

From the exhibition catalogue, *East of East Kimberley: Warmun to Asia*, p4
ReDot Gallery, Singapore, June 2008

A WORD FROM WARMUN ART

On behalf of the artists of Warmun Art Centre, we are delighted to welcome the people of Singapore to Gija country. It is significant that, in the year we celebrate our first decade, we present our first exhibition in neighbouring Asia, in a city no more remote to us than several in Australia. We are proud to be associated with ReDot Gallery, and excited about our artworks being exhibited in such a beautiful space.

Here in Warmun, the boab trees are losing their leaves and the lush greens of the Wet are changing to the red ochres of the Dry. The hot air is infused with birdsong and heavy with the Dreamings that explain how things came to be.

Warmun paintings are truly of the country, for they are composed of the many colours of the ochres collected by hand from the beautiful ranges, savannah and gorges that surround us here in the East Kimberley.

The white of the dots we call *mawundu*, an ochre of the finest texture that is also used for face and body ceremonial decoration. Artists go out every few months to Rose's Yard, 50km away, and dig out grey chunks. Peeled away and rubbed, they reveal a sparkling white. Black comes from charcoal made from our native trees. Blue is made by mixing charcoal and white, and green from charcoal and the radiant yellow that reflects the sun. That yellow, heated, also makes orange. Our coveted reds and pinks are sometimes traded with other artists.

In Warmun, artists still pound the ochres by hand, in an oversized mortar and pestle. Some sift and strain it for a fine powder, and thin it to a wash; others layer or contrast the textures to get a rich, tactile surface.

Some artists paint at the Art Centre; others paint at home. Most live in Warmun, either up the road or across Turkey Creek. Some live in neighbouring communities; others move away but still use our ochres to paint the stories that live deep in their consciousness.

Often children come to learn the stories and the traditional techniques. An exciting trend is that of the old stories being reinterpreted faithfully, several generations past, with a new, youthful slant.

We have worked hard with Giorgio and Caroline to bring you the cream of what is coming out of Warmun as we move into our second decade.

We bring you eight senior artists. Elder Madigan Thomas is a colour innovator; working in a palette moving from clotted creams and pastels to the earthy tones that were the traditional colours of the dance boards these paintings evolved from. Her stories teach Gija culture and law, flora and fauna, as well as touching on post-white-settlement events. Her prizewinning daughter Shirley Purdie weaves the organic shapes and vibrant colours into stories of country and 'two way' – the meld of Ngarrangkarni (Dreaming) and Christianity. Patrick Mung Mung is a strong community law man and teacher. He and his wife Betty Carrington portray country we can see from the Art Centre, out to the east. They can be found in the garden painting each morning: Patrick with his multiperspective landscapes and Betty with her delicate pastels and creamy, layered canvases. Nora Nagarra's unmistakable style takes on Purnululu using optic patterns; Churchill Cann's country is watercolourish and often ethereal. Mabel Juli's iconic *Karngin Ngarrangkarni* (Moon & Star Dreaming) has a story of star-crossed love as long as the painting is minimal. At her table beneath the concrete pillars of the old Art Centre building, Nancy Nodea makes her spare, precisely mapped out landscapes.

Her son Gabriel Nodea is an emerging artist and law man who paints symbols from his dreams. David Cox, who learned from Churchill Cann, has developed his own thickly swirling style. Lorraine Daylight learned the stories and techniques of founding member Jack Britten. Jane Yalunga, the daughter of the East Kimberley's acclaimed Rover Thomas, has her own quirky style. Marika Mung tells his stories of her father, Warmun artist Beerbee Mungnari, in her own way, always finely executed. Tommy Carroll, Marika Patrick and Roseleen Park have each developed their own distinctive style from soaking up the knowledge of artist relatives from way back, as well as a 'hidden knowledge' passed down through millennia spent in this ancient land.

We hope you will look beneath the surface, where the stories lie. The paintings come from the heart – of Gija people, and of Gija country.

Jacqueline Coyle-Taylor

Business manager, Warmun Art Centre

April 2008