

**MIRDIDINGKINGATHI
JUWARANDA
SALLY GABORI
DULKA WARNGIID –
LAND OF ALL**

ARTWORK LABELS

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Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori: Dulka Warngiid – Land of All

‘Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa,
danda ngad’

(This is my Land, this is my Sea, this is who I am)

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori was born around 1924 near a small creek on the southern side of Bentinck Island, in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. This small island, measuring around sixteen by eighteen kilometres, is the Dulka Warngiid, the land of all, of the Kaiadilt people.

Sally lived an entirely traditional life for her first twenty-three years, moving between her family’s main homeland sites and living according to an unbroken ancestral culture. In 1948, following devastating drought, storms and a near four-metre tidal surge, she and her kin were moved to the Presbyterian Mission on nearby Mornington Island. She remained there in enforced exile until the 1980s when the Land Rights movement saw small outstations erected on Bentinck.

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Remoteness and lack of infrastructure meant, however, that Sally would spend most of her life away from her country. Yet she always kept it in her heart, singing its songs with family and maintaining Kaiadilt culture.

In 2005 Sally was introduced to painting, and her unique style, vision and story captured the imagination of the art world. Mixing wet paints on canvas to create tonal shifts, she evoked geological or ecological flux on Bentinck, such as the transition from land to sea. Hard-edged colour contrasts describe structures that for thousands of years have remained unchanged, such as the ancient rock-walled fish traps, or the cliffs bordering the ocean. Sally's paintings resonate with the colours and textures of Kaiadilt country and the intensity and complexities of her history and memories.

Story place King Alfred's Country

2006

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Beverly Knight and Anthony Knight OAM, Melbourne

Dibirdibi Country – Topway

2006

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2008

The Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant

2008.227

Dibirdibi Country

2007

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne

My father's Country

2006

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of the Harding family, Sydney

This work pictures Thundi, the country surrounding a river near the north-eastern tip of Bentinck Island, which was the country of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's father, Thunduyingathi Bijarrb. The collector of this work travelled to Mornington Island to meet the artist and asked about the painting. Gabori noted that the large circle was an important fishing area at the mouth of the river. When asked about the yellow marks she replied that they were her favourite fish, the snapper. She then found a paintbrush and added more yellow marks to indicate the abundance of these fish at Thundi and the importance of the area as a key fishing ground for Kaiadilt people.

Birmuyingathi Maali Netta

Loogatha

Kaiadilt born 1942

Mirdidingkingathi Juwurnda

Sally Gabori

Kaiadilt c. 1924–2015

Warthadangathi Bijarrba

Ethel Thomas

Kaiadilt born 1946

Thunduyingathi Bijarrb May

Moodoonuthi

Kaiadilt 1929–2008

Kuruwarriyingathi Bijarrb

Paula Paul

Kaiadilt born c. 1937

Wirrngajingathi Bijarrb

Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatjil

Kaiadilt 1935–2009

Rayarriwarrtharrbayingathi

Mingungurra Amy Loogatha

Kaiadilt born 1942

Makarrki – King Alfred's Country

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2009 with funds from

Professor John Hay, AC, and Mrs Barbara Hay

through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

2009.195

Makarrki was an important hunting ground. Sally often recalled the exploits of her brother-in-law Tarurukingathi Kulkitji (Buddy) who wrestled with dugongs there. It was also the Country of her elder brother, Makarrkingathi Dingkarringathi Thuwathu Bijarrb (King Alfred). King Alfred was a strong warrior and the leader of the main Kaiadilt clan in the years prior to their removal to Mornington Island. During the late 1940s, a period of intense conflict caused by prolonged drought, King Alfred took the life of Buddy, before Buddy's brother, Kabararjingathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori killed the King and took his younger sister, Sally, as his wife.

Birmuyingathi Maali Netta

Loogatha

Kaiadilt born 1942

Mirdidingkingathi Jurwunda Sally

Gabori

Kaiadilt c. 1924–2015

Warthadangathi Bijarrba Ethel

Thomas

Kaiadilt born 1946

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Kaiadilt 1929–2008

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Kaiadilt 1935–2009

Rayarriwarrtharrbayingat

Mingungurra Amy Loogatha

Kaiadilt born 1942

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Dulka Warngiid

2007

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Catherine Allen,

Carolyn Berger and Delma Valmorbida, 2007

2007.527

For kids

This work is titled *Dulka warngiid*, meaning 'land of all'. It was painted by seven senior Kaiadilt women artists who were born and grew up on Bentinck Island before being moved to Mornington Island Mission. This island measures only twenty kilometres from west to east and twelve kilometres from north to south. Each artist painted Country that is special to her, creating a shared vision of their tiny island home, the saltwater that surrounds it, the sun and the sky. Viewing the work from left to right, can you see the different individual styles of each artist?

All the fish

2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Jim Cousins AO and Libby Cousins through

the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.612

This painting is one of around six large-scale works produced within the first year of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's career. These works conjure a large school of fish erupting from the bountiful reef-laden waters around Bentinck Island to feed on smaller fish or other marine creatures at the surface. As each fish breaks the water's surface a wave radiates from the disruption and, for a few seconds, a circle, or hundreds of them, remain as the memory of the interaction between beings and place. These paintings allude to schools of mullet, queen fish, mackerel or tuna, but never figuratively depict them. Instead, Gabori focused on the impact they and their activities had on the land.

For kids

Sally Gabori's homeland of Bentinck Island is surrounded by a large system of stone fish traps used to catch all kinds of fish. Gabori has happy memories of the many fish she saw in the sea, as well as memories of fish caught in nets or speared. She represents these fish as circles of different colours: blue represents the parrot fish, red the mangrove jack, yellow the golden trevally, and purple the mullet. The many circles also suggest bubbles and ripples made by a school of jostling fish on the surface of the sea.

How many of each type of fish can you see?
Have you ever been fishing?

Early paintings

In 2005 on Mornington Island, home to the Lardil people, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori at about eighty-one years of age first picked up a paintbrush and began to memorialise her homeland. Although the Lardil people have a strong and proud art history, the Kaiadilt community to which Sally belonged had little exposure to art, or any comparable form of mark-making, prior to 2005. Traditional tools, objects, or bodies were scarcely painted, as was the tradition elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia. The sole occasion of Kaiadilt people ever recording their stories through art-like media was in a group of drawings made at the request of ethnologist Norman B. Tindale during his expedition to Bentinck Island in 1960, today housed in the South Australian Museum.

At community painting workshops Sally – previously known as a weaver of traditional bags, baskets and nets – became the first Kaiadilt person to engage with art, and her love of paint and painting quickly grew. Her first painting *My Country*, 2005, is included here, and featured

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significant sites and memories from her birthplace around Mirdidingki Creek on the south side of Bentinck Island. A further six of Sally's earliest works focus on the places of her family: Thundi, her father's country, Makarrki, her brother's Country, and Dibirdibi Country, associated with her husband.

Within months, Sally had developed both in confidence and technique and was producing four-and-a-half-metre paintings crowded with hundreds of concentric circles, conjuring frenzied schools of fish feeding at her favourite fishing places on Bentinck. Paintings from late 2005 through to 2007 show the rapid development of an expressive gestural style that would become her trademark through the later years of her career and life.

My father's Country – plenty fish

2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist, Mornington Island

My father's Country

2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist, Mornington Island

My Country

2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist, Mornington Island

This painting was created at a workshop in 2005 at the Mornington Island Arts and Crafts Centre and was the first ever produced by the artist. During the dry season, many of Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's family returned to Bentinck Island, but she remained on Mornington Island with her husband. She was persuaded to attend a painting workshop led by curator Simon Turner from Woolloongabba Art Gallery. This first work was praised by senior Lardil artist Melville Escott. Gabori soon developed a love of painting and returned to the art centre whenever possible. Upon her family's return, Gabori showed them her paintings and they rallied around her, creating a small but incredibly vibrant Kaiadilt art movement.

My Country

2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist, Mornington Island

Thundi: My Father's Country

'This is the big river at Thundi on Bentinck Island. This is where my father was born.'

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI

Thundi (or Thunduyi) is Sally's father's Country, adjacent to a river near the island's northern tip, which runs parallel to a ridge of tall sandhills that skirt its north-eastern coast. A large saltpan marks the wet season extent of the river, while its dry season form is flanked by mangroves. The river empties out onto a large sand and mud flat to the north, which reveal large sandbars at low tide.

Many of Sally's early paintings feature this river area, an important fishing place. Colourful flashes of paint indicate her favourite fish species, the snapper. Later paintings of Thundi were generally much more austere in tone, often utilising only two colours to create fields of tonal and emotional intensity. Her stark black-and-white painting, *Thundi* 2011, evokes the sandflats and sandbars off Thundi's coast, pictured as if glistening in the light of a full moon.

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Sally overpainted other works in white, evoking sandflat ripple patterns, frothing water at the river's mouth, small lapping waves, storms and cyclones approaching from the northern Gulf, or the complete inundation of the area during extreme weather.

Many of Sally's Thundi paintings connect important sites along the north-eastern side of Bentinck Island, including Makarrki, her brother's country at the head of the large river at the centre of the north shore, and Rukuthi, one of her family's main living sites at Oak Tree Point at the island's north-eastern tip.

Thundi

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Adelaide

For kids

This artist represents Thundi, her father's Country, which is located beside a river near the north-eastern tip of Bentinck Island. To make these paintings, Gabori worked very quickly, applying white brushstrokes over and into brightly coloured wet paint before it had dried completely. The soft pinks and whites are mixed in the process of painting the canvas. Other paintings of Thundi in this exhibition are different in colour.

Can you find one which is mainly black with white and grey brushstrokes?

Thundi

2012

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Annabel Myer and Rupert Myer AO

Thundi

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Dr Terry Cutler, Melbourne

Thundi

2012

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Patrick Corrigan AM

Mirdidingki: My Country

‘This is where I was born on Bentinck Island next to the Mirdidingki River.’

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI

Sally’s ‘My Country’ paintings celebrate her birthplace Mirdidingki, centred on a small creek that runs from inland Bentinck Island to a small bay on the southern coast, facing the massive rivers of the mainland Gulf coast. Sally was born here around 1924.

Mirdidingki Creek is tidal, connected to the ocean at high tide and separated by long sand flats at low tide. Inland, saltpans emerge, while at the creek’s edges mangroves create a heavily forested tidal estuary towards its mouth. Halfway along the creek, a small but striking island devoid of vegetation emerges from the mangroves – a piercing circle of white among the green trees. Nearer the creek’s mouth, a branch extends to the east along the back-beaches of the bay. 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

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coral reefs teeming with turtles, fish and other sea life.

Sally's paintings of Mirdidingki often include strong linear icons at their centre, referencing the creek there, while others depict either the tree she was born under, the places loved ones are buried, the sand flats where shell fish are collected, or the camp site and middens where shells amassed over millennia.

My Country

2010

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

My Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Robert and Colette Goodliffe, Melbourne

My Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

My Country

2010

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

Dingkari: My Grandfather's Country

'Dingkari is an outside hunting ground to the south of Bentinck Island. It has a shallow reef but has very deep water right next to it. It is a good place to hunt dugong and turtle.'

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI

Dingkari (Dingkarri) is a small islet and important tidal hunting ground to the south of Sweers Island and the Country of Mirdidinkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's grandfather Dingkarringathi, and brother, Makarrkingathi Dingkarringathi Thuwathu Bijarrb (King Alfred). It is partially connected to Sweers by a long series of shallow rocky reefs called Karandjalt, which extend into the waters of the Gulf like a long hook, connecting the islet to the base of Bardathurr, the highest hill on Kaiadilt Country and the final resting place of Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod Ancestor.

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Dingkari was revered as a hunting area, as the deep channels that flow at the edge of the reef attract dugong, turtle and large species of fish. Kaiadilt men would travel to Dingkari using walpu, Kaiadilt log rafts. Most of Sally's Dingkari paintings feature circular, oval or rectangular shapes, reflecting the islet at different stages of tidal flux. Some show the interconnecting reefs between Sweers Island and Dingkari, while in others the islet is alone and adrift in a sea of paint.

My grandfather's Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

Dibirdibi Country

2012

synthetic polymer paint on bark

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2012

NGA 2012.1832

These bark paintings were among the artist's last works, painted in late 2012. They are atypical for Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, as her Kaiadilt people had no tradition of painting on bark. They were produced in conversation with Yolgnu artist Nyapanyapa Yunupingu whom Gabori met at the opening of *unDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial* in April 2012. Over the opening weekend Yunupingu's sister, the revered artist Gulumbu Yunupingu, passed away. As a senior Aboriginal woman, Gabori sat with Yunupingu, consoling her in her time of loss. In response, Yunupingu prepared and sent these two sheets of bark to Gabori, who painted them in white, a tribute to her friend who is known for her paintings composed of multiple markings of white ochre on bark.

Dibirdibi Country

2012

synthetic polymer paint on bark

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 2012

NGA 2012.1831

Dibirdibi Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Harriett and Richard England, Sydney

Dibirdibi Country

2009

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of John McPhee, Sydney

Dibirdibi Country

2012

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2014 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser AM, and

Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery |

Gallery of Modern Art Foundation

2014.323a-d

Nyinyilki

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Colin Golvan, 2008

2008.510

Nyinyilki: Mainbase

‘Nyinyilki or main base is where we built the outstation when we got our land back. That is why we call it main base as well.’

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI

Nyinyilki sits on the south-eastern coast of Bentinck Island and is situated next to a large permanent freshwater lagoon. Following the Kaiadilt Land Rights battles, an outstation was established there and is often referred to as ‘Main Base’ or ‘Main Camp’. Sally and the group of senior women whom she lived and worked with would return to Nyinyilki whenever possible during the dry season and to Mornington Island during the wet season due to a lack of infrastructure and resources. Many Kaiadilt know the settlement by the colloquial name ‘the old ladies’ camp’.

A large shallow bay joins this stretch of coast to Barthayi (Fowler Island) in the south, and to the east, a long rocky spit creates safe water where dugongs proliferate.

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The beach extends west to Mirdidingki, Sally's birthplace, and Kabararriji, where her husband Kabararrjingathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori was born. Sally's paintings of Nyinyilki are energised with memories of people and places from this area and have personal, familial, cultural and political importance. They often reference the rectangular freshwater lagoon of Nyinyilki, fringed by jungle; the semicircular rock-walled fish trap near the settlement; the cliffs to the west; sandbars that enable travel between Bentinck Island and Barthayi at low tide; and trails and tracks left on the water's surface and see grass beds by dugong.

Dibirdibi Country: My Husband's Country

'This is my husband's country on Bentinck Island. Its real name is Kabararri but I call it after his language name.'

MIRDIDINKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI

The overwhelming majority of Mirdidinkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's paintings focused on Dibirdibi Country, the Country associated with the Rock Cod Ancestor and her husband.

At the end of the last ice age, sea levels rose dramatically. The former Lake Carpentaria joined the Arafura Sea to the west and the Torres Strait to the east. The land surrounding the Wellesley Ridge became inundated, cutting off Bentinck Island from the mainland and from its neighbouring islands. Kaiadilt history commemorates this climatic episode – which occurred some 6000 years ago – through the narrative of Dibirdibi who carved the South Wellesley Islands off from one another with his ventral fins. Dibirdibi's creative and destructive journey ended at Bardathurr on Sweers Island where he was caught and eaten.

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His liver was discarded at the sea's edge, transforming into a freshwater spring that provides a reliable water source to this day. (Adapted from Mornington Island Art statement.)

For Gabori, ancestral story and intimate personal history overlap: her husband Kabararrjingathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori was also called Dibirdibi as the inheritor of the story and associated places. Pat's birthplace, his Country, is Kabararrji, which sits next to Sally's Country near the creek at Mirdidingki. In painting Dibirdibi Country Sally may be referring to Pat's birth Country or to the places he is associated with through ownership of that narrative cycle.

The Dibirdibi paintings depict inland estuarine salt pans, ironstone ridges, mangrove swamps, rivers, reefs, rock-walled fish traps, a freshwater waterhole and hunting ground covered in waterlilies and brimming with turtles, grasslands where malji was collected to make grass baskets, and Bardathurr, where Dibirdibi came to rest.

Nyinyilki

2010

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Beverly Knight and Anthony Knight OAM, Melbourne

Nyinyilki is a key work in Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's oeuvre. Its composition is evocative of the forms and phenomena around Nyinyilki, referencing the tracks feeding dugongs make on the surface of the water, on seagrass beds and on the massive sand bars, some of which link the beach at Thubalkarrawuru, to the west of Nyinyilki, to Thawalt, the north-western point on Barthayi (Fowler Island), a few kilometres south.

This work is reproduced as part of Gabori's major public artwork at the Brisbane International Airport, which spans more than 700 metres of the arrivals concourse, providing a welcome from a senior Indigenous person and artist to visitors from around the world.

Dibirdibi Country

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Purchased 2008 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM,
and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the
Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

2008.220

Dibirdibi Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection

Dibirdibi country

2009

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Estate of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

Dibirdibi Country

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Indigenous Art, 2010

2010.72

For kids

Sally Gabori represents her late husband's Country on Bentinck Island, where the liver of Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod Ancestor, was thrown into the sea and created a freshwater well that never ran dry. Dibirdibi is bush country, with a big saltpan and a freshwater swamp. The painting expresses the artist's love of this place. Gabori has invented her own way of painting. She uses a small brush loaded with paint to build up layers of colour.

What do you notice about the way that she applies colour? What colours can you see?

Dibirdibi Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Beverly Knight and Anthony Knight OAM, Melbourne

Dibirdibi Country

2008

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Collection of Beverly Knight and Anthony Knight OAM, Melbourne

Dibirdibi Country charts the coastline of south-eastern Bentinck Island, which holds many sites of great significance to Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori. One of the most documented of the artist's works, it includes references to the fig trees where her husband and mother-in-law were born at Kabararrji and Thubalkarrawuru, respectively, the billabong at Nyinyilki where the Kaiadilt outstation settlement was established following Land Rights battles and the beach at Kalthuriy, to the east of Nyinyilki, where her mother's father was born.

This work is reproduced at sixteen metres in length along the central wall of the Banco Court, the ceremonial court in the Queen Elizabeth II Court of Law (Brisbane Supreme and District Court) 'to celebrate and remind us of different perspectives and different ways of seeing'.

Dibirdibi Country

2011

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Rockhampton Art Gallery, Rockhampton

Winner 2012 Gold Award. Gift of the Moya Gold Trusts through the

Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust inner 2012 Gold Award. Gift of the

Moya Gold Trusts through the Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust 2012.007