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Peer reviewed

MARY GAGLER

## Exhibition Review: Ancestry and Kinship in Yolŋu Curation

### Abstract

*The author reviews the exhibition *Maḏayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, held at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, September 4–December 4, 2022; and the Katzen Arts Center, American University, Washington, DC, February 4–May 14, 2023. The exhibition’s tour continues at The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, February 3–July 14, 2024; and Asia Society, New York, September 24, 2024–January 5, 2025.*

**Keywords:** *Yolŋu, bark painting, Aboriginal Australia, Indigenous art, transcultural, Indigenous curation*

In *Maḏayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, the first museum exhibition of its kind outside of Australia, Indigenous curators focus on the Yolŋu art of bark painting. “*Maḏayin*” translates as “sacred,” “hidden,” and “beautiful,” and the show exemplifies its title; its curators have guarded the most sacred aspects of Yolŋu culture while revealing layers of information about the ancestry and networks of kinship present in bark painting. The exhibition welcomes visitors into a visual language of clan patterns and creation stories, which have been reproduced by the Yolŋu in ephemeral forms such as sand sculptures and ceremonial body painting since before recorded time. The exhibition is monumental, with over ninety paintings on tree bark and a selection of full-wall video installations. Its four-stop tour of the United States began at the Hood Museum of Art, with opening events at each venue bringing Yolŋu people and global audiences together.

*Maḏayin* is the result of a seven-year collaboration between Buku-Larrŋnggay Mulka Centre, an Indigenous-run art center in the small town of Yirrkala, in the East Arnhem region of Australia’s Northern Territory, and the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection in Charlottesville, Virginia. Curators Henry Skerritt and Kade McDonald worked with first-time Yolŋu curators Djambawa Marawili, Yinimala

Gumana, Wäka Munungurr, and W. Waŋambi (1962–2022). In the exhibition catalogue, Skerritt discusses their curatorial process, saying that “the Yolŋu curatorial team were concerned to show the works according to Yolŋu principles—principles of kinship and the connectivity between people and places.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, connectivity meant seeking Yolŋu community approval for each painting included in the show, commissioning works to fill gaps, and exhibiting works by a representative group of artists, from emerging to old masters.

Yolŋu contact with cultural outsiders expanded in the first half of the twentieth century, leading to relationships with anthropologists and missionaries and, later, gallerists and art collectors who commissioned bark paintings as portable, nonceremonial expressions of Yolŋu visual culture. These early commissions served a diplomatic role, which is echoed in the curation of *Maḍayin*, for which Yolŋu cultural leaders designed a strategy to share sacred meaning of Yolŋu culture. The earliest works in the show convey the formal and philosophical origins of the bark painting tradition, while more contemporary works represent newer art trends and the strength arising from Indigenous kinship systems.

The first thing visitors to *Maḍayin* learn is that the bark paintings, which pull viewers in with their visual density and dazzling patterns, are based on creation myths. Djambawa Marawili AM, the leader of the Madarrpa clan, explains that Yolŋu bark paintings are “more than fairy tales and pretty pictures. These stories and paintings were given to us by our elders, passed through the generations.”<sup>2</sup> Elders are a key aspect of the Yolŋu concept of kinship, which describes a connection based on the shared origins of people and the land, including its plants, animals, and ancestral spiritual beings. Each painting details part of a story, passed down through generations, that expresses belonging within the kinship system.

Performances, catalog essays, wall texts, and the exhibition website enliven hidden connections in the work. Visitors can see how painted clan patterns and epic poems called “songlines” connect through their shared ancestral identity as parts of a visual and auditory map. During the opening events at each exhibition venue, Yolŋu sing these ancestral songlines to bring the spirits back to the paintings, reuniting them with barks that have traveled far away. Describing the curating process, curator W. Wanambi sheds light on the animated charge of bark paintings and how they fit into Yolŋu principles of kinship:

I always say, you shouldn't show one person's painting on its own. Paintings need family, to show they're connected through authority and responsibility . . . For me, when I look at *ḡuwayak* (bark

painting), I don't see something flat. It's like the surface of the water. When you look at it, to us Yolŋu we just dive into family, kinship, land, colors, the strength and the power—it just draws us in.<sup>3</sup>

Seeing these bark paintings in person brings visitors into contact with the Yolŋu lived experience. For Yolŋu, everything in the world is designated as one of two complementary moieties: Dhuwa or Yirritja. These groups interconnect through marriage and ceremony, and they also determine intricate ways of relating to other people and the natural world. The exhibition layout reflects this important aspect of Yolŋu kinship: works by Dhuwa and Yirritja artists are in separate galleries that connect through narrative links.

One point of entry for these works is the purely aesthetic, but the Yolŋu curators have objectives beyond this framing: “Americans will come to the paintings through the art world, but . . . we want you to come to the grassroots level, to sit in the sand and let us show you a different way of coming to the paintings.”<sup>4</sup> By showcasing select works accompanied by stories, the curators invite viewers to immerse themselves in the Yolŋu worldview, sharing the embedded knowledge or *dhudji-dhawu* (the deep story) that connects all living things. Yolŋu paintings are not mere depictions of a deep, ancestral story, but manifestations of ancestral energy itself. Once the viewer knows this, each sea turtle or emu figure, for example, is charged with meaning. This aesthetic-cum-metaphysical concept is foreign to most outside audiences, but the Yolŋu curators embrace a calling toward cultural diplomacy, sharing layers of their philosophy in order to integrate their global audience as kin.

The show opens with a full-wall video installation (Fig. 1) of an eleven-minute looped video, *Gapu Munurru ga Balamumu Mirikindi | Deep Waters of the Dhuwa and Yirritja Moieties*, by Ishmael Marika of the Mulka Project.<sup>5</sup> In it, two clan elders are seen singing a welcoming and strengthening song while clapping rhythmic clap sticks overlaid with footage of ocean waves.<sup>6</sup> The video casts undulating light onto the exhibition's earliest work, a 1935 painting on flattened eucalyptus tree bark by clan leader Wongu Mununggurr. This bark piece is encased in Plexiglass on an elevated plinth, its presentation a marker of its historical significance as a work that communicated trust between Indigenous Australians and European visitors during a time when tensions with foreigners were mounting.<sup>7</sup> In this first gallery, one work presents an early instance of the historical technique of fine lines of ochre pigment on bark, and the other showcases Yolŋu filmmaking in one of several video installations that at once punctuate and ground the exhibition, giving a sense of geographic place through scenes of ceremonial dancing in Arnhem Land.

Throughout the show, the formal differences between the bark paintings and video installations make an intriguing contrast that communicates the heart of the exhibition: ancestral energy is present in Yolŋu art across time, distance, and mediums.



Figure 1. Installation view of *Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala* showing Ishmael Marika, *Gapu Munurru ga Balamumu Mirikindi | Deep Waters of the Dhuwa and Yirritja Moieties*, 2022, and Wongu Munungurr, *Sacred Clan Designs*, 1935. The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, September 4–December 4, 2022. Photograph by Rob Strong. Courtesy Hood Museum of Art



Figure 2. Installation view of *Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*. The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, September 4–December 4, 2022. Photograph by Rob Strong. Courtesy of Hood Museum of Art

Upstairs at the Hood Museum, bark paintings—nearly all in the traditional color palette of iron-rich red, clay white, yellow ochre, and carbon black, and some reaching over three meters tall—towered in the galleries (Fig. 2). Geometric clan patterns unify the compositions, providing a visual rhythm that ricochets around the gallery and formalizes the dynamic connections among all things.

In an adjoining gallery, a commissioned large-scale work by Marrnyula Manunggurr, *Djapu’Miny’tji / Djapu’ Clan Design* (Fig. 3), demonstrates the flexibility of ancient forms. The artist has painted variations of the Djapu’ clan design on 299 bark pieces, which together make up a three-and-a-half-meter-tall “puzzle-work” installation.<sup>8</sup> Marrnyula isolates the grid-like components of the Djapu’ clan pattern, making the subject of the work the clan design itself.<sup>9</sup>

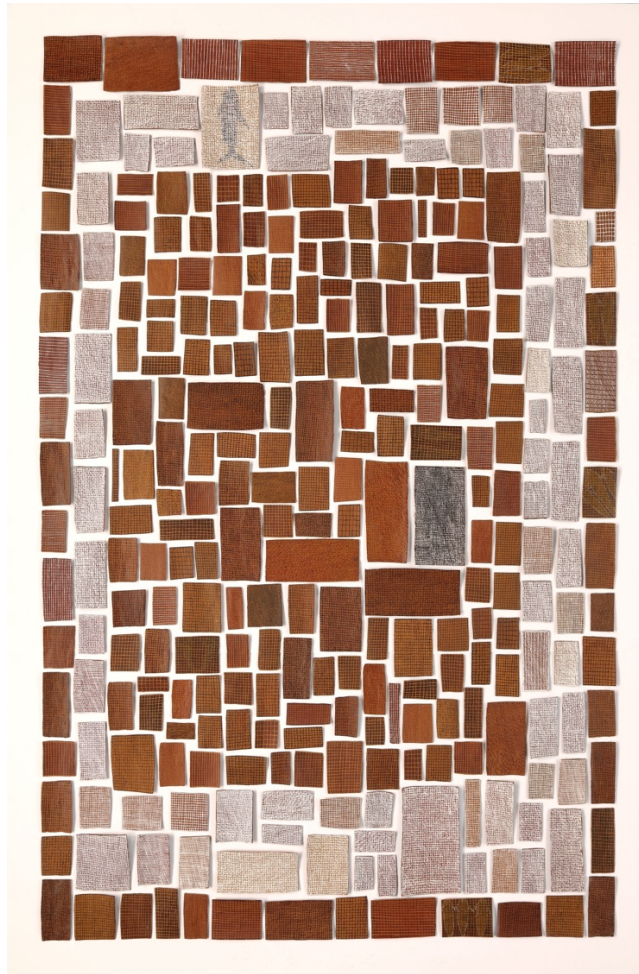


Figure 3. Marrnyula Manunggurr, *Djapu’Miny’tji | Djapu’ Clan Design*, 2019. Natural pigments on 299 eucalyptus bark pieces, 137 13/16 x 75 3/8 in. (350 x 187 cm), Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. The 2017–19 Kluge-Ruhe Madayin Commission, purchased with funds provided by William Alexander and Terrence Sykes, 2021, 2020.0002.001-299. Courtesy of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection

While the patterns in Yolŋu painting can first appear abstract, sitting with this work reveals how the narrative content is present in the smallest of details. Changes in line and color evoke different qualities of ancestral stories and contemporary traditions. The wall text for *Djapu'Miny'tji* describes its story: Mäna, the ancestral shark, became caught in a woven fish net. He summoned his strength and swung his head to break free of the net, creating a bend in the river.

On one bark piece in the work, steep diagonal lines cut through a grid of white squares, the white ochre representing clear river water. In the upper left, the shadow of a shark figure appears under the water's surface. On another bark piece, thin black lines meet at right angles to depict a fishing net, while also depicting darker water muddied by Mäna thrashing to escape.<sup>10</sup> Multivalent patterns activate each surface, referencing multiple ancestral, cultural, and natural events that bridge time. Shifting grids and sharp angles evoke the flash of anger in a captured animal's eyes, the shimmering surface of disturbed water, the actions of women moving like the shark in a contemporary ceremony, and the net-like designs that are painted on boys' chests for their initiation ceremony.<sup>11</sup>

Fine lines—painted with a steady hand onto bark using only a few long bristles of human hair—create an optical vibration in each gallery. This effect, called *bir'yun*, is essential to Yolŋu art as it is the presence of ancestral energy, manifested as various specific qualities in each story.<sup>12</sup> Clan patterns on different works create a shifting and dynamic surface that alters the viewing experience, as if the bark itself is moving on the wall. The selection of paintings underscores changes in the role of clan patterns across a timespan of eight decades, from figurative compositions to predominantly geometric works.

Bark painting motifs from the 1930s to the 1980s often depict multiple scenes from a myth narrative in a single work, and can require some amount of cultural information to discern the intended emotional tone and political theme.<sup>13</sup> More recent works show less sacred information and instead isolate a scene from a myth system, giving more space for the optical effects of clan patterns and in turn heightening the experiential quality of standing in front of the work.

In *Djambarrpuyŋu Mäna | Shark of the Djambarrpuyŋu Clan* (Fig. 4), Wilson Manydjarri Ganambarr paints the body of the ancestral shark Mäna in yellow ochre. In this episode of the shark's journey, a spear pierces Mäna's side and he burrows into the land, creating the clan patterns that emanate from his wounded body. The wall text explains the traditional myth: the larger hidden shark in the top half of the painting is a timeless version of the ancestral shark who continues to travel the earth in spirit form. While art-world discourse might read this as a sequential picture of a single shark before and after death, the curators offer a

chance to see the work in a new way: experiencing the imagery as a manifestation of the ancestral shark forever in mid-journey.

Through artistic expressions of a deep relationship to the natural world and ancient stories, *Maḏayin* presents a culture that has changed over time and celebrates individuality that is strengthened by a bedrock of connection. *Gurrutu*, the system of kinship, is made up of the paintings as well as the people who made them, the trees that the bark came from, the land, the sea, and all creatures. *Gurrutu* is both a way of relating and a source of strength, generated by identifying and connecting with one's original place within a vast cosmological web. Seeing all these works together connects us to our deepest identities, showing that we are connected to nature—and through it, to each other.



Figure 4. Wilson Manydjarri Ganambarr, *Djambarrpuyŋu Mäna | Shark of the Djambarrpuyŋu Clan*, 1996. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 75 7/8 x 22 3/4 in. (192.72 x 57.79 cm), Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. Gift of John W. Kluge, 1997, 1996.0035.017. Courtesy of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection



In the most recent works in the exhibition, individual styles and more non-ceremonial subjects emerge, especially among the works by women artists. In Dhambit Munungurr's *Bänhdharra | Ocean* (Fig. 5), the artist uses blue acrylic paint to depict a boisterous contemporary maritime scene in which Dhuwa and Yirritja clans make contact with sailors from Sulawesi.<sup>14</sup> Three giant octopuses indicate that the scene takes place in the waters of the Warramiri clan, at a specific ocean locale near the sacred rock Dhambit, for whom the artist is named.<sup>15</sup> Ancestral and contemporary timelines overlap in the jovial energy and place-making details of the composite scene.



Figure 5. Dhambit Munungurr, *Bänhdharra | Ocean*, 2019. Natural pigments and acrylic on eucalyptus bark. 78 11/32 x 42 17/32 in. (199 x 108 cm), Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. The 2017–19 Kluge-Ruhe Madayin Commission. Museum purchase, 2020, 2020.0007.001. Courtesy of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection

Contemporary paintings in the exhibition show the flexibility of tradition as they move away from depictions of mythic beings and toward secular stories, observable landscapes, and the night sky (Fig. 8). The formal techniques used also shift, as artists break from traditional compositions, yet the ancestral significance of these works persists regardless of content or form. Women artists play a unique role in the expanding of conceptual vocabulary, as their rights to depict certain subjects are restricted by ancestral custom. They experiment accordingly, with nonsacred subject matter that expresses their connection to the ancestral past and present.<sup>16</sup>

A notable example is Mulkun Wirrpanda's *Retja II | Rainforest II* (Fig. 6), which documents the artist's encyclopedic knowledge of edible plants that have kept Yolŋu communities healthy for millennia. She painted this work in order to transmit knowledge of the land and to protect future generations from the negative health impact of processed foods. Mulkun faced challenges when representing this subject; in order to accurately depict the ancestral energy suffusing the land, she had to listen to the plants: "I had to let the plants tell me what their secular identity or character was, by the way they grow or the way they look or express themselves. This gave me their rhythm, or their pattern."<sup>17</sup>

Artist Gunybi Ganambarr has applied his signature inventiveness to *Garrapara* (Fig. 7), carving the bark to resemble its painting's subject matter. The work's jagged top edge references a skinny fish and the thunderclouds, called Wanupini, found in Garrapara, a coastal area of Blue Mud Bay.<sup>18</sup> The composition's wavy lines represent the churning deep ocean currents of saltwater that meet the shore. Here, water becomes vapor and rises above mortuary sand sculptures to form clouds of life-giving rain. The composition blends forms from nature with traditional saltwater clan patterns, connecting the physical and metaphysical. The work is structured by the cycles of life and death and the enduring presence of ancestral time within them.<sup>19</sup>

*Madayin* succeeds in presenting some of the hidden, beautiful, sacred aspects of Yolŋu experience to non-Yolŋu people. Ample wall text and visual aids are spaced throughout the exhibition to help visitors unpack meanings and recognize complex patterns, clan identifications, and songlines. Additional online materials—including maps annotated by community elders, oral histories, and documentation of painting processes—deepen the viewing experience and form a global resource for Yolŋu culture.<sup>20</sup> A 3D rendering of the exhibition is available online, expanding access especially to Yolŋu who are unable to travel around the world to see their culture represented.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 6. Mulkuṅ Wirrpanda, *Retja II | Rainforest II*, 2017. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 52 3/4 x 31 3/32 in. (134 x 79 cm), Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. The 2017–19 Kluge-Ruhe Madayin Commission. Purchased with funds provided by Martha Burton and Margaret Vaden, 2020, 2020.0003.001. Courtesy of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection



Figure 7. Gunybi Ganambarr, *Garrapara*, 2018. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 64 11/16 x 21 1/4 in. (163 x 54 cm), Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. The 2017–19 Madayin Commission, 2020.EL.0004.017. Courtesy of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection

The bilingual catalogue (written first in Yolŋu Matha and translated into English) is a rich compendium of Indigenous Australian writing and perspectives on Yolŋu art and philosophical beliefs. Essays such as “Djulpan | The Seven Sisters or Pleiades Star Cluster” by Djerrkŋu Yunupiŋu and “Miljurr | Our Knowledge Comes Out from the Waterhole” by Wanyubi Marika connect viewers to cultural stories and messages of belonging to the natural world. Frances Morphy’s essay “When Two Worlds Meet: ‘Translation’ and Its Dilemmas” is an enlightening read on Yolŋu linguistics and metaphysics.

The works in the show present a conceptual message about universal kinship, and the public launch of the exhibition at each venue goes even further. Opening events bring Yolŋu people in contact with their global audience, creating occasions for interpersonal exchanges. The opening at the Katzen Art Center in Washington, DC, included short films and a four-panel symposium organized under the headings “Stewarding the Land,” “Harvesting the Land,” “Indigenous Voices in Museums,” and “Yolŋu Art Tomorrow.” These panels featured a delegation of Yolŋu artists and knowledge-holders who traveled to the opening, making the long journey from Arnhem Land.

At both the Katzen Art Center and the Hood Museum, members from local Indigenous groups joined the opening ceremonies to exchange gifts and perform welcoming protocols for Indigenous people who were visiting from afar. Yolŋu processional dances accompanied by song, percussion, and the bone-vibrating sound of the *yidaki* prepared the spaces for cultural transitions: Yolŋu paintings were physically entering North American exhibition spaces, and North American exhibition spaces were absorbed into a Yolŋu cultural expanse. These exchanges are acts of cultural diplomacy, building a structure for international kinship.

In her lecture at The Phillips Collection, which opened the Washington, DC, symposium, Dr. Jilda Andrews identified Indigenous cultural diplomacy as a cornerstone of Yolŋu art.<sup>22</sup> Andrews, a Yuwaalaraay cultural practitioner and museum ethnographer, was the inaugural keynote speaker for the W. Wanambi Distinguished Lecture, developed to honor the life of visionary Yolŋu leader W. Wanambi. She highlighted bark paintings’ intercultural orientation, stating that “these are translational objects . . . moveable forms of cultural knowledge . . . (that) find their platform in the outside world.”<sup>23</sup>

Andrews pointed to the Western museums’ presentations of the works as a powerful translational mechanism rather than something that makes it difficult to approach the works at a grassroots level.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, an art world framing invites viewers, conditioned for aesthetic transcendence in art museum contexts, to begin an interpretation that is closer to a personal spiritual experience. Andrews

suggested that the art museum context primes viewers for Yolŋu curation and a different way of coming to the paintings, to receive messages that are “of scales of time beyond your comprehension; webs of connection so multidimensional they collapse life forms into spirits and then back again.”<sup>25</sup>

Andrews offered that, over time, the full impact of these messages can be felt: that “these expressions are potent, patient, and cumulative.” The hopefulness in this claim is “not to deny the scale of destruction forged by colonization but to actively restore and repair.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Indigenous cultural diplomacy provides the model for mutual growth through intercultural encounters. Through careful listening to the truth in messages of kinship and connection offered by Yolŋu curation, vast networks of relationship can begin to be formed.



Figure 8. Installation view of *Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*. The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, September 4–December 4, 2022. Photograph by Rob Strong. Courtesy of Hood Museum of Art

*Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting From Yirrkala* is organized by the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia and Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre. The exhibition was on view at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire (September 4–December 4, 2022) and the Katzen Arts Center, American University, Washington, DC, (February 4–May 14, 2023). It will continue its tour at The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville (February 3–July 21, 2024), and Asia Society, New York, New York (September 24, 2024–January 5, 2025).

Mary Gagler is an independent art writer specializing in contemporary Australian Aboriginal art. She received her MA in art history and museum studies from The City College of New York, where she wrote about Gunybi Ganambarr's use of found objects in his sculptural work in a qualifying paper titled "Time and the Art of Gunybi Ganambarr: Asserting Primacy of Yolngu Culture through Found Objects." She presented this research at the College Art Association Annual Conference and The Courtauld Institute of Art's "Art History in Climate Change" online conference in 2020.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wukun Waŋambi, Henry Skerritt, and Kade McDonald, "Maḍayin: The Sacred and the Beautiful," in *Maḍayin: Waltjaŋ ga Waltjaŋbuy Yolŋuwu Miny'tji Yirrkalawuy | Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, ed. Wukun Waŋambi, Kade McDonald, and Henry Skerritt (New York: DelMonico Books D.A.P., 2022), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Djambawa Marawili, "Maḍayin'tja Dhuwalaya Ŋayi Marrparaŋ Our Sacred Knowledge Makes Us Strong," in *Maḍayin: Waltjaŋ ga Waltjaŋbuy Yolŋuwu Miny'tji Yirrkalawuy | Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, ed. W. Waŋambi, Kade McDonald, and Henry Skerritt (New York: DelMonico Books D.A.P., 2022), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Waŋambi, "Maḍayin," 26–28.

<sup>4</sup> Waŋambi, "Maḍayin," 26.

<sup>5</sup> "About The Mulka Project," Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, accessed April 8, 2023, <https://yirrkala.com/about-the-mulka-project/>. The Mulka Project is a cultural archive and training center in digital media, producing and repatriating film and digital media for future generations of Yolŋu.

<sup>6</sup> Ishmael Marika in conversation with Henry Skerritt and Kade McDonald, "Ishmael Marika reflects upon the opening of MADAYIN at the Hood Museum of Art," *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 8, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/ishmael-marika-reflects-upon-the-opening-of-madayin-at-the-hood-museum-of-art>.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description of the conflict and this piece's role in peace and trust negotiations, see Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, "Sacred Clan Designs, 1935," *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 9, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/ma%E1%B8%8Fayin-minytji-sacred-clan-designs/>.

<sup>8</sup> Marrnyula Munungurr, "Djapu' Clan Design, 2019," *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 9, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/djapu-minytji-djapu-clan-design/>.

<sup>9</sup> Yolŋu naming conventions dictate that artists are respectfully referred to by first name rather than by their second or family name.

<sup>10</sup> Marrnyula Mununggurr, “Nyumukuniny Nuwayak | Little Barks,” in *Maḍayin: Waltjan ga Waltjanbuy Yolŋuwu Miny’tji Yirrkalawuy | Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, ed. W. Waḅambi, Kade McDonald, and Henry Skerritt (New York: DelMonico Books D.A.P., 2022), 306.

<sup>11</sup> Mununggurr, “*Djapu’ Clan Design*, 2019.”

<sup>12</sup> Howard Morphy with Naminapu Maymuru-White and Frances Morphy, “Milniyawuy | The Milky Way” in *Maḍayin: Waltjan ga Waltjanbuy Yolŋuwu Miny’tji Yirrkalawuy | Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala*, ed. W. Waḅambi, Kade McDonald, and Henry Skerritt (New York: DelMonico Books D.A.P., 2022), 169. The Yolŋu technique of *bir’yun* is connected to ancestral beings, stories, histories, songs, and environment.

<sup>13</sup> Marawili, “Maḍayin’tja,” 42. The political import of a bark painting might include, for instance, emphasizing information about an individual’s land of origin when their family was forcibly removed from that land by colonists or missionaries. See Djambawa Marawili’s comments on the Yirrkala bark petition in 1963 and the 2008 Blue Mud Bay sea rights case, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, “*Ocean*, 2019,” *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 15, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/banhdharra-ocean>.

<sup>15</sup> Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, “*Ocean*, 2019.”

<sup>16</sup> For more information on how experimentation reveals new aspects of tradition, particularly in art by women artists, see Jennifer Loureide Biddle, *Remote Avant-Garde: Aboriginal Art under Occupation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 8-10, 132-138, 141-147.

<sup>17</sup> Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, “*Rainforest I*, 2017,” *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 8, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/retjai-rainforest-i/>.

<sup>18</sup> Gunybi Ganambarr, interview by author, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, “*Garrapara*, 2018,” *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 16, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience/pieces/garrapara-garrapara>.

<sup>20</sup> Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, “Explore Maḍayin,” *Maḍayin* (website), accessed April 8, 2023, <https://madayin.kluge-ruhe.org/experience>.

<sup>21</sup> “*Maḍayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala - Virtual 3D Tour*,” Hood Museum of Art, <https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/explore/exhibitions/madayin>.

<sup>22</sup> Jilda Andrews, “Flipping the Narrative: Historical Collections as Sites of Cultural Diplomacy” (W. Waḅambi Distinguished Lecture, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2023), accessed April 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/live/Pe4DPMqPPS0>.

<sup>23</sup> Andrews, “Flipping the Narrative.”



<sup>24</sup> “We are invited into what seems like realms of whimsy or otherworldliness; the fantastical creatures, expressive processes of country, the transfixing patterning, the codes, and then there is the story. Not always but we are sometimes helped towards those messages by story.” Andrews, “Flipping the Narrative.”

<sup>25</sup> Andrews, “Flipping the Narrative.”

<sup>26</sup> Andrews, “Flipping the Narrative.”