

WANAPATI YUNUPIŊU

'the stunning set-up for Wanapati Yunupinju's first ever solo exhibition (Melbourne or otherwise), sets a special corner of the [Melbourne Art] Fair on fire. The south looked jealously to the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art in Darwin late last year when the exhibition Murrŋiny surveyed eight artists from Yirrkala, all working in the medium of engraved "steel" (found metals). Now we get a piece of it ourselves, with Yunupinju's murrŋiny paintings that overlay images of marine life (from deep and shallow water) with ancestral designs of fire. These works do appear both hot and cool. The exposed aluminium twinkles innocently, but I wouldn't touch the murrŋiny surface; cut with a rotary drill, I bet it's sharp as hell.' – Victoria Perin, MeMO Review, 2022

<https://memoreview.net/reviews/melbourne-art-fair-victoria-perin>

Wanapati is a Yolŋu artist who lives in the remote Gumatj homeland of Biranybirany, North East Arnhemland in the Northern Territory. This is a coastal community set amongst sand dunes and stringybark forest at the end of a lonely gravel road three hours from the nearest small town, Yirrkala. There are approximately ten houses here but no mains power or store. The residents live a life dictated by the ceremonial and seasonal calendar supplemented by regular 6 hour round trips to the mining town of Nhulunbuy for supplies.

Wanapati is the son of deceased artist and spiritual leader Miniyawany Yunupinju from whom he inherited rich ceremonial instruction, and was trained in the art, Law and cultural practice of his and related clans while living between the homeland communities of Wandawuy (his mother's clan land) and Biranybirany. Wanapati has been strongly influenced by peer and artist Gunybi Ganambarr who radically embraced the use of found object in his practice. Gunybi is fifteen years older than Wanapati but a very inclusive and warm mentor to younger artists. He has always actively encouraged them to find their own path, as he was, by his own mentor, Djambawa Marawili AO.

Wanapati has quickly forged his own style, etching his sacred Gumatj clan designs and narratives into the face of discarded street signs and twisted metal and aluminium surfaces that litter the landscape of North East Arnhemland. He is a physically large man but quite shy, very gentle, friendly, humorous and soft spoken. He is popular within the Yolŋu community who recognise his natural humility and respect for others.

WANAPATI YUNUPIŊU

Born 1989; homeland Biranybirany; clan Gumatj, Rrakpala group; moeity Yirritja

Lives and works in Biranybirany, Northeast Arnhemland, Northern Territory, Australia

Wanapati Yunupiŋu is represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne in partnership with the Indigenous art centre Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka located in Yirrkala, North East Arnhemland, NT

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2024

Wanapati Yunupiŋu, Melbourne Art Fair, VIC

2023

Wanapati Yunupiŋu Nilnniln – the spark Tolarno Galleries.

2022

Wanapati Yunupiŋu Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Art Centre at Melbourne Art Fair, VIC

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022

Our Blue Planet Seattle Art Museum, USA

2021

38th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards Finalist, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), NT

Murrŋiny - a story of metal from the east Northern Centre for Contemporary Art / Salon Art Projects, Darwin

2019

Top End Ochre Everywhen Artspace, Mornington Peninsula VIC

Aboriginal Bark Painting from Yirrkala, North East Arnhem Land Purple Noon Gallery, Freemans Reach NSW

COMMISSIONS

2022

Melbourne Art Fair – \$10,000 First Nations Commission, Supported by Bennelong Funds Management. Gifted to Shepparton Art Museum Collection

COLLECTIONS

National Gallery of Victoria, VIC

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney NSW

Levi and Kaplan Collection, Seattle USA

Shepparton Art Museum, VIC

Deakin University Collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Murrjiny - A story of metal from the East catalogue published by Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art and Salon Art Projects 2021