



Tommy May (Ngarralja)

1935, Yarrnkurnja, the Great Sandy Desert, WA, Australia

Lives and works in Mindi Rardi Community, Fitzroy Crossing, WA, Australia

BIOGRAPHY:

Ngarralja is a Wangkatjunga/Walmajarri man. He was born at Yarrnkurnja, in the Great Sandy Desert. He dances and sings Kurtal, a ceremony relating to the main jila (living waterhole) in his country. He is also a painter and printmaker. He is now referred to as Karrayili which means middle aged person. He is not yet an elder, but he has been given the job of spokesman by his old people. He is fluent in both Wangkajiunga and Walmajarri languages as well as English. He also writes Walmajarri. He was one of the first people to start up the Karrayili Adult Education centre because he wanted to learn to read and write in his own language and English.

"I was big when I left my country. I was already hunting by myself. I was with my young brother and my mother. My father had passed away by this time. I know these stories and these places in my country. We are not allowed to paint that story for other people's country. We will get killed or into trouble if we do this. We put that easy story, not a really hard story like law business. We can't paint that either. I first saw paintings in caves. I learned a lot from people, mostly my father and grandfather. I was living all around in my country, camping all around. Wurna juwal, always moving. When I paint I think about this. My work is now like my drawing for printmaking, straight onto the tin, sometimes wood, using a knife or pens. I work every day, and I've travelled a lot with the paintings. Singapore, Houston, Washington DC, like that."

He is an important person for arts and culture in Fitzroy Crossing and was the formal Deputy Chairman of Mangkaja Arts and formal Chairman of Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC). Ngarralja was also an executive for the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) Board of Director's, and was a contributing artist to the Ngurarra Canvas used in the successful native title claim.

In 2020 he was awarded the top prize in the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2017 Ngarralija Tommy May - On Tin, Raft South, Hobart, Tasmania
- 2016 Gimme Shelter - A Survey Show from the Artists of Fitzroy Valley, Short St Gallery, Broome,
- 2016 Wurna Juwal ReDot Gallery Singapore
- 2009 Luka (Mud) with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2007 Jilji Jaa Martuwarra with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC

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2007 Lau Lau, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2020 37th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- 2017 Art of Aeons - Colours from the Western and Central Deserts, JGM Gallery, London
- 2017 NATSIAA, MAGNT, Darwin, NT
- 2017 Tanarnthi art Gallery of South Australia, SA
- 2017 Trace Elements Courthouse Gallery, Port Headland, WA
- 2016 Scratching the Surface, IDAIA, Sydney NSW
- 2016 Gimme Shelter, Short St Gallery, Broome WA
- 2016 Masterpiece Art Fair, JGM Art, London, UK
- 2015 Hedland Art Award Courthouse Gallery, Port Hedland, WA
- 2015 New Frontiers Linden New Art, St Kilda, VIC
- 2015 Everybody's Prints Nomad Art, Darwin, NT
- 2014 Broken Hill Art Prize Broken Hill, NSW
- 2014 City of Hoart Prize Hobart, TAS
- 2012 Mangkaja Arts 21 Year Anniversary Tandyana, Adelaide, SA
- 2012 Couples Suzanne O'Connel Galley, Brisbane, QLD
- 2012 Prints, Paper, Canvas Nomad Art, Dawrin, NT
- 2012 Emerging Better Worls Arts, Sydney, NSW
- 2011 Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Darwin, NT
- 2011 Jumu & Wanirri Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2009 Mangkaja Artsists 60 x 60 Randell Lane Fine Art, Perth, WA
- 2009 Mangkaja Survey Show, Short St Gallery, Broome, WA
- 2009 Senior Artists from Fitzroy Crossing, Suzanne O'Connel Gallery, Brisbane, QLD
- 2008 More Than a Few Good Men, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 2007 Jilji Jaa Martuwarra, Bridgette Braun Gallery, Melbourne
- 2007 Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Arts Centre, WA
- 2006 Impressions 2006. limited Edition prints by leading contemporary artists, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne
- 2005 This is Still My Country: Ngurrara Canvas, Artplace, Perth, Perth Concert Hall, Perth International Arts Festival
- 2003 Jila, Juma, Jiwari & Wirrkuja, University of Western Australia
- 2003 Murrkunkura Ngarrangkarnijangka Ngurrara: Three men's countries from the Dreamtime, Raft Artspace, Darwin
- 2002 Native Title Business - Contemporary Indigenous Art, national Traveling Exhibition, The 16th Asian International Art Exhibition, Guangdond Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2002 Group Show, Flinders lane Gallery, Melbourne
- 2001 Ngurrara Canvas, National Gallery of Australia
- 2001 Mangkaja Arts Ten Years On, Tandanya, Adelaide
- 2001 18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- 2000 Impressions! An exhibition of prints, Coomalie Centre, Batchelor, NT
- 2000 Group Show, Australian Print Workshop Gallery, Melbourne
- 2000 Fremantle Print Awards, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth
- 2000 People in Landscape: Contemporary Australian Prints, Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Manila
- 1999 Proof Positive, Gold Treasury Museum, Melbourne
- 1999 Cutting Comments: Contemporary Lino cut Prints 1995-98, Silk Cut Award Exhibition

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- 1999 Story Boards: ceramic Tiles form the Kimberley, Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth
- 1998 Group Show, Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London
- 1997 Heritage Commission Art Award, Old Parliament House, Canberra
- 1996 Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth
- 1996 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- 1996 Heritage Commission Art Award, Old Parliament House, Canberra
- 1995 Mangkaja Paper Works, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide
- 1995 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin. Selected to tour nationally with the first NATSIAA travelling exhibition
- 1995 Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Art Centre
- 1995 Prints from the APW Collection, Survey show of recent works from the APW archive, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne
- 1994 Ngarakura Ngurrara Minyarti, This is My Country, Festival of Perth Exhibition, Artplace Gallery, Perth
- 1993 Images of Power, Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley, National Gallery of Victoria

RESIDENCIES / ART PRIZES / PUBLIC ART:

- 2018 Finalist Alice Price
- 2017 Finalist Port Headland Art Award
- 2017 Finalist NATSIAA - General Painting
- 2017 Finalist Bunbury Art Prize
- 2017 Finalist, NATSIAA, MAGNT, Darwin, NT
- 2015 Port Hedland Art Award, Best work in a medium other than painting
- 2012 Fitzroy Crossing Police Station – Glass Panels (PA)
- 2012 Fitzroy Crossing Police Station (PA)
- 2010 Regional Arts Australia Volunteer Awards, sustained contribution
- 2010 Fitzroy Valley High School (PA)
- 2010 Fitzroy Crossing Swimming Pool (PA)
- 2008 Fitzroy Valley Education Centre – Panels Project (PA)
- 2008 Fitzroy Crossing Hospital - paintings on canvas, foyer design (PA)

COLLECTIONS:

Kluge Ruhe Museum of Aboriginal Art - Charlottesville USA
 National Museum of Australia
 National Gallery of Victoria
 Curtin University Collection, Perth
 Queensland State Art Gallery Berndt
 Museum of Anthropology Australian Print Workshop
 Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide
 Carleton College Art Collection, Northfield Minnesota
 Kennesaw State University Little
 Creatures Collection Fitzroy Crossing
 High School Fitzroy Crossing Hospital
 Leewuin Estate Collection

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BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- 2015 Feature Film: Putuparri and the Rainmakers
- 2009 FORM and the National Museum of Australia Canning Stock Route Project: Ngurra Kuju Walyja [One Country One People]
- 2007 Art Gallery NSW One Sun One Moon, Aboriginal Art in Australia
- 2006 Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) NEW LEGEND: A Story of Law and Culture and the Fight for Self-Determination in the Kimberley
- 2005 Exhibition Catalogue: Red Dot Gallery, Singapore Surprise; Cory and Friends
- 2004 National Gallery of Victoria Colour Power: Aboriginal art post 1984
- 2004 University of Western Australia / Berndt Museum of Anthropology ON TRACK: Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Western Australia
- 2003 Exhibition Catalogue: Cullity Gallery UWA Perth / Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency Martuwarra and Jila [River and Desert]
- 2003 Martuwarra and Jila, Jumu, Jiwarri and Wirrukuja, Exhibition Catalogue, Cullity Gallery, UWA Perth/Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency Australian Art Collector. Review/Maurice O'Riordan
- 2002 Native Title Business Contemporary Indigenous Art. Joan Winter. Gurang Land Council. Regional Galleries Assn QLD Kurtal; Snake Spirit.Video Documentary/ABC Television
- 2000 Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art,Oxford University Press & ANU Karrayili The history of Karrayili Adult Education Centre, IATSIS Canberra 2001 Painting Up Big, The Ngurrara Canvas, Kaltja Now National Aboriginal Cultural Institute - Tandanya 18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory People in Landscape. Contemporary Australian Prints. Exhibition Catalogue. University of Melbourne 16th Asian International Art Exhibition. Exhibition Catalogue. Australian Print Workshop Inc.
- 1998 Jila Painted Waters of the Great Sandy Desert, Video Documentary/SBS Television
- 1994 Ngajakura Ngurrara Minyarti, This is My Country, Exhibition Catalogue

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