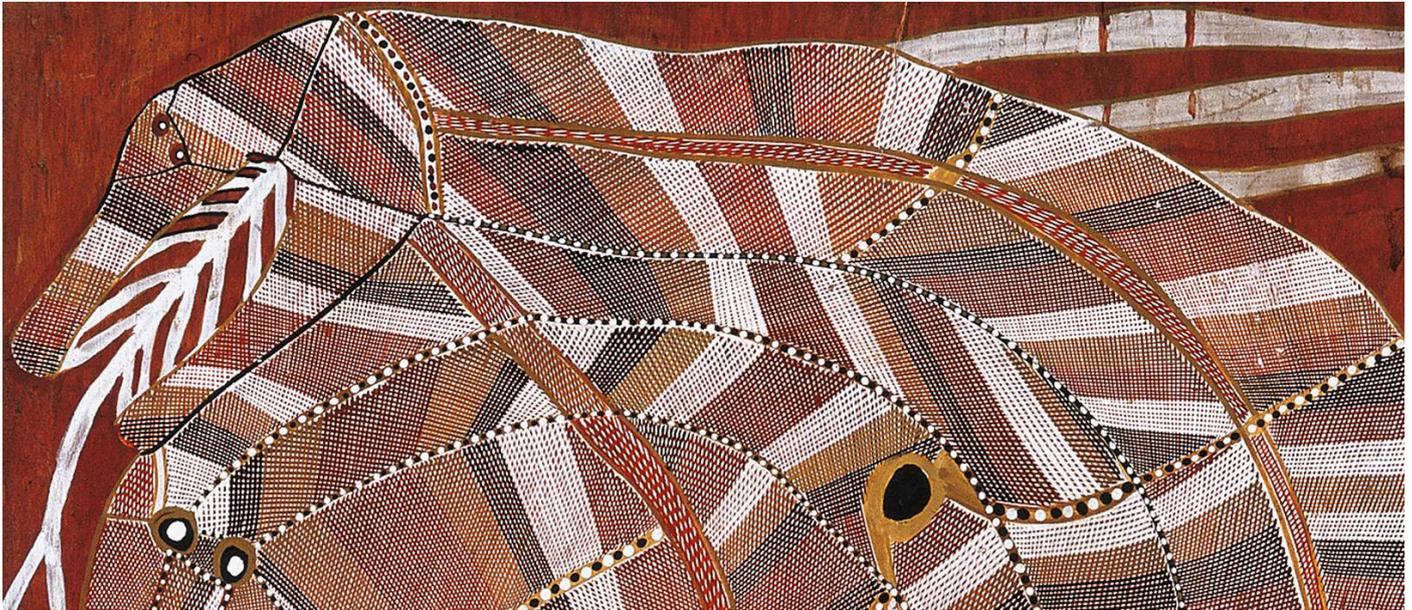

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY PRESENTS JOHN MAWURNDJUL: I AM THE OLD AND THE NEW

13 March 2021 - 29 May 2021



‘Mawurndjul is not simply Australia’s premier bark painter, he is one of our greatest artists of all time’

– John McDonald, Sydney Morning Herald’s art critic.

‘John Mawurndjul is the most celebrated bark painter living today... an artistic innovator on the world stage’

– Julie Ewington, The Monthly

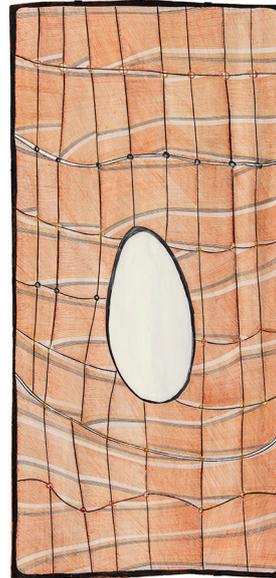
CDU Art Gallery is delighted to present a survey of works by one of Australia’s leading contemporary artists – master bark painter John Mawurndjul from Saturday 13 March 2021 until Saturday 29 May 2021. Developed and co- presented by the MCA and Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA), in association with Maningrida Arts & Culture, this landmark touring exhibition includes over 50 works, spanning forty years of the artist’s practice.

Following its critically acclaimed presentation at the MCA (6 July – 23 September 2018) and AGSA (26 October 2018 – 28 January 2019), *John Mawurndjul: I am the old and the new* will tour the country showing at eight regional galleries in 2019 and 2020 including Murray Art Museum Albury (NSW), Glasshouse Port Macquarie (NSW), Caboolture Regional Art Gallery (QLD), Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (NSW), Cairns Regional Gallery (QLD), Charles Darwin University Art Collection and Art Gallery (NT), Tweed Regional Gallery (NSW) and Bunjil Place Gallery (VIC). The MCA’s touring program is generously supported by the Australian Government’s Visions of Australia program.

John Mawurndjul, *Ngalyod (Female Rainbow Serpent)* (detail), 1988, earth pigments on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetrodonta*), Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds donated by Mr and Mrs Jim Bain, 1989, © John Mawurndjul, licensed by Copyright Agency 2021, photograph: Jessica Maurer.

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'We are 100% Australian and we are passionate about supporting regional Australia and doing our bit to help the communities we operate in' explains Red Energy's CEO Iain Graham, 'Becoming the MCA's regional Touring Partner gives visitors who may not be able to travel to Sydney to visit the MCA, the opportunity to enjoy exceptional Australian art in their own towns.'

John Mawurndjul AM is celebrated for his mastery of *rarrk* (cross-hatching) and his depiction of *djang* (sacred sites), a tradition shared by generations of Kuninjku artists. Bark paintings and sculptures drawn from private and public collections across the world tell the stories of Kuninjku culture and the significant locations surrounding the artist's home in central north Arnhem Land. [Click here to view the microsite.](#)

Born in 1952, Mawurndjul lives and works in Milmilngkan in western Arnhem Land and Maningrida in central north Arnhem Land. Since his first exhibition in 1980, he has become one of Australia's most widely recognised artists. In 1989 his work was included in the ground-breaking exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris, and his works have been included in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Australia, America, Germany and Japan. He was the recipient of the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award in 2003, has received the Bark Painting Award at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory four times, and in 2010 was awarded an Order of Australia. In 2018 he received the highly prestigious Red Ochre Award at the Australia Council for the Arts, National Indigenous Art Awards, for his outstanding lifetime achievement in the arts.

John Mawurndjul: I am the old and the new was co-curated by Clothilde Bullen (Curator, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Collections and Exhibitions, MCA), Natasha Bullock (Senior Curator, MCA), Nici Cumpston (Artistic Director, TARNANTHI Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art) and Dr Lisa Slade (Assistant Director, Artistic Programs, Art Gallery of South Australia), with Keith Munro (Curator, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Programs, MCA) as lead Cultural Advisor; in close collaboration with John Mawurndjul AM, Kay Lindjuwanga, Ananais Jawulba and Maningrida Arts & Culture staff: Michelle Culpitt, Zebedee Bonson and Derek Carter; and interpreter/translator Dr Murray Garde.

John Mawurndjul, *Ancestral Spirit Beings Collecting Honey*, 1985–87, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Maningrida Arts & Culture with financial assistance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council, 1994 © John Mawurndjul / Copyright Agency, 2021, photograph: Jessica Maurer.

John Mawurndjul, *Ngalyod*, 2012, Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2015 © John Mawurndjul / Copyright Agency, 2021, photograph: Jessica Maurer.

John Mawurndjul, *Milmilngkan*, 2007, earth pigments and on Stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetrodonta*), Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Gift of Susan Armitage through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation, 2016. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program © John Mawurndjul / Copyright Agency, 2021, photograph: Saul Steed

John Mawurndjul, *Nawarrumulmul (Shooting Star Spirit)*, 1988, Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds donated by Mr and Mrs Jim Bain, 1989 © John Mawurndjul / Copyright Agency, 2021, photograph: Jessica Maurer.

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The collections of the MCA and Art Gallery of South Australia form the genesis of the exhibition. Two barks - *Nawarramulmul (Shooting Star Spirit)* and *Ngalyod (Female Rainbow Serpent)* (both 1988) were the first artworks accessioned into the newly-incorporated MCA Collection in 1989; and *Namanjwarre, Saltwater Crocodile* (also from 1988) is a cornerstone piece from the Art Gallery of South Australia Collection, representing a watershed moment in the evolution of the artist's aesthetic.

In close collaboration with the MCA and Art Gallery of South Australia curatorial teams, John Mawurndjul led curatorial decisions and assisted in selecting the most significant artworks from his career. He was instrumental in determining the exhibition structure, which is grouped by places – or *kunred* – then animals and spirits, mimih, lorrkkon and etchings. The concept of *kunred* informs the artist's practice, both in the materials used such as the bark of the tree, natural earth pigments and charcoal, and in the representation of ideas critical to an understanding of Kuninjku culture.

Language is an important component of this presentation, with bilingual texts embedded throughout the exhibition design – from the didactics and labels available in Kuninjku, to translated texts featured in the catalogue and on the website.

MCA Director, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE said: 'This exhibition will be a revelation. It recognises John Mawurndjul as one of Australia's most important artists, and his contribution to the history of art and painting. The MCA has had a long-standing relationship with the artist, and we are very proud to have collaborated with the Art Gallery of South Australia to develop this landmark exhibition.'

Art Gallery of South Australia and MCA curators Nici Cumpston, Dr Lisa Slade, Natasha Bullock and Clothilde Bullen added: 'This artist-led exhibition has been an extraordinary journey across country and culture, with multiple voices working closely together to support and facilitate the artist's vision. We hope that through the beauty of Mawurndjul's art, and the extensive research that went into this exhibition, audiences will gain a deep understanding of the living history and culture of the Kuninjku people and their country.'

John Mawurndjul: I am the old and the new was displayed from July 6 until September 23, 2018 at the MCA and from October 26, 2018 until January 28, 2019 at Art Gallery of South Australia, as part of TARNANTHI. The touring exhibition is a smaller version of the large-scale retrospective shown at the MCA and AGSA in 2018/19.

The touring exhibition will be presented at eight locations across Australia throughout 2019–2021:

Murray Art Museum Albury (NSW):	8 March – 26 May 2019
Glasshouse Port Macquarie (NSW):	26 July – 22 September 2019
Caboolture Regional Art Gallery (QLD)	4 October – 24 November 2019
Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (NSW):	7 December 2019 – 19 January 2020
Cairns Regional Gallery (QLD):	7 February – 23 March 2020
Tweed Regional Gallery (NSW):	10 July – 13 September 2020
Bunjil Place Gallery (VIC):	24 November 2020 – 17 January 2021
Charles Darwin University Art Collection and Art Gallery (NT):	13 March – 29 May 2021

This touring project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program. *John Mawurndjul: I am the old and the new* is a touring exhibition developed and delivered by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The richly illustrated 400-page book contains a comprehensive overview of John Mawurndjul's practice by one of Australia's great scholars of Aboriginal art, Hetti Perkins; a detailed and illustrated biographical history by writer Genevieve O'Callaghan; a new interview between the artist and linguist Dr Murray Garde; and other essays by a range of experts in the field. The book has been designed and developed by the MCA Design Studio in collaboration with the artist and mirrors the structure of the exhibition with over 160 full colour image plates grouped by place, along with rarely seen images of the artist. The book celebrates language and is punctuated with the artist's words in Kuninjku, translated into English. The book is available for \$49.95 (softcover) from the MCA store and touring exhibition venues.

MICROSITE

The exhibition is supported by a microsite, johnmawurndjul.com. The site features an exhibition guide for the MCA and Art Gallery of South Australia exhibition spaces and an extensive video with the artist, recorded in Arnhem Land, in which Mawurndjul speaks in greater detail about his art practice and history, including rarrk paintings and the ancestral rock paintings found on the Kurulk clan lands. The microsite also features online learning resources, an explanation of place names and their significance to the exhibition, audio recordings of linguist and anthropologist Murray Garde on language, and a glossary, accompanied by recordings of Kuninjku language by John Mawurndjul and his family.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

John (Balang) Mawurndjul AM was born near Mumeka on the Mann River in 1952, an important camping site for members of the Kurulk clan. The site lies some 50 kilometres south of Maningrida, a remote community in central north Arnhem Land, approximately 500 kilometres east of Darwin in the Northern Territory.

Painting on bark is a relatively recent phenomenon, adapted from body painting. Mawurndjul was initially taught to paint by his father, the esteemed painter and weaver Anchor Kulunba, his uncle Peter Marralwanga, and elder brother Jimmy Njiminjuma. He has mastered the skill of bark painting over four decades of practice. His early explorations on bark in the late 1970s yielded to the conventions of bark painting at that time: figurative work depicting images of the *Ngalyod* (an ancestral Rainbow Serpent), *Namarrkon* (the female lightning spirit) and depictions of the rich resources found on his country – turtles, fish (particularly the Saratoga, barramundi and Grunter), crocodile and other creatures.

Mawurndjul's work has been included in exhibitions since 1980. In 1988, Mawurndjul won the Rothman's Foundation Award for best painting at the 5th annual National Aboriginal Art Awards at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and was included in the group exhibition *Dreamings*, in New York that same year. The following year, his work was included in the landmark exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris, which played an important role in changing the way his work was appreciated.

In 1991 Mawurndjul held his first solo show at Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in Melbourne. During the 1990s, his work began to shift in style, and he started to address the significant sites of his custodial country. The artist also began to make a concentrated body of sculptural work, including the hollow log coffins, or *lorrkkon*, and representations of the *mimih* spirit beings. More recently, Mawurndjul's practice has developed to reflect in more detail the *Mardayin* ceremony; shimmering geometric grids of *rarrk* (cross-hatching), and *djang* (a sacred site or totemic emblem) in a complete mastery of bark painting that borders on abstraction.

Mawurndjul exhibited his work in *Crossroads* in Japan in 1992, in the Sydney Biennale in 2000, and in *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians* in Germany and the UK and *In the Heart of Arnhem Land* in France in 2001. In 2004, his work was included in the landmark survey exhibition

John Mawurndjul, 2016 © Tristan Derätz (left) | John Mawurndjul, 1986 © Martin van der Wal (right)

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Crossing Country, the Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and in 2005 was honoured with a major retrospective of his work at the Musee Jean Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland. Mawurndjul created work for the Musee du Quai Branly's Australian Indigenous Art Commission in 2004, being one of only eight Aboriginal artists included.

He was the recipient of the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award in 2003, and has been awarded the Bark Painting Award at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in 1988, 1999, 2002 and 2016. In 2018, he was awarded the highly prestigious Red Ochre Award at the Australia Council for the Arts, National Indigenous Art Awards, for his outstanding lifetime achievement in the arts.

Media images accessible via Dropbox [here](#)



Museum of
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Exhibition organised and toured by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.
This project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.
