MUNGUYHMUNGUYH NGARRI BIMBUN BIM: FOREVER WE CREATE ART

Gabriel Maralngurra, Co-Manager of Injalak Arts & Crafts

Munguyhmunguyh means forever and ever. When you paint stories or paintings, they’ll probably live forever, they’ll never be forgotten. The stories we make when we paint will never be forgotten, they’ll be there for our kids and their kids, from generation to generation. This is bininj culture. We keep telling stories, repeating them over and over again. The stories will never be forgotten, they’ll remain the same, unchanged for ever.

I feel proud that I’m sharing these paintings, from myself and my people, here in Kunbarlanja and also for the rest of the world to hear the stories which will never be forgotten. The old people used to paint and tell stories, which are still the same. The old people used to tell their fathers the paintings, and learned from their old people. We carry on the same traditions.

We mentor the young artists who are around today, telling them stories, ensuring that they’re painting the right stories. It’s how we learned from our Elders, and it’s how we paint. Those Elders, when they were painting, they saw their fathers painting on rocks and they started painting on bark. Today we still paint on bark and on paper. That’s how the stories learned from their fathers, and then taught us, are we are teaching the younger artists, telling them the stories.

MUNGUYHMUNGUYH (FOREVER):
Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the John W. Kluge Injalak Commission

BARDAYAL NADJAMERREK AO
C.1926-2009, Kundedjnjenghmi language group
Kurdukadji Djang (Emu Dreaming) 1991
Natural pigments on paper
Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia
Gift of John W. Kluge, 1997
1991.0001.009.01

At the time of the Kluge commission, Bruce Nabegeyo had already established a reputation as a bark painter, learning from his father Bilinyara Nabegeyo (c.1920-1992) who also participated in the commission. Working on paper, Bruce found his voice as a master of highly elaborate narrative paintings. In this work, he tells the story of one of his ancestors: a woman who transformed into a rarrk (in-fill) rather than the cross-hatched rarrk used in ceremonial designs. The prominent inclusion of the artist’s stenciled hands serves to accentuate this connection to his rock art heritage while marking his relationship to his ancestral story.

Bruce Nabegeyo
C.1949-2009, Kunwinjku language group
Ngalyod dja Ngalkordow Djang (Rainbow Serpent and Brolga Dreaming) 1992
Natural pigments on paper
Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia
Gift of John W. Kluge, 1997
1991.0001.037

This painting depicts the story of Kurdukadji, the Emu Ancestor (seen in the center of the work), fleeing from hunters and their dogs (on the left). During her escape, Kurdukadji changes into a cypress tree and breaks her wings. She reaches a water hole that allows her to change into Ayplej, the Rainbow Serpent, and eventually into the Emu. When she changes back into an Emu, her wings are shortened, explaining why Emus can no longer fly. During her lifetime, Bardayal Nadjamerrek was held in high esteem for his deep knowledge of ceremony, law and country. Considered the last master rock artist, his paintings adhered strictly to the protocols of rock art, using single-line rather than the cross-hatched work used in ceremonial designs. The prominent inclusion of the artist’s stenciled hands serves to accentuate this connection to his rock art heritage while marking his relationship to his ancestral story.

Rock art on Injalak Hill. Image courtesy of Injalak Arts.

This painting depicts the story of Ayplej, the Rainbow Serpent and a nearby mimih (spirit). The Rainbow Serpent guards the two eggs from a mimih (spirit) nearby (in the upper right). While innovating in style and medium, Nabegeyo ensures the stories of his ancestors are passed down to future generations.
In 1992, Maralngurra, the then president of Injalak Arts, wrote that his hope for the future was that those who viewed these paintings would “develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal culture, our relationship to the Dreaming, and the creation of our clan lands.” For the people who created the paintings, it was a means to express their cultural transmission, teaching, and learning through art.

In September 1990, the American businessman and philanthropist John W. Kluge was approached with a proposal to commission forty-five works on paper by the leading artists of the newly formed Injalak Arts and Crafts Association. This exhibition presents five works from the original commission, alongside two newly commissioned works by the contemporary artists Joe Guymala and Gabriel Maralngurra. These remain a cornerstone of the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"This is how we paint today: I come from and that’s the way I do it painting. From my grandfathers to me, I’m a man of the country, this is how we paint, that’s my great-grandfather. They painted this [Ngalyod dja Ngalkunburriyaymi (Rainbow Serpent and Water Spirit) 2018], I’ll paint this painting [Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991] and under it. When I paint it, I will stay. That’s it. I think." — JOE GUMLAYA

"[Namarrkon] is the grandfather of the Kunwinjku. Namarrkon grew as a Barramundi fish and then a Lightning Spirit. He is very important and powerful. In this work, Namarrkon is shown as a Barramundi fish in the rarrk (cross-hatched designs) style. He is holding a water spirit in his mouth. His eyes are wide open and there is wind in his hair. Namarrkon is shown to be very powerful. This painting shows the power of the totemic ancestors that are powerful and can do whatever they want." — GABRIEL MARALNGURRA

"Every person puts a spirit and the other ones were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.

"I want people to feel the spirits and the elders who were doing those styles when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel and touch how it was done, to see the past continuing in the present." — JOE GUMLAYA

"Namarrkon (The Lightning Spirit) 1991" was donated to the University of Virginia with funds provided by Libby Kingdon and Michael Rowe and is held in the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. This exhibition was organized in consultation with the artists and scholars of Injalak Arts, Graham Willett, Peter Kurland, and the Rare Book Workshop.