ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in the 1920s, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori lived a traditional life with her family on Bentinck Island until its population was moved to Mornington Island by Presbyterian missionaries in the 1940s following devastating drought and cyclones.

Gabori was a key member of the Kaiadilt community and kept her traditions vibrant while in exile on Mornington Island, continuing to speak her language and sing the songs that connected her to her home. She was also a master weaver and spent much time making incredibly fine bush string and weaving nets.

A love of paint and painting provided a new focus over the final decade of Gabori’s life during which she created more than 1000 paintings.

Gabori’s works are held in major institutions nationally and overseas including at the Musée du quai Branly, Paris and the Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, Netherlands.

Before her passing, Sally Gabori created a major site-specific work for the Banco Court of Brisbane’s Supreme Court, and a sweeping mural reproduction of some of her works adorns the arrivals concourse at Brisbane International Airport.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

‘This exhibition captures in depth Sally Gabori’s instinct for colour and composition, her epic and multi-layered painterly abstractions that resonate with her deep connection to story places on Bentinck Island.’ Chris Saines, Director, QAGOMA

Among the works tracing Gabori’s stylistic shifts over her short but dynamic career are paintings highlighting the artist’s Country at Mirdidingki; her father’s Country at Thundi; her grandfather’s Country at Dingkari (Dingkarri); Nyinyilki, the main outstation on Bentinck; and Dibirdibi Country, the places associated with her husband Pat.

Taking its title from the Kayardild language name for Bentinck Island, which translates as ‘the whole world’, ‘the land of all’ or ‘the one place’, this retrospective reflects on the many stories of Gabori’s place and the body of work she created since commencing painting in 2005 at the age of 81.

‘Dulka Warngiid – Land of All’ brings together many important works, including Sally Gabori’s first and last paintings, large-scale collaborative works produced alongside other senior Kaiadilt women, bark paintings made in conversation with Yolngu artist Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, and works on paper created toward the end of her career.

LEARNING THEMES

The Australian National Curriculum identifies engaging students with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (ATSIIHC) as one of three cross-curriculum priorities. Each priority is framed with a set of organising ideas that ‘reflect the essential knowledge, understanding and skills for the priority’. 1

The ‘Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori: Dulka Warngiid – Land of All’ education resource offers teachers and students a matrix of before-, during- and after-visit activities in alignment with the three organising ideas of country and place, culture and history, life and people. Gabori’s work provides her audience with rich opportunities to learn about the relationship between each of the three organising ideas. The interconnected nature of the concepts of country, culture and life is evident when considering Gabori’s creative process. Her works capture a sense of place by communicating memories of the people whose stories are intertwined with the history and culture of the country she painted.
OUTLINE

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1 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (formally, Queensland Studies Authority), ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures resources: Mathematics supporting the implementation of the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priorities’, 2013, p.3. https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/aust_curric/ac_ccp_atsi_cultures_maths.pdf

RESEARCH AND REFLECT

CONTEXT FOR VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

MAPPING AND PERSPECTIVE

While many of Gabori’s paintings are abstracted beyond direct topographical correlation with the landscape, some give us important cues and symbols to decipher.’


COMPOSITION AND PERSPECTIVE

‘Gabori’s instinct for colour and composition approaches abstraction while conveying a deep connection to her important places.’ (pg. 8 Chris Saines, CNZM, ‘Foreword’, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori: Dulka Warngiid – Land of All [exhibition catalogue], p.8.

STORYTELLING AND PERSPECTIVE

‘Unlike (Emily) Kngwarreye, Lorna Fencer et al, Gabori was unable to reference a customary painting tradition on object, body, ground or rock, or an inherited iconography of visual signs and symbols that encode meaning or map a cultural landscape, for no such artistic system exists in Kaiadilt culture.’

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

COUNTRY AND PLACE:
THE INTERACTION BETWEEN BEING AND PLACE

Use colours, shades, tints and lines to create a pattern that illustrates the rhythm of natural abundance. Consider the movement, sound and energy that can be created when schools of fish come to the surface or flocks of birds pass above treetops.

HISTORY AND CULTURE:
DIBIRDBI THE ROCK COD ANCESTER

Analyse this composition by mixing and painting at least ten colour swatches (thumbnails). Let your colours dry briefly and then paint around the edges with black then blend over the top of the thumbnails with white.

LIFE AND PEOPLE:
KAIADILT PEOPLE AND KAYARDILD LANGUAGE

Work in small groups of 4 to 5. Construct a long canvas out of cardboard or thick paper and map out a well-known area, such as the Brisbane River and CBD, using large and simple shapes. Cut out sections of this map and distribute to each group member, who will then represent a story or idea about their section using only colour, shape and line.
HISTORY AND CULTURE: ICONS, CUES AND SYMBOLS

Depending on perspective, people will read the visual cues, icons and symbols within an artwork in very different ways. Record the markings in Gabori’s works that you perceive to represent pathways or structures (in nature or constructed by people).

DURING YOUR VISIT

SEE, THINK, WONDER

COUNTRY AND PLACE: THROUGH KAIADILT EYES

Focus on one colour and its relationship to black and white. Make note of what this reveals to you about Sally Gabori’s painting technique. Consider how the techniques employed by Gabori depict a relationship between land and water.

My Grandfather’s Country 2008 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 198 x 301cm / Photograph: Chris Groenhout

HISTORY AND CULTURE: LIFE AND PEOPLE: LOSS, LONGING AND LOVE

In Dibirdibi Country 2008, Gabori ‘brought together memories of places that were important for her and the Rock Cod totem people in her life, rather than telling the story of Dibirdibi. They include the fig tree at Kabararrji (the grey shape on the left) under which her mother-in-law, Mara, and husband, Pat, were born, the freshwater billabong at Nyinyilki (the dark shape on the right) surrounded by casuarina and a good source of drinking water, and the beach at Kalthuriy (the patch of yellow) which is the country of her mother and her mother’s father, Kalthuruyingathi’.¹

¹ Beverly Knight, Sally Gabori: A Survey Exhibition of Paintings 2005–2012: Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa, danda ngad = This is my land, this is my sea, this is who I am, ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 2013, p25.
AFTER YOUR VISIT

RESPOND AND MAKE

COUNTRY AND PLACE: VISUALISATION + MAPPING EXERCISES

The way an artwork about a place is oriented can reveal meanings, memories and ways of understanding the world.

Stand in a landscape and draw two versions of what lies ahead of you. Firstly, draw the horizon line and mark out elements (buildings, trees, poles) that intersect with the horizon line. Secondly, using shape and tone only, draw an aerial view of the area.

Finally, go back in doors and decide whether you will place your drawings on a wall with either the north-most side, or the point you were standing on, facing upward.


My Country 2010 / Synthetic polymer paint on linen / 150 x 101cm / Private collection, Melbourne / Licensed by Viscopy

HISTORY AND CULTURE: GRIDS AND (RE) PRESENTATION

The four panels that make up Dibirdibi Country 2012 present a large-scale representation of Bentinck Island’s salt pans. This work exemplifies the restrained colour palette used by Gabori following her husband’s death. The energy of the painting reflects the movement of wet-season tides and the shimmering of salt crystals in the sunlight.

Taking Dibirdibi Country 2012 as your inspiration, paint four square panels with only two colours. Experiment with assembling and reassembling your panels to maximise the visual impact of the entire work. You may even consider deconstructing your panels and reconstructing them in 3D.

Dibirdibi Country 2012 / Synthetic polymer paint on canvas / 121 x 484cm (installed) / Purchased 2014 with funds from Margaret Mittelheuser, AM, and Cathryn Mittelheuser, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery © Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori. Licensed by Viscopy

LIFE AND PEOPLE: VISUAL NARRATIVES/DIGITAL STORIES

Gather photos (use existing or new photos) of a place where you spent a lot of time when you were growing up. Create a 3–5 minute slideshow of these images. With classmates, discuss your memories of your selected place. What would you do and who would you spend time with at each location?

After you have shared your memories, revisit Dibirdibi Country 2008 and consider how Gabori represented the relationships between the places and the people she remembered.

Using only one colour, shape and paint brush, express relationships between different generations by creating a sense of people and places that have influenced your life.