



# UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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## ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

*The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.*

*Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.*

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# Volume 4, Issue 2

## Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions

### Guest Editors

*Marnie O'Bryan*

*Prof. Mark Rose*

### THEME

This special edition of the UNESCO Observatory E-Journal focuses on education for and about the First Peoples of Australia and bears witness to the many faces of Indigenous education in Australia. It testifies to a complex landscape; places on a map, places in minds and places in spirit that taken together present a snapshot of the tone and dimension of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in early 2015.

Indigenous education policy is framed by a bi-partisan commitment to 'closing the gap'. In some instances, Indigenous leaders are framing the debate over how this is best achieved. At the same time, non-Indigenous educators are increasingly becoming aware that equality and mutual respect can only be established once the Australian community opens its mind to the ancient wisdom and the true stories of this place. Many of the articles in this publication identify the 'gap' as an epistemological divide and argue that, like any bridge, education measures aimed at 'closing the gap' need to be constructed simultaneously from both sides. To that end, a number of papers focus on initiatives being developed and explored by mainstream schools to give authentic voice to the perspectives of First Australians for the benefit of non-Indigenous students.

### COVER ART

*Yirrkala Collage*

Various Artists,

Yirrkala Art Centre

*Courtesy of the artists  
and Yirrkala Art Centre*

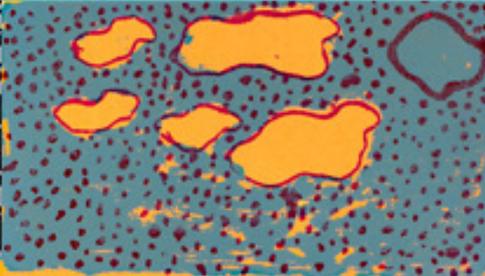
The papers in Volume One, '**Indigenous Education in Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis**', are all concerned with how Western educational structures and institutions work for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Volume Two of the Journal is entitled '**Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions**'. Each of the articles in this volume pertains to the education experiences of people living in remote Australia.

The articles in this publication take the reader through a rich multidisciplinary tapestry that points to the breadth and complexity of the Indigenous education landscape in Australia today. The papers are honest and true to the heterogeneous communities that are the First Peoples of Australia. Similarly, the poetry and artworks that appear here bear witness to the breadth, depth and diversity of artistic talent and tradition in this country. Taken together, they challenge the reader to move beyond a simplistic quest for 'the silver bullet' to redress disparity in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They encourage reflection, innovation, reciprocity, respect and empowerment through education.

We recommend each and every article.

Prof. Mark Rose & Marnie O'Bryan

Guest Editors



The **Yirrkala collage** is made up of the following artworks:

Gunariny#2 Wanambi 'Gapu'

Mamburra #2 Raymond 'Learning to be a Hunter'

Gurmarrwuy Yunupingu 'Mantpana'

Barrata Marika 'Sky and Earth'

Djuwakan Marika 'Mari'

Bulmirri Yunupingu 'Memories'

Gandhurrminy Yunupingu 'Djamarrkuli'

Ruby Alderton 'The Hunter'

Dhalmula Burarrwanga 'Milkarri'

Dhalmula Burarrwanga 'Garrung'

Gadaman Gurruwiwi 'Rangi'

Mikey Gurruwiwi 'Petrol Sniffer'

Mikey Gurruwiwi 'Ngarra'

Bawu Gurruwiwi 'Blood and Bones'

# Yambirrpa - Yuta: In Print

## A remote Arnhem Land community collaborative youth engagement project

**Denise Salvestro**

**Annie Studd**

**Will Stubbs**

### ABSTRACT

In 2009 the Yirrkala Community Education Centre in the remote Aboriginal community of Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land established The *Yambirrpa* Youth Development Unit (YYDU) to assist in re-engaging disengaged youth and getting them back to school or into employment. To exemplify their objectives the YYDU applied the Yolngu concept of *Yambirrpa*, a fish trap, as a metaphor for using knowledge to keep culture and language strong. The YYDU approached the local Art Centre, Buku Larrnggay Mulka, with a proposal that they consider collaborating in the project by providing programs in printmaking and film. Among the successful outcomes was a series of print projects including the *Yuta* (new) projects. These involved printmaking workshops where the young participants, working with new and innovative techniques, produced limited edition prints which were marketed and exhibited to critical acclaim. The YYDU - Buku Larrnggay Mulka collaborative print projects were successful in re-engaging the youth and providing them with access to education that would assist them into future employment. The increased skills and restored self-confidence has better equipped these young members of the remote community to participate more fully and fruitfully in society.

### KEYWORDS

*Yolngu, youth, culture, community, workshops, printmaking, engagement.*

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre (henceforth referred to as the Yirrkala Art Centre) is a non-profit organisation that specialises in the art of the Indigenous Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land, Australia. Located in the small remote community of Yirrkala it boasts a national and international audience for its acclaimed traditional art on bark and hollow logs. The Centre also houses a multi-media department, the Mulka Project, which focuses on digital archiving, and the Yirrkala Print Space, a studio that creates limited edition works on paper by Yolngu printmakers. (Yirrkala Art Centre, 2011)

Considered a vital part of community life, the Art Centre was approached by the local Yirrkala Community Education Centre in 2009, to consider collaborating in a project to re-engage the disengaged youth and get them back to school or into employment. The school had established the *Yambirrp*a Youth Development Unit (YYDU) to work with the youth. To exemplify their objectives the YYDU had applied the Yolngu concept of *Yambirrp*a, a fish trap, as a metaphor for drawing upon knowledge to keep culture and language strong. The YYDU proposed that the local Art Centre participate by providing programs in printmaking and film. The focus of this paper is the series of printmaking projects including the *Yuta* (new) projects conducted by the Print Space which proved successful in re-engaging the youth, restoring their self-confidence, assisting them into future employment and equipping them to participate more fruitfully in society.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Art is integral to the fabric of Yolngu culture which has a strong connection to land and sea. The art of the region is recognizable by the ochre coloured clan-specific cross-hatched patterns (*miny'tji*) traditionally painted on body torsos and objects during ceremony. Along with song (*manikay*) and dance (*bunggul*) it has always been used to pass on knowledge of law, history and culture. The dynamic nature of Yolngu art is reflected in the manner in which it has evolved with changing circumstances.

1. Anthropologist, Professor Howard Morphy has written in depth about the role of art in Yolngu society. In *Ancestral Connections* (Morphy Howard, 1991) and *Becoming Art* (Morphy Howard, 2008), Morphy analyses the shifting cultural and social contexts surrounding the production of Aboriginal art and discusses how the Yolngu have used their art as an instrument of cultural survival and as a component of the economic and political transformation of their society.

Yolngu have a long history of peaceful interaction with foreigners having engaged in active trade with the Macassans from at least the early 1600s until the South Australian Government put a stop to the trade in 1906. (Macknight C C, 1976, p.123) Following colonization by the British the situation gradually changed. Initially there was only sporadic interaction with *balanda* (non-indigenous newcomers) through exploration, attempts at establishing pastoral leases and visits by archaeologists. Then in 1935 the Federal Government considered a 'punitive expedition' against the Yolngu in response to reported killings of Japanese fishermen and the spearing of a policeman - incidents associated with Yolngu defending their people and their land. Mawalan Marika, a leader of the *Rirratjingu* clan, concerned for the survival of his people and seeking peaceful mediation, accepted a proposal by the Methodist missionary Wilbur Chaseling to establish a mission at Yirrkala located on ancestral land belonging to the *Rirratjingu* and *Gumatj* clans. As a consequence members of the seventeen clan groups in the surrounding area began moving into the mission to access food and medical supplies. This changed forever the demographic of the immediate area and the interactions between the clan groups who were now living in the one community in contradiction with their traditional ownership and custodian laws. (Yirrkala Art Centre, 2013)

Since the founding of the mission the art of the Yirrkala region has developed an appreciative audience. Work from Yirrkala was amongst the earliest commercial Aboriginal art marketed by the Methodist Overseas Mission. In the mid-1950s art emerging from Yirrkala was amongst the catalysts in the non-Aboriginal art world's realisation that Indigenous Australian art is a unique, independent art tradition.

The artists of Yirrkala were amongst the first artists globally to recognise the potential use of visual art as a political tool. They put this into practice in 1963 with the famous Yirrkala Church Panels (permanently displayed in the Art Centre museum) and the Yirrkala Bark Petitions (currently on display at Parliament House in Canberra), and more recently in 1999 the Saltwater Collection of eighty bark paintings now in the Australian National Maritime Museum Collection and in 2003 the *Wukidi* Installation of nine *larrikitj* (ceremonial poles) on permanent display in the Northern Territory Supreme Court, Darwin. In addition, the Yolngu have used their art to assert their connection to land in the Gove Land Rights Case, the Woodward Royal Commission, the Barunga Statement, the Yirrkala Homeland Movement, the Land Rights Act (NT) 1976, the Both Ways Education bilingual curriculum and through the music of the world renowned contemporary band, *Yothu Yindi*. (Yirrkala Art Centre, 2013) When government policy shifted and self-determination came to communities in Arnhem Land in the early 1970s, the artists saw the establishment of a community controlled art centre as critically important to furthering their economic independence, cultural security over sacred designs, and providing another forum for the promotion and maintenance of their political and intellectual sovereignty. <sup>1</sup>

The speed of cultural change imposed on Yolngu ceremonial and social life has been as intense as any that a group has had to face in a post-colonial history. To a large extent cultural strength has been maintained but each generation faces challenges to reinterpret Yolngu values in the face of a largely uninterested and ill-informed dominant culture. Inevitably this has caused some social dislocation. Unemployment, illness, poor nutrition, disengagement and substance abuse are new and unwelcome

2. The late Dr Marika a *Rirratjingu* woman, and daughter of Roy Dadaynga Marika, worked with academic and government institutions, was 2007 Territorian of the Year, a council member of the AIATSIS, and was on the board of directors of Reconciliation Australia. She led the development of curriculum for the education of Yolngu youth as well as the teaching of Yolngu languages and culture at CDU where she was awarded an honorary doctorate. At the time of her untimely death, Dr Marika was Co-Director of the Mulka Project, at the Yirrkala Art Centre the aim of which was to introduce meaningful employment and empowerment to the Yirrkala community through use of digital media. A great role model for the youth, she worked closely with the young employees to help their literacy skills, working on translation and documentation projects, and representing the community's interests to outside institutions... (Marika Raymattja Dr, 2008)

factors facing young Yolngu. The *Yambirrrpa Yuta* Project was an artistic print based workshop aimed at the youth battling this anti-social behaviour, in particular those who were not engaged with mainstream schooling and were at risk from substance abuse, suicide, teenage pregnancy, violence, and lack of motivation and self-confidence. Without providing specific statistics for the Yirrkala community, suicide is not rare and the other syndromes not uncommon.(Yirrkala Art Centre, 2011)

## **YAMBIRRRPA – A YOLNGU PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE**

The origins of the *Yuta* Project began back in 2009 when Andrea Kingston of the *Yambirrrpa* Youth Development Unit (YYDU) attached to the Yirrkala Community Education Centre (the local community school) attracted funding to deliver alternative programs for disengaged youth. The word *Yambirrrpa*, referring to a stone fish trap, has particular significance to the Yolngu. This was explained by the late Dr R. Marika<sup>2</sup> in the proposed abstract for a presentation which her untimely death prevented her from giving in Alice Springs, July 9, 2008, at the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Symposium, *Keeping Language Diversity Alive*. The title of the presentation was: *Keeping Culture and Language Strong Using Ancient Yambirrrpa Fishtrap Metaphors*:

*In 2005, we rebuilt the Yambirrrpa (stone fish trap) as an education workshop. This involved consulting and negotiating permission with the right people in the lead up to the workshop. All the students heard the Dhäwu (story) about the fisherman and the ancestors from the elders.*

*I will talk about how the Yambirrrpa story is used as a philosophy of shaping Yolngu knowledge. It has powerful imagery and analogies that help shape the visions of the elders in everyday life, through reliving the culture of the past. Yambirrrpa is also used as a metaphor of giving, sharing, and building strong relationships in the community and school. The fish trap is secure and sound so no fish can escape, like keeping the kids in the school together. The rocks can be seen as the foundation and the elders sitting there who hold that place together and look after the education interests of the school. This helps the school council and the teachers maintain and deliver strong Yolngu and ngapaki (non-Yolngu) education. We want our children to think cognitively and be prepared for the challenges they have to face in the future, to make future pathways under the guidance of those elders...(Marika Raymattja Dr, 2008)*

Guided by these principles, the YYDU sought projects targeting young people not engaged in school or work and identified as 'at risk'. They were mainly of school age, but included some older, with ages ranging between fourteen and twenty-five. The local Art Centre was approached to see if they would collaborate to support and deliver programs in printmaking and film. Funding was sought from the Northern Territory Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET). The supervisor for the project was Andrea Kingston, who in her capacity as Workplace and Training Co-ordinator at the Yirrkala School, took on the role of VET (Vocational Education and Training) co-ordinator for this project. The position was funded for a three year period under the Remote Learning Partnership agreement and was initially planned to finish mid-2012. (Kingston Andrea, 2011)

3. The word collograph is derived from the Greek word kolla meaning glue. The technique involves gluing or collaging materials of different textures, such as sand, paper, leaves, grass, onto a plate to create different textures in relief. The plate is then inked and printed. A great variety in colour and tonal effects can be achieved due to the highly textured surface.

4. The Garma Festival was established by the *Yothu Yindi* Foundation in 1998 and is held annually at an important ancestral site called Gulkula about 25kms from Yirrkala. It attracts over 2000 participants, Yolngu and non-Yolngu alike, and provides a platform for the Yolngu to share their culture and create meaningful dialogue between people about the importance of retaining and maintaining Indigenous Australian culture. (*Yothu Yindi* Foundation, 2014)

The first *Yambirrpa* project held at the Print Space was carried out from May to June 2010. It involved a group of six young women who were to take part in a printing workshop where they would learn various types of printing techniques under the guidance of some of the senior artists and the Print Space co-ordinator, Dianne Blake. Their participation had been bolstered by the knowledge that one of their friends, Ruby Djikarra Alderton, was doing work experience at the Print Space. The eighteen year old daughter of prominent Yolngu artist and print maker, Banduk Marika, Alderton had done most of her schooling away from Yirrkala in Darwin and Newcastle but had chosen to return to complete her schooling at the Yirrkala Community Education Centre. Alderton had experience of linocut and etching techniques from working with her mother, and was to play a pivotal role in the overseeing of all the *Yuta* projects.

As the Print Space was gearing up for production of prints for exhibiting in the Gapan Gallery at the annual Garma Festival it was decided that the group of young women should participate. The technique to be featured at that year's Garma was collography<sup>3</sup> - a technique that was long popular with the older print space artists. The group were taught the whole process from creation of the plates to the actual printing. The subject matter each chose was representative of some element of their culture, reflecting the relevance of country, family and history to each of the participants. Although not specified as a mandatory requirement of the project this was also in keeping with the philosophy of *Yambirrpa*. The girls worked alongside the older, more established artists who were on hand to give instruction in technique as well as ensuring accuracy with regard to the clan stories chosen as subject matter. Most of the young women involved enjoyed it so much they kept coming back, while for others this experience led into work within the community in other avenues such as child care. The funding did not allow for constant projects, and could only pay for Blake to be involved as advisor for four hours per week, leaving enforced periods of inactivity. In 2011, due to the ongoing problems with the funding structure, the project came to a standstill. Although no longer able to involve them in activities at the Print Space, Kingston and the other teachers made an effort to keep in touch with the group at least once a week to discuss other options regarding work or school. All members of the original group of six who worked on the Collograph Project returned to school in 2012. Amongst others who had participated in the project some chose to go back to their remote communities to do other work experience that had been arranged for them in areas of child care and ranger work. This first workshop had succeeded in empowering the young people and giving them the confidence to participate more fully and fruitfully in community life.

Eventually the School and the Art Centre co-coordinator, Will Stubbs, secured more funding through a government grant enabling them to set up more printing workshops. The works produced by the original participants of the Collograph Project were exhibited alongside the works of the established artists at the open air Gapan Gallery at the Garma Festival in August 2010.<sup>4</sup> The artists attended on the opening night and over the period of the exhibition and were excited to witness first-hand the positive response to their artwork and the fact that people were interested in learning about, and buying their artwork. The sale of over forty prints from the six editions exhibited at the Garma festival was instrumental in providing motivation and increased self-confidence. A vital part of the project was to further enhance their printing training by requiring them to fill the orders themselves, ensuring that

the girls would have to return to the Print Space to produce the prints. In this way the project was effective in improving their education and supporting them back into the workplace.

From this initial workshop, self-motivation increased and the six young women felt accepted by and connected to the Yirrkala Print Space with some of the girls expressing interest in continuing to work there. Their involvement with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre continued to play an important role in engaging them back into their community and a fuller and more purposeful life. A selection of the collographs they produced was exhibited at Nomad Galleries in Darwin in April 2011. Several of the young women went to Darwin for the exhibition opening. This was another important milestone in exposing them to a city and commercial gallery experience with them interacting directly with an art buying market. Kingston reported that although it was a daunting experience for young girls who had spent little time away from family and community they did themselves and their communities proud. All displayed a much higher self-confidence and self-esteem and went on either to employment within the community or back to school. (Kingston Andrea, 2011)

Such was the success of the first workshop that the Yirrkala Print Space decided to run another. Alicia Scobie (a local artist and tertiary qualified printmaker) volunteered to facilitate a workshop using a combination of photography, linocut and chine-collé techniques. This technique was totally novel. Nothing like it had ever been produced in the area. It owed nothing to the established Yirrkala art styles or authority and did not rely on any sacred knowledge or previous art production experience. Instead it employed digital photography, photocopying, chine-collé and linocut printing to produce a contemporary 'Facebook' feel to the final image. The young participants' familiarity with computers was relied on for the use of the Photoshop program to manipulate, contrast and crop the photographic image. *Ngarra* (I, me) was the collective title given to the resultant prints which were self-portraits of the young people in a context they themselves created and in a genre of which they themselves were the innovators. This was evidence of a change in direction in Yolngu art in both concept and subject matter. The young artists were at the forefront of these changes, experimenting with and creating innovative works in new media. With the production of self-portraits they were breaking new ground in Aboriginal art as the portrayal of the individual has until recently been uncommon in the art of societies with a group philosophy wherein they see themselves as part of a group or clan rather than as an individual. Kinship is central to Yolngu society and it is only through knowledge of their relationships to others that an individual can answer the question 'Who am I?' (Berndt & Berndt, 1978, p.27). Although the central subject of self was innovative all the participants also included some element of family, clan or country in the final image - reproducing clan design in background patterns, including the image of a family member or referencing hunting or other cultural practices - indicative that family and culture were still very relevant to their perception of self.

The pool of involved young people swelled weekly. At the final count twenty-eight artists had created thirty-six images in editions of five. The expanding group continued to attend the Print Space one day a week to complete the editioning of their self-portrait prints. An environment was generated in which they felt comfortable - listening to music, chatting and experimenting with different printing media

5. The Ownership Project is a studio and gallery promoting creative capacity and cultural expression of refugee, migrant, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. The gallery hosts exhibitions from their community engagement projects, residency program and remote arts initiatives. TOP's connections to art and design organisations link resident artists with further career progression opportunities. The Artists in Residence and Creative Capacity programs provide training in various printmaking media and an opportunity for participants to share their stories and aesthetics with the public. (TOP, 2012)

whilst working with digital technology that they had embraced wholeheartedly. The successful outcome of this project where these young people had used a photographic medium combined with new printing techniques to portray themselves in a contemporary fashion, seemed to empower them with the confidence to tackle issues concerning their remote community and life.

The self-portrait prints were exhibited to an enthusiastic local audience at the Yirrkala Art Centre at the end of 2010. Then in May 2011 a selection was included in an exhibition, *Young Ones*, at Nomad Art in Darwin where the innovative works were well received. The Art Centre co-ordinator, Andrew Blake, described the project as having given the local youth an opportunity to express their creative side with total freedom of expression. With these self-portraits they had succeeded in creating very contemporary art.

## YUTA PROJECT

The *Yuta* Project built on the momentum created from the *Ngarra* Project. In *Yolngu matha* (local language) *yuta* means 'young' (as in the participants) as well as 'new' (as in the art form). The initiative for the project came from Ruby Alderton who had assisted in the Collography and the *Young Ones Ngarra* Projects. She was now employed full-time at the Print Space as a printmaker. Alderton is very conscious of the importance of her Yolngu heritage and culture and expresses this in her art. She considered the *Yuta* projects a vital opportunity for the young people to work with their elders and have exposure to knowledge and stories and learn from the older artists how they could keep their culture alive through their artwork. Alderton was to oversee the project with the new Print Space co-ordinator, Annie Studd. To facilitate the workshop they approached Sean Smith, a printmaker involved with The Ownership Project (TOP) - an artist run space and printmaking studio located in Melbourne. Smith had previous experience of working with Yolngu artists in Arnhem Land and the philosophy behind The Ownership Project<sup>5</sup> embraced the very thing that the *Yuta* Project was attempting to achieve - the empowerment of the individual in community by providing a safe space where they can involve themselves artistically, without boundaries or judgement. The proposal for the *Yuta* Project was that the next step should be into photographic screen printing - a more sophisticated and technically demanding process which required acquiring new computer skills as well as the participants having to learn a totally new printing technique.

Because youth at risk often lack the confidence or esteem to actively search out positive alternatives they can easily fall into a life of substance abuse. The aim of this project was to re-identify the youth at risk and create another opportunity for self-expression. From previous workshops, staff at the Centre could see that the collaboration with other Yolngu artists connected to the Art Centre resulted in the young people gaining a greater depth of understanding and appreciation of art. This in turn led to greater confidence and improved self-esteem. The initial concerns as to whether the project would attract the young people and whether they would turn up, let alone keep coming back, were soon allayed. The young people enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to do something different and enjoyable.

The *Yuta* Project was funded by an Australian Council Grant and began in the first two weeks of February 2012. As with the previous project the technique was to be based on something that the young people used regularly – the cameras on their mobile phone. They were asked to go into their community to capture images of local scenes, places or people -- things that were meaningful to them and were, in their opinion, a reflection of their community and its lifestyle. The images produced provided a powerful insight into the issues facing the young people in Yirrkala and what was important to them. They used a Photoshop program to manipulate the image in black and white ready for exposure onto a screen. A hand drawn illustration was then created and the contrary images printed together to make a complex and resolved work of art. All the involved youth printed their own work and made their own colour choices, with it being left up to them to decide how much assistance they required.

As their titles indicate, some of the prints showed the youth engaged in the antisocial behaviour associated with substance abuse. The accompanying stories were quite poignant as it was obvious the youth were aware of what was happening and didn't want to go that way. This sentiment was expressed in the following examples:

*Petrol Sniffer* by Mikey Guyanya Gurruwiwi (age 14): *'I did this print because of how many sniffers there are here in Yirrkala. Just about everyone here sniffs. Being in one of the gangs used to be cool but now it's sniffing.'* (Print Space Yirrkala Art Centre, 2014)

*Blood and Bones* by Bawu Gurruwiwi, (age 15): *'On the first day when we came into the arts centre to do this project we all went for a drive around the community to take photos. We drove down to the small creek, the tunnel, while we were there we found these three boys sniffing in the morning. So we took photos of them. On the tree above them someone had graffitied "bloods" which is a gang name. I drew the bones, like blood and bones. These boys' brains are melting away too.'* (Print Space Yirrkala Art Centre, 2014)

Smith found it interesting to see the young artists' awareness and point of view through the subject matter they were tackling. The works were created in a manner he regarded as brave, direct and very refreshing. Smith considered that the works were not produced negatively but rather with a sense of optimism. It seemed that through their art they were giving a wake-up call by highlighting the negative practices. (Smith Sean, 2012)

The workshop was repeated later in June 2012 again with Smith collaborating. This time the participants were given complete artistic freedom in choice of subject matter and worked on developing the technique of combining photography with screen-printing. The eagerness with which the young people embraced the new project and their willingness to accept new challenges signified their increased confidence in their own abilities. That they were understanding the processes involved was reflected in the fact that the resultant prints were more complex than those from the first workshop. The main body of work was produced during the two workshops but the Yirrkala Print Space continued to encourage the young artists to come and make more prints. This resulted in new works being created throughout the year culminating in January 2013 with a total of thirty-three prints having been created by thirteen artists.

6. Part of The Yarra Aboriginal Partnership Plan objectives was “Promoting Culture– Strengthen and enrich local culture by promoting a greater understanding of and respect for Aboriginal people, culture, traditions and history.” (Yarra Council, 2001.)

7. Wandjuk Marika (1927–1987), eldest son of Mawalan who taught him to paint. Wandjuk was one of the first Yolngu to be taught to read & write English at the Yirrkala Mission School where he became a teacher’s assistant. Along with his artistic achievements he became an interpreter, advisor to Government bodies and Indigenous spokesperson leading the fight for recognition of Indigenous intellectual property. He was chair of the Aboriginal Arts Board from 1975–1980. (Marika Wandjuk, 1995)

At the completion of the project Smith arranged for an exhibition of the works at The Ownership Project (TOP) Gallery in Melbourne. The sell-out show was a reflection of the reaction to the prints. One of the most significant endorsements for the quality and significance of the artwork was the purchasing of a full suite by The Yarra City Council for its Contemporary Fine Arts Collection. In a letter to Smith the Council conveyed their excitement at having the *Yuta* works in their collection. The experts on their selection committee considered them the strongest body of work of all they had assessed in terms of their cultural importance and satisfying the objectives of their acquisition program.<sup>6</sup> The Council expressed interest in purchasing more works from the young Yirrkala artists.

The continuous engagement of youth in the *Yambirrpa* projects has resulted in a number of positive outcomes. Following the opening of the Melbourne TOP exhibition Ruby Alderton completed a residency at Alcaston Gallery where she gained insight into commercial gallery practice. In 2012 she was the youngest of the three Aboriginal guest curators for an exhibition entitled *Three* held at the Chan Contemporary Art Space in Darwin. Also during that year Dhalmula Burarrwanga, aged 17, won Best Overall Artwork (Judges Choice) at the Gove Peninsula Festival Art Awards for her print *Milkarr’* (Tears), a self-portrait in which she describes the small dots making up her face as looking like tears which could indicate that she is sad or happy but, she explains, it is rather that she is happy - happy to see the beauty in nature and happy to be part of nature. Gurmarrwuy Yunupingu, aged 17, won Best Indigenous Artwork in the event with her print of a night scene featuring, *Mantpana*, a tree in the local oval that was a favourite meeting place for the local youth. Ishmael Marika’s print *Sunset Tower* was accepted and exhibited at the 2012 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award. DJ Marika’s print *Mari* was included in the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art Exhibition, *String Theory*, which toured Australia in 2013-2014. It featured his self-portrait with headphones connecting him to his grandfather, Wandjuk Marika<sup>7</sup>, in a photo from the Mulka archive in which the renowned artist is holding handmade string (*raki*). In his description of the artwork DJ commented: ‘... *I took a photo of myself looking like he does in his old photo. In his photo he is holding raki and in my photo I am listening to music. It looks like he is holding my music. I drew the background design. I chose the colours and printed it myself. I like how the raki links my mari and me together even though he lived in the past and I am in the present.*’ (Print Space Yirrkala Art Centre, 2014)

DJ is one of the young men featured in a documentary, *The Lost Boys*, aired on ABC television in 2013-2014. The documentary highlights the issues confronting the current generation of young men in the Yirrkala community. DJ acts as a guide for the presenter, Sabour Bradley, who talks to DJ about his life in the community and the personal issues he is dealing with. When asked what he aspires to do in the future DJ replies: ‘I want to be a leader like my grandfather.’ He takes Bradley to the Art Centre and proudly shows him his *Mari* print. (Bradley Sabour, 2013)

The *Yuta* Project prints were also exhibited in *The Yuta Print Project - Yirrkala Young Artists* exhibition in 2012 at Harvey Arts Projects Gallery 391 in Ketchum Idaho, USA. The Harvey Arts Projects USA promotes Australian Indigenous art in galleries throughout the USA. In August 2014 Nomad Art featured a selection of the prints in *Yuta (New): A continuing Tradition of Youth Art from Yirrkala* exhibition in their Darwin Gallery. The prints were described as reflecting ‘the environment from

which they came, a place of newness, laughter, learning and the future grown from the foundations of culture and tradition.’ (Nomad Art, 2014) The *Yuta* prints have been acquired by institutions, galleries and collectors throughout Australia.

These contemporary and sophisticated artworks are a reflection of what young people find important in their daily lives and are a powerful insight into issues facing Indigenous youth in Yirrkala and throughout Australia. They are also a testament to the potential the next generation of artists in the region hold. The artistic fruit of this excursion into a new way of seeing and creating cannot yet be fully calculated. The affirmative response of outsiders to the artworks is only one side of the success story. Never before have images been made digitally in this region and so a new genre has been created with the Print Space staff also learning new skills. In their endeavour to engage the young members of the community, the Art Centre also created a new future for itself and gained energy from the new blood. Following the workshops the Print Space was overwhelmed by requests from those involved in the projects asking if they could work there. Regrettably the Art Centre could not accommodate all and was left with the difficult task of making a selection. Five of the young men and women involved in the engagement projects started permanent employment at the Yirrkala Print Space in 2014. Godut Ganambarr who had completed her work experience at the Print Space during Year 12 at the Yirrkala School had asked if she could stay on after graduation. She was joined by Munuyngu Marika, Bawu Gurruwiwi, Dhalmula#2 Burarrwanga, and Burrthi Marika.

At the Print Space the young group continues to gain skills in printmaking as well as general work and life skills while at the same time rejuvenating the Art Centre with their enthusiasm. They impress management and staff with the individual talent they express as artists and by their enthusiasm and commitment. Studd is constantly surprised at how quickly they pick up techniques. When preparing to take a week’s leave less than six months into their apprenticeship Studd left the group with a list of tasks which included editioning some of the prints that were to be exhibited at the coming Garma Festival Gapan Gallery. Expecting that without supervision the inexperienced group would only manage to edition a few, Studd was surprised on her return to find that in one week the group had editioned all the prints. Editioning a total of ninety prints in one week would be considered quite an achievement for experienced printmakers so was all the more impressive an achievement for a group of young trainees.

The projects carried out at the Yirrkala Art Centre Print Space involving the youth of the community have to date fulfilled the objectives of the *Yambirrpa* education program as described by Dr Marika, through ‘giving, sharing, and building strong relationships in the community and school’ and ultimately have upheld the philosophy of *Yambirrpa* of communicating ‘the visions of the elders in everyday life, through reliving the culture of the past.’ The projects have been successful in re-engaging the youth, facilitating their access to education and providing them with training for gainful employment. With upskilling and the restoration of their self-confidence the once dis-engaged young members of the community are now empowered role models contributing to the building of a healthy and sustainable community.

## SELECTION OF PARTICIPATING ARTISTS WITH ARTWORK TITLE AND AGE

Gunariny#2 Wanambi, 'Gapu'. Age 18

Mamburra #2 Raymond, 'Learning to be a Hunter'. Age 23

Gurmarrwuy Yunupingu, 'Mantpana'. Age 17

Barrata Marika, 'Sky and Earth'. Age 25

Djuwakan Marika, 'Mari'. Age 19

Bulmirri Yunupingu, 'Memories'. Age 22

Gandhurrminy Yunupingu, 'Djamarrkuli'. Age 24

Ruby Alderton, 'The Hunter'. Age 18

Dhalmula Burarrwanga, 'Milkarri'. Age 17

Dhalmula Burarrwanga, 'Garrung'. Age 17

Gadaman Gurruwiwi, 'Rangi'. Age 12

Mikey Gurruwiwi, 'Petrol Sniffer'. Age 13

Mikey Gurruwiwi, 'Ngarra'. Age 13

Bawu Gurruwiwi, 'Blood and Bones'. Age 15

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