

Ceremonial beauty and ancestral connections: Tiwi Islands art and artefacts – in pictures

The art of the Tiwi Islands is intimately connected with the visual, oral and dance culture that anchors Tiwi people's identity. From carved memorial sculptures to the intricate painted designs worn during ceremonies, Tiwi art is a gateway to understanding the depth and beauty of Tiwi culture. 'Melbourne is a long way from the Tiwi Islands,' says Pedro Wonaeamirri, cultural advisor to Tiwi, an exhibition of art and artefacts now showing at the National Gallery of Victoria. 'But I like to be able to share our stories with others.'

● ***Tiwi is showing at NGV Australia, Federation Square, Melbourne, until 8 March***

Main image: Jirtaka (Sawfish) (2000) by Jean Baptiste Apuatimi – *partial* Photograph: Jean Baptiste Apuatimi/National Gallery of Victoria

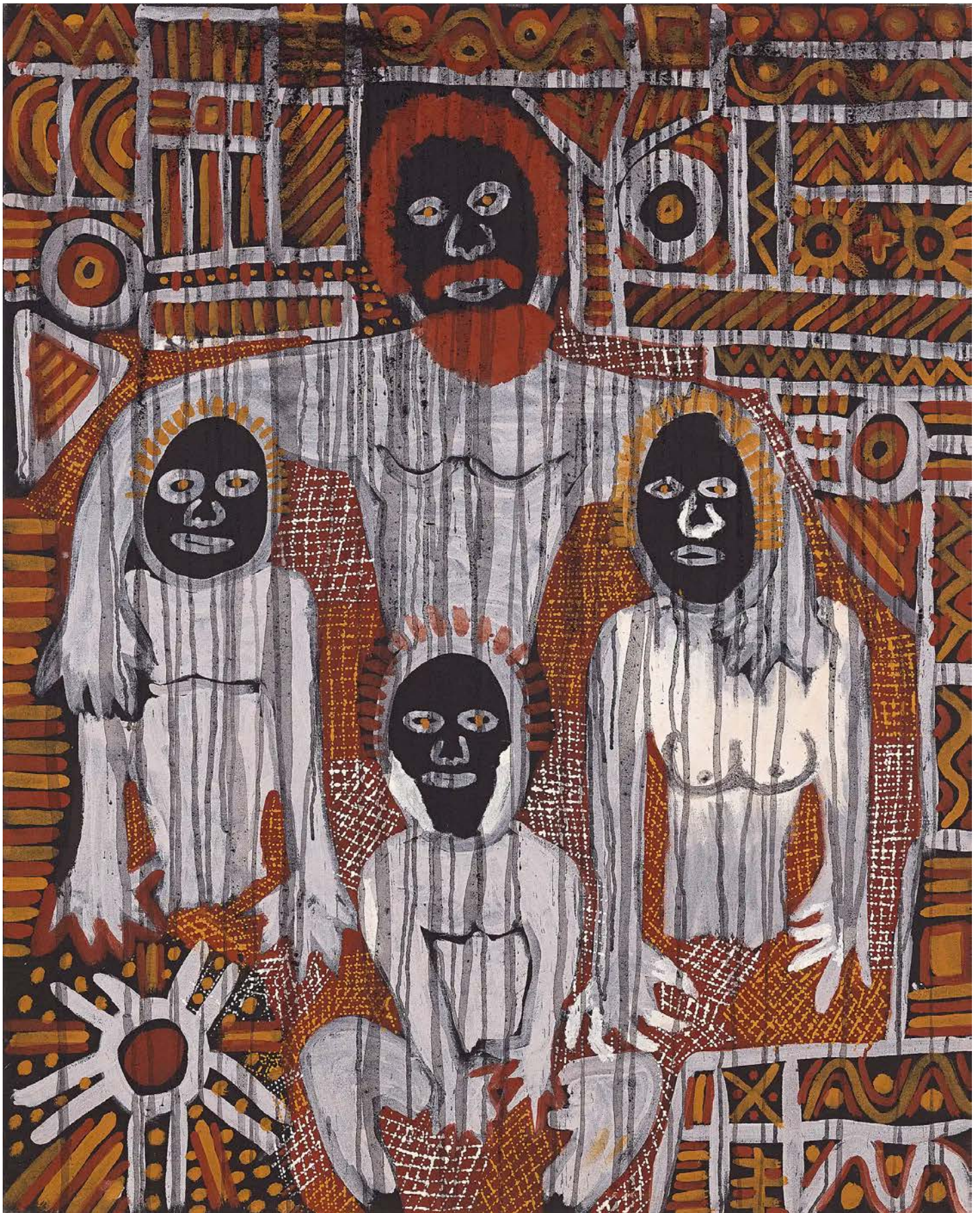
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Ngirimimpi (2017)

by Johnathon World Peace Bush The story of Purrukuparli, which describes how death came to the Tiwi and the first pukamani (mourning) ceremony originated, is central to Tiwi spiritual expression. Tiwi rising star Johnathon World Peace Bush explains, “Ngirimimpi means family. This is a painting of the family of the Tiwi creation story. Purrukuparli, Wai-ai, Jinani and Taparra are in this painting. I’m telling the old stories in my way with my jilamara [design].”

Photograph: Johnathon World Peace Bush/National Gallery of Victoria

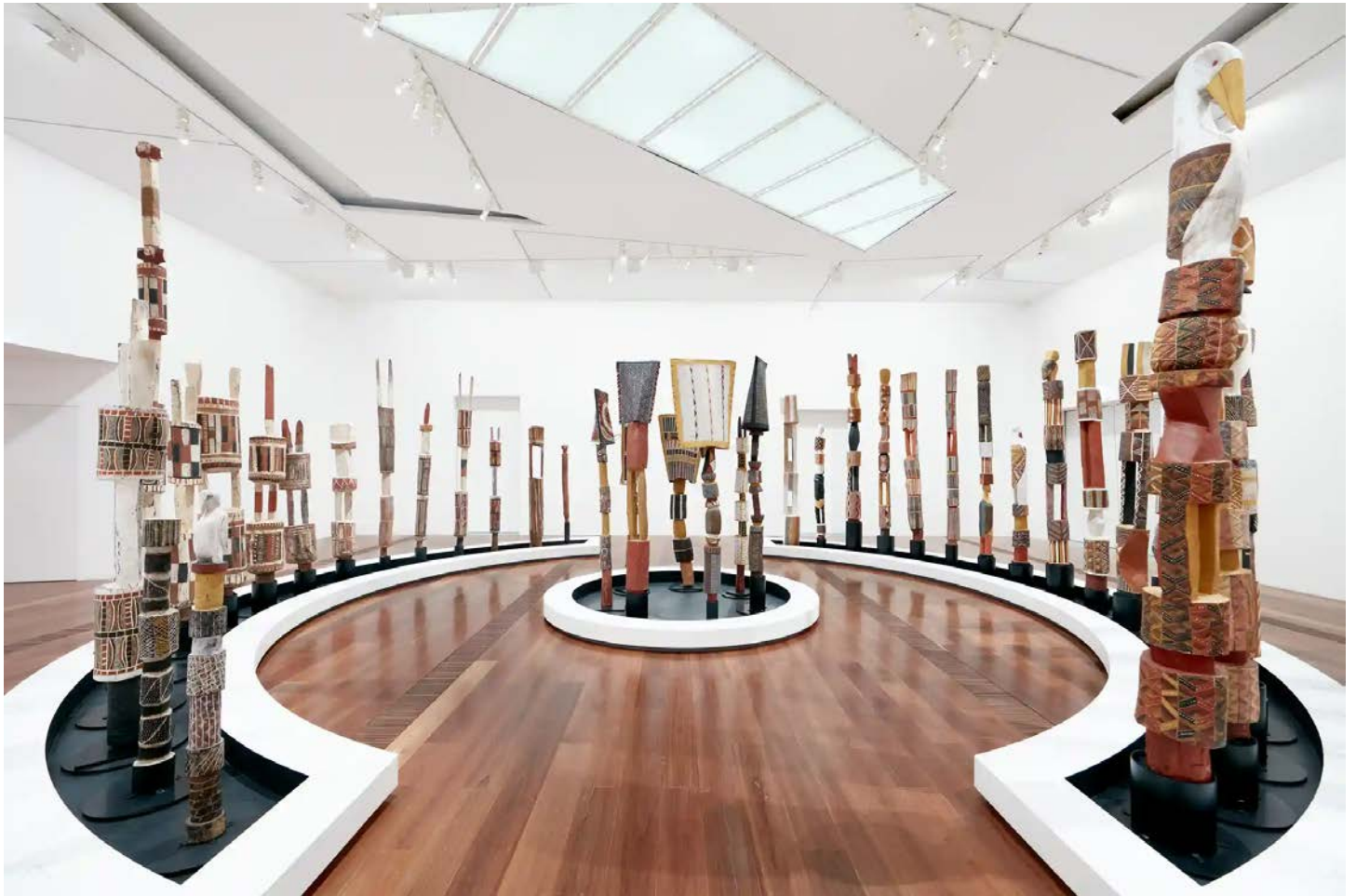


Tiwi, installation view

The first pukumani (mourning) ceremony performed in memory of Purrukuparli and his son Jinani marked the end of the Tiwi palineri (creation period). Since then, whenever a Tiwi person dies, the deceased's family commissions individual carvers to make tutini in memory of

the deceased and organises a pukumani ceremony. Tutini are erected around the grave of the deceased and left to the elements. The tutini displayed here range from 1912 to 2019 and reveal essential continuities of form as well as stylistic differences across time.

Photograph: Tom Ross/National Gallery of Victoria



Tunga (2008) by Pedro Wonaeamirri

On this tunga (bark basket), Pedro has painted his special design. He explains, ‘Ngingilawa jilamara is my design that no one else will use or copy. Pwoja is the name of the wooden comb that can make body design, so when we say pwoja, it is also the design from the comb. My paintings are based on pwoja, body paintings. When I paint, I think of myself and who I am. Sometimes when I paint, I sing to myself too. The songs help me to find a way of getting my own design ... They’re talking together - the song and the design.’

Photograph: Pedro Wonaeamirri/National Gallery of Victoria



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Purrukuparli and Bima (1959) by Cardo Kerinauia Tiyantingalayang

During the 1940s Cardo Kerinauia pioneered the carving of human figures atop pukumani tutini from which carvings of human, bird and animal forms on a smaller scale developed.

Kerinauia carved his figures in exquisite detail to represent Purrukuparli and his wife Wai-ai or Bima, ornamenting them with jilamara expressive of their ancestral connection and drawing out the anatomical differences between them. Kerinauia's figures stand securely on blocks, with arms and fingers separated from their torsos.

Photograph: Cardo Kerinauia Tiyantingalayang/National Gallery of Victoria



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Turtle boat (2001) by John Patrick Kelantumama

The artist represents Tiwi turtle hunters riding in a vessel created in the form of a turtle, complete with head and flippers. The energetic spirit of the hunt is evident in the facial expressions of the hunters, the angle of the turtle's head and the oar-like flippers.

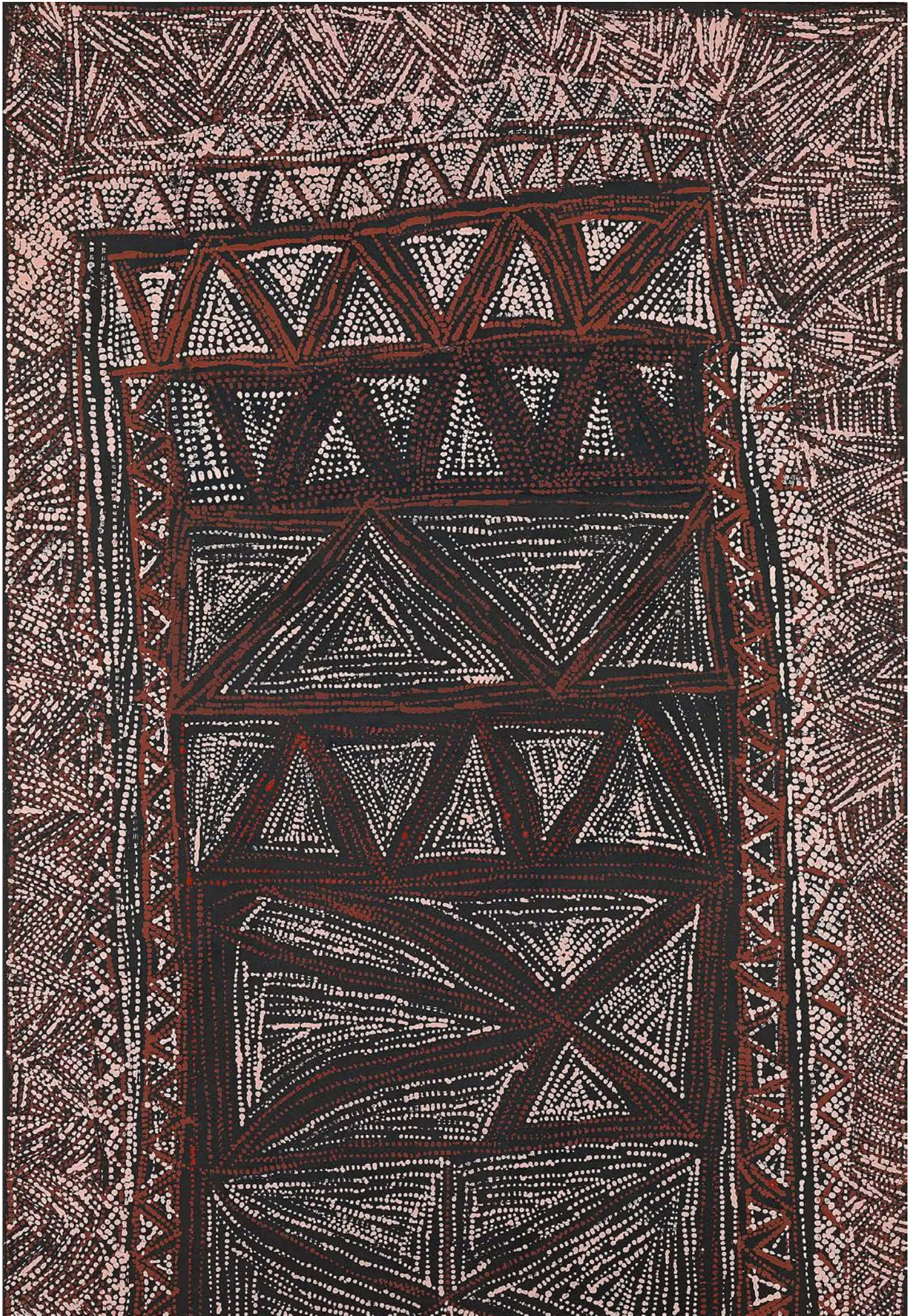
Photograph: John Patrick Kelantumama/National Gallery of Victoria



• **Jilamara design (2013) by Cornelia Tipuamantumirri**

Senior Tiwi artist Cornelia Tipuamantumirri of Munupi Arts has painted a jilamara (design) inspired by those worn on face and body during Tiwi yoyi (dances) for the pukumani (mourning) ceremony. Cornelia applies ochres with a pwoja (ironwood comb) to create a form of visual music: the ochre vibrates and dances across the canvas in fluctuating currents.

Photograph: Cornelia Tipuamantumirri/National Gallery of Victoria





• **Kayimwagakimi Jilamara (2011) by Raelene Kerinauia Lampuwatu**

Raelene Kerinauia developed her technique of painting with a pwoja (Tiwi ironwood comb) in response to work of other Tiwi artists. Hence, she says her work is ‘imagination but it’s not new’. In 2011, this work was awarded best bark painting at the 28th NATSIAA. She explains: ‘Influenced by old bark paintings made by Tiwi artists from long ago, I have created a painting that represents my Dreaming, yirrikipayi (crocodile). When I dance for ceremony, I dance my Dreaming, yirrikapayi dance.’

Photograph: Raelene Kerinauia Lampuwatu/National Gallery of Victoria





• **Kulama (2012) by Timothy Cook**

Timothy Cook's designs are associated with the kulama (coming of age) ceremony, performed in pakitiringa, the late wet season, when a ring appears around the moon. At kulama, which coincides with the harvest of the kulama yam, elders sing and dance for three days, welcoming boys into adulthood and giving them adult names. The circular forms symbolise the moon, yam and ritual circles; the cross reflects Cook's Christian spirituality and dots signify stars. This work won the Telstra Award in the 2012 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

Photograph: Timothy Cook/National Gallery of Victoria



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Jirtaka (Sawfish) (2000) by Jean Baptiste Apuatimi

For Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, painting was a way of remembering her late husband and mentor Declan Apuatimi, whose first painting was on a jirtaka (sawfish) bone. She says: 'Jirtaka is lovely tucker. My husband used to get that fish and bring him home. After we eat that fish we get that bone and paint him up: first black then Jilamara [body paint design]. Special design only for that one ... It's pukumani, that one. When he dies, they paint up that bone for ceremony. That bone he pukumani, the body of person now in that ceremony.'

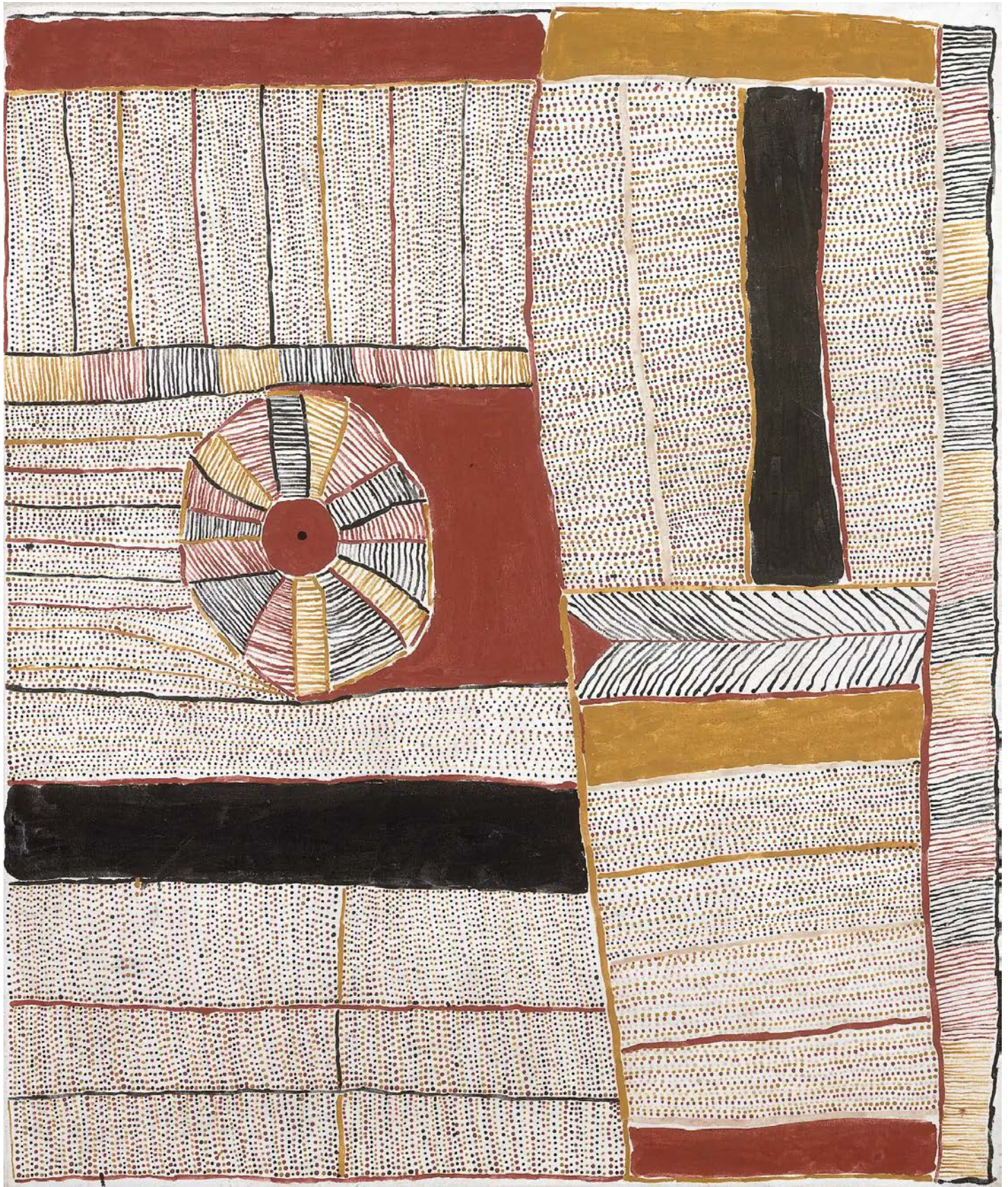
Photograph: Jean Baptiste Apuatimi/National Gallery of Victoria



Jilamara (1997) by Kutuwulumu Purawarrumpatu Kitty Kantilla

In 1997, Kutuwulumu Kitty Kantilla was introduced to painting on a white background by accident when, due to the absence of a support primed with black paint, she was prompted to work on white. This broke the direct link between Tiwi ritual mark making and contemporary art. Kantilla's radical use of white changed the visual dynamic, enabling the solid sections of ochre to stand up as a pronounced geometry. Instead of encountering dark paintings with shafts and points of lighter ochres, a sensibility of light is awakened in her work.

Photograph: Kutuwulumu Purawarrumpatu Kitty Kantilla/National Gallery of Victoria



• **Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country) (2020) by Michelle Pulutuwayu Woody Minnipinni**

Michelle Woody Minnipinni is a Tiwi rising star. This work is connected to her ancestors through her use of a pwoja (customary Tiwi comb) and natural ochres gathered on Country. She says: ‘When I think about parlingarri [the past], I consider how it is important to keep culture strong and keep it going for the next generation. This is important to Tiwi people ... The young

ones coming up today are going to be the future leaders - and we want them to be learning with their elders, through art and culture.'

Photograph: Michelle Pulutuwayu Woody Minnipinni/National Gallery of Victoria



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