

An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes. The composition is dominated by white and light blue tones, with dark blue and black accents. The strokes are thick and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and contrast.

MIRDIDINGGATHI
JUWARNDA **SALLY GABORI**
DULKA WARNGIID **LAND OF ALL**

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI
JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI
DULKA WARNGIID LAND OF ALL

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution First Australians make to the art and culture of this country.

WARNING

It is customary in many Indigenous communities not to mention the name or reproduce photographs of the deceased. All such mentions and photographs in this publication are included with permission. However, care and discretion should be exercised in using this book within Indigenous communities.





CAT.20
Dibirdibi Country (detail) 2009
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 101cm
Collection: John McPhee
Photograph: Jenni Carter

PAGES 4–5: CAT.43
Thundi (detail) 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm
Collection: Annabel and Rupert Myer, AO
Photograph: Jenni Carter

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FOREWORD

Chris Saines, CNZM

Director, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Ten years ago, the Queensland Art Gallery hosted the first of three Xstrata Coal Emerging Indigenous Art Awards. Among ten shortlisted artists was one who had taken up painting only a year earlier. Like many Kaiadilt women, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori was a skilled practitioner of traditional crafts who maintained her connection to Country through song. In 2005, at the age of 81, she had yet to pick up a paintbrush. This changed in April that year when she attended a series of painting workshops at the Mornington Island Arts and Crafts Centre. Here she discovered and embraced a new medium to express her connection to Country in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Gabori's instinct for colour and composition approaches abstraction while conveying a deep connection to her important places. Born on Bentinck Island in the 1920s, she lived a traditional life with her family until the entire population was moved to Mornington Island by Presbyterian missionaries in the 1940s following devastating drought and cyclones.

Though Sally Gabori could never return permanently to Bentinck, due to her husband's ailing health, and then her age, she was able to revisit her birth Country occasionally by charter plane from Mornington.

Gabori's keen desire to communicate the stories and knowledge accumulated over an incredible life spanning 90 years has left an astonishing legacy. Few artists have made such an impact from such a short career: a major site-specific work adorns the Banco Court in Brisbane's Supreme Court Building; and a sweeping mural for the redeveloped international terminal of the Brisbane Airport was one of the last major projects commissioned during her lifetime. In it, a selection of Gabori's artworks are reproduced and applied from ceiling to floor along the 750-metre arrivals concourse. A more potent and poetic welcome to Queensland could hardly be imagined.

CAT.34
Dibirdibi Country 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
121 x 484cm (installed)
Purchased with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM,
and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland
Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Among 50 pictures in 'Dulka Warngiid' that trace Sally Gabori's stylistic shifts over a decade of practice are paintings of the artist's Country at Mirdidingki; her father's Thundi Country; Nyinyilki, the main outstation on Bentinck where Sally and her family would return at every possible opportunity; and Dibirdibi Country, the places associated with her husband Pat. Her late output included massive collaborative paintings with other Kaiadilt women, bark paintings produced in conversation with Yolngu artist Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, and emotionally loaded, almost monochromatic, paintings and works on paper.

In addition to the Queensland Art Gallery's own holdings, this exhibition includes works from public and private collections nationally. I thank the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Mirndiyan Gununa Aboriginal Corporation (Mornington Island Art), the University of the Sunshine Coast, Rockhampton Art Gallery, Alcaston Gallery, the Port Phillip Collection and the Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori.

Our generous private lenders include Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM, Patrick Corrigan, AM, Phillip Harding, Dr Terry Cutler, Robert and Collette Goodliffe, Annabel and Rupert Myer, AO, Richard and Harriett England, Eleonora and Michael Triguboff and John McPhee.

The dedication of the Gallery's Curator of Indigenous Australian Art, Bruce Johnson McLean, has driven this project from the beginning. I thank him for the thoughtful and perceptive way in which he has shaped this exhibition and its publication. The National Gallery of Victoria's Senior Curator of Indigenous Art, Judith Ryan, has written on Gabori's position in the broader landscape of female Aboriginal women painters, and I thank her for her insight. We're delighted that this exhibition tours to the NGV.

'Dulka Warngiid' was made possible through the support of Beverly Knight, Alcaston Gallery, a great champion of Mrs Gabori's work; Mornington Island Art; and the Estate of Sally Gabori. This publication has been assisted by generous contributions from Beverly and Anthony Knight and Peter and Anna Cottell. Glenn Manser has supported curator Bruce Johnson McLean's research travel, contributing to this project and the broader development of our Indigenous Australian art collection.

'Dulka Warngiid' was under development when it was announced in early 2015 that Sally Gabori had died peacefully surrounded by family and friends. While we would have loved for her to see her pictures gathered in this way, we are grateful we can share them with the world. It is a privilege and a pleasure to celebrate the work of such a remarkable artist, whose legacy is a vibrant and immensely powerful picturing of Country.





DULKA WARNGIID: THE WHOLE WORLD

Bruce Johnson McLean

Like so many celebrated artists, Sally excelled at painting the world she knew. The key to understanding her art comes from knowing, in at least a small way, her place.

Sometime around 1924 Sally Gabori was born by a creek on the south side of a small, almost barren island in one of Australia's most isolated areas. Her family lived a traditional life, almost entirely dependent on the sea. They very rarely had contact with the white Europeans who had claimed their land from afar some 150 years earlier, and had none of the material comforts that we take for granted today. That Sally was born on the blind side of the Australian frontier and then went on to become one of Australia's greatest contemporary artists is testament to the magic of contemporary art: that given the right support an artistic virtuoso can thrive outside of the centre of art-world power and, sometimes, great art can just happen.

Like so many celebrated artists Sally excelled at painting the world she knew. The key to understanding her art comes from knowing, in at least a small way, her place — Kaiadilt Country — home to the Kaiadilt people on Bentinck Island. At just 16 by 18 kilometres, it is the largest of the South Wellesley group of islands in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria, off north-western Queensland, in northern Australia.

CAT.9

Dibirdibi Country – Topway (detail) 2006

Synthetic polymer paint on linen

151 x 101cm

Purchased 2008, The Queensland Art Gallery

Foundation Grant

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

PAGES 10–11: CAT.15

Dibirdibi Country (detail) 2008

Synthetic polymer paint on linen

196 x 305cm

Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM

Photograph: Chris Groenhout

KAIADILT COUNTRY A HISTORY

Bentinnck Island and the other formations that make up Kaiadilt Country are relatively young landforms. Archaeological research suggests that the Kaiadilt have inhabited the islands for the 6000 years of their existence, since the last ice age separated the islands from the mainland.¹ The culture that developed here was unique to this place, and its language, songs and stories grew with the land.

Macassan harvesters of trepang, the sea cucumbers bountiful in Bentinnck's shallow rocky reefs, had visited the islands for hundreds of years pre-European contact, setting sail annually from their base in Sulawesi, Indonesia. As Bentinnck Island is in the southern Gulf, further on from well-known Macassan contact sites in Arnhem Land and in a more historically remote area, little is known about the interaction between Kaiadilt people and the Macassans. However, their presence is still imprinted on the land through a grove of Tamarind trees, which were brought to northern Australia via Makassar, still standing on Barthayi (Fowler Island).

The first close contact with Europeans came in 1802 when Matthew Flinders anchored the *Investigator* for 15 days at the southern end of the channel between Bentinnck and Sweers Islands, which today bears the name Investigator Road. European visits to the region were limited to the crews of passing exploratory ships who often stopped at Sweers Island to inscribe their journeys on the Investigator Tree until Burketown was established on the mainland south of Bentinnck Island in 1865. In 1866 the entire population of Burketown was relocated to Sweers Island following outbreaks of disease. Carnarvon, a settlement with a customs house, was established on Kaiadilt Country where settlers remained until the 1890s.

The European settlers were keen to restrict the Kaiadilt to Bentinnck Island, and occasionally violence would erupt on Sweers as the Kaiadilt tried to access their important sites, freshwater springs and wells and newly stocked food resources including sheep and cattle.

Around 1916, John McKenzie, who had established a lime mine on Sweers Island, settled near the estuary at the lower reaches of Kumbali, one of two river and estuary systems along with the Makarrki in the north that cleave Bentinnck Island in two during the wet season. He is remembered as being openly hostile to the Kaiadilt and in 1918 he led a mounted party to massacre Kaiadilt camped at Rukuthi (Oak Tree Point) at the island's north-eastern tip. Although some details are disputed, Kaiadilt history records 11 people killed.² Anthropologist Norman B Tindale noted that Sally's mother was shot at, but survived, the massacre. Today, Kumbali is also known as McKenzie River, a cruel reminder of this dark history.

Bentinnck and Sweers Islands were declared Aboriginal reserves in 1934 and, apart from occasional visits from Presbyterian missionaries from Gununa³ on Mornington Island attempting to coax the Kaiadilt into their care, the people of Bentinnck Island lived again in relative isolation on their Country. In the late 1940s, however, a series of disasters beset the islands and greatly affected the Kaiadilt people. A prolonged and savage drought gripped the island and stimulated tension within the community. Suffering malnutrition, 42 people were taken to Gununa in late 1947. The drought broke in February 1948 following a devastating tropical cyclone that unleashed an estimated 3.7-metre storm surge, inundating all but Bentinnck Island's highest points.⁴ Kaiadilt Country's freshwater sites were contaminated, and the island's remaining population finally relented to missionary advances and moved to Gununa soon after.

In Gununa, on Lardil Country, the Kaiadilt faced great upheaval. Their children were taken and placed in dormitory schools, and they were confined to camp in swampland at the far end of the settlement. This dislocation was so traumatic that anthropologist and Kaiadilt linguist Professor Nicholas Evans has noted that

for several years, no child was born and survived, rupturing forever the chain by which one sibling transmits their language to the next. No child born after the move has ever mastered the intricate Kaiadilt language.⁵



In May 1960, Tindale led an expedition to Bentinnck Island, taking many senior Kaiadilt people back for the first time since their removal. As part of his ambitious project to genealogically 'map' Aboriginal Australia, Tindale spent some weeks on the island producing an intricately detailed map including important place names and dolnoro (clan estates) boundaries. Looking to title his map, Tindale asked the Kaiadilt men the island's name, and they replied 'dulka warngiid', which Evans explains as follows:

Dulka warngiid allows many translations into English. Dulka can mean place, earth, ground, country and land; warngiid can mean one, but also 'the same', 'common', 'in common' and 'only'. Because Bentinnck Island and its small surrounding islands were the whole world for the Kaiadilt people, they did not need a word for Bentinnck Island itself, since in actual conversation what was always more important were the specific places whose names rub shoulders every few hundred metres. So when ethnographer Norman Tindale sought a translation for the European name Bentinnck Island, to place on his epic 1962 map, he was given the name Dulka warngiid, which he translated as 'land of all', and it stuck. But it can equally well be translated as 'the one place', or 'the whole world'.⁶

CAT.51

BIRMUYINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA
b.1942 / **MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA**
SALLY GABORI c.1924–2015 /
WARTHADANGATHI BIJARRBA ETHEL THOMAS
b.1946 / **THUNDUYINGATHI BIJARRB**
MAY MOODOONUTHI 1929–2008 /
KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL
b.(c.)1937 / **WIRRINGAJINGATHI BIJARRB**
KURDALALNGK DAWN NARANATJIL
1935–2009 / **RAYARRIWARTRHARRBAYINGATHI**
MINGUNGURRA AMY LOOGATHA b.1942

KAIADILT PEOPLE

Dulka Warngiid 2007

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
195 x 610cm

Purchased with funds donated by Catherine Allen,
Carolyn Berger and Delma Valmorbidia, 2007

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

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MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA

Around 1924, a hostile period raged within Kaiadilt society and Sally's mother left the family's main homeland around Rukuthi and walked to the south of the eastern half of the island to have her child. Sally was born at Mirdidingki, a small creek and estuary towards the western end of a long sandy beach. Sally's family history is also important in establishing her relationship to different places on Kaiadilt Country. Her father, Thunduyingathi Bijarrb, was born at Thundi (Thunduyi) near the river just south of Rukuthi around 1865 and died in 1930 when Sally was still a young child. Her mother, Murukunabayingathi Karnda Thandamand, was born at the eastern end of the small densely wooded Albinia Island, just off the western point of Bentinck Island, sandbars separating it at low tide from the site of Minakuri by only a very narrow channel. She was born around 1880 and died during the catastrophic period on the island in 1946. Sally's older brother, Makarrkingathi Dingkarringathi Thuwathu Bijarrb (King Alfred) was born at the head of the Makarrki River, at the centre of the northern shore and lived from around 1897 to 1947. King Alfred was a leader of the Kaiadilt in the years before their removal from the island.

During her younger years Sally and her family moved between the main homeland places, living an entirely traditional life focused around the rich marine resources of Kaiadilt Country. She helped maintain the rock-walled fish traps, harvest the fish and turtles trapped within, and engaged in ceremonial activities involving song, dance, story and law, which linked her spiritually, culturally and physically to the places of her kin.

In her teenage years Sally fell in love with Kabararrjngathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori, a rival to King Alfred who forbade their relationship. In an episode fit for a Shakespearean tome, Pat led a raid against King Alfred's group, which was partly revenge for an attack on his own group, killing the King and taking a young Sally as the most recent of five wives.⁹ Sally and Pat spent just a year on Country as a couple before their relocation to Mornington Island, but were together reminiscing, singing and talking about their country until Pat's death in 2009.



Proceeds from Sally's paintings allowed her to charter a flight for one last return to Kaiadilt Country with her husband in 2007. He scantily said a word in the year prior to returning and many thought him incapable of speaking. Yet, when he travelled back to his dulka, his Country, he erupted into speech, telling stories and giving voice to his many memories.¹⁰ Such is the positive transformative energy of returning to Country and the destructive power of removal from it.

Mirdidingki Creek
Photograph: Daniel Rosenthal

Fish trap at Kirk Point, Bentinck Island
Photograph: Anna Kreij

These photographs were taken during research supported under the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project number DP120103179)



ART CAREER

Sally's short but potent journey as an artist began in 2005, at the age of 81 when the local art centre on Mornington Island, in association with Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane, held painting workshops led by Simon Turner to try and revive the once vibrant art-making community. Initially only the local Lardil artists were involved, but Turner, an artist, curator and developmental figure with extensive experience in remote communities including Utopia, wanted to include the old people, particularly senior women. Throughout Australia it has been the elder artists, those with the knowledge and authority, who have been the biggest influence on Aboriginal art. These senior leaders also have the currency within their communities to transform these dual-purpose art and cultural spaces. It was a person of this stature that Turner was seeking to attract to the art centre.

With the help of then art centre manager Brett Evans, Turner convinced two groups of leaders from Gununa to attend his workshops. The first were the senior Lardil men and included Lindsay (Spider) Roughsey and Arnold Thuganmu Watt. Both belonged to an earlier Lardil art movement on the island led by Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey. At the second workshop, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, a small

woman known mostly as a weaver from a community that had never put paintbrush to canvas, was persuaded to join. The senior men offered the art centre a renaissance in Lardil painting based on innovative new interpretations of body painting designs developed with Turner. Sally delivered something more unexpected — an entirely new, unbridled contemporary vision that would captivate the art world.

Although Lardil people on Mornington Island, living in the same community as Kaiadilt people, had a strong art history, the Kaiadilt community had little exposure to art, or any comparable form of mark-making, prior to 2005. The sole occasion of Kaiadilt people ever recording their stories through art-like media was in drawings made by senior people, at the request of Tindale during his expedition in 1960, today housed in the South Australian Museum. Traditional tools, objects, or bodies were scarcely painted, as was the tradition elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia; instead, bodies were marked with cicatrices, ceremonial cuts that aged into patterned scars. So, Sally Gabori's entrance into art came without preconception, without the weight of a tradition to follow. Here was a space for something completely new, a space for pure innovation.

Joseph Watt, Lindsay Roughsey and Sally Gabori painting at Mornington Island Arts and Crafts, 2005
Photograph: Brett Evans
Image courtesy: Woolloongabba Art Gallery



Sally Gabori painting at Mornington Island Arts and Crafts, 2005
Image courtesy: Woolloongabba Art Gallery

CAT.2
My Country 2005
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
60 x 30cm
Collection: The Estate of Mirdidinggathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

CAT.1
All the fish 2005
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
190 x 424.5cm
Gift of Jim Cousins, AO and Libby Cousins through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013
Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Sally's first painting *My Country 2005* (cat.2) conveys an artist's first attempt to capture what is familiar in an entirely new way. Depicting her birthplace at Mirdidingki, vibrant forms, shapes and outbreaks emerge from the uncharacteristically unpainted white canvas background. Although somewhat experimental, this work showed all the potential of what would come, and senior Lardil artist Melville Escott, followed by the workshop convenors, encouraged her early effort.

Soon, Sally was visiting the art centre at every opportunity, engaging with a new life focus, constantly pushing herself to improve. The act of removing oneself from a comfort zone at over 80 years of age is remarkable, but the fact that Sally would continue to push herself to achieve so much more during her 'twilight years' is truly astonishing.

Sally's four-metre-plus paintings of schools of fish, completed mere months into her career, provide invaluable insight into the way she viewed her world. These works, with hundreds of concentric circular forms jostling for space, conjure a large school of fish erupting from the bountiful reef-laden waters around Bentinck Island to feed on smaller fish or other marine creatures at the surface. As each fish breaks the water's surface a wave radiates from the disruption and, for a few seconds, a circle, or hundreds of them, remain as the memory of the interaction between beings and place. These paintings, variously titled *Plenty Fish* or *All the Fish*, allude to schools of mullet, queen fish, mackerel or tuna, but never figuratively depict them. Instead, Sally focused on the impact they and their activities had on the land. Evans noted that the Kaiadilt word *malji*, which translates roughly as 'textured, rhythmic hole' is used to define the patterned 'holes' that these schools of fish create on the skin of the water.¹¹ *Malji* also refers to

patterns made in Kaiadilt weavings, specifically the negative space between fibres, and these early paintings provide a conceptual link between Sally's weaving and the start of her painting career.

Within seven months of picking up a paintbrush, Sally had held one solo exhibition and, soon after, a group exhibition with her kin at Woolloongabba Art Gallery. These exhibitions in her first year of practice were pivotal in establishing this once diminutive senior woman as an art world force and are testament to the gallery's developmental focus. Sally's first representation at a major institution was in the Queensland Art Gallery's *Xstrata Coal Emerging Indigenous Art Award* in 2006. Few artists have exhibited in a state institution in their first year of practice, but even at the early stages of her career, Sally's energy was irresistible. Later in 2006 she joined Melbourne's prestigious Alcaston Gallery, arguably the key gallery for Indigenous art in Australia and gallery director Beverly Knight developed a close relationship with Sally and the community.



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori with daughters Amanda (L) and Elsie (R) Gabori
Photograph: Kerry Trapnell
Image courtesy: Arts Queensland / Cairns Indigenous Art Fair

Kaiadilt women artists:
Netta Loogatha, Paula Paul, Amy Loogatha, Sally Gabori, Ethel Thomas, Dawn Naranatjil, May Moodoonuthi, 2006

Image courtesy: Woolloongabba Art Gallery



CAT:50

BIRMUYYINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA
b.1942 / **MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA**
SALLY GABORI c.1924–2015 /
WARTHADANGATHI BIJARRBA ETHEL THOMAS
b.1946 / **THUNDUYINGATHI BIJARRB**
MAY MOODOONUTHI 1929–2008 /
KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL
b.(c.)1937 / **WIRRGAJINGATHI BIJARRB**
KURDALALNGK DAWN NARANATJIL
1935–2009 / **RAYARRIWARRHARBAYINGATHI**
MINGUNGURRA AMY LOOGATHA b.1942

KAIADILT PEOPLE

Makarrki – King Alfred's Country 2008

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 x 600cm

Purchased 2009 with funds from Professor John Hay, AC,
and Mrs Barbara Hay through the Queensland Art
Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

In 2007, inspired by a return to Country, Sally led a monumental effort to map many important Kaiadilt places through three epic six-metre long collaborative paintings alongside her sisters and nieces — Thunduyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi, Wirngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatjil, Kuruwariyingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Paula Paul, Rayarriwarrrharryingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha, Birrmyuingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and Warthadangathi Bijarra Ethel Thomas — all of whom were born on Bentinck before the exodus. The incredibly exuberant works focused on three subjects: Dulka Warngiid and mapping Bentinck Island through their dulkiwatha (the places they were born and the ties that bind them to those places); Sweers Island, the second largest of the islands of their Kaiadilt Country, including the final resting place of Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod Ancestor; and Makarrki (King Alfred's Country), mapping the place of King Alfred, a key figure in all of the artists' lives.¹²

Towards the end of her career Sally also painted major collaborative works with her daughters, Amanda and Elsie, and encouraged her other daughters, Dorothy and Helena, into the art centre. These paintings allowed Sally to create a space there for a new generation of Kaiadilt artists. As the original group of senior Kaiadilt artists began passing away, a generational shift or renewal was necessary for this newly developed Kaiadilt visual culture — Kaiadilt art — to continue to grow. And again it was the cultural phenomenon that was Sally Gabori who led that transition. More importantly, she took great joy in being surrounded by family at the art centre, sharing stories, sharing culture. Today, Sally's nieces and daughters are accomplished artists in their own right.

Working alongside Inge Cooper, the coordinator of the painting studio at Mornington Island from 2006, Sally's work developed at an astonishing rate and over the barely eight years of her painting career almost all major institutions in Australia, and a large number of important private collections, acquired her works. That she achieved this during such a short professional career¹³ is testament to her energy and tenacity, and those who supported her gift.



PLACES

In Sally's paintings places and people are inseparable, stemming from the Kaiadilt tradition of naming people through association with the place and totem one was born into. By adding the Kaiadilt suffix ~ngathi (meaning 'born at') to a person's birthplace, a name is created. Sally Gabori, born by the small creek at Mirdidingki, started life as Mirdidingkingathi. Her totemic sign was juwarmda, the dolphin.¹⁴ Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda can be most easily translated then as the dolphin-totem person born at Mirdidingki. The name Sally Gabori was borne of European naming conventions imposed on the Kaiadilt people after their forced migration to Mornington Island. It accorded with society's requirement that Aboriginal people assimilate with social systems and naming conventions from the other side of the world. 'Sally' was an arbitrary Christian name given to the then young woman who arrived at Gununa, while Gabori conformed to the European Christian tradition of a wife taking a husband's last name. (Gabori is a corruption of the place-name of her husband Kabararrjingathi, or perhaps just the name of the place, Kabararji.)

Sally painted six key places hundreds of times each, every painting different from the one before, sometimes markedly. Yet in each there are landscape cues to be found.

The 'My Country' (Mirdidingki) paintings celebrated Sally's birthplace, the small creek that runs from inland Bentinck Island to a small bay on the southern coast, facing towards the massive rivers of the mainland Gulf coast. Inland, salt pans emerge, while at the creek's edges mangroves dominate, becoming a heavily forested tidal estuary at its mouth. Halfway along the creek, a small but striking midden-encrusted island devoid of vegetation emerges from the mangroves — a piercing circle of white among the green trees. Nearer the mouth of the creek a branch extends to the east along the back-beaches of the bay, creating an area of density in an otherwise sparse land. The creek ends in a long



sandy tidal flat that extends into the bay for hundreds of metres, then transforms into a vibrant network of connecting coral reefs teeming with turtles, fish and other sea life.

Thundi (or Thunduyi) is Sally's father's Country, adjacent to a river near the northern tip of the island that runs parallel to a ridge of tall sandhills flanking the north-eastern coast of the island. A large salt pan marks the wet season extent of the river, while its dry season form is flanked by mangroves. The river empties out onto a large sand and mud flat to the north that a small channel separates from a large sandbar at low tide. Sally's *Thundi* 2011 brings these sandflats and sandbar to mind through a stark black and white palette, gleaming as if these features were illuminated by the light of the moon. Other works about Thundi were completed entirely in brushstrokes, or were similarly overpainted in white, evoking the ripple patterns on the sandflats, the frothing water at the river mouth, small waves lapping on the beach or the complete inundation of the area during extreme weather.

CAT.33
Thundi 2011
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 101 x 196cm
 Collection: Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout



Mangroves at Thundi
 Photograph: Anna Kreij

Sandflats at Mirdidingki
 Photograph: Daniel Rosendahl

Saltpan viewed from Jirrkamirndiyarrb
 Photograph: Sean Ulm

Low tide at the mouth of Makarrki River
 Photograph: Annette Oertle

These photographs were taken during research supported under the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project number DP120103179)





Nyinyilki is a homeland site on the south-eastern coast of Bentinck Island with a permanent freshwater lagoon. Following the Kaiadilt land rights victory, an outstation was established there, often referred to as 'Main Base', and Sally and her family returned to stay at every possible opportunity. A large sandy bay joins this stretch of coast to Barthayi in the south and to the east a long rocky spit creates safe water where dugongs proliferate.

Other places Sally often painted included Makarrki, her brother's Country — the large river in the north of Bentinck Island; and Dingkari, belonging to her brother and grandfather — a reef and tidal hunting ground off the southern tip of Sweers Island.

The overwhelming majority of Sally's paintings, however, focused on one theme and place — Dibirdibi Country. Her paintings of it are much more expansive and draw on a broader range of experiences and related places than do her other bodies of work. Dibirdibi Country is the Country of the Yuujbanda (Dreaming) Ancestor, Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod whose creative journey, as recounted by Kaiadilt people, accords with the geologically verifiable account of the creation of the South Wellesley Islands.

Nyinyilki fish trap, looking out to Barthayi
(Fowler Island)
Photograph: Annette Oertle

Rocky ridge at Kalnyirri
Photograph: Sean Ulm

Freshwater lagoon at Kurrangki
Photograph: Sean Ulm

These photographs were taken during research supported under the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project number DP120103179)



At the end of the last ice age sea levels rose dramatically. The former Lake Carpentaria joined the Arafura Sea to the west and the Torres Strait to the east. The land surrounding the Wellesley Ridge became inundated, cutting off Bentinck Island from the mainland and from its neighbouring islands. Kaiadilt history commemorates this climatic episode — which occurred some 6000 years ago — through the story of Dibirdibi who thrashed about, cutting out channels with his ventral fins and carving the South Wellesley Islands off from one another.

Dibirdibi's creative and destructive journey ended at the high hill Bardathurr on Sweers Island, where he was caught and eaten. His liver was discarded, thrown at the sea's edge below a cliff at the hill's base, transforming into a freshwater spring that provides a reliable water source to this day.¹⁵

For Sally though, ancestral story and intimate personal history overlap: her husband Pat Gabori was also called Dibirdibi as the inheritor of the story, song and associated places for Dibirdibi. Pat's birthplace, his Country, is Kabararjji, which sits next to Sally's Country at the mouth of the creek at Mirdidingki. In painting Dibirdibi Country Sally may be referring to Pat's birth Country or to the places he is associated with through ownership of that narrative cycle.

These paintings depict inland estuarine salt pans, ironstone ridges, mangrove swamps, rivers, reefs, rock-walled fish traps, a freshwater waterhole and hunting ground covered in waterlilies and brimming with turtles, and Bardathurr, the spring where Dibirdibi came to rest. Dibirdibi Country provided an extraordinarily rich set of places with personal and cultural associations that, in turn, provided Sally with a wealth of creative inspiration.



My Grandfather's Country 2011 (cat.32) alongside corresponding Google earth satellite images of Dingkari (rotated clockwise 92 degrees)
 Satellite image courtesy: Google earth / Images © DigitalGlobe 2016



My Country 2010 (cat.22) alongside corresponding Google earth satellite image of Mirdidingki (rotated clockwise 158 degrees)
 Satellite image courtesy: Google earth / Images © DigitalGlobe 2016



AN ABSTRACTED WORLD

The vibrant colours, bold forms and gestural brushwork in Sally's art have lent associations to various forms of abstraction. The repeated concentric circle motifs of her 'many fish' paintings, which have drawn comparisons to Wassily Kandinsky's abstractions of 1913, and her later heavily worked paintings, evoke abstract expressionism and gestural abstraction. Yet, in all of these works are well-defined places, stories and memories.

One of the issues facing those who feel adrift in viewing Sally's fluid paintings is not so much a question of what she is painting, but how to read it. So much of what we know about art has been written in the language of European art theory, making full translations from the lexicon of others almost impossible. Sally was one of just a handful of speakers of the Kayardild language, so very few people were able to fully penetrate her art-making thought processes, let alone provide an easy translation into familiar art language.

A work that is key to understanding Sally's oeuvre is the dramatic *Nyinyilki 2006* in the Musée du quai Branly, Paris (pictured left). This stark, rather modern-looking painting of black and white concentric circles seems abstract enough to be considered in the trajectory of post-modern artists. On closer inspection, however, and with deeper research, another story emerges; a simple internet satellite map service allows us to gain an appreciation of Sally's country. While many of her paintings are abstracted beyond direct topographical correlation with the landscape, some give us important cues and symbols to decipher. If we were to focus on Nyinyilki, an area around a large freshwater lagoon in the south-eastern corner of Bentinck Island, we notice the shape of the lagoon, strangely rectangular for a natural body of water, sitting inside a semi-ovular bed, fringed by a circle of trees. When we look back at the painting of Nyinyilki, it transforms from a gestural exercise in painting concentric circles into something else. The 'circles' now take on different shapes — the rectangular lagoon, the semi-ovular bed, the circular fringe of trees — as the painting morphs into a story about a place.



Nyinyilki 2006
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
136 x 151 cm
Photograph © Musée du quai Branly, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Michel Urtado / Thierry Ollivier

Nyinyilki or 'Main Base' outstation
with lagoon at centre
Satellite image courtesy: Google earth /
Image © Terra Metrics and DigitalGlobe 2016



To the west of the area pictured in our map of Nyinyilki we see the sinuous lines of the sandy coastline and, at the curve of the coast near the lagoon, a small rock-walled fish trap. This semi-circular motif features heavily in Sally's paintings, most often as bold, black arches that contrast dramatically atop her colourful landscapes. Additional insight is gained by being in this place, especially during low-tide, to see the many rocky outcrops and massive sand bars, some of which link the beach at Thubalkarrawuru, to the west of Nyinyilki, to Thawalt, the north-western point on Barthayi (Fowler Island), a few kilometres south. These sandbars snake sinuously through the bay creating massive 'w', 'm' and 's' forms, which are highly reminiscent of a number of central icons in Sally's paintings, including *Nyinyilki 2010* (cat.25). Sally often talked about the maze-like trails left by dugongs after grazing on sea-grass beds, which also influenced the composition of her Nyinyilki paintings.¹⁶ These paintings, then, could be inspired by any or all of these forms and phenomena as Sally responded to her memories of this place, the time she spent there and the things she knew about it.

There are three physical elements that are unavoidable and ever present on Bentinck Island — the land, the sea and the sky — each encoded in Sally's paintings. The land and sea hold many of the important places, stories and memories already discussed, but the impact of the sky is less acknowledged. Many of Sally's paintings resemble the organic shapes and structures of clouds, from waif-like nimbus forms to menacing shapes that evoke the destructive cumulonimbus, the bringer of storms. Later in her career, Sally painted many darker works, often just using subtle variations on a monochromatic black and white theme. Many of these paintings, while still characteristically free and painterly, embody an almost sinister energy.

Nyinyilki 2010 (cat.25) alongside corresponding
Google earth satellite image of sandbars
near Nyinyilki (rotated anticlockwise 85 degrees)
Satellite image courtesy: Google earth /
Image © Terra Metrics and DigitalGlobe 2016

Annually from 2006 to 2010 cyclones passed through the Gulf, bringing wild storms and ominous skies.¹⁷ Paintings in these years were often highly suggestive of cyclones and extraordinary weather events Sally experienced on country during her youth,¹⁸ including one in 1948 that brought a near four-metre tidal surge, forcing her family to abandon their lands. Many of these works include large sections over-painted with thin applications of white, redolent of this catastrophic inundation. Although the joyful times Sally spent on the place she loved are important in understanding her work, so are these traumatic memories.

Ultimately, what we see in a painting is entirely dependent on the knowledge we bring to it. That said, Sally was unequivocal when explaining her work. Although she rarely gave intricate interpretations or transliterations of her compositions, she proclaimed 'Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa, danda ngad (This is my Land, this is my Sea, this is who I am).'¹⁹

Sally almost always spoke her own language and had little English — barely enough to engage in the most basic conversation. Many have proposed that painting became a new language for her.²⁰ Unable to connect with the outside world in her dying tongue, her works invited us into a world we would otherwise never have been able to access. However, it is crucial to note that in each of her works Sally is not engaging an audience, but communicating with her land and family. She invites us to witness the creative residues of these intense personal connections.



Sally, interestingly, was a singer who conversed and connected with places remembered and people departed through song. Her paintings, likewise, take on the fluidity of song: a repeating chorus is broken by a special memory, erupting in joy, in colour. Here are works of which, like a favourite song she'd sung every day of her 80-plus-year life, she knew every stroke, every note, supremely.

Sally often broke out into Kaiadilt song and dance, sometimes spontaneously, but often when finishing a work or being reunited with her important major paintings. One particularly moving instance was during the media preview of 'unDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial' at the National Gallery of Australia in May 2012. A wall filled with her monumental paintings, including *My Grandfather's Country* 2009, (cat.21) compelled Sally to rise from her wheelchair to stand in front of her paintings and sing and dance. Her haunting, lullaby-like songs have been described by Evans as expressing

a longing for absent people or love and homesickness for particular places. A feeling for the close ties to country that these songs express can be gained from the words of one of Sally's songs: 'bluraayaanki mankinji/mankinji jananga jirrkurumirdamirda diijuru', which translates as 'from being in someone else's country, in my previous night's camp in the west, I will sit down in my sea country to the north.'²¹

Sally's paintings, like this performance, stir a sense of love, loss and longing. When she paints her country she paints the memories of those places and the people who were connected to them through name. When she paints Thundi (Thunduyi), she paints about Thunduyingathi Bijarrb, her father. When she paints Dibirdibi Country, she paints about her beloved husband (Kabararrjingathi Bulthuku) Pat Gabori. And when she paints Nyinyilki, she paints about those people she fought alongside and returned to Country with. Conceptually, Sally's paintings, although identified by place names, are equally portraits of the people who belonged to them.

At the heart of her paintings is an incredible human universality. Although they may appear abstract, they radiate emotional warmth in their celebration of her family and her home. They are paintings of loss, of longing, of love. One day the Kaiadilt community hopes to make a memorial for Sally on Bentinck Island to commemorate her many achievements in the art world.²² Perhaps more importantly it will serve as an enduring witness of the primacy of the connection between this great artist to the place she was torn from as a young woman but who carried it always as her Dulka warngiid. Her *Land of All*. Her *Whole World*. Her home.

Sally Gabori viewing her work *Nyinyilki* 2009 at the Press Preview for 'unDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial' National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, May 2012
Image courtesy: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



ENDNOTES

- Richard P Robins, Errol C Stock, David S Trigger, 'Saltwater people, saltwater country: Geomorphological, anthropological and archaeological investigations of the coastal lands in the Gulf Country of Queensland' in *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum: Cultural Heritage Series*, 1998, pp.75–125, Queensland Museum, Brisbane, 1998.
- Roma Kelly, *The McKenzie Massacre on Bentinck Island*, Mirndiyan Gununa Aboriginal Corporation, Gununa, Qld, 2014.
- Gununa is a settlement on Mornington Island. It is the Lardil word for 'Enough'. <http://kreios.webcity.com.au/~mor77505/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/MI-History-Culture-DownloadablePDF.pdf>, viewed November 2015.
- <http://www.bom.gov.au/cyclone/history/gulf.shtml>, viewed November 2015.
- Nicholas Evans, 'Muthaa miburlda ngad: The life of Sally Gabori', in *Sally's Story*, [exhibition catalogue], Woolloongabba Art Gallery, 2005, pp.14–15.
- Nicholas Evans 'Dulka warngiid: A place of our own', in *The Heart of Everything: The Art and Artists of Mornington and Bentinck Islands*, Woomera Aboriginal Corporation and Mornington Island Arts and Crafts, Gununa, Qld, and McCulloch and McCulloch Australian Art Books, Fitzroy, Vic, 2008, p.2.
- During the Outstations movement, many Aboriginal people relocated from impoverished government settlements to establish 'outstations' on their own Country. The Pintupui communities of Kintore and Kiwirrkurra in Western Australia are the best-known examples.
- Bruce Johnson McLean, interview with Dr Berry Zondag, Coordinator, Kaiadilt Aboriginal Corporation, and Principal Solicitor, Junkuri Laka Wellesley Islands Aboriginal Law, Justice and Governance Association, Gununa, August 2015.
- An account of this is given by Pat Gabori in 'Thundamun', in Dick Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow: The Autobiography of an Aboriginal*, Reed, Sydney, 1971, p.116. Also quoted in Brett Evans, Nicholas Evans, Paul Memmott, Simon Turner, *Sally's Story*, p.1.
- Conversations with Brett Evans, former manager, Mornington Island Arts and Crafts, Gununa, August 2015.
- Nicholas Evans and Penelope Johnson, 'Bilda Miburiji Kurrij (Seeing with far eyes): The root of Kaiadilt women's art', *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, no.49, 2010, pp.59–63, 85. www.ngv.vic.gov.au/journal_edition/edition-49/, viewed November 2015.
- King Alfred is the father of Rayarriwartharrbayingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha and Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and a close relative of the other women.
- Sally was believed to have stopped painting in 2012, but produced one final group of six works in 2013, painted at the aged care facility at Gununa.
- Juwarnda has been translated as 'black porpoise' in Nicholas Evans, *Kayardild Dictionary and Thesaurus: A Vocabulary of the Language of the Bentinck Islanders, North-West Queensland*, Dept. of Linguistics and Language Studies, University of Melbourne, 1992, p.61. There is no species of true porpoise found in northern Australia. 'Black porpoise' is the local English term for the species of dolphin that inhabits the waters around Kaiadilt Country.
- Details of Dibirdibi Story proved by Mirndiyan Gununa Mornington Island Art Centre, December 2015.
- Gabori is quoted in material provided by Alcaston Gallery and translated by Nicholas Evans: 'Danda yubuyubu kurrngu bijarrbana kurrnguruthirind' (This is the trail dugong leave in the water off Main Base or Nyinyilki when they feed on the bottom.)
- Cyclones Monica (2006), Nelson (2007), Helen (2007–08), Charlotte (2009) and Olga (2010) all travelled through and impacted the Southern Gulf region.
- This connection is also made in John McPhee, *Sally Gabori: A Survey Exhibition of Paintings 2005–2012: danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa, danda ngad = this is my land, this is my sea, this is who I am*. [exhibition catalogue], ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 2013, p.20.
- This quote from Gabori was also the title of a retrospective exhibition, 'Sally Gabori 2005–2012: Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa, danda ngad – This is my Land, this is my Sea. This is who I am', organised by Alcaston Gallery at the Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra 2013.
- Dallas Gold in *Beyond Sacred: Recent Paintings from Australia's Remote Aboriginal Communities: The Collection of Colin and Elizabeth Laverty*, Hardie Grant, Victoria, 2008 has also written on this point.
- Nicholas Evans, 'People of the strand – The Kaiadilt of Bentinck Island', in *The Heart of Everything: The Art and Artists of Mornington and Bentinck Islands*, pp.56–7.
- Bruce Johnson McLean, conversation with Rayarriwartharrbayingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha and Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha, Gununa, August 2015.

Nyinyilki 2009
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
197.5 x 606.4 x 5cm
Purchased 2011
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



CAT.12
 Story Place King Alfred's Country (detail) 2006
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 121 x 91cm
 Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout

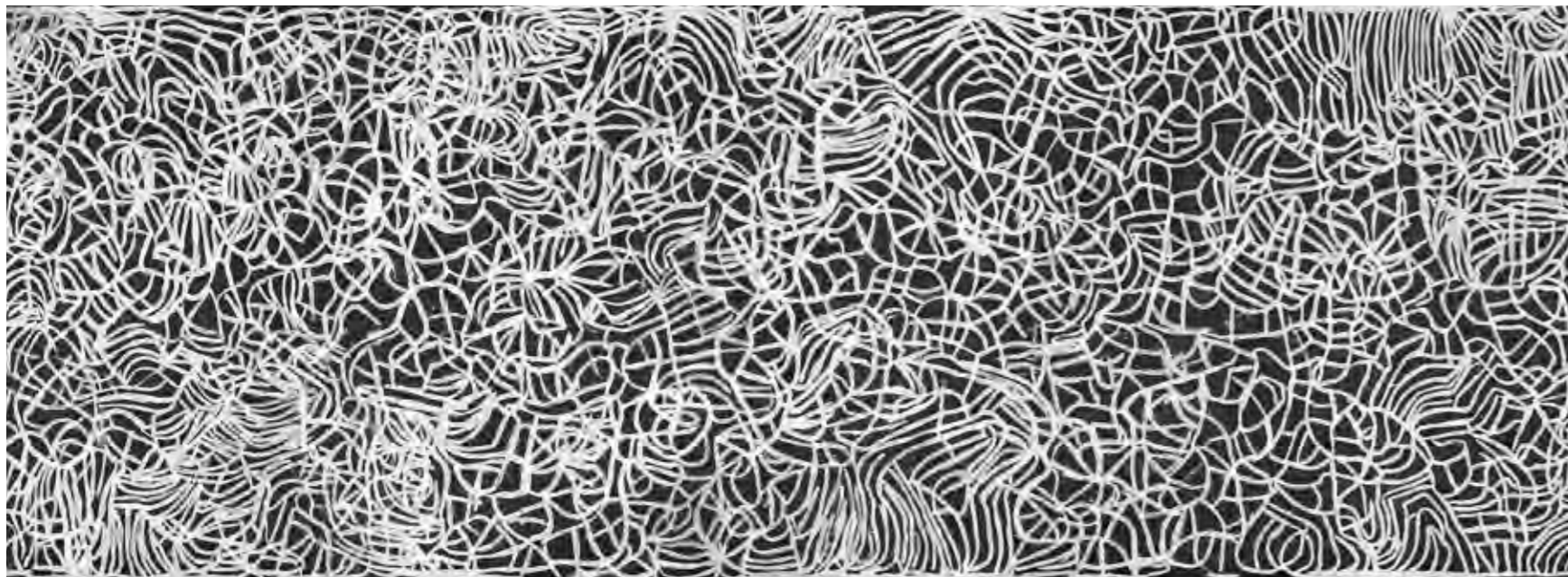
BROKEN COLOUR AND UNBOUNDED SPACE

Judith Ryan

An artist's artist, free to venture at will, unconstrained by ethnographic precedent or ritual strictures, Gabori's body of work exists essentially as art: that is its undeniable power.

In 2005, an unprecedented form of Aboriginal painting materialised on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland that was totally unrelated to the dot and line, circle path iconography of Western Desert art and the wellsprings of its inherited visual language. This aesthetic epiphany occurred when senior Kaiadilt woman, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, a weaver originally from Bentinck Island in the Wellesley Islands, happened to participate in a painting workshop at Mornington Island Arts and Craft Centre, conducted for the Lardil men by Simon Turner of Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane. Somewhat unexpectedly, Gabori, then resident in an aged care facility and attending the workshop as a form of occupational therapy, produced *My Country 2005* (cat.2). This small canvas in primary colours, which possessed an aesthetic power of startling surprise, did not accord with other known forms of Aboriginal painting by men or women.

Indigenous Australian women only emerged as independent artists during the mid 1980s. By the early 1990s Aboriginal women had begun to distinguish themselves as daring colourists, eager to experiment with gesture and form and to explore pictorial space. The belated acknowledgment of them as contemporary artists of consequence is partially attributable to the universally acclaimed paintings of Emily Kame Kngwarreye (c.1910–96), an Anmatyerre woman from Utopia Station, in the central Australian desert. Kngwarreye, a mark-maker extraordinaire, possessed of a phenomenal work ethic, produced a body of around 3000 works during the last seven years of a life spanning 86 years. Working alternatively in different combinations of dots and lines, tones and colours, Kngwarreye affected a revolution in that her work resisted interpretation as encoded map-making, sacred design or landscape: it was neither notational nor diagrammatic narrative, but visual music of mass appeal.



Importantly, however, Ngwarreye's untrammelled spontaneity of gesture, her textured work with unruly line and layered dots and marks, is not a form of Abstract Expressionism but is deeply connected with customary ritual painting. Her paintings are free translations onto canvas of ochre arkeny (body markings) for women's awely ceremonies that are performed to hold and look after Country, promoting feelings of happiness, health and wellbeing in the Anmatyerre community. Ngwarreye's fecund brushstrokes and tangled lines are also a hymn to her principal Dreaming, anwerlarr (pencil yam, *Vigna lanceolata*) (fig.1) associated with her grandfather's Country, Alhalker. The artist indelibly belonged to this birth Country, which she almost invariably painted. The songs, the dances, the body markings, the sensations of being on Country were an indelible part of her being that is palpable in the spontaneous vigour of her hand and in traces of the inherited lexicon of signs and marks that she translated and utterly transformed into holistic compositions all her own. By immersing herself in the practice of painting, after a gestation period of 11 years of working in the batik medium Ngwarreye increasingly distanced herself from any literal correspondence with the ritual body designs that were her earliest form of mark making. Her iconography was stripped back to its barest essentials and oscillated between parallel monochrome stripes, intuitive tangles of lines and fields of layered, dump-dump gestures.

In accord with Ngwarreye, virtuosic Aboriginal artists and authoritative law women of the Western Desert, such as Lorna Napurrurla Fencer (c.1925–2006) (fig.2) and Wingu Tingima (c.1917–2010), were driven to paint once they were introduced to acrylic and canvas. These senior artists used a mnemonic visual language learnt and practised in women's ceremonies and in quotidian contexts, such as sand drawing,

but radically transformed this inherited iconography of kuruwari (ancestral designs) into contemporary paintings with heavily worked surfaces that form a metaphor of the land. The artists employed free gestures, layered stippling and spontaneous stretches of colour, formed of kinti-kinti (close-close) dots and rhythmical swathes of colour to memorialise and celebrate ancestral narratives, associated with much-visited and fondly remembered places in their home Country. Their freshwater performative 'mythscape', directly painted onto primed canvas, pulse with song lines of dancing women, curved linear markings of ochre body paintings and hair-string belts that summon forth the spectacle, music and exultant rhythms of women's ceremonies, or encode the extra-temporal exploits of ancestral beings in a metaphysical cultural geography. The iconography of their paintings — hieroglyphs that can be read like the marks made in the sand for milpatjunanyi (storytelling) — were often laid down first to structure the composition, forming bones of Country through which ancestral beings travelled, tjukurpa mulapa (true stories) are transmitted and power radiates.

FIG.1
EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE
 Anmatyerre c.1910–1996
Anwerlarr anganenty (Big yam Dreaming) 1995
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 291.1 x 801.8 cm
 Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Donald and Janet Holt and family, Governors, 1995
 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 © Emily Kame Ngwarreye / Licensed by Copyright Agency



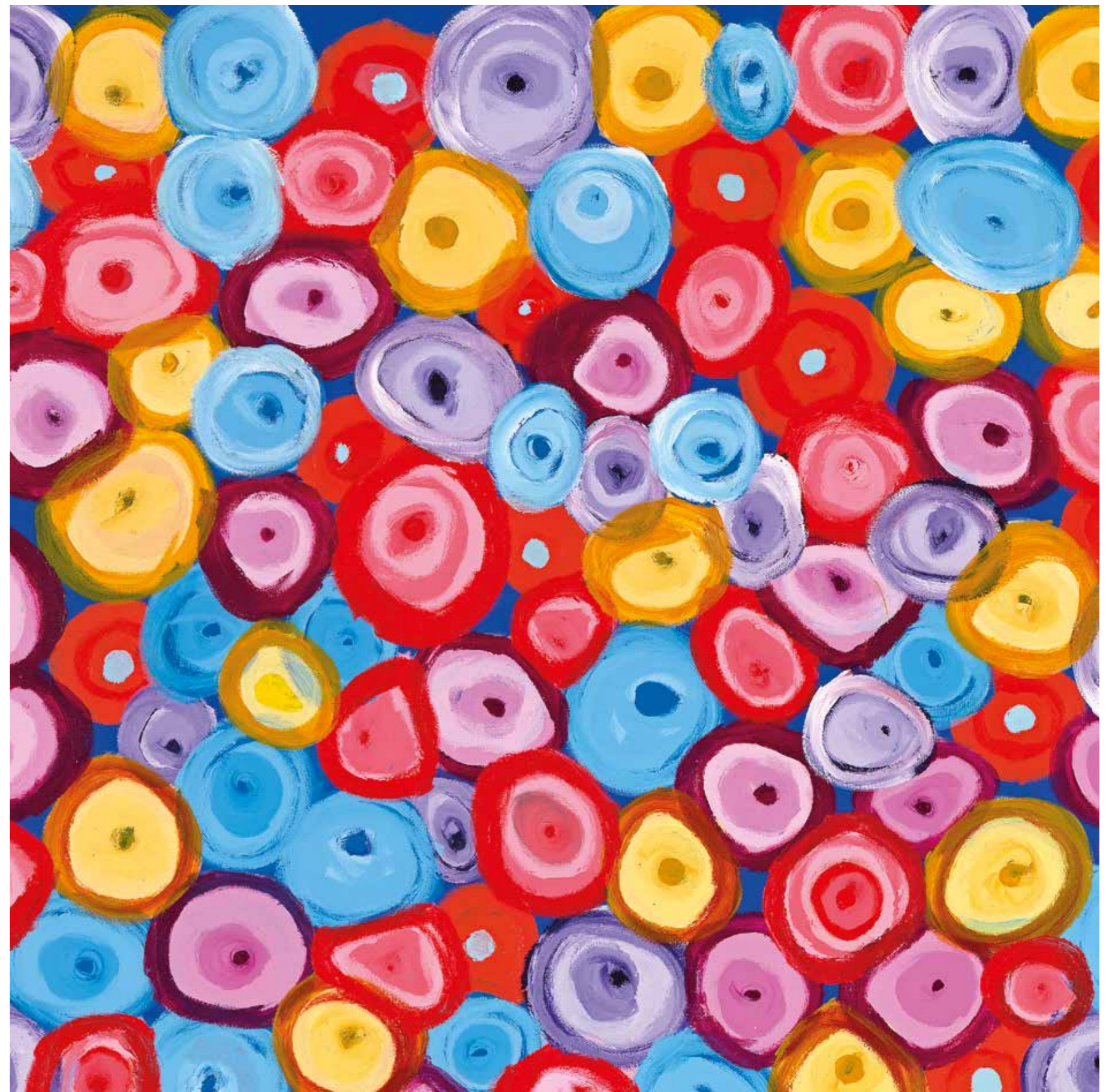
FIG.2
YULYURLU LORNA NAPURRURLA FENCER
 Warlpiri c.1925–2006
Ngapa, warna manu Jukurrpa (Water, snake and seeds Dreaming) 1996
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 193.2 x 101.3 cm
 Purchased, 1997
 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 © Yulyurlu Lorna Napurrurla Fencer / Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency, 2016

Sally Gabori, the author of an explosive form of painting unrelated to that of her Western Desert predecessors, was a totally different saltwater artist of considerable sophistication and daring. She was born in 1924 at Mirdidingki on tiny Bentinck Island, which measures just 20 kilometres from west to east and 12 from north to south, and is surrounded by a large system of elaborate stone fish traps built along the edge of the island and out to sea. These ancient fish traps, constructed of rock and cemented together by the growth of oysters, attest to the Kaiadilt people's sophisticated traditions of fish farming.¹ Fish were washed into the traps at high tide where they were easily harvested, netted or speared, ensuring a nutritious diet, rich in protein. Here Gabori lived in her isolated Kaiadilt universe, in accord with custom, developing intimate knowledge of her saltwater environment and of Kaiadilt cultural practices, fish farming, food gathering, weaving, cartography and cosmology, learning to see and pattern the world through Kaiadilt eyes.² In 1948, following a cyclone, high seas, considerable loss of land and contamination of the freshwater supply, all 63 Kaiadilt residents, including the newly married Mrs Gabori and her immediate family, were evacuated to the Presbyterian mission on Mornington Island, severing the quotidian rhythm of their existence and their practising of culture. Here they were brought into contact with Europeans and came under the subjugation and culture shock of the mission. This traumatic and forcible dislocation caused a deep sense of anomie and sadness in those in exile and disrupted the transmission of Kayardilt language to the next generation of Kaiadilt people who were separated from their parents and punished for speaking in language.

In 2005, almost 60 years after her disconnection from Bentinck Island, the 81-year-old Sally Gabori, one of only seven Kaiadilt speakers of Kayardilt language, began to paint spontaneously with undiluted primary colours. Unlike Kngwarreye, Lorna Fencer et al, Gabori was unable to reference a customary painting tradition on object, body, ground or rock, or an inherited iconography of visual signs and symbols that encode meaning or map a cultural landscape, for no such artistic system exists in Kaiadilt culture. Gabori invented her own painterly style that eventually went further than Kngwarreye in sabotaging 'ooga booga' preconceptions of Aboriginal art. She relished the acrylic medium and became engrossed in the physical process of painting, smearing, dabbing and incessantly working with

a small brush. She made multiple brushstrokes in layers of loose pigment, forming dense fields of colour devoid of the minutiae of dots, lines, markings or crosshatching that characterise other forms of Aboriginal art. Gabori intuitively engaged with the conceptual process of composing paintings on blank canvases, devising forms, shapes, textures, colours and rhythms that corresponded with the way she had learnt to see and make sense of the world. The act of painting brought to her mind's eye vivid sensations of the fullness of her lived experience on Bentinck Island, seen and sensed haptically in diaspora. Intriguingly, once Gabori was immersed in the business of making art, the larger the scale, the more confident and energetic she became in attacking the whole canvas holistically and working with broken colour. Gabori's monumental canvases of uncontained space, daring colour and vigorous gesture, which emerged from 2008 and beyond, have since fractured white preconceptions of what Aboriginal art should look like and mean and have compelled us to regard these works with fresh eyes, devoid of an established theoretical vantage point or comparisons with other forms of Aboriginal art. An artist's artist, free to venture at will, unconstrained by ethnographic precedent or ritual strictures, Gabori's body of work exists essentially as art: that is its undeniable power.

When standing in front of one of Gabori's huge masterworks and looking at its ebullient surface qualities it is as if the canvas has become 'an arena in which to act — rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyse or "express" an object, actual or imagined.'³ The challenge is not to use Gabori's Aboriginality 'as a category that enables you to think that you know exactly what it is all about in advance, or as a sort of hospital bed upon which you think the art is coming from a position of trauma, of suffering, of displacement'⁴, but to let the work speak for itself as a unique form of contemporary painting.



CAT.1
All the fish (detail) 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 190 x 424.5cm
 Gift of Jim Cousins, AO and Libby Cousins through the
 Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013
 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



CAT.18
Ninjilki (detail) 2008
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 198.8 x 460.6cm
 Purchased with funds donated by Colin Golvan, 2008
 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gabori's inaugural experiments with acrylic on intimate canvases are loose arrangements of organic shapes that render visible ideas, cultural memories and sensations of the play of light on rock pools and cherished story places associated with close family members, which had lain dormant in her mind and spirit. Gabori authored in these works a luminous painterly form of expression and a way of seeing that featured vibrant colours in open space. The individual works, painted directly onto the canvas, without preliminary underdrawings, issued from her whole body — the strength of a body's gesture — not just from fingers trained to hold a pencil, a skill the artist had not been taught or deemed necessary to learn. Irregular circles and freely painted roundels often figure in this formative period, irrespective of the designated titles. As if in response to Barnett Newman's provocative question, 'who's afraid of red, yellow and blue?' Gabori worked only in these primary colours, as yet unmixed, completely removing herself from the ethnographic essentialism of ochres.

Particularly strong in Gabori's memory of her island environment are the bountiful fish caught in woven nets or in the hand-built stone fish traps that surround the island. As a Kaiadilt woman well versed in catching and harvesting fish from nets and traps, Gabori delighted in representing a myriad of fish, as an abundance of vibrant, jostling circles. *All the fish* 2005 (cat.1), one of Gabori's first monumental canvases, teems with blue Parrot Fish, red Mangrove Jack, yellow Golden Trevally and purple Mullet as they appeared in the net or came to the surface of deep blue water, their brilliant colours resulting when the sunlight hit them.



A seminal, smaller work of 2006, *Story Place King Alfred's Country* (cat.12) reveals the artist's new-found fascination for radiant expanses of white pigment and a tendency to pare down the number of motifs and create compositions of one or several swollen forms that bleed into each other. *Ninjilki 2006* (see p.28), a singular composition of black and white rectangles inside bold concentric circles, is distinguished by Gabori's primal attack on the canvas and intrepid use of both black and white, dynamic tonal bursts of energy that loom large in her practice. These prophetic paintings, my first direct encounter with the artist's work, dispense with the idea of a background and the clearly defined, rounded shapes of *All the fish* and rely more on the vibrating rhythm of her brush, dense textures of paint, expanded forms and stark tonal contrasts.

Once Gabori made the transition to monumental canvases, this merging of forms into one another becomes more pronounced, evidenced by *Ninjilki 2008* (cat.18), a symphony in white and black with a dash of hot pink (three of her favourite colours) and *Dibirdibi Country 2008* (cat.16) — an extroverted tsunami of colour. Vital thrusting gesture, broken colour and unbounded space became characteristic of these non-figurative paintings, worked in a vigorous, energetic manner. The expansive swathes of colour in *Dibirdibi Country* are repeatedly applied with a small brush loaded with paint, as was her wont, to build depth and physicality into the spectrum of colour, heightened with white that lives in the materiality of the paint layer. Gabori's husband's place, Dibirdibi, where the liver of Dibirdibi, the

Rock Cod Ancestor, was thrown into the sea and created a perpetual freshwater well, recurs constantly in the artist's oeuvre as Country inextricably associated with people and things held dear. Dibirdibi is forever renewed in Gabori's pictorial imagination as a series of visual parables or metaphors of this remembered landscape, each a different invention of her impulsive hand. The immersive performative process of working incessantly with pigment enables her to reconnect with Dibirdibi.

Also in 2008, Gabori embarked on a series of ethereal pastel works, with softly dabbed, smeared and blurred surfaces, termed 'ice-cream' paintings by art historian John McPhee.⁵ These lyrical rhythmical canvases are created by applying a final layer of white brushstrokes over and into brightly coloured wet paint, so that muted hues are mixed in the very process of painting. By working fleetingly and impetuously, *alla prima* (wet on wet) before the under-layer has completely dried, colours and tonalities shift and transform, creating subtle paler and darker nuances of one colour within the white expanses on the surface. The swiftness of Gabori's method is critical to works such as *Thundi 2008* (cat.19), which are suffused with vapours of various intensities of rose pink, equivalent to JMW Turner's 'tinted steam', and utterly free of any correspondence to figuration or ethnographic precepts. Biographical references abound in *Dibirdibi Country 2008* (cat.15),⁶ a calmer field of hushed pink, broken by amorphous yellow and grey shadows and an arresting black motif in the upper right, which stands as a sublime expression of the poetics of tranquillity.

Around 2011, Gabori developed a different technique, necessitated by her diminishing physical stamina, which prevented her from finishing a work in a day.⁷ Instead of painting wet into wet, as previously, she developed a way of applying a milky solution of white over a layer of vibrant colour that had already dried. Consequently, in works such as *Dibirdibi Country 2011* (cat.29) there are two distinct layers of energy. Some of the opaque white brushstrokes obscure what lies beneath, while others are almost translucent, creating a pearlescent textural veil in which colour and darker tonalities interpenetrate the frenetic rhythms of Gabori's brush.

Many of Gabori's works are composed of highly simplified expanses of colour and light, broken by jagged black shadows or blocks of impenetrable, brooding darkness, an absolute depth of tone the artist uses to dynamic effect in many of her works, notably *My Country 2010* (cat.23). In this canvas, the field of textured white paint bearing grey rhythmic shadows is dramatically broken by a black vertical chasm. Whereas *Thundi 2011* (cat.33) operates in negative: shafts of light illuminate the unending field of blackness. This fascination with bold gestural sections of colour intersected by dynamic white or black accents seems as significant as the content itself: Gabori's work is instinctive and unselfconscious and proclaims the power and physicality of paint.

Beyond the titles that Gabori has given her individual paintings, the artist has remained reticent on their exact interpretation. The Kayardild linguist, Nicolas Evans, suggests that Gabori's paintings 'are worked up from the distinctive blocks of light or colourations of the land and sea that dominate as one sits at the locations she names, transmuted so radically that the landscapes which inspired them are barely recoverable'.⁸ It is as if:

These works have their own oblique vocabulary, their own internal logic or anti-logic, their own stories to tell that resist placing an external narrative. Their meanings are made in the encounter between the viewer and the art object, an experience that is sensual, emotional, intellectual and dependent upon the attention and expectations of the person doing the looking.⁹

Unconstrained by a pre-existing Kaiadilt painting tradition or inherited lexicon of signs, Gabori has authored a non-derivative radical language that bypasses the written, or demands for 'stories' that beleague the field of Aboriginal art, to express sensations of locus, life and cultural memory in diaspora. The paintings strike a chord with those of other contemporary international artists, also concerned with the aesthetics of paint and the splendour of colour and remind us that as Lucien Freud stated:

The greatest characteristics of genius is above all energy . . . The highest, the most difficult achievement of art is not to make us laugh or cry, or inspire our lust, but to do as nature does, that is fill us with wonderment. The most beautiful works have indeed this quality. They are surreal in aspect, incomprehensible.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

- 1 See John McPhee, 'Sally Gabori: Feeling the landscape', *Art Monthly Australia*, no.249, May 2012, p.5.
- 2 For biographical information on Mrs Gabori and the Kaiadilt people see Nicholas Evans and Penelope Johnson, 'Bilda miburiji kurrij (Seeing with far eyes): The root of Kaiadilt women's art', *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, no.49, pp.54–63.
- 3 Harold Rosenberg, www.art-quotes.com/auth_search.php?authid=2026, accessed 22 October 2015.
- 4 Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Crossed territories: Indigenous cosmopolitan', in *Brook Andrew: Eye to Eye*, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2007, p.19.
- 5 John McPhee, p.9.
- 6 See John McPhee, 'Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa, danda ngad – This is my Land, this is my Sea, this is who I am', in *Sally Gabori: A Survey Exhibition of Paintings 2005–2012*, ANU, Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, p.25.
- 7 John McPhee, 'Sally Gabori: Feeling the landscape', *Art Monthly Australia*, no.249, May 2012, p.7.
- 8 Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking and Looking*, Picador, New York, 2012, p.247.
- 9 Evans and Johnson, p.63.
- 10 www.mindmarrow.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/repository-119-bon-mots-lucien-freud-on-the-ultimate-aim-of-art/, accessed 20 October 2015.

CAT.19
Thundi (detail) 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 304cm
Private collection, Adelaide
Photograph: Sean Davy



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's
painting table
Tabletop with synthetic polymer paint
112 x 244.7cm
Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, oam
Photograph: Chris Groenhout

**EARLY
PAINTINGS**



CAT:2
My Country 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 60 x 30cm

CAT:5
My Country 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 60 x 76cm

Collection: The Estate of Mirdidinggathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori





CAT.4
Dibirdibi Country 2005
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
70 x 100cm
Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingathi Juwarnda
Sally Gabori
Courtesy: Mirdiyan Gununa Mornington Island Art



CAT.6
My Father's Country 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 61 x 83cm
 Collection: The Estate of Mirndiyani Gununa
 Sally Gabori
 Courtesy: Mirndiyani Gununa Mornington Island Art



CAT.7
My Father's Country - Plenty Fish 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 60 x 76cm
 Collection: The Estate of Mirndiyani Gununa
 Sally Gabori
 Courtesy: Mirndiyani Gununa Mornington Island Art



CAT.8
Story Place – King Alfred's Country 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 61 x 83cm
 Collection: The Estate of Miridingkingathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori
 Courtesy: Mirndiyani Gununa Mornington Island Art



CAT.3
Balarrid The Story Place 2005
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 213 x 91cm
 Donated by John Mairwaring in 2012
 through the Cultural Gifts Program
 Collection: University of the Sunshine Coast
 Photograph: Mick Richards Photography



CAT.11
Outside Story Place 2006
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 121 x 91cm
 Corrigan Collection
 Photograph: Greg Weight



CAT.12
Story Place King Alfred's Country 2006
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 121 x 91cm
 Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.10
My Father's Country 2006
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 137 x 91cm
 Harding Family Collection
 Photograph: Farina Fotographics



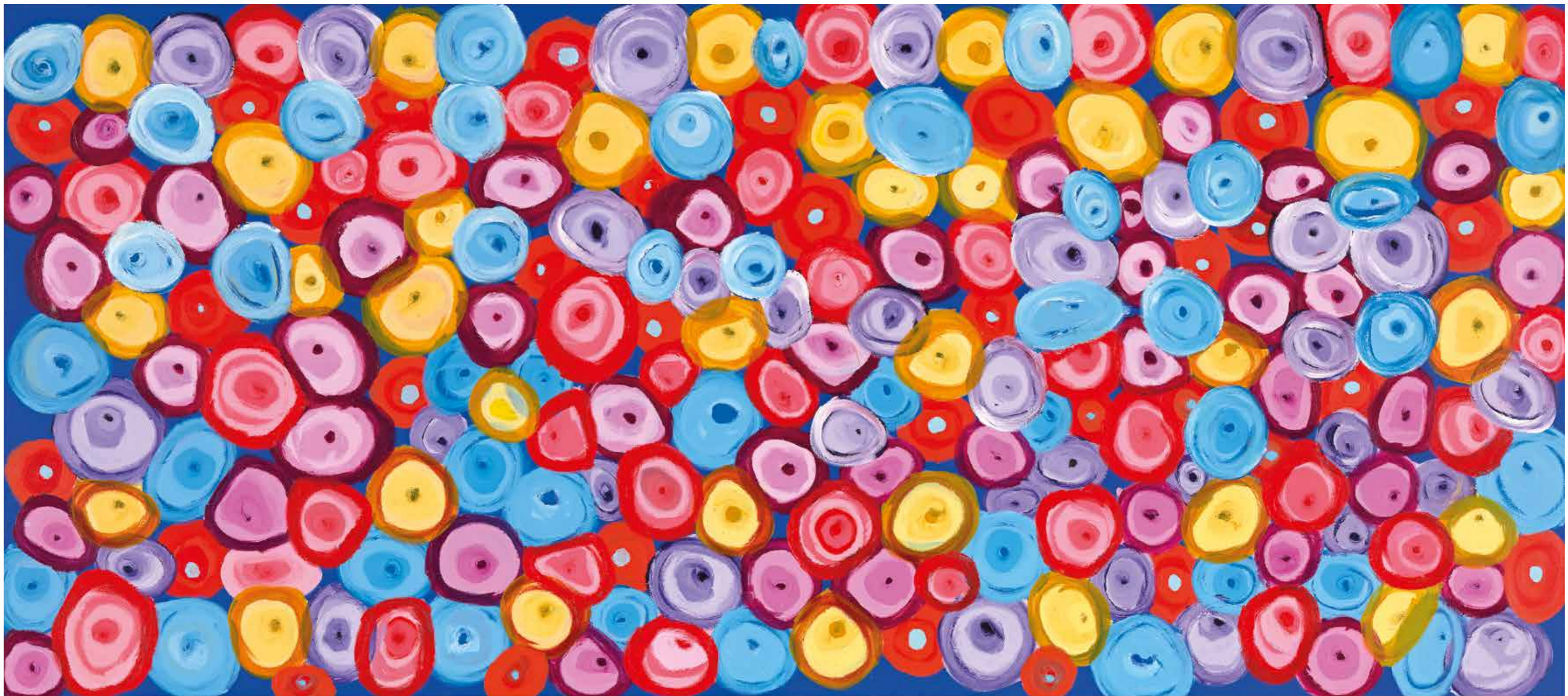
CAT.9
Dibirdibi Country - Topway 2006
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 151 x 101cm
 Purchased 2008, The Queensland Art Gallery
 Foundation Grant
 Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



CAT.14
My Father's Country 2007
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 152 x 101cm
 Harding Family Collection
 Photograph: Farina Fotografics



CAT.13
Dibirdibi Country 2007
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 150 x 100cm
 Collection: Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.1
All the fish 2005
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
190 x 424.5cm
Gift of Jim Cousins, AO and Libby Cousins through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013
Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

MIRDIDINGKI
MY COUNTRY



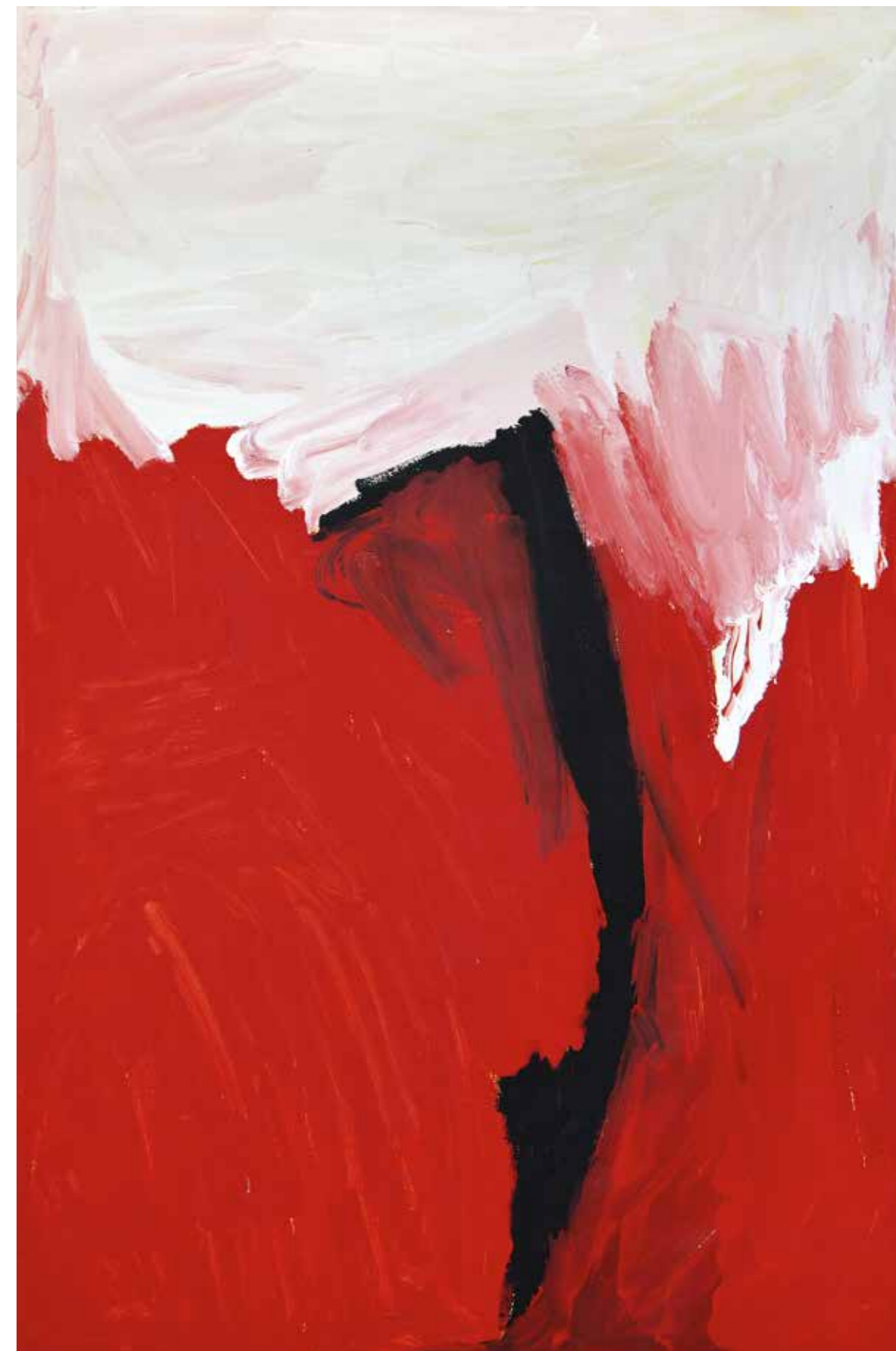
CAT.30
My Country 2011
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 151 x 151cm
 Private collection
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout

CAT.31
My Country 2011
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 196 x 101cm
 Collection: Robert and Colette Goodliffe, Melbourne
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout





CAT.23
My Country 2010
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 151 x 101 cm
 Private collection
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout

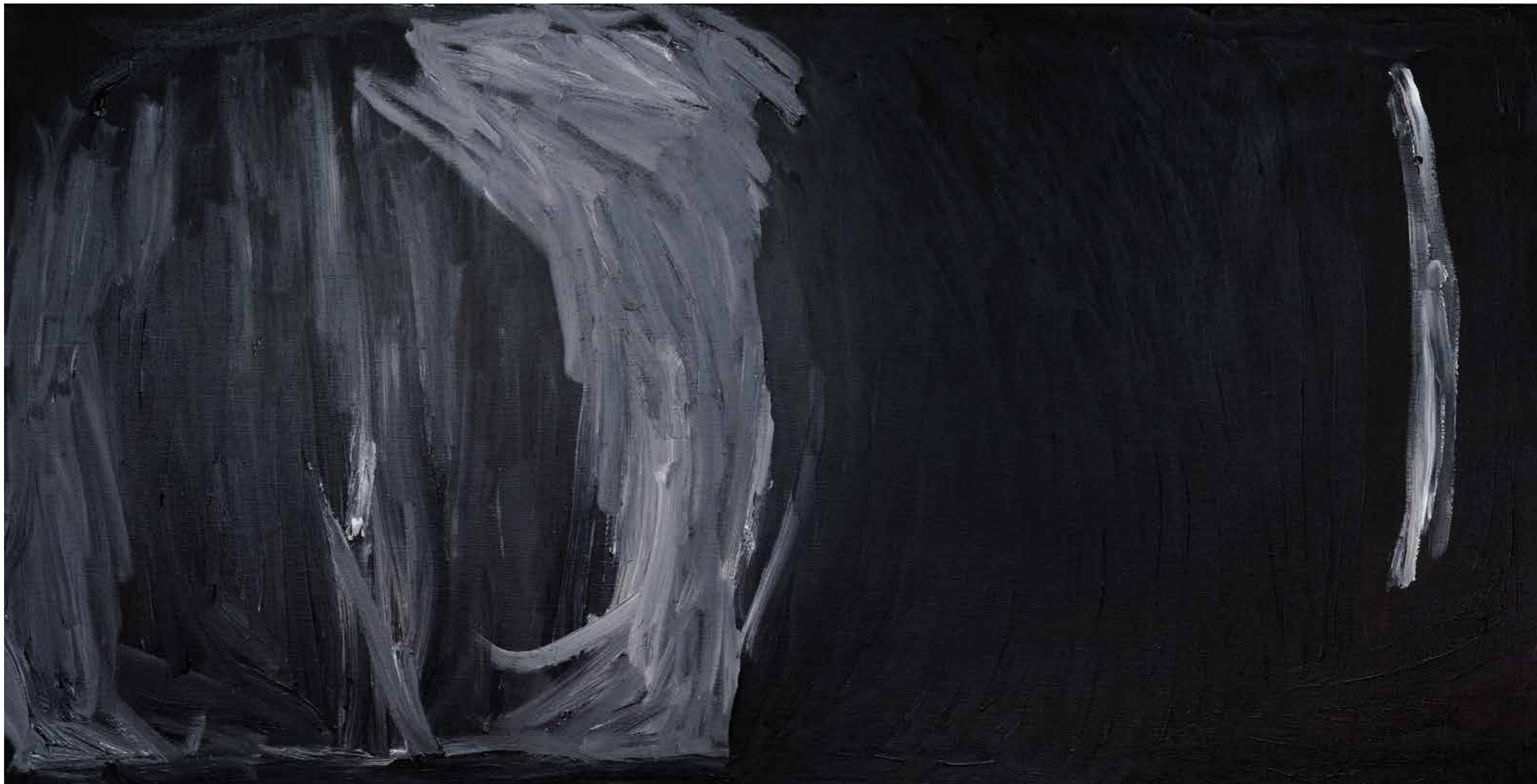


CAT.22
My Country 2010
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 150 x 101 cm
 Private collection, Melbourne
 Courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

THUNDI
MY FATHER'S
COUNTRY



CAT.41
Thundi 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
Triptych: 196 x 303cm (installed)
The Port Phillip Collection
Image courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



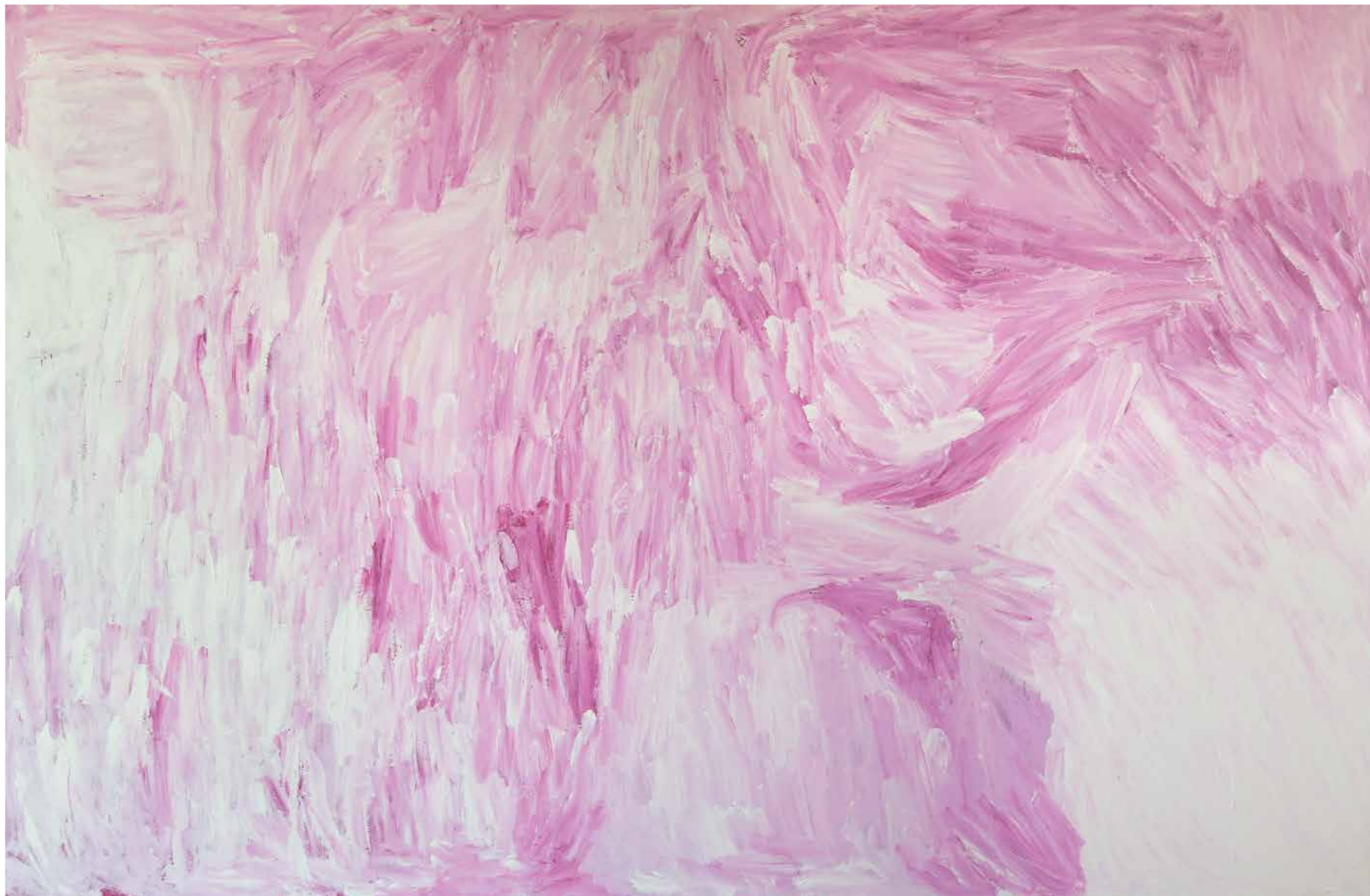
CAT.33
Thundi 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
101 x 196cm
Collection: Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne
Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.42
Thundi 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm
Corrigan Collection
Photograph: Greg Weight
Image courtesy: University of Sydney Art Gallery



CAT.43
Thundi 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm
Collection: Annabel and Rupert Myer, AO
Photograph: Jenni Carter



CAT.19
Thundi 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 304cm
Private collection, Adelaide
Photograph: Sean Davey, The Photography Room

DINGKARI
MY GRANDFATHER'S
COUNTRY



CAT.21
My Grandfather's Country 2009
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
 137 x 122cm
 Acquired with the Founding Donors 2010 Fund
 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

CAT.32
My Grandfather's Country 2011
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 198 x 301cm
 Courtesy: The Estate of Mirindjingathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout



NYINYILKI



CAT.24
Nyinyilki 2010
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
196 x 300cm
Private collection, Adelaide
Photograph: Michal Klivanek



CAT.25
Nyinyilki 2010
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
196 x 300cm
Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, oam
Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.17
Ninjilki 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 x 300cm
Collection: Eleonora and Michael Triguboff
Image courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.18
Ninijiki 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
198.8 x 460.6cm
Purchased with funds donated by Colin Golvan, 2008
Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

DIBIRDIBI
MY HUSBAND'S
COUNTRY



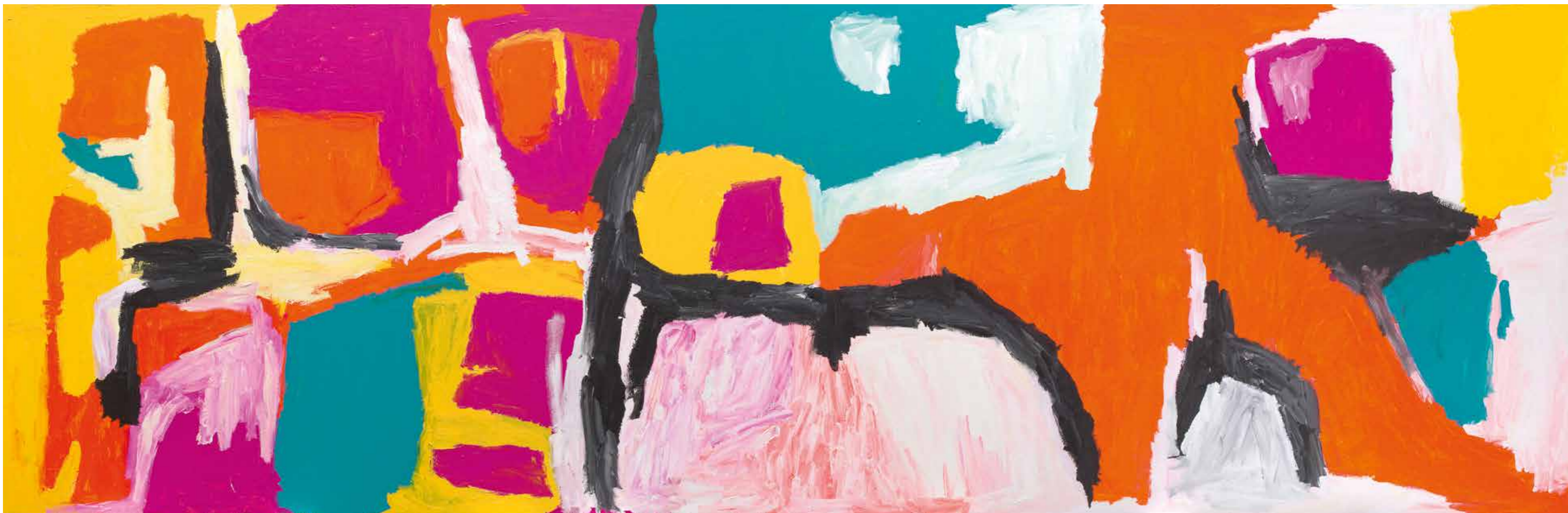
CAT.15
Dibirdibi Country 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
196 x 305cm
Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, oam
Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.26
Dibirdibi Country 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 455cm
Winner 2012 Gold Award. Gift of the Moya Gold Trust
through the Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust.
Collection: Rockhampton Art Gallery



CAT.27
Dibiribi Country 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 196cm
Private collection
Photograph: Carl Warner



CAT.16
Dibirdibi Country 2008
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 x 600cm
Purchased 2008 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, *AM*,
and Cathryn Mittelheuser, *AM*, through the Queensland Art
Gallery Foundation
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



CAT.34
Dibirdibi Country 2012
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
Four panels: 121 x 484cm (installed)
Purchased with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM,
and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art
Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



CAT.28
Dibiribi Country 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm
The Harriett and Richard England Collection
Image courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.29
Dibiribi Country 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm
Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM
Courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.20
Dibirdibi Country 2009
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 198 x 101 cm
 Collection: John McPhee
 Photograph: Jenni Carter



CAT.35
Dibirdibi Country 2012
 Synthetic polymer paint on bark
 150 x 80 cm
 Purchased 2012
 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



CAT.36
Dibirdibi Country 2012
 Synthetic polymer paint on bark
 211 x 46 cm
 Purchased 2012
 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



CAT.37
Dibirdibi Country 2012
 Pencil on wove paper
 54 x 76cm
 Purchased with funds provided by the Aboriginal Collection
 Benefactors' Group 2014
 Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney



CAT.38
Dibirdibi Country 2012
 Pencil and watercolour on wove paper
 54 x 76cm
 Purchased with funds provided by the Aboriginal Collection
 Benefactors' Group 2014
 Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney



CAT.39
Dibiribi Country 2012
 Watercolour and pencil on paper
 55 x 75cm
 Collection: John McPhee
 Photograph: Jenni Carter



CAT.40
Dibiribi Country 2012
 Watercolour and pencil on paper
 56 x 76cm
 Private collection, Geelong
 Photograph: Chris Groenhout



CAT.47
 Thundi 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori



CAT.48
 Thundi 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.49
 Thundi 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.44
 Dibirdibi Country 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.45
Dibirdibi Country 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Private collection
 Image courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.46
Dibirdibi Country 2013
 Synthetic polymer paint on linen
 90 x 60cm
 Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkathi Juwarnda
 Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



CAT.50

BIRMUYINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA
 b.1942 / MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA
 SALLY GABORI c.1924–2015 /
 WARTHADANGATHI BIJARRBA ETHEL THOMAS
 b.1946 / THUNDUYINGATHI BIJARRB
 MAY MOODOONUTHI 1929–2008 /
 KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL
 b.(c.)1937 / WIRRRNGAJINGATHI BIJARRB
 KURDALALNGK DAWN NARANATJIL
 1935–2009 / RAYARRIWARRTHARRBAYINGATHI
 MINGUNGURRA AMY LOOGATHA b.1942
 KAIADILT PEOPLE

Makarrki – King Alfred's Country 2008

Synthetic polymer paint on linen

200 x 600cm

Purchased 2009 with funds from Professor John Hay, AC,
 and Mrs Barbara Hay through the Queensland Art
 Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery



CAT.51

BIRMUINGATHI MAALI NETTA LOOGATHA
 b.1942 / MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA
 SALLY GABORI c.1924–2015 /
 WARTHADANGATHI BIJARRBA ETHEL THOMAS
 b.1946 / THUNDUYINGATHI BIJARRB
 MAY MOODOONUTHI 1929–2008 /
 KURUWARRIYINGATHI BIJARRB PAULA PAUL
 b.(c.)1937 / WIRNGAJINGATHI BIJARRB
 KURDALALNGK DAWN NARANATJIL
 1935–2009 / RAYARRIWARTRHARRBAYINGATHI
 MINGUNGURRA AMY LOOGATHA b.1942

KAIADILT PEOPLE

Dulka Warnjiid 2007

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

195 x 610cm

Purchased with funds donated by Catherine Allen,

Carolyn Berger and Delma Valmorbidia, 2007

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

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THE GABORI SISTERS: GATHERING BY THE SEA

Laura Mudge



To coincide with 'Dulka Warngiid – Land of All', the Children's Art Centre (CAC) presents 'The Gabori Sisters: Gathering by the Sea', an immersive exhibition for children developed in collaboration with Sally Gabori's daughters Elsie, Amanda and Dorothy Gabori. Sally Gabori was instrumental in forging a whole new style of painting through her bold use of shape and colour to depict her beloved homeland of Bentinck Island in Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria. Her new-found way of expressing her connection to country was something that she shared with her family, introducing her sisters, nieces and her daughters to painting. Amanda recounts:

Mum wanted me to start painting with her. I was really excited. That was many years ago. Now I feel very proud to follow mum's footsteps, feel strong. One day our children or grandchildren will follow our footsteps.

Amanda and her sisters create vibrant artworks that celebrate the strong connection the Kaiadilt people share with the land, sea and sky surrounding their ancestral home of Bentinck Island. Elsie explains that 'white, purple, brown and blue — these remind me of the country, white rocks, brown country, blue seas, purple skies.'

The CAC exhibition title is inspired by the Kayardilt words ngurruwarrawaanda barrnyant (a big gathering at the stone fish trap). The ancient stone walls of the fish traps, built along the island's shore and out to sea, have long-enabled Kaiadilt people to collect fish and other sea creatures using the tides and are an important source of food. Elsie talks about the significance of the fish traps for her people:

Gathering food ends up keeping our family together and strong. Keeping culture strong too as the tradition and stories get passed on to the young people. I feel safe when I have my family around me.



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori,
Amanda Gabori and Elsie Gabori working on
Pat and Sally's Country 2011, Mornington Island
Arts and Crafts, 2011.
Photograph: Inge Cooper

**MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA
SALLY GABORI
AUSTRALIA QLD c.1924–2015
AMANDA GABORI
AUSTRALIA QLD b.1966
ELSIE GABORI
AUSTRALIA QLD b.1947
KAIADILT PEOPLE**
Our Country 2011
Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 305cm

Images courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

In 'The Gabori Sisters: Gathering by the Sea' children and families are invited to engage with the stories and memories of these Kaiadilt women to learn about Kaiadilt culture and the Kayardilt language. Amanda explains that:

it's important for our children to return to Country and to learn about their culture. We hope the children at the exhibition will also taste what it feels to be like our children, taste the sea.

Bentinck Island, and the abundance of life in the shallow coral reefs that surround it, form the foundation for the design of this interactive exhibition space, which creates an immersive environment through colour, light and sound. Children can discover the stone wall fish traps that are found in this part of Australia and the 'sea tukka' gathered by the Kaiadilt people. Dorothy explains how:

the stone fish trap is special to Bentinck Island, not many cultures use them to hunt. Even when we mob return after many years, we can see the work the old people did still standing there waiting for us. It grounds us to culture, family and country. The young people still use that hunting area even now.

Quoted text is from an email conversation between Laura Mudge, Acting Senior Program Officer, Children's Art Centre, and Grace Barnes, Dorothy, Elsie and Amanda Gabori in February 2016.

LIST OF WORKS

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

Australia Qld c. 1924–2015

Kaiadilt people

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p>1 <i>All the fish</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 190 x 424.5cm Gift of Jim Cousins, AO and Libby Cousins through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne</p> | <p>6 <i>My Father's Country</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 61 x 83cm</p> | <p>12 <i>Story Place King Alfred's Country</i> 2006 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 121 x 91cm Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM</p> | <p>17 <i>Ninilki</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 200 x 300cm Collection: Eleonora and Michael Triguboff</p> | <p>22 <i>My Country</i> 2010 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 150 x 101cm Private collection, Melbourne</p> | <p>28 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 198cm The Harriett and Richard England Collection</p> | <p>34 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on linen Four panels: 121 x 484cm (installed) Purchased with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM, and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery</p> | <p>38 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Pencil and watercolour on wove paper 54 x 76cm Purchased with funds provided by the Aboriginal Collection Benefactors' Group 2014 Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney</p> |
| <p>2 <i>My Country</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 60 x 30cm Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori Courtesy: Mirndiyan Gununa Mornington Island Art</p> | <p>7 <i>My Father's Country – Plenty Fish</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 60 x 76cm</p> | <p>13 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2007 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 150 x 100cm Collection: Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne</p> | <p>18 <i>Ninilki</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 198.8 x 460.6cm Purchased with funds donated by Colin Golvan, 2008 Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne</p> | <p>23 <i>My Country</i> 2010 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 101cm Private collection</p> | <p>29 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 198cm Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM</p> | <p>35 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on bark 150 x 80cm Purchased 2012 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra</p> | <p>39 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Watercolour and pencil on paper 55 x 75cm Collection: John McPhee</p> |
| <p>3 <i>Balarrid The Story Place</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 213 x 91cm Donated by John Mainwaring in 2012 through the Cultural Gifts Program Collection: University of the Sunshine Coast</p> | <p>8 <i>Story Place – King Alfred's Country</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 61 x 83cm Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori Courtesy: Mirndiyan Gununa Mornington Island Art</p> | <p>14 <i>My Father's Country</i> 2007 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 152 x 101cm Harding Family Collection</p> | <p>19 <i>Thundi</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 198 x 304cm Private collection, Adelaide</p> | <p>24 <i>Nyinyilki</i> 2010 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 196 x 300cm Private collection, Adelaide</p> | <p>30 <i>My Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 151cm Private collection</p> | <p>37 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on bark 211 x 46cm Purchased 2012 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra</p> | <p>40 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Watercolour and pencil on paper 56 x 76cm Private collection, Geelong</p> |
| <p>4 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 70 x 100cm</p> | <p>9 <i>Dibirdibi Country – Topway</i> 2006 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 101cm Purchased 2008. The Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant Collection: Queensland Art Gallery</p> | <p>15 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 196 x 305cm Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM</p> | <p>20 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2009 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 198 x 101cm Collection: John McPhee</p> | <p>25 <i>Nyinyilki</i> 2010 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 196 x 300cm Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM</p> | <p>31 <i>My Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 196 x 101cm Collection: Robert and Colette Goodliffe, Melbourne</p> | <p>41 <i>Thundi</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on linen Triptych: 196 x 303cm (installed) The Port Phillip Collection</p> | |
| <p>5 <i>My Country</i> 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 60 x 76cm</p> | <p>10 <i>My Father's Country</i> 2006 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 137 x 91cm Harding Family Collection</p> | <p>16 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 200 x 600cm Purchased 2008 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM, and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery</p> | <p>21 <i>My Grandfather's Country</i> 2009 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 137 x 122cm Acquired with the Founding Donors 2010 Fund Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra</p> | <p>26 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 198 x 455cm Winner 2012 Gold Award. Gift of the Moya Gold Trust through the Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust. Collection: Rockhampton Art Gallery</p> | <p>32 <i>My Grandfather's Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 198 x 301cm Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori and Alcaston Gallery</p> | <p>42 <i>Thundi</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 198cm Corrigan Collection</p> | |
| <p>11 <i>Outside Story Place</i> 2006 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 121 x 91cm Corrigan Collection</p> | <p>17 <i>Ninilki</i> 2008 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 200 x 300cm Collection: Eleonora and Michael Triguboff</p> | <p>22 <i>My Country</i> 2010 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 150 x 101cm Private collection, Melbourne</p> | <p>27 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 196cm Private collection</p> | <p>33 <i>Thundi</i> 2011 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 101 x 196cm Collection: Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne</p> | <p>36 <i>Dibirdibi Country</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on bark 211 x 46cm Purchased 2012 Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra</p> | <p>43 <i>Thundi</i> 2012 Synthetic polymer paint on linen 151 x 198cm Collection: Annabel and Rupert Myer, AO</p> | |

44 *Dibirdibi Country* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi
Juarnda Sally Gabori and Alcaston
Gallery, Melbourne

45 *Dibirdibi Country* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Private collection

46 *Dibirdibi Country* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi
Juarnda Sally Gabori and Alcaston
Gallery, Melbourne

47 *Thundi* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Collection: The Estate of
Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

48 *Thundi* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

49 *Thundi* 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Courtesy: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi
Juarnda Sally Gabori and Alcaston
Gallery, Melbourne

KAIADILT WOMEN'S COLLABORATIVE

50 Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha

Australia Qld b.1942

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

Australia Qld c.1924–2015

Warthadangathi Bijarrba Ethel Thomas

Australia Qld b.1946

Thunduyingathi Bijarrb May

Moodoonuthi

Australia Qld 1929–2008

Kuruwarringathi Bijarrb Paula Paul

Australia Qld b.(c.)1937

Wirngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk

Dawn Naranatjil

Australia Qld 1935–2009

Rayarriwartharrbayingathi Mingungurra

Amy Loogatha

Australia Qld b.1942

Kaiadilt people

Makarrki – King Alfred's Country 2008

Synthetic polymer paint on linen

200 x 600cm

Purchased 2009 with funds from

Professor John Hay, AC, and Mrs

Barbara Hay through the Queensland Art

Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

51 *Dulka Warngiid* 2007

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
195 x 610cm

Purchased with funds donated by
Catherine Allen, Carolyn Berger and
Delma Valmorbida, 2007

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne

**THE GABORI SISTERS:
GATHERING BY THE SEA**

'The Gabori Sisters: Gathering by the
Sea' is the eighth large-scale interactive
exhibition commissioned by the
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern
Art in collaboration with the Children's
Art Centre. Elsie, Amanda and Dorothy
Gabori, Sally Gabori's daughters, have
created a vibrant setting for exploring
the sisters' connection to Bentinck Island,
their homeland in Queensland's Gulf of
Carpentaria. They share their memories
and stories, and through a range of exciting
hands-on and multimedia activities young
visitors learn about Kaiadilt culture and the
Kayardiild language.

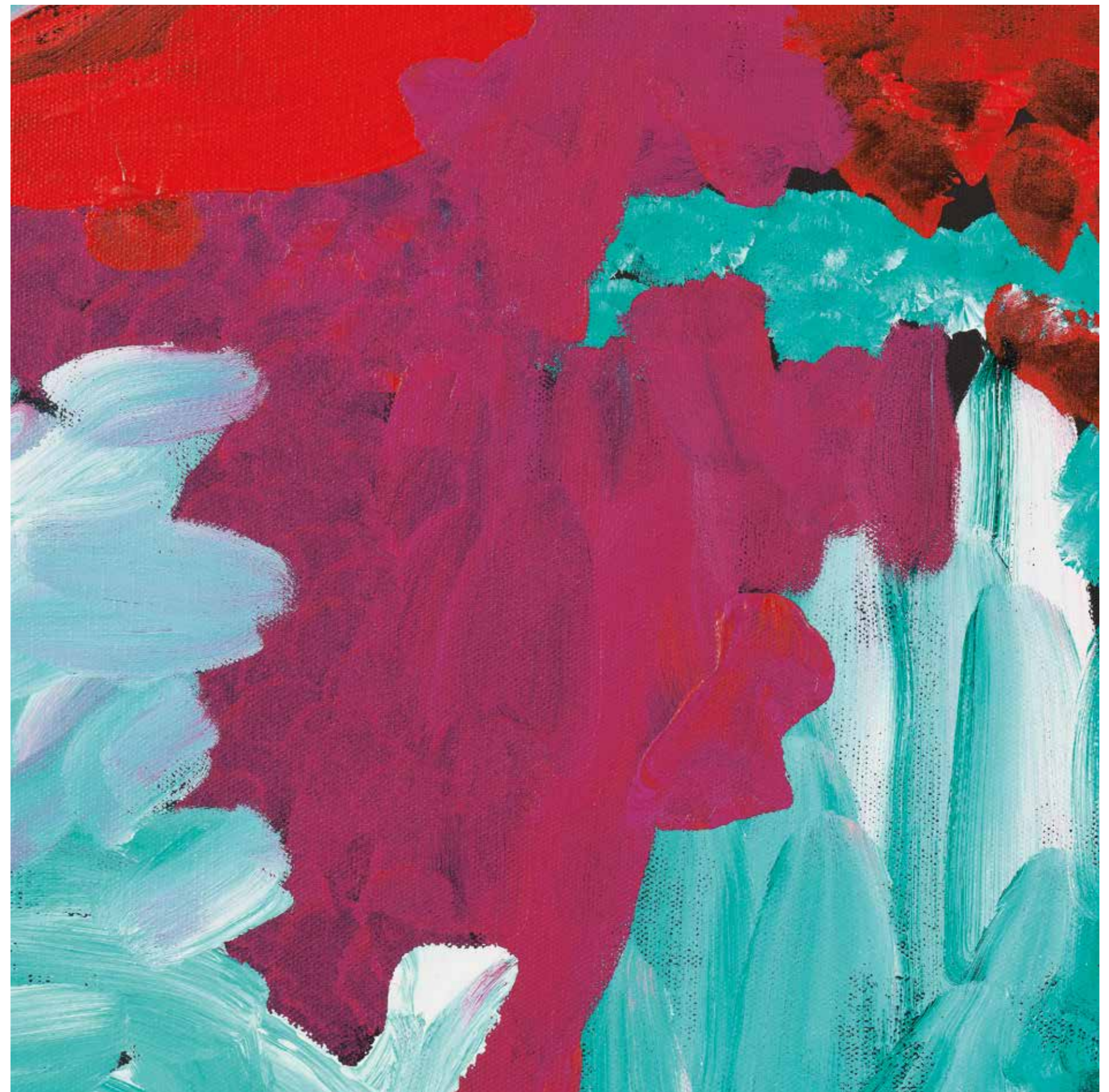
CAT.47

Thundi (detail) 2013

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 x 60cm

Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda
Sally Gabori

Image courtesy: Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne



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Sally Gabori in front of her commissioned work for the Brisbane Festival 2011
Image courtesy: Brisbane Festival



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The Gallery gratefully acknowledges the following lenders of artworks featured in this exhibition:

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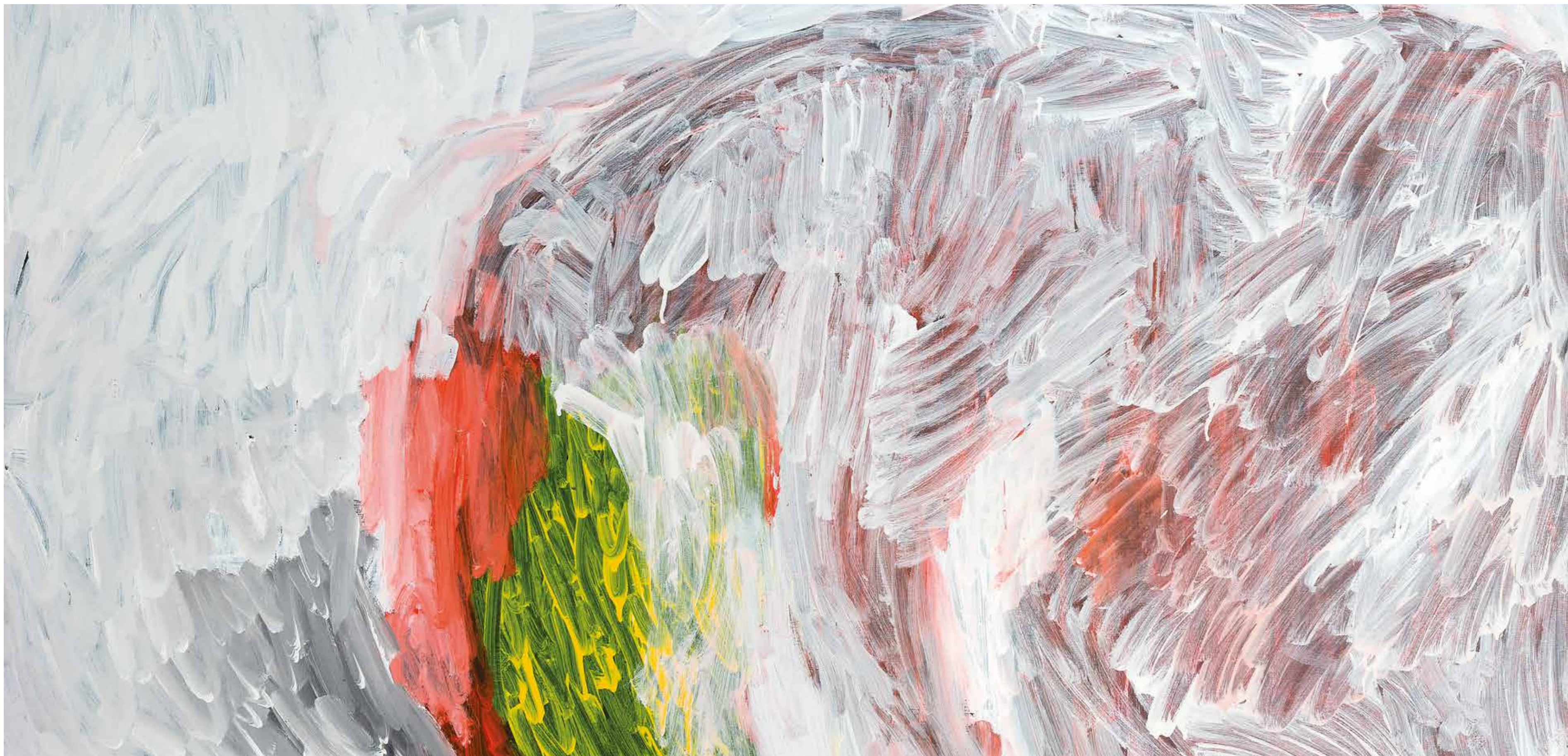
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Dibirdibi Country (detail) 2012

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
121 x 484cm (installed)

Purchased with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM, and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

PAGES 126–27: CAT.8

Story Place – King Alfred's Country 2005

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
61 x 83cm

Collection: The Estate of Mirdidingingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori

PAGES 136–37: CAT.26

Dibirdibi Country (detail) 2011

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
198 x 455cm

Winner 2012 Gold Award. Gift of the Moya Gold Trust through the Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust
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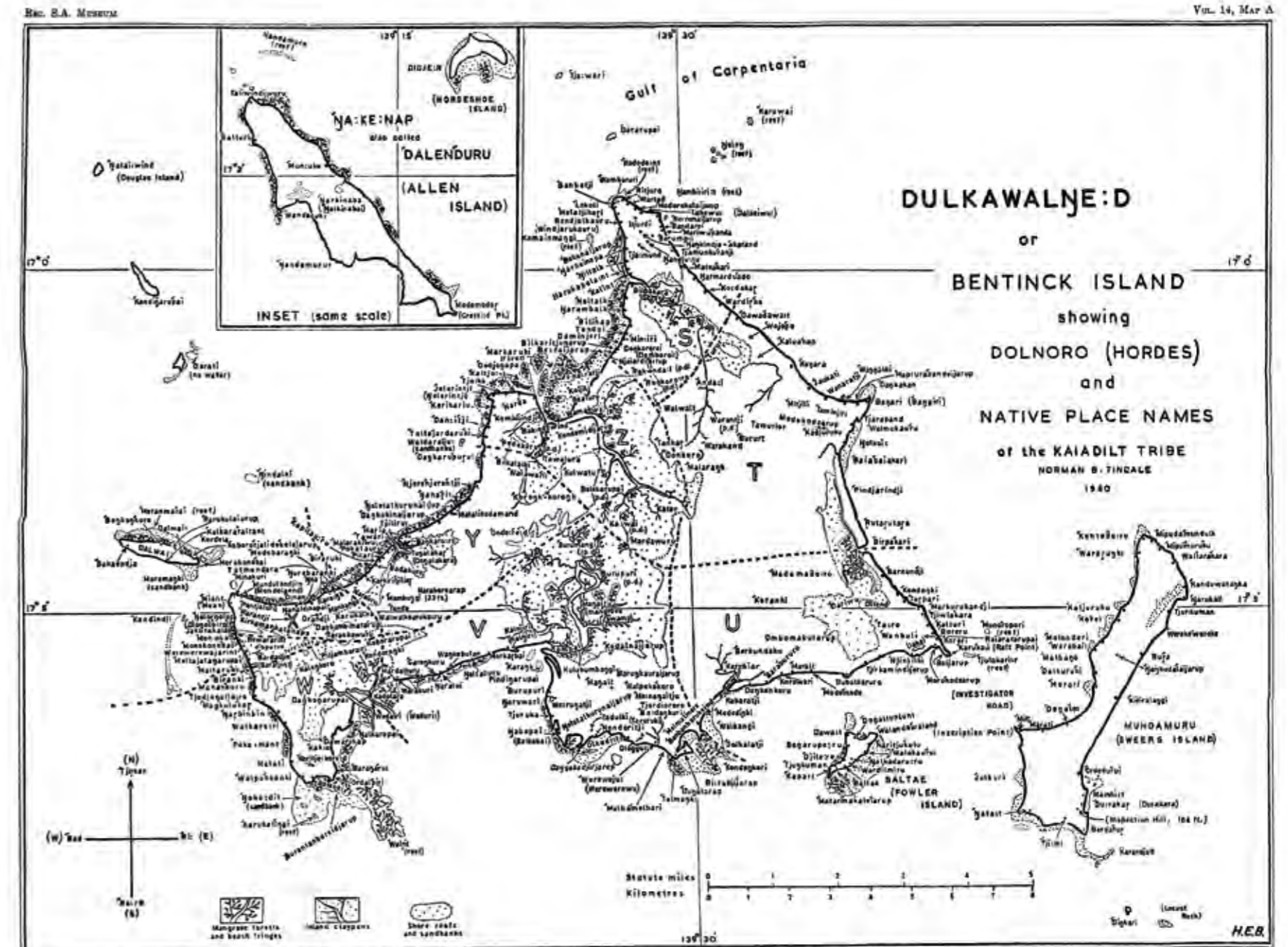
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Dibirdibi Country (detail) 2011

Synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 x 198cm

Collection: Beverly and Anthony Knight, OAM
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PL. 100 (Plate 8.)

Norman Tindale's 1960 map of Bentinck Island, published in his *Geographical Knowledge, and Some Population Changes of the Kaiadilt People of Bentinck Island, Queensland*, W L Hawes, Government Printer, Adelaide, 1962. © Museum Board of South Australia

