

BARRUPU YUNUPINGU (1948–2012)


Untitled (Ancestral Fire), 2010
natural earth pigments with synthetic
binder on bark, 140 x 75 cm
Represented by Raft Art Space

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Barrupu Yunupingu, from the **Gumatj** clan, grew up at Yirrkala Northern Territory. She attended the mission school and trained and worked as a nurse at the Yirrkala clinic until its closure in 1975. When the Yirrkala printspace was commissioned she was one of the first women to complete works. In 2007 Barrupu began producing more bark paintings and developed her signature style of larger works.

ABOUT THE PAINTING

Fire holds great totemic significance to the Yunupingu family. Gurtha (fire) and its manifestations as flames, smoke, charcoal, ash and dust are rendered in varying patterns of diamond-shaped miny'tji (sacred clan designs). The diamond design represents fire; the red, flames; the white, smoke or ash; the black, charcoal; the yellow, dust. Yunupingu's painting is vigorous, creating a striking interpretation of the ancestral fire that swept through a huge swathe of eastern Arnhem Land, from Biranybirany to Melville Bay.

CONCEPTS

It is said that Dhuwalandja, the Gumatj clan language, is the tongue of flame. This language cuts through all artifice, incinerating dishonesty leaving only the bones of the truth. This clan design records the sacred identity of the law and the land and therefore the 'background' design has been 'covered' by a figurative representation relevant to the law represented.

Studying

What story is Barrupu Yunupingu investigating in this painting?

Look at the subtly changing patterns. Describe these different types of lines. What might these patterns suggest?

Research the Yunupingu family.

Making

Using coloured pencils create a drawing that develops your own set of symbols or motifs to represent a journey or a place that is important to you.