



Shire of East Pilbara (Martumili Artists)

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Kumpaya Girgirba

Birth Date 1932

Language Manyjilyjarra

Skin: Karimarra

Place of Birth Kiwirrkurra area

Home

Biography

"I came back to do painting in my side [region] and even taught the others to paint. My auntie showed me how to paint and ... which part of the Country I should do- only my area and my stories on my side... From there I never stop painting, and first when I started I did so many, lots and lots of painting ... and so we taught each other and everybody else is doing it now.

Wangka is storytelling – like a drawing, putting something on the canvas. Painting it, but old people used to tell stories on the sand, with fingertips... They draw it in the sand like they do on a canvas. [I paint] my own [stories], where I came from, where my parents used to take me, where my grandparents area [was], where we used to hunt and go place to place, camping with my parents and grandparents."

- Kumpaya Girgirba, as translated by Ngalangka Nola Taylor

Kumpaya is a Manyjilyjarra woman, respected law woman and cultural leader, born in the 1940s close to Kiwirrkurra, a rockhole located in the Gibson Desert and to the south west of Lake McKay. Her brothers include the renowned artists Charlie Wallabi (Walapayi), Helicopter and Patrick Tjungurrayi, all of whom she has outlived. In her youth, Kumpaya grew up in the area surrounding Kiwirrkurra, and continued to live a *pujiman* (traditional, desert dwelling) lifestyle into adulthood; *"When I was a young girl, I walked everywhere, travelling along the Canning Stock Route. I walked north and west, around Wana warla (lake). I grew up around there, going right around that Country and all the way back to Kunawarritji."* (Kumpaya Girgirba)

Kumpaya intentionally avoided the European drovers that travelled along the Canning Stock Route, but eventually she, her husband, three children and the extended family group with whom she was travelling encountered surveyor Len Beadell in 1963. He was grading roads through the Western Desert for the Woomera Missile Testing Range. *"That whitefella had fruit, flour and tucker... He gave all the little kids fruit [and they] made the biggest waru (fire)... and cooked it. When they came back... it had cooked away to nothing, there was nothing there to eat."* (Kumpaya Girgirba)

Len Beadell notified staff at Jigalong Mission of their whereabouts, and consequently they were tracked and persuaded to relocate to the mission. There they rejoined many relatives that had already moved in from the desert. After living for a time at the mission, Kumpaya worked on several pastoral stations throughout the Pilbara, washing clothes and making damper (a type of flat bread). In 1982, during the 'Return to Country' movement, she relocated with her family to Parnngurr Aboriginal community, where she continues to live today with her children and grandchildren.

Kumpaya is an extraordinary teacher and orator, with particular skill in gathering artists together for large collaborative projects. She primarily paints her *ngurra* (home Country, camp), along the middle section of the Canning Stock Route, and between Punmu Aboriginal community and Kiwirrkura, more than 500 kilometres eastward. Kumpaya learned how to paint and weave baskets while visiting family in Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing and Patjarr, and is credited with introducing these skills to Martu people. Kumpaya's work has been exhibited widely across Australia and internationally, and acquired by the National Museum of Australia.

Group Exhibitions

- 2024 Martumili Artists at Japingka Gallery, Fremantle
- 2023 Dancing For Our Country, Yaama Ganu, Moree, NSW
- 2023 Le Chant Aborigene des Sept Soeurs, IDAIA, Paris, France
- 2023 Songlines - Centres dart du desert australien, IDAIA/ Australian Embassy, Paris, France
- 2022 Marlakurringu - Return / Come Back, Yaama Ganu Gallery, Moree, NSW
- 2022 Waru (Fire), Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2022 Tracks We Share
- 2021 Martumili Mob, The Courthouse Gallery, Port Hedland, WA
- 2021 Paper Wangka (Paper Story), Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2021 Pukurlpa (happy inside), Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2020 Belonging to Martu, Harvey Arts Project, Idaho, US
- 2020 Ngurra Means Home, Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2020 Contemporary Desert Art, Dellasposa, London, UK
- 2020 Strong Country, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2020 Matriarchs 2020, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2019 In Cahoots, touring exhibition from Fremantle Art Centre, Fremantle, WA
- 2019 Nyurnma (burnt Country), Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2019 Martu Wangka, Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA
- 2017 Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters, touring exhibition from National Museum of Australia, Canberra, ACT
- 2017 Community Life, Martumili Gallery, Newman, WA

Group Exhibitions

- 2016** Desert Mob, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT
- 2016** Black White & Restive, Newcastle Art Gallery, Newcastle, NSW
- 2015** Three Deserts Singing, Frewen Arts, Piccadilly, Mayfair, London
- 2015** Martumili Artists, Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2014** Martumili, Harvey Art Projects, USA
- 2014** Martu Art From the Western Desert, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW
- 2014** Malya Yuturringu; be a star, State Theatre Centre, Perth, WA
- 2013** Australia, Royal Academy of the Arts, London, England
- 2012** We Don t Need A Map: a Martu experience of the Western Desert, WA
- 2012** Martumili Artists 2012, Merenda Gallery, Perth, WA
- 2012** Warla: an explanation of the salt lakes in the Great Sandy Desert, Short Street Gallery, Broome, WA
- 2012** Decrochage de l'exposition des Martumili Artists, Galerie Kungka, France
- 2012** Martumili Artists at Art Mob, Art Mob, Hobart, TAS
- 2012** Yiwarra Kuju (One Road), Australian Museum, Sydney, NSW
- 2011** Yiwarra Kuju (One Road), Perth Convention Exhibition Centre, Perth, WA
- 2011** Revealed – Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia, Gallery Central, Perth, WA
- 2011** Waru! Holding Fire in Australia's Western Desert, Thomas Welton Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford University, San Francisco
- 2010** Jakulpa laju kartyinpa (Bringing a message), Chapman Gallery, Canberra, ACT
- 2010** Desert Mob, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT
- 2010** Yiwarra Kuju – One Road, One People, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, ACT
- 2010** Jakulpa laju kartyinpa (Bringing a message), Chapman Gallery, Canberra, ACT
- 2010** Martumili Group Exhibition, Redot Art Gallery, Singapore
- 2009** Puntu kurnu (Belongs to the people), Newman Visitors Centre, Newman, WA
- 2009** Warranpalampaju kayili yaninpa (Our Country travelling north), Raft Art Space, Darwin, NT
- 2009** Yankuni Laju Karnkani Kujungka (We are travelling together by air), Red Dot Gallery, Singapore
- 2008** Jitirangu (Rainbow), Randell Lane Gallery, Perth, WA
- 2008** Martumili Artists Recent Works, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne, VIC
- 2008** Martumili Artists, Port Hedland Courthouse Arts Centre and Gallery, Port Hedland, WA
- 2008** Ngurra waltja wakarni (We are painting country), Short St Gallery, Broome, WA
- 2007** Martu-la wakarnu kuwarri wiyaju, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne, VIC
- 2006** Parnngurr Artists, Stanford University, California, USA

Collections

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA