



Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre

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Burrnjupurrŋu (dec) Wunuŋmurra

Date of Birth: 30/06/1949
Clan: Dhaŋwaŋu
Homeland: Gurrumuru
Moiety: Yirritja

Biography

Burrnjupurrŋu is one of the foremost yidaki makers of North East Arnhem land and senior law-man for the Dhaŋwaŋu clan. As a young man he was a celebrated yidaki player and was in demand to play at various ceremonies in the East Arnhem region. He is highly respected amongst Yolŋu for his skills at selecting and crafting ceremonial quality yidaki, often being asked to make instruments for use specifically amongst Yolŋu communities.

He has taught many people who themselves are now leading yidaki makers and players. This includes Datjirri #1 Wunuŋmurra and the late Milkayŋu Munuŋgurr, the original yidaki player for the Yothu Yindi band.

Burrnjupurrŋu lives at his clan's land Gurrumuru where he makes yidaki with his wife Djul'djul' Gurruwiwi and his children. Djul'djul' is the daughter of the late artist Mithinarri Gurruwiwi and learned how to paint from him. Most often, Burrnjupurrŋu makes the yidaki and Djul'djul' paints them, a perfect partnership that results in excellent playing yidaki with top quality artwork.

Their yidaki are sometimes painted with Gälpu clan designs from Djul'djul's clan. Wititj the olive python, djaykuŋ the file-snake and guḍurrku the broŋga are common motifs. At other times they are decorated with beautiful columns of diamonds, the sacred miny'tji belonging to the Dhaŋwaŋu clan. Their yidaki are highly priced among collectors and players world-wide, being commonly referred to as some of the best works available.

Burrnjupurrŋu was born an identical twin to parents Nyepayŋa (John) Wunuŋmurra and Gangarriwuy Waŋambi, younger brother to prolific artist and leader, the late Yaŋgarriny Wunuŋmurra.

As a young boy he spent a lot of time in the bush with his father and twin brother Djalawu and recalls learning a lot together. As a child he stayed at the Yirrkala mission where he attended school and learned English. During this time he would visit ceremonial expert Manydjarri Ganambarr and learn yidaki. "When I was a little boy, I was learning dip a derrick dip a derrick, I would go out bush by myself and look around for yidaki. I learned a lot from Manydjarri and Djalu'. When I was about 18 I started learning manikay, for buŋgul (ceremony)."

In the 1970's, he was invited to be part of a tour that traveled overseas, performing traditional Yolŋu song and dance. This was possibly the first Yolŋu group to represent their culture outside of Australia. In his own words he stated the following: "I went with Djambawa ga Gawirriŋ. I seen many places, Paris, New York, Singapore, London, Canada all round Australia... bukmaŋ (every place)." "Näpaki (non-Aboriginal) should respect yidaki ga Yolŋu. We are the first people to play yidaki, first people singing ga dancing buŋgul djäma (ceremony) with biŋma (clapsticks)."

Collections

Yidaki in numerous private collections world-wide