

# **Bábbarra Designs**

## **Material Stories by women of Arnhem Land**

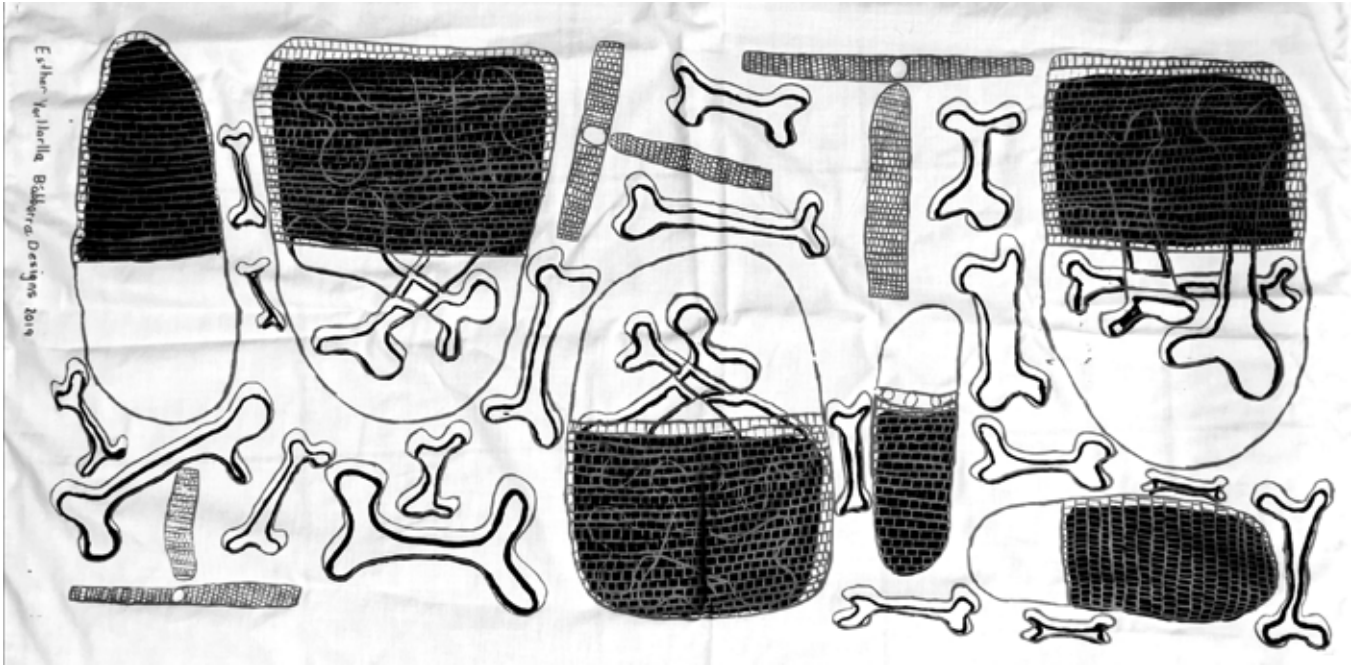
### **Artwork Labels**

# **Bábbarra Designs: Material Stories by women of Arnhem Land**

The Bábbarra Women's Centre is based at Maningrida, located approximately 500km east of Darwin in the remote Northern Territory region of Arnhem Land, at the mouth of the Liverpool River.

It has a proud history of positive social impact and was originally conceived by women in the community to develop and run women-centred enterprises that support healthy and sustainable livelihoods. Bábbarra Designs is the main enterprise, consisting of a textile workshop specialising in the production of hand-printed fabric designs using linocut block prints and screen prints.

All of the screen print designs are painted by hand onto acetate using bush brush made from manyilk (sedge brush *Cyperas Javanicus*) during workshops with collaborator, Bobbie Rueben. The subject relates to a range of stories about culture and Country. This exhibition of selected textiles supports the women working through Bábbarra Women's Centre, who have been significantly and economically affected by the shut-down of their community due to Covid 19.



1

## **Esther Yarllarla**

Ndjébbana people

born 1963

works in Johnson Bay and Maningrida, Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

## **Mardarda and Njarlarla (Bones and Fire-sticks)**

designed 2019 (printed 2022)

ink on linen

In Esther Yarllarla's first screen design, she depicts the story of fire sticks and bones carried in a dilly bag, a traditional way that the Ndjebenna people – Yarllarla's clan group - would ensure they could always light a fire for warmth, for cooking or for ceremony, whilst travelling from place to place.

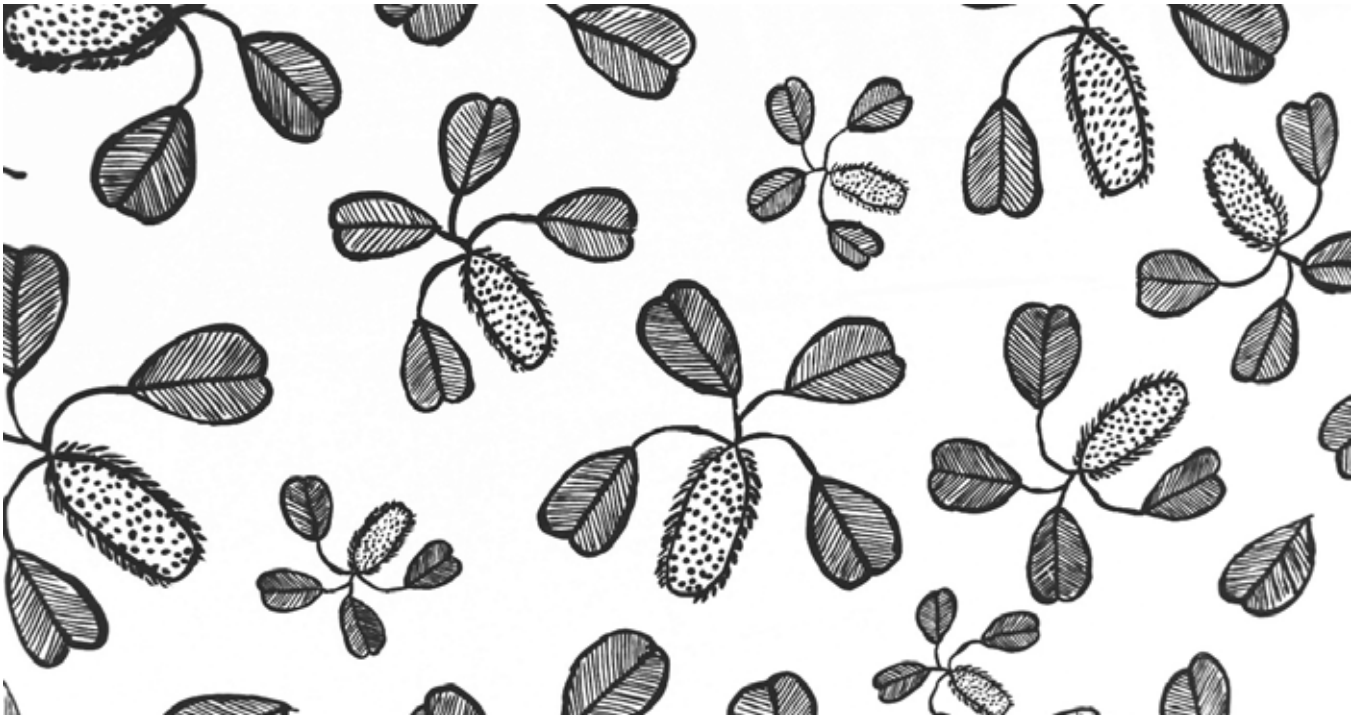
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“Old people would always carry dilly bags, sometimes with water, honey, food or bones of our deceased people. When someone passed away their body would be put on a high platform built from eucalyptus and paperbark. They would use a firestick to light a fire under the platform, and people would perform ceremony to send the deceased’s spirit back to their country. The body would then be left for many months until clan members returned to collect the bones to take them back to the deceased’s homeland for burial.

“The bones would be painted with brown ochre and placed in a dillybag, and upon reaching the deceased’s homeland, people would sing together and place the bones in a lorrkkon (a hollow log coffin).”

**EDITED FROM THE ARTIST’S STATEMENT**

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2

## **Belinda Kuriniya**

Kuninjku people

born 1968

works in Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

## **Manyawok (Cheeky Yam)**

designed 2003 (printed 2022)

ink on silk

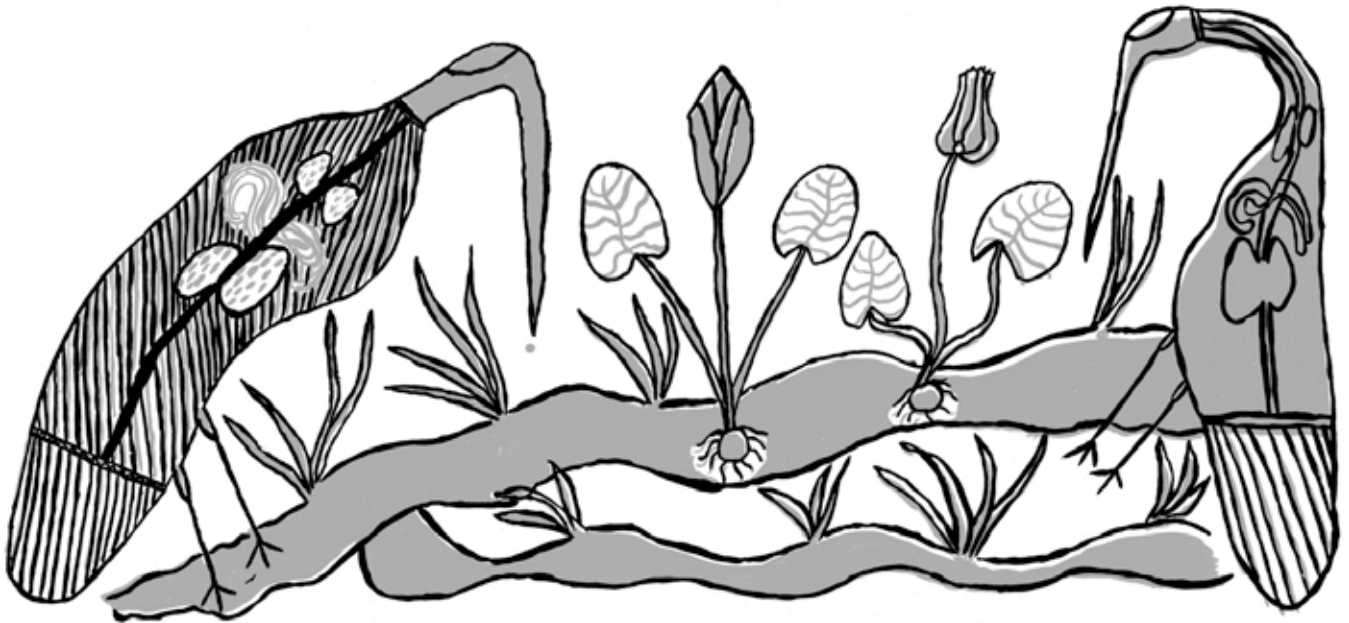
This design depicts the cheeky yam, which is found on the artist's country, near the outstation of Mumeka in central Arnhem Land. Yams are an important bush food that are collected during the wet season.

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Unlike other yams that can be eaten roasted, the cheeky yam can be poisonous if not properly prepared. The preparation process of the yam traditionally takes two days. Firstly, the yams are dug up with a digging stick and boiled over a fire. They are then peeled and sliced into thin strips, which are placed in a special dillybag woven by women from pandanus leaves. The yam-laden dillybag is then strung from an overhanging branch into a river, so the bag just touches the flowing fresh water.

The cheeky yams are left like this overnight to allow the running water to remove the toxins. The next morning, people return and collect the dillybag, and leave the yam pieces in full sunlight to dry out. Finally, when the yam pieces have dried in the sun for a day, they are ready to eat.

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## **Deborah Wurrkidj**

Kuninjku people

born 1971

works in Mumeka and Maningrida, Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

## **Kandji (Jabiru)**

designed 2006 (printed 2022)

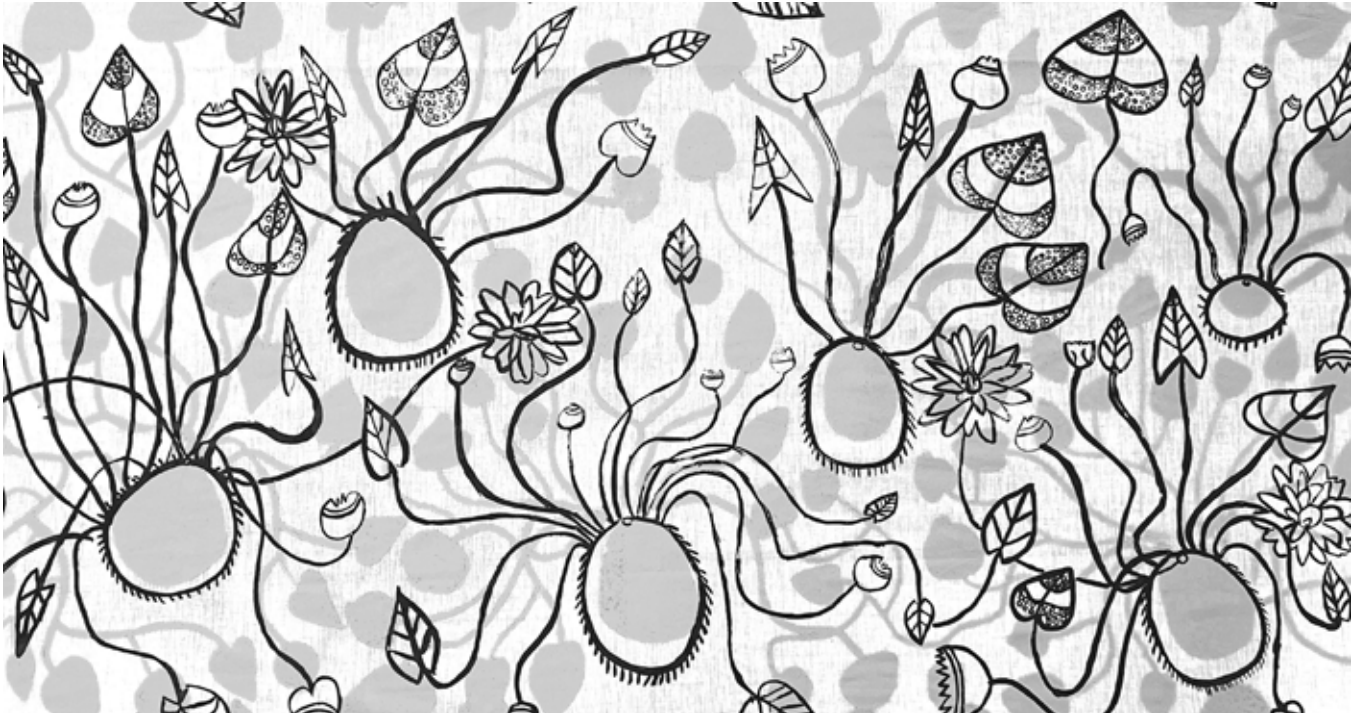
ink on cotton

Deborah Wurrkidj has depicted the Kandji or Jabiru, an important part of the ecosystem near Mumeka, an area of savannah grassland which sits not far from the Liverpool River west of south-west of Maningridia. Wurrkidj states: “Minmanyarr is the wetlands area before Mumeka, my homeland. There are always lots of birds there, including

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this Kandji (Jabiru). The Kandji belongs to the Yirridja moiety, so I call this bird mother. They are looking for fish and turtle in the billabong area, in the mud. There is also Wayuk (water lily) in this design, the flowers can be pink, white or yellow. The bottom part with the roots we call bulparr. Wayuk is good manme (food). We eat the yellow seedpods inside.”

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## **Roseanna Bonson**

Kuninjku and Burrara peoples  
born 1989

works in Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

## **Wayuk (Waterlily)**

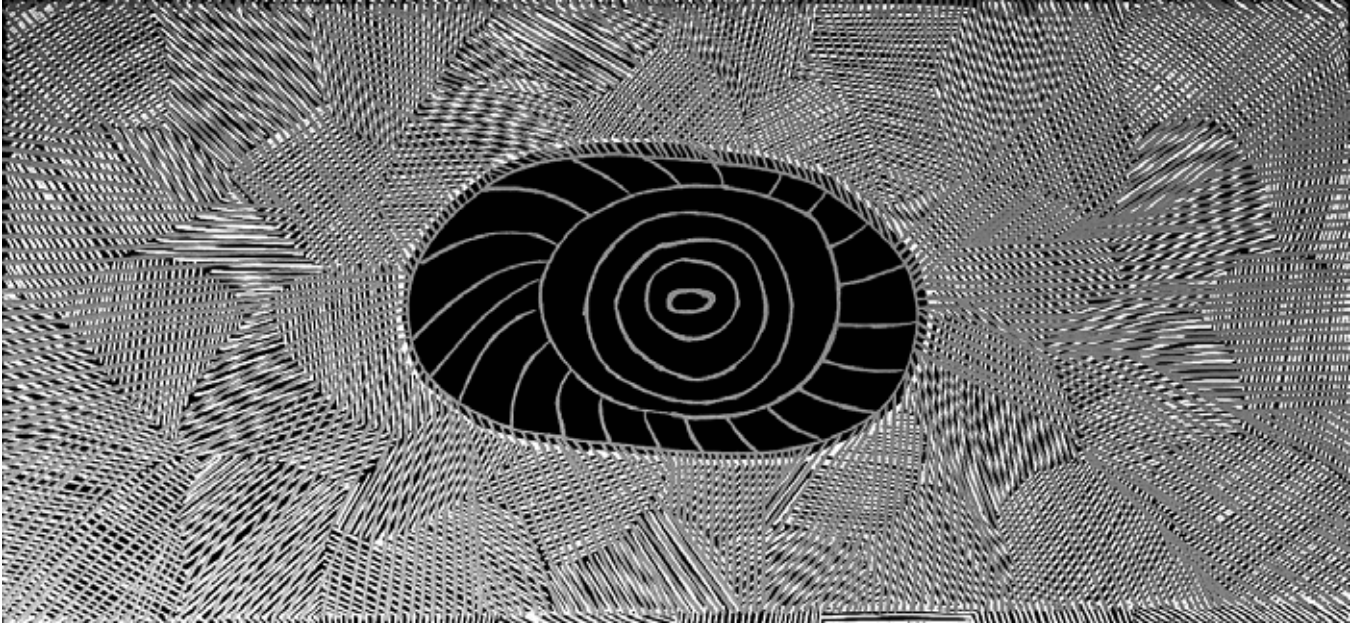
designed 2019 (printed 2022)  
ink on silk

This is Roseanna Bonson's first two-colour design for Babbarra, and she has depicted the Wayuk, or waterlily (*Nymphaea violacea*) that grows in the swamps around Barrihdjowkkeng. Barrihdjowkkeng lies between the Liverpool and Tomkinson Rivers, south of Maningrida in western Arnhem Land.

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The swamps are important places that are not only rich in natural resources but are sites that indicate occupation by important spirits, such as the Yawkyawks – similar to a mermaid. The Wayuk is also an important food source and the stems, seeds, seed heads and tubers are all eaten. Roseanna states that “I always follow the footpath of my grandmother... We went to the bush and ate bushtucker like yam, yabbie, barra, catfish and magpie goose. We didn't come into town often, we were staying at Barrihdjowkkeng outstation. I learned how the old people used to live. I always think about my family out there and I keep going. My grandmother asked me to work with her for many years. I watched her making lino and screen printing. That's why I stay in this job and I'm for the women's centre”.

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## **Janet Marawarr**

Kuninjku and Kune peoples  
born 1962

works in Mumeka, Mankorlod and Maningrida, Arnhem  
Land, Northern Territory

## **Gungura (Spiral Wind)**

designed 2010 (printed 2022)  
ink on cotton and linen blend

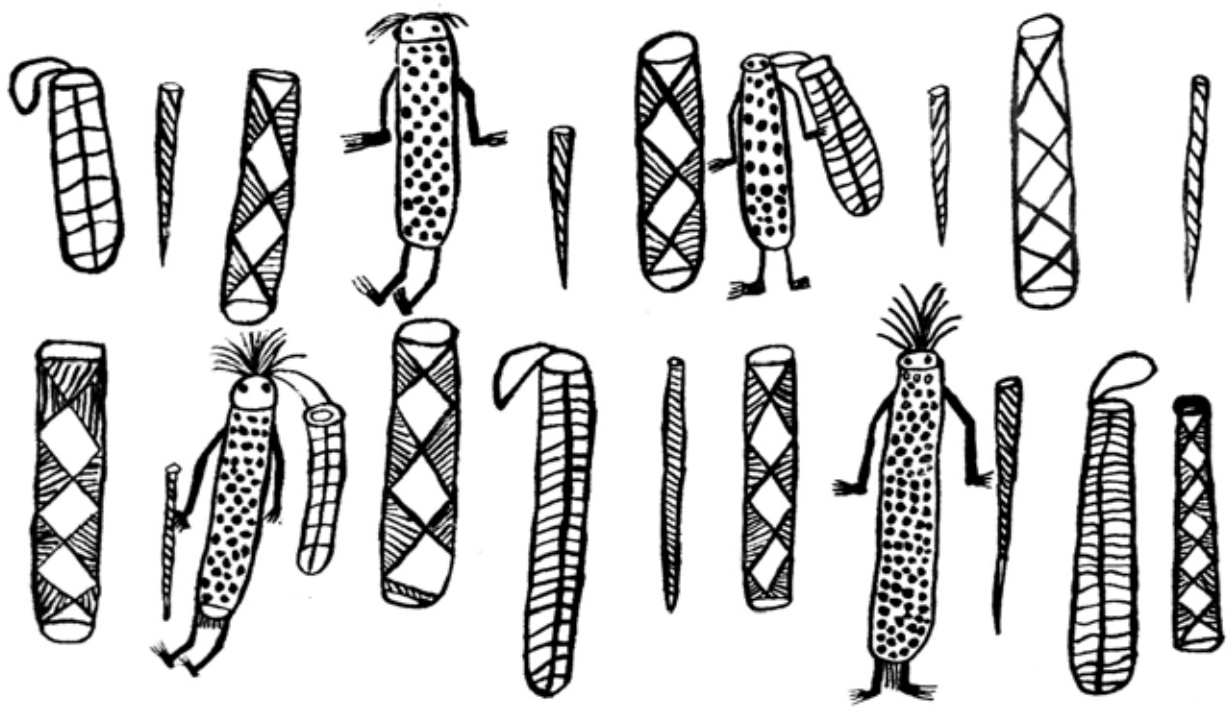
Janet Marawarr has depicted kunkurra, the spiralling wind associated with several sites in the Kardbam clan lands. On one level, this design can be interpreted as a depiction of the kinds of mini-cyclones common during the wet season in Arnhem Land, where the artist lives. Kunkurra also relates specifically to a site called Bilwoyinj, near Mankorlod, on the artist's clan estate.

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Mankorlod is an outstation and can be found at the very southern end of the Tomkinson River in southern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, near where the Cadell River crosses over and into it.

At this site, two of the most important Kuninjku creation beings, a father and son known as na-korrkko, are believed to have hunted and eaten a goanna. They left some of the goanna fat behind at the site, which turned into the rock that still stands there today.

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## Lucy Yarawanga

Gurr-goni and Kuninjku peoples  
born 1961

works in Nangak and Maningrida, Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

## Bawáliba (Stone Country Mimih)

designed 2007 (printed 2022)

ink on linen

“Bawáliba is the Djang (sometimes known as Dreaming) of my mother and my uncles. They are good spirits, they protect us and they recognise families. They are really tall-just like human beings, like us. They dance late at night and have a lot of hair.

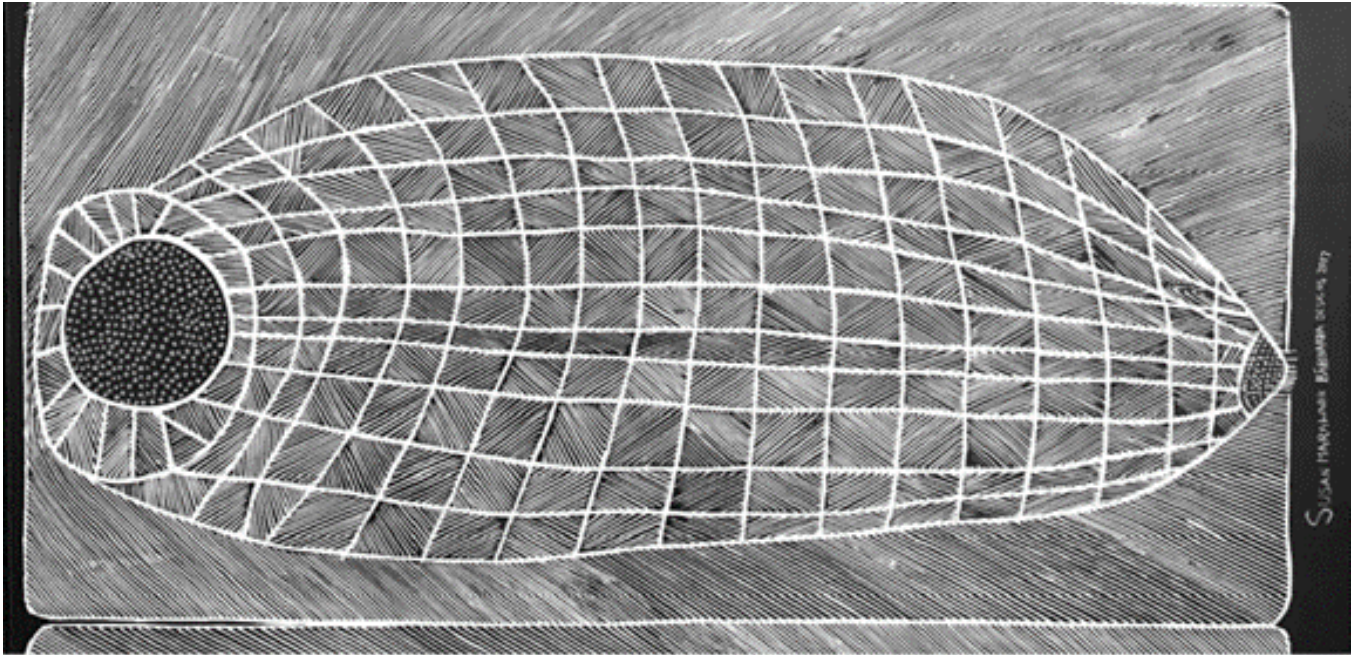
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“In olden times, a long, long, long time ago Bawáliba were here, before people were on the land. Bawáliba used to go out hunting and care for country. They hunt carrying fish traps and digging sticks, near the homeland Djinkarr. They go out hunting on the floodplains with dilly bags and digging sticks. They collect a lot of bush foods, and sleep together with one bark shelter. Sometimes now they still come alive when we sleep, they might come to our houses and peep through the window.

“During the day they always turn into stone and they sleep. We still know that green rock covered in moss near Djinkarr, that’s Bawáliba sleeping.”

**LUCY YARAWANGA, ARTIST STATEMENT.**

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## **Susan Marawarr**

Kuninjku people

born 1967

works in Mumeka and Maningrida, Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

## **Mandjabu (Fish Trap)**

designed 2017 (printed 2022)

ink on linen

Kuninjku people – Susan Marawarr’s people -  
traditionally make two sorts of conical fish traps. One  
is called mandjabu, made from a vine called milil, and  
another smaller one made from the grass manylik (sedge  
brush *Cyperas Javanicus*).

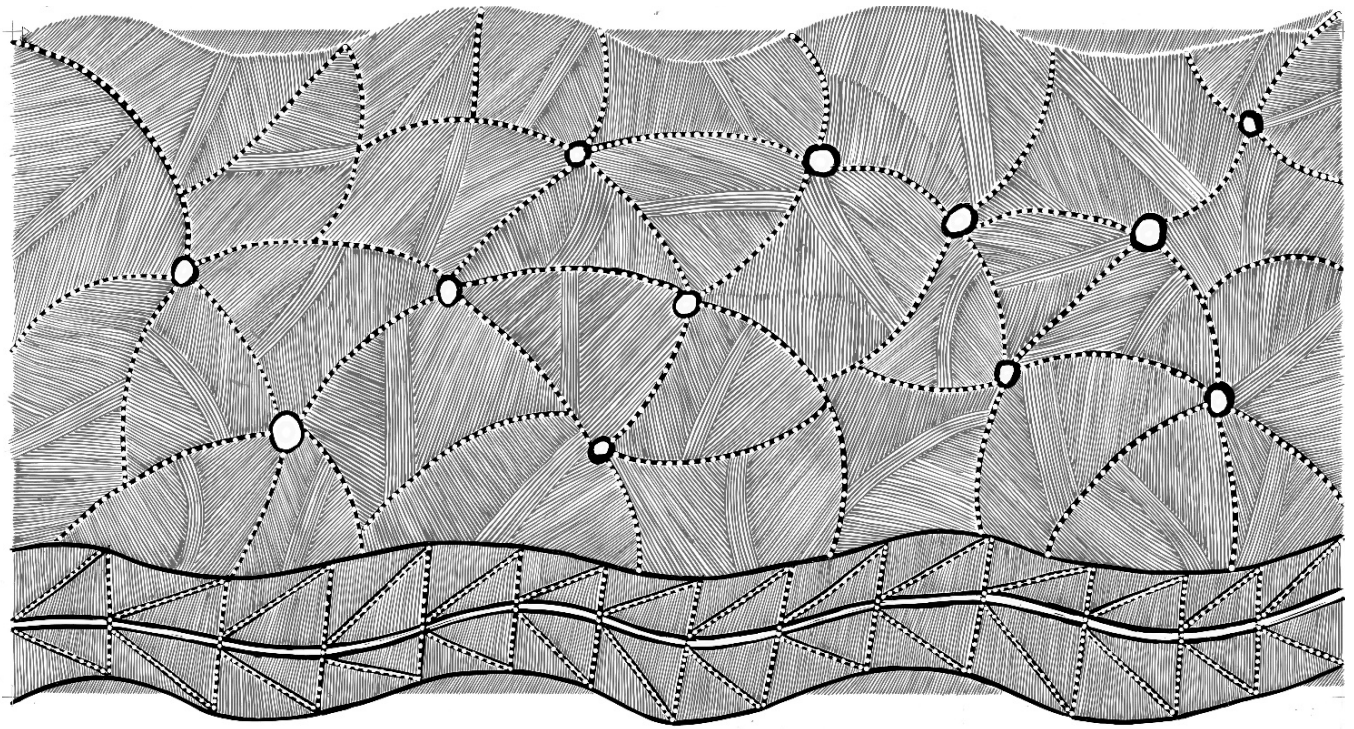
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The mandjabu conical fish trap is bigger and stronger and used in tidal reaches of creeks to catch large fish. The smaller, lighter manylik trap is used in freshwater flowing creeks to catch smaller fish and freshwater prawns.

To make fish traps and fish net fences artists firstly get milil (vine) from the jungle and they put it in water for one night to make it soft. Next they start weaving it; they make rings for the inside to keep the fish trap's shape. Artists work for three or four weeks on the fish trap. They also make string from burdaga (kurrajong) to attach the bardainy (hibiscus) rings and to tie the conical end of the fish trap.

People would then catch fish like rajarra (saltwater barramundi), janambal (freshwater barramundi), buliya (small black freshwater catfish), an-guwirrpia (bonefish), and dalakan (sand bass) in these fish traps.

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## **Janet Marawarr**

Kuninjku and Kune peoples

born 1962

works in Mumeka, Mankorlod and Maningrida, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

## **Kunkurra (Spiral Wind)**

designed 2015 (printed 2022)

ink on silk

Janet Marawarr has depicted kunkurra, the spiralling wind associated with several sites in the Kardbam clan lands. On one level, this design can be interpreted as a depiction of the kinds of mini-cyclones common during the wet season in Arnhem Land, where the artist lives.

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Kunkurra also relates specifically to a site called Bilwoyinj, near Mankorlod, on the artist's clan estate. Mankorlod is an outstation and can be found at the very southern end of the Tomkinson River in southern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, near where the Cadell River crosses over and into it.

Bilwoyinj site is also a ceremonial ground for a ceremony called Yabbaduruwa, a major ceremony owned by the Yirridja patrimoiety. In Kuninjku cosmology, the world is divided into halves or moieties – both male and female - into which all people, land and clans are classified. The Yabbaduruwa ceremony is primarily concerned with initiation, land ownership and promoting the cyclical regeneration of the human and natural worlds.