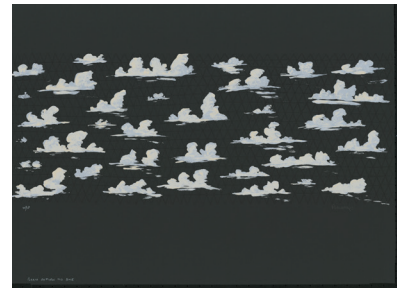
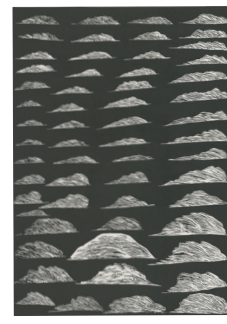




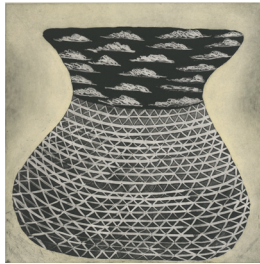
**NAWURAPU WUNUJMURRA**  
*Garrapara*, 2009  
Etching on Hahnemühle paper  
Printed by Sean Smith  
15.75 x 24 in.  
Gift of Basil Hall, 2023  
2023.0006.102



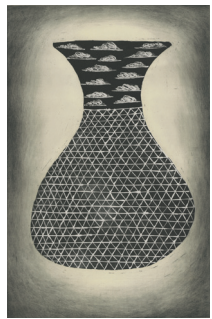
**NAWURAPU WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2017  
Silkscreen on Revere paper  
Printed by Basil Hall  
22 x 29.75 in.  
Gift of Basil Hall, 2023  
2023.0006.138



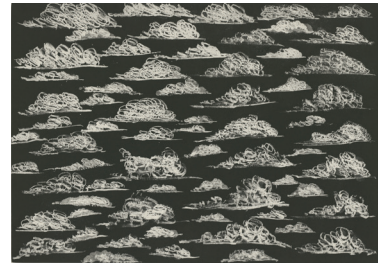
**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Linocut on Somerset paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika  
and Bitharr Maymuru  
30.25 x 22.25 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.001



**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Etching on Hahnemühle paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika  
and Bitharr Maymuru  
27.75 x 23.75 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.002



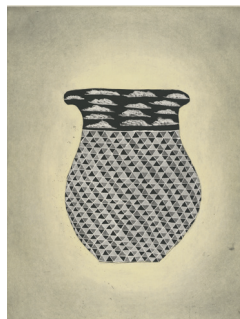
**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Etching on Hahnemühle paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika  
and Bitharr Maymuru  
27.25 x 19.25 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.003



**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Etching on Hahnemühle paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika  
and Bitharr Maymuru  
17.75 x 25.5 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.004



**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Etching on Hahnemühle paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika and  
Bitharr Maymuru  
33.5 x 25.5 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.005



**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Etching on Somerset paper  
Printed by Munuy'ngu Marika  
and Bitharr Maymuru  
33.25 x 25.5 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.006



**BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA**  
*Wanjupini*, 2022  
Natural pigments on ceramic  
14.5 x 15.75 x 15.75 in.  
Museum purchase, 2023  
2023.0008.007

# Wanjupini: Clouds of Remembrance and Return

January 5 - July 7, 2024

Upper West Oval Room of the Rotunda  
at the University of Virginia

1826 University Avenue, Charlottesville, Virginia 22904; Open daily 9 am - 5 pm

## Nawurapu Wunujmurra

1952-2018

Dhalwanju clan

Nawurapu Wunujmurra was the eldest son of the great artist and Dhalwanju clan leader Yanggarriny Wunujmurra. He assisted his father from an early age and began painting in his own right as his spiritual authority increased. After contributing to every major group project that emerged from Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre in the 1990s, he held his first solo exhibition at GrantPirrie Gallery, Sydney, in 2004. In the 2000s, Nawurapu became renowned as a sculptor and his carved *mokuy* (spirit) entered major museum collections. In 2009, he was included in the Moscow Biennale and, in 2010, he won the inaugural "New Media" prize at the 27th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. During a trip to Makassar, Indonesia in 2015, a batik from one of his paintings was presented to the Textile Museum in Jakarta. A posthumous exhibition of his sculpture was shown at Fondation Opale, Switzerland, in 2021.

## Bulthirrirri Wunujmurra

Born 1981

Dhalwanju clan

Bulthirrirri Wunujmurra is an emerging artist who began making art independently in late 2007. She is the granddaughter of the great artist and Dhalwanju clan leader Yanggarriny Wunujmurra and the classificatory daughter of the great painter and sculptor Nawurapu Wunujmurra. Under her father's guidance, she maintained her family's rich artistic heritage. Following his death in 2018, she assumed responsibility for the creation of art depicting the stories he taught her, which has since led to stylistic innovation in her work. In 2018-19, she was also elected to the management committee of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre.



KLUGE - RUHE ▸ ABORIGINAL  
ART ◀ COLLECTION  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



Parents Program



Cover image: BULTHIRRIRRI WUNUJMURRA, *Wanjupini*, 2022, etching on Somerset paper, printed by Munuy'ngu Marika and Bitharr Maymuru. Museum purchase, 2023. 2023.0008.006.

Wanjupini: Clouds of Remembrance and Return

## Wanupini: Clouds of Remembrance and Return

By Douglas Fordham, Professor and Chair, Department of Art, University of Virginia. Fordham is an historian of art and the British empire and a print specialist. In both his research and teachings, Fordham engages with the Kluge-Ruhe collection.

**“Wanupini (clouds) is the same story as my father taught me about the sunset.”  
— Bulthirri Wunumurra**

In this selection of prints and a ceramic pot, clouds drift in subtly modified patterns. These are the works of Nawurapu Wunumurra and his classificatory daughter, Bulthirri Wunumurra, both Yolŋu artists from Arnhem Land at the top end of Australia’s Northern Territory. The thunderheads are associated with the beginning of the monsoonal wet season and the first sighting of *perahu* (boats) from Indonesia on the horizon.<sup>1</sup> Fishermen based in the port of Makassar in Sulawesi, Indonesia, whom the Yolŋu refer to as Mangatharra (or Makassans), visited the north coast of Australia every year starting in late December or early January to gather *trepang* (sea cucumber) and engage in trade. They departed on the winds associated with *bulunu*, or the southeast cloud formations that herald the dry season.



Nawurapu Wunumurra in front of a *perahu* (boat) on the beach in Makassar, Indonesia. Image courtesy of Will Stubbs.

These clouds are quite different from those found in the history of Western art. In the early 1800s, the English artist John Constable wandered outside to produce carefully observed “cloud studies” that captured his country’s famously changeable weather. Constable’s interest in clouds emerged in the same era as modern meteorology, and it revels in the close observation of transient natural effects. Later in the century, French Impressionists turned the flicker of light and shade into an aesthetic principle. A preoccupation with clouds continued right into the twentieth century. In 1963, the German artist Hans Haacke conceived of a *Condensation Box*, built from nothing more than plexiglass and water, which brought natural condensation cycles into the art gallery. Implicit in these works are assumed dichotomies between Nature and Culture, and between Science and Art.

Instead, the clouds of Nawurapu and Bulthirri assert the fundamental unity of Country, an all-encompassing term that includes the land, sea, sky and every entity in between. Yolŋu regard things that

we see as inanimate, such as clouds, as having the life force within. The patterns and colors are as emblematic as those on a flag, and like a flag they represent the ancestral lands of the Dhalwaŋu clan. Each artist has depicted the towering cumulonimbus clouds shared by all Yirritja clans as a symbol of the cycle of souls from ocean to cloud before they are reborn as freshwater rain.<sup>2</sup> In their language, Yolŋu Matha, the word for “sunset” is *djapana* and in the Indonesia dialect of Bugis it means “farewell.” The *Djapana* song cycle follows natural and trade cycles as the sun sets, the fishermen from Sulawesi leave, and the spirits die. But, also, it encompasses the rebirth of the spirits, the return of their friends with the northern monsoon and the rising of the sun.

Nawurapu has maintained the visual storytelling that he learned from his own father, the renowned Yolŋu artist and leader Yangarriny Wunumurra. In 2014, he produced a large bark painting for transfer to batik cloth in Indonesia, helping to reestablish ties between Yolŋu and the people of Sulawesi that had been disrupted by national laws and travel restrictions at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The next year he visited the port of Makassar as part of a Yolŋu delegation that shared songs and belongings. And then in 2016, Abdi Karya, an Indonesian director and performance artist who co-curated the Yolŋu/Macassan Project in the 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, visited Yirrkala, thereby completing the circle. A twenty-first century artist exchange reestablished connections that had been integral to both cultures for centuries. In the midst of these interchanges, Nawurapu made clouds central to his practice, adorning bark paintings, *larrakitj* (memorial poles) and prints with the encoded triangular pattern of the Yolŋu and, uniquely, with the naturalistic cloud motif.

And now Bulthirri is following in her father’s footsteps, representing cloud motifs as a central element of her work. She recounts how she paints a story that was passed down from Nawurapu: “Wanupini (clouds) is the same story as my father taught me about the sunset. The sun is going down. The sunset on the clouds is like the red sails of the Makassans’ ships leaving at the end of the season.” Bulthirri continues, “We cry because the Makassans are leaving. The *mokuy* (spirit) is dancing and leaving—the body is dead and the spirit is going to Balambala. This is Yirritja *bäpurru* (ceremony), the same as my grandfather, Yangarriny—this is his *manikay* (song).”

These are bittersweet clouds, calling to mind cycles of loss, but also promising future returns. “The sun will rise again. The Makassans will come back. And the spirit will return. My father, who passed away, taught me this story. He taught me how to paint the story of *wanupini*.” In the works of Bulthirri and Nawurapu, clouds always float together, evoking recurring cycles and intergenerational songs. “When I see this print it makes me happy,” Bulthirri shares, for “it reminds me of my father and the story he taught me. Through these stories we stay connected.”



Bulthirri Wunumurra (right) and Munuy'nu Marika (left) in the Yirrkala Print Space. Image courtesy of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre.

This exhibition includes both her prints and a ceramic pot with *wanupini*, often accompanied with the triangular pattern. The triangular shapes evoke not just clouds, but pregnant women and the red sails of *perahu*.<sup>4</sup> The clouds and triangular patterns together refer to a specific place at the *marrŋar* (anchorage point) in the Dhalwaŋu clan estate at Gurrumuru. What may appear at first sight as a decorative pattern signifies Dhalwaŋu Country, which is linked by song to their centuries-long trade with the people they know as Makassans.

The mediums of print and pottery are as significant as this iconography. Most of the prints were created at the Yirrkala Print Space, which was founded in 1995 within the Buku-Larrngay Mulka Art Centre, an Indigenous community-controlled art center in Yirrkala. Nawurapu created the earliest of his etchings in 2009 in collaboration with the Australian master printmaker Basil Hall. It is a vertical landscape in which clouds hover on a metallic gold sky while a sea of undulating hatch marks fills most of the page. In his later silkscreen, bright white clouds float over a black grid of intersecting triangles. While Bulthirri’s prints, all made in 2022 and 2023, might appear similar from a distance, each one subtly reveals the process by which it was produced on closer inspection. A linocut represents clouds as solid as mountains, each traversed by contour lines where her tool carved away the matrix, whereas an etching is densely packed with clouds formed by the looping circles of her hand.

Many of her prints represent ceramic vessels painted with clouds and geometric designs. The pots, still used today in Sulawesi, are called *rupa* in Yolŋu Matha and *budjung* in Bugis-Makassarese languages. In 2023, Bulthirri painted the one acquired by Kluge-Ruhe, which was likely made in Java due to the loss of local knowledge. As she notes, “I have been painting *wanupini* on ceramic pots as it reminds me about the connection the Makassans have with Yolŋu.” Here are testaments to the rejoining of Yolŋu and people of Sulawesi in the twenty-first century. As Abdi Karya wrote, these painted vessels are “a meeting of two different classical traditions in one object. ...Makassar’s classical pottery tradition combined with sacred Yolŋu painting offers a different dimension and contemporary notion of the centuries-old relationship between the two cultures.”<sup>5</sup> Glowing against a black ground, Bulthirri’s printed images of painted pots capture the essence of *wanupini* as clouds of both remembrance and return.

### NOTES

1. Kade McDonald, Henry Skerritt, and Will Stubbs, “Nawurapu Wunumurra, *Wanupini (Clouds)*, 2017,” *Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/wanupini-clouds/>.
2. Ibid.
3. This cultural exchange is recounted in Abdi Karya, “Jappama. Nia’ma (I’m Leaving. I’m Here),” *QAGOMA Asia Pacific Art Papers*, 2021, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://apap.qagoma.qld.gov.au/jappama-nia-ma-im-leaving-im-here/>.
4. McDonald et al., “Nawurapu Wunumurra, *Wanupini (Clouds)*, 2017.”
5. Karya, “Jappama. Nia’ma (I’m Leaving. I’m Here).”

**“When I see this print it makes me happy— it reminds me of my father and the story he taught me. Through these stories we stay connected.”**