

John Wolseley and Mulkun Wirrpanda — Molluscs / Maypal and the warming of the seas



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COVER

John Wolseley

*The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima
to Roebuck Bay* (detail) 1985–89

sumi ink and watercolour on paper on canvas

Geelong Gallery

Gift of the artist, 2016

Reproduced courtesy of the artist

Introduction

In 2016, painter, printmaker and installation artist John Wolseley (b. 1938) gifted his six panel panoramic watercolour *The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima to Roebuck Bay* 1985–89 to Geelong Gallery. This recently conserved and reframed work is the catalyst for the exhibition *John Wolseley and Mulkuṅ Wirrpanda—Molluscs / Maypal and the warming of the seas*.

This project is part of Climarte's ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019, a festival of exhibitions and events considering climate change and its increasingly evident, diverse impacts. Climarte provides a multidisciplinary forum and range of opportunities for artists, scientists and researchers to reflect on the realities of our changing world.

In this immersive installation John Wolseley and senior Yolḷu artist and clan leader Mulkuṅ Wirrpanda (b. 1942), extend their decade-long collaboration. Mulkuṅ lives and works in Yilpara and Baniyala, her traditional homelands in North-East Arnhem Land.

Mulkuṅ paints on bark, and larrakitj (memorial poles) using natural earth pigments. Both artists met in 2010 and subsequently spent an extended period exploring the flora and fauna of Blue Mud Bay near Yilpara.



John Wolseley and Mulkuṅ Wirrpanda—Molluscs / Maypal and the warming of the seas, installation view



Mulkuṅ Wirrpanda *Gipipi* 2018

In her previous works Mulkuṅ has represented various and little known local plant species and traditional foods as a way of retaining cultural knowledge for younger generation of Yolṅu. In 2018, inspired by Bentley James's book *Maypal, Mayali' ga Wāṅa (Shellfish, Meaning & Place)* Mulkuṅ began to paint and represent the numerous diverse shellfish of her coastal environment.

Mulkuṅ and John Wolseley share a profound sense of the beauty and fragility of the earth and its ecosystems, and in this project their works meditate especially on the mollusc as a powerful indicator of changing oceanic conditions and water systems.

John's first works reflecting on the warming of the seas go back to 1988. Here, among major historical and contemporary large scale paintings, we present unique woodblock prints taken from swamp mangroves that bear the bored channels of 'shipworms', a widespread species of mollusc feared by 17th and 18th century naval explorers, including James Cook, for its capacity to consume a ship's timber, rendering it dangerously unseaworthy.

Geelong Gallery is committed to engaging with the realities of our changing climate and environment through the works of leading, exceptionally imaginative and acutely observant artists. We are honoured to celebrate two of Australia's most critically acclaimed senior artists, and to bring their important and moving collaboration into our community.

Jason Smith

Director & CEO, Geelong Gallery

Maypal

I guess most of us could name a few of the class of things we call shellfish; oysters, mussels, clams, hermit crabs, mudcrabs. But then it starts to peter out. The inspiration for many of the works in this show was an amazing publication put out by NAILSMA with documentation by Bentley James, photography by David Hancock and incredible design by Therese Ritchie. Its full title is *Maypal, Mayili' ga Wäŋa: Shellfish, Meaning and Place. A Yolŋu Bilingual Identification Guide to Shellfish of North East Arnhem*. It has the weight and feel of a prayer book. And in a way it is.

It is a reverence for these sacred foodstuffs that define and sustain the magical coast that we live on. But instead of that handful of species that we sleepwalkers can name there are over two hundred pages of individual edible Maypal with multiple Yolŋu names, their Latin tag and where available an English Common name.

It is a prayer that the existence of this knowledge and these names be infinite. It is a ritual incantation of this knowledge and these names that they may live on in the hearts and minds of the people who live with them for eternity.

Along the way, funny things have been revealed. When Mulkuŋ adopted her brother John Wolseley as a member of the Dhudi-Djapu clan of the Dhuwa moiety she anointed him with the name Langurrk. A particular beetle larvae 'Witchetty Grub' which burrows into the mud and yams adjacent to freshwater billabongs. This recognises his propensity for grubbing around in the mud of floodplains in pursuit of his art.

And in this exhibition there are several moving portraits of her brother as grub. But what is an insect larvae from a freshwater setting doing in a collation of 'Shellfish'? Well, in this classificatory system Yolŋu include Langurrk and other large edible larvae of cossid moths and longicorn beetles in the category of gämurruŋ within the designation of maypal. And this grub is 'grub'. Delicious food especially when roasted.

Sounds weird? In Linnaen classification a mollusc is 'An invertebrate of a large phylum which includes snails, slugs, mussels, and octopuses. They have a soft unsegmented body and live in aquatic or damp habitats.' So slugs are molluscs in the way that Science organises the world.

Welcome to the wonderful world of Shellfish.



Mulkuŋ Wirrpanda *Langurrk*
(Portrait of John Wolseley) 2018

Mulkun approaches sharing this knowledge by painting the species as she knows them, in a secular way, as they suggest themselves to her. These renditions are influenced by their naturalistic form but also their rhythm, personality and taste.

Many of these species are embedded in the sacred songs of other clans which she cannot touch. They may have specific designs which relate to estates of land which she cannot speak for. So as she comes to each new character in this play she must invent a fresh way to show them. Aided by her lifetime of familiarity in locating them under metres of mangrove mud or clinging to the same rock they do, as she chips away, whilst the waves lap. Up close and personal even to the extent of savouring their flavour.

Coinciding with this exhibition at Geelong Gallery will be *Midawarr/Harvest* at the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre of the Melbourne Museum. This collection of barks, woodcuts, larrakitj and one massive 10-metre wall scroll was the initial collaboration between Mulkun and John Wolseley which led to this mutual exploration of these aquatic creatures. Over a period of seven years the two worked together in their shared passion to look clearly at the land we inhabit and express the nature of the rich food within.

The publication accompanying that exhibition gives an intimate view of thirty-eight individual plants. So much of the knowledge of, and even the existence of, these plants is unknown to us as residents of Australia. Although we are surrounded by them and we could take sustenance from them they are strangers to us. It is Mulkun's concern that as development and invasive species and practices impinge upon them they may disappear. But even more tenuous than their own survival is the ephemeral knowledge of them as characters in the long-running saga 'Human Life in Australia'. As the pervasive flour, sugar, tea, tobacco empire casts its pall over her community she sees the devastating effect of the loss of interest in the reality of our surroundings.

If native foodstuffs are valued it is only through the prospect of their industrialisation and commercialisation. If they are described it is only in terms of a Northern hemisphere version: bush onion, tomato, carrot, apple. Never known by their own name.

And so it was a natural progression for Mulkun to turn our eye to another cast of characters who had dominated the stage before we imported our own narrative and players. The category of things that we call shellfish. She hopes you can love them as she does.

Will Stubbs

Coordinator, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre



John Wolseley

In John Wolseley's paintings, whatever their apparent content, certain formal qualities are present. A mixture of pictorial and verbal information discloses curiosity, irony, interpretations of paradox and the artist's sense of the unity of all things. He is absorbed in explorations of the natural world and the human impact on it.

The genesis of English-born John Wolseley's epic painting *The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima to Roebuck Bay* 1985–89 is in the coastal bays around Broome, where he explored mangrove swamps and coastal bays with their small pearl farms, perhaps only a single raft. There, from a retired Japanese pearling captain, Wolseley discovered a different view of the sea as a vast, uncharted country, a huge territorial area with towns on its edge, in contrast to the land dweller's perception of coastal towns being on the edge of a landmass. In *The pearl fisher's voyage ...*, Wolseley traverses this territory from Japan's Shima Peninsula to the pearling coast at Roebuck Bay.

The pearl fisher's voyage ... encompasses multiple models of reality. Full of signs and metaphor, it is a 'sort of natural history of images by the sea', with many systems operating and a multiplicity of related images shown in different forms. Wolseley explores how they affect us as images and how they are metaphor for other things.

Amazement is part of his focus; shells become images of enclosure, of sensuality; harbours and bays become refuges; the physical movement of tide and sand becomes a sexual image; water in a bay, with its nacreous, pearly qualities, is enhanced by the palette he chooses. Colour is used as mood and metaphor, reflecting and linking ideas which become visual constructs in the painting.

The artist becomes immersed and enmeshed in certain life experiences past and present. This journey is not only about travel and movement, but ranges widely through philosophy, poetry and semiotics.

Not only is Wolseley conscious of the immediate physical image of an area, but he also considers poets and writers whose texts illuminate his ideas. For instance, he describes this painting as expressing 'some of the sort of philosophy which finds its apogee' in *The poetics of space* by French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard.

On the surface, Wolseley's painting is a linear construct in six panels which read from left to right. The first panel's Zen Buddhist passage on enlightenment is reflected in the painting's shifts from the ascetic to the sensual. The text is linked to a circle, an important image in mystical and



John Wolseley
The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima to Roebuck Bay (detail) 1985–89

religious thought, which Wolseley also sees as both simplicity and perfection and as an expression of the Taoist idea of the harmony of the visible with the invisible.

In the second panel of *The pearl fisher's voyage ...*, Wolseley begins with a quotation or appropriation of Japanese painting: a group of philosophers in a tea-house is enclosed by a harbour. Surrounding this contemplative image are vignettes of objects the artist found washed up on the shore of a Shima bay. There are shells, a Shinto votive offering, discarded ferry tickets, thongs—a 'curious juxtaposition of a semiotically peaceful view and the disordered unsystematic collection of disparate objects' which have become part of the sea's detritus. It introduces a brilliant red with its denotations of sensuality reinforced by shell images and the text of a Pablo Neruda poem.

Pace quickens as the journey begins and moves across the ocean from Japan to Australia. Large sails suggest the romanticism of a voyage and Wolseley reveals that 'Ithaka' by the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy was very much in his mind at this point.

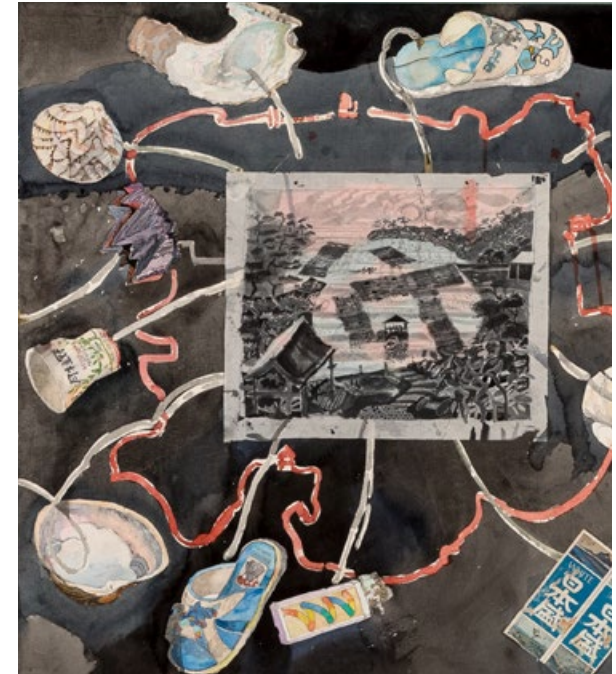
Setting out on the voyage to Ithaka
You must pray that the way be long,
Full of adventures and experiences...

Tropical islands and vegetation appear and there are suggestions of the ancient interaction of Asia and Aboriginal Australia. Part of the fourth panel is painted on an old nautical chart of the area around Roebuck Bay. Two people sorting pearls in a roofed structure recall the philosophers and tea-house from the second panel. In part it is a construct of the opposed images of the pearl—its spiritual totality and perfection and the search for material success implied in the trading of pearls.

The fifth panel's emphasis on philosophical and material chaos expresses the artist's concern that society's search for material totality is leading to a spent planet and ultimate extinction. The perfection of the pearl and the safe harbour of its shell become a metaphor for hope. A quotation from a famous medieval poem 'Pearl' precedes the final panel with its image of the beautiful underside of a pearl shell. It prefigures Wolseley's hope that his painting might represent a rearrangement of existing systems and oblique ways of getting at and making paintings.

Bettina MacAulay

First published in *Diverse Visions*,
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1991



John Wolseley
*The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima
to Roebuck Bay* (detail) 1985–89



Molluscs/Maypal and the Warming of the seas. A voyage in paintings and Iarrakitj round Geelong Gallery

This exhibition takes us on a voyage all the way from Ise shima in Japan, down past the Philippines, and between Sulawesi and Borneo and across the Timor sea all the way to Roebuck Bay in North West Australia. Then we will meander up around the Kimberley coast to the Gulf of Carpentaria to Yirrkala and then to Dhurupitjpi, the homelands of Mulku Wurrpanda.

As we move along the different works on the walls and then back again through the forest of poles in the centre of the gallery, we navigate a sea of signs and symbols and metaphors. This is an allegorical journey—a kind of Seelenwanderung, or symbolic life journey. We celebrate molluscs—particularly oysters and pearls—and find correspondences between them and other phenomena of the sea along their shores and fringing mangrove swamps. We study sea shores and sea wrack, and lament their margins of litter, detritus and pollution. And important Yolŋu artists introduce us to Maypal, those molluscs and coastal dwelling creatures which are not only a vital source of food but have complex associations with creation myths.

During this voyage there emerges the image of the sea itself echoing the processes of molluscs as it pushes all the flotsam and jetsam out onto its edges. But now it is being overwhelmed and overloaded with plastic, rubbish and the effects of oil and gas production and is slowly dying.



The red numbers on John Wolseley's hand-drawn map relate to numbered works in the exhibition and this essay



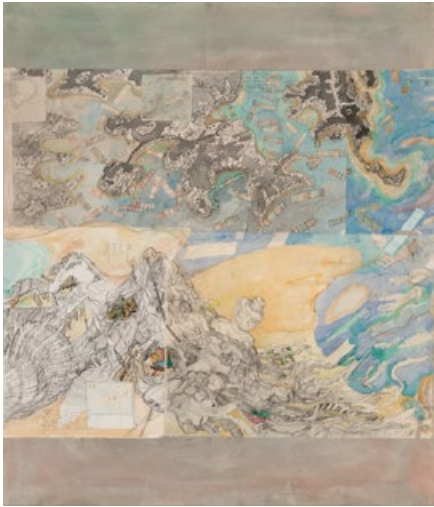
Cat. no. 1a

We start this journey with the first work in the exhibition—a long painting in five panels *The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima to Roebuck Bay* 1985–89 [Cat. no. 1]. This work starts with images of pearls, dew-drops and pearl farms hidden in the inlets and coves of Ise Shima. I had been inspired to visit this part of Japan by a conversation I had in Australia with a retired Japanese Sea Captain in Broome. He told me about how every year he made a pilgrimage to the Temple of Ise in order to make offerings to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu.



Cat. no. 1b

I went there later that year and made an offering too and then wandered around the edges of secluded bays with pearl rafts and collected lots of gomi or rubbish and sea shells. When I noticed a strong correlation between the graphic designs on the gomi and the Shinto votive offerings, I was struck with ideas concerning the sacred and profane, dualities which were to emerge quite often on this journey. This discarded packaging often appropriated age-old religious symbols and I later pasted several of these on to this painting.



Cat. no. 1c

In the third panel [Cat. no. 1c], we are sailing down the coast (pausing at Sado Island) navigating isthmuses, islands, where I documented the plastic flotsam and sea shells and seaweed. In one bay I found that the ocean currents had directed Korean detritus to one side of the bay while all along the other side there was predominantly Russian rubbish.



Cat. no. 1d

By the fourth panel [Cat. no. 1d], we are heading out to the open sea. Hidden behind the sails of a boat there is in an abbreviated, almost distilled form a summary of the voyage past the Philippines and down to Borneo. Our ship then follows the Wallace Line—the biogeographical boundary which marks the division between the Laurasian and the Gondwanan tectonic plates. This is evident as we notice that the biota on one side of the line has entirely different animals, birds and plants occupying the same niche. For example, squirrels on one side and possums on the other.

As we pass between the islands of Bali and Lombok, we hear the cries of barbets floating across from Bali and from the Gondwanan side, the squawks of cockatoos and friarbirds.

And so we reach the most north-westerly tip of Australia. Over a map of Cape Leveque and the Buccaneer Archipelago I have drawn our yacht floating above the fast disappearing coral reefs, below a wireless mast set in amongst strangely scraggy pandanas.



Cat. no. 1e

In panel five [Cat. no. 1e], we reach a hidden cove where two pearl farmers are sorting out large oyster shells and the pearls inside them. And then we hug the coast up the edge of the Kimberley pausing now and then at secret pearl farms hidden in the inlets. The voyage weaves through islands and we are led into mazes of mangrove-fringed islands. In the painting these morph into Taoist diagrams or the images in Buddhist or the Shinto sacred texts. Or we find ourselves blown into sea wrack or plastic rubbish, or—even worse—oil slicks and dead seabirds.

In the final panel [Cat. no. 1f], we move further into a kind of Satori—an awakening. As Sasha Grishin wrote, 'the final image is one of perfection: the glowing oyster shell, both a harbour and a haven, is the end of a journey and a prayer.'¹



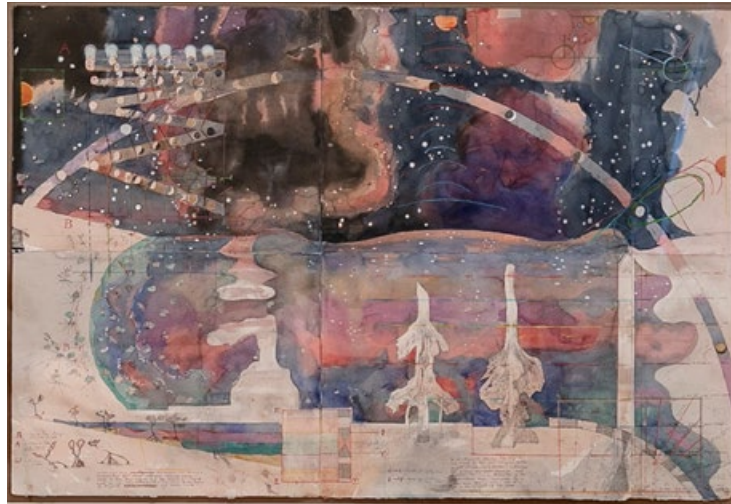
Cat. no. 1f

I finished painting *The pearl fisher's voyage* towards the end of 1989. There has been a curious shifting or slippage in the symbolism of the shell or the pearl since then. The image of an open or spent seashell seems to hint at some kind of finality in a more poignant way than it did before. Maybe this is because in my many years of beachcombing I have increasingly found empty sea shells glistening in the sand in estuaries where I've been told that some of the living mollusc are now rarely seen.

As we move onwards to, *Projecting the tides, Point Torment, Western Australia 1988–90* [Cat. no. 2], we leave the pearl fishers and continue the voyage further over the Kimberley and camp for a few days on a beach near Derby. I had been puzzled by the way some of the mangroves on the edge of the sea seemed to be dying or collapsing. I did a number of paintings which documented how up there in King Sound—famous for the huge difference between high and low tide—the tides had slowly increased their reach into the land and had knocked over some of the mangroves.

Did this indicate sea level rise? A few years later I was there again. And my question was answered. The few mangroves which were left were dead. I carried two of them back and now they stand in front of the painting in this exhibition called *Elegy for the coral reefs and mangroves of the Arafura Sea* [Cat. no. 7].

With the help of a sailor whose craft was moored in the bay near my camp, I included tide tables on my painting as they related to several other locations around the world. Then I added diagrams which connected these movements of the tides with the phases of the moon as it pulled them in their diurnal cycles of eternal return.



Cat. no. 2

Another painting I did at the time emphasises the connections between moons and tides. There are other lines of connection which hint at the symbolic correspondences between the moon, shells, pearls, the sea and the sails and masts of ships which link and connect many of the works in this exhibition. It is by symbolic images that we painters often try to reveal the underlying truth or 'being' of ourselves and the earth. And it is through the power of symbolic thinking that as Gaston Bachelard wrote, '*we can reveal the secret of the correspondence between all things*'.²

So here I was meditating on seashells; and how in them and in the pearl within them there rest opposing symbolic meanings—the one pulling me to ideas of some kind of spiritual totality, the other tugging me into the direction of mammon—towards the materialist hell and its status symbols. All manner of conflicting signifiers, including the pearls, around the necks of my patrons.

As we continue our voyage around the Kimberley we find ourselves at anchor in a bay on the northern side of the Tiwi Islands. Here is a painting called *Javan leaf and Tiwi leaf—continental drift* 2001 [Cat. no. 3].

We have crossed again, across the bottom of the Wallace Line. This painting sets two leaves from each side of the divide, over a diagram documenting the Wallace Line itself and the main geological force lines where the tectonic plates meet. On the Laurasian side I have drawn a leaf from Java and the other a leaf picked from a tree on the Tiwi Island beach.

In *Tide reach* 1988 [Cat. no. 4], we return to the mangroves with this painting of a quadrant of a patch of ground closely webbed and criss-crossed by the roots—and the pneumatophores which enable these strange trees to breathe and survive in their watery environment.

During much of this voyage we have seen evidence of the world-wide clearing of mangrove swamps, and the loss of these important carbon sinks as habitats for molluscs, here represented by a single fiddler crab.



Cat. no. 3 and 4

4



5



As we journey forwards to *Tidal ecosystems with mangroves* 2019 [Cat. no. 5], we encounter another type of mollusc—the teredo worm or shipworm as it reveals its various life processes. In this assemblage of sculptures and printed works, several mangrove tree trunks and branches have been sliced, inked up, and then prints have been made which show the tunnels and engraving of these creatures as they eat themselves through the wood. These log sculptures, supported by metal stands, are shown in front of their corresponding prints or portraits on the gallery walls.

Another slab of wood, also with its print behind it is a fragment of a yacht owned by Stuart Purves of Australian Galleries, that was nearly sunk by these fearsome critters. It wasn't until the mid-18th century that copper-cladding ships had been invented to stop them being riddled with holes. For thousands of years before that, these same teredo worms have been a nutritious source of food for the Yolŋu as Will Stubbs of Buku-Larrnggay Mulka wrote to me—

It is really interesting to me this teredo worm. A sustaining nutritious sacred food source in situ in the gathul mangrove wood. And doing everything it could to protect the Yolŋu from the colonisers' wooden hulls.

There are also slices of Balkpalk tree stems burrowed into by langurrk beetle grubs here. These specimens have also been placed on metal stands in front of rubbings (frottage) made from them.

River red gum branch with beetle engravings 2019 [Cat. no. 6], is one of the many tree trunks in this show, (including the marvellous larrakitj by Mulku Wirrpanda and her fellow Yolŋu artists). It references the invasions of Australia by European powers described above. In particular, the masts of those ships which sailed around this coast. Significantly, Captain Cook inspected the Norfolk Pines for possible use as masts for the English Navy. This particular 'mast' a red gum branch, has had a rubbing done in graphite on a long banner of mulberry paper which is suspended like a sail beside it. This red gum branch has been intricately engraved by longicorn beetle grubs that also feature throughout this exhibition.



Cat. no. 6

Now, in *Elegy for the coral reefs and the mangroves of the Arafura Sea* 2019 [Cat. no. 7], we have arrived at the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala. Down the coast from here, I made a series of paintings which celebrate mangrove swamp systems. In this work I tried to hint at some of the changes which are occurring in the marine ecosystems all around northern Australia and in the seas to the north. Shellfish are signifiers of these changes and have been described as the canaries in the mine. One could almost say they are the 'molluscs in the mine.'

Among the many threats to the marine ecosystems are offshore oil and gas development and the run off from giant mining operations—like the Adani coal mine in Queensland. This project is yet another nail in the coffin of any kind of hope of containing the galloping increase of Co2 in the atmosphere. Or the possibility of stopping the continuing burning of fossil fuels and all the prospects of incremental climate change—rising sea levels and the warming of the seas. Consequences include the impending loss of the Great Barrier Reef. In this work, painted some 30 years after I explored similar concerns in *Projecting the tides*, *Point Torment*, *Western Australia*, I have shown some of the visible signs of changes in the environment which have occurred since I painted the earlier picture.



Cat. no. 7

We encounter burnt or destroyed mangroves more often. For instance in Queensland, the mangroves fringing the estuaries have often been cleared and sometimes set on fire by the sugar cane plantations which are encroaching on their original territory. Or I come across remnant stands of mangroves in between the monstrous marina developments which have replaced the maze-like mangrove swamps of the past. It is these estuaries which are the breeding ground for many of the shellfish of the tropical seas. Many have been cleared of a mangrove habitat once teaming with a fecund mix of flora and fauna which once included many mollusc species. Other threats include drought and increased salinity.

In shells and shellfish there lie two opposed reaches of symbolic meaning—in poetry and myth they are often used as wonderful metaphors of fecundity and regeneration. The myth of Aphrodite's birth from a conch shell is one of many which relate to the creative power of shells as emblems of a universal matrix. In several of the portrayals of oysters, you will have encountered on this 'voyage through paintings,' corporeal even erotic images.

In *Elegy for the coral reefs and the mangroves of the Arafura Sea*, there are also shells which point towards another pole—towards an incorporeal, pure and pearly white emptiness. Not as symbols of perfections or union with the absolute, but with the terrible beauty of spentness and death which can be found in sun bleached bones in the desert or the coral reefs which are collapsing as the Great Barrier Reef heads towards extinction. This painting with its two sentinel mangrove trunks standing in front of it like witnesses, shows the wild surges of the giant tides of the Arafura Sea as they surge through the mangrove swamps each day through the mangroves.

Also scoured and sucked like a tidal zone are the tunnels and corridors made by the teredo worm molluscs. I like to think of this work as an x-ray painting done by a white man, showing the empty hollows and cavities which were once the dwelling of living vital forces. The hinged shells of the giant Mangrove Oyster in the middle of the painting, and the dying bleached lace of the coral near it act as a lament for a disappearing world.

Our journey continues over the top of the continent along to Nhulunbuy then down into the Gulf of Carpentaria to Yirrkala and then to Dhuruputjpi, the homeland of Mulkun Wirrpanda. Since 2005 she has painted what has been described as the most extensive and brilliant series of barks and larrakitj devoted to edible plants ever painted by an indigenous artist. Three years ago she turned her attention to the Maypal of her region including molluscs. In our voyage round the gallery which has replicated the voyage made in the real world across the northern seas we have reached four of the paintings on bark and a forest of sixteen larrakitj or poles. The majority of these are by Mulkun Wirrpanda and there is also a pole by Malalakpuy Munyarryan and another by Gānda Munyarryun.

In these works the artists have shown the individual mollusc as it is set within its environment—the energy and flow of the sand in which it lives, or the tree stems on which it travels or burrows. And miraculously this intimate environment is set again into a larger macrocosm and flows into abstract dimensions of geology and the earth's dynamic systems.



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The Yolŋu describe the metapatterns and underlying shapes of the cosmos in the form of myth ceremony and story. In these works in the gallery there are beautiful examples of how even the smallest and seemingly insignificant creatures—like the grubs of beetles or the teredo worm molluscs—when described as elements in the great mythic song cycles have their own importance.

The documentation of some these works and the descriptions of the molluscs and associated ecosystems which I have included below came from the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre and provides extraordinary insights into the complexity of some the works included in this exhibition and highlight the significance of Maypal as sustenance both for body and spirit.

A number of barks and poles depict Längurrk, as in *Längurrk (Portrait of John Wolseley)* 2018 [Cat. no. 8]. When Mulku Wirrpanda adopted her brother John Wolseley as a member of the Dhudi-Djapu clan of the Dhuwa moiety she anointed him with the name Längurrk, a particular witchetty grub that burrows into the mud near billabongs. Will Stubbs has suggested that this name reflects John's propensity for grubbing around in the mud of floodplains and in the earth of forests in pursuit of his art.

In *Gipipi* 2018 [Cat. no. 9], the round flat and sharp up-right disk of the edible shellfish Gipipi, appear in a number of Mulku's poles and barks. They are found in mud or on sandflats at low tide. Other Yolŋu names are girripipi, bamparrawarr, giyipi. Gipipi often sits a couple of feet down in soil mud so the hunter finds it when it slices their soles as they sink on to its upright blade. A common name is mangrove oyster. When cooked on the fire it has a small delicate scallop like orange meat sandwiched between the two flat halves.

The inside of the shell is a silver shiny surface similar to mother of pearl which is sometimes used for jewellery or decoration.

Gipipi belongs to the Dhuwa moiety.

Gathul Mangroves 2018 [Cat. no. 12]—inspired by Dr Bentley James' book *Maypal, Mayali' ga Wäŋa* (Shellfish, Meaning & Place) Mulku began to paint the essence of shellfish she has grown up with. She achieves this by painting the species as she knows them in their naturalistic form without reference to their sacred identity. This follows a similar phase where the artist of her own volition explored lesser known plant species which she feared were being forgotten by younger generations.



Cat. no. 12

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14

This work presents a very Catholic view of the maypal offering more of a contextual view of the mangroves with many species depicted including things which are not technically maypal (shellfish). There is Djewul or seaweed, Dharripa or Trepang, Djimbirri or Mangrove Jack, Gaywarr or Box Jellyfish, The Nyiknyik or water rat, Djanda the Goanna, Many'tjarr the mangrove leaves, Gunḍa or rocks and catfish. In addition, there are the Njokaliya, hermit crabs, Duṅ'ku, Djulku, False Trumpet Snail (conch), Gaṅ'kurr (Pyramid Top Snail), Garrtjpa Brown Baler Shell.

The opening in *Untitled (Dhalimbu Gaṅ'kurr Milinydjura)* 2018 [Cat. no. 15], is dhalimbu or the fluted giant clam. Synonyms are gāṅjili, muṅapuwa, rruthana, walpulay. This is also sung as sacred by Yirritja people who recognise its femininity. It is also equated with an anchoring foundation and the colourful dynamism of the ocean. Harvested at low tide its ink provides a hair dye. For the purposes of eating and preparing it is divided into the mākiri (ear) which is the connective tissue cut into delicious bite size slices, the mārwaṭ or hair the frilly colourful part and then the dhulmu or body. Care must be taken to extract the milkuminy or bile sac.



Cat. no. 14

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The triangular shapes are gan'kurr, or pyramid top snail. The dotted areas are milinydjura which is called in English a bean-shaped wedge clam.

The base of *Nirriwan ga Namura* 2018 [Cat. no. 17], shows namura the giant black-lipped rock oyster. The long strings of shells are nirriwan at the base are another very well known shellfish. The pole also includes the best known of all, the mekawu, or ordinary rock oyster which is appreciated by all. This work shows this species in its most spectacular manifestation, growing as clumps attached to the single stem aerial roots dangling from the branches of the mangroves into the tide when it is high. By boat or at low tide a single swipe with the knife can sever the bunch and deliver up to 50 fat oysters on each stem. Which are then smoked over the fire until they open. The nirriwan at the top are specifically shown as individuals attached to rocks. These are juveniles depicted in circular fields.

The base of *Untitled (Mulkuṅ (Namura))* 2018 [Cat. no. 18], shows namura the giant black-lipped rock oyster, full of protein, they occur in rocky environments as well as attached to mangrove trunks. Namura belongs to the Dhuwa moiety. They can grow flat upon rocks or in a curve around the roots.

There is also one njukaliya, a hermit crab. These descend from the arched roots to the seabed as the tide encroaches. They are a delicious standby staple for any estuarine hunting trip. Generally housed in the discarded shell of bunybu the lesser longbum, who are eaten and seen as medicinal and whose empty shells often provide a home for the more mobile njukaliya. Njukaliya are delicious when cooked and they turn a bright orange colour. It is not uncommon to see large congregations of them as they gather for a conga line of shell swapping next to a large washed up shell which could see them all upgrade once the larger crab abandons its shell for the new one. Yolṅu know how to tempt hermit crabs to leave their shell entirely by making an ululating sound which triggers this behaviour.

In *Maypal* 2018 [Cat. no. 20] the field of small circles with dots is milinydjura. This is also called the bean-shaped wedge clam which is an edible shellfish found within the sands of the beach. Milinydjura belongs to the Yirritja moiety.

The circular shapes are a flat disk-shaped shellfish belonging to the Dhuwa moiety and usually found on the roots of the mangrove trees. The meat is orange when cooked. Its English name is the sponge finger oyster and it is known in Yolṅu matha as giyathawun.

The large circles and 'peanut shapes' are the closed and open forms of the edible shellfish, Gipipi which can be found in mud or on sandflats at low tide. At the base of the pole are collections of a shellfish of the pippi family known as Warrapal which have been rendered in two different styles. Also shown is the edible variegated venus clam which has the Yolṅu names; diyamu, ririnyin and yirinyin and the larger version called yananu.

About half way up the pole is a field of ṅaywun or shelf mussel also known ṅayawun. It belongs to the Dhuwa moiety and is smaller than wurrṅka.

In *Gathulṅur (In the mangroves)* 2018 [Cat. no. 21], Mulkuṅ takes us into the mangroves and we can see the feet of the hunters.

Dhän'pala- King or Queen of shellfish in East Arnhem is one that sustains many people and anchors many hunting trips. Found by feeling with feet or combing with hands, knife blades or rakes or sometimes just spotted as cryptic lips just poking free of the mud or as a hole or crack in the surface of the mud indicating a subsidence below where she has moved.

This is the mud mussel, also known in Yolŋu matha as dhäkurru, räğudha, räwiya, rruṇundhaṇaniṅ, yiwaḷkurr, yuwaḷkurr. Found in mangroves and the muddy floodplains adjacent. There is a technique where a small fire is constructed using specially chosen size and type of kindling around a stacked pyramid of dhän'pala so that one ignition will cook and open as many as thirty at one time.

These shellfish belong to the Dhuwa moiety. In this pole dhän'pala are depicted lying hidden in the mud at the top of the pole. Hidden aside them are djiny'djalma or nyuka. Yolŋu women trek for kilometres atop the network of buttress roots anchoring the mangrove forest in the sweet black mud. There is a rhythmic pattern to the mud which a buried mud crab disturbs and their holes which are often wedged into hidden sections beneath the trees are visible to only the trained eye. Then begins the task of extracting the crab with massive vice like pincers from their deep dark wet hole usually with bare hands!

Mulkun also shows us gan'kurr, or pyramid top snail: a conical pyramidal cylinder with a spiral gently frilled surface fitting on a twenty cent to fifty cent piece sized base. Yolŋu distinguish between this and ḷatha which is the rougher variety currently regarded by

science as the same species. It is attached to rocks and moves amongst reefy areas. It belongs to the Dhuwa moiety. The Yolŋu dictionary identifies this as a trochus shell. They are edible.

Malalakpuy Munyarryun's *Wajupini* 2018 [Cat.no. 13], belongs to the Wangurri clan. This is recognised by the fact that miny'tji (sacred clan design—the detailed cross hatching 'behind' the figurative imagery) belonging to the Wangurri covers the piece. This pole shows disguised representations of a mangrove log washed in from saltwater Mangalili country into the Wangurri clan freshwater area of Gularri, the Cato River. It contained Milka or mangrove worms which died once it washed into the fresh water. This pattern was etched in the log and is here repeated as the Wangurri sacred clan design which appears throughout. The songs of the Wangurri invest this log with sacred power allowing it to make paths that other beings and landscape features could follow.

It is also a representation of the 'mangrove worm' with its wood eating jaws shut. Here the log has completed a journey through the tidal interplay of fresh, salt and brackish to the fresh waters of Gularri near Dhalinbuy—the actual residence of the artist and homeland for the Wangurri.



Cat. no. 13

14

15

16

17

The Wangurri often show the head of the log in its feminine shape as the anvil shaped Wet Season cumulo-nimbus as here. Within the design of the freshwater Wangurri water which covers the log is the hidden image of *noykal* the ancestral being taking the guise of the turrum or greater trevally. In this guise the tail of the fish is the cloud used by *noykal* to get back to Mangalili country for the beginning of the wet season. There is a metaphor for the soul's journey from life to death to rest to rebirth. The saltwater flows to the horizon where it is taken up as water vapour by the feminine thunderhead cloud which carries it as the pregnant maternal shape to the escarpment where it gives birth through rain. The log also has reference to the canoe used by the ancestral hunters who were the first Mangalili people to die, having drowned at sea, and the hollow log used for final mortuary rites.

Gända Munyarryun's *Wangurri Minytji* 2018 [Cat. no. 25] also belongs to the Wangurri clan, demonstrated by the fact that *miny'tji* (sacred clan design—the detailed cross-hatching 'behind' the figurative imagery) belonging to the Wangurri covers the piece. This pole shows disguised representations of a mangrove log washed in from saltwater Mangalili country into the Wangurri clan freshwater area of the Cato River.

It contained *milka* or mangrove worms which died once it washed into the fresh water. This pattern was etched in the log and is here repeated as the Wangurri sacred clan design which appears throughout. The songs of the Wangurri invest this log with sacred power allowing it to make paths that other beings and landscape features could follow. The pole itself is the mangrove worm as well and shows that creature which is a teredo worm but more of a shellfish whose shell has shrunk and evolved than a worm.

Here the log has completed a journey through the tidal interplay of fresh, salt and brackish to the fresh waters of the Dhalinbuw stretch of the Cato River—the actual residence of the artist and homeland for the Wangurri. It depicts *nyunala*, ox eye herring and *noyawu*, short neck tortoise. All Wangurri clan freshwater totems.

John Wolseley

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1. Sasha Grishin, *John Wolseley: Land Marks III*, Thames and Hudson, Melbourne, 2015
 2. Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969



Cat. no. 17 21 25 23 1
20 24



List of works and roomsheet

John WOLSELEY

born United Kingdom 1938; arrived Australia 1976

1. *The pearl fisher's voyage from Ise Shima to Roebuck Bay* 1985–89
sumi ink and watercolour on paper on canvas
Geelong Gallery
Gift of the artist, 2016

This work is one of John Wolseley's extensive journey paintings, produced over a five year period. Rather than a linear narrative travelogue, it is a complex world view. It records Wolseley's various observations, love of poetry and writers, thoughts on time and environmental beauty and realities during travels in Japan and Australia. This journey picture begins and ends with different symbolic representations of perfection—the circle—and reflects on states of order and chaos.

1a. Introduces a Buddhist meditation on enlightenment, and the circle is drawn to reflect on a path to internal order and balance.

1b. Is an observation of detritus collected by Wolseley from the shore of Shima Bay, combined with poetry by the Nobel Prize winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

1c. Depicts pearling rafts and flotsam and jetsam.

1d. Is dominated by the sail, and reflections on the voyage between Asia and Australia, arrival in Roebuck Bay, and meditations on maritime and pearl-fishing history.

1e. Continues Wolseley's journey around the Kimberley and visits to pearl farms. Here, detritus and pollution from the sea—a faded Cheezels box—is juxtaposed against a book page carrying the late 14th century Middle English poem *Pearl*, in which a father laments the loss of his daughter, his 'pearl'.

1f. Is an imposing, lyrical rendition of luminous oyster shell, and a symbol of quiet perfection and the beauty of Nature at the end of the journey.

2. *Projecting the tides, Point Torment, Western Australia* 1988–90
watercolour, gouache graphite, pen and ink on paper
Private collection, Melbourne

This work represents the cyclical passage of time, and the effects of the sun and the moon on the tides. While camped near Derby in the Kimberley, Wolseley observed the extraordinary high tides that characterise this coastal habitat, noting these are also harbingers of rising sea levels. Notations, meticulously drawn mangrove roots, and the evocation of the moon as a pearl combine here in a poetic meditation on time and space.

3. *Javan leaf and Tiwi leaf—continental drift*
2001 watercolour
Collection of the artist

In this work Wolseley reflects on the Wallace line, a faunal (and a floral) boundary line drawn in 1859 by British naturalist Alfred Wallace to distinguish biodiverse ecological zones between parts of Asia and Australia. The path of the Wallace line also relates to the contours of the earth's continental shelves that link Indonesian islands to mainland south-eastern Asia, and Australia to Papua New Guinea.

4. *Tide reach* 1988
watercolour
Courtesy of Australian Galleries, Melbourne
and Sydney

5. *Tidal ecosystem with mangroves* 2019
mixed media installation
Collection of the artist

Here Wolseley assembles a number of historical reference images of 'shipworms', working drawings and frottage—unique woodblock prints taken from the branches of swamp mangroves displayed here that bear evidence of Teredo worm dwellings. Indigenous representations of the Teredo worm are painted on several of the poles in the centre of the Gallery.

6. *River red gum branch with beetle engravings* 2019
red gum branch and rubbing taken from the branch
Collection of the artist

7. *Elegy for the coral reefs and the mangroves of the Arafura Sea* 2019
watercolour, graphite, collaged woodblock prints and mangrove branch rubbings, mangrove branches
Collection of the artist

This work is a lament for the loss of coastal reefs and mangrove swamps due to the increasing warming of the seas and rising sea levels.

Mulkun WIRRPANDA

Dhuḍi-Djapu
Australian, born c. 1942

Mulkun Wirrpanda is a clan leader and senior female artist for the Dhuḍi-Djapu clan from Dhuruputjpi. Mulkun paints Dhuḍi-Djapu miny'tji (sacred design) that depicts her traditional lands, and in this exhibition presents a range of recently painted barks, *larrakitj* (memorial poles), painted with natural earth pigments. In 2018, inspired by Bentley James's book 'Maypal, Mayali' ga Wānja' (Shellfish, Meaning & Place) Mulkun began to paint the various shellfish species particular to her environment and local food sources.

Unless otherwise stated, all works by Mulkun Wirrpanda are courtesy of the artist and Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala.

8. *Lāngurrk (Portrait of John Wolseley)* 2018
earth pigments on bark
Collection of John Wolseley

When Mulkun Wirrpanda adopted her brother John Wolseley as a member of the Dhuḍi-Djapu clan of the Dhuwa moiety she anointed him with the name Lāngurrk, a particular witchetty grub that burrows into the mud near billabongs. This name reflects John's propensity for grubbing around in the mud of floodplains and in the earth of forests in pursuit of his art.

9. *Gipipi* 2018
earth pigments on Stringybark

The top of this work describes the round flat and sharp upright disk of the edible shellfish Gipipi, also known as the Mangrove Oyster.

10. *Gipipi* 2018
earth pigments on Stringybark

11. *Lāngurrk* 2018
earth pigments on Stringybark
Collection of John Wolseley

12. *Gathul Mangroves* 2018
earth pigments on Stringybark log

Malalakpuy MUNYARRYUN

Wangurri

Australian, born c. 1972

13. *Wanupini* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

Courtesy of the artist and Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala

This work belongs to the Wangurri clan, recognised by the miny'tji (sacred clan design using detailed cross hatching against the figurative imagery). This pole is simultaneously a representation of both the mangrove log and the round-headed mangrove worm (with its wood-eating jaws shut). The log has completed a journey through the tidal interplay of salt and brackish waters to the fresh waters of Gularri near Dhalinybuy, the artist's homeland.

Mulkun WIRRPANDA

Dhudi-Djapu

Australian, born c. 1942

14. *Gipipi* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

15. *Untitled (Dhalimbu Gan'kurr Milinydjura)* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

The opening in this pole is Dhalimbu (*Tridacna squamosa*), the Fluted Giant Clam. It is also associated with femininity, and the anchoring foundation and dynamism of the ocean.

16. *Längurrk* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

17. *Untitled (Nirriwan ga Namura)* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

18. *Untitled (Mulkun (Namura))* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

The base of this pole shows Namura the Giant Black-lipped Rock Oyster (*Saccostrea mytiloides*).

19. *Längurrk* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

20. *Maypal* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

21. *Gathuljur (In the mangroves)* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

Dhän'pala: King or Queen of Shellfish in East Arnhem is one that sustains many people and anchors many hunting trips.

22. *Längurrk* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

23. *Untitled [Mulkun (Namura)]* 2018
earth pigments on Stringybark log

24. *Gathuljur* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

Gända MUNYARRYUN

Wangurri

Australian, born 1959

25. *Wangurri Minytji* 2018

earth pigments on Stringybark log

Courtesy of the artist and Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala

This pole represents the Teredo worm—a species that is more a shellfish without a shell than a worm. It also depicts nyuŋala (ox eye herring) and ŋokawu (short neck tortoise), all Wangurri clan freshwater totems.

John WOLSELEY

born United Kingdom 1938; arrived Australia 1976

Artist's sketchbook and coastal detritus 1989–90

leather bound journal with watercolour, ink and graphite on paper, and found objects
Collection of the artist

Artist biographies

John Wolseley

born United Kingdom 1938; arrived
Australia 1976

John Wolseley is represented by Australian
Galleries, Melbourne and Sydney.

australiangalleries.com.au/artists/john-wolseley/

Mulkun Wirrpanda

Dhudi-Djapu
Australian, born c. 1942

Mulkun Wirrpanda is represented by
Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala.

yirrkala.com/mulkun-wirrpanda/

Malalakpuy Munyarryun

Wangurri
Australian, born c.1972

Malalakpuy Munyarryun is represented by
Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala.

yirrkala.com/

Gända Munyarryun

Wangurri
Australian, born 1959

Gända Munyarryun is represented by
Buku-Larrngay Mulka, Yirrkala.

yirrkala.com/

John Wolseley and Mulkun Wirrpanda – Molluscs / Maypal and the warming of the seas

A Geelong Gallery exhibition
30 March to 2 June 2019

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Geelong Gallery

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