WATAMI MANIKAY
THE SONG OF THE WINDS
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Our Gurrųŋu, our kinship, has no edge.
No middle, no beginning, no end.
It connects us and surrounds us equally.
We are each the centre.
Everyone who ever was or ever will be.
We are all connected.

Due to the closing of the Art Gallery of New South Wales to minimise the spread of COVID-19, The Mulka Project has produced an immersive online rendition of Watami Manikay, making it possible for the public to experience this extraordinary installation piece.

Watami Manikay is an immersive collaborative performance by the Yolŋu digital artists of The Mulka Project. The collaboration weaves together the kinship relationships of artists from multiple connected Yolŋu clans. It links beyond people, to plants, animals, places, waters, seasons, and through to the winds. Watami Manikay cycles inside immersive landscapes. The space presents enveloping projections, paired with spatial audio, resulting in a mixed media canvas for our artists to present their digital performances, their selfhood and their unique relationships to each other and our world.

At the centre of Watami Manikay stands a unique larrakitj (hollow ceremonial logs) painted white with gapaŋ (ceremonial clay). The larrakitj represents the foundation gunđa (the rock). The unwavering rock grounds each clan to their identity whilst the ephemeral gapaŋ represents the changing clouds rebuilding anew with every passing season.

Watami Manikay is not intended to be a filmic linear narrative but rather a cyclical work with no beginning middle or end, akin to the seasons or Yolŋu kinship. Each moment in the work is a valid entry point and exit point.

Watami Manikay combines The Mulka Projects experience in high fidelity virtual reality film-making, digital animation techniques, precise projector mapping skills, and countless generations of evolving Yolŋu art practice to create a powerful Indigenous contemporary work ingrained in one of Australia’s oldest thriving cultures.
Wukuŋ Waŋambi places the viewer into his Marrakulu clans saltwater named Guḏultja. The surrounding waves rise over their heads and they are plunged into the darkness below, revealing the centre larrakitj (ceremonial hollow log) as a lone stringybark tree. The waves continue to rise and fall over the viewers heads, the rising waves strip the bark from the tree exposing it's smooth trunk, the waves then paint the trunk with gapaŋ (ceremonial clay), preparing it to be a canvas for Wukuŋ's minyti (design). The audience remains here, immersed in the underwater darkness. Wukuŋ sings his Marrakulu clan's Gapu manikay (Saltwater songline) and slowly countless schools of mullet arrive, spiralling and enveloping the viewer; during this time Wukuŋ's painted minyti (design) of the Sea Mullets emerge onto the larrakitj. The Sea Mullets swim off into the distance and the larrakitj fades to black leaving the audience in darkness.

As multimedia artist Patrina Munuŋgurr's face fades up out of the darkness her Djapu clan begin to sing the Wukuŋ manikay (Cloud songline). Old people sing this ancient songline to ask Yolŋu to paint themselves with gapaŋ (ceremonial clay) before they start performing bungul (ceremonial dance). Patrina displays the processes of preparing the gapaŋ which is used for ceremonies, artwork and for it's medicinal properties. She paints her forehead, which represents the Dhuwa waŋupini (cloud). As she covers her forehead, arms and hands with gapaŋ the centre black larrakitj is imprinted with Patrina's gapaŋ handprints, slowly the larrakitj is covered in gapaŋ and clouds till the entire larrakitj becomes white. “Past, present and future. Gapaŋ helps us to stand strong”.

Mundatjŋu Munuŋgurr transports the audience inland to her mothers, Wangurri clan homeland of Dhalinybuy, right to the edge of the tranquil Dhaliny River. The larrakitj is blanketed by an overhead shot of Dhaliny River, displaying it's grandness and placement. Mundatjŋu's Momu (her mothers, mother) sings Gapu Gularri (Fresh and Saltwater) Milkarri (female sorrow songline). Wangurri clan leader Buwathay Munyarryun can also be heard singing the Gapu Gularri manikay (songline), imagining the freshwater of the river reaching the saltwater of the sea where the two waters mingle together.
Facing the eastern saltwater, **Ishmael Marika** sits, singing his Rirratjiŋu clan's Waŋupiŋi manikay (Cloud songline). The manikay calls the many different names of the clouds that build up over the sea and travel on Bulluŋu (East Wind). The clouds gather and darken embracing the central larrakitj building up and building up, signalling the approaching wet season of Midawarr. He takes the audience out over the saltwater at night as his Maḻu (fathers, brother) sings the Rirratjiŋu clan's Rulyapa manikay (Saltwater songline.) Meanwhile Ishmaels Rulyapa mintji (design) animates, encompassing the larrakitj, representing the Rirratjiŋu saltwater.

The audience is settled on the saltwater at dawn. As the sun rises, so too does **Gutiŋarra Yunupiŋu's** minytji (design), the Gumatj clans minytji of Baru the crocodile ancestral being, creator of fire. As the Baru minytji slowly shrouds the audience the central larrakitj is metamorphosed into the Baru, draped in it's skin. A 1986 audio recording of the Gumatj clan singing the Baru manikay (songline) plays. This audio was sourced from a Madarrpa clan woman's funeral filmed by Ian Dunlop and kept safe in the Mulka Archives. The audience is then, once again plunged back under the waves into the darkness.
Wukuṉ Wanambí has held the position of Cultural Director at The Mulka Project since its inauguration in 2007. As well as the crucial role he plays at Mulka, Wukuṉ is also a renowned artist. Wukuṉ’s first bark for the Saltwater project won the 1998 NATSIAA Best Bark Award. Wukuṉ has gone on to establish a high profile career. He had his first solo show at Raft Artspace in Darwin in 2004 followed by solo shows at Niagara Galleries, Melbourne in 2005 and 2008. In 2008 he was commissioned to provide a design for installation on a seven-story glass façade in the Darwin Waterfront Development. Wukuṉ has been involved heavily in all the major communal projects of the last couple of decades including the Sydney Opera House commission and the opening of the National Museum of Australia. In 2014 he produced his first multimedia art piece Nhina, Nhama Ga Njama (Sit, Look and Listen) which was a concept inspired by the digital archive of cultural footage which he oversees and keeps safe at the Mulka Project. This piece is exhibited at Raft Artspace and has received great interest on an artistic level and also an academic level. In 2018 Wukuṉ combined his traditional art practices with his contemporary film art and won the NATSIAA 3D Award for his piece Destiny. This piece comprised of 3 larrakitj (burial poles) representing the rocks that stand in the mouth of Trial Bay painted with his renowned minytj (design) of Sea Mullets searching for their great great grandparents. It also included an animation of his fish designs projected onto the floor of the gallery spiralling between the larrakitj. In 2019 he displayed a larger scale interactive version of this concept for the Art Gallery of South Australia, which was exhibited as part of the Gurruṯu Exhibition for Tarnanthi. In this adaptation of his 2018 piece the space that the projected fish swim was much greater, as well as spiralling around the larrakitj the fish interacted with the audience using motion sensor technology.

Patrina Mununggur is one of the leading cinematographers and post-production technicians at the Mulka Project. She came to prominence as a filmmaker after filming and producing two films focused on dhapi (male initiation ceremony) out in Yolŋu homelands. These two films are still some of the most popular ceremonial movies amongst the Yolŋu community. In 2016 Patrina graduated from an AFTRS short course in Melbourne and returned home inspired and completed a 7 part series documenting the hunting, preparation, and alchemy of the 7 colours of master weaver and colour dyer Laŋani Marika which was displayed at the Darwin Film Festival and is often used by young yolŋu weavers as a guide to dying pandanus. In 2017 Patrina delivered her first television commission for NITV, a documentary titled Wanđawuy Dhapi (male initiation ceremony) and was a guest speaker on a panel at the 2017 Tarnanthi Festival. Also in 2017 Patrina produced and exhibited her first screen-based artwork at The Good Shed Gallery (Claremont WA) as part of the Earth Matters Exhibition. Her piece Gurkurr Dhalkuma (Strengthening the Bloodlines) which was shot in 6K, focused on the properties of gapan (white clay) used for Yolŋu ceremony, art and health. This exquisite film piece has been described as meditative. As well as exhibiting her film she hosted workshops at the gallery the week of the opening, sharing her cultural knowledge. In 2018 Patrina produced another 6K film piece titled, Dhunupa’kum Nhuna Wanda (Straightening your Mind), this film piece was awarded the 2018 National Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Media Award. In March 2019 Patrina travelled to Monash University, Caulfield and took part in a lecture to over 100 people, discussing the roles of The Mulka Project in the community of Yirrkala and later held a floor talk at MUMA discussing The Mulka Projects exhibition piece as part of the Shapes of Knowledge exhibition. She has just completed a commissioned collaborative 6k film piece with Ishmael Marika which will be displayed in March 2020 on a 3x16:9 screen at the University of Technology Sydney. The concept of their piece is based around Yolŋu mapping and the season of Rarranhdharr.
Mundatjnu Munungurr was one of only two students to complete their Year 12 studies and graduate in 2015 from Yirrkala School, an indigenous bi-lingual school located in a remote community in NE Arnhemland. As soon as she graduated she commenced employment as a Dhimurru Ranger to help protect and maintain the land for which she cares for deeply. During a year of conserving her and her Yolŋu ancestors’ country she discovered the potential of film as a medium for documenting her culture, keeping it safe and passing it down to the next generations. At the beginning of 2017 she embarked on her film career and acquired a position at The Mulka Project as a filmmaker in training. In her time at The Mulka Project, Mundatjnu’s passion and skills for filmmaking has grown rapidly. Mundatjnu has helped film and produce a great number of cultural documentaries about the ceremony, language, art, and traditions of her Yolŋu people. In 2017 Mundatjnu had two film works exhibited at major Australian art institutions. In 2018 she was involved in creating Virtual Reality environments for the Awaken exhibition at Arts West Gallery Melbourne University. In March 2019 Mundatjnu travelled to Monash University Caulfield with her Mulka workmates and took part in a lecture to over 100 people, discussing the roles of The Mulka Project in the community of Yirrkala, during this trip she also led a floor talk at MUMA regarding the Mulka Projects installation piece as part of the Shapes of Knowledge exhibition. In 2019 she contributed greatly to the development of the Gurrutu (Yolŋu Kinship) Engine which was displayed as a multimedia piece at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of Tarnanthi.

An accomplished filmmaker, artist, director and musician, Ishmael Marika has produced a plethora of works since his commencement at the Mulka Project in 2010. In 2011 Ishmael directed and produced his first film, which was a documentary on Yolŋu land rights titled Waŋa Wataŋumirri Dharuk. This film has screened at many festivals as well as a private screening with the East Timor President Ramos Horta. In 2013 he was a finalist in the NATSIAA Youth Award for his piece Sunlight Energy and he also directed and produced a dramatic short film entitled Galka, which depicted Yolŋu sorcery. Galka was launched to standing ovations at Garma and was also exhibited at Primavera, Museum of Contemporary Art in 2014 along side his other film art piece titled My Grandfather Passing on a Message, which was later, accessioned by the National Gallery of Victoria. In 2015 Ishmael worked with the ABC directing a short film Gāpu Ga Gunda – The Art of Nongirrnga Marawili which, was broadcast as part of the Art X North project and he also produced Rulyapa for the Slide exhibition at Gertrude Contemporary. This same year he was recognised for his many achievements in film-making and community leadership and was presented the NT Young Achiever of the Year Award. 2016 Ishmael won the NATSIAA Young Award for his video art piece Sunlight Energy II and the very next day received a NIMA award for best Traditional Song of the Year. 2017 saw Ishmael Marika produce by far his largest film piece, commissioned by Transport for NSW. Ishmael's 6K video piece called Wunya’Gali (The Other Side) was shot in 5 x 1 hour segments and is displayed at Wynyard Station Sydney on a giant curved LED screen, 23 metres wide and 3 metres high. Wunya’Gali provides a pure window into the life of a remote indigenous community existing in parallel with central Sydney, giving commuters and visitors a rare opportunity to witness the ebb and flow of indigenous life, alongside their own. Ishmael also collaborated with Martu desert screen artist Curtis Taylor on an art piece for the In Cahoots exhibition at the Fremantle Art Centre and in October 2017 Ishmael collaborated with famous artist Mr N. Wununmurra on an installation called Waŋupini (Cloud) for the Art Gallery of SA as part of Tarnanthi Festival. Ishmael’s video projections accompanied Mr N. Wununmurra’s Larritjitj (burial poles). In 2018 Ishmael produced a film piece which is currently displayed at Arts West Gallery, Melbourne as part of the Awaken exhibition. Ishmael recently exhibited a collaborative artwork at The National 2019 exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art which is a projection of his clans water minytji (design) onto larrkitj (burial poles). In 2019 he was heavily involved in the development of the Gurrutu (Yolŋu Kinship) Engine which was displayed at the Art Gallery of South Australia during the Tarnanthi Festival. He also completed a collaborative piece with Patrina Munungurr, which will be displayed in March 2020 on a 3x16:9 screen at the University of Technology Sydney. The concept of their piece is based around Yolŋu mapping and the season of Rarranhdharr.
The story of Gutiŋarra Yunupiŋu is inspirational. Despite being deaf since birth he has managed to overcome many barriers. He was one of only two students to complete their Year 12 studies and graduate in 2015 from Yirrkala School. As soon as Gutiŋarra graduated he was eager to commence employment at The Mulka Project as a Project Officer and filmmaker. Gutiŋarra works as a film-editor, producing his own creative films and also editing ceremonial footage filmed by himself and his teammates. Working as a cameraman takes him out to Yolŋu homelands where he regularly films cultural ceremonies and events. In 2017 Gutiŋarra Yunupiŋu produced a film for the Our Stories documentary series for NITV titled Gutiŋarra Djälkiri (Gutiŋarra’s Journey), which focused on Yolŋu sign language, his first language. In that same year he also produced a collaborative video piece for Tarnanthi, titled Yuta Mulkurr (New Minds), which was exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia and in 2018, his film Maykarran (Lightening Strike) was a finalist in the Digital Portraiture Awards. In March 2019 Gutiŋarra travelled to Monash University Caulfield with his Mulka workmates and took part in a lecture to over 100 people, discussing the roles of The Mulka Project in the community of Yirrkala. Gutiŋarra recently was awarded the Telstra NATSIAA Multimedia Award for his 6k filmwork Gurruṯu mi‘ mala (My Connections) which demonstrates his connections to his people and his country through the Yolŋu kinship-system of gurruṯu. In this artwork he reveals his position in the world of gurruṯu through his first language, barrkuŋu waŋa (language from a distance) Yolŋu sign language. Gurruṯu’mi mala was later exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of Tarnanthi 2019 and has received great interest due to the fascinating concept underlying this art piece and his history as a film maker and artist.

Arian Ganambarr-Pearson has been Mulka Music’s head studio engineer since he commenced in 2015. He has developed into a competent sound engineer, music producer and has an amazing rapport with the Yirrkala community. He continues to work with a wide range of local artists across three generations and has gone above and beyond his work commitments to accommodate artists on weekends and well into the evenings. A crucial part of his job is to record songlines of the elders remotely and in the studio. These priceless recordings are kept safe in the Mulka Archive and made publicly accessible to the community. He has produced sound designs for many of The Mulka Projects exhibitions and films. Arian also works closely with school groups from Yirrkala and Nhulunbuy as well as hosts workshops in the Mulka Studio. Arian continues to work closely with, engineer and produce local artists and bands Marrtjala, Ezy 5, Marcus Lacey, Bala G, Johnathan Yunupiŋu, Aris MC, Yirmal, The Y Boys, Yirrŋa Yunupiŋu and other up and coming artists. He has also scored and produced music specifically to sync to Mulka Film productions and his background as a musician is a useful commodity in his role as studio engineer. Arian has helped female Yolŋu musician Dhapanbal Yunupiŋu’s musical career flourish. In 2019 she released her debut album Biḏiwiḏi which she produced in the Mulka Recording Studio with Arian mentoring her along the way.