

Nongirrŋa Marawili



Introduction

Born 1938, Darrpirra, Northern Territory

Artwork Title: *Baratjala*, 2019

Location: Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia and Campbelltown Arts Centre

Marawili's practice is grounded primarily in printmaking and painting. Her work is deeply personal, drawing inspiration not only from her ancestral heritage but also the philosophies of her own Maḡarrpa clan. Hers is a painting practice that embodies the places she moves through and the people who have come before her, reflecting the philosophical shape of her reality rather than its sacred manifestation. She limits herself to using 'the land' to create. This is either natural or recycled material destined for landfill. 'I paint water designs. The water. As it crashes on to the rocks at high tide. Sending the spray into the sky. Rock. Rocks which stand strong. And the waves which run and crash upon the rocks. The sea spray. This is the painting I do. You may spy on me and think that I am painting sacred things. This would be a lie,' said Marawili.

Baratjala is a Maḡarrpa clan estate adjacent to Cape Shield, where the artist camped with her father and his many wives as a young girl. It is the essence of Maḡarrpa but does not hold the high order sites like Yathikpa do. Marawili lived nomadically as part of a clan group with a flotilla of canoes between Groote Eyelandt and the mainland. Her father's name was Mundukul (Lightning Snake) and this is also the name of the serpent (also known as Water Python, Burruṭ'tji or Liasis Fuscus), which lives deep beneath the sea there.

In 2018, Marawili painted a suite of paper works incorporating bright pink, which were featured in her solo show at Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, and also her major retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales *From My Heart and Mind*. Also featured in both shows were large barks, painted in a pinkish hue drawn from mixing red and white ochres. She travelled to Sydney for the opening of her retrospective, just before leaving, she made a radical move, using a pigment obtained from discarded magenta print toner. Surprisingly, a cup of toner was found when the cartridge was opened. This was compliant with the edict artists who paint sacred designs should follow: 'If you paint the land, use the land.'

Left to Right: Nongirrŋa Marawili; Baratjala [Pink Lightning], 2019; Baratjala, 2019; Baratjala, 2019; Baratjala, 2019; and Baratjala, 2019. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Presented at the 22nd Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Sue Acret and James Roth. Courtesy Private Collection, Melbourne; Private Collection, Sydney; Carey Lyon and Jo Crosby Collection; and the artist; Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala; and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne. Photograph: Zan Wimberley.

Nongirrŋa Marawili

Inquiry questions

- Spend a few moments observing Nongirrŋa Marawili's bark paintings. What are some of the first things you notice?
- What colours and shapes/patterns do you see in these paintings?
- Nongirrŋa Marawili has incorporated discarded magenta ink toner into her work. How does it effect the artwork?
- Nongirrŋa Marawili's artworks capture the energy and movement of a living landscape. What type of movements do you see or feel in her paintings?
- Why do you think these six paintings are hung together?
- What effect would be achieved if the paintings were hung separately instead of together?

Creative learning activity

- Nongirrŋa Marawili's work is a reflection of the people and places she moves through, and she shows this in the art she creates. Music and sound is another way we remember places and people. Think of a place you remember fondly. Create a playlist of 10 songs, which could consist of music or audio works that have a connection to that space.

Reflection

- Would you describe this as 2D, 3D or an installation artwork? Why?
- What are some of the ways that Nongirrŋa Marawili has made you think about 'place' through her artwork?

Extension

- Gather natural materials such as rocks, leaves, twigs and sticks from your backyard or park.

Make a rubbing or take a photograph to document the different textures and surfaces you find within this place.

Use your objects and rubbings and create an artwork that explores the natural world.