

# Ginger Riley Munduwalawala

c. 1936 –1st September, 2002

**Ginger Riley Munduwalawala** was born about 1936 in the bush in South East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory of the Marra people. He was a traditional man, charismatic, with the gracious manners and reserve characteristic of an initiated Indigenous elder. Few painters showed his degree of commitment to the ideals of painting. A born painter, obsessively he continued to push his skills and interpretation in new directions.

Munduwalawala's unique style marks him as a great Australian artist. He worked on a heroic scale both in concept and style. His images are often dazzling with brilliant colour and he seemed to enjoy the exaltation of painting big stories.

The regulation of society in most sophisticated civilizations relies on a foundation of inherited cultural practice. In Munduwalawala's case, as with many Indigenous people the traditions are passed orally through ceremonial rituals from one generation to the next and are in many instances secret and permit little understanding to the uninitiated; and thus his images are powerful representations of his responsibilities under his inherited lore.

The most distinctive image in Munduwalawala's work is the totemic white-breasted sea eagle, Ngak Ngak, often shown singly or as a repeated image. Ngak Ngak fulfils the role of a guardian - looking after the country.

Munduwalawala's images generally interpret in paint a sequence of events, which are focused on his mother's country around the Limmen Bight and the Limmen Bight River in the Northern Territory of Australia. This country is the area around the Four Archers, a geographical formation about 45km inland on the Limmen Bight River. This country includes the Limmen Bright River and the Maria and Beatrice Islands at the mouth of the river. In his caretaker role of his mother's country, the artist's mother is the cloud and the sun, and his paintings often depict heavy rain-filled clouds or fine rain and bright sunlight, his creation story.

Munduwalawala was not a prolific artist, each painting was carefully thought out - the images were all seen in his mind; they were often inspired by the changing seasons. Then in a burst of creative energy a group of new works would appear - the only changes from the images in his mind are related to colour. He preferred to paint in full sunlight, or in studios with bright lighting, enabling him to capture the radiant colours, which are his trademark.

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63 JERSEY RD WOOLLAHRA SYDNEY AUSTRALIA  
TEL + 61 2 9327 3922

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Ginger Riley was the first living Indigenous artist to be honoured with a retrospective and publication at the National Gallery of Victoria, in 1997. This retrospective, a ten year overview of his painting life, was monumental and still considered the most exhilarating and superb of any exhibitions focusing on an Australian artist's career.

The artist was represented by Alcaston Gallery his entire career. He passed away in September 2002 after a short illness. Director Beverly Knight is a trustee of the Estate of Ginger Riley.

Ginger Riley is represented in most major public art galleries and collections in Australia and several in Europe, the United Kingdom and the USA.

### **Selected Solo Exhibitions:**

**1991** *Ginger Riley Munduwalawala - Limmens Bight Country South East Arnhem Land*, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, South Australia, in conjunction with Alcaston House Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

**1991** *Ginger Riley Munduwalawala*, The Australia Gallery, SoHo, New York, United States of America, in conjunction with Alcaston House Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

**1997** *Mother Country in Mind: The art of Ginger Riley Munduwalawala*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

**1999** *Always at Home, works on paper*, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

**2001** *Native Title*, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

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