



**PORTALS OF LOVE AND LOSS:  
SONIA KURARRA**

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University of Western Australia  
on the occasion of the exhibition

*Portals of Love and Loss:*  
*Sonia Kurarra*

Curated by Emilia Galatis

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery  
12 February – 23 April 2022

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Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra* (detail), 2021, acrylic pen and paint on canvas, 180 x 94.5cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency



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# PORTALS OF LOVE AND LOSS: SONIA KURARRA

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Curated by Emilia Galatis

12 February – 23 April 2022

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery



Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra*, 2019, acrylic on leather cow hide, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency



Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm. Courtesy the artist and Dr. Anne Lee

Image overleaf:  
Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra* (detail), 2019, acrylic pen and paint on canvas, 240 x 120cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency

## KURARRA IS LIKE THE MARTUWARRA

Lynley Nargoodah  
(Special Projects Curator at Mangkaja Arts)

*Kurarra is like the Martuwarra (River). She can be calm like the soft flows of the Martuwarra or destructive depending on the mood she's in.*

*Kurarra paints free flowing, navigating each twist and turn of the Martuwarra.*

*As the river brings life to the Martuwarra People (River people), so does each brush stroke as it hits the canvas.*

*As the Wakari (pandanus) stands calmly on the waters edge, to me it resembles the calmness that painting gives Kurarra as she reminisces.*

*The country is slowly changing. Memories of loved ones fishing, hunting and gathering along the Martuwarra's edge with family are like the flow of the Martuwarra, you can't touch the same current twice.*

*Like the Martuwarra that breaks it's banks and floods the country, so does her choice of mediums from canvas to Perspex and paper. Like a permanent water source, her style never changes the Martuwarra runs through her. She is the Martuwarra; just let her flow.*





## SONIA KURARRA: PORTALS OF LOVE AND LOSS

*my wrists are rivers  
my fingers are words*

Charles Bukowski, *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*

One of the most important practicing female artists in WA, watching Sonia paint is a divine act. Zealous dedication and seamless transitions turn energy into aesthetic. Streams of colourful consciousness pouring from her core; gesture and emotion are essential to her mark making, mediating, and meditating through paint application.

Sonia has worked tirelessly for over 30 years, creating magic across thousands of surfaces. The exhibition features recent explorations on Perspex and leather alongside canvas painting and works on paper with ink, acrylic pen and gauche. The newly commissioned Perspex installation simulates the multilayered and synchronistic ideas in her work, conversely, a microcosm of the river water environment.

*Portals of Love and Loss* traces the cyclical motions of environmental expansion and contraction, flowing

through seasonal variation. Sonia operates from an aged care in Fitzroy Crossing where the painting program transcends the facility, triggering memories of life in Noonkanbah. Forever on the banks of the river, the rhythms of nature are encoded in every brush stroke.

Sonia paints the sandy billabong country along the stretch of the Fitzroy River that runs directly behind the community. After the food waters recede, there are billabongs that hold a plentiful supply of parlka [barramundi], kurlumajarti [catfish] and bream. She paints gapi [fish], parrmarr [rocks] where the Fish is cooked, ngurti [coolamon] and a karli [boomerang]. Sonia paints these images over and over as though they are etched into her psyche; works that are linear representations in monotonous and others that are layers lathered on with wild and confident brush strokes.

Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. Courtesy the artist and Julie Rust



Image left:  
Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra at Noonkanbah*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 60cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency

Image right:  
Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra at Noonkanbah*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 60cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency

Image below:  
Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra at Noonkanbah*, 2021, acrylic pen and paint on canvas, 180 x 60cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency





## MANGKAJA ARTS PROFILE

Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency is a vibrant Aboriginal owned art centre in the township of Fitzroy Crossing, in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. The overarching goals of the organization remain the same as much today as when it was first established; to support cultural, social and economic development for people of the Fitzroy Valley region. Mangkaja Artists are renowned for their innovative practise, uninhibited style and lively use of colour, painting images of country that share stories of culture and identity. Mangkaja represents award winning artists from the region and is a centre for innovation and artistic experimentation with multiple art forms. Mangkaja has gallery partners around the globe and is constantly

growing its means of sharing the art and culture of the region in contemporary art exhibitions and events. Many artists are represented through each of the State Galleries, the National Gallery of Australia and significant private and public collections around the world.

Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. Courtesy the artist and Dr. Anne Lee

Image overleaf:  
Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra at Noonkanbah* (detail), 2021, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 60cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency





# SONIA KURARRA BIOGRAPHY

Sonia Kurarra is a Walmajarri woman born in 1951 in Noonkoonbah community on the banks of the Martuwarra. Noonkoonbah is about 160 km from Fitzroy Crossing. In her later years, she now resides in Guwardi aged care in Fitzroy Crossing. Sonia Kurarra grew up in the river country at Yungngora (Noonkanbah) and began painting at Mangkaja in the early 1990s working mostly on paper. She used to help the kindergarten teacher with teaching art. They used to take the children out to the Sandy Billabong and teach them how to paint and dance. There is a ngarrangkarni [Dreamtime] snake that lives in the billabong. His name is Nangurra. Sonia began painting at Mangkaja Arts in the early 1990s working mostly on paper. Since 2008, Sonia has been working predominantly on canvas and her practice has become more consistent.

Kurarra is one of the corner stones of Mangkaja Arts and contemporary art making in the Fitzroy Valley region. Her sublime art making is un-paralleled. The watery depths of her rivers banks and billabongs are multilayered microcosms of contemporary life within Guwardi aged care. All at once, her work speaks to the past, present and future, equal parts personal and universal.

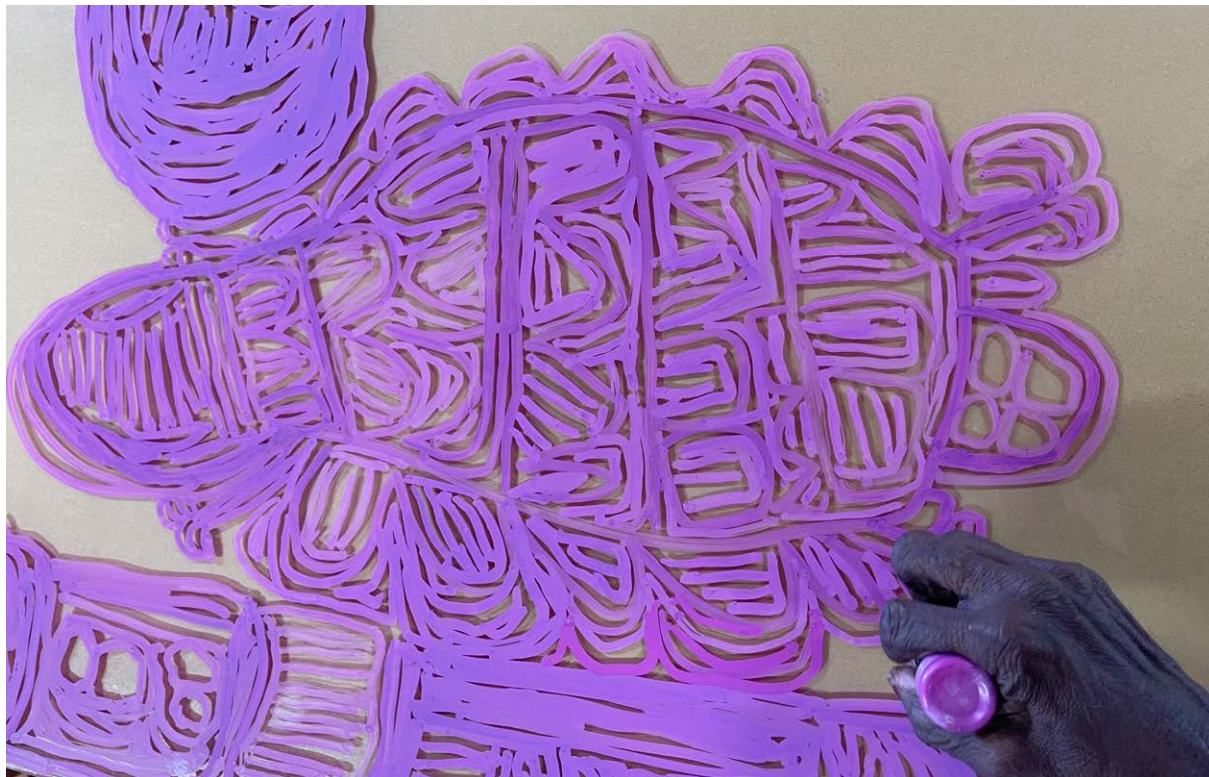
image: Sonia Kurarra working in Aged Care, Fitzroy Crossing. Image Emilia Galatis 2020





Sonia Kurarra, *Martuwarra*, 2021, acrylic pen and paint on canvas, 180 x 94.5cm. Courtesy the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency

previous pages:  
 Sonia Kurarra working at Mangkaja Arts, Fitzroy Crossing. Images Emilia Galatis 2020



Both pages:  
Sonia Kurarra working at Aged Care in Fitzroy Crossing, images Emilia Galatis, 2020-2021





*“I feel happy and I sing. Sometimes, I feel upset, I sing when I paint.*

*I paint fish swimming, one old lady drowned she was big and we dragged her out with rope. I paint the pandanus trees....my daughter was sitting I told her to go. I sat with white paint my granddaughter. Water Snake told me my daughters swim away. Then I went east, I use to sit and fish down the creek. Mashing crocodile eggs, I didn't eat crocodile. Piyirn piyirn is a bird, water snake was looking at me. Seen my jaja was sitting. Miss my uncle. This is Martuwarra...when I paint, I sing at the same time. I don't paint crocodile or sawfish, I feel sorry for the sawfish and crocodile.”*

Sonia Kurarra, translated by Jen Dickens and courtesy of Mangkaja Arts

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Image: Sonia Kurarra in Fitzroy Crossing, 2021, photograph by Emilia Galatis

