

20th
TELSTRANATIONAL
ABORIGINAL &
TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER
art AWARD



16 August - 7 December 2003

director's MESSAGE

This year marks a major milestone as the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award celebrates its twentieth year.

Established in 1984 by the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, the Award celebrates the diversity and strength of Indigenous art.

Indigenous art has a unique vitality, which continues to develop and grow. As Director of the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory this is the third Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award I have been associated with. I am especially honoured to be a part of the twentieth celebrations of this landmark Award.

The Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award provides the opportunity for artists to receive deserving national recognition of their work through this prestigious Award.

I congratulate the four category winners, and the First Prize winner, and also acknowledge the other artists whose works were selected for this year's Award. The contribution by all the entrants embodies the artistic excellence, authenticity, and significance within a unique culture and tradition.

I also take this opportunity to extend my gratitude and appreciation to Telstra for its valuable support and ongoing partnership. Telstra have provided a leading example in the Northern Territory, in the opportunities that can be created in promoting and sustaining the creative dimension in our society.

Anna Malgorzewicz
Director
Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
August 2003

sponsor's MESSAGE

This year the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award celebrates 20 years of support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art - one of the oldest living art traditions in the world. Since 1992 Telstra has been principal sponsor of the award and is proud of the leadership role the Award plays in promoting contemporary indigenous art.

Telstra has a strong commitment to supporting the communities in which we operate and the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award reflects our commitment to our Indigenous communities and to regional and rural Australia.

In addition to the Telstra First Prize of \$40 000 and four additional category awards each of \$4000, Telstra's sponsorship includes acquisition of works

for the Telstra collection at the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. This means that local, national and international visitors to the gallery are able to enjoy the collection.

Telstra congratulates this year's winners along with the organisers and all the artists who have contributed to ensuring the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award remains the most prestigious event in the indigenous arts calendar.

Dr Ziggy Switkowski
Chief Executive Officer
Telstra
August 2003



telstra
first PRIZE \$40,000

Richard Bell

Gamillaroy language
Brisbane QLD

Scientia E Metaphysica
(Bell's Theorem)

2003
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas



telstra general PAINTING AWARD \$4,000

Regina Wilson

Marathiel language
Peppimenarti NT

Syaw - Fish Net

2003

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

This painting represents the stitch and weave of the syaw or fish net. The weaving method is the same as the stitch used in weaving the *warrgarri* (dilly bag) except bigger.

The *pinbin* (bush vine) grows near the river and is stripped into fibres which are then woven into the net. The *syaw* is used to catch fish, prawn and other edible living creatures in the creeks and rivers.

highly COMMENDED

Lily Morton Akemarr

Ampilatwatja, Utopia NT

Arreth

Tommy Watson

Irrunytju (Wingellina) WA

Wipu

The judges commend Lily Morton Akemarr's *Arreth* for its delicate invocation of an almost translucent desert landscape. Lily's Ampilatwatja community has in recent years produced works of distinction, as has the Irrunytju community and Tommy Watson's commended painting, *Wipu* bursts with sensory overload of the riotous colours of the desert.

telstra bark PAINTING AWARD \$4,000

Galuma Maymuru

Manggalili clan
Bangardijan subsection
Yirritja moiety
Dhuruputjpi NT (residence)

Guwak

2002

Natural pigments on bark

This is a major clan painting about Djarrakpi, the Manggalili clan homeland at the tip of Cape Shield, a promontory overlooking the northern aspect into Blue Mud Bay. At Djarrakpi there is a lake of brackish water behind the massive coastal sand-dunes. The other side of the lake is scrubby woodland. The Manggalili regard the lake as a place signifying fertility, whose sandiness is the domain of the spirit sisters Nyapalingu (symbolised by the X shapes). The other side is associated with the male Guwak people who were sent to find this place by the Yirritja Creator Being Barama. Upon arriving at Djarrakpi the Guwak alighted on the sacred Marawili tree, a *gan'yawu* or bush cashew tree. The Guwak men are shown here both in the guise of the Koel cuckoo and as a sacred object entwined in sacred possum-fur string. After the Guwak founded Djarrakpi they brought the Manggalili people there.

The wavy bands of crosshatching are the sacred clan signature of the Manggalili and symbolise many things, including the sand country of Djarrakpi and the tracks left behind by the various totemic species at Djarrakpi, including Marrngu the Ringtail Possum and Gunyan, the scavenger Ghost crab

The Guwak is also associated with death and mortuary rituals. Guwak's companion, Marrngu the Possum, spun its own fur into sacred string and anchored it on the sacred Marawili tree where it connects to the reservoir of Manggalili souls: The Milky Way. Depicted also is a *yingapungapu* - a ceremonial sand sculpture, for the confinement then release of the deceased's spirit. *Wangupini* - the feminine cumulonimbus thunderhead 'pregnant' with the wet season rains, is shown at the ends of the sculpture. The sandhills and winds also bear this mark.



The spearthrower refers to Malwiya the Emus who dug with their spears trying to find freshwater but found only water contaminated with salt. The Emus threw their spears in frustration over the dunes and into the sea. Where they landed freshwater bubbled to the surface. These wells are exposed today at low tide.

(Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre)

highly COMMENDED

Samuel Namunjdja

Maningrida NT

Bilwoyinj Site

From Maningrida, bark painter Samuel Namundja's *Bilwoyinj Site* is commended for its exquisite patterning and controlled energy.



telstra
work on PAPER
AWARD \$4,000

Alick Tipoti

Kala Lagaw Ya language
Torres Strait QLD

***Kuiyk ar Mari - Head and Spirit
(Reincarnation)***

2003

Linocut

'This story recorded from my father Leniaso Tipoti.
Story originates from Badu Island, Torres Strait'

(Alick Tipoti)

highly COMMENDED

Danie Mellor

Canberra ACT (residence)

Cyanthea cooperi

Danie Mellor's *Cyanthea cooperi*, is a magnificent mezzotint, complete with fernscape imagery and a funky border, which echoes the moss and ferns of the rainforest and the technical attributes of his chosen medium.



wandjuk marika 3D MEMORIAL AWARD \$4,000

sponsored by TELSTRA

Lorna Jin-gubarrangunyja

Galijan subsection
Jowanga moiety
Bararra (Martay) language
Maningrida NT

Conical Fishtrap

2003

Fibre (Pandanus spiralis)

The Maningrida region is known for its conical fish traps. Traditionally, only men were involved in the construction of the large fish traps, but small children would crawl inside to assist with fixing the inner trap. Now women also sometimes make them. Traditionally the conical fish traps are inserted into barriers made with long mats or fences of upright wooden stakes wadded with grass, to divert fish into the trap.

Burarra and Kuninjku people are particularly renowned for making fish traps. Burarra make conical fish traps called *jina-bakara*, using pandanus (Pandanus spiralis). The Kuninjku people traditionally make two sorts of conical fish traps, one called

mandjabu made from the vine *milil* (Malaisia scandens) and a smaller one called *manyilk mandjabu* made from the sedgegrass *manyilk* (Cyperus javanicus). The large *milil* conical fish trap is bigger and stronger than the *manyilk* variety and is used in tidal reaches of creeks to catch large fish. The smaller and lighter *manyilk* trap is used in flowing fresh water creeks to catch small fish and fresh water prawns.

(Maningrida Arts & Culture)

highly COMMENDED

Wukun Wanambi

Yirrkala NT (residence)

Wawurritjpal

The judges commend Wukun Wanambi's *Wawurritjpa*, its school of fish flowing up, down and around the contours of the hollow log, the bubbling water evoking energy and fluidity.

judges' COMMENTS

The high quality of the works in the 20th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award was a delight to us, but also a challenge to select award winners from such a strong exhibition. The one hundred and fifteen works were preselected from 400 entries and therefore each of the works selected should be acknowledged for its merit.

Over the twenty-year history of the Award, the development of art making from customary styles and the growth of experimentation within them, to artists moving across different media has invigorated the exhibition and its many visitors. The twentieth display is no exception.

The Telstra First Prize is awarded to Richard Bell for *Scientia E Metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)*. The multi-layered commentary by this well-established artist based in Brisbane challenges us to engage with its colour packed visual power, intellectual base and textual authority. With all the variability of wave particle theory, Bell's Theorem questions the contemporary art market in a powerful artistic statement.

The General Painting category was particularly strong. From an excellent range of work we gave the Award to Regina Wilson whose beautiful and sophisticated *Syaw-Fish Net* is a brilliant example of recent painting from the Peppimenarti region, best known for its fibre work. The wonderful transition from this three-dimensional art to painting on canvas has been effected with great subtlety, translating the complexity of weaving techniques and the experience of their texture.

The continuing innovation and variety of the works emerging from remote communities is as exciting as it is promising for the future of Indigenous art. We commend Lily Morton Akemarr's *Arreth* for its delicate invocation of an almost translucent desert landscape. Lily's Ampilatwatja community has in recent years produced works of distinction, as has the Irrunytju community and Tommy Watson's *Wipu* bursts with sensory overload of the riotous colours of the desert.

The Telstra Bark Painting Award goes to Galuma Maymuru's *Guwak*, a major clan painting from her Djarrakpi homeland in northeast Arnhem Land. One of the first Yolngu women to be instructed in the painting of sacred clan designs, Galuma is from a family of outstanding artists. Her mastery is ably shown by her remarkable compositional arrangement, depth of imagery and brilliant technique. From Maningrida, we commend bark painter Samuel Namundja's *Bilwoyinj Site* for its exquisite patterning and controlled energy.

We were pleased to acknowledge the diverse explorations of the artists in the Wandjuk Marika Three-dimensional Memorial category. The inclusion of this category has allowed artists to display the ever-expanding possibilities of the three-dimensional form within an art gallery environment. Lorna Jin-Gubarrangunya's *Conical Fishtrap* which won this award, seduced us quietly. Its sculptural form, patient and methodical, is permeable, a container which allows water and light to bring it to life. We also commend Wukun Wanambi's *Wawurritjpa*, its school of fish flowing up, down and around the contours of the hollow log, the bubbling water evoking energy and fluidity.

Alick Tipoti's linocut *Kuiyk ar Mari - Head and Spirit (Reincarnation)*, is the most distinguished work on paper, a testament to the strong traditions of the Torres Strait, executed with technical expertise, imagination and reflective intensity. We commend Danie Mellor's *Cyanthea cooperi*, a magnificent mezzotint, complete with fernscape imagery and a funky border, which echoes the moss and ferns of the rainforest and the technical attributes of his chosen medium.

The twentieth Award celebrates the continuing creative possibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and we hope that the selection we have made for the Awards will encourage and stimulate developments for the future.

Dr Brian Kennedy
Ms Francesca Cubillo

