Short St. Gallery

Alison Jarnja Burgu



Born	1966 - 2025
Skin	Djingun
Language Group	Ngarinyin
Region	West Kimberley

Biography

Alison is the second eldest daughter of Mowanjum artist and elder Stateman, Roger Burgu. As a six year old, Alison appeared in Michael Edol's award winning film *LaiLai,* which focuses on traditional Aboriginal Culture in the Wororra homelands near Doubtful Nay.

Alison was born in Derby hospital and educated in Derby, completing her secondary education in the early 1980's. She undertook work experience as a nurse's aide and later a teacher's aide, before securing permanent employment at the Holy Rosary School as a teacher's aide.

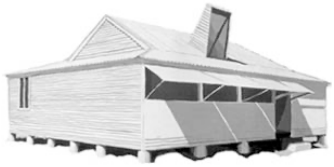
She says of her eight-year experience, *"I learnt how things worked. How to work with teachers and other aides, I was going to conferences in Broome, expanding myself and learning from others, learning how to make programs for children and how to teach. I made my own work for the children. It gave me a lot of skills. Nursing also helped me to care for the old, children and others in my community."*

When Alison had her daughter, she left town. Through the Community Employment Development Project, Alison was offered the opportunity to make a contribution to her community and she entered the project as a trainee pre-school teacher.

Alison describes her first painting experience as *"not good"*. She adds, *"I couldn't draw anything. No good at drawing animals or Wandjina. Just couldn't do it properly. I would look at other people's work and would just keep doing it… I was making mistakes, the hands were too small, the head was too small. Just kept going, doing it again and again."*

When the community learnt to paint at the Mowanjum Halll, Alison leant to apply 'different backgrounds and ways to use the paint.' She adds, *"I used old people's style first (like in the caves) and now I have improved and have my own way. I am satisfied where I am."*

"When my father and uncle were alive, I heard lots of stories. I put them in the paintings. Stories were important. They taught us about culture. We can talk to our children about it. Culture needs to be strong in this community and our families."



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Alison's father, Rodger Burgu, was a church minister for the Mowanjum community. *"He did a lot of work with the people, speaking out for the community, speaking to Government. I was very close to him. I learnt from him, things that are very close to my heart like showing fairness."*

In the book 'Mowanjum- 50 years community history', a self-published history of Mowanjum artist about the Mowanjum Community, Roger Burgu writes, *"Wudu is a discipline for the kids. If a kid goes to town, they want that lollie or cool drink. In wudu, that's the way we train our kids. We can put smoke on the kids. That's the Wandjina giving is that thing for our kids."*

Alison says the Wandjina is *"like God. The Wandjina and God are alike. The culture and law together. That is my belief. In me there are two special parts. I will always keep these. Meaningful to me, you know "* Alison is also a Christian; *"I understand both sides".*

"The Wandjina helps us lead our lives in a good way. our teenagers are reading about it, growing up with their culture. The knowledge put in their minds, settles them down, especially the young teenagers. It makes me happy to see them accept the meaning. We teach them about their lives by touching their hearts and stopping the foolishness."

Alison has visited her grandmother's country, Worrorra, where she visited the Wandjinas in the caves. Alison remembers *"I felt right at home and relaxed. I remember my grandfather used to paint the Wandjinas, the paint had faded and he would repaint them. It's old country and the old spirit. We are looking after him (the wandjina). To go to the caves you need to have an old person with you, someone like Donny (Woolagoodja) You can't just go there."*

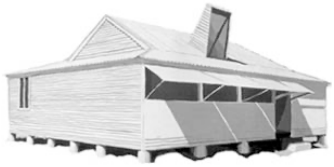
Alison helps at the annual Mowanjum Festival helping children make totems, which are used as part of the ceremonial dress at the festival. *"In annual events like these, culture is passed down. We are proud of what we are doing at the art centre. As parents, we can see that the children know what they are doing and they know the meaning. They can see and feel it."*

Solo Exhibitions

2012 Wandjinas – Darwin Art Fair

Group Exhibitions

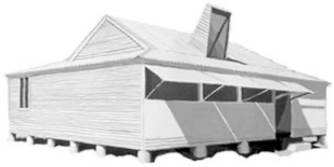
2017 Sydney Opera House Sydney Homeground Markets
2017 Paintings Tarnanthi Art Fair (Adelaide, South Australia)



Short St. Gallery

2016	Wandjina Darwin Art Gallery, 5th Telstra Art Award Museum
2016	Darwin Art Fair – Darwin, Northern Territory
2016	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2016	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2015	Darwin Art Fair – Darwin, Northern Territory
2015	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2015	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2014	Darwin Art Fair – Darwin, Northern Territory
2014	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2014	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2013	Darwin Art Fair – Darwin, Northern Territory
2013	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2013	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2012	Shinju Matsuri Wandjina, Budda Budding – Broome 6 Gallery
2012	Darwin Art Fair – Darwin, Northern Territory
2012	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2012	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
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2010	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2009	Mowanjum Fesival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2009	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2008	8 Shinju Matsuri Wandjina Budda Budding – Broome 6 Gallery
2008	Kimberley Art Prize – Derby Western Australia
2008	Mowanjum Fesival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2008	Cultural Connections - Artitja Art Gallery, Perth
2008	Spirit of the Wandjina - Shinju Matsuri Exhibition Broome 6 Gallery
2007	Mowanjum Fesival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2007	Arralululai – Broome 6 Gallery
2007	Mowanjum Exhibition Woodford Dreaming Festival, QLD
2006	Spirit of the Wandjina - Governor Stirling Tower, Perth
2006	Power of the Wandjina – Macquarie University Sydney
2005	Spirit of the Wandjina – Broome 6 Gallery
2005	Keeping the Wandjinas Fresh- Exhibition and book launch - Alexander Library Perth
2005	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2005	Mowanjum Exhibition Woodford Dreaming Festival, QLD
2004	Mowanjum Exhibition – Sydney Dreaming Festival
2004	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby

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2003	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2003	Spirit of the Wandjina, Harvey Bay QLD
2002	Visions from the Cave – Sun Picture Theatre, Broome
2002	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2001	Recent Works - Melbourne Spirit of the Wandjina Gallery
2001	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2000	The Art of the Wandjina - Sydney Olympics Exhibition, NSW
2000	Spirit of the Wandjina - Compass Travel Postonja Slovenia
2000	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, Derby
2000	Spirit of the Wandjina Exhibition - Melbourne
1999	5th Telstra Art Award Museum and Art Gallery of the NT- Darwin
1999	Power of the Wandjina Telstra National Headquarters - Melbourne
1999	Recent Works Spirit of the Wandjina Gallery - Melbourne
1999	Power of the Wandjina - Governor Stirling Tower, Perth
1999	Spirit of the Wandjina Exhibition - Governor Place, Sydney
1999	Mowanjum Festival - Mowanjum Community
1998	Spirit of the Wandjina - Telstra National Headquarters, Melbourne
1998	Mowanjum Festival - Mowanjum Community
1998	Mowanjum Wandjina Art – Matso's Broome
1998	Spirit of the Wandjina – Grosvenor Place, Sydney
1997	Mowanjum Festival – Mowanjum Community

Publications

WA Tourism Web site - featured artist 2008
KAA collective of Kimberley artists - featured artist 2008/2009

Bibliography

2004	The Observer
2010	Mowanjum 50 year Community History
2010	Mowanjum Artists Defend Their Art in Sydney, Arts Backbone, Jenny Wright

Commissions

2000	Sydney Olympics Opening Ceremony - large scale sculpture