

# Dhumbadha Munga

## Talking Knowledge

Metro Gallery 2019







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10-26 October 2019

**Metro Gallery**

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# Foreword

In 1957, aged just twenty-four, Kevin Gilbert was sentenced to life imprisonment in New South Wales. Developing his artistic skills and cultural insights whilst incarcerated for over 14 years, Gilbert became Australia's first Aboriginal playwright and printmaker whose extensive creative legacy is recognised nationally and internationally.

In 1973, Vic Simms literally sang his way out of prison after he learnt to play guitar and write songs about his life and Aboriginal rights issues. Simms secured a record deal with RCA Records, recorded an album live at Bathurst Jail and, upon his release, became one of the first Indigenous performers to sing at the Sydney Opera House.

Similarly, in 1986, Jimmy Pike painted his way out of Fremantle prison after discovering his talent for painting and reconnecting with his country and culture while incarcerated. Pike became one of Australia's leading internationally acclaimed Indigenous artists and, even before his release from prison, his works were exhibited in and collected by major Australian galleries. His works are also represented in major galleries around the world.

*Dhumbadha Munga Talking Knowledge*<sup>1</sup> explores the transformative power of art and cultural exchange between previously incarcerated contemporary Indigenous artists and the Indigenous artists from The Torch who mentor and support them.

The Torch provides art, cultural and arts vocational support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders through its Indigenous Arts in Prisons and Community program. Central to the program is cultural expression and connection to the arts industry.

Artists from The Torch program exhibiting in *Dhumbadha Munga Talking Knowledge* have already made significant inroads into the art arena. Following in the path of the artists mentioned above, some have had their works collected by state galleries and museums and all by a wide range of organisations and private collectors. They are vibrant, emerging, Indigenous Australian artists making their stamp on the art world with inspiring stories of courage, resilience and cultural connectivity.

Blackgin, Paul McCann, Sean Miller, Robby Wirramanda and myself are all Indigenous artists who work at The Torch providing ongoing creative and cultural resources, advice and arts industry support and opportunities to men and women in The Torch program. The support is an exchange of knowledge and stories, of ideas and concepts, and of creativity and the business of art. It is a rewarding and enriching experience for all involved and a two-way street to be travelled with pride and excitement for what the future holds.

I would like to thank Barry and Helen Fitzgerald of Metro Gallery for generously embracing and supporting the curatorial concept for the exhibition and providing such a beautiful and esteemed commercial gallery space for the artworks to be displayed in.

I also gratefully acknowledge all funders and supporters of The Torch, particularly the Victorian Government through the Department of Justice and Regulation, Gandel Philanthropy and the Victorian Legal Services Board who provide specific support for The Torch's post-release program.

Finally, I wish to thank all staff from The Torch for their hard work and dedication and to thank all the artists involved in the exhibition, particularly those from The Torch program who, through their courage and creativity, have made the extraordinary journey from behind prison walls to inside commercial gallery walls.

**Kent Morris**  
**Barkindji**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**The Torch**

1. *Dhumbadha Munga* means Talking Knowledge in the language of the Boon Wurrung people



# Christopher Austin

## Gunditjmara Keerraaywoorrong

Christopher is from the Gunditjmara Nation of south-western Victoria. Creating art and sharing his culture and stories have given him direction in life and help him to pass on cultural knowledge to the younger generations.



**The Road Comes to an End 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 140 cm  
\$3,750

A Gunditjmara man is looking into a mirror which is reflecting him with white skin. This symbolises the assimilation policy which forced Indigenous Australians to lose touch with who they were and where they came from. The assimilation policy didn't work, which is why the mirror is broken. The road to the right is evidence of capitalist society and the mess it creates. However, 'the road stops here'. Beyond that is beautiful Gunditjmara Country which the creator, Bunjil the eagle, looks over and protects. The totems of my Country are the white cockatoo and the black cockatoo. You can see their feathers hanging in the tree alongside feathers from an eagle. Finally, there are three jigsaw puzzle pieces. These are a prompt for the viewer to stop and think about three things that need to be done to achieve reconciliation.

# Blackgin

## Wurundjeri

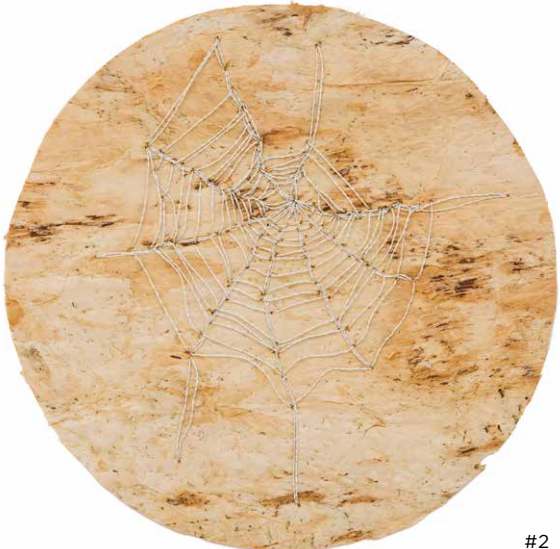
Blackgin explores themes related to her matriarchal lineage and notions of feminism. She engages with materials that connect her to her cultural heritage through the continuation of their traditional uses and is particularly known for her work using paperbark. While paperbark has historically been used in housing, bandaging, cooking and a range of other activities, ultimately Blackgin is drawn to its flesh-like qualities and the way that its textures and colours draw the eye. In the context of this artwork, *Marnda Grik*, it is also a natural habitat of many species of large native spiders. Blackgin lives in the Central Goldfields region of Victoria and is the Indigenous Women's Arts Officer at The Torch.

**Marnda Grik Web Series 2019**  
Cotton thread on paperbark,  
50 x 46 cm  
\$1,200 each

Marnda Grik means large spider in Woiwurrung, the language of the Wurundjeri people. Marnda Grik is the mother figure, the knowledge holder and the weaver of history. These works examine how colonisation has disconnected Indigenous people from culture and Country through my personal experience as a Wurundjeri woman and the western concept of arachnophobia. To overcome my arachnophobia and repair my spiritual relationship to Marnda Grik as the matriarch, I learnt the art of spinning webs and am re-telling Marnda Grik's story in an attempt to reframe my relationship with spiders from one of fear to one of love.



#1



#2



Blackgin  
Wurundjeri



#3



#4



#5



#6

Graham Gilbert  
Wiradjuri

Graham's paintings are known for their high level of skill and detail. His paintings intertwine the symbolism of native animals with landscapes that tell of a time when a traditional lifestyle was lived by his ancestors prior to European contact. *Most of my paintings are about hunting and gathering, as I grew up in tents and caravans in New South Wales. I learnt to live off the land by learning from my Grandfather. I followed the seasons.*

**Kangaroo 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 83 x 153 cm  
\$4,000

The kangaroo is on a journey to find water and a better feeding ground, unaware that he is the main food source for the local Aboriginal people. The hand prints show that Aboriginal people, through their paintings and rock art, have left their mark on Country about their identity and their knowledge of food sources.

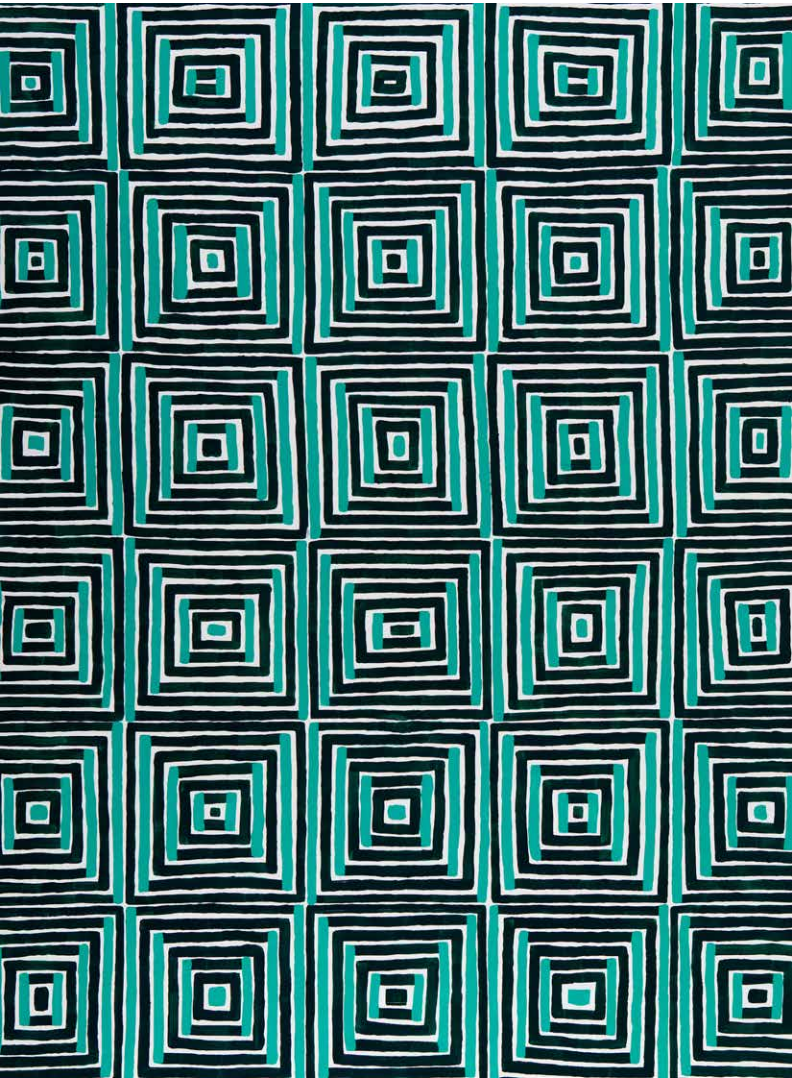




# Renee Gray

## Yorta Yorta

Renee is a Yorta Yorta woman living in central Victoria who paints about family, community and Country using traditional Yorta Yorta line work.



*Ulupna Wanala (Home in Spring) 2019*  
Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 133 cm  
\$3,600

Returning home in Spring, everything is lush and green with lots of new growth. This painting represents a new beginning for me.

# Veronica Mungaloon Hudson

## Pitjantjatjara

Veronica grew up in Central Australia and was interested in art from an early age. She grew up watching and listening to her elders, especially her Pop, who taught her to draw in the sand. Her art is influenced by these experiences, her cultural knowledge and the stories that have been passed down to her by her family and community.



*Burning on the River #1 2019*  
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101 cm  
\$3,500

The land is burnt to clear it of old dead growth and, in its place, new growth is encouraged. Animals are attracted to the new growth which can be hunted for bush tucker. It's a traditional cycle of life which keeps our young healthy and strong as they learn to hunt and gather.



Veronica Mungaloon Hudson  
Pitjantjatjara



*Burning on the River #2* 2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101 cm  
\$3,500



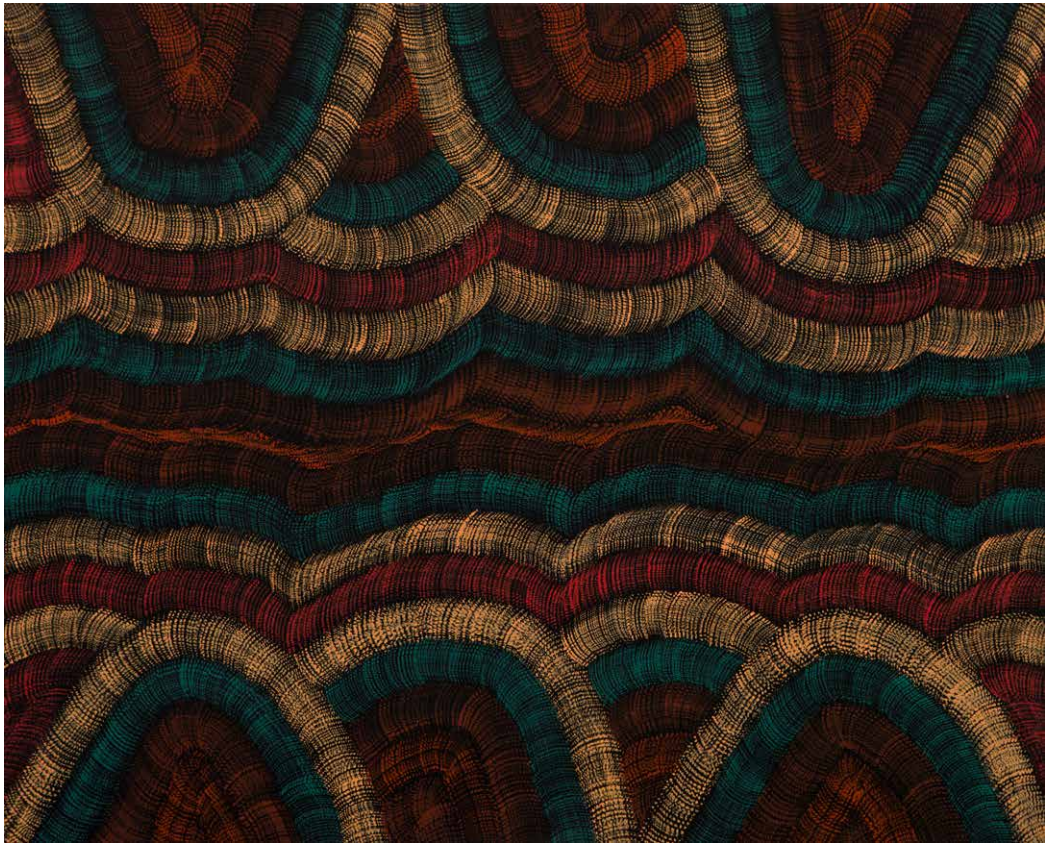
*Burning on the River #3* 2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101 cm  
\$3,500



# Jeffrey Jackson

## Mutti Mutti

Jeffrey is a Mutti Mutti man from north-western Victoria who has been painting for over a decade. His palette includes the colours of the sand, the earth and the surrounding landscapes and his designs explore the intricate patterns found there. Jeffrey's artwork recently featured on The Torch's Yarra Trams Community Partnership tram.



*Sands of Time, Lake Mungo #10*  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 75 cm  
\$1,500

*Sands of Time, Lake Mungo #11*  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 170 cm  
\$3,500

At Lake Mungo, the colours of the sands and the earth change over time. When the wind blows, the sand hills change shape and the designs in the sand change. It moves like it's alive and goes wherever the wind takes it. Different sands and the earth around them change colours after the rain then, when slowly drying, turn many different shades before going back to their original colours. After the rains, new sprouts will shoot up out of the ground, changing the colours again.





# Marbukk

## Southern Riverine region

Marbukk identifies strongly with the South Australian desert and the Murray River and his connection to these landscapes and the animals in them is vividly expressed in his work. His artworks are inspired by a deep love for the country and animals around him and he hopes to inspire in his audience an admiration for the vibrant colours of life.



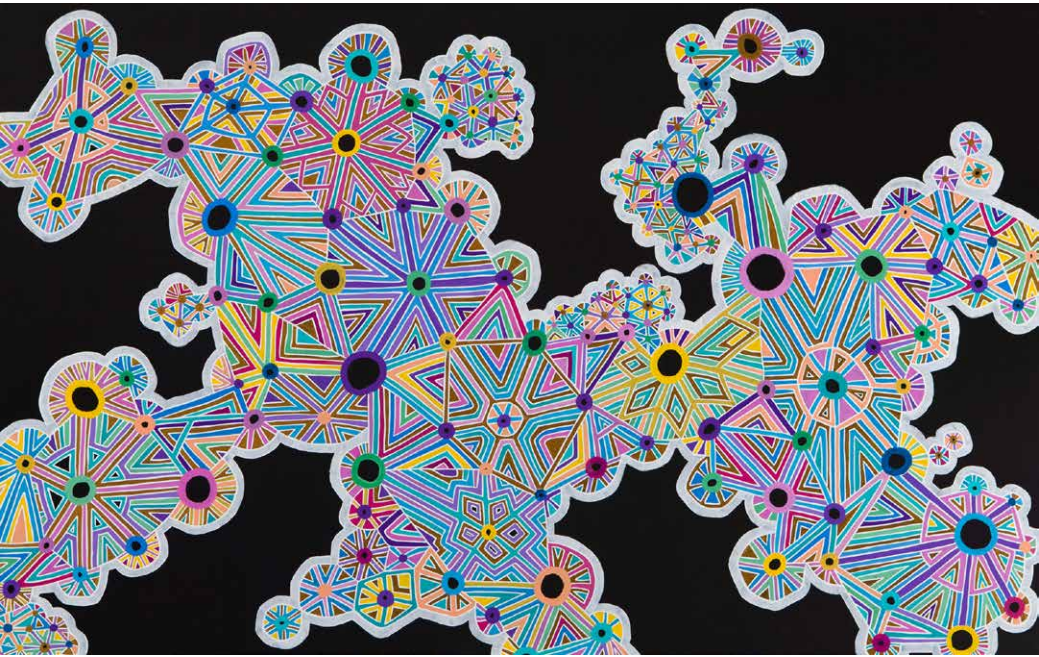
**Mallee Fowl at Linga Pink Lakes**  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 74 cm  
\$1,500

The Mallee fowl is very independent and resilient, just like Aboriginal people. This Mallee fowl is digging a big, deep nest in the sand where it will bury its eggs. The mum doesn't sit on the eggs. It takes a chick three to four hours to dig its way out and, as soon as it has a rest and dries-off, it runs into the bush. They have to fend for themselves and only come back together to breed. Like the Mallee fowl, our people can look after ourselves and are tremendous survivors. Our kids can survive in the bush and learn everything they need to learn just from playing. We learn from the land, we are part of the land and we love the land.

# Paul McCann

## Marrithiyel

Paul is a Marrithiyel man and a traditional landowner of the south-west region of the Daly River in the Northern Territory. He is the Senior Indigenous Arts Officer at The Torch with long-term experience working in varied roles within the Justice systems in Victoria and the Northern Territory. His paintings are strong, bold representations of his land and culture.



**My Dreaming** 2019  
Acrylic on canvas, 112 x 177 cm  
\$5,500

I was born and raised in Darwin but had not been home for over 3 years until I went back in August this year. I visited family and friends and went to some places of great significance in my life's journey. *My Dreaming* represents my past, present and future, the many life experiences and choices that I have made which have lead me to be the person I am today. When I stand back and look at what I have created, I see a tapestry of my life written in the stars.



# Sean Miller

## Kamilaroi

Sean lives on Wurundjeri Country and explores his Kamilaroi heritage through his art. For Sean, working with clay creates a tangible connection to Country, where his ancestors culturally and artistically shaped the ground and carved trees for ceremony. He was a finalist in the 2016 Indigenous Ceramic Art Awards and has artworks in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria and the Shepparton Art Museum. Originally a participant in The Torch program, Sean is now an Indigenous Arts Officer at The Torch, delivering the program in prisons as well as in community.



***Kookaburra Sits in the Sacred Tree***  
2019  
Glazed stoneware, 68 x 32 x 32 cm  
\$10,000

Gugurrgaagaa, meaning kookaburra, is a sub totem of the Kamilaroi people. Gugurrgaagaa is sitting high in a sacred carved tree, surveying the country.

# Kent Morris

## Barkindji

Kent is a Barkindji man, a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts and an alumnus of the Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Leadership Program. He has more than 20 years' experience as a practising artist and curator. In 2011, Kent was appointed by The Torch to design, develop and deliver the Indigenous Arts in Prisons and Community Program and he is now Chief Executive Officer of The Torch. Central themes in his work are connection between contemporary Indigenous experience and cultural practices, and their continuation and evolution.

***Cultural Reflections - Boon Wurrung (St Kilda) -Maggpie***  
2019  
Giclee print on rag paper, 110 x 160 cm  
Edition of 5 +2AP, unframed \$4,000, framed \$5,000  
Courtesy Vivien Anderson Gallery

Indigenous knowledge systems are embedded in the land even after its many transformations. As I walk, I experience and recreate the rhythms, shapes and designs of my ancestors. Learning from the rhythm and habits of native birds, I experience how birds have adapted to the built environment, to technology and colonialism, reflecting the ways in which Indigenous cultures survive and adapt. In their songs and flight I see the complexity of contemporary Indigenous experience constantly being created and revealed.

The artwork will feature on a Melbourne Art Tram for the 2019 Melbourne International Arts Festival.





# Gary Reid

Pitjantjatjara/Yankuntjatjara



**Wati Ngintaka 2019**

Acrylic on canvas, 89 x 199 cm

\$4,500

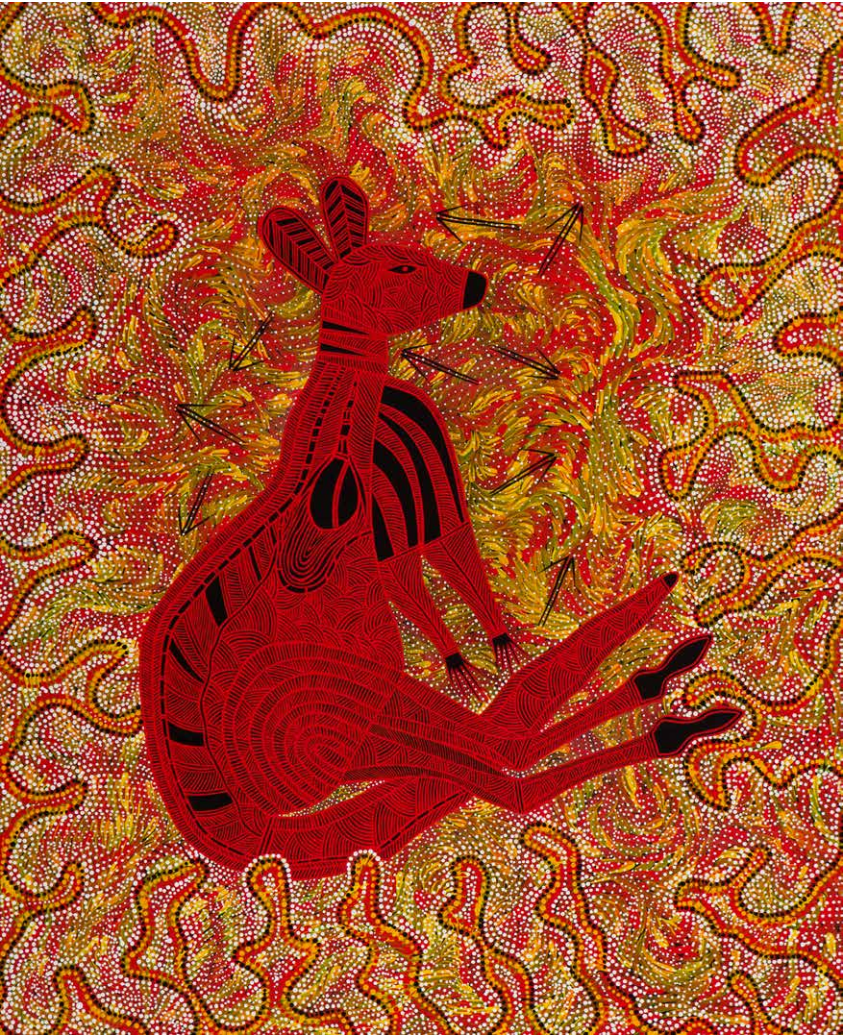
Wati Ngintaka (wati = man, ngintaka = goanna) heard fine grinding not too far away. He ran to the sound, found the grinding stone and stole it and ran away with it. He ran with it through the Pitjantjatjara lands, up past Amata, Kanpi and Angaja, to the Western Australian border to a place called Uran. The tribesmen who were chasing him caught up with him and regained the grinding stone, then they stabbed him in the foot and cut him up. He can be seen today in the mountain at Uran.



# Gary Reid

## Pitjantjatjara/Yankuntjatjara

Gary was born in Melbourne and eventually found his birth mother, who is from the Swan Hill area, when he was 21. In his 20s he went looking for other family members and returned to his ancestral land, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in north-western South Australia. Ever since, he's been painting the stories of his people while learning about his cultural heritage.



*Marlu Dreaming 2019*

Acrylic on canvas, 110 x 90 cm  
\$2,750

This painting is about tradition, that's why there's no colour in the kangaroo, just black and red. It's about being strong with your culture. Behind him is Water Dreaming and around him are mountains.

# Kelvin Rogers

## Yorta Yorta

Kelvin is a Yorta Yorta man who grew up on the Murray River. As a young man, he learned traditional skills such as didgeridoo-making and how to gather and use bush tucker. His distinctive style of painting uses colour palettes that depict his traditional country and are designed to 'stop people in their tracks'. Whilst incarcerated, painting helped Kelvin to explore his culture and move through some difficult times. Dhungala, the Murray River, is a constant source of inspiration, spiritual connection and strength.



*Story of My People 2019*

Acrylic on canvas, 152 x 40 cm  
\$4,000

The border represents the journey of my people. The Rainbow Serpent created Dhungala, the Murray River, and brought the colours that represent my beautiful Yorta Yorta Country.



# Ralph Rogers

## Baranbinja

Ralph has developed his art practice over decades, first learning to paint by observing his elders in Brewarinna in north-western New South Wales. He is deeply motivated by a responsibility to keep cultural knowledge alive and, through his artworks, explores his ancestral connections to Brewarinna and the history of aquaculture associated with the area.



**Murray Cod Dreaming, Brewarrina 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 137 x 132 cm  
\$5,000

The Murray cod represents all the male Elders that played a significant role in my growing up: handing-down stories, taking me walkabout and looking over me on my journey. This painting is my tribute to them and expresses the love I have for them all. I hope to carry their voices as I represent Country.



**Platypus Dreaming, Brewarrina 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 138 x 135 cm  
\$5,000

The platypus represents my grandmothers, aunts, mothers and daughters and all the women of the Dreamtime. It particularly allows me to show my respect to my Grandmothers: Grandmother Evelyn Crawford, Grandmother Essie Coffie and Grandmother Mum Shirl. They cared for me and they are a part of the great memory I have of growing up. This painting is my tribute to them and expresses the love I have for them all. I hope to carry their voices as I represent Country.



# Garry Scott

## Southern Riverine Region

Garry has experienced many challenges throughout his life. Whilst incarcerated, he decided to explore and connect to his culture by making art. He uses his art and culture as the foundation to look at where he has been and where he wants to be in his life. Through painting he has found the focus and strength to change his lifestyle and walk a positive path, including passing on his new-found knowledge and skills to his children.



**Coming Together 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 156 x 155 cm  
\$6,000

These five turtles represent myself and my partner, our two children and my son from a previous relationship. My son has just recently moved home with us so now we are all one family coming together. We are circling the big campsite in the middle of the painting which represents our home. The journey tracks, water holes and meeting places all around us are where we have been on our journeys through our lifetime. I am very grateful to have such a supportive and accepting partner in my life who makes this coming together possible for us all.

# Ash Thomas

## Yorta Yorta/Wiradjuri

Ash was born in Shepparton and has fond memories of spending school holidays by the Murray River ‘without a worry in the world’. He has a lifelong passion for art and now practises his art on Wurundjeri country. His artwork is detail-oriented and represents a strong connection to his family, identity and culture.



**Shields of Strength 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 101 x 76 cm  
\$2,000

This represents my mum, me and my two siblings. My mum was recently diagnosed with cancer and this experience bought my brother, sister and I closer together. The shields represent the strength we had to develop to get through her illness and recovery.



# Robby Wirramanda

## Wergaia/Wotjobaluk

As a child, Robby painted with his grandmother who had a big influence on his artistic life. He maintains a strong connection to his country and wants his children to see his artworks as life lessons to learn from, drawing on personal experiences, cultural history and family to create his art. Initially a participant in the Torch program, Robby has been working for The Torch as an Indigenous Arts Officer in Community in northern Victoria since 2017.



**Burning Off 2019**  
Acrylic on canvas, 217 x 270 cm  
\$9,000

Burning off the land removes toxins and growth-inhibitors from the soil and allows room for fresh growth in the fertile ground. The same can be achieved when we apply this to our own mind and our life.

I paint to reconnect to memories of my family and my traditional land. Coming from a big family it is important to me to be a practising example to help and inspire the future generations that come through my bloodline. Painting takes me to a world that wants only to be beautiful.

*Paul McCann, Marriithiyel*

Art connects you to culture and makes you feel a part of the community.

*Christopher Austin, Gunditjmara Keerraaywoorong*

My art practice reveals the continued presence and patterns of Aboriginal history and culture in the contemporary Australian landscape. The rhythms, shapes and designs of ancestors are ever-present.

*Kent Morris, Barkindji*



# Partners & Supporters

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Cover: Robby Wirramanda *Burning Off*  
Inside front cover: Ralph Rogers *Platypus Dreaming, Brewarrina* (detail)  
Opposite page 1: Christopher Austin *The Road Comes to an End* (detail)  
Inside back cover: Ralph Rogers *Murray Cod Dreaming, Brewarrina* (detail)







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