



Jean Baptiste Apatimi, *Purrikuparri* [Old Bark painting] 2005, natural ochres on linen, 150 x 100cm, gifted by the Charles Darwin University Foundation, 2010 to the Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU 1775



Above: John Patrick Kelantumama, *Jurrukukuni* [Boobook owl] 2007, natural ochres on ironwood, H37cm, Tiwi Design Collection AC-34

Front: John Patrick Kelantumama, *Owl face* 2007, natural ochres on ironwood, H28cm, Tiwi Design Collection AC-160



Nyini parlingari purrupakuluwunyi, amintiya kiyi nyingani awarra Jilamara
Looking back, looking forward in our Art



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***Too much information is an obstacle to seeing.
My works are created to be seen.*¹**

In 2007, Tiwi Design Aboriginal Corporation, based at Nguuu on Bathurst Island, received Special Project Funding from the Australia Council to conduct a series of artist-run workshops that aimed to pass on the skills, knowledge and traditions of arts and crafts on the Tiwi Islands to the next generation of emerging artists at Tiwi Design and young people in the community. Beginning in March 2007, male and female senior artists ran several workshops in the art centre and 'out bush', dependent on seasonal factors. Young and old examined sources and experimented with techniques of Tiwi art and craftsmanship as they related to ceremony and contemporary life: carving ironwood, making *tunga* (bark baskets) and comb-work decoration, producing woven and hand-made ceremonial adornments, and painting on bark and canvas. The 'Keep Culture Strong' project, as it was known, became a template for individual creativity as much as a collective community endeavour. Its aim was to reflect and draw from the past, with a view to nurturing current art and preserving its future. The essence of the project and the **Tiwi Design Collection** it fostered are captured in this exhibition's title, chosen by Tiwi Design artists – *Nyini parlingari purrupakuluwunyi, amintiya kiyi nyingani awarra Jilamara: Looking back, looking forward in our Art.*

Workshop tuition included the sourcing of ironwood, mangrove wood and stringy-bark, its preparation and curing as the support for carved and painted sculptures, spears, fighting sticks, *tunga* and other objects; sourcing and preparing pandanus and other plant fibres, collecting seeds (such as the blood red *Abrus precatorius*), feathers and various natural materials for woven/hand-crafted items, as well as obtaining a range of ochres as the principal painting/decorative media. The project proved so successful that its activities extended beyond the nine month term of the Special Projects Grant, becoming a Tiwi Design Art Centre-sponsored activity. By late May 2008, the Tiwi Design Collection born of this project, already documented and catalogued by young Tiwi trainees at the art centre, extended its teaching and creative roles to the broader community, with senior artists running instructional workshops for Tiwi students from Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic Primary School (MCS) and Xavier Community Education Centre, Nguuu. The Collection and its related cultural development strategy were later incorporated into the MCS School curriculum, opening the art centre to the Nguuu community and beyond.

Both the initial project and formation of a Tiwi Design Collection were driven and supported by Tiwi Design artists. Initially, illustrations and photographs reproduced in Charles P. Mountford's 1958 publication *The Tiwi: their Art, Myth and Ceremony* were a source of inspiration for the project and its creative evolution. Historic images of facial decoration and body-painting for *Kulama* and *Pukumani* ceremonies – a form of ceremonial disguise – prompted aesthetic experimentation. They evolved into flattened, 'facial'-scale paintings on canvas by Tiwi women. Male artists began carving birds and *parlini* (Creation Time) figures of various dimensions, experimenting with chisels and hand tools, and the application of ochre pigments. The project gave the artists time: an opportunity to reflect and regenerate, to consider art as a process rather than a means of production.

Both male and female artists also renewed their acquaintance with traditional Tiwi ceremonial items at the Patakijiyali Museum at Nguuu, responding to the familiar and unfamiliar: not by copying, but through instruction and reinvention. By late 2007, the project had matured into a distinct Art Centre collection of the artists' own making. Several young Tiwi women, expressing a desire to 're-connect' with their past and their ancestors, then visited the National Museum in Canberra (during the *Cultural Warriors Triennial* at the National Gallery of Australia), specifically to see ethnographic collections of Tiwi material culture items. They were able to identify objects made by their fathers or other family members, and returned home to Nguuu galvanised by the experience. Additionally, images of historic work by Tiwi ancestors in the collections of the Art Gallery of South Australia reinvigorated contemporary practice. The Tiwi Design Collection had itself become the impetus for seeing institutional collections as a life-line rather than an assemblage of fossilised relics: a pathway between the past and present, sign-posting a way into the future.

This exhibition comprises four interconnected parts.

First, it displays for the first time in a public institution a selection of carvings, sculptures, paintings, fighting sticks, spears, clubs, ceremonial objects and adornments, and painted/decorated *tunga*, all drawn from the **Tiwi Design Collection**.

Secondly, it comprises other contemporary works by Tiwi Design artists represented in the **Charles Darwin University Art Collection**: recent paintings, limited edition prints, carvings and painted *tunga*, created during the same period of reinvigorated practice as the Tiwi Design Collection and as a consequence of the 'Keep Culture Strong Project'.

Thirdly, taking its cue from the exhibition's title *Looking back, looking forward in our Art*, a selection of older material culture items and carvings from the University Art Collection is also displayed in a new light and in a specific Tiwi context. Part of a 'micro-collection' within our permanent holdings, these works pre-date the existence of a university in the Northern Territory. Assembled in about 1986 by the former Warden of the University College of the NT, the late Professor Jim Thomson, they were originally displayed at the former Myilly Point campus in glass display cabinets, much like disembodied ethnographic artefacts rather than as works of fine or applied art. In the context of this exhibition, they offer an opportunity to reflect on the University Art Collection's development and growth, and its function as a living collection within our region, with an important role to play in community engagement.

Fourthly, the University Art Collection is able to draw on its significant collection of limited edition prints by Tiwi Design artists dating to the early 1990s, when the then NTU Print Workshop (known today as Northern Editions) was in its infancy within the School of Art.

Purpose-built printmaking facilities were opened at the University in 1993. In the second half of that year, a number of Tiwi Design artists became the third group of Indigenous Northern Territory artists to take part in printmaking workshops on campus. Under the tutelage of VET Lecturer in Remote Area Printmaking, Leon Stainer, the artists (including Maria Josette Orsto, Marie Evelyn Puautjimi, Bonaventure Timaepatua, Osmond Kantilla and Peter Damien Munkara) produced sugar-lift etchings with aquatint, lithographs and offset lithographs. In June 1994, a second workshop conducted at Nguuu produced a suite of

small etchings (later editioned in Darwin) by artists including Cyril James Kerinauia, Edwin Ferdnando, Jock Puautjimi, Maria Josette Orsto and Bonaventure Timaepatua. A selection of these early prints is included in this exhibition.

Historically, Tiwi Design artists have been engaged in Western printmaking techniques since at least 1968, when the first wood-block prints were produced by Bede Tungatalum and Eddie Puruntatameri, later joined by Giovanni Tipungwuti in 1969, under the auspices of the Catholic School at Nguuu. These designs were later transferred to silk-screens that were developed as printed textiles. The Catholic Mission supported printmaking and textile manufacture as creative endeavours, later employing Tiwi women to sew printed items into homewares and fashion apparel. Tiwi Design artists were the first Indigenous artists in Australia to embrace screen-printing as an artistic medium.

Today, Tiwi Design is one of the oldest and artistically diverse Aboriginal art centres in Australia, producing paintings in ochre (on canvas, bark and linen), ironwood carvings, screen-printed fabrics, ceramics, bronze and glass sculptures, jewellery, as well as limited edition prints. This year, Tiwi Design celebrates its 40th anniversary as an Aboriginal art centre and its 30th anniversary as an Aboriginal Corporation.² These anniversaries coincide with the Charles Darwin University Art Collection's 30th anniversary in 2010, marked in 2009 with the creation of its first dedicated and purpose-built exhibition space: the **Charles Darwin University Art Gallery**. It is both a pleasure and a privilege that the official opening of the Collection's new Gallery coincides with this exhibition, opened by Tiwi Design artists.

The Tiwi Design Collection was created to be seen: given its history and mission, it is only fitting that its first curated exhibition take place in a University Art Gallery. Through *Nyini parlingari purrupakuluwunyi, amintiya kiyi nyingani awarra Jilamara*, the University Art Collection and Tiwi Design may sing, dance and paint³ together – looking back, looking forward in our art.

Anita Angel
Curator, Charles Darwin University Art Collection
and Art Gallery
April 2010

¹ Robert Rauschenberg, interviewed by Alain Sayag, 9 January 1981 in: S. Hunter, *Robert Rauschenberg: Works, Writings and Interviews*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2006, pp.151-3 at 153.
² On 1 May 1970, a partnership was formed between Giovanni Tipungwuti and Bede Tungatalum under the name Tiwi Designs (later changed to Tiwi Design – singular); it became an incorporated body (Tiwi Design Aboriginal Corporation) in 1980.
³ James Bennett described the Tiwi notion of creativity as holistic: 'to sing is to dance is to paint' – comment to Judith Ryan, Senior Curator Indigenous Art, National Gallery of Victoria, 1994.

Right: Romolo Tipiloura, *Japarra* 2007, natural ochres on ironwood, H100cm, Tiwi Design Collection AC-60



Top: Maria Josette Orsto, *Kulama* 2008, natural ochres on Eucalyptus tetrodonta, 31 x 26cm [irreg.], Tiwi Design Collection AC-97

Centre: Ita Tipungwuti, *Untitled* 2007, natural ochres on canvas, 39 x 29cm, Tiwi Design Collection AC-208

Bottom: Maria Josette Orsto, *Untitled* 2007, natural ochres on canvas, 44 x 33cm, Tiwi Design Collection AC-210



Left: John Martin Tipungwuti, *Japuraringa* [Forked fighting spear – female] 2007, natural ochres on Eucalyptus tetrodonta, H219cm (detail), Tiwi Design Collection AC-181

Right: Cyril James Kerinauia, *Arawinikiri* [Ceremonial & fighting spear – female] 2007, natural ochres on Eucalyptus tetrodonta, H153cm (detail), Tiwi Design Collection AC-185

