

## Judges' Comments 28<sup>th</sup> NATSIAA 2011

Year after year, the NATSIAA shows the strength and diversity of Indigenous art in Australia. The exceptional quality and aesthetic excellence of this year's entries presented us with the opportunity to discuss the merits of individual works, and also reach consensus in our decision making. Ricardo Idagi's *Upi mop le Tail end man* from the New Media section is a heart-felt work, with over-powering presence and depth of personal and cultural revelation. This study in self-portraiture and use of the moving image enables the mask to come to life, providing a glimpse into deeply held convictions and memories. Dennis Nona's *Zuga Zug* is an edgy and macabre depiction of an unnerving ancestral narrative. The challenging composition reveals the artist's mastery of the etching medium and its engraved quality references the tradition of Torres Strait Islander carving.

Gali Yalkarriwuy Gurruwiwi's *Banumbirr* are sublime examples of Morning Star poles. The meticulous attention to detail, finesse of production and truth to material exemplify the depth of his cultural and ritual knowledge. The clusters of feathers and ethereal, organic elements that comprise these objects point to the artist's commitment to his practice; Gali's poles emanate a power and presence. The Bark Painting section this year is particularly well represented, with many works of exceptional standard that are mesmerising in their optical brilliance. Raelene Kerinauia's *Kayimwagakimi Jilamara* is a sensational example of the use of the Tiwi comb to create cultural markings in natural ochres. Raelene's work has a beautiful materiality of surface. Its subtle shifts of white and beige ochre, overlaid with rhythmical diagonal marks suggest the skin of the crocodile, her Dreaming.

The Painting section shows the best of long-established, resurgent and contemporary expressions in this medium. The diversity and strength of painting as a means of conveying the artists' relationship with country, or engaging in dialogue with history, is particularly evident. The winning painting, Bobby West Tjupurrula's *Untitled* refers to the narrative of Tingari ancestral beings who were consumed by fire at the rockhole site of Tarkul. The luminosity of this skillfully executed painting and its subtle variations of tonality, mark making and texture bring this narrative to life and also capture the topography of this terrain.

This year's overall winner is Dickie Minyintiri's *Kanyalakutjina (Euro Tracks)*. This painting is a spontaneous and multi-layered expression of the artist's profound ancestral relationship to country. The subtle application of colour, the gestural quality of the mark making and the incorporation of fluid linear elements make this a masterful work of art. The opacity of harmonious, pale pigments and the dynamic reiteration of ancestral tracks through country, create a shimmering surface that radiates energy and spirituality.

In arriving at our unanimous decisions, we felt that a number of other works deserve special commendation. These are George Tjungurrayi's *Untitled*; Christopher Pease's *Bling*; Djambawa Marawili's *Yathikpa*; Dinni Kunoth Kemarre's *Chess set* and Lucy Malirrimurruwuy Wanapuyngu's *Healthy food from the past*. The judges would like to extend their congratulations to all the finalists and prizewinners, and would particularly like to acknowledge and thank the Award Coordinator, Natalie Merida and Senior Curator, Dr Christiane Keller for their guidance and support.