



Short St. Gallery



Tommy May (Ngarralja)

Born 1935 - 2022
Language Group Walmajarri
Region Fitzroy / West Kimberley

Ngarralja is a Wangkatjunga/Walmajarri man. He was born at Yarnkurnja, in the Great Sandy Desert. He dances and sings Kurtal, a ceremony relating to the main jila (living waterhole) in his country. He is also a painter and printmaker.

He is now referred to as Karrayili which means middle aged person. He is not yet an elder, but he has been given the job of spokesman by his old people. He is fluent in both Wangkajijunga and Walmajarri languages as well as English. He also writes Walmajarri. He was one of the first people to start up the Karrayili Adult Education centre because he wanted to learn to read and write in his own language and English.

"I was big when I left my country. I was already hunting by myself. I was with my young brother and my mother. My father had passed away by this time. I know these stories and these places in my country. We are not allowed to paint that story for other people's country. We will get killed or into trouble if we do this. We put that easy story, not a really hard story like law business. We can't paint that either. I first saw paintings in caves. I learned a lot from people, mostly my father and grandfather. I was living all around in my country, camping all around. Wurna juwal, always moving. When I paint I think about this.

My work is now like my drawing for printmaking, straight onto the tin, sometimes wood, using a knife or pens. I work every day, and I've travelled a lot with the paintings. Singapore, Houston, Washington DC, like that."

He is an important person for arts and culture in Fitzroy Crossing and was the formal Deputy Chairman of Mangkaja Arts and formal Chairman of Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC).



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Ngarraija was also an executive for the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) Board of Directors, and was a contributing artist to the Ngurarra Canvas used in the successful native title claim.

He lives with his children at Mindi Rardi Community, Fitzroy Crossing.

Solo Exhibitions

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| 2017 | Ngarraija Tommy May - On Tin, Raft South, Hobart, Tasmania |
| 2016 | Gimme Shelter - A Survey Show from the Artists of Fitzroy Valley, Short St Gallery, Broome, WA |
| 2016 | Wurna Juwal ReDot Gallery Singapore |
| 2009 | Luka (Mud) with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC |
| 2007 | Jilji Jaa Martuwarra with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC |
| 2007 | Lau Lau, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne |

Group Exhibitions

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| 2017 | NATSIAA, MAGNT, Darwin, NT |
| 2017 | Tanamthi art Gallery of South Australia, SA |
| 2017 | Trace Elements Courthouse Gallery, Port Headland, WA |
| 2016 | Scratching the Surface, IDAIA, Sydney NSW |
| 2016 | Gimme Shelter, Short St Gallery, Broome WA |
| 2016 | Masterpiece Art Fair, JGM Art, London, UK |
| 2015 | Hedland Art Award Courthouse Gallery, Port Hedland, WA |
| 2015 | New Frontiers Linden New Art, St Kilda, VIC |
| 2015 | Everybody's Prints Nomad Art, Darwin, NT |
| 2014 | Broken Hill Art Prize Broken Hill, NSW |
| 2014 | City of Hoart Prize Hobart, TAS |
| 2012 | Mangkaja Arts 21 Year Anniversary Tandyana, Adelaide, SA |
| 2012 | Couples Suzanne O'Connel Galley, Brisbane, QLD |
| 2012 | Prints, Paper, Canvas Nomad Art, Dawrin, NT |
| 2012 | Emerging Better Wors Arts, Sydney, NSW |
| 2011 | Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Darwin, NT |
| 2011 | Jumu & Wanirri Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC |
| 2009 | Mangkaja Artsists 60 x 60 Randell Lane Fine Art, Perth, WA |
| 2009 | Mangkaja Survey Show, Short St Gallery, Broome, WA |
| 2009 | Senior Artists from Fitzroy Crossing, Suzanne O'Connel Gallery, Brisbane, QLD |
| 2008 | More Than a Few Good Men, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane |
| 2007 | Jilji Jaa Martuwarra, Bridgette Braun Gallery, Melbourne |
| 2007 | Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Arts Centre, WA |



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- 2006 Impressions 2006. limited Edition prints by leading contemporary artists, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne
- 2005 This is Still My Country: Ngurrara Canvas, Artplace, Perth, Perth Concert Hall, Perth International Arts Festival
- 2003 Jila, Juma, Jiwari & Wirkuja, University of Western Australia
Murrkunkura Ngarrangkarnijangka Ngurrara: Three men's countries from the Dreamtime, Raft Artspace, Darwin
- 2002 Native Title Business - Contemporary Indigenous Art, national Traveling Exhibition, The 16th Asian International Art Exhibition, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2002 Group Show, Flinders lane Gallery, Melbourne
- 2001 Ngurrara Canvas, National Gallery of Australia
- 2001 Mangkaja Arts Ten Years On, Tandanya, Adelaide
- 2001 18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- 2000 Impressions! An exhibition of prints, Coomalie Centre, Batchelor, NT
- 2000 Group Show, Australian Print Workshop Gallery, Melbourne
- 2000 Fremantle Print Awards, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth
- 2000 People in Landscape: Contemporary Australian Prints, Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Manila
- 1999 Proof Positive, Gold Treasury Museum, Melbourne
- 1999 Cutting Comments: Contemporary Lino cut Prints 1995-98, Silk Cut Award Traveling Exhibition
- 1999 Story Boards: ceramic Tiles from the Kimberley, Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth
- 1998 Group Show, Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London
- 1997 Heritage Commission Art Award, Old Parliament House, Canberra
- 1996 Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth
- 1996 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- 1996 Heritage Commission Art Award, Old Parliament House, Canberra
- 1995 Mangkaja Paper Works, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide
- 1995 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin. Selected to tour nationally with the first NATSIAA travelling exhibition
- 1995 Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre
- 1995 Prints from the APW Collection, Survey show of recent works from the APW archive, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne
- 1994 Ngarakura Ngurrara Minyarti, This is My Country, Festival of Perth Exhibition, Artplace Gallery, Perth
- 1993 Images of Power, Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley, National Gallery of Victoria



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Publications

- 2015 Feature Film: Putuparri and the Rainmakers
- 2009 FORM and the National Museum of Australia
Canning Stock Route Project: Ngurra Kuju Walyja [One Country One People]
- 2007 Art Gallery NSW
One Sun One Moon, Aboriginal Art in Australia
- 2006 Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) NEW LEGEND: A Story of Law and Culture and the Fight for Self-Determination in the Kimberley
- 2005 Exhibition Catalogue: Red Dot Gallery, Singapore
Surprise; Cory and Friends
- 2004 National Gallery of Victoria
Colour Power: Aboriginal art post 1984
- 2004 University of Western Australia / Berndt Museum of Anthropology
ON TRACK: Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Western Australia
- 2003 Exhibition Catalogue:
Cullity Gallery UWA Perth / Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency
Martuwarra and Jila [River and Desert]
- 2003 Martuwarra and Jila, Jumu, Jiwari and Wirrkujia, Exhibition Catalogue, Cullity Gallery, UWA Perth/Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency
Australian Art Collector. Review/Maurice O'Riordan
The Painted Desert: The fate of an Aboriginal Masterpiece, New Yorker Magazine July 28, 2003
- 2002 Native Title Business Contemporary Indigenous Art. Joan Winter. Gurang Land Council. Regional Galleries Assn QLD
Kurtal; Snake Spirit.Video Documentary/ABC Television
- 2000 Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art,Oxford University Press & ANU
Karrayili The history of Karrayili Adult Education Centre, IATSIS Canberra
- 2001 Painting Up Big, The Ngurrara Canvas, Kaltja Now National Aboriginal Cultural Institute - Tandanya
18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
People in Landscape. Contemporary Australian Prints. Exhibition Catalogue. University of Melbourne
16th Asian International Art Exhibition. Exhibition Catalogue. Australian Print Workshop Inc.
- 1998 Jila Painted Waters of the Great Sandy Desert, Video Documentary/SBS Television
- 1994 Ngajakura Ngurrara Minyarti, This is My Country, Exhibition Catalogue

Collections



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Kluge Ruhe Museum of Aboriginal Art - Charlottesville USA
National Museum of Australia
National Gallery of Victoria
Curtin University Collection, Perth
Queensland State Art Gallery Berndt
Museum of Anthropology Australian Print Workshop
Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide
Carleton College Art Collection, Northfield Minnesota
Kennesaw State University Little
Creatures Collection Fitzroy Crossing
High School Fitzroy Crossing Hospital
Leewuin Estate Collection

Awards

2018	Finalist Alice Price
2017	Finalist Port Headland Art Award
2017	Finalist NATSIAA - General Painting
2017	Finalist Bunbury Art Prize
2017	Finalist, NATSIAA, MAGNT, Darwin, NT
2015	Port Hedland Art Award, Best work in a medium other than painting
2010	Regional Arts Australia Volunteer Awards, sustained contribution

Public Art

2012	Fitzroy Crossing Police Station
2010	Fitzroy Valley High School
2008	Fitzroy Valley Education Centre – Panels Project
2008	Fitzroy Crossing Hospital - paintings on canvas, foyer design
2010	Fitzroy Crossing Swimming Pool
2012	Fitzroy Crossing Police Station – Glass Panels

Positions Held

Ongoing	Senior Advisor of Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency
2007	Men's Chairperson: Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) This position required Ngarralja Tommy May to: Represent KALACC to assist and promote the ceremonies, songs and dances of the Kimberley people to encourage and strengthen the social, cultural and legal values and ensure the traditions are given deserved recognition in Australian society, 2007-2009



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- 2009 Representative of KALACC on the National Heritage Board for the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) This position requires Ngarraja Tommy May to Sit on the Board as a special advisor to the KLC on Heritage matters in the Kimberley.
- 1987 Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA)
Positions held: Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Ordinary Director, Stand-In Director, 1987-2008
- 2006 Cultural Liaison Officer, 2006-2009
Canning Stock Route Project
- 2005 KALACC representative with Wayne Bergmann
Met the King and Queen of Sweden in Perth and dined with them to discuss the importance of repatriation.
- 1998 KALACC representative
Visited Parliament House in Canberra with Joe Brown
Member of the Indigenous Reference Group on Intellectual Property
This position requires Ngarraja Tommy May to Travel to workshops to advise and develop policy on Indigenous copyright issues Represent the views of local Aboriginal people at conferences in relation to Indigenous copyright issues
Hold meetings locally to let people know about the issues discussed at the reference group meetings
Founder of Mangkaja Arts and Deputy Chairman
This position requires Ngarraja Tommy May to act on behalf of the Chairman in his absence Provide leadership to the executive Provide direction to the manager