

# MEMORY, PLACE AND PRACTICE

Explore ideas of memory and place within the practice of Indigenous Queensland artists.

VIEW ONLINE

QAGOMA  
LEARNING



**MAVIS NGALLAMETTA**  
*PAMP (SWAMP) 2009*

Many people associate swamps with stagnant water, algae and putrid mud. In contrast, Mavis Ngallametta's swamps are picturesque lagoons that ring the community of Aurukun in the post-wet season. In these lagoons, crystal clear fresh water abounds, tainted only by the tea-coloured tannins of the melaleuca trees lining the banks. *Pamp (Swamp)* is one of the artist's earliest works from her pamp series. Bold and celebratory, Ngallametta's swamps feature brightly coloured waterlilies, birds, insects and snakes, people collecting flowers, and families fishing and camping at their favourite spots.

**LOOK** 

Look closely. Can you find the various signs of life in the swamp? (Hint: Look for birds, snakes and butterflies amongst the trees)

**THINK** 

1. Looking at the painting, what sorts of sounds do you think you would hear coming from this swamp? What elements of the work suggested these sounds to you?

2. Ngallametta often plays with perspective in her works. In *Pamp (Swamp)*, do you feel like you are in the swamp looking up to the sky, or hovering above looking down? Discuss your thoughts.

**CREATE** 

As a class, investigate the types of flora found around your school grounds. Take photos of the different plants and trees that you find and collect a small snipping of each. Sketch each snipping onto the same piece of paper to present an overview of the flora around your school. Press the snippings into clay to create an impression. Once dry, assemble the clay pieces in a location that is important to you as a group.

## WATCH

[Watch](#) the introduction to Mavis Ngallametta's early works, including *Wutan 2011*.

## THINK

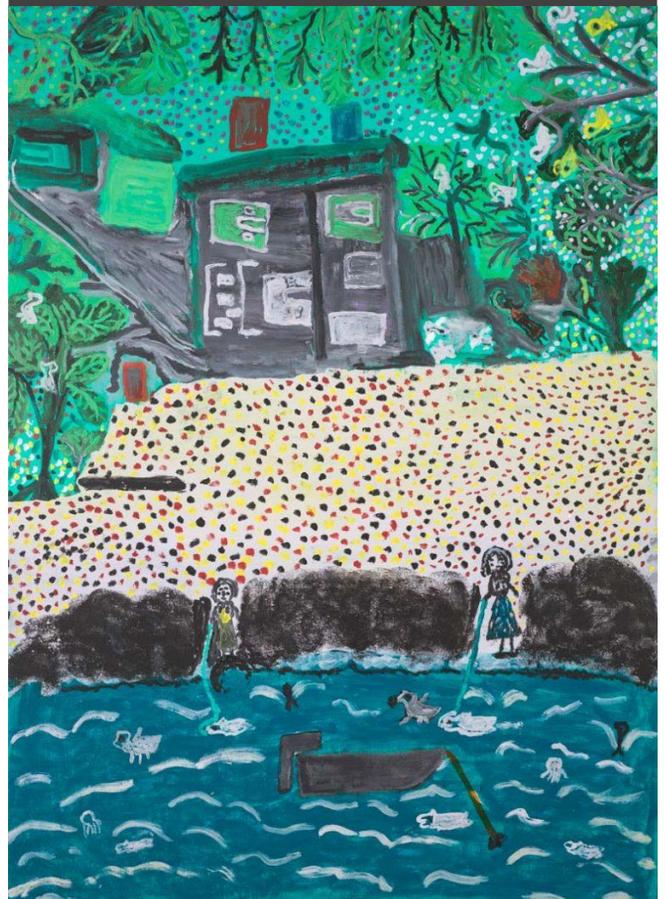
1. Compare *Wutan 2011* with [Wutan #2 2014](#). How has Ngallametta's visual language evolved between the two works?
2. What do you think is the focal point of this painting? What is it about this feature that draws your eye?

## CREATE

As a class, choose a place around school that is important to you and discuss why it is special. Find a spot where you can sketch a view of your chosen place, thinking about background, middle ground and foreground as you draw. Transform your drawing into a watercolour and once dry, work back over the top with oil pastels, using pattern and texture to suggest different features of the landscape.

## MAVIS NGALLAMETTA *WUTAN 2011*

*Wutan* was a favourite camping and fishing spot of Mavis Ngallametta, whose memories visiting this place go back to her childhood. When Ngallametta painted, she often used a unique perspective. Neither the flat, feet-on-ground perspective traditionally used in landscape painting, nor the bird's-eye view that is most often associated with Aboriginal painting, Ngallametta's perspective is best described as a view at an angle of roughly 45-degrees. In *Wutan 2011*, the artist has divided the composition into thirds — the water of the inlet at *Wutan* sits at the bottom, the sandy bank appears in the middle, while the hills and trees sit at the top of the painting.





## MIRDIDINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI

*DIBIRDIBI COUNTRY 2008*

This painting shares the story places of Dibiribi, the Rock Cod ancestor, who carved out the South Wellesley Islands from the mainland with his fins. This story belonged to the artist's late husband, Pat, and the painting brings Gabori closer to him in depicting the country they loved. Gabori's paintings retain certain representational elements. Here, stone-walled fish traps dominate the painting in the form of black and white arching forms through the centre of the painting. The physical characteristics of the land can also be identified — rivers, streams and sandy beaches.

### EXPLORE

The place Gabori painted is found on Dulka Warngiid (Bentinck Island). Explore Bentinck Island through this [interactive map](#).

### THINK

1. What is a fish trap? Can you see where these are in the painting?
2. Look at the other colours in the painting – what do you think these represent?
3. What was Sally Gabori trying to tell people about Dibiribi Country through this artwork?

### CREATE

Think of a place which is special to you and your family (it could be your house, a holiday spot, or your school) and the key features of it. Draw an aerial view of this place using symbols and colours to mark out the important spots and what it means to you.

## EXPLORE

Explore Sally Gabori's use of shape and line. Compare *My Country* 2005 with the images of Mirdidingki Creek in the [interactive map](#).

## THINK

1. What are the main shapes and lines in this painting? Why do you think Gabori used curved lines and circles?

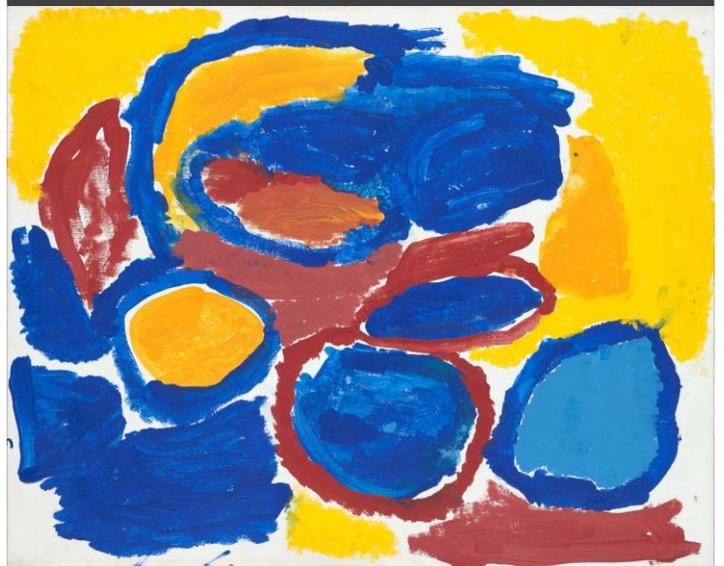
2. Why did the artist choose these colours?

## CREATE

Create a collage using shape and line from a photograph. Take a photo of a favourite place at school. Print a black and white A4 copy of the photograph. What lines and shapes stand out? Using oil pastels, draw over those lines and shapes in your photograph. Next, using coloured cardboard (textured and plain) or coloured paper, cut out the highlighted shapes and glue them onto white A4 paper. Draw the lines of the landscape with oil pastels

## MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI *MY COUNTRY* 2005

The *My Country* (Mirdidingki) paintings celebrated Sally Gabori's birthplace, the small creek that runs from inland Bentinck Island to a small bay on the southern coast, facing towards the massive rivers of the mainland Gulf coast. Inland, salt pans emerge, while at the creek's edges mangroves dominate, becoming a heavily forested tidal estuary at its mouth. Halfway along the creek, a small but striking midden-encrusted island devoid of vegetation emerges from the mangroves — a piercing circle of white among the green trees. Nearer the mouth of the creek a branch extends to the east along the back-beaches of the bay, creating an area of density in an otherwise sparse land. The creek ends in a long sandy tidal flat that extends into the bay for hundreds of metres, then transforms into a vibrant network of connecting coral reefs teeming with turtles, fish and other sea life.



## SHIRLEY MACNAMARA

*Cu* 2016

*Cu* refers to the deep holes of abandoned copper-mining exploration sites that scar the artist's family land at Mount Guide Station in western Queensland. Shirley Macnamara's grandson, Nathaniel, worked with her to make the copper wire and raw copper 'tree' shapes, to depict an overhead view of the snappy gums that grow on the surrounding hills, now levelled for mining. These trees can take decades to grow in the hot, dry climate of western Queensland, and their destruction is felt for generations.



### LOOK

Compare *Cu* to this photo of the landscape around Mount Guide from Macnamara's *Copper Mine Suite* 2016. What do you notice?



### THINK

1. How would you describe what copper looks like? Can you think of anything around your house or at school that is made of copper?
2. What do you think the landscape looks like where Shirley Macnamara lives?
3. Based on this artwork, what do you think the artist is trying to tell us about the snappy gums and the impact of mining on Country?

### CREATE

Create a sculpture using recycled materials that represents a feature of the landscape of your local area – this could be a mountain or a beach. Consider how people might view your sculpture from different angles and how you can use this to add meaning to the work.

## SHIRLEY MACNAMARA *SPINIFEX VESSEL I* 2011

Dense spinifex hummocks grow in abundance in the parched ground of western Queensland where Shirley Macnamara lives. In them, the artist finds shelters made by small animals and insects, and *Spinifex vessel I* is reminiscent of those forms. Macnamara has a deep reverence for the natural world; when harvesting her materials, she avoids destroying spinifex plants unnecessarily by carefully taking only the runner roots that connect individual hummocks. Macnamara relishes tactility. To explore this quality, she has pasted crushed ochres — wamarla (red) or guthulu (yellow) ochre — and black spinifex resin into the fabric of finished pieces, as well as embedding or scattering small objects over their surfaces.



## EXPLORE

Find images of the spinifex plants that grow in western Queensland. What does spinifex remind you of? Can you think of another plant that might be similar?



## THINK

1. *Spinifex vessel I* resembles a nest or small shelter. What sort of animal or insect do you think might live here?
2. The spinifex Macnamara uses to create her vessels reflects the culture and history of her own people and is closely connected to the place where she lives. Is there a plant that your family has a connection with or likes to grow?

## CREATE

Trace and cut a template for a basket out of lightweight cardboard. Weave together different materials such as paper, cardboard, fabric, cane or raffia to form a basket. Experiment with texture by adding objects to the outside of the basket that suggest a particular place.

## CAPTIONS

**Mavis Ngallametta** / Kugu-Uwanh people, Putch clan / Australia 1944–2019 / *Pamp (Swamp)* 2009 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 116 x 111cm / Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2015. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © The Estate of Mavis Ngallametta | **Mavis Ngallametta** / Kugu-Uwanh people, Putch clan / Australia 1944–2019 / *Wutan* 2011 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 129 x 94cm / Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2015. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © The Estate of Mavis Ngallametta | **Mirdidingkingathi Juwarrnda Sally Gabori** / Kaiadilt people / Australia c.1924–2015/ *Dibirdibi Country* 2008 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 200 x 600cm / Purchased 2008 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM, and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Mirdidingkingathi Juwarrnda Sally Gabori. Licenced by Copyright Agency 2020 | **Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori** / Kaiadilt people / Australia c.1924–2015 / *My Country* 2005 / Synthetic polymer paint on canvas / 60 x 76cm / Gift of the Estate of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2017 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda. Licensed by Copyright Agency, 2020 | **Shirley Macnamara** / Indjalandji/Alyawarr / Australia b.1949 / **Nathaniel Macnamara** / Australia b.2004 / *Cu* 2016 / Hand-coiled copper wire and raw copper / 22 x 25 x 25cm / Purchased 2017 with funds from Gina Fairfax through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © The artists | **Shirley Macnamara** / Indjalandji/Alyawarr / Australia b.1949 / *Copper Mine Suite* (detail) 2016 / Collection: QAGOMA Research Library / © Shirley Macnamara | **Shirley Macnamara** / Indjalandji/Alyawarr / Australia b.1949 / *Spinifex vessel* / 2011 / Twined spinifex (*Triodia pungens*), ochre, seeds, spinifex resin and synthetic polymer fixative / 12 x 27cm (diam.) / Purchased 2011. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © The artist

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This resource has been developed by QAGOMA Learning in collaboration with Donna Nicholson and Valerie Rogers, QAGOMA Learning Teacher Advisory Group members.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.