

# Short St. Gallery



## Roy Wiggan

**Born** 1930 - 2015  
**Language** Bardi  
**Region** West Kimberley

Roy Wiggan is from the Bardi group in Western Australia. Ilma is a term that refers to open ceremonies performed by the Bardi people and the objects used in these ceremonies. The Bardi's country is situated north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula. Ilma ceremonies are composed and owned by individuals. These men are said to have received the songs and the form of the dances from rai spirits of dead men.

(Extract from Western Desert Appeal catalogue / assoc. with Papunya Tula exhibition, 2000)

Bardi totems are complex in design and are distinctively different from the more basic string cross designs in other areas of the Kimberley. The Bardi and neighbouring Jawi were a seafaring people who built flimsy rafts from light mangrove poles fastened together with wooden skewers. The people lived largely off marine products and had an unparalleled understanding of the intricacies of the treacherous tides, rips, whirlpools and overfalls for which the Buccaneer Archipelago is infamous.

During the war, the mission on Sunday Island closed down and the Bardi and Jawi people who had lived there were transferred to the Derby Reserve. Here they subsisted in abject conditions surrounded by mudflats, continually dreaming of a return to their beloved blue-water islands. Anthropologist Michael Robinson worked with these people during this crucial period, and presented a Master's Thesis to UWA.



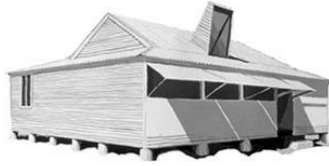
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Billy Ah Choo, one of the refugees from Sunday Island, was working on Camballin Station chasing birds off the rice fields when a series of songs came to him centred around the life of his close friend Henry Wiggan who had died. Billy's son Sammy is continuing with these songs and traditions, and Roy Wiggan, the eldest son of Henry, regularly has spiritual visits from his father who brings designs for the ilma Roy now creates. Many of these designs revolve around an epic saga when his father was washed out into the Indian Ocean on his raft which broke in half. He survived for three days before miraculously being carried back to Sunday Island by freak tides - and helping spirits. One of the ilma represents the flashing lighthouse at Cape Leveque. Others feature fish, birds, jellyfish, a seaweed that gives protection to pearlshells, a smoke signal, a waterspout, whirlpools and many more.

Another misadventure with a happy ending occurred while Henry Wiggan was skipper of the Mission lugger. The vessel, which was under sail and had no engine, was swept away in a fierce tidal rip. After being trapped in a whirlpool, the lugger was dashed against Mid Rock, a jagged outcrop located between East and West Roe Islands. The mast was broken and Henry's shoulder injured, but they nevertheless survived due to his singular power as a medicine man. He was able to conjure up a huge turtle which swam under the lugger and carried it back to the safety of Sunday Island.

## Exhibitions

- 2023 Black Sky, Perth Festival Visual Arts and University of Western Australia
- 2022 Making Worlds, Art Gallery of New South Wales, North Building, Sydney
- 2018 Sydney Biennale, Sydney, NSW
- 2016 Magic Object, Art Gallery of South Australia
- 2013 With or Without You, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and University of Western Australia
- 2012 Un-acclimatised, Monash University Museum of Art at Switchback Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2012 Fish in Australian Art, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney
- 2011 Pearls, Paint & Ilma, Aratong Galleries, Australian High Commission, Singapore
- 2008 25th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, MAGNT, Darwin
- 2008 The Ecologies Project, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne
- 2007 Aboriginal objects, sculpture and bush toys, Michael Reid at Elizabeth Bay
- 2005 Nararlala- recent works, Roy Wiggan, Mary's Place, Sydney, NSW
- 2005 Recent Works from Roy Wiggan, William Mora Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2004 'Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award', Darwin, NT



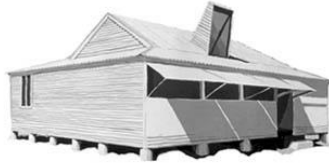
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- 2004 Desert Ocean, Short St. Gallery @ Kidogo Gallery, Fremantle, WA
- 2003 'Field', Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, QLD
- 2003 Roy Wiggan Solo Exhibition, Art Mob, Tas
- 2003 Waterhole, Raft Gallery @ Grant Pirie Gallery, Sydney, NSW
- 2002 Roy Wiggan Solo exhibition, Nimarnan - coming together, Short St. Gallery @ William Mora, Melbourne, VIC
- 1996 The Eye of the Storm: Eight Indigenous Australian Artists, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India
- 1996 13th National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Award, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Travelling Exhibition
- 1995 The Power of the Song - The Sea Journey, National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW
- 1994 Roy Wiggan - Tide Rider from the West, National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW
- 1993 The Tenth National Aboriginal Art Award Exhibition, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, NT
- 1993 Images of Power, Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1991 Sea People, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW

## Collections

National Gallery of Australia  
National Gallery of Victoria  
National Maritime Museum  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory  
Art Gallery of Western Australia  
Art Gallery of Adelaide  
Berndt Museum  
Lavery Collection  
Aimee Proust Collection  
Holmes a Court Collection  
Art Bank  
Stokes Collection  
Monash University Collection  
Royal Perth Hospital Art Collection  
UTS ARTGallery Collection

## Bibliography



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- 2018 Biennale of Sydney Showcases Artworks, Australian Jewish News, March 2018
- 2018 Art Monthly, Sydney Biennale, March 2018
- 2018 Off the Wall, Daily Telegraph, Saturday Extra, 17 March, 2018
- 2016 <http://adelaidebiennial.com.au/artist/roy-wiggan/>
- 2006 The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art
- 2005 Talk of the Town, ABC TV, 16th September 2005
- 2003 Ashley Crawford, Art in Australia, Jan-March 2003 review
- 2001 Philip Adams Late Night Live Program, ABC Radio
- 1997 Djon, M., Aboriginal Art Abroad: Responses to Touring Exhibitions in Europe, The United States and Asia, Art and Australia v.35 n.1 pp 68-73
- 1996 Caruana, W., The Eye of the Storm: Eight Contemporary Indigenous Australian Artists, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- 1993 Ryan, J., Images of Power, Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne