



Goobalathaldin

Dick Roughsey & Friends

29 January – 26 March 2022

16albermarle Project Space acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Goobalathaldin

Dick Roughsey & Friends

A 16albermarle Project Space exhibition

Curators

John Cruthers

Una Rey

Gretchen Stolte



Front cover:
Dick Roughsey
Dancers of the Rainbow Serpent 1971
acrylic on board, 60 x 91 cm
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Dick Roughsey with wife Elsie Labumore Roughsey and sons Basil and Duncan (F. Woolston) from *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey, 1971, A.W. Reed

Foreword

John Cruthers

28 January 2022

I've loved the work of Dick Roughsey since I first came across it in the early 1970s. It was in the pages of *Art and Australia*, and I was a nerdy, art-mad kid in Perth, teaching myself about Australian art by reading whatever I could find. I was also drawn to the work of Ray Crooke – who I later found was a friend and mentor of Dick's – and Sam Fullbrook. Both, like Dick, were painters of the landscape with a particular interest in the genre of the figure in landscape, but the difference was, I could see their works in Perth at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

After moving to Sydney in 1977, I was able to see Dick's works in the flesh and was captivated by his gentle views of Lardil people living their lives on Mornington Island. But the real turning point came in 2010, in Cairns – where, I later discovered, Dick had lived in for long periods making his paintings. It was at the second Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, held in several large disused fuel tanks. One of the feature exhibitions was *Goobalathaldin: Rough Sea Dick Roughsey O.B.E (c1920-1985)*, a small focus exhibition assembled by Jan Manton Art Brisbane and Griffith Artworks, supported by Mornington Island Arts and Craft Centre. The essay by Simon Wright was by far the best piece of writing on Dick's work I had read.

The seven carefully chosen paintings had an electrifying impact. Around the year 2000 I'd begun working professionally in Indigenous art, advising private collectors. So I was very aware of the work of the Papunya Tula Artists, those from the Kimberley and Arnhem Land and, as the decade unfolded, from the APY Lands. The knowledge and exposure to works from these remote communities—based on traditional body painting, sand painting etc—made me see Dick's very different works with new eyes. Here was a remote area artist painting in a western style to record the everyday lives of his people in country. As far as I was aware, very few other Indigenous artists had worked in this way. His works were a unique insight for anyone interested in understanding contemporary Aboriginal life in a remote community—the kinds of places few non-Indigenous Australians had visited.

My appreciation grew further when I walked through the exhibition with a young First Nations curator from Canada, an official guest at the event. I can't remember her name and haven't been able to find it online. But from her curatorial work in Canada, she had a level of understanding of Dick's paintings and the visual protocols in his work which I had noticed but not grasped. Firstly, she pointed out the painter's point of view. Nearly always Dick positioned himself in front of, but not included in, the action or scene he was depicting. He was clearly delineating himself as a spectator. And then he layered the painting in a very specific way—first were other people watching the action, sometimes more than one layer of observers, whose backs we see. Then came the subjects taking part in the action, and finally the land or seascape in which the action was taking place.

It was about visual protocols, she explained, and who had the right to see and know things, and the importance of respecting these things. The works enact a world view and set of protocols that are perhaps Dick's deepest intention and meaning in painting them, works he knew he was making for a largely white Australian audience. I looked at those seven paintings for hours, feeling my way into what Dick was saying and with a growing comprehension of the depth of intentions in his work.

Back in Sydney and quite by accident, I came upon a large group of Dick's works at a gallery on the north shore. I discovered that Dick had had three solo exhibitions there in the 1970s. There was quite a lot of work still unsold, the gallerist said, some owned by the gallery and some by the Roughsey Estate. Was I interested in seeing them?

The idea for this exhibition was sown at that moment. Seeing the work I knew it could be used to share Dick's incredible story and bring his work to a wider audience. But with no access to gallery space, the photocopied pages of artwork images sat in my files for almost a decade. Then in 2019 I opened 16albermarle Project Space with my son Sam, with the intention of introducing Australian audiences to contemporary art from southeast Asia. But from the outset we decided to stage one Australian exhibition

every year, and our second Australian exhibition we agreed, would be a survey show of Dick Roughsey.

Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey & Friends grew in scale since it was first imagined. In bringing together the last paintings from the gallery and the Roughsey Estate, works from private lenders and bark-paintings by known and unknown ancestors, 'the friends' have become key. So too have the friends and supporters of this project: Joeline Roughsey and Mandy Naranatjil representing the Roughsey Estate, MIArt / Mirndiyan Gunana art centre manager John Armstrong, Mornington Island elders Edgar Wilson, Lawrence Burke and John Williams, anthropologist Paul Memmott, gallerist Gabriella Roy, writer

Jennifer Isaacs and Philip Brackenreg and Julie Brackenreg, who I thank for entrusting me with many of these works, to which they have been connected for over 50 years. Most importantly, co-curators and essayists Una Rey and Gretchen Stolte are friends without which this exhibition would not have happened. We share a huge enthusiasm for Dick's work, for the art of Mornington Island and for bark painting. Each of them has extended and expanded the exhibition in different ways and it is truly a joint project.

We hope you enjoy *Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey & Friends*.



Xavier Herbert, Thancoupie, Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey (with unknown, far left), c.1980s / Image courtesy: Jennifer Isaacs



Dick Roughsey showing his bark paintings at Karumba Lodge, 1963 / Image courtesy: Valerie Lhuede

Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey & Friends

Una Rey

My people have no record of time – they just lived there, happy as the seasons came and went, carrying out sacred ceremonies and dances, hunting, fishing, fighting, loving, bringing up children and dying.¹

In March 2021 when I was invited to write a short essay on Dick Roughsey for a June exhibition I said yes without hesitation. I looked at the works set aside for the show and read *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* published in 1971.

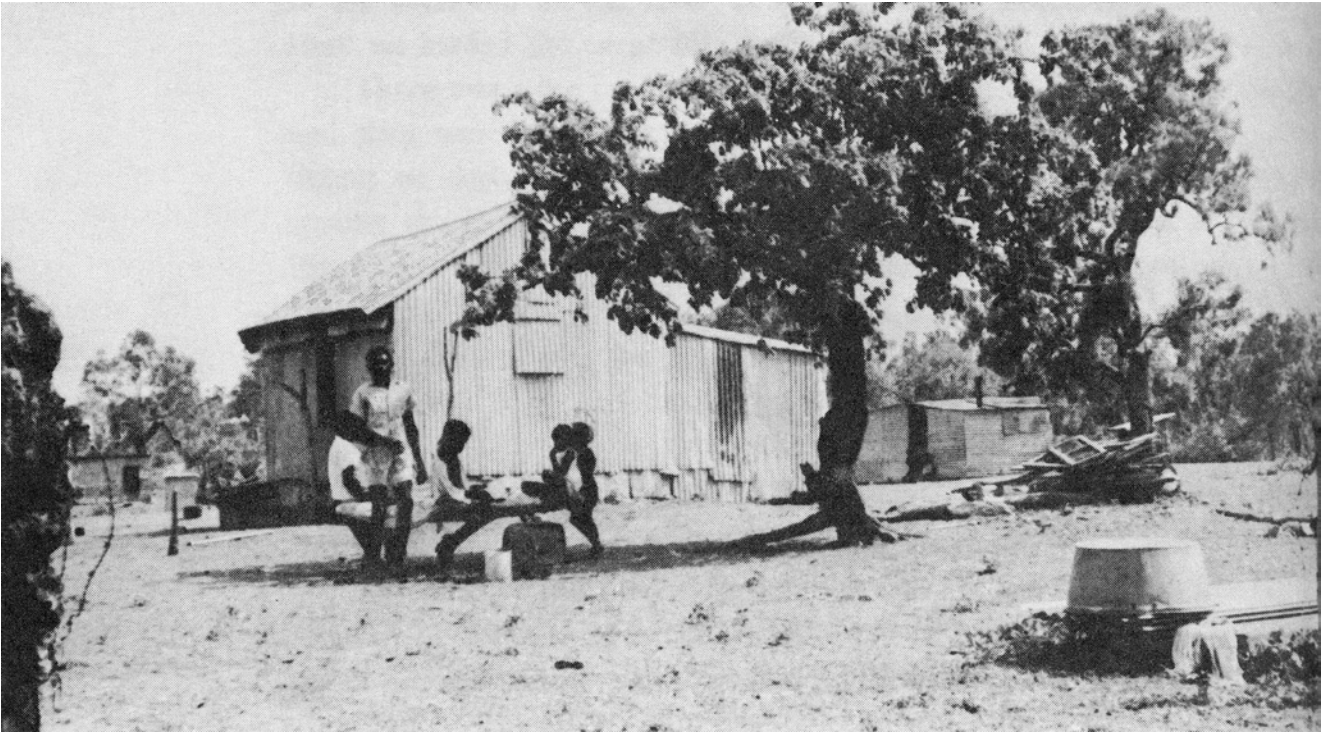
The above quote is plucked from the text, striking for its descriptive relationship to his paintings' subjects, but also for its seemingly anachronistic innocence. However, the story is more complex: endorsed by his assistant and editor Percy Trezise as the first book of its kind by a 'full-blood Aboriginal', 50 years on *Moon and Rainbow* remains an important work of cross-cultural history and biography, Lardil world views, environmental knowledge and ancestral law. Read in companionship with Labumore Elsie Roughsey's book *An Aboriginal mother tells of the old and the new* (written in the early 1970s but not published until 1984), the narrative is doubly rich. From their distinctive philosophical perspectives, husband and wife map a raft of social, cultural and political change as 20th century modernity and late colonialism encroached on their islands.

Like the 'rough sea' for which Goobalathaldin was named, Roughsey's work was produced against an uneven set of conditions which galvanised, rather than upset, his determination to convey his stories. The exhibition *Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey & Friends* also came together under turbulent conditions, delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally conceived to share the last works of the Roughsey Estate with Sydney audiences, what emerged was a more expansive picture of creative exchange and its dynamic economies as the list of works—and artists—grew.

Roughsey slipped across cultural themes, ideas and creative traditions, exhibiting nationally and achieving commercial success for roughly two decades, though his market appeal was somewhat eclipsed by the rise of Western Desert painting in the 1980s. In 2010, a quarter-century after his death, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair mounted a long overdue survey of his work, and in 2019 QAGOMA and Cairns Art Gallery collaborated to present a tightly packed exhibition celebrating Roughsey's legacy. As we discovered, despite these important curatorial projects, tracing the chronology of Roughsey's life, the provenance of his art and his circle of artists remains a work in progress.

By contrast, place and genealogy are unequivocal in this tale. Roughsey was first known as Gara Gara, after his birthplace on Langu-Narnji (Sydney Island). This was on his father Kiwarbija/Kubulathaldin's country on southern Mornington Island, the largest of the Wellesley Islands, where the Larumbanda group claim sovereignty. His mother Kuthakin was of the Lelumbanda clan on the eastern side of the island, as the Lardil were divided by the four directions long before the compass of 'the men with faces of white-pipe clay.'²

Roughsey spent his early years immersed in Lardil cosmology on custodial country before he was forcibly removed to the local Presbyterian Mission (est. 1914) around the age of eight. Along with his four brothers, extended kin and Aboriginal children taken from their families across Queensland, 'Dick' as he became known, was subject to the rigid discipline of segregated dormitories and a malevolent



Dick and children in front of his oild house at Mornington (P. Trezise) from *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey, 1971, A.W. Reed

Christianity. When he reached adolescence, Roughsey was turned out of the mission school to find paid work on the mainland. Much of his youth was spent between subsistence work at the mission, a series of pastoral jobs in the Gulf of Carpentaria and living a traditional Lardil lifestyle. (This was during the heavy-handed restrictions of movement enforced by the *Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act 1939* and before the hard-won fight for equal pay legislation was realised). In 1946 Roughsey and Elsie Williams married at the Gunana/Mornington Island mission.³ Soon afterwards he constructed a bark house with Elsie, marking his maturity as a husband, father and provider: the Roughseys had five sons and a daughter, and they offered vital support to other families and children, including through Elsie's work as a midwife.

Friends and influences

In the late 1950s Roughsey's movement between different modes of island life and mainland labouring include deck-handing on the supply ship *Cora*. This maritime circuit around the Gulf of Carpentaria brought Roughsey into contact with mainland Aboriginal populations in which comparisons, connections and exchanges were made between local laws and customs, kin relations and material artefacts. Critically important were visits to Yirrkala where he observed serious bark painting for an 'outsider' audience at a time when the political potential of cultural expression was being explored and exploited.⁴ Back on Lardil territory in the early 1960s, Roughsey and his elder brother and cultural leader Lindsay

Roughsey (also known as Burrud, 'seaweed floating on water') began producing barks in addition to artefacts they were making for the tourist market.

Elsie, herself a well-known maker of cottonwood bush dolls, recalled her husband returning from a long day 'hunting for wood craft' with 'large bent boomerang' and being mocked by fellow Lardil, 'Hey, your children can't eat wood. Why don't you go

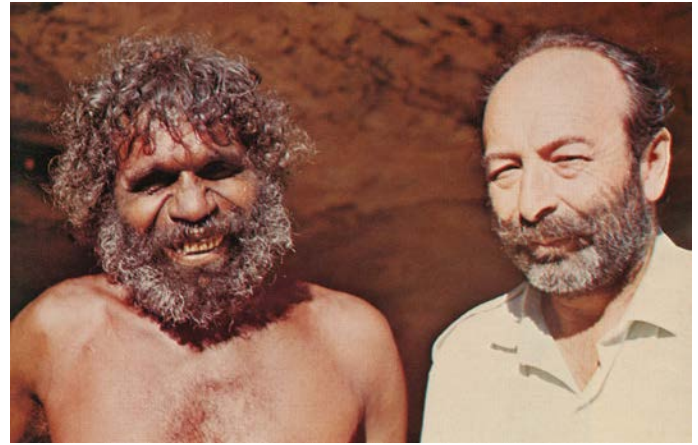


Labumore Elsie Roughsey, *Five bush dolls* c1972 painted wood, five parts, irreg. 35-55 cm high
Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of WA
© Labumore Elsie Roughsey/Copyright Agency, 2022

for fishing?’ Undeterred, the Roughseys continued their cultural enterprising. As they predicted and Elsie wrote, ‘one day [artefacts] will be very important to the people.’ She describes long periods of working ‘on our own’, ‘collecting different colours from mud for clay’—and not always striking paydirt. ‘It was hard to find the right stuff’. Yellow mud was dug from salt pans and water courses, and they ‘made fire and put the mud to burn’ for red. Black came from charcoal, white clay from rocks and soaks. Together they harvested tree gums, chopping them up and boiling them down to make glue. ‘It was very hard for all our plans and ideas, but it was something we could make for our living’.⁵

While art production was already underway when Roughsey met professional pilot and amateur artist Percy Trezise in 1962, the well-documented association marked an artistic breakthrough for Roughsey. While working as a yardman at the Karumba Lodge, Roughsey observed Trezise ‘busy painting a shapely mermaid on the bottom of the [newly built swimming] pool,’ as if the mythological and painterly siren was an augury for the future. The meeting also initiated an enduring friendship, its value reinforced by Dick and Lindsay calling Trezise ‘Warrenby’ after the legendary Lardil warrior and hunter. When Roughsey showed some of his ‘Namatjira style’ bark paintings to ‘the Captain’ (‘I don’t think he liked them very much’), Trezise encouraged him to ‘stay within his own experience and culture.’⁶ Following Roughsey’s account, they talked over beers into the night devising a pragmatic ten-year career plan: five years focussing on Lardil ‘legends’, then five years working in the European style, an apprenticeship that Roughsey hoped would put him in the lineage of Albert Namatjira (1902-1959).

The Roughsey/Namatjira comparison was applied by the popular press, and there were social and artistic parallels—as well as departures.⁷ Both artists navigated complex intercultural contracts to produce and promote their work, each leaving a prolific output and distinct art historical legacies. They each enjoyed reciprocal friendships with white artists—Roughsey with Trezise and modernist painter Ray Croke and Namatjira with Rex Battarbee, whose support inspired the Hermannsburg watercolour movement in Central Australia from the mid-1930s. This trade in knowledge of Aboriginal Country and culture in exchange for training in materials, techniques and introductions to the metropolitan art system was critical for artists living on ‘remote’ custodial lands before the community art centre model was established. Roughsey took a leading role in this shift from assimilation policies to self-determination as the inaugural chairman of the Australia Council’s Aboriginal Arts Board from 1973-75.⁸ His advocacy



Dick and Warrenby (Trezise) (F. Woolston) from *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey, 1971, A.W. Reed

was instrumental in supporting the social, political and economic imperatives of the 1970s, which had significant impacts on the professionalisation of contemporary Indigenous art centres, as distinct from earlier mission-run enterprises.

There is another art historical parallel that draws on the agency of men’s cross-cultural alliances: the emergence of the Western Desert painting movement at Papunya in 1971-72, in which an entirely different ‘old/new’ visual order was launched on the world. Though artist and schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon’s catalytic role in the early days of the men’s painting at Papunya Tula has been revised in recent scholarship, like Trezise he encouraged creative expression (with a view to market interest) true to Aboriginal ritual iconography and traditions.⁹ And while the ‘Papunya plan’ would take roughly a decade to unfold, the aesthetic import from the desert to the urban centres ran against the grain of Roughsey’s timeline and his ‘whitefella’ styled paintings.

...sacred ceremonies and dances...

A number of Roughsey’s bark paintings dated from the 1960s and signed Goobalathaldin exist in public collections. Some depict initiation ceremonies similar to two c1960s Mornington Island bark paintings collated for this exhibition.¹⁰ These works (possibly by Dick and/or Lindsay Burrud Roughsey) follow a narrative vignette sequence in what appears to be a local adaptation of the Yolngu style: a flat pictorial space divided into theatrical, temporal elements. One of the barks, *Mornington Lardil initiation ceremony* (c1960s) presents the intricate elements of the lurugu initiation ceremony, enclosed by decorative cartouches. The artist records an array of ceremonial accessories, some of which reference trade with mainland communities. Finely rendered weapons, shields, conical ‘love’ hats with emu feathers,

dancing tassels made from wallaby or native hibiscus string, bark baskets, musical instruments and marine life seem to float on the distinctive white-ochre ground. Men and women are painted up for performance servicing the primary motif of the initiate, whereas in *Lardil male initiation ceremony* and in Lindsay's gouache (signed Burrud), *Lardil bora ground* (1969), only men are present around the striking yellow 'bora' or ceremonial dancing ground.

In *Moon and Rainbow*, likely motivated by a desire to document a key cultural practice in decline, Roughsey details the lurugu ceremonial procedures along with a black and white reproduction of one of his 'initiation story' barks. Although he and his brother Lindsay were not initiated due to missionary interventions, Trezise described Lindsay as the 'songman, philosopher, dreamer and law carrier'¹¹ entrusted to safeguard cultural traditions during a climate of suppression; his role in Goobalathaldin's developing art practice was significant. It is plausible that both brothers were born at Gara Gara, and Lindsay's *Picnic on the beach* (1966) certainly matches Dick Roughsey's written description of his birthplace: fruiting pandanus palms on a sheltered beach, a long sandbank and a clear, late dry-season [September] day, a Lardil family in classical repose. Working together in bush camps, the collaborative cultural practices and artistic cross-pollination occurred between artists and family members as it did between Trezise, Roughsey and Crooke. Lindsay was part of this dynamic creative mix in the 1960s and '70s. The brothers exhibited regularly together in Cairns (where Roughsey spent considerable time from 1964) during a dynamic period of cultural revival and promotion.



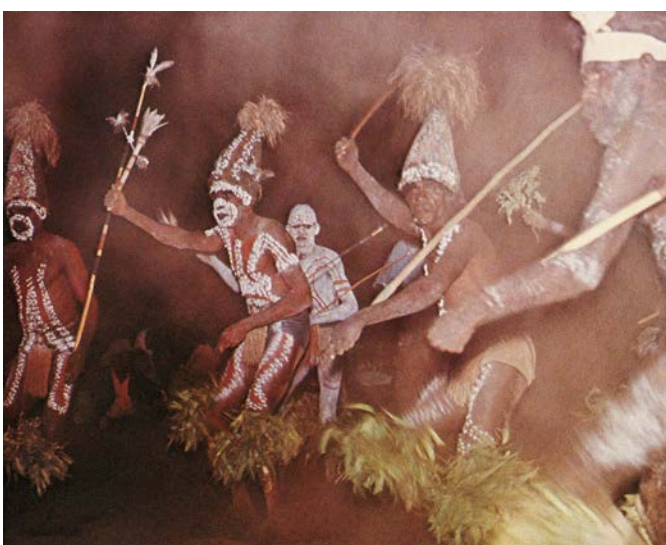
Burrud (Lindsay Roughsey), *Picnic on the beach* 1966
gouache on board, 28 x 37.5 cm
© Lindsay Roughsey/Copyright Agency, 2022

Dancers of the Rainbow Serpent (1971) is indicative of this performative culture, in which the spectators' gaze leads us onto the 'stage', the impressively decorated performers advancing like a rolling swell with shake-a-leg rhythm. Even though the audience here is 'in-house,' on home ground, Cairns in 1964 marked the beginnings of the Mornington Island dance troupe's performances for national audiences, a professional innovation which continues today.

...hunting, fishing, fighting...

During preparations for Roughsey's first exhibition in Cairns in 1963, Trezise cut barks from around his home in Cairns, which he flew up to Karumba for Roughsey's use. This example of imported art materials was a practical contribution on the Captain's part, but it was not the only supply line, as Gretchen Stolte's essay elaborates. Back on Mornington, in the monsoon season when the sap is running, barks were harvested by Roughsey and his extended family as *Cutting bark* (1971) demonstrates. Similarly, works such as *Boys killing grasshoppers* (1971), *Spearing dugong* (1975) and *Fishing party* (n.d) exemplify Roughsey's intimate portrayals of economic dependence on the land and sea. As documents of the continuum of island life including modern adaptations, these every-day, matter-of-fact works of languid, secular ambience contrast with the malevolent undercurrents and mythological allegories of historical and ancestral subjects.

The murder of Mornington Island's first missionary, Reverend Robert Hall in October 1917 and the ensuing attack on the mission homestead made national news and had local repercussions still fresh in Lardil memory during Roughsey's lifetime. In his autobiography he interviews surviving eye-witnesses



Lindsay leads a traditional Warrenby dance (P. Trezise) from *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey, 1971, A.W. Reed

to render key episodes in the violent events that occurred a few years before his birth. *Dragging the body of Rev. Hall* (1971) portrays the morning after the midnight ambush on the sleeping Hall as the three killers haul the body off to a shallow grave. The spectral figures stalking the bush evoke the fear the Mornington Islanders felt following these events; a fear manifested by the violent killing, but also fear of repercussions for the killing of a white man. On this occasion, the perpetrators were tried in court and imprisoned. No wholesale 'reprisal' was launched on the Lardil, but years later when his sentence expired, one ex-prisoner returned to reclaim his wife: *Wife stealer fights back Mornington Island* (1972), whether secular or mythological in origin, portrays the perpetual conflict over women that Roughsey refers to throughout his text.

...
The ancestral narratives of Lardil lore are a common subject, but Roughsey is not restricted to his immediate cultural circle. As noted above, his peripatetic working life brought him into contact with mainland Aboriginal communities, including trips through

Cape York with Trezise, Crooke and traditional custodians documenting rock art sites. Such adventures are captured in *Trezise making camp Laura* (1973) and *Trezise hiking* (1976). The remote 'field trips' also inspired Roughsey's successful foray into children's illustrated books in which he 'cleverly fused certain southern Gulf [Lardil] elements into the Cape York regional cultural repertoires...'¹² *The Chase* and *Eelgin, the old grasshopper woman* (both 1973), are near identical facsimiles of illustrations for *The Giant Devil Dingo* (1973), the first of Roughsey's ten children's books. The dingo whose 'galloping shook the ground and sounded like distant thunder' struck fear and wonder into the hearts and minds of Australian kids. I was one of them, versed in Beatrix Potter's anthropomorphic puddle-ducks and creation dramas of *The Dream-time* (1965) by pseudo-surrealist Ainslie Roberts and 'myth collector' Charles Mountford. I dreamt about Roughsey's canine hunter, and only when I read the bedtime story to my two sons, naming them as the heroic Butcher Bird brothers, did I put that devil-dingo to rest.



Dick Roughsey, *Dragging the body of Rev Hall* 1971
oil on board, 40 x 60 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022

...loving, bringing up children and dying.

Towards the end of his life and suffering from the contagious eye-disease trachoma, Roughsey returned to Gunana/Mornington Island, where he died of cancer in 1985. Widely travelled, with an OBE in recognition of his cultural and political advocacy and countless exhibitions to his credit, his odyssey outclasses the 'two-worlds' cliché Trezise summarised as '[a man] equally at home spearing dugong or sitting up to cigars and brandy.'¹³ As an artist, leader and intercultural mediator, he crossed multiple boundaries and borders and brought others along. Today Mirndiyan Gunana is a successful art centre where his descendants proudly claim the Roughsey legacy among a network of Wellesley Island relations and peers including Kaiadilt artists from Bentinck Island.

The late Roughsey work *Hunters returning* (1981) is staged against a dead calm sea, its sunset palette the stuff of allegorical closures. The mirror-like surface of the water meets the sky without distinction, only the floating reefs giving sense of a horizon. A homecoming, this is pure Roughsey at his most gentle. Never the vacant vistas of Namatjira's landscapes, Roughsey's paintings record the animated social worlds of Mornington Islanders and friends, 'doing their thing', looking into the picture plane and tacitly inviting us to share their view.

Thank-you to Joelene Roughsey, John Armstrong and Paul Memmott for conversations during the writing of this essay.

Dr Una Rey is an arts writer, artist and independent curator with a research interest in cross-cultural practice. Recent projects include Black White & Restive: cross-cultural initiatives in Australian contemporary art (2016) at Newcastle Art Gallery and Inside Elands (2021) at The Lock-Up. Una lectured in Art History at the University of Newcastle from 2016-2021 and managed Indigenous art centres in Central Australia and on the Tiwi Islands between 1997-2005. She was appointed Editor of Artlink magazine in 2021.



Dick Roughsey *Hunters returning* 1981
acrylic on board, 61 x 91 cm

© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022

Notes

- ¹ Dick Roughsey (Goobalathaldin), *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal*, (Sydney: A.W. Reed, 1971), 16.
- ² Roughsey, 13. While referring to Europeans, the reference to 'pipe-clay' suggests earlier trade with Macassans.
- ³ Elsie Roughsey's book dates their marriage to 1946, after the war and when the missionaries returned. Other accounts date the wedding to 1944.
- ⁴ The Yolngu Church panels and Bark Petitions to parliament in 1963 were ground-breaking statements in the lead-up to the Northern Territory Land Rights Act (1976).
- ⁵ Labumore Elsie Roughsey, *An Aboriginal mother tells of the old and the new*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1984), 180.
- ⁶ Roughsey, 1971, 133-134.
- ⁷ S.P Wright, 'Dick Roughsey, Goobalathaldin, Gara Gara, O.B.E', *Goobalathaldin: Rough Sea*, exh.cat., Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Jan Manton Art & Griffith University, Queensland College of Art, 2010. (n.p)
- ⁸ He also served on the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (1974-75) and was awarded an OBE in 1978. See Jennifer Isaacs, *Dick Roughsey: A legend in art and story*, exh.cat., QAGOMA and Cairns Art Gallery, 2019, available online at: <https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/goobalathaldin-dick-roughsey-a-legend-in-art-and-story/>
- ⁹ Scholars Vivien Johnson, John Kean and Luke Scholes have led revisions of Bardon's work. See Una Rey, "Bardon's Legacy: Paintings, Stories, and Indigenous Australian Art." In *Mediating Modernism: Indigenous Artists, Modernist Mediators, Global Networks*, eds Ruth B. Phillips and Norman Vorano, (Durham, UC: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2022).
- ¹⁰ The 2019 QAGOMA exhibition included *Gergargal – Red-bill's story* (1965), a bark painting with initiation imagery held in the National Gallery of Victoria: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/78418/> accessed 20 June 2021. The University of Newcastle Collection includes a Roughsey bark with similar iconography. After consultation with artists at Mirndiyan Gunana/Mornington Island Art Centre, the decision was made not to exhibit the two bark paintings discussed and not to reproduce images in this catalogue.
- ¹¹ *Heritage of Mornington*, The Canberra Times, Thursday 20 April 1967, 21.
- ¹² Paul Memmott, *Roughsey, Dick (Goobalathaldin)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography [online] <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/roughsey-dick-goobalathaldin-14193> accessed 16 May 2021.
- ¹³ *Heritage of Mornington*, 1967.



Dick working in Cape York camp (P. Trezise) from *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey, 1971, A.W. Reed

The Legacy of Mornington Island Bark Paintings

Gretchen Stolte

Bark paintings have one of the most dynamic, controversial and arguably fascinating histories in Queensland, and Mornington Island artists contribute to this history in exceptional ways. Like many communities across the state, Mornington Island had a strong tradition of artefact making well before and after invasion, through the missionary decades and up until present day. Bark paintings are part of that tradition, but in Queensland bark is an introduced medium. How do we understand newness in Indigenous communities and why are bark paintings especially challenging?

Indigenous artists in Queensland stepping into any art market – either the fine art market or the so-called tourist market – have had to face the stereotypes and expectations created by the popularity of other art movements across Australia. Arnhem Land bark paintings and Western and Central Desert dot paintings hold a particular place in contemporary art history and the popular imagination, and this can cause Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in Queensland some difficulty in navigating that market.¹ Bark paintings do in fact have their own unique history in Queensland and Mornington Island bark paintings hold a special place in that history. Much of this legacy is due to the brothers Lindsay and Dick Roughsey, but it also includes artists like Mervyn Roughsey, Jackson Jacob, Arnold Watt and a host of others who were part of the Mornington Island art movement.²

Bark paintings were popular in the Mornington Island region during the 1950s and 1960s³ but there is evidence to suggest bark paintings were being

produced by Lindsay Roughsey as early as the 1940s.⁴ This production might have been part of a wider state interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefact engagements that began in the early 1930s.⁵ This in turn was informed by a world-wide movement whereby governments increasingly saw one solution to the 'Indigenous plight' as the reintroduction of traditional arts and crafts into communities for production to the tourist market.⁶ Producing for the market – as opposed for ceremonial or cultural contexts – was actively encouraged.

This encouragement culminated in 1959 when the Queensland Department of Native Affairs created a retail arm to facilitate the marketing and production of works from Indigenous communities. This retail arm, Queensland Aboriginal Creations (QAC), was an outlet store in Brisbane that sponsored, organised and facilitated cottage industries across Queensland. From coastal Hope Vale and Yarrabah near Cairns, to Cherbourg and Woorabinda north west of Brisbane, QAC actively engaged with and directed communities in their artefact production. In Brisbane, they employed local Aboriginal artists to produce works for tourists and interested collectors. QAC also employed Indigenous staff at their Brisbane shop, one of the few places where local Aboriginal people were represented and employed.⁷ QAC was an active force in the state for over four decades, finally closing in the 1990s. Works passing through its doors include shells from the Torres Strait Islands and boomerangs from Hope Vale in the early years, and in the later years pottery from Yarrabah and Cherbourg flowed to Brisbane for sale.⁸



Queensland Aboriginal Creations, shop interior showcasing several Mornington Island works including clubs, spear throwers and boomerangs. Original archive details: "Curio shop, George Street [Brisbane]" March 1964 Department of Native Affairs. Queensland State Archives Item ID435956, Photographic material.

Mornington Island artists were stalwart participants in QAC from the onset, regularly sending boxes full of artefacts to QAC to meet a demanding market. The retail outlet prominently displayed those wares in the shop and historical photos frequently highlight Mornington Island works (See above). Overall, boomerangs were incredibly popular but bark paintings from Mornington Island were also in high demand. They were also mired in controversy. To facilitate the developing market, original Arnhem Land bark paintings were imported into Queensland in the 1960s by the Department of Native Affairs. Local Aboriginal artists were then infamously instructed to copy them for sale.⁹ Cultural copyright was not a consideration by the state and an entire production system was created. Hope Vale would become the bark 'blank' production hub, from where prepared barks would be shipped to Brisbane and Mornington Island for painting and then sale. Brisbane artists would copy Arnhem Land barks, however Mornington

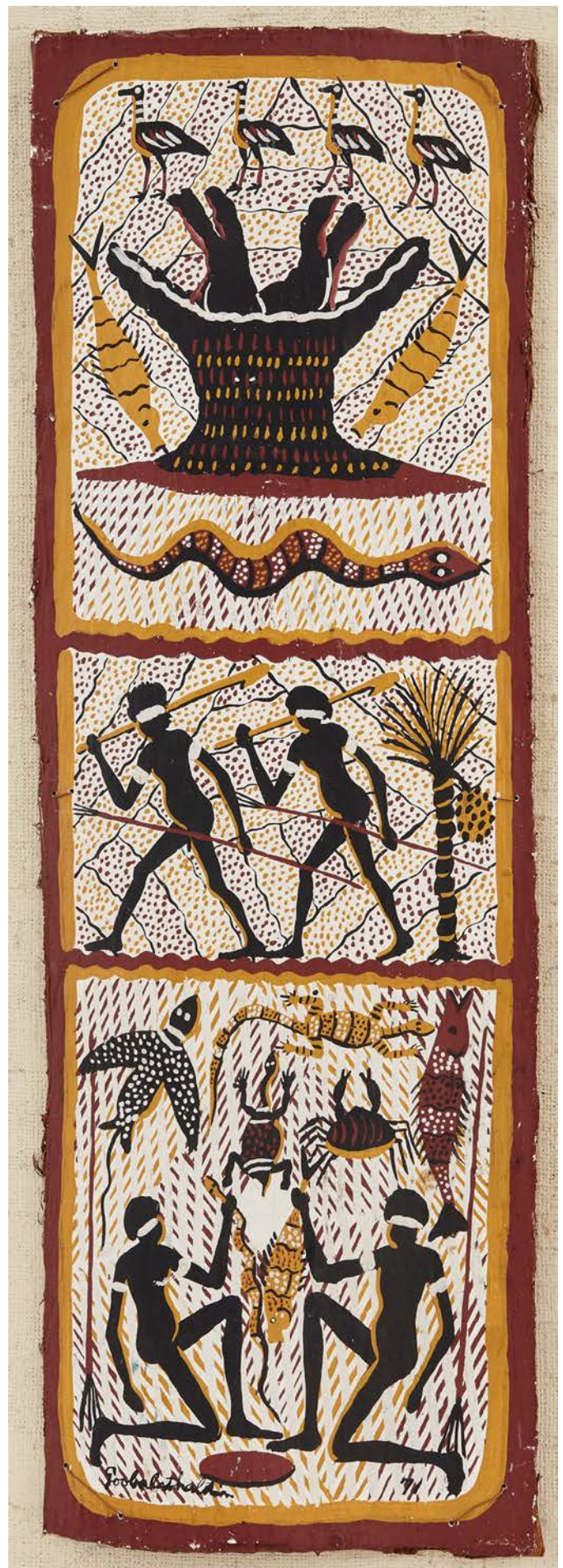
Island artists were permitted to produce culturally specific stories and legends. Local Hope Vale artists wanted to paint their own stories but the 'archives reflect a hesitancy to allow Hope Vale to paint their own barks'.¹⁰ Mornington Island bark paintings 'sold better' and the valuable bark blanks were sent to those communities that maximised profits.¹¹

As Una Rey's essay demonstrates, the special relationship between Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey produced their own approach to art, separate to but potentially influenced by QAC's programs. Trezise and Roughsey developed ambitious five-and ten-year plans to break into the fine art market. The first five years included painting stories and legends on bark using natural ochres and pigments while the second five years focused on oil paintings done in the Western style on canvas or board.¹² This ambitious plan to foster a reception to Dick's works paralleled and was carried out within the QAC

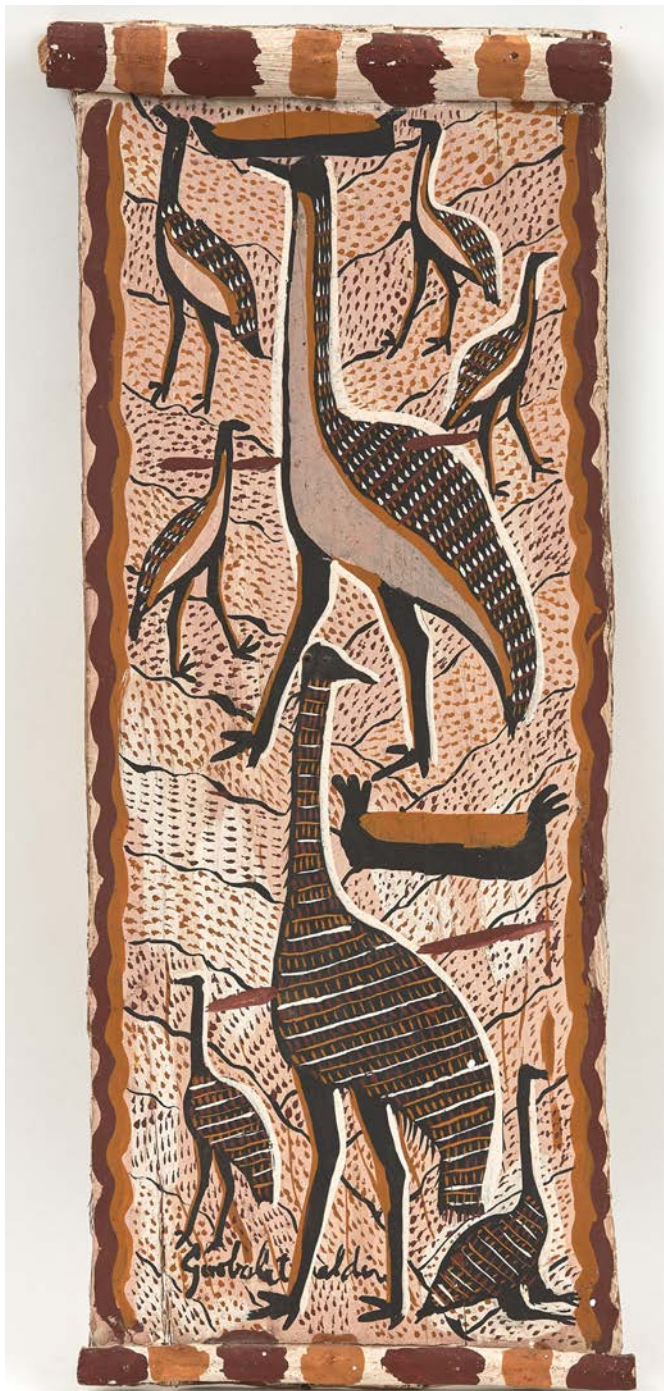
environment. Eventually, Hope Vale artists also decided that no one in Brisbane was going to prevent them from telling their own stories on bark, and they produced dozens and dozens of works currently held at the Queensland Museum. As a result, the 1960s and 1970s saw a plethora of bark paintings and bark painting styles from all over Queensland being produced for the fine art and tourist market. The popularity though and the subsequent infamy of the copied Arnhem Land barks – a scandal that prompted Wandjuk Marika himself to come down to Brisbane to set the record straight in the 1980s¹³ – tended to overshadow the cultural stories on bark coming out of both Hope Vale and Mornington Island. This controversy complicated the standing of Queensland bark paintings and as a result their reception and the willingness of the public to appreciate them. But as this exhibition clearly illustrates, there is much to appreciate from these barks, especially if one develops the visual literacy to do so.

Visual literacy can be equated to connoisseurship¹⁴ and the understandings of iconographies, artistries and mark-making, but the histories behind these works are vital. Bark painting made in Queensland, as an introduced medium, does not have the same meanings behind the design elements as those made in Arnhem Land, even if the design elements look similar. As Dick Roughsey wrote in his autobiography, *Moon and Rainbow*, he visited Yirrkala in Eastern Arnhem Land and was invited into the circle of artists practicing during this time.¹⁵ As anthropologist Paul Memmott writes, this visit 'resulted in the adaptation of the cross-hatching patterns...into an early Lardil art style'.¹⁶ Indigenous art is steeped in cultural localities so even if the design elements in Mornington Island bark paintings appear like those design elements in Arnhem Land barks, they still need to be seen on their own terms. This exhibition does just that and these works are the guide.

In Dick Roughsey's *Taboo food story* (Figure 2), the bark painting tells a local Lardil story and one the artist returned to again and again. Mornington Island works are 'quite figurative, and primarily done in sequenced vignettes',¹⁷ so repeated stories are quite common. In *Taboo food story*, the picture plane is divided up into registers (similar to eastern Arnhem Land barks) and the background is segmented into sections and filled with design elements such as dots and dashes. These dots and dashes are a uniquely Mornington Island touch as there are no overlapping elements and plenty of space in between. Figures are imposed on top of the patterned background and done in a silhouetted manner, making each figure easily read as a figure. This silhouette style continued with works done in acrylics or oil on canvas or board.



Dick Roughsey, *Taboo food story* 1972
 © Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey, *Emu and turkey story* c1960s
 © Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022

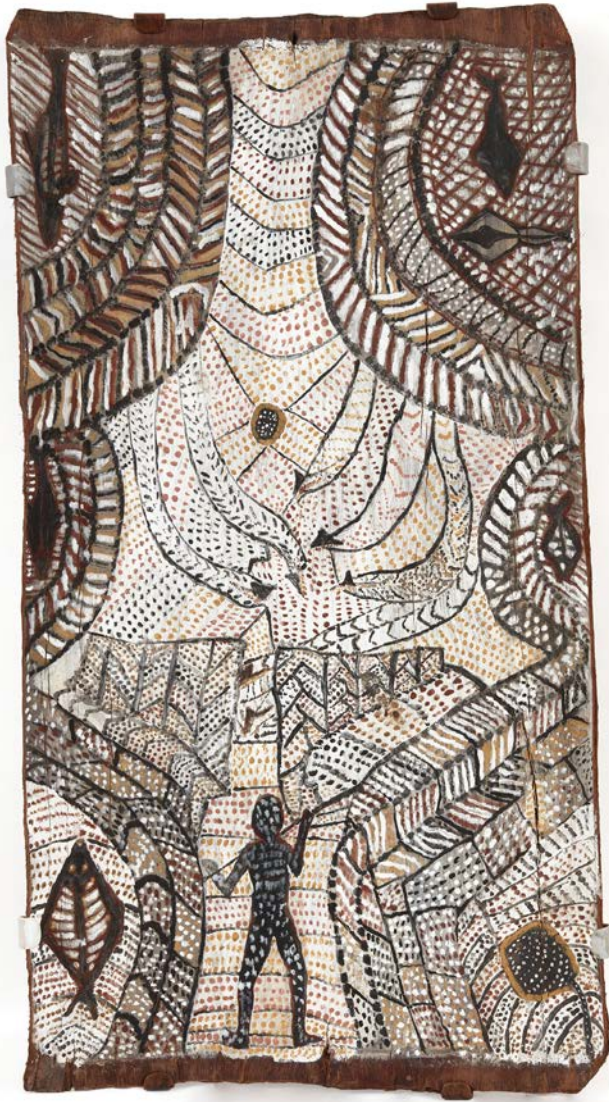
Emu and turkey story was another theme Dick Roughsey returned to again and again. It is a pourquoi or etiological story in that it explains why emus cannot fly and have several offspring and why turkeys do fly and only have two chicks.¹⁸ The background is subtly divided into chevrons with infill of dots and dashes. The emus and turkeys are rendered in bold contrasting colours with the dotting and dashing echoing along their backs, creating a strong visual impact across the picture plane. The depiction of this story includes hunting and cooking with utensils and implements. The asymmetry of the smaller birds is an example of an emerging Mornington Island style as well.

The impact of the Mornington Island art movement can be seen in two untitled bark paintings in the exhibition whose origins are not known.¹⁹ Both works have the hallmarks of the Mornington Island style, visible in the colour palette, the linework and dotted infills. The work below has elements of what Memmott calls “material culture story paintings” depicting shields, spears, clubs, boomerangs and spear throwers with additional elements that could be read as ceremonial or cultural.²⁰ The black and yellow bands curve across the board, demarcating the picture plane and allowing the artist plenty of opportunity to play with different types of infill. In the case of this work, this infill takes the form of carefully placed dots – completely different from the dotting found in the Central Desert dot painting movement. But it is very similar to those dots surrounding the two figures carrying spear throwers found in Dick Roughsey's *Taboo food story*.

The careful dotting is just one hallmark of the Mornington Island art movement and is also used heavily in the work at right, along the central vertical register. In addition to the dots, the use of line is also included as a unique design element. These lines however should not be read as cross-hatching despite first appearances. Except for the netting



Ancestor, most likely a Mornington Island artist, c1960s,
 natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark



Ancestor, most likely a Mornington Island artist, c1960s, natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark

pattern in the upper right corner, none of the lines intersect with another line. Instead, the artist is clever in their approach, using a different background colour and contrasting line colour to create their design. The illusion of Arnhem Land-like cross-hatching is present, but the reality is a uniquely Mornington Island style. Further, this kind of infill was also used by Lindsay Roughsey in the bark paintings he produced for the anthropologist Tindale in 1962, now in the collection of the South Australian Museum.²¹ Mornington Island clearly had its own approach to bark paintings.

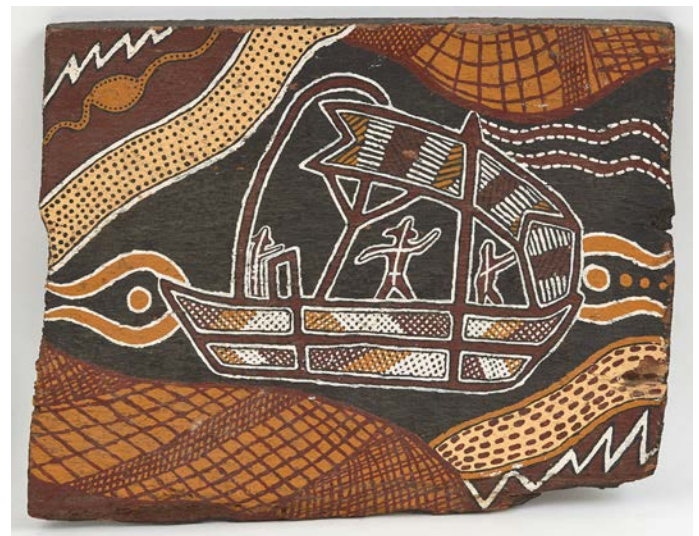
Of particular note in this exhibition is an unknown bark painting which is quite the mystery (see image at right). This small bark is a hodgepodge of styles: eastern Arnhem Land cross-hatching, a Macassar-like boat scene, unusual design elements and undulating ribbons of Mornington Island dotting. Easily dismissed as an unattractive painting or just a curio, this bark is actually a fascinating compilation of histories and artistic trajectories and influences,

and a testament to the abilities of Aboriginal artists to innovate and create. More than a curio of the QAC era, this little bark has its own special place in Queensland Indigenous art history.

While Queensland Aboriginal Creations created a highly crafted market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, in doing so it muddied the waters in regard to the reception of bark paintings in Queensland. Mornington Island artists however, largely due to the efforts of Lindsay and Dick Roughsey, managed to forge their own unique approach to bark painting, creating a regional vocabulary of mark-making and patterning to tell the customary stories of their country.

Mornington Island bark paintings have been held in high regard for decades – beginning in Tindale’s collecting in 1960 and continuing with the collections on exhibit today. They continue to intrigue and inspire and above all, stand for a complexity of histories, agencies and artistic innovations.

Dr Gretchen Stolte is a Nimi’ipuu (Nez Perce) Native American with degrees in art history and anthropology focusing on the material culture of First Nations peoples both in North America and Australia. Major curatorial projects include Old Masters: Australia’s Great Bark Artists for the National Museum of Australia (2013) and Queensland Aboriginal Creations: Agency and Legacy for the University of Queensland’s Anthropology Museum (2021). Dr Stolte is a practiced-based researcher and is currently a lecturer in Indigenous studies and research design at the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Australia.



Unknown artist, c1960s, natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark. Unknown provenance, collected by Nigel London

Notes

- ¹ Gretchen Stolte, Lynelle Flinders, Cheryl Creed and Tommy Pau, "An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Approach to Intellectual Property: Industry Insight into the Development of Indigenous Cultural Protocols," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 2(3) (2015): 64-75.
- ² Paul Memmott has coined the term Wellesley Islands Art Movement but the various art historical trajectories of artists across the different islands demand a more nuanced understanding of this region.
- ³ "About," MI Mirndiyan Gununa, accessed 19 December 2021, <https://www.morningtonisland.com.au/about>
- ⁴ Paul Memmott, "Origins of the Contemporary Art Movement," in *The Heart of Everything: the Art and Artists of Mornington & Bentinck Islands*, eds. Nicolas Evans et al. (Fitzroy: McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, 2008), 19.
- ⁵ Gretchen Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: an Anthropology of Identity Production in Far North Queensland*, (London: Routledge, 2021), 21.
- ⁶ Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 35, K. K. Potter, "James Houston, Armchair Tourism, and the Marketing of Inuit Art," in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century: Makers, Meanings, Histories*, ed. W Jackson Rushing, III (New York: Routledge: 1999), 39-56, Odd Halseth, "The Acculturation of the Pueblo Indians," *El Palacio* (1925) 18: 254-268.
- ⁷ Michael Aird, *Brisbane Blacks*, (Southport: Keeraira Press, 2001), 95.
- ⁸ Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 31, 41.
- ⁹ Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 36.
- ¹⁰ Gretchen Stolte, *Queensland Aboriginal Creations: a Critical Essay*, [Catalogue of an exhibition held at the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum, 28 February 2020 - 18 June 2021], (Brisbane: University of Queensland Anthropology Museum, 2020), 4.
- ¹¹ Stolte, *Queensland Aboriginal Creations*, 4.
- ¹² Dick Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal*, (Sydney: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1971), Karen Patricia Smith, "Merging Dreams and Consummate Realities: the Collaborative Ventures of Dick Roughsey and Percy Trezise," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 1989, 20-26.
- ¹³ Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 44-45.
- ¹⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?" in *Visual Literacy*, ed James Elkins, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2010), 13.
- ¹⁵ Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow*.
- ¹⁶ Memmott, "Origins of the Contemporary Art Movement," 20.
- ¹⁷ Jennifer Isaacs, "Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey: Stories of this Land," [Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Cairns Art Gallery, 16 Nov, 2018 – 10 Feb, 2019], (Cairns: Cairns Art Gallery, Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2010), 2.
- ¹⁸ "Goobalathaldin (Dick) Roughsey, The Emu and the Turkey 1971," Cairns Art Gallery, accessed 23 December 2021, <https://www.cairnsartgallery.com.au/collections/the-emu-and-the-turkey>.
- ¹⁹ Zoe Rimmer (2017) used the term 'Ancestor' in the curation of *kanalaritja: An Unbroken String* and works that were historical and not attributed to a specific creator. See <https://kanalaritja.tmag.tas.gov.au/>
- ²⁰ Memmott, "Origins of the Contemporary Art Movement," 20
- ²¹ Personal communication John Cruthers, 31 December 2021.

Exhibited Works



"This story tells of two sisters. They both had a few children each. Emu was the big sister and Turkey was the smaller sister. They were hunters but Emu was better than her sister. One day they went hunting together and they did a lot of hunting but Turkey decided to go back early to cook all her roots and nuts. When she had finished, she hid her cooking stick. Turkey was waiting for her sister. When Emu came home Turkey said to her, "Sister, put your hands in the fire to open up the ashes, that's what I did." But Emu burnt all her hands from the hot fire, so that is why you see Emu can't fly today.

"Then next day they went hunting again as usual. Emu returned early and she hid some of her children in the grass and was waiting for Turkey. Emu cried, "Sister look, I've got only two children - I killed the others so that there would be more food to go around. You've got many kids, why don't you kill them and just keep two.

"After Turkey killed her babies, Emu called to her chicks to come out from the hiding place and eat tea. Turkey cried out, "You've tricked me!" Turkey got her two children and flew away. So today you can see Emu's got more chicks than Turkey.

"The moral of this story is that sisters should not lie to each other, otherwise you'll make bad enemies with your families. That is the story of the two sisters, Emu and Turkey."

Story from John Williams.

Notes verso:

"This painting shows how my Tribe of the Lardill hunt for food. The men seen with fish spears and fish nets are fishermen, and the woman above depicts their way of hunting on the land. They gather pandanus pine nuts, snakes, goannas, and many roots."

Goobalathaldin



Dick Roughsey
A hunting scene 1972
natural ochres on eucalyptus bark
80 x 22 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/
Copyright Agency, 2022



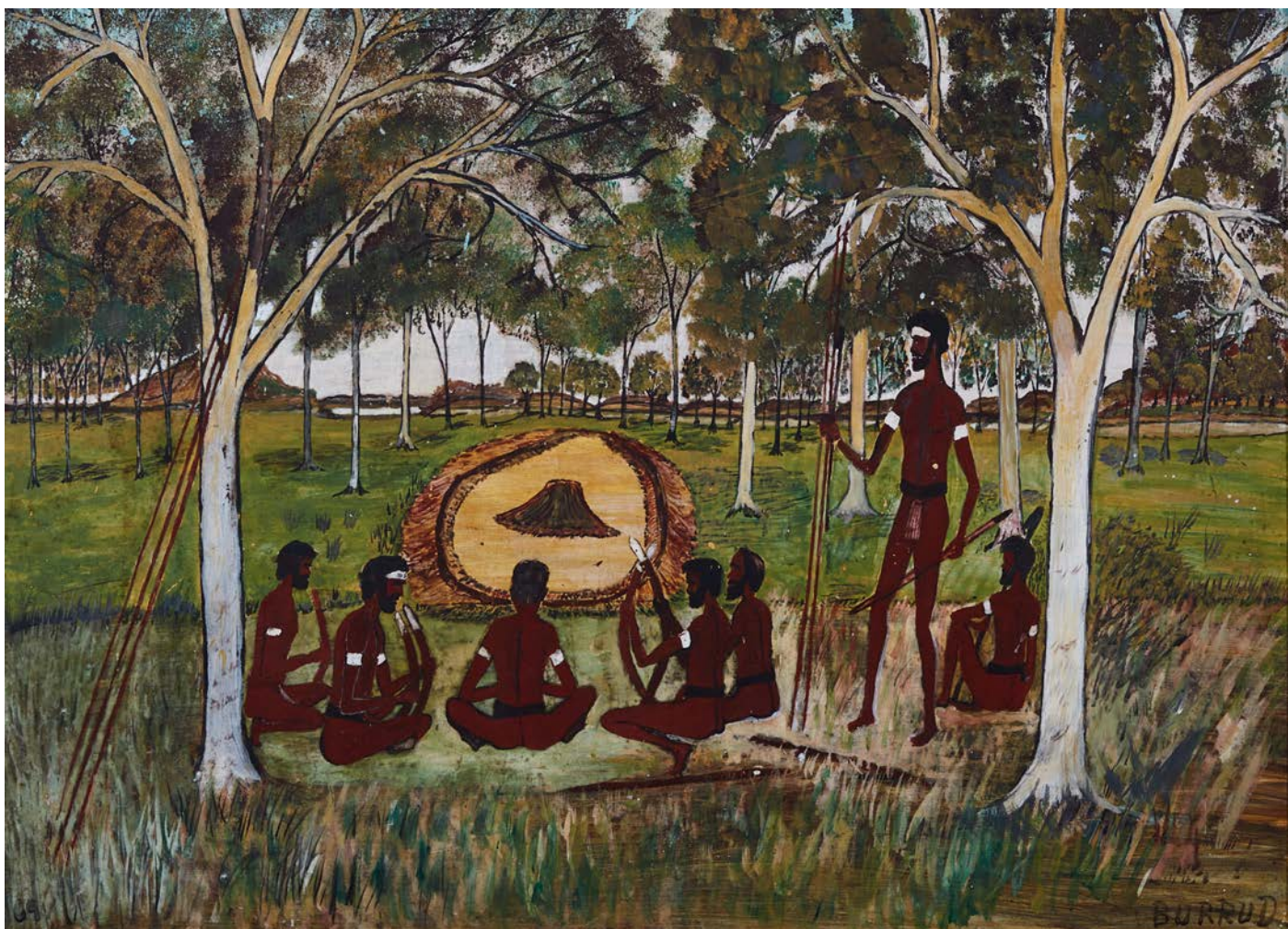
Dick Roughsey
Cutting bark 1971
acrylic on board
29.5 x 37 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Spirit hunters 1971
earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
43 x 30 cm irreg.
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Burrud (Lindsay Roughsey)
Picnic on the beach 1966
gouache on board
28 x 37.5 cm
© Lindsay Roughsey/Copyright Agency, 2022



Burrud (Lindsay Roughsey)
Lardil Bora grounds 1969
tempera on board
42 x 58 cm
© Lindsay Roughsey/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Dancers of the Rainbow Serpent 1971
acrylic on board
60 x 91 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Not attributed
Ceremonial hat, Mornington Island c1970s
human hair, ochres, emu feathers
54 x 20 x 20 cm

In 1914 the Mornington Island Mission was established and three years later the murder of the first missionary Reverend Robert Hall in October 1917 made national news. The violent event had local repercussions fresh in Lardil memory during Roughsey's lifetime. Three men were charged with the murder, and others did gaol-time for their involvement in the ensuing attack on the mission homestead.

In Roughsey's autobiography *Moon and Rainbow* (1971) he interviews surviving eye-witnesses whose descriptions likely inspired *Dragging the body of Rev. Hall* 1971. The painting at right portrays the morning after the midnight ambush on the sleeping Hall, with the ringleader Gidigal hauling the victim off to a shallow grave.



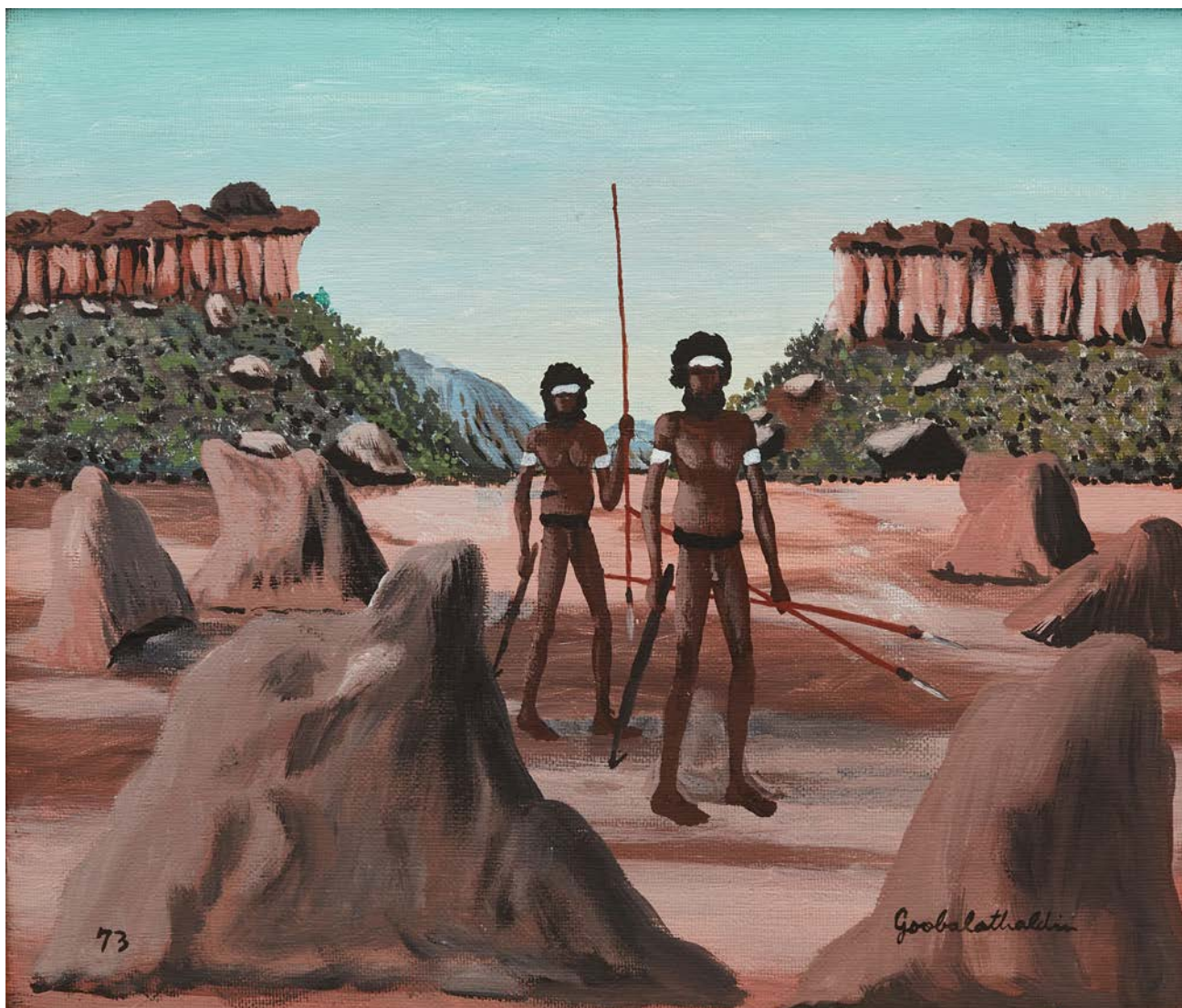
Dick Roughsey
Dragging the body of Rev Hall 1971
oil on board
40 x 60 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Eelgin, the old grasshopper woman 1973
acrylic on board
63 x 76 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
The Chase 1973
acrylic on board
63 x 76 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Marnbill and Dewaliwali 1973
acrylic on board
30 x 35 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Estate of Dick Roughsey
Reproduced with permission, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Wife stealer fights back, Mornington Island 1972
acrylic on board
30 x 36 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Going fishing 1981
acrylic on board
60 x 90 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022
40



Dick Roughsey
Hunters returning 1981
acrylic on board
61 x 91 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Boys killing grasshoppers, Mornington Island 1975
acrylic on board
30 x 40 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Percy Trezise
Scrub turkeys nd
acrylic on board
30 x 40 cm
© Estate of Percy Trezise



Attributed to Jackson Jacob
Stingray and the honeybee nd
ochres on bark
53 x 27 cm
© Jackson Jacob/Copyright Agency, 2022

“Wankabel means honey bee in our language. This story belongs to Sidney Island area and that there are no bees on Sidney Island because the big Balibal, the spotted stingray, jumps out of the water drowning the bees if they try and fly over to the island.”

Story from Ellen Roughsey.



Attributed to either Mervyn or Duncan Roughsey
Stingray and the honeybee c1960s
natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark
67 x 37 cm



Dick Roughsey
Pelican Bay 1976
acrylic on board
45.5 x 61 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Picking oysters, Mornington Island 1971
oil on board
25 x 35 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Cooking dugong 1976
acrylic on board
35.5 x 45.5 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Spearing dugong 1971
acrylic on board
40.5 x 61 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Estate of Dick Roughsey
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The Two Devils Story

John Williams

“A long time ago on Gurraben Reef off Forsyth Island, two little boys were making a fire with fire-sticks. Up above, two malgarn (devil-birds) were singing out, “Wii!”

The two boys heard them and mocked them, singing out, “Wii!”

The two malgarn again sang out, “Wii!”

And the two boys again copied them – “Wii!”

Then the malgarn sang out louder, “Wii!”

And the two boys again copied them - “Wii!”

And again, the malgarn sang out even louder, “Wii!”

And again, the two boys copied them, singing out even louder, “Wii!”

The malgarn jumped down and grabbed those two boys and wrapped them up in a net. They dragged the net south onto a sandbank. One malgarn said, “Come over here, let the two boys lay down there in the net. You and I can go to the point and make some firesticks.”

They left the boys tied up in the net near the ocean in the south-west and went to the north-east to try and make a fire to cook them. The malgarn rubbed their firesticks, jila, jila, jila, jila! They started to get fire. They rubbed again, but the fire wouldn't start. Maltha (nothing). Meanwhile, the two boys were still on the sandbank, struggling to escape from the net.

“Have you got anything like a knife or tomahawk to cut this net?” asked one boy.

“No,” replied the other boy, “but look! I've got a bottle here beside me!”

“Well, that's alright,” said the first boy, “Go on, cut it with the bottle!”

So, he tore and cut at the net until he made his way out. The first boy was still inside, looking to see how far away the malgarn are. He was worried they

would see them escape. The other boy reassured him, “They're far away, far off to the east.”

“You go out first, then I'll come out after you.”

The first boy came out then and together they rolled down the sandbank. Rolling, rolling, rolling, rolling, right into the saltwater. They swam and they swam, all the way west back to Forsyth Island. The two malgarn were still trying to make fire.

“Right,” said one, “Go and get them now. We'll eat while it's still light.”

The other malgarn went and looked. He called out “Hey, there's nothing here! No boys! They've gone!”

“Get them!” said the first malgarn, “Don't hide them! I won't give you any. Get my food!”

“They're not here,” said the other one, “Look, there's nothing!”

“Get them! Don't hide that food of mine. I want to eat them. Don't hide them for no reason!”

“They're not here! You look for them!”

The first malgarn started heading to the north-east, ready for a fight. He picked up the net and looked in every corner. The two boys were really gone. Of course, the two malgarn blamed each other for losing the boys. And then of course they started fighting. They fought each other all over the place – in the west and north and south and east. While they were fighting shooting stars fell down into the ocean. Well, when they finally had enough of fighting, the two malgarn thought that maybe they should try looking for the boys.

“Come on, you go to the north side and I'll go to the south side.” While they were looking, they sang a song in Yangkaal. “Danda gurra, danda gurra, danda gurra, danda gurra, danda gurra, danda gurra, danda gurra. Danda warrirr!”

Continued on page 52



Attributed to Arnold Watt
The story of the two Lurugu boys 1965
natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark
73 x 41 cm
© Arnold Watt/Copyright Agency, 2022

After a while two malgarn still hadn't found any sign of the two boys. They took off and flew over Robert Island and back to Forsyth Island in search of the boys. They landed on a sandbank at Marragadba, wandered around to the west and did durlida (shit) there. The people saw those malgarn in the west and quickly sent the boys to the east side. But then the malgarn went east too.

"Here they are on the east side, wandering around. Hide the children, those boys. Hide them all!" They did their best to hide the children, but the malgarn must have heard them, because next thing they flew over and landed right there in the middle of the people's camp.

The malgarn asked the people, "Are our good ones here? The ones who ran here a little while ago?"

"We don't have anyone," the people replied.

"Don't hide them! Don't hide them!" yelled the malgarn. "Get my devil's children! Get my children!"

The people were worried, so they brought out one little child to offer to the malgarn.

"This is the one, right? This one?"

"No, that one's bad, he has a big stomach. That one's yours, he's bad."

They brought out another child. "Is it this one?"

"That one's bad too. He's bad, with a skinny body."

They brought out two more children. "How about these two?"

"No, those are your bad ones, leave them. Those are bad, they've got skinny bodies."

They brought out two more children. "How about these two?"

"No, those are your bad ones, leave them. Those are bad, they've got skinny bodies."

The malgarn explained exactly what they were looking for. Eventually the people were forced to bring out the two boys who had escaped from the devils' net. "How about these two people?"

"Yes, those are ours," the malgarn said. "Bring them up!"

Well, the people weren't so silly as to give their boys away that easily. "Righto!" said one of the men, "Before you take these boys, go over there and shake-a-leg."

The malgarn started to shake-a-leg, because by now they were ready to do anything to be able to eat those two delicious boys. But the people continued with their plan ...

"Go on, put your legs wider apart," they said. "Open your legs."

The two malgarn opened their legs wider still, and the men all speared them. The malgarn were writhing in pain. And then they flew straight up into the sky with the white spears sticking out behind them. And they kept on going up until they disappeared out of sight."



Dick Roughsey
Fishing party nd
acrylic on board
35.5 x 45.5 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Copyright Agency, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Trezise making camp Laura 1973
acrylic on board
41 x 51 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Estate of Dick Roughsey
Reproduced with permission, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Trezise hiking 1976
acrylic on board
30 x 38 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Estate of Dick Roughsey
Reproduced with permission, 2022



Dick Roughsey
Bush walk 1976
acrylic on board
61 x 81 cm
© Dick Roughsey Goobalathaldin/Estate of Dick Roughsey
Reproduced with permission, 2022



Percy Trezise
Cave art, Cape York nd
oil on board
30 x 37.5 cm
© Estate of Percy Trezise



Ray Crooke
Limestone bluffs at Chillagoe nd
oil on board
18 x 28 cm
© Ray Crooke/Copyright Agency, 2022



Mervyn Roughsey
Untitled 1986
synthetic polymer paint on bark
63 x 24 cm
© Mervyn Roughsey/Copyright Agency, 2022



Unknown ancestor, possibly Mornington Island
Title unknown c1960s
natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark
71 x 36 cm



Unknown ancestor, possibly Mornington Island
Title unknown c1960s
natural ochres and charcoal on eucalyptus bark
80 x 54 cm



Not attributed
Title unknown c1960s
acrylic on wood
64 x 21cm
Collected by Nigel Lendon



Not attributed
Title unknown c1960s
acrylic on wood
21 x 27cm irreg.
Collected by Nigel Lendon

Timeline

- The Lardil people live on Gunana/Mornington Island and others in the Wellesley Islands. The Kaiadilt people live on nearby Bentinck Island, and the Yaangkal on Denham and Forsyth Islands, as they have for thousands of generations.
- For at least 500 years Macassan trepangers from Sulawesi visit the islands in search of sea cucumbers and interact with the Lardil and Kaiadilt.
- Portuguese explorer Anthony van Diemen names the eastern cape of the island.
- Matthew Flinders names the island after Richard Wellesley, 1st Marquess Wellesley, who was known when young as the Earl of Mornington.

1905

- The Wellesley Islands are proclaimed as an Aboriginal reserve, under a Protector of Aborigines appointed by the Queensland Government.

1914

- Presbyterian Mission established on Gunana/Mornington Island. The Lardil people are prevented from performing luruku (initiation ceremonies) and from observing their own laws, language and social and cultural practices.

1917

- First missionary Rev. Hall is murdered on Mornington Island.



Aerial view of Mornington Island

1924

- Gara Gara (later known as Goobalathaldin and Dick Roughsey) born, Goobira Point, Langu-Narnji (Sydney Island), on Larumbanda Southern Lardil clan estate.

c1932

- From age 8, mission schooling.

c1937

- Sent to mainland for station work (age 13-14), but divides time between out bush on Mornington, subsistence living on the mission and pastoral work.

1940-43

- Works on Tallawanta Station near Burketown due to shortage of white labour during war.

c1943

- Marries Labumore Elsie Williams. They have six children - Mervyn, Raymond, Kevin, Eleanor, Basil and Duncan.

c1945

- Starts producing artifacts and some bark paintings for the tourist market.

1947-47; 1953-62; 1965-72

- Rev. Douglas Belcher named 'Gundtha' [father] by the Lardil manages the mission for a total period of c18 years. He had studied art 1935-37 at a Melbourne technical college and was more libertarian than previous missionaries. Belcher closed the dorms, encouraged local language, supported the arts and craft movement and the performance troupe.

1948

- Kaiadilt relocate to Mornington Island following severe cyclonic flooding – remembered as a forceful intervention by the missionaries.

c1950s

- Two year's work as a deckhand on the supply ship *Cora* servicing communities from Thursday Island to Normanton, Burketown and Mornington Island to Yirrkala, Groote Eylandt, Rose River, Boorooloola and Vanderlin Island.

1958

- Luruku ceremony (male initiation) performed and filmed for the first time since c1932.

1960

- Lindsay Roughsey paints collection of barks for anthropologist Norman Tindale, now in South Australian Museum.

Early 1960s

- 'Roughsey and his elder brother Lindsay initiate a style of bark painting depicting Lardil sacred histories on cross-hatched and pointillist backgrounds.'
(Paul Memmott, Roughsey, Dick (Goobalathaldin), Australian Dictionary of Biography [online])

1962

- Meets pilot Percy Trezise while working at Karumba Tourist Lodge; embarks on a ten year plan to become a professional artist in the Lardil and European styles.

1963

- Holds first exhibition at the Cairns School of Art Library. Meets artist Ray Croke and cartoonist Eric Jolliffe. Visits and is inspired by Croke's studio.

1964

- Goes to Cairns in March to work towards his exhibition; Trezise and Croke return from Aurukun Mission, helping the Wik-Munkan with bark painting and other work.
- March-April-May: Isabella Gorge trip (west of Cooktown) with Croke, Trezise, Frank Woolston and Aboriginal man Willy Long. Roughsey collects bark and paints.
- Dick and Lindsay Roughsey exhibit bark paintings in Upstairs Gallery, Cairns.
- Mornington Islanders perform their first corroboree for audiences in Cairns Little Theatre.
- First solo exhibition in Brisbane at Frank Woolston's gallery late in 1964.
- Dick and Elsie run a family business on Mornington Island. Dick makes bark paintings and artifacts and Elsie produces cottonwood bush dolls.

1965

- Roughsey, Trezise, Woolston, Croke, Tony Allen & windward men visit Sydney Island to make a film for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies on fishing and hunting methods (see Croke's *Mornington Island* 1965).



Ray Croke, *Mornington Island* 1965

1967

- Four man show in Canberra (Macquarie Galleries?): Roughsey, Trezise, Croke, Lindsay.

c1967/8

- Begins painting in acrylic and oil in the western landscape style (S.P Wright, 'Dick Roughsey, Goobalathaldin, Gara Gara, O.B.E', *Goobalathaldin: Rough Sea*, exh.cat., Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, 2010).

1969

- Takes part in Hells Gate research expedition with Trezise, Croke and Wollston to the Kennedy Creek region of Cape York.

1970

- Mornington Island Dancers begin professional interstate tours.

1971

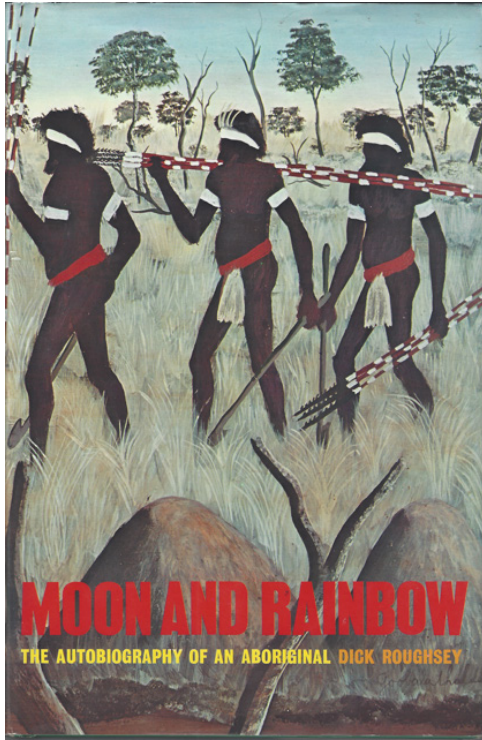
- Solo exhibition *Dick Roughsey*, Artarmon Galleries, Sydney, 30 November 1971. Opened by Dr Jean Battersby for Nugget Coombs. Dick and Elsie attend opening.
- Publication of *Moon and Rainbow: the autobiography of an Aboriginal* by Dick Roughsey.

1972

- *Lurugu* documentary filmed; released in 1974 by Ronin Films.

1973

- Woomera Aboriginal Corporation established on Mornington Island to create a thriving cultural life on the island and increase the participation of island people in arts and cultural activities. Incorporated in 1983.



1973

- *The Giant Devil Dingo*, first of ten children's books published.
- Joint exhibition *Dick Roughsey & Percy Trezise*, Artarmon Galleries Sydney, 6 November 1973. Opened by Dr Jean Battersby.
- *Exhibition for Queensland*, Toowoomba, with ceramic artist Thancoupie.

1973-76

- Inaugural chairman of the Aboriginal Arts Board (Australian Council for the Arts).

1974-75

- Serves on the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

1975

- Publishes *The Rainbow Serpent* (Children's Book of the Year Award 1976 and 1979).
- Joint exhibition *Dick Roughsey and Percy Trezise*, Australian Galleries Melbourne, 10-21 March 1975. Opened by the Honourable EG Whitlam, QC, MP, Prime Minister.

1976

- Joint exhibition *Dick Roughsey & Percy Trezise*, Artarmon Galleries Sydney, 15-26 June 1976. Opened by Dr Jean Battersby.

1977

- Addresses the World Wilderness Congress in Johannesburg, South Africa, citing the cultural heritage of Cape York.

1978

- Presbyterian Mission leaves the Wellesley Islands. Administration is taken over by the all-Aboriginal Mornington Shire Council.

1980

- Solo exhibition *Dick Roughsey (Goobalathaldin)*, Gallery A Sydney, 16 February – 8 March 1980.
- *Recent Paintings Goobalathaldin (Dick Roughsey)*, Australian Galleries Melbourne, 18 February – 1 March 1980.

1984

- Publication of Elsie Roughsey's book *An Aboriginal mother tells of the old and the new*.

Mid 1980s

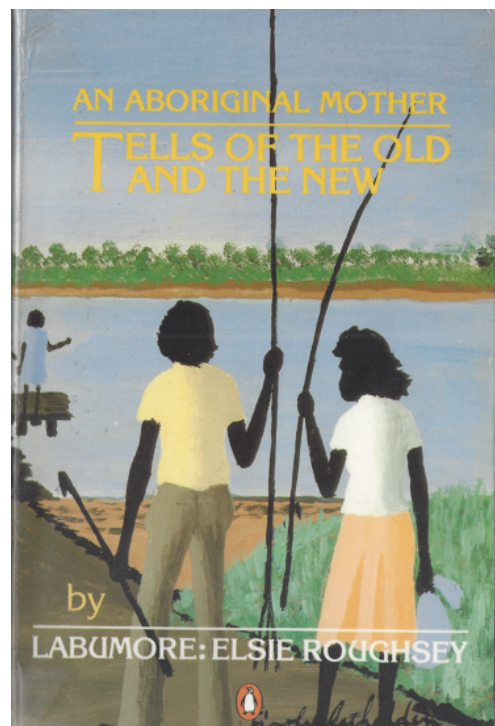
- Mornington Island Art and Craft facility built. Since 2009 it has operated MIART Studios within the Mirndiyan Gunana Aboriginal Coporation.

1985

- Dick Roughsey dies of cancer on Mornington Island, 20 October 1985.

2010

- *Goobalathaldin: Rough Sea Dick Roughsey O.B.E (c1920-1985)*, survey exhibition Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, 20-22 August 2010 (partners Griffith Artworks, Queensland College of the Arts, Jan Manton Art).



2013

- *Dick Roughsey (Goobalathaldin) 1924-1985*, Artarmon Galleries Sydney, 24 August – 7 September 2013.

2014

- *Searching for Hells Gate: Ray Crooke, Goobalathaldin (Dick Roughsey) and Percy Trezise*, Cairns Art Gallery, 29 August – 9 November 2014

2019

- *Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey: Stories of this land*, survey exhibition, QAGOMA Brisbane and Cairns Art Gallery, 30 March – 18 August 2019.

2022

- *Goobalathaldin Dick Roughsey & Friends*, survey exhibition, 16albermarle Project Space, Sydney, 29 January – 26 March 2022.



Dick and Percy with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Australian Galleries 1975

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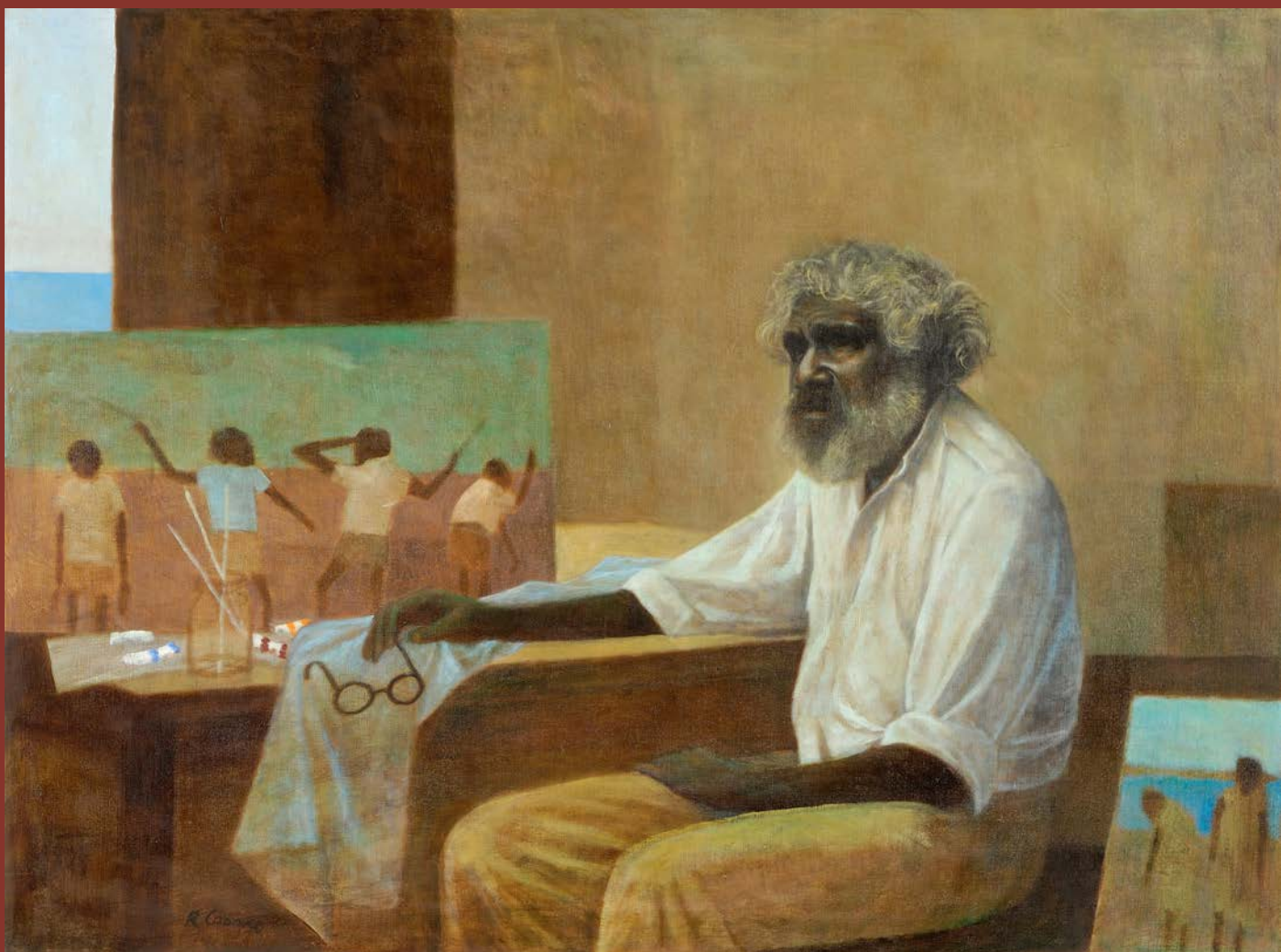
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Ray Austin Crooke, *Portrait of Dick Roughsey OBE* 1982
oil on canvas, 90.7 x 120.3 cm
Donated by Albert Scheinberg, Moreton Bay Regional
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