

An analysis of six works from *Colour Power 22*, an exhibition of New Wave Indigenous artists at JGM Gallery.

"So I take this word, "reconciliation", and I use it to reconcile people back to Mother Earth, so they can walk this land together and heal one another because she's the one that gives birth to everything we see around us, everything we need to survive."

- Max Dulumunmun Harrison, 2019

ainted in 2020, *Ngura (Country)* is an archetypal work by Eric Barney Mungi Kumanara, composed with a patchwork of pinks, oranges and reds with a grid of double rings laid across the surface. The squarish shapes are perhaps suggestive of the way Barney views his natural surroundings in Yankunytjatjara Country in the northwest of South Australia. Amidst the ostensibly unmanageable surroundings of the "outback", Barney sees an orderly arrangement of the natural resources that have sustained his people (Anangu) for generations.

The black and white double rings represent "tjukula" (water sources). By emphasizing the intensity of the reds and oranges that surround them, Barney conveys a sense of intense heat and, by extension, stresses the importance of the "tjukula". Masterfully, he has used an apparently simple arrangement of three colours and two shapes to communicate his knowledge of Yankunytjatjara Country and why that knowledge is so vital.

Much like Barney's work, there is an intense sense of heat conveyed in Mawukura Jimmy Nerrimah's painting, *Millinjinang & Willi*. All three stages of burning are de-



noted by the palette: incipient yellow, fiery red and charred blackness. This is intensified by the wavy contours of the shapes, almost as if we were viewing this image through a haze of sweltering heat. There is also a distinct sense of space expanding and contracting, perhaps because of this heat. Squares condense more and more until, at the centre, they transform into a circle. These circles are in fact "jila" and, like the "tjukula" in Barney's work, they represent waterholes. Their elemental juxtaposition to the heat lends the image an alchemical quality and a sense of geographical transformation.

Nerrimah's early life may help to further contextualize this work. Much of his adolescence was spent evading drought and bushfires and the "jila" sustained him and his family through many of these disasters. These "jila", then, may also signify the communities Mawukura travelled with, while the squares perhaps represent the fire and heat that constantly pursued them.

One of the few sculptures in *Colour Power 22* is Luke Djalagarrarra's *Bird Carving II*, an elongated piece of carved wood, adorned with bright reds, yellows, blues and whites. What we first perceive is the simplicity of the figuration. As a silhouette, the sculpture would more closely resemble a didgeridoo than the figure of a bird. However, with very subtle curves and a carved hook at the top, Djalagarrarra represents wings and a beak. This innovative sense of design is typical of artists from Ngukurr, where Djalagarrarra lives and works.

Decorating the bird with hatched reds, yellows and whites in the style of a lower garment, Djalagarrarra anthropomorphises the creature, conveying a very human, perhaps ancestral, presence. The hatching has another conceptual function. Much like Barney's work, the representation of nature (or a natural creature) with meticulous geometry imbues the painting with a sense of order and interconnectedness.

- Written by Julius Killerby

Opposite: Mawakura Jimmy Nerrimah, *Millinjinang & Willi*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 120cm x 90cm, image courtesy of the artist and JGM Gallery





Above:

Joy Kngwarreye Jones, *Enteebra*, 2015, acrylic on linen, 120cm x 90cm, image courtesy of the artist and JGM Gallery

Below right:

Jukuja Dolly Snell, *Kurtal - Living Water I*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm, image courtesy of the artist and JGM Gallery

wo works from *Colour Power 22, Kurtal - Living Water I & Kurtal Living Water II* were painted by Jukuja Dolly Snell in 2015, the same year she won the Telstra NATSIAA Prize. Both painted with vibrant colours, these are archetypal works by Snell and a seamless fit for the exhibition.

Laid down quite gesturally, the lines in *Kurtal - Living Water I* convey a distinct rawness, while the playful palette perhaps suggests Snell's fondness for the land she is depicting. This land, or "country", is the Great Sandy Desert, southwest of Lake Gregory, where water runs through the sandhills. This is represented on the canvas with alternating lines of blue and yellow, or blue and green.

Kurtal - Living Water II follows the same theme, depicting "jila" (waterholes) scattered amongst the sand dunes. Snell represents these as irregular black dots with rings of green, engulfed by a wash of purple. Dolly, her two brothers and her two sisters were born near these "jila" and so for her they have an ancestral relevance. Moreover, Spider Snell (Dolly's husband) once rescued her brother from one of these waterholes. It is perhaps because of the significance these "jila" have in the context of Snell's life that she encases them within a thick red bank, aesthetically emphasising their importance. Both these works, then, perfectly articulate the theme of *Colour Power 22*. With an acrylic palette, First Nations Australian artists, such as Snell, found new ways of embellishing the landscape, conveying a visceral passion for "country" through the colour scheme.

In contrast to the other works from *Colour Power 22*, Joy Kngwarreye Jones' *Enteebra* is conspicuously monochromatic. In the context of this exhibition, it is further distinguished by a pedantically applied uniform pattern. Repeated white lines push from the centre of the canvas, forming petal-like shapes that curve outward from their base, becoming whiter as they do. The painting represents a flower which is found in a cave called Enteebra, located northeast of Alice Springs. For the Kngwarreye women, this site is used for ceremonial purposes.

- Written by Millie Potter

"For the first time, Aboriginal artists discovered the blaze of colours available in acrylics which helped them portray the burst of floral blooms that appeared after the seasonal rains in their ancestral lands in the desert region."

- Jennifer Guerrini-Maraldi, Director, JGM Gallery

