



Tommy May (Ngarralja)

Born in 1935, Yarrnkurnja, the Great Sandy Desert. Died in 2022, Western Australia, Australia.

BIOGRAPHY

Tommy May Ngarralja is a Wangkatjunga/Walmajarri man. He was born at Yarrnkurnja, in the Great Sandy Desert. He dances and sings Kurtal, a ceremony relating to the main jila (living waterhole) in his country. He is also a painter and printmaker. He is now referred to as Karrayili which means middle aged person. He is not yet an elder, but he has been given the job of spokesman by his old people. He is fluent in both Wangkajunga and Walmajarri languages as well as English. He also writes Walmajarri. He was one of the first people to start up the Karrayili Adult Education centre because he wanted to learn to read and write in his own language and English.

“I was big when I left my country. I was already hunting by myself. I was with my young brother and my mother. My father had passed away by this time. I know these stories and these places in my country. We are not allowed to paint that story for other people’s country. We will get killed or into trouble if we do this. We put that easy story, not a really hard story like law business. We can’t paint that either. I first saw paintings in caves. I learned a lot from people, mostly my father and grandfather. I was living all around in my country, camping all around. Wurra juwal, always moving. When I paint I think about this. My work is now like my drawing for printmaking, straight onto the tin, sometimes wood, using a knife or pens. I work every day, and I’ve travelled a lot with the paintings. Singapore, Houston, Washington DC, like that.”

He is an important person for arts and culture in Fitzroy Crossing and was the formal Deputy Chairman of Mangkaja Arts and formal Chairman of Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC). Ngarralja was also an executive for the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) Board of Director’s, and was a contributing artist to the Ngurarra Canvas used in the successful native title claim.

In 2020 he was awarded the top prize in the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Ngarralija Tommy May - On Tin*, Raft South, Hobart, Tasmania
 - 2016 *Gimme Shelter - A Survey Show from the Artists of Fitzroy Valley*, Short St Gallery, Broome, Australia
 - 2016 *Wurra Juwal*, ReDot Gallery, Singapore
 - 2009 *Luka (Mud)*, with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
 - 2007 *Jilji Jaa Martuwarra*, with Dorothy May Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
 - 2007 *Lau Lau*, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne, Australia
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GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *37th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Australia
- 2017 *Art of Aeons - Colours from the Western and Central Deserts*, JGM Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 2017 *NATSIAA*, MAGNT, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
- 2017 *Tanarnthi art Gallery of South Australia*, Sout Australia, Asutralia
- 2017 *Trace Elements*, Courthouse Gallery, Port Headland, Western Australia, Australia
- 2016 *Scratching the Surface*, IDAIA, Sydney New South Wales, Australia
- 2016 *Gimme Shelter*, Short St Gallery, Broome, western Australia, Australia
- 2016 *Masterpiece Art Fair*, JGM Art, London, United Kingdom
- 2015 *Hedland Art Award*, Courthouse Gallery, Port Hedland, Western Australia, Australia
- 2015 *New Frontiers*, Linden New Art, St Kilda, Victoria, Australia
- 2015 *Everybody’s Prints*, Nomad Art, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

- 2014 *Broken Hill Art Prize*, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia
- 2014 *City of Hoart Prize*, Hobart, Tasmania
- 2012 *Mangkaja Arts 21 Year Anniversary*, Tandyana, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia
- 2012 *Couples*, Suzanne O'Connell Galley, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
- 2012 *Prints, Paper, Canvas*, Nomad Art, Dawrin, Northern Territory, Australia
- 2012 *Emerging Better Works Arts*, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
- 2011 *Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair*, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
- 2011 *Jumu & Wanirri*, Brigitte Braun Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- 2009 *Mangkaja Artists 60 x 60*, Randell Lane Fine Art, Perth, Western Australia, Australia
- 2009 *Mangkaja Survey Show*, Short St Gallery, Broome, Western Australia, Australia
- 2009 *Senior Artists from Fitzroy Crossing*, Suzanne O'Connell Gallery, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
- 2008 *More Than a Few Good Men*, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- 2007 *Jilji Jaa Martuwarra*, Bridgette Braun Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2007 *Fremantle Print Award*, Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia, Australia
- 2006 *Impressions 2006 - limited Edition prints by leading contemporary artists*, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne, Australia
- 2005 *This is Still My Country: Ngurrara Canvas*, Artplace, Perth, Australia
- 2005 *International Arts Festival*, Perth Concert Hall, Perth, Australia
- 2003 *Jila, Juma, Jiwarri & Wirrkuja*, University of Western Australia, Australia
- 2003 *Murrkunkura Ngarrangkarnijangka Ngurrara: Three men's countries from the Dreamtime*, Raft Artspace, Darwin, Australia
- 2002 *Native Title Business - Contemporary Indigenous Art, national Traveling Exhibition*, The 16th Asian International Art Exhibition, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2002 *Group Show*, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2001 *Ngurrara Canvas*, National Gallery of Australia, Australia
- 2001 *Mangkaja Arts Ten Years On*, Tandanya, Adelaide, Australia
- 2001 *18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Australia
- 2000 *Impressions! An exhibition of prints*, Coomalie Centre, Batchelor, Northern Territory, Australia
- 2000 *Group Show*, Australian Print Workshop Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2000 *Fremantle Print Awards*, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth, Australia
- 2000 *People in Landscape: Contemporary Australian Prints*, Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines
- 1999 *Proof Positive*, Gold Treasury Museum, Melbourne, Australia
- 1999 *Cutting Comments: Contemporary Lino cut Prints 1995-98*, Silk Cut Award Exhibition, Australia
- 1999 *Story Boards: ceramic Tiles from the Kimberley*, Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth, Australia
- 1998 *Group Show*, Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London, United Kingdom
- 1997 *Heritage Commission Art Award*, Old Parliament House, Canberra, Australia
- 1996 *Fremantle Print Award*, Fremantle Art Centre, Perth, Australia
- 1996 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Australia
- 1996 *Heritage Commission Art Award*, Old Parliament House, Canberra, Australia
- 1995 *Mangkaja Paper Works*, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, Australia
- 1995 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin. Selected to tour nationally with the first NATSIAA travelling exhibition
- 1995 *Fremantle Print Award*, Fremantle Art Centre, Australia
- 1995 *Prints from the APW Collection*, Survey show of recent works from the APW archive, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne, Australia
- 1994 *Ngarakura Ngurrara Minyarti, This is My Country*, Festival of Perth Exhibition, Artplace Gallery, Perth, Australia
- 1993 *Images of Power*, Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia

RESIDENCIES / ART PRIZES / PUBLIC ART

- 2018 Finalist - Alice Price
- 2017 Finalist - Port Headland Art Award
- 2017 Finalist - NATSIAA - General Painting
- 2017 Finalist - Bunbury Art Prize
- 2017 Finalist - NATSIAA, MAGNT, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia
- 2015 Best work in a medium other than painting - Port Hedland Art Award
- 2012 Fitzroy Crossing Police Station – Glass Panels (PA)
- 2012 Fitzroy Crossing Police Station (PA)
- 2010 Regional Arts Australia Volunteer Awards, sustained contribution

- 2010 Fitzroy Valley High School (PA)
 - 2010 Fitzroy Crossing Swimming Pool (PA)
 - 2008 Fitzroy Valley Education Centre – Panels Project (PA)
 - 2008 Fitzroy Crossing Hospital - paintings on canvas, foyer design (PA)
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COLLECTIONS

Kluge Ruhe Museum of Aboriginal Art - Charlottesville, United States

National Museum of Australia

National Gallery of Victoria

Curtin University Collection, Perth

Queensland State Art Gallery Berndt

Museum of Anthropology Australian Print Workshop

Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide

Carleton College Art Collection, Northfield Minnesota

Kennesaw State University Little

Creatures Collection Fitzroy Crossing

High School Fitzroy Crossing Hospital

Leewuin Estate Collection

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