



Short St. Gallery

Phyllis Thomas

Born 01/01/1933
Language Group Gija
Region East Kimberley

Ngarrangarni / Totem: Black Cockatoo, Kingfisher

Phyllis Thomas is a Gija woman of Nagarra skin whose bush name, Booljoonngali, means "big rain coming down with lots of wind". She was born at a place called Riya on the Turner River, south east of the Bungle-Bungles. When young she worked on Turner Station looking after poultry, gardening, grinding salt and carting water from the well but often preferred to run away into the bush with the old women. She loved walking all over the country with her mother's mother and the other women, hunting, collecting dingo scalps and looking for gold. She married Joe Thomas from Rugun, Crocodile Hole and lived there for many years.

She began her painting when Freddie Timms set up the Jirrawun Aboriginal Arts group there. Her work depicting Dreaming places and bush tucker from the Crocodile Hole area as well as the country around the middle reaches of the Ord and Turner Rivers where she was born, achieved almost immediate success. She was represented in the Telstra Art award exhibition in 1999 with a stunning picture Boornbem Goorlem, Hot Water Spring II done in black and pinkish red colour made by mixing red and white ochre. The spring is in a gorge with the open sky shown as a plain expanse of paint above the water and rock faces. Other works include Bush Honey - 'Sugarbag' Dreaming at Dry Swamp in which the dark cells of the hives float on a plain ground, and Loomoogool Blue Tongue Lizard Dreaming in which a prominent landscape feature is seen from the side.

Phyllis' work has been acquired by a number of collectors and galleries including a special focus purchase of five paintings by the Western Australian Art Gallery in 2000. Her painting "the Escape" done as part of a series of paintings relating to massacre stories by Jirrawun artists intended to be shown together as "Blood on the Spinifex" was exhibited at the Seventeenth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Exhibition in 2000 and was highly commended. It was purchased as part of the MAGNT Telstra collection. This image was used as the poster and catalogue cover for the exhibition at the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne between December 2002 and March 2003. An eight panel series on the same subject was shown at Raft Artspace in Darwin in April 2002. This was purchased by the Western Australian Art Gallery in 2003. Phyllis was also a singer and dancer with the Neminuwarlin Performance Group in its production of Fire, Fire Burning Bright which premiered at the Perth International Arts Festival in February



Short St. Gallery

2002 and opened the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts the State Theatre of Victoria in October 2002. She sings the haunting Warnalirri with Peggy Patrick on the second half of the group's CD released in 2002 during PIAF.

Themes

Country in the middle reaches of the Ord and Turner Rivers
Dreaming places around Turner River Station country
Traditional life practices of Aboriginal people prior to European settlement
Traditional Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) stories

Group Exhibitions

2018	Wynne Prize Finalist, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW
2017	Spiritual essence of the Earth with Warmun artists - Aboriginal Signature Estrangin gallery • Brussels
2017	For the Women - Tandanya, Adelaide
2016	Telling Tales: Excursions in narrative form - Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia
2015	Garnkiny: Constellations of Meaning - Short Street Gallery, Broome, WA
2014	Garnkiny: Constellations of Meaning - Melbourne VIC
2014	Warmun: Gija Contemporary Art of Western Australia - Harvey Art Projects, USA
2014	Warmun Aboriginal Art - Art Images Gallery, Adelaide, SA
2013	Nagarra & Naangari - Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2012	Earth: Ochre Painting from Warmun - Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland, NZ
2011	Where Knowledge Comes From - Gadfly Gallery, Perth, WA
2011	(Re) - Currents of Warrambany - Gecko Gallery, Broome, WA
2010	Ochres of the Kimberley - Tunbridge Gallery, Margaret River, WA
2010	Surface of Our Dreaming - Paintings by Gija Women - Chapman Gallery, Canberra, ACT
2010	Warmun - Our Earth Our Story - Art Images Gallery, Norwood, SA
2010	Putipula Gallery - Noosa, QLD
2010	Big Country - Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, NT
2010	Framed Gallery - Darwin, NT
2009	Warmun Ochres: Rich Earth - Gadfly Gallery, Perth, WA
2007	Warmun Snapshot, Aboriginal Art Fair - Darwin, NT
2007	Dog Dreamings - Seva Frangos Art, Perth, WA



Short St. Gallery

- 2006 Bungle Bungles, Short St. Gallery, Broome, WA
2006 Warmun Arts - Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, WA
2005 Warmun Women's Show, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2005 Gija: Across The Border, Raft Artspace, Darwin, NT
2005 Warmun Group Show, Framed Gallery, Darwin, NT
2005 Waterhole Country, Short St. Gallery, Broome, WA
2005 New Work From Warmun, Gadfly Gallery, Perth, WA
2004 Big Country Show, Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, NT
2002 Warmun Group Show, Flinders University Art Museum, SA
2001 Beyond Wings, Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide, SA
2001 Short on Size, Short St. Gallery, Broome, WA
2001 Ochres, Short St Gallery, Broome, WA
2001 New Paintings from Warmun Art Centre, Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane, QLD
2000 The Seventeenth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Exhibition - Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Darwin, NT
1999 My Country - Northern Territory University, Darwin, NT
1999 New art from the Kimberley - William Mora Galleries, Melbourne, VIC
1999 The Seventeenth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Exhibition - Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Darwin
1998 Jirrawun Artists - William Mora Galleries, Melbourne, VIC
1998 Jirrawun Artists from Crocodile Hole - Gemma Stowe, Perth, WA

Awards

- 2015 32nd Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award

Bibliography

- 1999 Ngalangangpum Jarrakpu Purrurn: Mother and Child, Margaret Stewart, Magabala Books, Broome, WA