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MASTERPIECES FOR MELBOURNE ANNOUNCEMENT NGV acquires works by major Kimberley artists, Rover Thomas and Alec Mingelmanganu



In the lead up to the National Gallery of Victoria's 150th birthday celebrations in 2011, the NGV today announced three outstanding acquisitions by renowned Indigenous artists, Rover Thomas (1926-98) and Alec Mingelmanganu (1905-81).

The acquisition of these three Indigenous works, *Yunurr (Spring Creek)* 1991 by Thomas and two Mingelmanganu works both titled, *Wanjina* 1980, was made possible by the Felton Bequest.

Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director, NGV said: "These are very significant additions to our collection of Indigenous art, one of the NGV's great treasures. They support of the NGV's ongoing commitment to collecting, celebrating and exhibiting the best examples of Australian Indigenous art."

Judith Ryan, Curator, Indigenous Art, NGV said: "These works are powerful expressions of Kimberley Indigenous culture. Both Thomas and Mingelmanganu have become leaders of Indigenous Australian art and represent strongly the traditions, history and experiences of their homeland."

Using earth pigments on canvas, Thomas' work *Yunurr* (pictured above) was inspired by the land at Texas Downs Station, where he worked as a stockman.

Thomas conceptualizes Red Fire or Kilfoyle Hill as a rounded squarish shape, bearing loose yellow dotting that stands out on black ground. The red-ochre angular section in the bottom left corner indicates the road for motor cars near the hill.

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Top left: Rover Thomas (Joolama) Kukatja/Wangkajunga c.1926–1998 *Yunurr (Spring Creek)* 1991, earth pigments on canvas, 60.0 x 100.0 cm
Felton Bequest, 2010, © The artist's estate courtesy Warmun Art Centre

Bottom right: Alec Mingelmanganu, Woonambal c.1910–1981, *Wanjina*, earth pigments and natural binder on canvas, 128.0 x 90.0 cm, Felton Bequest, 2010, ©
The artist's estate 2010, courtesy Aboriginal Artists Agency

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Ms Ryan said: “*Yunurr* is an exceptional example of Thomas’ style. It exhibits the magical balance of form and colour for which he is celebrated.”

Mingelmanganu’s works represent the anthropomorphic form of Wanjina, a spiritual ancestor of the Woororra, Ngarinyin and Woonambal peoples.

Wanjina created the laws of social behavior and is associated with the life-giving properties of water, bringing monsoonal rains and distributing the spirits of the unborn to their clan waterholes. Wanjina is illustrated as a solid mouthless figure with black eyes, dissected by a beak-like nose.

“The *Wanjina* works gracefully represent Mingelmanganu’s acute powers of observation and mastery of natural pigments,” said Ms Ryan.



Dr Vaughan said: “In securing these works, the Felton Bequest has inaugurated its significant contribution to the NGV’s 150th anniversary fundraising campaign. The bequest created by Alfred Felton in 1904, has provided the NGV’s greatest masterpieces and in our 150th year we are seeking new philanthropic contributions to ensure the NGV collection continues to acquire works of high significance for future generations to enjoy.”

These works are currently on display in the Indigenous Galleries at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Entry is free. Open 10am–5pm. Closed Mondays.

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Image: Alec Mingelmanganu, Woonambal c.1910–198, *Wanjina*, earth pigments and natural binder on canvas, 122.0 x 68.0 cm, Felton Bequest, 2010, © The artist’s estate 2010, courtesy Aboriginal Artists Agency

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