

# Short St. Gallery

## Kumpaya Girgirba

**Birth Year** 1932  
**Language Group** Manyjilyjarra  
**Region** The Pilbara



### Biography

*"I came back to do painting in my side [region] and even taught the others to paint. My auntie showed me how to paint and ... which part of the Country I should do- only my area and my stories on my side... From there I never stop painting, and first when I started I did so many, lots and lots of painting ... and so we taught each other and everybody else is doing it now.*

*Wangka is storytelling – like a drawing, putting something on the canvas. Painting it, but old people used to tell stories on the sand, with fingertips... They draw it in the sand like they do on a canvas. [I paint] my own [stories], where I came from, where my parents used to take me, where my grandparents' area [was], where we used to hunt and go place to place, camping with my parents and grandparents."*

### - Kumpaya Girgirba, as translated by Ngalangka Nola Taylor

Kumpaya is a Manyjilyjarra woman, respected law woman and cultural leader, born in the 1940s close to Kiwirrkurra, a rockhole located in the Gibson Desert and to the south-west of Lake McKay. Her brothers include the renowned artists Charlie Wallabi (Walapayi), Helicopter and Patrick Tjungurrayi, all of whom she has outlived. In her youth, Kumpaya grew up in the area surrounding Kiwirrkurra, and continued to live a pujiman (traditional, desert dwelling) lifestyle into adulthood; *"When I was a young girl, I walked everywhere, travelling along the Canning Stock Route. I walked north and west, around Wana warla (lake). I grew up around there, going right around that Country and all the way back to Kunawarritji."* (Kumpaya Girgirba)

Kumpaya intentionally avoided the European drovers that travelled along the Canning Stock Route, but eventually she, her husband, three children and the extended family group with whom she was travelling encountered surveyor Len Beadell in 1963. He was grading roads through the Western Desert for the Woomera Missile Testing Range. *"That whitefella had fruit, flour and tucker... He gave all the little kids fruit [and they] made the biggest waru (fire)... and cooked it. When they came back... it had cooked away to nothing, there was nothing there to eat."* (Kumpaya Girgirba)



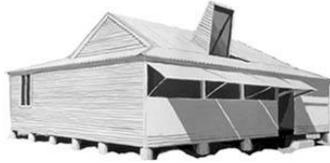
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Len Beadell notified staff at Jigalong Mission of their whereabouts, and consequently they were tracked and persuaded to relocate to the mission. There they re-joined many relatives that had already moved in from the desert. After living for a time at the mission, Kumpaya worked on several pastoral stations throughout the Pilbara, washing clothes and making damper (a type of flat bread). In 1982, during the 'Return to Country' movement, she relocated with her family to Parnngurr Aboriginal community, where she continues to live today with her children and grandchildren.

Kumpaya is an extraordinary teacher and orator, with skill in gathering artists together for large collaborative projects. She primarily paints her *ngurra* (home Country, camp), along the middle section of the Canning Stock Route, and between Punmu Aboriginal community and Kiwirrkurra, more than 500 kilometres eastward. Kumpaya learned how to paint and weave baskets while visiting family in Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing and Patjarr, and is credited with introducing these skills to Martu people. Kumpaya's work has been exhibited widely across Australia and internationally and acquired by the National Museum of Australia.

## Group Exhibitions

- 2022 Tracks We Share
- 2021 Martumili Mob, The Courthouse Gallery, Port Hedland, WA
- 2021 Paper Wangka (Paper Story), Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2021 Pukurlpa (happy inside), Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2020 Belonging to Martu, Harvey Arts Project, Idaho, US
- 2020 Ngurra Means Home, Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2020 Contemporary Desert Art, Dellasposa, London, UK
- 2020 Strong Country, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2020 Matriarchs 2020, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2019 In Cahoots, touring exhibition from Fremantle Art Centre, Fremantle, WA
- 2019 Nyurnma (burnt Country), Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin NT
- 2017 Community Life, Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2016 Desert Mob, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT
- 2016 Black White & Restive, Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle, NSW
- 2015 Three Deserts Singing, Frewen Arts, Piccadilly, Mayfair, London
- 2015 Martumili Artists, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2014 Martumili, Harvey Art Projects, USA
- 2014 Martu Art From the Western Desert, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW
- 2014 Malya Yuturringu; be a star, State Theatre Centre, Perth, WA
- 2013 Australia, Royal Academy of the Arts, London, England
- 2012 We Don't Need A Map: a Martu experience of the Western Desert
- 2012 Martumili Artists 2012, Merenda Gallery, Perth



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- 2012 Warla: an explanation of the salt lakes in the Great Sandy Desert, Short Street Gallery, Broome
- 2012 Decrochage de l'exposition des Martumili Artists, Galerie Kungka, France
- 2012 Martumili Artists at Art Mob, Art Mob, Hobart
- 2012 Yiwarra Kuju (One Road), Australian Museum, Sydney
- 2011 Waru! Holding Fire in Australia's Western Desert, Thomas Welton Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford University, San Francisco
- 2011 Revealed – Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia, Gallery Central, Perth
- 2011 Yiwarra Kuju (One Road), Perth Convention Exhibition Centre, Perth
- 2010 Jakulpa laju kartyinpa (Bringing a message), Chapman Gallery, Canberra
- 2010 Yiwarra Kuju – One Road, One People, National Museum of Australia, Canberra
- 2010 Martumili Group Exhibition, Redot Art Gallery, Singapore
- 2010 Desert Mob, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 2009 Puntu kurnu (Belongs to the people), Newman Visitors Centre, Newman
- 2009 Warranpalampaju kayili yaninpa (Our Country travelling north), Raft Art Space, Darwin
- 2009 Yankuni Laju Karnkani Kujungka (We are travelling together by air), Red Dot Gallery, Singapore
- 2008 Martumili Artists Recent Works, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne
- 2008 Ngurra waltja wakarni (We are painting country), Short St Gallery, Broome
- 2008 Martumili Artists, Port Hedland Courthouse Arts Centre and Gallery, Port Hedland
- 2008 Jitirangu (Rainbow), Randell Lane Gallery, Perth
- 2007 Martu-la wakarnu kuwarri wiyaju, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne
- 2006 Parnngurr Artists, Stanford University, California

## **Collections**

National Museum of Australia  
Art Gallery of Western Australia