

Two old artists looking for shellfish

This is the fourth exhibition in which John Wolseley and Mulkuṇ Wirrpanda have joined forces to make work about the living world of East Arnhem Land. Their installation *Midawarr/Harvest* about the edible plants of the region, is currently touring around Australia, and now in this show there is a new body of work about the tidal reaches and mangrove swamps of the Arafura Sea. In late 2017 Mulkuṇ turned her attention to *Maypal* - the shellfish of vital importance to her people. Once again her aim is to pass on to future generations her vast knowledge of the cultural and nutritional value of these creatures. At about the same time in 2017, John also found himself infatuated with molluscs and insects; making drawings and relief prints and rubbings of the burrowings and engravings, which the larvae of beetles and moths make under the bark of the trees around his home in Central Victoria.

He thinks that this strange obsession was set in motion in 2009 when Mulkuṇ adopted him as her wawa or brother, and gave him the name of *Länggurrk* – a larval grub which lives in mud and the wood of trees. This led him to the other beetle species which live within the Mangrove trees of Arnhem Land as well as the shellfish which cling to their trunks and branches. In 2018, he concentrated on the fabled and feared *Teredo* or mangrove worm which gnaw their way through the trunks and limbs of trees and through the hulls of ships. In fact, until the end of the eighteenth century this hungry mollusc sunk most of the European ships before they could reach Australia.

In this exhibition, John has incorporated strange fretted prints and frottages into large paintings of the living dynamic of a mangrove swamp with its marine creatures, swags of sea weed, fish, trepang and molluscs, surging back and forth

within the great diurnal tides of the Arafura sea. In *Umwelt – The life world of the Mangrove oyster, the Teredo worm and the Giant Marbled eel*, (pictured) he has made a painting which describes the ‘life worlds’ of various creatures - how they carve and engrave their paths and burrow through mud, sand and the wood of trees. He calls these paintings ‘inscapes’ rather than ‘landscapes’ and emphasises how they are about the inner movement of the life of the land rather than its surface or outer appearance.

The works by Mulkuṇ are rich distillations of the biomes of these saline swamps – each larrakitj or bark painting is a kind of ecosystem in macrocosm. For instance, in *Balkpalk ga Guyita* (pictured) Mulkuṇ has painted Balkpalk – native peanut – with its rich red seedpods which is host to a large longicorn beetle. Mulkuṇ is here celebrating the time she and John found a number of these delicious grubs which were later eaten by several of the artists working in the Buku-Larrṅgay Mulka Centre.

Swirling round the larrakitj poles Mulkuṇ has painted the teeming life of the Arafura Sea. There are trepang (Dharripa), mangrove jacks (Ngarrawu), hermit crabs (Nokaliya), goannas (Djanda), water rats (Nyiknyik) and seaweed (Djewul). There are all manner of shellfish - baler shells (Garrtjpa) mud mussels, and the giant black-lipped oyster. Sometimes the larrakitj itself is symbolic – as in *Dhalimbu Gan'kurr Milinydjura* (pictured) where the opening in the pole represents the mouth of Dhalimbu, the fluted giant clam – a shellfish of sacred importance in song and ceremony.

*John Wolseley would especially like to thank Will Stubbs and the team at Buku-Larrṅgay Mulka Centre, Geelong Art Gallery, Linda Fredheim who designed and made the Beetlearium cabinet and Kaitlyn Gibson who printed many of the woodcuts and etchings.*



Left to right: Mulkuṇ Wirrpanda *Balkpalk ga Guyita* 2019 earth pigments on stringybark 235 x 86 cm  
*Dhalimbu Gan'kurr Milinydjura* 2018 earth pigments on stringybark log 295 cm high  
*Nirruwan ga Namura* 2018 earth pigments on stringybark log 255 cm high



John Wolseley *In Lunggurma season the North wind reunites the Makassans with their Yolḁu family members to harvest trepang together* 2019 watercolour on blue lake paper 139 x 101.5 cm

John Wolseley and Mulkuṇ Wirrpanda:  
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*Märrma ḡalapal-manda miny'tji-djämamirri  
maypalwu ḡarruma gurra*



23 July - 11 August 2019

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Mulku Wirrpanda:  
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for shellfish**

*Märrma jalapal-manda miny'tji-djämamirri  
maypalwu larruma gurra*

Tuesday 23 July 2019 6pm to 8pm  
28 Derby Street Collingwood VIC 3066

Artist talk with John Wolseley  
3pm Saturday 3 August 2019

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Front: John Wolseley *Field painting 6 - Mallee beetles*  
2019 watercolour, etching and relief prints from  
found wood 54 x 67 cm unique



Above: John Wolseley and Mulku Wirrpanda—*Molluscs / Maypal and the warming of the seas*, installation view, Geelong Art Gallery. Above right: John Wolseley *Beetlearium* 2018-19 cabinet with insectarium for housing beetles and their larvae, framed prints and four drawers containing prints and the logs from which they have been made blackwood, eucalypt, plywood and horizontal scrub and relief prints. Cabinet designed and made by Linda Fredheim, Hobart 150.5 x 35 x 44 cm



John Wolseley *Umwelt - The life world of the Mangrove oyster, the Teredo worm and the Giant Marbled eel* 2019 watercolour, carbonized wood, graphite and relief prints, chine-collé on paper 153 x 346 cm