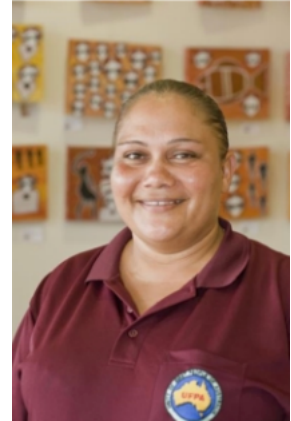




Short St. Gallery



Leah Umbagai

Born	1974
Region	West Kimberley
Language	Worrorra

Leah was born in Derby Hospital. She attended kindergarten at Mowanjum Pre-school and completed high school at Derby District High. Raised by Donny Woolagoodja and Mildred Mungulu, Leah demonstrates a great love and understanding of her culture in her artwork. She produces breathtaking Wandjina images and pictures of the constellations Seven Sisters and Wallungunder, son of the first Wandjina, Idjair, whose spirit lives in the Milky Way in the shape of an emu.

In addition to being one of the Kimberley's top basketballers, Leah juggles her art with the care of her young son Folau and her work as an Executive Councillor for Mowanjum and the remote Larinyuwar outstation, where she spends a considerable amount of time.

Leah has always possessed a conspicuous artistic talent - she was awarded the prestigious Marlene Bruce Art Award for Kimberley Aboriginal Art at the age of just 20. Her work is keenly sought and represented in many collections throughout Australia.

Leah commenced practicing as an artist at a very young age. "I was small when I started painting with my Grandmother (ElkinUmbagai). She brought me up and then she passed when I was five years old." Leah then went to live with Mildred and Donny Woolagoodja. Leah likes "being around the older people". "I liked the stories my grandmother and grandfather used to tell me, passing on the law of our country. They didn't teach me they passed on the stories, telling me the significance of each animal and the way to live life."



Short St. Gallery

Leah's grandfather used to take her to the cave sites. "He taught me about the land, water, rocks. Janet Oobagooma was also teaching me what I needed to learn about our culture. We walked seven hours a day looking at the caves. When you are there the spirit speaks to you. It is glad you are around. Some places can be interpreted and in others I wonder what they are saying. My passion for painting is from these experiences." Leah continues, "My passion for painting is also from my relationships, my clan and my country and also in my dreaming. I dream when I am in my country. In my dream, my grandfather and grandmother gave me a song or dance. I say no I want to paint. I believe the spirits show you things through dreams. I can have a dream before I paint."

Leah's totem is the freshwater barramundi. Leah explains, "It is my ungud, my dreaming. It belongs to the story about Ungud (the snake). In traditional storytelling ungud is given to the father or grandfather through dreams or as a living animal to the parent. When the child dies the spirit returns to the animal. What is taken by the earth is given back. If you have a special animal, you cannot eat it. It just doesn't taste right, to sort of eat yourself."

Leah represents her culture through painting stories about the son of the first Wandjina, Idjair, whose spirit lives in the MilkyWay, Wallununda, in the shape of an emu. It is said that the Wandjinas were sent by Idjair. The painting contains images of the snake, turtles and crocodiles, the whole of creation, and represents the dynamic forces between the spiritual and physical worlds, desire and law, procreation and ethical codes of conduct. Leah explains, "I got a grilling for this painting (Wallununda). I saw it in my dream. I told them the elders that I dreamt the story and they then said it was ok. The spirit spoke to you through your dream.' She adds, "You are not supposed to draw this story. Others can't draw this. You can only draw what you are allowed to tell in your country."

Regarding her art practice Leah says, "As a painter, I'll try anything. I sketch, draw totems and landscapes. Living in a Western way, I can combine both ways. At first I didn't like using ochre on canvas. The traditional way is to use it on clay, slate or bark. It is awkward to change this traditional way of painting but the paintings I am working on now are ochre and look better, look nice." Leah likes to draw animals and stories and she confides that she will only paint her tribal Wandjina from Worrorra country or all three Wandjinas together, representing the Mowandjum community. Leah started painting at home. At school she "practiced all sorts of skills, learning to sketch, screen print, make etchings. Art was always there. Norval, the art teacher at Mowanjum Hall, encouraged me even more. My real passion for painting is influenced by my culture."

Leah encourages her son and other young relatives to paint by drawing with them. "I draw cars, cartoons, draw stuff they play with and show them how to draw faces. We do paintings together. I look at stuff and I can draw it. I tell them everyone has their own way of looking. We are all different." What does Leah like about painting? "When I paint, I can have



Short St. Gallery

a million people shouting at me and I can't hear a thing. I am in the space. I love painting. Painting and even a song or a dance is connected to who you are otherwise it means nothing."

Leah is currently studying community management. "I have worked in so many areas but now I will actually have a certificate to prove it. It's a good achievement for my community. You need to know the Western way before you can get something done. I would like to have my own business one day."

Group Exhibitions

2024	Country Bin Pull'em. Looking back together, Museum fuer Weltkulturen Frankfurt a.M., Germany
2024	We are still here Kimberley Arts and Photography Prize, Derby, WA
2024	Revealed, Fremantle Art Centre, Fremantle, WA
2023	FORM: Represent, Aboriginal Figurative Practice in Western Australia (Part 1)
2023	Kimberley Art and Photography Prize
2023	REVEALED: Emerging Aboriginal Western Australian Artists, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle, WA
2023	FORM- Represent exhibition, Perth, WA
2022	Sydney Contemporary
2022	NATSIAA, Finalist Painting MAGNT, Darwin, NT
2020	Shinju Art Award
2020	NATSIAA, Finalist paintings MAGNT, Darwin, NT
2019	Moonies Art Studio/Gallery, Broome, WA
2018	Port Hedland Art Prize, Port Hedland Court House Gallery, Port Hedland, WA
2017	Derby Christmas Markets, Derby, WA
2017	Sydney Opera House Sydney Homeground Markets
2017	prints Port Hedland Court house & Markets
2017	Paintings Tamaranthi Art Fair (Adelaide, South Australia)
2017	paintings Darwin Art Fair Emerging Aboriginal Western Australian Artists (Fremantle Gallery - Perth)
2017	Revealed Painting Japingka Gallery (Fremantle)
2017	(prints) Fremantle Art Centre
2017-2005	Mowanjurn Ar & Culture Festival Exhibitions
2017	Kimberley Art Prize
2016	Revealed, Fremantle Art Centre, WA
2016	Darwin Art Fair, NT
2015	Revealed, Fremantle Art Centre, WA
2014	Revealed, Fremantle Art Centre. WA
2012	NATSIAA, NT
2010	NATSIAA, NT



Short St. Gallery

2009	Sharing Difference on Common Ground, Holmes a Court Gallery, Perth, WA
2008	Shinju Matsuri Wandjina Budda Budding, Broome 6 Gallery, WA
2008	Kimberley Art Prize
2008	Cultural Connections – Artija Art Gallery, WA
2008	Spirit of the Wandjina - Shinju Matsuri Exhibition
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- Exhibi on and book launch - Alexander Library, Perth, WA
2005	Mowanjum Exhibition - Festival of the Dreaming Woodford, QLD
2004	Mowanjum Exhibition - Sydney Dreaming Festival, Sydney, NSW
2003	Spirit of the Wandjina - Harvey Bay QLD
2002	Visions from the Cave - Sun Picture Theatre, Broome
2001	Recent Works - Melbourne Spirit of the Wandjina Gallery
2000	The Art of the Wandjina - Sydney Olympics Exhibition, NSW
2000	Spirit of the Wandjina - Compass Travel Postonja Slovenia
2000	Spirit of the Wandjina Exhibition – Melbourne
1999	Young Visions of Ancient Land – Governor Place, Sydney
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
1998	Spirit of the Wandjina - Telstra National Headquarters, Melbourne
1998	Mowanjum Wandjina Art – Matzo's Broome
1998	Spirit of the Wandjina – Grosvenor Place, Sydney
1998	Kids from the Kimberley – Art Gallery of Western Australia – Perth
1993	Kewdale Senior High School – Year 12 Art Awards
1987	America's Cup Poster Competition

Collections

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, WA
Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt.M., Germany
Parliament House Perth, WA
Western Australia Museum, Perth



Short St. Gallery

Awards

2022	Finalist: Telstra NATSIAA Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
2020	Finalist: Telstra NATSIAA Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
2019	First Nations Award: City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder Art Prize WA
2012	Finalist: Telstra NATSIAA Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
2010	Finalist: Telstra NATSIAA Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
1999	Finalist: Telstra NATSIAA Museum and Art Galler of the Northern Territory
1998	Kimberley Art Prize
1993	Marlene Bruce Awards for Kimberley Artists
1991	Kewdale Senior High School – Year 12 Art Awards