

Shining a Light on Culture and Justice with Johnathon World Peace Bush

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MY COUNTRY

COUNTRY ROAD + NGV FIRST NATIONS COMMISSIONS

THE IAN POTTER CENTRE:
NGV AUSTRALIA
FEDERATION SQUARE

22 MAR –
04 AUG 2024
FREE ENTRY

This story is part of a series profiling artists and mentors involved in the [Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions: My Country](#). In their own words, artists and mentors share their personal stories, shine a light on their work and community and share the messages they have for the next generation of First Nations creatives.

Here, Johnathon World Peace Bush talks about the great work being produced in Australia's remote Art Centres, the power of mentorship and his advice for emerging artists.

This is the first time I've made an artwork on a commission for someone, and I really enjoyed the process. I learnt a lot. I also liked working with Pedro (Pedro Wonaeamirri), my mentor.

Pedro's artwork is very unique. He does patterns that he makes on his own and he has always said to me 'just do your own style.'

As part of this project, I went on Country and danced and made a film as well. I really want to help people learn and share in our culture.

I didn't always paint. I don't think I knew my talent until later in life, but I've been doing artwork for more than 20 years.



Johnathon World Peace Bush and Pedro Wonaeamirri at Milikapiti, Melville Island for the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions: My Country, on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne 22 March – 4 August 2024. Photo: Leicolhn McKellar

I have been working with the art centre (Jilamara Arts) since 2016. I paint on canvas and put all of my ideas on that canvas. For the artwork I made for this exhibition, you can see that I have painted a family in a village with a bushfire running through and a man pulling a horse.



Installation view of Johnathon World Peace Bush's paintings and Johnathon World Peace Bush and Pedro Wonaeamirri's tunga Aminya Pukupanarli on display in My Country: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions from 22 March to 4 August 2024 at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Tom Ross



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“I paint a lot about western laws and Aboriginal Lore. I like using two techniques and bringing them into one. It’s about understanding the past and present for the next generations.”

I think things have been hard in the past, but our culture is what makes us strong. We need our culture so that we can stay strong in the future. I want people to see that I show the hidden side of reality. I paint about justice, and I want them to learn and understand that.

I can’t wait to be in Melbourne and the NGV and see this all come to life. I am very excited to see my work at the gallery and find out how people respond to it.

What do I hope they learn?... I hope they understand that there are lots of art centres who are doing very well. There are also lots of senior artists like Timothy Cook and Conrad Tipungwuti who are also doing good work. These artists paint here at the art centre on the island.



Milikapiti, Melville Island. Photo: Leicolhn McKellar



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I've always lived here on the island (Melville Island). We're north of Darwin. If you have never seen it, it's very very beautiful. We're up here with a big sea breeze and a big beach. Sometimes in the morning there is thunder and rain. You can see and pick some fish. We have all kinds of fish like barramundi, giant trevally, snapper...we're right near the Indonesian sea.

The work we do here is like leaving a trademark behind for future generations... it's very important that we leave something behind for the ones who come after and that we encourage them.

If I was talking to other artists or young artists, I would say, 'if you want to show your art, you have to put it on display and share it with people. Let the painting tell the story on its own.'

If you want to be an artist, it's time to shine and do your best. Your image of a nation is full of imagination. Let them see what's hiding in your ideas.



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Installation view of Johnathon World Peace Bush and Pedro Wonaeamirri's work *Tartuwali amukurri angawila Murrakupupuni (Shark on our Country)* 2024 on display in *My Country: Country Road + NGV*

First Nations Commissions from 22 March to 4 August 2024 at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photo: Tom Ross

The Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions: My Country is a national, biennial mentorship and exhibition program that pairs emerging Australian First Nations artists and designers with one of eight esteemed industry mentors. Working collaboratively, the mentors each support and guide an emerging artist to create new and ambitious works.

Responding to this year's theme of 'My Country', these new works are displayed in a major exhibition that's now open and free to visit at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.