



Yuliyuru

Lorna Fencer Napurrurla

Edited by Margie West



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Wakefield
Press

Indigenous people are respectfully advised that names and images of deceased people appear in the following pages. Where possible permission has been sought from appropriate family members. Images of Lorna Fencer Napurrurla have been reproduced with the consent of her daughter.

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Yulyurlu warri-jarrija Mimila nyurru-wiyi warnu manu kalarnalu milya
pungu. Yulyurlu nyinaja ngaju-nyangu pimirdi. Nyampu mardukuja Yulyurlu,
ngulaji miyaluju raa-pungu, wardinyarramanu-juku wayilparra Ngulajuku ...
Nakamarra-jangka.

*Yulyurlu used to work at Mimi Arts and Craft and we knew her well.
Yulyurlu was my aunt. That woman, Yulyurlu, opened her heart and always
made me happy.*

Marilyn Nakamarra Peters, 2011

Foreword

Yulyurlu Lorna Fencer Napurrurla was an innovator – regarded by many as the most original Warlpiri artist to emerge from Lajamanu. She was among the enthusiastic group of men and women who first took up acrylic painting at the Lajamanu School in 1986. As her mastery of the medium developed, Napurrurla developed a highly personal style to illustrate her ancestral stories. At the heart of her lifetime’s work was the Yam complex that centred upon her country at Yumurrpa in the Tanami Desert.

Because of her revolutionary painting style, Yulyurlu has often been equated with the late, great Emily Kngwarreye, who ironically was also inspired by the Yam Dreaming from her Utopia country – the same pencil yam as Yulyurlu’s. Like Kngwarreye, Yulyurlu was prolific. Her independent and rather mercurial character was reflected in her unrelenting need to paint, and if no suitable material was immediately to hand, she would paint on cardboard boxes, scraps of metal, even directly onto the art centre floor! She was also an intuitive colourist who loved the vibrancy that the new

acrylic palette offered. There was no colour she wouldn’t use, although she had a predilection for blue, aqua and warm yellows, reds, oranges and bright pinks. It was this vibrancy and the energy of her work that attracted a dedicated following within the arts community.

After moving to Katherine she strengthened her relationship with the Mimi Arts and Crafts community art centre when it reopened in 2001 after the devastating Katherine flood. Yulyurlu soon became the backbone of the art centre and one of its high profile artists. Mimi’s manager, Barbara Ambjerg Pedersen, developed a close relationship with Yulyurlu and wanted to honour her career and contribution to the centre with a major show. The resulting exhibition, *Yulyurlu Lorna Fencer Napurrurla*, is proudly presented by Artback NT: Arts Development and Touring with the support of Mimi and Lorna’s daughter Judy Martin Napangardi along with other members of the Warlpiri community. Currently this is one of only a handful of curated shows to honour a desert woman painter.

It has been a pleasure collaborating with Mimi Arts and Crafts on this project and I commend their foresight in creating and maintaining an archive of this superb artist's work and for their inspiration in conceiving this show. I would also like to thank the contributors to the catalogue, Barbara Ambjerg Pedersen, Chips Mackinolty and Christine Nicholls, for sharing their insights and personal reminiscences about the artist, who has been variously described as tough, funny, flirtatious, bossy and seriously dedicated to her art.

It is easy to see that Lorna was admired and respected by everyone she came in contact with. This is also obvious from the tremendous support the exhibition has generated from the many gallerists who have assiduously promoted the artist during her lifetime and who have generously loaned work for the exhibition. I would also like to acknowledge the public institutions that have made their collections available, together with many private collectors who have also generously loaned their

precious work for this show. Without their support the exhibition would not have been possible. I also wish to thank Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia. Finally, I would like to congratulate the curator, Margie West, for this outstanding exhibition.

Artback NT: Arts Development and Touring is the Northern Territory's visual and performing arts touring organisation and is the NETS agency (national exhibitions touring support) for the Territory. Artback NT works with individuals, groups and arts based organisations to present and tour a dynamic and exciting range of arts experiences across the Territory. As evidenced by this stunning exhibition, Artback NT's visual arts touring program focuses on the development and national promotion of Northern Territory artists, whilst also offering a range of stimulating exhibitions throughout the Territory.

Louise Partos
Executive Officer

Preface

In 2010 Barbara Ambjerg Pedersen asked if I would curate a Lorna Fencer Napurrurla show on behalf of Mimi Arts and Crafts. She had wanted to do this for some years and the time seemed right, given that a suitable period had elapsed since the artist's death. The five years that Yulyurlu worked at Mimi were relatively stable compared to her experience with the Warnayaka Art Centre at Lajamanu. Not that this prevented Yulyurlu – whose independence as an artist was legendary – from continuing to work with a range of reputable as well as less scrupulous dealers – despite the stigma that this attracted. For Yulyurlu it was clearly a means to an end. She just kept painting at times when many of her peers from Lajamanu with promising careers often could not. On the way she forged many influential relationships, which is apparent in the phenomenal support from many gallery owners, public institutions and private collectors who have all willingly lent some outstanding work to support one of their favourite artists.

Most of the profiled artwork comes from Napurrurla's more mature and prolific period from 1995 onwards, as not many of her earlier pieces could be traced.

It's also difficult to know how productive or engaged she was during this early period of community endeavour involving around a hundred artists. It could be said that her early painting from this period was competent but relatively unremarkable. The loose composition and adventurous colouration of this early Warlpiri work, however, set the tone for Napurrurla's most prolific period from the mid-1990s onwards. It was then that she really emerged as an artist in control of her medium, her style and, in some ways, her artistic destiny. She was also helped along the way by a handful of dedicated arts advisers and galleries who instantly recognised her special talent.

In less than a decade Napurrurla had moved away from the classic style of Warlpiri art with its symbols often in scattered fields of dots to a more distinctive idiom. While she still referenced these classic elements, Napurrurla's work relied increasingly upon her own brand of iconic, abstracted naturalism especially for depicting foliage, flowers, tubers, root structures and so on. Her brushwork became more gestural, with painterly applications of pigment layered into luminous surfaces of depth and vibrancy.

In her later period after 2000, many of her designs were more graphic, the colour fields denser and flatter, and her masterful use of colour even more adventurous.

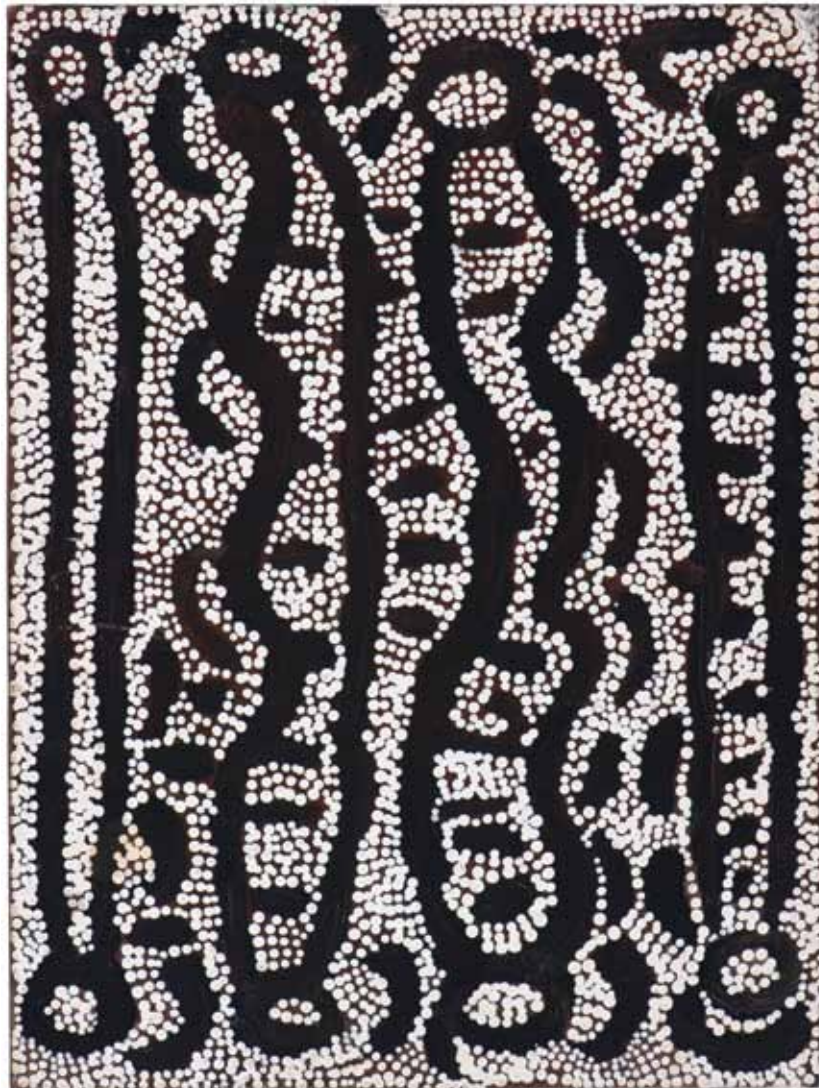
Despite her continual experimentation, Napurrurla repeatedly employed certain structural elements, almost visual templates, to capture the essence of her ancestral narratives: the central roundel of the Yam and its rib-like, or rambling, linear root structure, the dotted matrix of the Caterpillar Dreaming, the repeat floral motif of the Kangaroo Tucker and the pulsating energetic linearism of the Snake, Lover Boy Dreaming. These elements provided the backbone to Yulyurlu's ongoing explorations of her Jukurrpa (Dreaming). The exhibition with its range of paintings on paper and canvas as well as three-dimensional items, illuminates something of this daring, if sometimes erratic, artistic journey over twenty years of her practice.

After immersing myself in the life and aesthetic of this Warlpiri painter I have also come to appreciate what a special

talent she actually was. A lesser artist might have succumbed to the difficulties posed by an erratically functioning local art centre. However, Napurrurla's individualism and her drive to paint, plus her ability to forge relationships with a range of art brokers, are the reasons why so many of her major works are now in public and private collections. Her productivity is reflected by the significant number of group exhibitions that featured her work, along with at least 19 solo shows.

Yulyurlu was in many ways a self-made artist whose capacity to go it alone, as Christine Nicholls has observed, certainly held her in good stead as far as her artistic career went. Even so, she didn't achieve the recognition that many people feel she deserved. Artback NT and Mimi Arts and Crafts hope that the *Yulyurlu Lorna Fencer Napurrurla* exhibition and catalogue will highlight the contribution this talented and often irreverent artist made to the Central Desert art movement and reposition her as a major force in contemporary Australian art.

Margie West



Yarla, Yam 1992
synthetic polymer paint on canvas board
38 x 25 cm
Courtesy of the Helen Read Collection, Darwin



Warna Jukurrpa (Snake Dreaming) 1986
enamel paint on plywood
76.6 x 57.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Anthony Knight, 1990



Digging Stick c.1997
synthetic polymer paint on wood
106 x 4.5 x 4.5 cm
Courtesy of the collection of
Beverly and Anthony Knight,
Melbourne

Digging Stick c.1997
synthetic polymer paint on wood
102 x 4 x 4 cm
Courtesy of the collection of
Beverly and Anthony Knight,
Melbourne



Digging Sticks and Bush Tucker 2001
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
180 x 123 cm
Courtesy of Adrian Newstead,
Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery, Sydney

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Orthography:

Where possible, spelling in the text is based upon the most up-to-date and accepted Warlpiri orthography (Laughren, Mary, 1974 ongoing). Spelling and titles attributed to artwork by art advisers/agents have been retained to reflect the history and provenance of the artwork. In some instances untitled works whose subject matter has been identified have been augmented with supplementary titles [bracketed] with the permission of the lender and the artist's agent. The stories for Lorna Fencer Napurrurla's artwork are detailed in Christine Nicholls' text rather than with the individual artwork.

This book and exhibition have been supported by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting touring exhibitions by providing funding assistance for the development and touring of Australian cultural material across Australia.

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synthetic polymer paint on cotton duck, 200 x 148 cm



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