the lower Murray River region, Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong. **Research** the Coorong National Park. What is unique about this area? What environmental difficulties does this area face today and why are the sedge rushes used by Koolmatrrie now endangered? **Find out** about the causes and possible solutions to these problems.

7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- **Observe** *Eel trap* 1997 by Yvonne Koolmatrrie and **comment** on its physical qualities. **Look** closely at the weaving pattern, including the bundling, stitching and tying of material. **Imagine** the labour-intensive process of its creation. **Speculate** on how your response to *Eel trap* may change depending on where you view it – a museum, an art gallery or a fishing shop?

- **Study** *Two men dreaming* c1985 by Rover Thomas and **describe** the tones, textures, colours and perspective. How has Thomas suggested the glow of moonlight? In what ways does this work represent landscape? **Discuss** the concept of East Kimberley artists 'painting country with country'.

- **Research** Koolmatrrie's role in the revival and preservation of Ngarrindjeri weaving techniques. **Assess** the role of museums in her practice. Why is the preservation of Ngarrindjeri weaving so important to Koolmatrrie? **Study** other fibre artists and **discuss** fibre art's role within the visual arts.

- **Learn** how the nightmare of Cyclone Tracy ignited a cultural renaissance and the birth of a regional contemporary art movement. What is the significance of the Gurrir Gurrir joonba to Gija people and to the wider world of Indigenous art? **Research** the Warmun school of art established by senior painters Thomas, Paddy Jaminji and Queenie McKenzie.

- **Research** the 2002 exhibition *Blood on the spinifex*, conceived in direct response to the History Wars. **Learn** about this debate and **examine** the role played by East Kimberley artists in response. Why did these artists choose to tell their stories through art? Do you agree that oral and visual records are legitimate modes of evidence? **Discuss** these ideas in class. **Consider** the ways that different artists address truth and how they bear witness to subjects of horror and grief through their art.

bitter + sweet



GINGER RILEY MUNDUWALAWALA c1936–2002
Mara, Borroloola, Gulf region

Ngak Ngak and the Ruined City 1998

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
193 x 249.3 cm

Purchased under the terms of the
Florence Turner Blake Bequest 1999

© Estate Ginger Riley Munduwalawala, courtesy of Alcaston Gallery



MICHAEL RILEY 1960–2004

Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine region / Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine region,
Sydney, South-east region

Untitled (feather) 2000, from the series **cloud**

chromogenic pigment print
106 x 150 cm

Gift of Anthony Bourke 2010

© Michael Riley Foundation. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

I was thinking about trying to make a painting of the cloud moving and that ground, a long way below. Then I began painting from the air at Limmen Bight, painting all the country and the clouds. Painting, painting, painting. That's my mind, that's in my mind. Ginger Riley Munduwalawala⁵

cloud was quite a resolved exhibition, in that it brought all those elements together: my childhood, Christianity, histories of Aboriginal peoples, and making some sort of connection by showing things like the cow floating in this ethereal sky. Michael Riley⁶

Aboriginal Australia, the world's oldest living culture, has experienced enormous change, persecution and exclusion, yet Aboriginal art has emerged as a vibrant cultural beacon and is celebrated around the world today. Many artists, their families and ancestors have directly experienced hardships but their work proudly honours country and culture. In the paintings of the late Ginger Riley Munduwalawala the energy and life of his culture is captured by his bold use of colour and dynamic depiction of his homelands, while for the late photographer Michael Riley the depiction of the colonial experience, entwined with Aboriginal icons, is poignantly portrayed and speaks directly to the strength and power of Indigenous culture.

K-6 ACTIVITIES

- **Look** at *Ngak Ngak and the Ruined City* 1998 by Ginger Riley Munduwalawala. **Describe** the colours you can see and the way the artist has applied the paint. **Imagine** you are a bird flying over this country. **Describe** the things you would see, the temperature and how you would feel. **Locate** the four key elements of Munduwalawala's country which he often painted – Ngak Ngak (the ancestral sea eagle), the Limmen Bight River, Garimala and Bandian (the two ancestral snakes) and the Four Archers rock formations. **Make** a painting which includes four things which are important to you. **Think** about people, places and objects and **experiment** with scale to highlight their importance. **Explain** your painting to the class.

- **Look** at how Michael Riley uses the Australian sky as a backdrop in his 2000 series *cloud*. Take your four images of important things, **cut** them out, and **place** them on new backgrounds including scenes of cities, water and textures like grass and stone. How does changing the background change your understanding of the image?

- **Find** photos and satellite imagery of Munduwalawala's country in south-east Arnhem Land. **Notice** the colours and patterns of country. **Locate** the Limmen Bight River and the Four Archers rock formations. **Find** images of the dramatic sandstone formations known as the Ruined City. **Compare** them with Munduwalawala's depictions of these sites in his paintings.

- **Look** at *Untitled (feather)* 2000 by Riley. How do you think he made this work? Do you think the feather is floating or falling? How would you describe the sky? Riley saw the feather as a 'messenger'. **Think** about what he meant by this. What message do you think Riley is trying to send? How could you send a message, what would it say and who would you send it to?

7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- **Consider** the use of perspective in *Ngak Ngak and the Ruined City* 1998 by Ginger Riley Munduwalawala. Are you looking across the landscape or viewing it from above? How does this compositional device suggest the perspective of Ngak Ngak (the ancestral sea eagle) and inform our understanding of Munduwalawala's relationship to his subjects?

- **Compare** Munduwalawala's portrayal of the Australian landscape with that of Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale. How is each artist's relationship with the land revealed in their work? Munduwalawala was called the 'boss of colour' for his remarkable use of colour. How does Munduwalawala communicate his love for country and bring it alive? **Analyse** his use of diverse painting techniques – stippling, underpainting and gestural sweeps – and **assess** their importance in creating this celebration of country.

- **List** words and ideas which come to mind when you look at *Untitled (feather)* 2000 by Michael Riley. **Notice** scale, colour, composition, media and subject matter. Riley described the feather as a 'messenger'. What do you think he meant by this? This work is part of *cloud* 2000, Riley's final series of ten digital photographs. **Find** other images from this series and **suggest** ways in which they draw together themes in his work. How does this series express the idea of 'bittersweet'?

- **Research** Riley's diverse suites of work in photomedia, film and video. Look at earlier photographic series including *Sacrifice* 1992 and *flyblown* 1998. **Identify** recurring themes and subjects and **analyse** the ways in which his work has grappled with many aspects of Indigenous history – colonisation, dispossession, assimilation and self-determination. How might his own experiences of segregation and racism have informed his practice?