

## 1. Curatorial Statement

### Curators:

Kade McDonald and Helen Hughes

### Artists:

Marrnyula Mununngur, Barayuwa Mununngur, David Egan and Lisa Radford

### Overview of our proposed project, artists, and artworks:

Our proposed billboard installation shows Indigenous and non-Indigenous artworks side-by-side. Such cross-cultural collaborations are an important strategy for reflecting both the complexity and diversity of contemporary Australian art practices, as well the complexity and diversity of the Collingwood community. More specifically, our proposed project explores strategies of deflection, concealment and invisibility in contemporary painting practices from North East Arnhem Land and Melbourne. It is a collaboration between Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre in Yirrkala, and Gertrude Contemporary in Fitzroy, Melbourne.

*Buwuyak* is the Yolgnu word for ‘invisibility’. It has been used to describe a recent painting technique that deploys clan designs and patterns to obscure and overlay certain sacred elements embedded in the painting, shielding them from the perception of uninitiated viewers. **Marrnyula Mununngur** and **Barayuwa Mununngur** have adopted contemporary techniques to extend on the use and meaning of *buwuyak*. Their art, as with much of Yolgnu art, is a revelation at the same time as a withholding. You can see the designs but not understand their full meaning. You can hear the songs but must avert your eyes from some of the dance. There are mysteries and other dimensions that are not for us to know. And in this understanding is a revelation too. Their work requires an embrace of humility and patience.

Invisibility, deflection and camouflage are themes explored by Melbourne-based painters **Lisa Radford** and **David Egan**, who have, respectively, taken the busy, multi-coloured anti-graffiti fabrics used on public transport seating, and the backs of playing cards (always a veil that obscures the hand of cards from the card player’s opponent), as subjects for their recent paintings. In this way, Radford and Egan treat the canvas like a shield, something that deflects attention and abrogates interiority.

We propose to show one work each by these four artists on the billboards: Marrnyula Mununngur and David Egan for the first iteration, and Barayuwa Mununngur and Lisa Radford for the second iteration.

We submit this proposal in the hope that the juxtapositions of their work on these two billboards in Collingwood will inspire new ways of thinking about contemporary painting practices in Australia, to allow Yolgnu painting concepts and techniques to open up questions about non-Indigenous painting practices, and vice versa.

### Responsiveness to the site/and or format of the billboards:

Billboards, alleyways and street corners are sites that typically attract graffiti. In the past, **Lisa Radford**’s work has directly addressed council attempts to deflect graffiti through the use of anti-graffiti fabric on bus and tram seats. When transposed into acrylic paint on hardboard and exhibited in the gallery, these fabric patterns look like

detailed and colourful abstract paintings, yet they have another secret purpose: to deflect creative interventions on public property. More recently, Radford has worked with local fashion designer Hugh Westland (of label H.B. Peace) to experiment in making new types of fabrics. Westland and Radford use heat-transferrable plastic to iron texts onto sheets of fabric of varying transparency, which are then draped in front of the painting like a veil.

**David Egan**'s plant paintings, called 'plantings', use plants that he has picked on the walk from his home in Collingwood to his studio in Abbotsford as pigment. He then paints images of plants and gardens using the plant pigments he has collected on his walk in a type of self-reflexive gesture. The paintings are made by and depict one and the same thing: plants from people's front gardens on his walking path between Collingwood and Abbotsford. A non-industrial agent, the pigments from the plants fade over time when exposed to sunlight, thus literally becoming more invisible by the day.

Both Barayuwa and Marrnyula's work reveal patterns that are older and will outlive the environments in which they are exhibited. They are at once immortal and more ancient than any building in Melbourne. **Marrnyula** paints her sacred clan design, the fishtrap made of sticks that caught the ancestral shark at Wandawuy, her homeland. Marrnyula's fishtrap is executed in minimalist geometric grids with cross-hatching in each square. The negative space between the squares is the trap, which is invisible because of the patterning, and within the trap and the patterning is the Mana (the ancestral shark). Marrnyula paints with ochre on bark, using brushes made of human hair. Often, she paints on small barks, which are then hung en masse to form a bigger grid, echoing the grids within the painting themselves.

**Barayuwa** paints his mother's clan design. Within the design are the bones of the whale on the beach made sacred with the essence of Mirinyungu (ancestral whale from the waters of Yarrinya). The multiple directions of the bands of *miny'tji* (sacred clan design) relate to the sacred saltwater of Yarrinya, the chop on the surface of the water and the ancestral powers emanating from it. Barayuwa started to hide the elements of the whale skeleton in the patterns of his work. His paintings invite the viewer to discover these objects through suggestive props such as video, sculpture and photos. He photographs the development of each piece, helping reveal the hidden objects within the pattern. Videos of the water at Yarrinya are exhibited alongside his installations to point towards the meaning of his mother's sacred patterns (such as in his current exhibition as part of 'Primavera' at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney).

### **Considered and rich work that will extend the program:**

Where previous works exhibited on the billboards have all had a strong photographic base, the four artists we propose to present are all painters and thus command an entirely different use of the billboards — as an extension of barks or canvases, rather than a screen. Moreover, as a curated project presenting and comparing the work of four artists as opposed with just one, our proposed project allows a dialogue about invisibility, concealment, deflection and painting to develop *between* the two billboards and the surrounding environment over the course of the year.