

TELSTRA NATSIAA

2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Media Release

STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL FRIDAY 8 AUGUST 2025 6:00 PM AEST

2025 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Winners Announced

The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) is delighted to announce the 2025 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) winners.

Gaypalani Wanambi from Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, is the prestigious 2025 Telstra Art Award winner with her monumental etched metal work, *Burwu, blossom 2025*.

Gaypalani is the eldest daughter of renowned artist Wukun Wanambi (1962–2022), whom she assisted as she was growing up. Their family home doubled as an art studio from her earliest years. The verandahs or the lounge room would invariably be the scene of art production, with a large pole or bark being worked on by her parents and siblings. Her father's renditions of thousands of tiny fish demanded ultimate patience and precision. She carried much of the workload of assisting him, including grinding the ochre pigments.

Before her father's sudden death in 2022, Gaypalani had begun to produce work in her own right and under her name with his blessing. By this time, her father had broadened his practice to include innovative digital work through the Mulka Project and was a member of the Found group of artists who engraved recycled road signs. After her father's passing, cultural protocol required her to avoid using his designs. Instead, Gaypalani began to create artwork from the epic song poetry relating to the journeys of Wuyal, the Ancestral honey hunter.

Gaypalani was a 2023 Telstra NATSIAA finalist and in 2024 won the Ravenswood Women's Art Prize. Her work is held in the collections of MAGNT, Parliament House (Canberra), Powerhouse (Sydney) and numerous private collections.

Telstra Art Award

\$100,000

Gaypalani Wanambi

Yolŋu Matha

born 1986

lives Yirrkala, NT

Burwu, blossom 2025

etched steel panels, aerosol paint

299 x 299 x 3 cm

Artwork story

This work is about Wuyal, the Ancestral honey hunter, an important Ancestor of the Marrakulu clan. Wuyal was the first man to look for a homeland for the Marrakulu people. He began a journey from Nilipitji through Gurka'wuy, travelling via Yuḏuyudu to Cape Shield, up to Trial Bay and along the Goyder



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River until he came to Nhulun, or Mount Saunders. He felled the Ancestral Waṇambi tree, causing a river of honey and thus founded the Marrakulu clan homeland at Gurka'wuy. The Marrakulu dance as bees in their ceremony, elbows extended, hands clutching stringybark leaves, which vibrate as wings.

Our 2025 Telstra NATSIAA panel of judges include- Stephen Gilchrist, Gail Mabo and Brian Martin

Judges' Comment

"Gaypalani Waṇambi is the winner of the 2025 Telstra Art Award valued at \$100,000 for her etched steel and aerosol work *Burwu, blossom*. This is an exceptional work that visually and materially explores different relationships to and understandings of Country. Presenting two worlds with two sides, the epic Ancestral journeys of Wuyal are delicately engraved onto the silvery surfaces of discarded road signs. Each time the viewer moves, the work responds accordingly, revealing and concealing the undulations and intangible lifeforces of Country. Each jewel-like panel shimmers with exquisitely rendered designs that are deeply anchored to Yolṁu philosophies. Despite its scale and its composite parts, there is a visual cohesion to the work that has been ambitiously, intentionally and expertly assembled."

Quote from Adam Worrall, Director, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT)

"We are delighted to celebrate Gaypalani Waṇambi as the recipient of the 2025 Telstra Art Award. Gaypalani's work about Wuyal, the Ancestral honey hunter is a testament to her exceptional talent and deep connection to the stories of the Marrakulu clan homeland at Gurka'wuy. Her depiction of the epic song poetry relating to the journeys of Wuyal, as he looked for a homeland, is a powerful reflection of Ancestral stories and pays homage to her father, renowned artist Wukun Waṇambi (1962–2022), whom she assisted as she was growing up.

In addition to celebrating Gaypalani's exceptional achievement, I would like to extend my congratulations to the other category winners and to all 71 finalists who entered their works and shared their stories.

In 2025, we proudly highlight the significant participation of female artists, with 42 of this year's artworks created by women. The artworks shared through Telstra NATSIAA provide inspiration that captivates audiences both near and afar and showcases the tremendous diversity and depth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic and cultural expression found across Australia." -Adam Worrall, Director MAGNT

"Congratulations to Gaypalani Waṇambi for the extraordinary work that powerfully connects us to Country through the stories and spirit of the Yolṁu people, and to all the 2025 Telstra NATSIAA winners. This year's finalists and award recipients have once again delivered an exhibition rich in storytelling, inspiration, and deep cultural expression and we are proud to continue our support. Every year, these awards honour the remarkable talent of First Nations artists, and 2025 continues that legacy with profound beauty and strength." - Lyndall Stoyles, Telstra Group Executive for Sustainability, External Affairs and Legal



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Telstra General Painting Award

\$15,000

Iluwanti Ken

Pitjantjatjara language

born 1944

lives Amata community, SA

Walawuru Tjurkpa (Eagle story) 2025

synthetic polymer paint and ink on linen

152.5 x 198 cm

Artwork story

Iluwanti Ken is well known for her large-scale ink drawings that feature graphic depictions of mother eagles hunting. These highly detailed drawings are created using punu sticks and express her Tjukurpa (Anangu cultural heritage, encompassing past, present and future). She says that birds like the walawuru (eagles) and patupiri (swallows) have lessons for Anangu women about how to care for one's children. These birds build strong wiltjas (shelters) for their family, hunt for food and protect their young from dangers.

About the artist

Iluwanti Ken is a Pitjantjatjara artist originally from Watarru and now lives in Amata, in the APY Lands in South Australia. In 2020, Iluwanti won the Telstra Work on Paper Award at Telstra NATSIAA and was a finalist in the 2021 Dobell Drawing Prize at NAS Sydney and the 2020 National Works on Paper Prize at Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery. Several of her works were featured in Tarnanthi 2020: Open Hands, at the Art Gallery of South Australia. In addition to her art practice, Iluwanti sits on the board of directors for both Tjala Arts and the APY Art Centre Collective. Her work is held in numerous public collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Artbank and the Singapore Art Museum.

Artist quote

"I paint the stories of my father's Country - Walawuru Tjukurpa - the story of the eagles. This is my Tjukurpa and all of my children's Tjukurpa too." - Iluwanti Ken

Judges' comments

"There is an explosive energy in this work by Iluwanti Ken, whose black and white painting depicts the *Walawuru Tjurkpa* (Eagle story). Using punu sticks to create this large-scale work, the figurative forms of mother eagles hunting are infilled with intricate and singular linework and are contrasted against large washes of paint and ink. With its graphic intensity and painterly confidence, it immediately draws the viewer into its powerful orbit."

Highly commended Telstra General Painting Award: **Daniel Walbidi Kirriwirri 2025**



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Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award (sponsored by Telstra)

\$15,000

Owen Yalandja

Kuninjku language

born 1962

lives Maningrida, NT

Ngalkodjek Yawkyawk 2025

bridal tree (*Xanthostemon paradoxus*), kurrajong (*Brachychiton diversifolius*) and bamboo with ochre and PVA fixative

242 x 42 x 14 cm

Artwork story

"This story is very old. That old man [my father, Crusoe Kuningbal], when he was alive, told that story to me, to all of us. He told us about the yawkyawk [mermaid] spirits women called Ngalkodjek who live in the billabong on my Country. He told us how they call out loudly, how they call out as they walk along. When they walk down from the bush, they follow a set path that belongs to them, and they walk along calling out. That is their path, which they take. It is an old traditional route." – Owen Yalandja

About the artist

Kuninjku artist Owen Yalandja is a senior member of the Dankorlo clan, the custodians of an important yawkyawk site. In the early 1980s, Owen learned carving from his father, renowned artist Crusoe Kuningbal (1922–1984). Owen and his brother, Crusoe Kurddal (1961–2020), followed their father's legacy and, over the years, found their own distinct styles. In the early 1990s, Owen experimented with the dot patterns his father taught him, then created V-shaped marks to represent the scales of the watery beings. As he says, 'I make it (yawkyawk) according to my individual ideas. My father used to decorate them with dots. A long time ago, he showed me how to do this. But this style is my own, no one else does them like this.'

Owen's work is represented in major international collections and has been exhibited at major institutions both locally and globally, including at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Australia, Melbourne Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and Bargehouse, London. His work has also been presented at the Venice Biennale, the Biennale of Sydney and the National Gallery of Australia's National Indigenous Art Triennial.

In 2023, Owen won the Telstra Bark Painting Award at Telstra NATSIAA.

Judges' comments

"Owen Yalandja's meticulously crafted sculptural work shows an artist at the height of their powers. The intricate detail on the strong yet streamlined body of the *Yawkyawk*, showcases an exceptional level of artistry. Each element is carefully designed to manifest not only an Ancestral Being but a whole cultural universe. With meticulous attention to detail in the fins, arms, hair, and painted surfaces, the artist brings the Yawkyawk to life. By utilising new materials and techniques to retell an ancient story, Yalandja's work plays a vital role in maintaining, safeguarding, and invigorating cultural practices."

Highly commended Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award: **Binygurr Wirrpanda Gudurrku 2024**



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2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Telstra Bark Painting Award

\$15,000

Lucy Yarawanga

Gurr-goni language

born 1961

lives Maningrida, NT

Bawáliba & Ngalyod 2024

earth pigments and PVA fixative on stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetrodonta*) stringybark

164 x 49.7 cm

Artwork story

“Bawáliba are good spirits, they protect us. They are really tall – just like us. They dance late at night and have a lot of hair. In olden times, a long, long, long time ago, Bawáliba were here, before people were on the land. One time, the Bawáliba were really, deep asleep. They didn’t hear the noise of Ngalyod, the Rainbow Serpent, coming. When they heard it, they hid in their cave. Ngalyod came in, but it was too late to run. He ate the Bawáliba. They all died. He ate their legs and arms into pieces. Only one survived.” – Lucy Yarawanga

About the artist

Bulanjdjan Lucy Yarawanga is an experienced Gurr-goni multidisciplinary artist who predominantly works through Bábbarra Women’s Centre. She works with both lino-printing and screen-printing techniques, with her textile designs often referencing her Ancestral stories, including various depictions of Bawáliba (Djinkarr spirit woman). Lucy’s painting style, like her personality, is bold and to the point. As well as her native Gurr-goni language, one of the least commonly spoken languages in Arnhem Land – Lucy also speaks another eight Maningrida languages.

Artist quote

“I’m an artist. I work doing bark painting and I also do designs at the Women’s Centre (Bábbarra). I didn’t get these things from nowhere. I had them in my mind from when I was eight or nine years old. My mother was telling me that story. She passed away in 2019. I was thinking to myself, when I was working by myself, to make that design, Bawáliba. And my fabric design goes everywhere, and my art on bark and paper. I don’t think of myself as a perfect woman or artist, no. I’m just painting. Sometimes, I save money for my grandkids.” – Lucy Yarawanga

Judges’ comments

“The muscular, curling form of Ngalyod appears to emerge from the edges of this dynamic bark painting by Lucy Yarawanga, drawing us into its powerful visual impact. Various-sized spirit figures called *Bawáliba* surround the formidable snake, but they are clearly no match for *Ngalyod*. The black and white palette, combined with the use of negative space, heightens the drama of this ancestral encounter. There is an immediacy to this work, and the decoration on *Ngalyod*’s skin, along with the long-spotted bodies and spiky hair of the *Bawáliba*, showcase the work of an intuitive, confident and uninhibited artist.”



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2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Telstra Work on Paper Award

\$15,000

Naomi Hobson

Southern Kaantju and Umpila languages

born 1989

lives Coen, Cape York, QLD

Present & Beyond 2024

pigment print on cotton rag paper

124 x 164 cm

Artwork story

"Present & Beyond is a new work in my photographic series *Life on the River*. The work shows a young local boy from Coen. He is confident within himself and secure in the knowledge that his present and his future are intertwined in the deep past where others before him walked and rested in safety. I am fixated on the reflections that our Ancestors occupied this very space, and am amazed at how far we have come in sharing space over time. I am capturing time and a history where images begin to travel between the past, the present, and beyond." – Naomi Hobson

About the artist

Naomi Hobson is a visual artist who resides on the banks of the Coen River, where her grandparents were born. This landscape inspired her paintings, photography and ceramics. Naomi's most recent solo exhibitions in 2025 were at Art Paris and in Hong Kong – Art Basel. She is represented by Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery, London, United Kingdom. In 2024, Naomi's work featured in the National Photographic Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. She has won both the Mervyn Moriarty Landscape Award at the Queensland Regional Art Awards (2023) and the Geelong Contemporary Art Prize (2022).

Her work is in public and private collections nationally and internationally, including MAGNT, National Gallery of Australia, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, National Art Library, London.

Judges' comments

"In this work, Naomi Hobson explores Ancestral echoes across time by capturing the tranquil waters of the Coen River, which reflect and absorb the deep histories of the land. Highlighting the river's life-giving qualities, this lush landscape underscores the vital relationship between people, place, and Ancestral presence. Cinematic in its scope, this rich tonal photograph celebrates the river and all who are connected to it."



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2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Telstra Multimedia Award

\$15,000

Jahkarli Felicitas Romanis

Pitta Pitta language

born 1998

lives Naarm (Melbourne)

Pitta Pitta (Extracted) and Pitta Pitta (Google's Gaze) 2025

digital print on polyester film, aluminium light boxes

28 x 28 x 6 cm (each)

Artwork story

These photographs are Google Earth's (re)presentation of Pitta Pitta Country. They are freeze frames that show the transition from aerial view to street view. The visual distortions in the images embody a rupture in the supposed neutrality and authority of Google Earth, exposing cracks in its colonial framework. These fractures symbolise the limitations and biases of Western cartographic practices, which fail to grasp the complexity of Country as a living, relational entity with agency. By revealing these flaws, the works challenge the false narrative of 'terra nullius', asserting the enduring presence and sovereignty of Indigenous knowledges and connections to Country.

About the artist

Jahkarli Felicitas Romanis is a proud Aboriginal woman of Pitta Pitta descent. She is an artist and researcher based on Kulin land in Victoria. After completing an honours degree in photography at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 2020, she commenced a PhD at Monash University in 2021 through the Wominjeka Djeembana Indigenous Research Lab, in the faculty of Art, Design and Architecture. Her arts practice is inextricably intertwined with her identity as a Pitta Pitta woman and aims to subvert and disrupt colonial approaches to image-making and photography. Jahkarli's research and practice are heavily informed by her family's oral histories and photographic archives. Her work has been exhibited in various galleries and arts festivals locally and internationally, some of which include Ars Electronica, Austria; PHOTO International Festival of Photography, Victoria; Museum of Australian Photography and Craft Victoria. In 2023, Jahkarli was a finalist in Telstra NATSIAA. She currently works as a lecturer in the Art, Design and Architecture faculty at Monash University, Melbourne.

Judges' comments

"In this work by Jahkarli Felicitas Romanis, the artist uses Google's digital photography to challenge its cartographical authority and question its objectifying lens. With its unsettling stillness, she highlights Google's glitches and pixelations to reveal its technological limits and its stark contrast with Indigenous conceptualisations of Country. Framing the work like a lens, she creates an enclosure of Country for the viewer to peer into, which generates a tension between the assumed neutrality of Google's technology and the agency and vitality of Country."

Highly commended Telstra Multimedia Award: **Johnathon World Peace Bush and Doriana Bush** *Joan of Arc: Arika 2025*



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2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Telstra Emerging Artist Award

\$15,000

Sonia Gurrpulan Guyula

Djambarrpuyngu language

born 1998

lives Dhondji Homeland, NT

Mat 2025

pandanus and bush dye

163 x 163 x 5 cm

Artwork story

"Artists from all over come here for their pandanus and colours. We like to play around with bush dyes to get new colours. We mix some of this with some of that and keep experimenting to keep us interested and inspired. The circle pattern is like our grandmothers and great-grandmothers used to make. They called it Njanmara, a little bit different but mostly the same." - Sonia Gurrpulan Guyula

About the artist

"I saw my sisters, Garmundawuy (b. 1971) and Yindiri (b. 1985), making fibre art when I was growing up. I had a dream to follow them. At Dhondji, where I live, we have lots of long pandanus and good bush colours." - Sonia Gurrpulan Guyula

Judges' comments

"With its vibrant bands of shifting colour, we were instantly captivated by the intricate weave of this pandanus mat. Demonstrating a profound understanding of the medium and its potential, the artist appears eager to follow in the footsteps of her sisters while establishing her unique creative identity. As Sonia states, 'Little bit different but mostly the same'. With its commanding presence, we were impressed by the remarkable interplay of technical expertise and material knowledge."

Quote from 2025 Telstra NATSIAA judges: Stephen Gilchrist, Gail Mabo and Brian Martin

"We are honoured to have been invited to judge the 2025 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. We want to congratulate all the finalists and thank them for sharing their extraordinary works. It was a privilege to spend both physical and intellectual time engaging with these works, which showcase the incredible depth of cultural knowledge and creative talent within the sector. We were drawn to works of art that pulled us into their cultural worlds through the strength of their visual and narrative power. The exhibition highlights intergenerational connections that reveal a profound cultural duty to retell ancient stories in new ways.

We thank MAGNT, Kate ten Buuren, Rebekah Raymond and Adam Worrall for giving us the time to engage thoughtfully with these works. They fostered a wonderfully unhurried process that prioritised care and respect for artists, and we have strived to follow this approach.



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About Telstra NATSIAA

Telstra NATSIAA is Australia's longest-running and most prestigious art award of its kind, presented on Larrakia Country (Darwin) by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) and Principal Partner, Telstra.

Now in its 42nd year, the 2024 Telstra NATSIAA features Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across the nation, sharing incredible works reflecting the strength of cultures, responses to current affairs and unerring connections to Country.

This year, 71 finalists from across Australia have been selected from 216 entries. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards were established by MAGNT in 1984 to recognise and promote appreciation and understanding of the quality and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art throughout Australia.

The Awards have been a career changer for many of the finalists and winners throughout its 42 years. This year, we celebrate a 34-year-long partnership with Telstra.

Telstra Art Award | \$100,000

Category Winners | \$15,000 each

Telstra General Painting Award

Telstra Bark Painting Award

Telstra Work on Paper Award

Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award (sponsored by Telstra)

Telstra Multimedia Award

Telstra Emerging Artist Award

Join us for the Awards Ceremony

Date: Friday, 8 August 2025

Time: 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM ACST

Location: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), 19 Conacher Street, The Gardens, Darwin

[Free registration here](#)

Exhibition

Open until Sunday 26 January 2026

[The Virtual Gallery is now live here](#)

Vote for your favourite artwork

[People's Choice Award](#)

Opening Weekend Public Programs

[Register for the Curator and Judges Talk here](#)



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[Register for the Artist's Talk here](#)

Available to Interview

Adam Worrall | MAGNT Director

Kate ten Buuren | NATSIAA 2025 Curator

Some artists are available upon request

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More Information about the Telstra NATSIAA

1. Telstra NATSIAA is Australia's longest-running and most prestigious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art award.
2. The 2025 Telstra NATSIAA are a celebration of contemporary Indigenous art.
3. 71 exceptional artworks have been selected from 216 entries, presenting a snapshot of the finest contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art created in the past year.
4. Telstra NATSIAA has been a platform for both emerging and established artists to showcase their talents for over four decades.
5. The Telstra NATSIAA exhibition opened on 21 June 2025 and continues until 26 January 2026.
6. The ceremony will include the announcement of all 2025 Award winners on Friday, 8 August 2025.



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