

OUR UNBROKEN LINE

The Griffiths Family

Curated by Dora Gerrngarri Griffiths



This exhibition is about many things. It is a big story. It is about my grandmother, Dinah Dingle, who was born before the arrival of white men and survived colonization. Her people were forced to move from their Country to cattle stations [ranches] to learn about white man's living. They were forced to work on the stations, like slaves. The only pay they received was flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and some clothes. They were not allowed to speak their own language on the station and were taught how to say, "Yes Mr. Boss" and "Yes Mrs. Boss." Some still talk like that today. In 1967 after an important referendum was passed in Australia, our people were removed from stations to towns and their lives changed again for the worse.

This exhibition is about the stories before colonization. My mother Peggy Madij Griffiths was born on Newry Station and did not experience her mother's traditional way of life. She only learned about the history of her Miriwoong people and Country from her mother and grandparents.

I am telling the world what happened to our people many, many years ago before I was born. It is much easier telling the story through art, animation and videos. These stories have been passed down from generation to generation and they will be told for many generations to come so that our great-grandchildren will know what our mother was told. These stories were not written down in any way, but passed down through storytelling and art.

This exhibition is about the many changes that occurred in our people's lives over a short period of time. Today we are still suffering from our past. It is important that the true history of our people be told. That is why we are trying to keep our stories strong and ensure that they will be passed down to the younger generations to come.

Finally, this exhibition is about our mother, Peggy Griffiths, who is a great artist and mentor to me, my sister Jan Baljagil Gunjaka Griffiths, and to my granddaughters, Delany Ngugunuk Griffiths, Cathy Marawuk Binbirridj Ward, Anita Churchill, and Kelly-Ann Ngadjil Drill.

—DORA GRIFFITHS, Curator

Dora Griffiths is an artist, curator and arts administrator of the Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples. She was born in Kununurra, Western Australia, where she lives with her five children and fifteen grandchildren. Dora has been a director of the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts board and the Chair for several years. She completed an arts-worker extension program in 2012 in which she learned art industry skills including conservation, and in 2018 she earned a Certificate in Cross Cultural Conservation and Heritage from the University of Melbourne. In 2019, Dora participated in an Art Gallery of Western Australia internship program, and has since curated numerous exhibitions including *The Alternative Archive* (2019) and *Open Borders* (2022), which toured regionally throughout Western Australia. In 2023 she was awarded the East Kimberley Aboriginal Achievement Award for her outstanding contribution to culture and community.

Our Unbroken Line: The Griffiths Family is presented in partnership with Waringarri Aboriginal Arts and Creative Australia. It is supported by Creative Australia and UVA Arts.

This work by my mother is the most important piece in this exhibition. It depicts the Country in the Keep River National Park where my grandmother, my mother's mum, Dinah Dingle was born. In this painting are places where our grandmother walked, fished, and hunted with her parents and grandparents. It tells the entire story of our grandmother's life. They had no hospital and no car in those days. They used to walk from Country to Country. The work is curved because my mother wants you to feel what it is like walking in her Country and being surrounded by Country.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

PEGGY MADIJ GRIFFITHS

Born 1941

Miriwoong people

Jalin to Jemarin 2020

Natural ochre and pigment on paper

Lamboong are wooden vessels used to carry babies, food, and water. On this *lamboong*, my mother has painted Jalin, an important site for Miriwoong people on her Country, Jinamoom (Keep River) and spinifex [a type of spikey grass]. The *lamboong* represents my mother carrying her culture, Country, stories, and family history. She was the first from our community to be involved in textiles and ceramic workshops and she encouraged the younger artists to join her and not be shy. She wanted to tell the story of her Country in different mediums and she led the way, mentoring and encouraging her daughters and granddaughters to do the same.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

PEGGY MADIJ GRIFFITHS

Born 1941

Miriwoong people

Jalin 2023

Earthenware with underglaze decoration

These paintings tell a story about my mother's mother, Dinah Dingle, who hid in the billabong [small lake] from the tracker and the station owner who were looking for Aboriginal people to work as hard labor on the cattle station. Our mum, Peggy Griffiths, told the story to my little sister, Jan. Mum did not know how to tell the story, so now Jan tells it through her art on our mum's behalf. Jan's paintings are bright and colorful, but the story is sad and emotional.

Jan's ceramics, which you can see in the alcoves, tell the same story but in a different medium. My sister is not only a painter but also a ceramic artist, poet and installation artist. I have chosen these pieces because I want to show the many ways that Jan tells the story through her art. She makes *lamboong* [carrying vessels], plates, and slip-cast boab nuts. Slip-cast boab nuts are a new type of artwork that we are creating at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

JAN BALJAGIL GUNJAKA GRIFFITHS

Born 1971

Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples

ABOVE MANTLE

***History Beneath the Beauty* 2023**

Natural pigments on paper

LEFT ALCOVE

***History Beneath the Beauty* 2023**

Porcelain with hand painted underglaze decoration

RIGHT ALCOVE

***History Beneath the Beauty* 2023**

Underglaze with sgraffito on porcelain

The boab tree is very special. It's what our people lived off, the boab nut. It can get dry and fall to the ground and when it's raw you can roast it. When people first come to the Kimberley region, they all love the boab tree because it's unique and there's nothing like it. I'd like to teach people that the tree doesn't just hold history, knowledge and culture. It holds survival. We acknowledge the boab tree with the Dreamtime stories and history and the knowledge that was handed down. My grandmother was born under a boab tree.

– JAN BALJAGIL GUNJAKA GRIFFITHS

JAN BALJAGIL GUNJAKA GRIFFITHS

Born 1971

Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples

LEFT WALL, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Gerdewoon – Boab Nuts 2024

Jilinybeng – Bush Cucumber 2024

History Beneath the Beauty 2024

Slip-cast porcelain with hand painted underglaze decoration

RIGHT WALL, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Bush Tea 2024

Jamarndaj – Bush Fig 2024

Waterlily 2024

Boodbarang – Konkerberry 2024

Slip-cast porcelain with hand painted underglaze decoration

As the granddaughter of Peggy Griffiths, Delany calls her *gagai* (maternal grandmother). Cathy Ward, whose painting can be seen opposite, calls Peggy *ngajang* (paternal grandmother). Cathy and Delany are learning their grandmother's stories and about the Ngarangarni (Creation Time) when ancestors created the land, rivers, plants and animals.

Cathy and Delany's paintings are maps of the same Country, which is a place called Goordim. Our ancestors used to shelter here from the floods. The billabongs [small lakes] would fill up after the wet season and they would go there to gather water, hunt and fish. Goordim is the big hill that can be seen in both paintings, which is also known as Butterfly Dreaming. This Country was created by the butterfly during the Ngarangarni. There is a cave there full of butterflies. It is a beautiful place.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

DELANY NGUGUNUK GRIFFITHS

Born 1989

Miriwoong people

Goordim, Woorilbem and Flying Fox Springs 2023

Natural pigments on canvas

Goordim is where traditional song and dance was taught to younger generations. Two tribes would come together and the elders from each group would teach the traditional song, dance, and storytelling to keep it alive. This is where Cathy's grandmother, Peggy Griffiths, learned to sing and dance. Now, she has passed these songs and dances down to her children and grandchildren. We are all traditional performers today.

Cathy depicts Jinamoom (Keep River) flowing through her painting, joined by many smaller creeks. The Country is surrounded by big hills with the river and springs running through them, like gorges, creating billabongs [small lakes]. Cathy does not use dotting in her work. She makes her rivers and hills stand out through lines of white ochre.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

CATHY MARAWUK BINBIRRIDJ WARD

Born 1994

Miriwoong people

Goordim 2023

Natural pigments on canvas

The leaves [of the white gum tree, *Warlarring*] are used for smoking once someone passes away and the bark, they used to burn the bark and use the ashes to chew bush tobacco with. This makes the tobacco last longer.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

Born 1970

Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples

Warlarring – White Gum Leaves 2024

Natural pigments on canvas

The ashes from the burnt [Bauhinia] tree are used for chewing tobacco with. The ashes are very white and they taste “cheeky” (hot like chilli) when mixed with water.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

Born 1970

Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples

Wanyarring – Bauhinia tree 2024

Natural pigments on canvas

My mum, Peggy Griffiths wanted to find different ways to bring young people into art to teach them about bush tucker [foods]. She led the first textiles workshop in 2016 to encourage me and her granddaughters to learn the new medium, while also handing down knowledge. Today we have a fashion range made from all these textiles called Boonkaj, which means “coming out” or “appearing.”

These textiles are block printed by hand to show our bush tucker. My print is of the leaves of the boab nut, which you can eat. Anita and Kelly-Ann print the bush fruits Meжереен and Jamandaj. Meжереен is a little sweet black plum, a bit like a blueberry. Jamandaj is a fig from trees that grow alongside rivers. My mum and the old people used to eat these foods while living on Country. We still eat them today.

– DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

DORA GERRGNGARRI GRIFFITHS

Born 1970

Miriwoong and Ngarinyman peoples

Gerdewoon thon Malin – Boab Nut Leaves and Water Weed 2023

Hand block-print ink on linen

ANITA CHURCHILL

Born 1988

Miriwoong people

Mejerren – Black Plum 2023

Hand block-print ink on linen

KELLY-ANN NGADJIL DRILL

Born 1988

Gija people

Jarmandaj – Bush Fig 2023

Hand block-print ink on linen