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East Kimberley artist shortlisted in Silver Jubilee Telstra Art Award

East Kimberley's Shirley Purdie is one of over 100 entrants to be short listed in this year's prestigious 25th *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award*.

Shirley's three-dimensional work *Ngalangangpum (Mother and Child)* is a 100cm high wood carving, colourfully painted in locally sourced and pounded ochres. Ngalanganpum means Mother and Child in the local Gija language, and is used to signify Mary and Jesus.

The work explores the spiritual communication between two cultures – Christian and Gija – and the similarities between the two belief systems.

Shirley, a senior Warmun artist who was born at Mabel Downs Station in 1948 before moving to the Warmun Community in 1968 is also a strong law and culture woman and an important ceremonial singer and dancer in her community. Inspired by older Warmun artists, including her mother Madigan Thomas, Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie, her Uncle Jack Britten encouraged Shirley to paint and she began painting her country.

"It's good to learn from old people, they keep saying when you paint you can remember that country, just like a photo, good to put in painting so kids can know and understand. When the old people die, young people can read the stories from the paintings," Shirley said.

Shirley is a former finalist in the *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award* and in 2007 her work *Stations Of The Cross* won the Blake Prize for Religious Art.

Museum and Art Gallery (MAGNT) Acting Director, Apolline Kohen said the great diversity of Indigenous expression is reflected in the artworks submitted this year which range from 2D works on paper, bark and canvas to 3D works made from fibre, ironwood and fibreglass.

"The quality of the art works we have received for this year's Silver Jubilee is outstanding, and there is no doubt the judges will have a difficult time selecting the winners," Ms Kohen said.

Lawrie Mortimer, General Manager of the Telstra's Indigenous Directorate, said the Telstra Art Award provides incredible exposure for Indigenous artists from all around Australia.

"Telstra's support of this Award helps ensure the continued development of Indigenous art in Australia by identifying and recognising the country's most talented artists, no matter where they live," Mr Mortimer said.

The overall \$40,000 Telstra Award and further four media categories will again be non-acquisitive in 2008, which means the winning artists can retain or sell their works.

"We're expecting many of the works to be in great demand following the announcement of this year's winners," Ms Kohen said.

"Last year, over two thirds of finalists sold their works for a combined total of more than \$850,000."



Winners in the Telstra Art Award will be announced on Friday 15 August at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and works will be on display until Sunday 26 October 2008.

The Telstra Art Award is open to all adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and aims to showcase the very best Australian Indigenous art from around the country.

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Media note: To speak to Telstra Art Award finalists call Melanie Neilson on 0400 599 463.

The 25th *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award* is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.



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