

MAPA WIYA (YOUR MAP'S NOT NEEDED)
Australian Aboriginal Art from the Fondation Opale



Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples are advised that this document pictures and mentions names of deceased people.



Mapa Wiya (Your Map's Not Needed): Australian Aboriginal Art from the Fondation Opale presents more than one hundred works—paintings on bark and canvas, hollow log coffins (*larrakitj*, *lorrkkon*, or *dupun*), pearl shell body adornments (*lonka lonka* or *riji*), and shields—created by more than sixty artists from different regions of rural Australia.

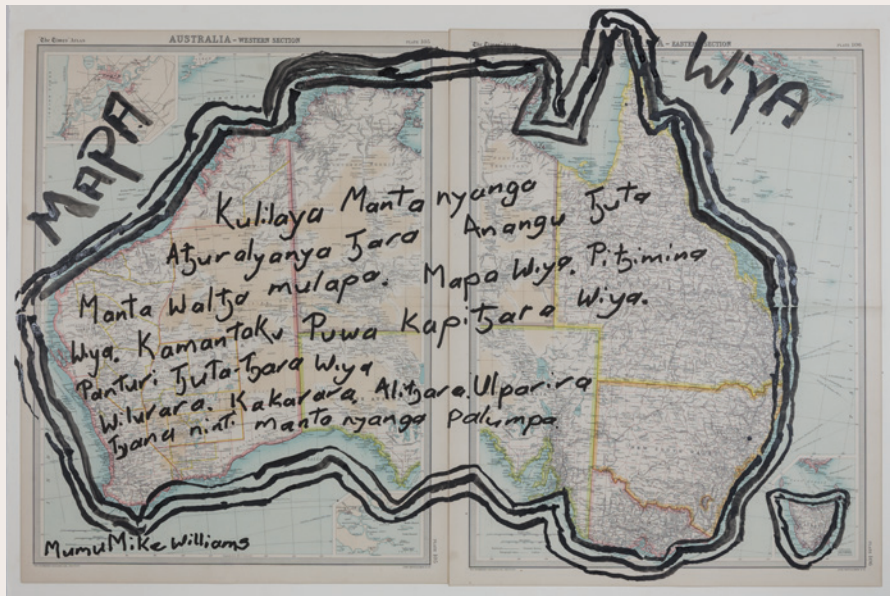
These works represent profound recitations of Aboriginal peoples' personhood, their Country, and the different intercultural spaces indigenous peoples occupy in Australia today.

Country is the word Aboriginal peoples frequently use when referring to their ancestral lands.

There are many different names for Country in the more than 200 indigenous languages of Australia: *ngurra* among Warlpiri, Pintupi, and Luritja speakers in the Northern Territory, *manta* for Pitjantjatjara speakers, who live along the border of the Northern Territory and South Australia. Country describes the disparate terrains of their lives: grasslands, vast deserts, and rainforests, with their distinctive rock formations and water holes, and other meaningful spaces, including the land on which large cities have been built as well as memorialized sites of colonial violence. Country is more than the physical land, however. It is the spiritual and social basis for Aboriginal peoples' autonomous, seminomadic ways of living. The laws and primordial creations of their ancestors are always present in Country. They are visible in song lines, which are routes that creator beings traveled while singing the landscape's physical features into existence. Knowing Country, moving through it, and cultivating its deeply embedded song lines animate the visual expressions on view in the exhibition. To walk through the five galleries is to experience the diverse ways Aboriginal artists share their knowledge of Country with others.

Made after the 1950s, the paintings and sculptural works in Mapa Wiya are concurrent with Aboriginal peoples' struggle for civil rights and control of their Country. During the 19th and 20th centuries, white settlers forcibly removed Aboriginal peoples from their ancestral land and segregated them into settlements. Many of the artists whose works are on view here were born during this period and experienced the trauma firsthand. Parallel to movements for civil rights in the United States and independence in formerly colonized African and Asian nations, Aboriginal peoples campaigned for citizenship, voting rights, and control of their ancestral lands. They finally gained Australian citizenship after a national referendum in 1967.

The advent of contemporary Aboriginal painting is an important part of this history. Developing out of social and economic welfare initiatives run by regional Australian governments and missionaries, the genesis of the contemporary art movement is frequently attributed to the collaborations in the early 1970s between an Anglo-Australian school teacher Geoffrey Bardon (1940–2003) and senior Aboriginal men including, Kaapa Tjampitjinpa (ca. 1926–89), Mick Wallankarri Tjakamarra, and Uta Uta Tjangala (ca. 1926–90), who were living at the Papunya Native Settlement to the west of Alice Springs in central Australia. The settlement had opened in 1958–59 as a facility for the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and, by the late 1960s, was overcrowded with several diverse groups speaking different languages: Pintupi, Luritja, Warlpiri, Kukatja, and Anmatyerr. From this origin story, the cultural, political, and commercial trajectories of Aboriginal artists have taken uneven, often overlapping, paths. Artists Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri, for example, have realized successful careers as artists and participated in major international exhibitions. In other instances, Aboriginal artists have submitted paintings as evidence in court in order to document their ancestral claims to land ownership and stewardship.



ABOVE Kunmanara (Mumu Mike) Williams, Pitjantjatjara language group, *Mapa Wiya (We Don't Need a Map)*, 2017. Ink and acrylic marker pen on found map, 23 ¼ × 35 ½ in. (59 × 90 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. © Kunmanara (Mumu Mike) Williams. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland

RIGHT Ignatia Djanghara, Wunambal language group, *Wanjina (Spirit)*, ca. 1980s. Natural earth and acrylic on eucalyptus bark, 14 ¾ × 6 ¾ in. (37.5 × 16 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. © Ignatia Djanghara / Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland



In the first gallery, two recent works by Kunmanara (Mumu Mike) Williams introduce the significance of Country with graphic immediacy. Like many Aboriginal men, Williams worked as a stockman for white Australian-owned cattle ranches in the southern desert region. He was a recognized healer (*ngangkari*) and community church pastor who became a prominent figure involved in regional campaigns for Aboriginal land rights in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Defying government prohibitions of criminal misuse, Williams painted and drew on official Australian government documents such as maps and mailbags. In these works, he often employed the phrase *mapa wiya*—literally meaning “no map”—which is the origin for the Menil Collection’s exhibition title and thematic focus. These are “land rights paintings,” Williams proclaimed. In one example on view, he superimposed song line contours and text on a 20th-century map of Australia issued by the Edinburgh Geographical Institute. Williams’s Pitjantjatjara-language text, which derives from the songs and chants of land rights protests and meetings, covers the map’s cartographic information and thwarts its original administrative function to communicate foreign partitions of their Country. His text reads:

WE DON'T NEED A MAP. LISTEN: THIS IS ABORIGINAL COUNTRY. WE DON'T NEED MAPS, OR BITUMEN ROADS, OR GOVERNMENT BORE WATER. WE DON'T NEED ALL THE BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES. IN THE NORTH, THE SOUTH, THE EAST AND THE WEST, THERE ARE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR COUNTRY.

A second work by Williams on view, *Postbag Painting*, 2017, reinforces his declaration of indigenous knowledge and Country. On a reclaimed government mailbag, which hangs from a spear made from the toxic wood of the mulga

tree, Williams painted a large black image of Australia with a Pitjantjatjara-language text, song lines, three spears (*kulata*), and a shield (*tjara*) or coolamon vessel. His imagery resonates strongly with the array of 20th century wood shields (*punu tjara*) from Central Australia on view nearby. In *Postbag Painting*, Williams purposefully disregards the printed warning that “theft or misuse of this [mail] bag is a criminal offence,” by crossing out “bag” and writing “*manta*,” deftly transforming the Australian government’s warning into an Aboriginal one: “theft or misuse of this *Manta munu Tjukurpa* [Country and Culture-Law] is a criminal offence. Penalties apply.”

Tjukurpa, a Pitjantjatjara-language term frequently translated as the “Dreaming,” “Dreamtime,” or “Everywhen,” is an omnipresent concept intrinsic to Aboriginal peoples’ relationship with Country. There are common regional characteristics of the Dreaming, but different groups of Aboriginal peoples possess ancestral knowledge and histories particular to their Country. Enumerated in songs, performances, oral histories, paintings, and sculptures, the Dreaming is a flexible and living cosmology of ancestral creation beings and proprietary knowledge—histories, culture (creativity), and laws—that structure Aboriginal personhood and society. As suggested by Williams’s statement, the Dreaming is a concept for the diverse works in the exhibition. It is a living foundation for their ways of knowing and being in Country, coalescing the ancestral past, the contemporary present, and the potential futures of Aboriginal peoples.

Among the figural paintings on bark and canvas in the first gallery, two works by Ignatia Djanghara and one by Lily Karadada depict *Wanjina*, anthropomorphic representations of the Dreaming (*Lalai*) specific to the Kimberley region (northwestern Australia). *Wanjina* figures are associated with the energy of clouds, rain, thunder, lightning, and other atmospheric phenomena. A black oval or semioval shape on their chests represents a mother-of-pearl shell that is used,

even today, to summon rainfall. *Wanjina* generally are benevolent beings, but they are also recognized for their abilities to fiercely punish lawbreakers. Painted and repainted on the interior walls of rock shelters in the Kimberley region over several thousands of years, *Wanjina* are respected ancestors that are eternally present in Country.

In his two large bark paintings, John Mawurndjul uses geometric designs and crosshatching (*rarrk*) to generate the visual energy of creation beings and the Dreaming’s sacred sites (*Djang*) in western Arnhem Land. Mawurndjul’s style shifts away from a long history of figurative bark painting in Arnhem Land depicting creation beings and animals against monochromatic backgrounds. *Dilebang Waterhole*, 2016, and *Mardayin at Dilebang*, 2006, refer to a rocky cliff and ravine that have a seasonal fresh water spring. Located on the Kurulk clan estate in Arnhem Land, *Dilebang* is a sacred site for ancestors and home to a Rainbow Serpent (*Ngalyod*), a foundational creation being connected with water, storms, and all forms of life. Throughout Australia, and especially in areas in the tropical north like Arnhem Land, the Rainbow Serpent is one of the most powerful creation beings. *Mardayin* is an important ceremony held at the *Dilebang* and other sacred sites during which living descendants are invested with the authority of the Dreaming. Painted with the same dense crosshatching technique as Mawurndjul’s bark paintings, the bodies of participants and the surfaces of ceremonial objects symbolize the mesmerizing skin of the Rainbow Serpent.

History, mythological knowledge, and lived experiences are simultaneously present in paintings by Rover Thomas and Paddy Bedford.



Rover Thomas, Wangkujunga and Kukatja language groups, *Ilulunja* (Sugar Bag Hill), 1986. Acrylic on wood, 31 ½ × 39 ¾ in. (80 × 100 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland.
© Rover Thomas / Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland

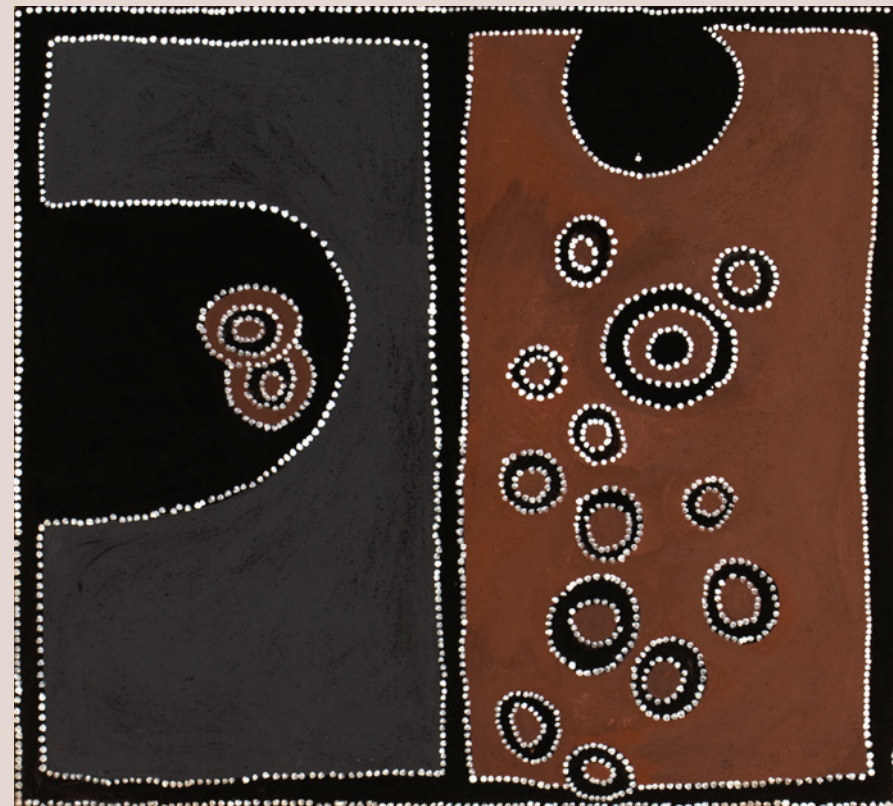
Large, colorful paintings by Emily Kame Kngwarreye (ca. 1910–96) and collaborative works by artists from Central and Western Australia expand on the significance of Country. Her paintings are intimate interpretations of flora, fauna, and the eternal life forces of ancestral beings that infuse her Country. The three works by Kngwarreye on view illustrate an increasingly gestural and fluid application of paint during the artist's short but prolific career that extended from 1988 to 1996. The layers, patterns, and calculated density of dots in the earliest painting in the exhibition, *Alhalkere* (My Country), 1990, exemplify a period shortly after the artist's initial move from making batik fabrics to painting on canvas. Her other two works, *Merne Everything IV Bush Food* and *Winter Abstraction*, both date to 1993 when Kngwarreye began to use larger paintbrushes that she customized in order to achieve a desired aesthetic. Often depicting flowers and plants at the end of an abundant summer season, when fruits are ripe and seeds are drying, Kngwarreye's paintings spring from her holistic knowledge of Alhakere, her home.

A forest of sculptures in the form of hollow log coffins from Arnhem Land and paintings by Rover Thomas and Paddy Bedford define the spaces of the gallery. The installation of hollow log coffins in the Menil's exhibition is an homage to the *Aboriginal Memorial*, 1987–88, by Djon Mundine (b. 1951), which is on permanent display at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. Composed of 200 hollow log coffins that Mundine commissioned from 43 Arnhem Land artists, the *Aboriginal Memorial* commemorates the tragic experiences of Aboriginal peoples during 200 years of European settlement in Australia. Made from tree trunks hollowed out by termites, coffins historically were part of a second burial ceremony. Painted and planted vertically in the ground, they held the bones of ancestors secure in order to facilitate their rightful return journey to Country.

The contemporary sculptures on view by John Mawurndjul, Baluka Maymuru, Gulumbu Yunupingu, Mick Kubarkku, and several other Arnhem Land artists reference this historical and cultural significance.

History, mythological knowledge, and lived experiences are simultaneously present in paintings by Rover Thomas and Paddy Bedford. In East Kimberley during the early 1980s, Rover Thomas began painting his Country and its Dreaming, as well as different sites he visited while working as a stockman or cattle rancher. *Ilulunja* (Sugar Bag Hill), 1986, is one painting in a series of works about the destruction of the city of Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory, by Cyclone Tracy in 1974. In Thomas's depiction, the storm was an act of retribution by the Rainbow Serpent, who was angry about the decline of indigenous cultural practices. Visits by the spirit of a deceased family member following the cyclone's devastation prompted Thomas to create a public ceremony of dances and songs, the Gurrir Gurrir cycle. Dancers carry and manipulate large paintings on board with imagery narrating the song lines of the spirit's return journey to Country. The natural pigments and pictorial language developed for the Gurrir Gurrir cycle proved decisive for the future of painting in the Kimberley region.

In *Bedford Downs Massacre*, 2001, Paddy Bedford depicts a particularly traumatic event in East Kimberley, a massacre of Aboriginals that took place in the 1920s. The tones of brown and black paint and white dots divide the canvas into two fields. Bedford painted numerous concentric circles with these colors to represent the lifeless bodies of these men, poisoned with strychnine, as well as the tree stumps that were fuel for the fire to incinerate the evidence. Two isolated concentric circles on the left side of the canvas represent witnesses to this horrific event hiding atop a hill.



ABOVE Paddy Bedford, Gija language group, *Bedford Downs Massacre*, 2001. Natural earth and acrylic on canvas, 48 1/8 x 53 1/8 in. (122 x 135 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. © Paddy Bedford. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland



RIGHT Gurrir Gurrir Ceremony, East Kimberley, ca. 1994



Movement and travel through Country are the prevailing themes in the final galleries.

ABOVE *Riji or Lonka Lonka* (Body Ornament), 20th century. Carved pearl shell and natural earth pigments, 6 3/8 x 4 1/2 x 1/4 in. (16 x 11.5 x 0.6 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland

RIGHT *Riji or Lonka Lonka* (Body Ornament), 20th century. Carved pearl shell and natural earth pigments, 6 5/8 x 4 1/2 x 3/4 in. (16.8 x 11.2 x 2 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland



Pearl shells engraved with interlocking geometric designs, which are accentuated with red pigments and fat rubbed into the incised lines, were part of an elaborate and robust indigenous trading network originating from the Kimberley coast. Aboriginal peoples appreciated the shells as valuable and exchangeable possessions. Their glistening surfaces made them particularly attractive ornaments when worn on the body, often suspended with cords of plaited human hair. They remain efficacious objects that healers and rainmakers use in their ceremonies. Today, their symbolic designs are important visual references for contemporary artists, such as Jackie Kurltjunyintja Giles Tjapaltjarri and Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri, whose paintings are on view.

Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri and members of his family continued a seminomadic life as hunter-gatherers in the Gibson and Great Sandy Desert regions with little or no outside contact until 1984. Tjapaltjarri and his younger sister, Yukultji Napangati (b. 1971), have since become leading international exponents of contemporary painting from Australia. Tjapaltjarri's two paintings, which depict the undulating landscapes of the Great Sandy Desert, appear to oscillate and move with visual energy. He generates this effect by painting patterned backgrounds on which he meticulously adds tight, meandering lines composed of dots. *Mamultjunkunya*, 2009, portrays a culturally significant site near Lake Mackay, a large salt-water lake that spans the modern borders of the Northern Territory and Western Australia and features prominently in the *Tingari* ceremonial cycle from the Dreaming.

Tingari refers to the ancestors of Pintupi and other Aboriginal peoples from the Western and Central Deserts. These ancestors traversed large stretches of their Country—moving from one waterhole to the next—fashioning a landscape of song lines and sacred sites. The *Tingari* ceremony is



Ronnie Tjampitjinpa, Pintupi language group, *Tingari Cycle at a Site Adjacent to Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay)*, 1994. Acrylic on canvas, 72 1/8 x 60 in. (183 x 153 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. © Ronnie Tjampitjinpa / Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland. Photo: ReDot Fine Art Gallery

a series of stories related through dance and lengthy songs that recount the ancestors' creations. These ceremonies initiate new generations—future ancestors—in the knowledge of primordial beings, the formation of song lines, and the shaping of the world. They are exceptionally sacred and secret, and primarily the domain of men.

The deep connections of the *Tingari* to the regions around Wilkinkarra, the Pitjantjatjara-language name for Lake Mackay, are also the subject of the three paintings by Ronnie Tjampitjinpa. Painting rectilinear designs that repeat and amplify, Tjampitjinpa shares qualities of the *Tingari* story cycle without disclosing its secret content. The visual impact of his paintings, however, communicates the *Tingari* ceremonial cycle's authoritative aura, its outer shell.

Tjampitjinpa's paintings of his ancestral places and ceremonies exemplify Kunmanara (Mumu Mike) Williams's commanding affirmation of Aboriginal people's knowledge and indissoluble bond with Country. Tjampitjinpa moved to the Papunya Native Settlement shortly after the Australian government opened the facility in late 1950s. He grew up there, separated by nearly 200 miles from his Country, attending an English language school. He began to paint in the early 1970s, under the guidance of Mick Wallankarra Tjakamarra and other pioneering Aboriginal elder men working with Geoffrey Bardon at Papunya. Separation from his Country did not extinguish Tjampitjinpa's rich heritage and cultural understanding of his ancestral lands. His story is an acknowledgment of Williams's assertion: "We don't need a map." Aboriginal peoples are the perpetual custodians of Country, and the works on view in *Mapa Wiya* are topographies of their knowledge—visual accounts of its living history, primordial and recent, ceremonial and secular.

—PAUL R. DAVIS AND GEORGES PETITJEAN

ARTISTS

MARINGKA BAKER CA. 1952	DHUWARRWARR MARIKA CA. 1946	ANATJARI TJAKAMARRA CA. 1938–92
TERESA BAKER 1977	JIMMY NERRIMAH MAWUKURA 1924–2013	MICK WALLANKARRI TJAKAMARRA CA. 1910–96
PADDY BEDFORD 1922–2007	JOHN MAWURNDJUL 1952	RONNIE TJAMPITJINPA CA. 1942
JARRAN JAN BILLYCAN CA. 1930–2016	BALUKA MAYMURU CA. 1947	CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI 1932–2002
BYRON BROOKS CA. 1951	JIMMY MIDJAWMIDJAW 1897–1985	JACKIE KURLTJUNYINTJA GILES TJAPALTJARRI 1944–2010
DIIDJA CA. 1900–82	GRAHAM MILMARUPUY UNRECORDED	MICK NAMARARRI TJAPALTJARRI CA. 1927–98
IGNATIA DJANGHARA CA. 1930–90	GEORGE MUNG MUNG CA. 1921–91	WARLIMPIRRNGA TJAPALTJARRI CA. 1958
BILLY DJOMA CA. 1927–DECEASED	TOMMY MUNGATOPI CA. 1924–85	TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA 1929–2007
DAVID GALIWIRRI 1945–95	BARDAYAL LOFTY NADJAMERREK CA. 1926–2009	JOHNNY WARANGKULA TJUPURRULA CA. 1918–2001
MARGARET RARRU GARRAWURRA CA. 1940	PADDY COMPASS NAMATBARA CA. 1890–1973	KANI TUNKIN 1981
MICKEY DURRNG GARRAWURRA CA. 1940–2006	IVAN NAMIRRIKKI 1961	UNRECORDED ARTISTS
FRED GRANT 1943	NINGURA NAPURRULA CA. 1938–2013	LENNARD WALKER CA. 1966
NED GRANT CA. 1941	JIMMY NGALAKURN 1946	WUKUN WANAMBI 1962
JIMMY AN. GUNGUNA 1935	JIMMY NJIMINJUMA 1947–2004	KUNMANARA MUMU MIKE WILLIAMS 1952–2019
DJALU GURRUWIWI CA. 1940	NAATA NUNGURRAYI CA. 1932	MULKUN I WIRRPANDA CA. 1947
SIMON HOGAN CA. 1930	LAWRENCE PENNINGTON CA. 1934	DATJIRRI II WUNUNGURRA 1940
LILY KARADADA CA. 1937	PATJU PRESLEY CA. 1945	YARITJI YOUNG CA. 1956
EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE 1916–96	IAN RICTOR CA. 1960	GULUMBU YUNUPINGU CA. 1943–2012
MICK KUBARKKU CA. 1920–2008	PADDY HENRY RIPIJINGIMPI 1925–99	MINIYAWANY YUNUPINGU 1947–2008
NAPUWARRI MARAWILI 1967	ROVER THOMAS 1926–98	
NONGGIRRNGA MARAWILI CA. 1937		

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

PUBLIC OPENING CELEBRATION

Music and dance performances by Stanley Gawurra Gaykamangu (singer-songwriter), Amrita Hepi (dancer and choreographer), and David Williams (didgeridoo musician)
Friday, September 13, 6–9 p.m.

COMMUNITY DAY

Performances and cultural workshops by the Alabama—Coushatta Tribe, Stanley Gawurra Gaykamangu, and Amrita Hepi
Saturday, September 14, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Professors Howard and Frances Morphy in conversation with Curator of Collections Paul R. Davis
Thursday, November 7, 7–8 p.m.

CURATOR TALK

Paul R. Davis on the work of artist Kunmanara (Mumu Mike) Williams
Sunday, November 10, 3–4 p.m.

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Stop, Look and Listen!
Da Camera Young Artists reflect on the exhibition
Saturday, November 16, 3 p.m.

LECTURE

Fred Myers, *Inspiration in Place:*
The Gift and Invitation of Indigenous Australian Art
Thursday, December 5, 7 p.m.

*All programs are free and open to the public.
For additional information and programs, visit menil.org.*

COVER Kanpi Women's Collaborative: Maringka Baker, Teresa Baker, Kani Tunkin, Pitjantjatjara language group. *Minyma Tjutangkku Kunpu Kanyini*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 59 1/8 x 118 1/8 in. (150 x 300 cm). Fondation Opale, Switzerland. © Kanpi Women's Collaborative / Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2019. Image courtesy of Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland

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