



MEDIA RELEASE

2026 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 2026 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) winners.

Northern Territory born artist Ryan Presley is the prestigious 2026 Telstra Art Award winner with his standout oil painting *Our lifestyle of tranquillity undisturbed 2026*.

Dr Ryan Presley was born in 1987 in Mparntwe / Alice Springs and is a Marri Ngarr artist currently based on Yugambeh Country (Logan City) in south-east Queensland. His practice spans painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, installation and writing, and is marked by a deep engagement with the visual economies of power, memory and resistance.

Ryan's work critically recomposes grand narratives, foregrounding Indigenous autonomy and challenging colonial modes of representation and understanding. Known for combining technical precision with conceptual rigour, his projects interrogate the symbolic and material legacies of settler colonialism – particularly through the lens of currency, ritual and state authority. He exhibits internationally, including Gadigal/ Sydney's Art Gallery of New South Wales (2023) and Artspace (2019), Eindhoven's Van Abbemuseum (2018) and Vienna's Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste (2021).

His major solo exhibition, *Fresh Hell*, was co-commissioned by Adelaide Contemporary Experimental (Karna/Adelaide) and Gertrude Contemporary (Naarm/Melbourne). Ryan is represented by Milani Gallery and holds a PhD in Art Theory (Griffith University 2016). He is a recent recipient of a 2025 Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship.

Telstra Art Award

\$100,000

Ryan Presley
born 1987
Marri Ngarr language
lives Logan, Qld

Our lifestyle of tranquillity undisturbed 2026

oil paint on polyester
183 x 152.7 cm

Artwork Story

The protagonist lies peacefully, accompanied by loyal companion and a luxury rifle; poised on a precarious edge. Dark, reflective waters ripple at the threshold, while in the background a large bushfire sparks and stirs. Elements combined that reflect our present moment, intrinsically shaped by days gone by and continually informing days to come. Our *lifestyle of tranquillity undisturbed* positions the Western canon –





particularly the Renaissance – as something locally inherited rather than distantly revered. Renaissance is approached here as a method: the excavation of objects and ideas from the past, carefully recontextualised and redeployed as foundations for renewed artistic inquiry and collective imagination, held together by a fragile hope for social flourishing. One key reference within this painting is Domenico Beccafumi's *The Annunciation* (c. 1545–1546).

Artist quote

"Our lifestyle of tranquillity undisturbed appears as a dreamscape that mediates the Orwellian slogan: 'Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.'" - Ryan Presley

Our 2026 Telstra NATSIAA panel of judges are Julie Gough, Yhonnie Scarce and Warraba Weatherall.

Judges' Comments

"Ryan's painting is a standout in terms of successfully drawing together diverse cultural, cross cultural and art history references to successfully hold a viewer in affective contemplation about the past, present, future of the figure centrally depicted and by extension the cultural life, memories and responsibilities, they and their compatriots are maintaining, at all costs.

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

"My heartfelt congratulations to Ryan for winning this year's 2026 Telstra Art Award and to all the category winners and finalists. I was captivated by Ryan's monumental painting that presents a recomposed view of the past, with references to classical Renaissance style. It has been executed with such technical precision and is a standout work in a year when the quality and diversity of entries was exceptional.

"The artworks shared through Telstra NATSIAA showcase the breadth and diversity of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, continuing to demonstrate the important role art plays in preserving culture, sharing stories and fostering greater understanding across Australia."

Quote from Lyndall Stoyles, Group Executive at Telstra.

"Congratulations to Ryan Presley and all this year's Telstra NATSIAA winners and finalists. Ryan's powerful work shows how art can challenge the way we see the world, spark important conversations and deepen our understanding of Australia's shared history. The Telstra NATSIAA is one of the country's most important celebrations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture, showcasing extraordinary talent from communities across Australia. We're incredibly proud to support these awards and celebrate the artists whose stories, creativity and vision continue to inspire us all."

Overall NATSIAA Judges comments

"The strongest works demonstrate critical artistry grounded in cultural integrity. They embody cultural authority, intellectual rigour and a deep commitment to the responsibilities shared within our contemporary cultural practices."

TELSTRA NATSIAA

2026 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Category Winners

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Telstra General Painting Award

\$15,000

Vanessa Inkamala

born 1968

Western Aranda language

lives Mparntwe / Alice Springs, NT

Arrkurla Nukala / Lyaarta Ntema 2026

recycled road sign, gesso primer, gouache watercolour paint, house paint, cold wax medium

136.5 x 180 x 4 cm (overall)

Artwork Story

Acknowledgement: Tyler Arnold, studio coordinator, assisted with lettering on the artwork, under the artist's direction. "The words "Arrkurla Nukala" and "Lyaarta Ntema" mean "before" and "after/today" in my language, Western Aranda. I put them on these signs to show how the way I visit my homeland, Tjoritja, the West MacDonnell Ranges, has changed over my lifetime. Today we have a bitumen road. I take photos on my phone. You can take any picture on the phone. Sometimes I take them back to the art centre and use them to make paintings. Before phones we would just see the living Country, or we would see it in our memory. I also like painting from my memory." -Vanessa Inkamala

About the artist

Vanessa Inkamala was born in Ntaria (Hermannsburg) in 1968, with a rich artistic heritage – her great-uncle was the renowned artist Albert Namatjira (1902–1959), and her aunt, the late Ivy Pareroultja (1952–2022), was also a respected artist. Following in her family's footsteps, Vanessa's younger brother, Reinhold Inkamala, is also an established landscape painter. In her late twenties, Vanessa married Fabian Conway, an Eastern Arrernte man from Santa Teresa, situated east of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Immersed in the vibrant artistic community there, Vanessa honed her craft, creating works inspired by the cultural richness of the region. Currently based in Mparntwe, Vanessa dedicates her days to her artistic practice at the Itja Ntjarra Art Centre. Her journey with the art centre began in 2010, and her distinctive style quickly captured the attention of major collectors. Her works are now part of esteemed collections including those at the University of Technology Sydney, National Museum of Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Vanessa's artistic journey has been marked by participation in special projects, including a professional development workshop led by acclaimed artist and friend Tony Albert. Her dedication to exploring complex themes through her art continues to resonate within the artistic community.

Judges' comments

"Vanessa's work provides a compellingly multi-layered journey across time and Country. Vanessa continues and honours the creative language of her forebears whilst sharing how technology now also assists art development and production."

Highly commended Telstra General Painting Award: **Wulu Marawili Garranali – Sanctuary 2026.**



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.



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Telstra Bark Painting Award

\$15, 000

Barayuwa Mununggurr

born 1980

Miwatj language

lives Rurrualala, NT

The hidden reef at Yarrinya 2025

earth pigments on stringybark

165.3 x 79 cm

Artwork story

Ancestors of Barayuwa's mother's Munyuku clan killed their brother whale Mirinyuṇu and butchered it. Blinded by their greed for the rich fat food, they lost sight of the discipline of kinship. When realisation dawned, they threw their stone knives into the sea in shame. These became the hidden dangerous reef Garapana.

"Disguised within this design are the knives, limbs and bones of the whale made sacred with the essence of Mirinyuṇu. The bounty of a whale carcass rich in nutrition can become a dangerous threat in tropical conditions if people lack the discipline to control consumption." - Barayuwa Mununggurr

About the artist

Barayuwa Mununggurr paints his own Djapu designs as well as the Munyuku clan designs of his mother Bengitj's homeland, Yarrinya. Yarrinya is also the motherland of his paternal grandfather, Wonggu Mununggurr. The vibrant patterns that originate from his mother's Munyuku clan designs recall an ancestral story that took place on the Yarrinya saltwater estate, in which Munyuku spirit men hunt their own brother, a whale called Mirinyuṇu. In addition to painting, Barayuwa makes yidaki (didgeridu), galpu (spear throwers), gara (spears) and bilma (clapsticks). Barayuwa has been exhibiting since 2007. His exhibitions include Yarrinya, Sullivan+Strumpf Gadigal/Sydney (2024); Primavera, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2014); Living Waters, Monaco Oceanographic Institute (2016); Rambangi: Together as Equals, with Ruark Lewis, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin (2015); Barayuwa Mununggurr, Outstation Gallery, Darwin (2015); Gapan Gallery, GARMA Festival (2013); Gadawulkwulk Means Shelter (with Ruark Lewis), Cross Art Projects, Sydney (2012); Arboreal, Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney (2011); Returning to Djakapurra – A Collection of Poles and Barks from Yirrkala, Redot Gallery, Singapore (2010); After Berndt, Indigenart, Mossenson Gallery, Perth (2009); New Generations: Yirrkala Artists, Creative Economy, Brisbane (2008); and Galuku Gallery, Darwin Festival Print Exhibition, Darwin (2007).

Judges' comments

"Barayuwa's powerful piece deftly both conceals and reveals the cultural narrative at its centre through applied oxide designs co-existing with deliberate excision and removal of other elements. The underpinning story itself is about retaining knowledge of clan origin and identity that includes components deliberately disposed in the deep past. Enacting remembrance is brilliantly evident and executed by the creative decisions made in constructing this compelling work on bark."



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Telstra Work on Paper Award

\$15, 000

Jenna Mayilema Lee

born 1992

Larrakia, KarraJarri and Wardaman languages

lives Melbourne, Vic

Taking back taken 2026

printed paper maps, book-binding thread, archival glue, wire

54 x 450 x 13 cm (overall)

Artwork story

"This body of work comprises six danala (dillybags) made from maps taken from the British Museum. In the Great Court, visitors are invited to donate in exchange for a map. I chose not to. I quietly gathered them over time, later asking friends and family to take small stacks and carry them back to Australia. 'What began as a simple act grew into intention. 'This is not theft for theft's sake, but conceptual restitution, an act that asks: what does it mean to take from an institution built on taking? 'The danala stand as quiet refusals. Taking what was taken.'" – Jenna Mayilema Lee

About the artist

Jenna Mayilema Lee is a Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman and KarraJarri woman with Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and AngloAustralian (Irish and Scottish) ancestry. Her practice explores language, materiality and the transformation of inherited narratives. Deeply intrigued by what is lost in translation, Jenna explores the spaces between words, the felt but unwritten, capturing the subtleties that surround language. Her work channels these overlooked nuances into immersive installations, works on paper, sculpture and multimedia. Working primarily with books and historical papers, viewed as colonial artefacts, Jenna interrogates dictionaries that have poorly compiled First Peoples languages and applies Larrakia linguistics, using this process to better describe the world she sees around her. Through deconstruction and reconstruction, she engages with materials that echo the past, revealing the hidden stories they carry. Her work seeks to uncover the unseen forces shaping our understanding of history and identity, drawing attention to what time has eroded and collective memory has suppressed. Jenna's practice has been recognised through numerous awards, including the 2025 Venice Biennale shortlisted team, the 2024 Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize, the 2023 Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award (Emerging Artist), the 2020 Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award at Telstra NATSIAA and the 2019 Dreaming Award (National Indigenous Art Award, Australia Council).

Judges comments

"*Taking back taken* is a work of quiet beauty, eloquent and effective in how it carries its laden content. Jenna's haunting piece dexterously manifests the loss and ongoing impact of museums and collecting practices on those whose cultural objects were taken."

Highly commended Telstra Work on Paper Award: **Robert Namarnyilk Marlgawa Ngermi Djang** (*Mother Country and Mother Rainbow Serpent Dreaming*) 2026



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Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award (sponsored by Telstra)

\$15, 000

Napuwurri Marawili

born 1967

Yolngu Matha language

lives Yilpara, NT

Djambatj – Deadly hunter 2025

earth pigments on wood

69.3 x 9.8 x 7.4 cm; 94.5 x 10.5 x 7.3 cm

Artwork story

“Gany’tjurr is the Reef Heron totem of the Maḏarrpa clan. The design shows the saltwater of Grindall Bay (Yathikpa). Manikay (sacred song) and bungul (ritual dance) pertain to the movement of the tides here and Gany’tjurr as Djambatj, the archetypal Yirritja male spear hunter.” - Napuwurri Marawili

Yolngu hunters mirror the strategy of this bird also enshrined in the dance. The bird crouches and creeps forward as the small rippling waves enter the shallows. The foam obscures the view of the prey. The hunter stands up as the water calms and recedes, then spears down to fix the fish with its beak.

About the artist

Napuwurri is the third son and fourth child of the great artist Bakulanjay Marawili (1944–2002). In the last years of his father’s life, it was he who worked most closely on art with him. They completed a number of collaborative works together. He follows many of his father’s stylistic features and was endorsed as a legitimate artist of his clan’s sacred designs by his father before his death. Napuwurri first came to wider attention in the Yakumirri exhibition at Raft artspace in Darwin. The Holmes à Court Collection bought this set of paintings in its entirety. He is an adaptable man with a versatile range of artistic skills. As well as dancing and singing in ceremony he sculpts and makes prints. As a young man he travelled to the east coast and worked as a carpenter, married and had two children before moving back to north-east Arnhem Land. He has strong links to Numbulwar through his second wife, Rita, and from his early years spent there as Bakulanjay’s family was one of the last of the Maḏarrpa to move back to their homeland of Yilpara in the 1980s. Napuwurri worked for Buku-Larrnggay Mulka for two years before returning to Yilpara to live in 2006. His first solo show was at Suzanne O’Connell Gallery in 2008, from which the National Gallery of Australia bought two works. The Kerry Stokes Collection has also acquired his work. In 2018, Napuwurri won the Telstra Bark Painting Award at the 35th Telstra NATSIAA and sang his manikay to the crowd as he accepted his award. The bark, Baraltja Dugong Yathikpa, was acquired by the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, USA.

Judges’ comments

“These herons are truly captivating in form. Napuwurri knows them so well as to carve their combined characteristics, Ancestor and bird, into remarkably beautiful and convincing transformative beings.”

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Telstra Emerging Artist Award

\$15,000

Guruwuy Murrinyina

born 1975

Yolŋu Matha language

lives Gäŋgan, NT

Prismatic arc 2026

earth pigments on stringybark hollow pole

295 x 29 x 36 cm

Artwork story

The Galpu clan miny'tji (sacred clan design behind the lilies) represents Djari (rainbows) and the power of the lightning within them. It also refers to the power of the cyclone created by Wititj, the Rainbow Serpent. The diagonal lines represent trees that have been knocked down as Wititj moves from place to place, as well as the ribs of the snake.

"The sun shining against the scales of the snake form a prism of light like a rainbow. The lightning comes when they strike their tongue. The thunder is the sound they make as they move along the ground." -
Guruwuy Murrinyina

About the artist

Guruwuy Murrinyina lives with her son at the very remote homeland of Gäŋgan, a village of ten houses adjacent to a chain of billabongs inland from Blue Mud Bay. The nearest town is a four-hour drive along dirt roads. This is where her art centre is at Yirrkala. In one of these deep waterholes resides Wititj, the Rainbow Serpent, which is encoded in her paintings of lilies. Guruwuy is the daughter of deceased artist Malaluba Gumana and has four siblings. Malaluba was a highly esteemed, award-winning artist who was celebrated for the delicacy of her hand and deft colour-mixing skill with earth pigments. Their father was Yanalka Murrinyina of the Djarrwark clan, whose homeland is Balma to the south and equally remote. Guruwuy had been assisting her mother in her paintings of Galpu clan imagery up until her mother's sudden death in February 2020. In grief and observing spiritual protocols, Guruwuy did not begin to paint in her own right until mid-2022. With her first rendering of these new works, it became clear that she had taken a fresh approach to her mother's theme, using a different palette and even more finely detailed compositions.

Judges' comments

"Guruwuy's application of the design across the log surface demonstrates deep assuredness and sensitivity to the mediums and the story depicted."



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Telstra Multimedia Award Telstra

\$15,000

Colin Heenan-Puruntatameri

born 1995

Tiwi language

lives Milikapiti, NT

Ngirramini Ngini Amparruwu (The story of the widow) 2026

single-channel video, 3:00 minutes, with Yirriwala and Timirrikimaka (fighting sticks), locally sourced earth pigments on ironwood

70 x 20 x 4 cm (overall)

Artwork story

Acknowledgements: Pedro Wonaeamirri (singer), Patrick Freddy Puruntatameri (wood carver) and Will Heathcote (camera operator).

Translation: In this multimedia work *Ngirramini Ngini Amparruwu (The story of the widow)*, Colin Heenan-Puruntatameri performs both a chant created by his mother, R Puruntatameri, and the widow dance, as a contemporary audio-visual document celebrating the performative foundations of Tiwi art and culture. Historically, the widow dance was performed with Yirriwala and Timirrikimaka, the two carved ironwood objects that Colin has created as part of this work.

“The Miyartuwi (Pandanus Skin-Group) are looking at me wearing short shorts. Whose matriarch name is of Purrupuntingamo.” - Colin Heenan-Puruntatameri

NOTICE OF CUSTODIAL INTEREST This artwork embodies the collective knowledge of the Tiwi people. It was created by and with the consent of the Custodians of this knowledge. The intellectual and cultural property of this work belong to the artist, the Tiwi people and their Ancestors, through long-standing, living cultural practice.

About the artist

Colin Heenan-Puruntatameri is an artist, arts worker, cultural leader and digital media practitioner based in Milikapiti, Melville Island. His multidisciplinary practice spans performance, video and cultural archiving. He leads Wurrungura, Jilamara’s digital archive and media centre. A graduate of the Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley (ANKA) Arts Worker Extension Program and a previous intern at the National Gallery of Victoria, Colin advocates for embedding Tiwi culture in digital spaces to engage younger generations. He is a current Director of ANKA and sits on the Executive Committee of Jilamara Arts. ‘From body it moved onto bark and then canvas, silk, printing and now we are moving into digital. Culture is evolving with time.’ Colin has also been on the production teams for new collaborative multimedia artworks that celebrate the performative foundations of living culture and creative practice. These include YOYI (dance), a multi-channel projection work that showed at Gropius Bau in Berlin, The National 4: Australian Art Now at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, and the Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery at the University of Melbourne. *Kapala* (sailing boat), a collaborative video work with Michelle Woody Minnapinni, has also shown at the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art in Darwin and Monash University Museum of Art in Melbourne.



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Judges' comments

"Colin's work demonstrates the potential of community created video works to record traditional practices, including storytelling, song and dance. Sharing across time strengthens cultural continuity and encourages creative reinterpretations and fresh responses, such as this work, to emerge."

Highly commended Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award (sponsored by Telstra): **Kevin 'Sooty' Welsh**
Scarred 2026.

ENDS

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Available to Interview

Adam Worrall | MAGNT Director

Dr Shannon Brett | NATSIAA Curator

Some artists are available upon request

About 2026 Telstra NATSIAA:

The Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards are presented annually by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, celebrating excellence and innovation in contemporary Indigenous art since 1984.

The 2026 Telstra NATSIAA marks 35 years of Telstra's sponsorship of NATSIAA. In 1992, then known as Telecom, they began their sponsorship of the First Prize Award. In 1993, the partnership grew into what it remains today, with Telstra as Principal Sponsor supporting all awards categories.

The 2026 Telstra NATSIAA marks 40 years of the Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award. This award commemorates Wandjuk Marika OBE (1927-1987), a Yolngu man, artist and leader. This was first awarded in 1987 after his passing that same year and was then known as the Memorial Award for Mawalan's Eldest Son. This was in line with cultural protocols to not use his name in the years immediately following his passing. It became the Wandjuk Marika Memorial 3D Award (sponsored by Telstra) in 1993 when Telstra became the sponsor for all Award categories.

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



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2026 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards

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Join us for the Awards Ceremony

Date: Friday, 7 August 2026

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 24 January 2027

[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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