A000-AUS- Bathurst Island-Male figure-Polychrome-Iron Wood-20th c

Case No.: Oceania

**Accession No.**

**Formal Label:**

**Display Description:**

From the Island of Bathurst off the northern coast of Australia. Aboriginal Tiwi Head made from iron wood with natural ochre as label -  Artist - Harold Munkara Ngaruwanajirri Nguiu Abstract male ancestral figure with bold white, yellow, and dark red paint over charcoal.

Tiwi art and language are markedly distinct from those of nearby Arnhem Land. Compared with Arnhem Land art, Tiwi art often appears to be abstract and geometric. With its strong patterns and use of color, Tiwi art is recognized as being very attractive and highly collectable.

Bathurst and Melville Islands are beautiful tropical islands that are home to nearly 2500 Tiwi-speaking people. There are three major art centers located on the Tiwi Islands: two on Melville Island (Munupi Arts and Crafts Association at Pirlangimpi and Jilamara Arts and Crafts at Milikapiti), and one on Bathurst

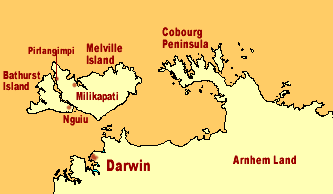
**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:**

**Geographical Area:**

**Map:**

The Tiwi Islands (Bathurst Island and Melville Island) are located 100 km north of Darwin. The dangerous waters separating the islands from mainland Australia have allowed the art and culture of the Tiwi people to develop in relative isolation.



**GPS coordinates:**

**Cultural Affiliation:** Tiwi Design at Nguiu).

**Media:**

**Dimensions:** Length 23.5"  (60 cm), Width 4"  (10 cm)

**Weight:**

**Condition:**

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

The community of Milikapiti has a population of around 400, and about 40 artists work regularly at the Jilamara art centre. As well as young and emerging artists, Jilamara has been the work place for distinguished elder artists including Kitty Kantilla, Freda Warlapinni, Pedro Wonaeamirri, Leon Puruntatameri, Timothy Cook and Maryanne Mungatopi. There are approximately 300 people at Pirlangimpi where Munupi is an active art centre. Some of the best known artists from Munupi include Susan Wanji Wanji, Reppie Orsto and Thecla Puruntatameri.

On the Tiwi Islands the art of body painting for ceremony has been practised for thousands of years. The decorative patterning of the Tiwi was also used on *tutini* (graveposts or Pukumani poles) and *tungas* (bark baskets). The traditional form of mark making was derived from the creation story Palaneri and associated stories - for more, see the pages on [Tiwi creation stories](http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/tiwi2.php) and [Tiwi ceremonies](http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/tiwi3.php).

Today Tiwi artists produce high quality paintings, fabrics and sculpture for exhibition in Australia and overseas. There is no 'story' as such for individual paintings. The main themes relate to the Pukumani ceremony and *pwoja* (body painting). The body painting imagery is used as a way of masking people's identity so the deceased cannot reclaim their loved ones. Detailed *jilamara* (design) also decorates the *tutini* in honour of the dead. These poles are now recreated for the fine art market, and are always made of cured ironwood. Smaller figurative and bird sculptures are also available.

Tiwi is the main language spoken on Melville and Bathurst Islands. Whilst English is taught at schools as a second language, the Tiwi communicate principally in their own language. Since contact with the western world the Tiwi language has changed and younger Tiwi now have difficulty understanding the older version.

Mangroves line the estuaries and some of the shorelines on both Bathurst and Melville island. The mangroves provide a habitat for a multitude of sea life: including cockles, mud crabs, mangrove 'worms' (actually shellfish) and many varieties of fish, especially Barramundi. Fruit bats, also known as flying foxes, are commonly found in the mangroves along with a multitude of birds. Tiwi believe *ningawi* - mysterious little people who are linked to ceremony - also inhabit the mangroves.

## Traditional culture

Each community has a store selling essential foods, but hunting for traditional food is still an important part of Tiwi life. On the land, people hunt for wallaby, lizards, possums, carpet snakes, pig, buffalo, flying foxes, bandicoot, turtle and seagull eggs and magpie geese. From the sea people hunt for turtle, crocodiles, dugong and they catch a large variety of fish. Tiwis collect cockles, oysters, yuwuli 'worms', mud mussels and crabs, bush apples, plums and yams, sugar bag (native honey), mangoes, cashews, paw paw and coconuts. The social aspects of hunting remain important - although traditional tools in many cases have been replaced by rifles, plastic buckets and 4WD vehicles. For Tiwi people, hunting, collecting and cooking food is a shared activity.

Dancing or *yoi* is a part of everyday life on the Tiwi islands. Tiwi inherit their totemic dance (for example, magpie geese) from their mother. There are a number of different skin groups on the Tiwi islands. These are patri-lineally handed down from generation to generation. Different dances are performed for different reasons. Some dance spontaneously happens at celebrations as an expression of emotion or some happen in a more structured manner at ceremonies. Dancing plays an important role in ceremonial events, for example, during the Pukumani ceremony the dances performed reflect the relationship to the deceased.

Narrative dances are performed and can depict everyday life or historical events. The bombing of Darwin in the Second World War has been portrayed through song and dance as have many other significant events. Singing always accompanies dancing and new songs are continually being created. The Tiwi traditionally paint their body for ceremony using natural ochre pigments. This tradition of mark making is the foundation for modern Tiwi art

## Tiwi country

The land on both islands is heavily forested, mainly with eucalyptus, stringy bark ironwood, woolly-butt, and paperbark. There are also tall cabbage palms, pandanus, wild plum, bush apple and yams provide a rich but seasonal source of food. The bush provides a habitat for many different animals, including wallaby, possum, bandicoot, snake, lizard, and numerous bird species. Waterholes fed from freshwater springs are often surrounded by pockets of monsoonal vineforest. Open marshlands and swamps can be found near the mouths of some waterways.

Beaches on the islands vary, with clay cliffs, rocky outcrops and expanses of white sand. The sands provide a haven for turtles to lay their eggs, the rocks provide a habitat for oysters to grow in abundance and the cliffs provide the varieties of ochre used by the Tiwi for painting. Crocodiles, sting rays, dugong, turtle, sharks, manta rays and many varieties of fish can be found in the waters surrounding the islands.



**References:**

**Price:  $1800**

# Tiwi Creation Stories

The following accounts of Tiwi creation stories were given by Maryanne Mungatopi in 1998.

## Palaneri - The Creation Period

The Tiwi Islands of Bathurst and Melville were created at the beginning of time during the dreaming or Palaneri. Before this time there was only darkness and the earth was flat.

Mudungkala, an old blind woman arose from the ground at Murupianga in the south east of Melville Island. Clasping her three infants to her breast and crawling on her knees she travelled slowly north. The fresh water that bubbled up in the track she made became the tideways of the Clarence and Dundas Straits, dividing the two islands from the mainland.

She made her way slowly around the land mass and then, deciding it was too large, created the Aspley Strait, which divides the Islands. Mudungkala then decreed that the bare islands be covered with vegetation and inhabited with animals so that her three children left behind would have food. After the Islands were made habitable she vanished. Nobody knows from where she came or, having completed her work, where she disappeared to.

## Purrukapali and Bima

Purrukapali was Mudungkala's only son. Every day his wife Bima went out gathering food for him, accompanied by their young son Jinani. In the same camp lived an unmarried man, Japara, who used to persuade Bima to leave her child under the shade of a tree and go into the forest with him.

On one very hot day Bima neglected her son too long and he died in the hot sun. On hearing of the child's death, Purrukapali became so enraged that he struck his wife on the head with a throwing stick and hounded her into the forest. In an effort to help the anguished father, Japara promised to restore the dead child to life within three days, but Purrukapali was inconsolable and the two men soon became locked in a deadly struggle.

Purrukapali picked up the dead body of his son and, walking backwards into the sea, he decreed that death should come to the whole world. As his son had died, the whole of creation would die and, once dead, never again would come to life. There was not death before this time.

The place where Purrukapali died, on the east coast of Melville Island, became a whirlpool so strong that anybody who approached it in a canoe would be drowned. When Japara saw what happened he changed himself into the moon. But he did not escape the decree of Purrukapali, for even though his is eternally reincarnated, he has to die for three days every month.

One can see on the face of the moon man the wounds that he received in his fight with Purrukapali. Bima, still bearing scars on her head, became Wayai, the curlew bird, that still roams the forest at night, wailing in remorse for her misdeeds and for the child that she lost.

## Tokampini

The death of Jinani brought the creation period to a close. This event was marked by the first Pukumani burial ceremony. Tokampini, the father of Bima called all the original creators, men and women, to the ceremony. These mythical beings were taught the rules of behaviour and the laws of marriage and tribal relationships that had always to be obeyed. Then the periods of light and darkness were established, determining the cycle of daily events. The creators transformed themselves into various creatures, plants, animals, natural forces or heavenly bodies - and spread across the islands. They are the Tiwi totems or skin groups.