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‘THIS IS MY FATHER’S PAINTING’: A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION OF THE MOST ICONIC ROCK ART IN KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

Sally K. May, Josie Gumbuwa Maralngurra, Iain G. Johnston, Joakim Goldhahn, Jeffrey Lee, Gabrielle O’Loughlin, Kadeem May, Christine Ngalbarndidj Nabobbob, Murray Garde and Paul S. C. Taçon

Abstract. The Anbangbang Gallery in the Burrungkuy area of Kakadu National Park includes some of the most iconic rock art imagery from Australia. Visited and enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors every year it stands as a testament to Aboriginal culture and provides a glimpse into the remarkable rock art traditions of this region. Yet, most visitors are surprised to discover that rock art was still being produced at this site in the 1960s. In this paper, we explore the most recent rock art created at the Anbangbang Gallery. Most importantly, we present new evidence from a first-hand account of the paintings being created in 1963/64 and discuss the implications of these new insights for our understanding of the practice, the artists, and the social context of rock art in northern Australia.

Introduction

‘This is my father’s painting’ were the words of Josie Gumbuwa Maralngurra (henceforth, Josie) in 2018 as she looked up at the paintings at the iconic Anbangbang Gallery site in Kakadu National Park (henceforth, Kakadu; Figs 1 and 2), located in western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Australia. It had been decades since she had lived and camped in this area — long before Kakadu National Park was first established in 1979. This paper is a story of one woman’s recollections of a moment in time when some of the most iconic rock paintings in the world were made. These paintings, created during the wet season of 1963/64 (December – March), are visually compelling and adorn the cover of books, magazines and travel blogs the world over. The site is visited and the rock art is admired by tens of thousands of people every year. Yet, the story behind these relatively recent paintings is little known with the history of the site taking on its own unique mythology.

First-hand accounts of rock art being created are extraordinarily rare. By the time anthropologists and other researchers began asking questions about rock art in Australia, most of the artists had passed away and others may have simply been unwilling to discuss their work. While rock art is occasionally still created in western Arnhem Land, it is very rare and sporadic (e.g. Taçon 1992; Munro 2010; Taylor 2016, 2017). Josie’s new insights are, therefore, particularly important for



Figure 1. Map illustrating the location of Kakadu National Park and Anbangbang Gallery (Map by SKM).



Figure 2. The main panel at the Anbangbang Gallery (photo: Andrea Jalandoni).

our understanding of rock art creation and broader social and cultural activities. Since she was born in the dry season of 1952, Josie walked country (i.e. travelled across her traditional and neighbouring lands) with her father, mother and brother. Many times they were accompanied by her kinship classificatory grandfather Nayombolmi and his wife Rosie. During her childhood and youth she witnessed her father and grandfather creating rock art as a natural part of everyday life — something done regularly and connected to other aspects of cultural life. Josie's stories inform us of the role rock art played in their lives and, in this case, the social context behind the creation of the last paintings produced at the Anbangbang Gallery (Fig. 2). As a witness and participant in creating this stunning artwork, Josie's recollections are unique and force us to rethink existing assumptions about the people behind the paintings and the role of rock art in their lives.

Understanding the significance of Burrungkuy

The Burrungkuy area within Kakadu is perhaps more commonly known as 'Nourlangie', an English corruption of the original Nawurlandja in the Kundjeyhmi language. It has long been recognised for its cultural, archaeological and rock art significance and the Burrungkuy area was a key element in the World Heritage Listing for Kakadu in 1981 (UNESCO 1982). As Senior Traditional Owner Jeffrey Lee explains, Burrungkuy was a focal point for many clans in the area:

Burrungkuy is an area where family and all the clans come together and share their stories, share their knowledge, teaching the younger generation how to

hunt, how to paint, how to find bush tucker, all that was happening here. Everybody from everywhere, all clans, used to come here and share their knowledge and their songs and dance, passing that on to us ... just like when you have Christmas, you know, all the family get together, here that's what we used to do.

The Burrungkuy area was part of the Warramal clan estate. There was a close and regular association with the following clans and language groups: Umpugarla, Badmardi, Bukurnidja, Djok, Erre, Kodjkandi, Mirarr Kundjeyhmi, Jawoyn, Kunwinjku, Murumburr, Rol and Urningangk (Chaloupka 1982: 15–16). Sadly, the Warramal clan ceased to exist in the mid-1900s and neighbouring clans such as Djok, Mirarr Kundjeyhmi and Murumburr now take a management role for this clan estate. It is worth noting that the Badmardi clan seems to have had a particularly close association with the Warramal and the Burrungkuy area in the past. As Chaloupka (1982: 16) notes, 'They said that they were of "one river": a creek which originated in their valley was the main source of Nourlangie Creek. This clan also brought the remains of their dead to Burrunguy or Nawulandja for burial'. The Warramal, in turn, also visited members of the Badmardi clan in their traditional lands around Deaf Adder Gorge each year (Chaloupka 1982: 16).

Even before its World Heritage listing, the Burrungkuy area was being promoted for tourism. In the early 1960s, Allan Stewart, proprietor of the Nourlangie Safari Camp, was visiting the main rock art sites of Burrungkuy with his clients, many of whom were from overseas (Stewart 1969, 1985). Indeed, Stewart (1969, 1985) takes credit for discovering and naming

Nourlangie (Nawurlandja) despite the fact that Aboriginal people continued to live in the area and were, in fact, themselves guiding Stewart to these locations. This history of tourism in the Burrungkuy area was, most likely, the reason why it continues to be a focus of rock art tourism in Kakadu today, despite the presence of thousands of other rock art sites in the region.

A number of researchers have recorded and studied sites within the Burrungkuy area. Edwards undertook the earliest rock art research in 1965, when he was conducting a photographic survey of Arnhem Land to assist Ken Maddock's anthropological studies (R. Edwards pers. comm. 2018). Subsequently, Brandl undertook a detailed recording of the Anbangbang Gallery in 1968, although he never published the material (see Brandl MS 1348a; Brandl 1968). Brandl returned with Jan Jelínek and colleagues in 1969 to document the Anbangbang Gallery again (referred to as Gallery 1, Anbangbang 1) and many others site across Arnhem Land (Jelínek 1989: 317–323). Edwards returned again in 1973 to survey for the Alligator Rivers Fact Finding Study (Edwards 1974; see also Edwards 1979). During this later survey, Kamminga and Allen (1973) also noted some rock art sites in their archaeological survey for the same study. In 1979 Chaloupka was commissioned by mining company Noranda to conduct a survey of the Koongarra area which is located within the Djok clan estate and is nearby to the Anbangbang Gallery (Chaloupka 1979). During the 4-week period of this survey, Chaloupka located and recorded 126 sites, and noted 24 previously documented by Edwards and/or Kamminga and Allen. Chaloupka (1982) drew upon this survey and report heavily when he produced the book 'Burrunguy Nourlangie Rock'. Others have included Nourlangie sites in their broader studies, including Chaloupka (e.g. 1993), Haskovec and Sullivan (e.g. 1989), Lewis (1988), Welch (1982), Taçon (e.g. 1989a, 1989b) and Taçon and Chippindale (e.g. 2001a). The most recent Burrungkuy rock art-related publication is by Welch (2015), which provides a general overview of rock art at Ubirr and Nourlangie, as the key rock art tourism sites in Kakadu. Together this research history provides an important baseline from which to expand our understanding of Anbangbang Gallery.

Just two years before Edwards began recording rock art in this region, an extended Aboriginal family camped in the Anbangbang Gallery and produced one of the most visually stunning and significant series of paintings that exists within Kakadu. These paintings represent the most recent layer of art in this rockshelter. In 2018 our research team documented 187 figures of



Figure 3. A section of the Anbangbang Gallery in 1962 taken during filming for the BBC documentary *Quest Under Capricorn* (after Attenborough 1963).

varying ages in this shelter with subjects ranging from human figures to Namarrkon (Lightning Man) and x-ray fish, with analysis ongoing. It is, however, the most recent layer of painting at this site and the story of its artistic creation that is the focus of this paper.

Anbangbang Gallery: timelines, oral histories and myths

As mentioned previously, much had been said about the Anbangbang Gallery and it is highly likely to be one of the most photographed rock art sites in northern Australia, if not the whole of Australia. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) photographic database has images of the gallery taken every one to two years since 1963. The streams of researchers and tourists have all contributed to the Anbangbang Gallery narrative that thrives today.

The timeline for painting the Anbangbang Gallery is only known through serendipity and some aspects do not wholly agree. The key points in the timeline are that in 1962 the site was visited and photographed by David Attenborough and the film crew for the BBC documentary series *Quest under Capricorn*. The team spent nine weeks camped at Nourlangie Safari Camp during their Australian adventures (Attenborough 1963; see also Stewart 1969: 53; Chaloupka 1979: 3; 1982: 15). Importantly, Attenborough's published photograph does not include much of the rock art present today (Fig. 3). He had taken one of the rare photographs of the Anbangbang Gallery before the final layer of art was created in 1963/64 (Attenborough 1963: Pl. 3; see also Edwards 1974: Pl. 23). A further record of Anbangbang at this time comes from Valerie Lhuedé, a tourist and keen photographer, who visited the area



Figure 4. Anbangbang Gallery in 1968 photographed by Eric J. Brandl (Eric J. Brandl 1968, courtesy of AIATSIS).

in September of 1963 and her photographs record the gallery before it was painted for the last time (Lhuedé 2012: 17, 19). Sometime after September of 1963 the new paintings were created, probably during the wet season of 1963/64, certainly before 1965 when Edwards visited the site. As far as we know, Edwards (1974) was the first non-Indigenous person to have recorded the substantial new additions to the Anbangbang Gallery, with Eric J. Brandl (MS 1348a) following soon after (Fig. 4).

In his book *Journey in time* Chaloupka (1993: 238, see caption for Fig. 276) states that Nayombolmi painted the bottom row of human figures in the gallery, and that Old Nym Djimongurr (henceforth, Djimongurr) and Old Hector Djorlom, men who also worked at Nourlangie Safari Camp, created the other subjects. However, Chaloupka does not state any sources for this new information, and it appears that his conclusion is based on the style of the motifs, and not on direct ethnographic information. Haskovec (n.d.: 1) states that the bottom row of human figures was *repainted* in 1963 and the larger Ancestral Beings above were also painted in 1963. Haskovec and Sullivan (1986: 1) also clearly state 'It has long been known that the so called Main Gallery at Anbangbang and the Blue Paintings were painted by Najombolmi' (Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 1; see also Chaloupka 1979: 7).

Given the documented history of Anbangbang Gallery includes clear reference to Nayombolmi as the key artist we must start by asking — who is 'Nayombolmi'?

Our knowledge of Nayombolmi is derived from interviews and recollections from some of the men and women who knew him. These include his biological cousins Nipper Kapirigi, George Namingum and David Canari, as well as his kinsmen Toby Gangale, Jimmy Wokwok and Jacky Namandali (e.g. Chaloupka 1979: 7; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 2; Taçon 1989a).

According to those who knew him, Nayombolmi was born around 1895 in the Stone Country (escarpment), south east of Balawurru (Deaf Adder Creek) (Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 5). He belonged to the Badmardi clan, inherited via his father Nanggwirid (Brandl MS 1348b). He was *na-mardku* (matrimoiety) and a member of the *An-djarrabuma* matry inherited from his Jawoyn mother (whose name is not recorded) (Chaloupka 1983: 107; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 5). Matries are social categories, the membership of which is determined by matrilineage (see Harvey and Garde 2015: 230). Nayombolmi had two wives, Rosie Almayalk (also known as Nalmainyrag) and Nellie, but he did not have any children (Brandl

MS 1348b; Stewart 1969: 48; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 7, 10).

His early life would now probably be described as 'traditional'. He spent his time hunting and gathering resources while walking country along seasonal routes as his ancestors had done before him. During these journeys he would attend ceremonies and during his life he passed through all stages of initiation (Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 6). He was skilled in working stone to make tools and weapons and was remembered as having prowess with a spear. Namingum recalls him once killing a buffalo with a spear; and his skills at catching fish meant that non-Indigenous people who knew him often referred to him as Barramundi Charlie (Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 6).

During his adult life, Nayombolmi and his wives worked in the buffalo shooting industry, shooting, skinning and preparing the hides (Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 6-7; see Levitus 1982). In his later years he worked at Nourlangie and Muirella Park Safari Camps and assisted the tourist shooters, where he also traded bark paintings that he produced and undertook cultural performances for tourists (Stewart 1969, 1985; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 7; Lhuedé 2012: 17). However, Nayombolmi would frequently return to his clan estates and traditional walking routes during the wet season, as did all the Aboriginal people who worked at the safari camps (Stewart 1985). It was during the wet season that Nayombolmi created many of the rock



Figure 5. The Aboriginal camp at Nourlangie Safari Camp c. 1960. Josie stands between her mother and father to the left in the photo (photo: Judy Opitz Collection).

paintings that Haskovec and Sullivan (and others) were later to record with his surviving relatives and friends (Chaloupka 1983; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986). In 1986 there were 604 paintings said to have been painted by Nayombolmi at 46 places situated in no less than six clan estates (Haskovec and Sullivan 1989: 62). Later researchers have added more places and paintings that are made by him (e.g. Taçon 1989a; Chaloupka 1993), which may earn Nayombolmi the title of most prolific known rock painter in the world. Previous research has concluded that it was during one of his last journeys in the wet season of 1963/64, that Nayombolmi painted the most recent art at Anbangbang Gallery, a place where he had cultural responsibilities (Stewart 1969: 48; Chaloupka 1982: 22–25). Nayombolmi passed away in 1967 at Mudginberri at an estimated age of 72.

New insights

During background research for a new rock art project in the Djok clan estate, we came across a collection of photographs from the aforementioned Nourlangie Safari Camp, most of them taken by Judy Opitz in the early 1960s (see also Opitz 2009). It was from this camp that Stewart and his Aboriginal guides, most notably Djimongurr, would set off in their 4WDs towards Nanguluwurr, then on to Anbangbang Gallery before turning towards Nawurlandja (Little Nourlangie) and the beautiful Anbangbang Billabong (Chaloupka 1982: 15; Lhuedé 2012: 16–18). One particular photograph (Fig. 5) taken around 1960 in the Aboriginal Camp not far from the main Nourlangie Safari Camp buildings caught our attention. The photograph captures nine people reluctantly standing in front of their shelters, surrounded by their animals — dogs, pigs and a goat. To the left of the photograph we see one family group — Molly (mother), Josie (daughter), Djimongurr (father) and Young Nym (son). To their right, in the

centre of the photograph, is Nayombolmi. The three young men next to him are as yet unidentified. Finally, the woman to the far right, who appears unamused at having her photograph taken, is the grandmother of



Figure 6. Josie Maralngurra with her father Djimongurr, c. 1960. She is holding her pet pig Lacey (photo: Judy Opitz Collection).



Figure 7. Josie and family at their home in Gunbalanya, western Arnhem Land, in June 2018 (photograph by JG).

current Senior Traditional Owner Jeffrey Lee. While assuming the adults in the photograph had passed away, we sent a close-up photograph of the young girl Josie, to friend Donna Nadjamerrek in western Arnhem Land in the hope that, if in good health, she may be willing to talk to us. We assumed, as Josie was photographed with two known rock painters, Djimongurr and Nayombolmi, that she might have some stories and information about them and some insights into a childhood spent at Nourlangie Safari Camp. Donna informed us that Josie was alive and well and living with her family in Gunbalanya. On our first meeting Josie declared that she not only had stories relating to her family but that, in fact, she was with her father and Nayombolmi when they painted much of their rock art (Figs 5–7).



Figure 9. Nourlangie Safari Camp c. 1960 with Nayombolmi (far left), Djimongurr (blurred in the middle, holding leg of crocodile skin) and Josie Maralngurra (holding the tail) (photo: Judy Opitz Collection).



Figure 8. Jeffrey Lee, Josie Maralngurra and Christine Nabobbob at the Anbangbang Gallery, July 2018 (photo: Ashil Ranpara).

While a number of sites were visited and many hours of oral histories have been recorded with Josie Maralngurra, in this article we focus on her visit to Anbangbang Gallery in June 2018 and her recollections of one particular painting event.

Walking into Anbangbang, a place she knew as a child but had little relationship with as an adult, was a confronting experience for Josie. The car park, signage, walkways and hundreds of tourists — such a different experience to the remote quiet location she knew as a child — would normally disorient anyone in her situation. Yet, upon entering the gallery and seeing the rock art, her memories were clear (Fig. 8). She explained that she had camped here many times with her family as a child. Her family, as she would explain, included her father Djimongurr, her mother Molly, her brother Young Nym and her kinship grandfather Nayombolmi and his wife Rosie (his older wife Nellie had passed away some years before). They were a small group but very close (Fig. 9).

At the start of *Kudjawk* (the monsoonal wet season generally spanning from December to March) each year, Djimongurr and his family were relieved of their duties at Nourlangie Safari Camp and would return to their traditional lands to see family, trade, take part in ceremony, visit sites, hunt and more. Anbangbang Gallery was one of the camping places along this walking route. Each year they would camp in the shelter for varying periods of time. When the rain fell too hard they would move around the corner to

seek better shelter. Josie pointed out the location of the campfire and the sleeping arrangements in the shelter, and said that they used paperbark as a bed and had no blankets, but the fire kept them warm. This type of paperbark bedding was noticed in the shelter when Attenborough visited the site in 1962 (Attenborough 1963; Chaloupka 1982: 22). The resources nearby were ample — Josie named cheeky yams (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), long yams (*Dioscorea transversa*) and sugarbag (honey) as food they enjoyed collecting and eating when camped at this place. She also said that fish were easy to catch nearby in the billabong. This area was known to be able to support a large population and was a gathering place for large ceremonies, with people walking from hundreds of kilometres away to attend (Chaloupka 1982: 15).

Burrungkuy was also an important burial site and, during the recent past, some people who died while working away from their country were returned to Burrungkuy for interment in the rockshelters (Chaloupka 1982: 14). Many of these bark bundle burials and associated burial goods have been stolen since tourists began visiting the area in the 1960s (see Chaloupka 1982: 29).

In the wet season of 1963/64 Josie and her family were once again camped in this shelter. She recalled that they stayed about a week. During this time Djimongurr and Nayombolmi were occupied painting. 'These ones here, these are the ones my father drew when I was a child. My father and his father [Nayombolmi] worked together to create these older paintings over here' (Josie Maralngurra via interpreter Christine Nabobbob 2018). The family became the support network to ensure the two men were able to continue their work uninterrupted. She recalls that her mother had to work extra hard to ensure everyone had enough to eat (given the two men were unable to hunt). One of Josie's roles was to collect water in a palm leaf container for the artists to use when mixing their pigments. The pigment itself was carried with them from other places and stored inside old tobacco tins. The men carried simple cotton bags to hold all their tools and other personal items. A tree orchid known as *djalամardi* (*Dendrobium affine*) was collected from nearby paperbark trees to use as a binder mixed into the pigment/water paste (Fig. 10). They would chew the *djalամardi* then squeeze the juice into the mixture. *Djalամardi* was also chewed to make into a paintbrush. The men also used other reed brushes for the finer line work.

Of the painting itself, Josie remembered very clearly that Djimongurr and Nayombolmi would take it in turns to paint: 'The old man and my father helped each other to paint the rock' (Josie Maralngurra via interpreter Christine Nabobbob 2018). A single forked stick was leaned against the wall of the shelter as a ladder. Squatting at the top of this single stick would require great balance and strength and when one tired,

the next would resume the work where the other had finished. In other words, the creation of the paintings in the Anbangbang Gallery was a joint effort by the two men. There was one exception, however, with Josie clearly stating that Nayombolmi was responsible for the Nabalwinjbulwinj painting around the corner from the main panel (this image is not included for cultural reasons). She was also clear that Old Hector Djorlom, a known rock and bark artist from the area that Chaloupka (1993: 238, see caption to Fig. 276) names as an artist for the Anbangbang Gallery, had not been present when the paintings were created.

When asked about the stories for the different paintings Josie told us that as a woman she is not the right person to be passing on the stories for rock art sites in Jeffrey Lee's country. She was aware of the stories but deferred to Jeffrey Lee to share this knowledge, as we do in this paper. Lee related the public aspects of the stories behind some of the figures painted by the two artists, and versions of these stories have also been shared in earlier publications (Chaloupka 1982, 1993; Welch 2015). Figure 11A is a painting of Namandjolk (or Nabilil), an Ancestral Being depicted here with a *dabberrk* (head ornament of white cockatoo feathers) in his hair — one of the identifying features of this particular being. The most commonly known story relating to Namandjolk is that he broke the incest laws with his (kinship) sister on the rocks above the Anbangbang Gallery shelter. The feather headdress was thrown by his sister and landed on a lower ledge in the rock where it still can be seen today (Chaloupka 1993: 47). Later she changed into Almudj (the Rainbow Serpent) and made her way to the stone country via Balawurru (Deaf Adder Creek) in Badmardi Country. Namandjolk later transformed into the saltwater crocodile after a failed



Figure 10. Stephanie Djangjul with *djalամardi* (*Dendrobium affine*), used as a binder and a brush by the Anbangbang Gallery artists in 1963/64 (photo: PSCT).

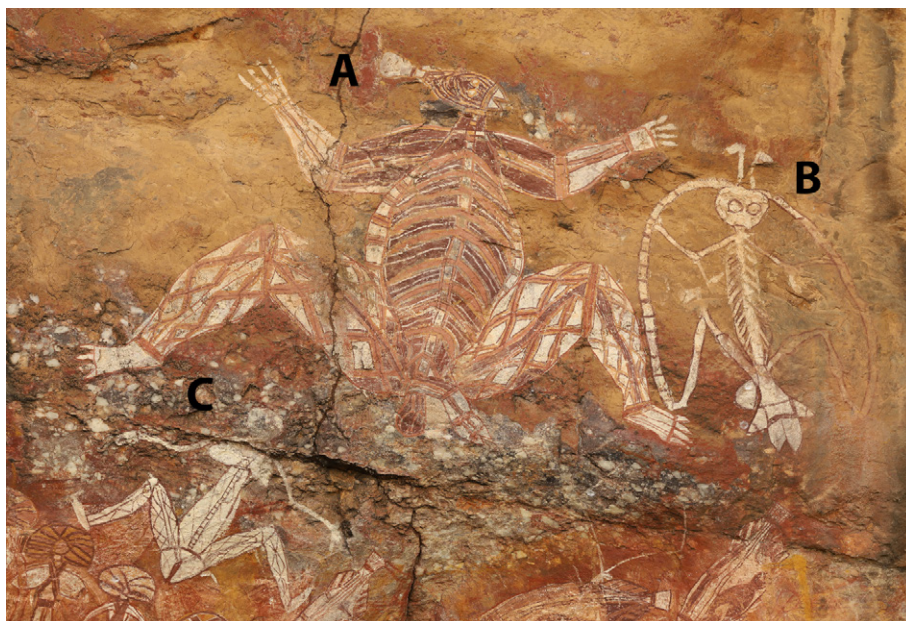


Figure 11. (A) Namandjolk/Nabilil, (B) Namarrkon and (C) Barrkinj painted in 1963/64 by Nayombolmi and Djimongurr (photo: Andrea Jalandoni).

attempt to track down his sister (Chaloupka 1993: 47). Their journey is vast, complicated and interconnected with other Ancestral Beings across northern Australia. All but forgotten on the lower right-hand side of the panel is what could be a depiction of Namandjolk's sister — a key player in the broader, aforementioned, cultural story for the site (Figs 4 and 12). While contemporary with the other 1963/64 paintings this figure has been severely damaged and is barely visible today.

Alongside Namandjolk there is a painting of Namarrkon (Lightning Man) (Fig. 11B). Namarrkon is a major regional mythological and ceremonial figure who was both creative in the sense that he (sometimes she) helped to create the landscape and is also the keeper of Aboriginal law, punishing those who break the traditional laws. Namarrkon is depicted here with a band of lightning encircling him and hammers representing thunder protruding from his knees and elbows. He controls the large storms that engulf this region during the wet season. The figure below Namandjolk is Barrkinj (Fig. 11C), the wife of Namarrkon. We know of only two other depictions of her: (a) a rock



Figure 13. The three x-ray saratoga from the Anbangbang Gallery painted in 1963/64 by Nayombolmi and Djimongurr (photo: Andrea Jalandoni).



Figure 12. Close up from the 1968 Brandl photograph showing the now faded female figure at the lower right of the Anbangbang Gallery main panel (Eric J. Brandl 1968, courtesy of AIATSIS).

painting at Mount Borradaile (see Roberts and Parker 2003: 82–83) and (b) a bark painting by Nayombolmi (possibly painted together with Djimongurr) while they were living at Nourlangie Safari Camp. Further details pertaining to these very complex and interrelated Ancestral Beings and their stories are given by Chaloupka (1993), Taçon (1989a), Taylor (1996) and Gunn and Whear (2008).

Below the Ancestral Beings are three x-ray saratoga (*Scleropages jardini*) known in the local Kundjeyhmi language as *ngaldadmo* or *guluibirr* (Fig. 13). They were painted at the same time as the Ancestral Beings. Fish such as saratoga are embedded in the broader western Arnhem Land cultural belief and artistic systems, as best demonstrated by Taçon (1989a, 1989b) and Taylor (1996). Their inclusion in this panel would have signalled a deeper cultural meaning to initiated community members. As Taçon (1989a: 290) explains:

Fish as a symbol in the oral and mythic literature of the peoples throughout Arnhem Land is powerful and pervasive. The symbolic associations are finite, however, and generally focus around water, clan wells, spirit-children, growth, reproduction, reincarnation and states of ultimate transition or transformation, such as death, birth and rebirth.

This connection between fish and fertility is important when considered in context with other imagery at this site and within the 1963/64 scene, as we will now discuss.

Along the lower part of the panel are a series of human-like figures in a style synonymous with the work of Nayombolmi (Fig. 14). In their study of Nayombolmi's rock art, Haskovec and Sullivan (1986, 1989) identified human figures as a key feature of Nayombolmi's rock art repertoire. They state '... Najombolmi's art is heavily biased towards paintings of human figures, in particular of human females' (Haskovec and Sullivan 1989: 67). This remarkable series of paintings at the Anbangbang Gallery is both representative of his other work in Kakadu and unique in its composition. Indeed, Chaloupka (1982: 25) acknowledges the Anbangbang paintings as Nayombolmi's best, 'This painted wall is unique, the last work of a great artist'. Our new insights reveal Nayombolmi had some assistance with these paintings.

There were originally 11 human-like figures depicted along the lower part of the main panel (Fig. 14). Many of these have now faded or been damaged by feral animals such as buffalo rubbing against the rock. While no story relating to these figures has been passed to us, the detail in the paintings and previous research provide important insights. Eight of these figures are female with breasts depicted, wearing 'breast girdles' and at least two have dashes in their breasts (Chaloupka 1982: 11). The three remaining figures are male. These detailed figures are embedded with ceremonial symbols and to an initiated person would communicate cultural information relating to clan, ceremony and moiety. Referring to this particular scene, Taçon and Chippindale (2001b: 303) argue that the artist/s have used traditional x-ray techniques but added painted body designs and other items of adornment. They argue that these designs are similar to ceremonial body painting reported by Spencer in the early 1900s (Taçon and Chippindale 2001b: 304; Spencer 1914: 151, Fig. 47). Discussing Nayombolmi's work more broadly they state:

Many of Najombolmi's paintings seem to reflect a desire for children, as a large number are concerned with fertility and aspects of childbirth. Several of his depictions of women, for instance, have areas with coloured dot infill where the uterus is located. These are said to represent the developing foetus. Other paintings of women have dot infill on the breasts; Aboriginal elders say this was Najombolmi's way of indicating that the women he painted were lactating ... (Taçon and Chippindale 2001b: 304).

The 'breast girdles' are also a key feature with Hodgson (1995: 83) noting in her review of material



Figure 14. The series of human-like figures painted in 1963/64 by Nayombolmi and Djimongurr (photo: Andrea Jalandoni).

culture from this region that 'A thin skein of string was worn around a young girl's chest to indicate her first menstruation' (see also Chaloupka 1982: 11; Taçon and Chippindale 2001b: 304). This painted scene — embedded with layers of cultural meaning only briefly touched upon in this paper — is deserving of its iconic status.

Importantly, the photographs of the panel before it was painted in 1963/64 show these new paintings were produced over the top of earlier ones in a similar style. As for the Namandjolk figure above, with its faded counterpart below, the similarity in style and technique suggests that the same artist/s were responsible for the earlier and later paintings of human figures on this panel (compare Figs 3, 4 and 14).

Importantly, Josie told us that during the enduring wet season she and her brother often asked her father to tell stories. On many occasions this resulted in him spontaneously gathering his painting kit to illustrate the story. Similar examples are well known in the area and it seems this was a common way for young boys and girls to gain knowledge about mundane as well as mythological events and stories (e.g. Garde 2004; Taçon and Garde 1995). However, that was not the case for the Anbangbang Gallery in 1963/64. The two old men seem to have had a single vision for this new series of paintings and were intent on completing it.

When asked whether it was unusual for her father and Nayombolmi to paint at a shelter where they were staying, Josie explained that it was not and stated, 'They just wanted to sit and do paintings all the time'. In fact, during our first discussion with Josie, she was asked if she ever saw her father creating rock paintings. Her answer came without hesitation: 'Koongarra, Nanguluwurr, Burrungkuy', and with a hand gesture she added 'everywhere'. Later, during a conversation



Figure 15. Djimongurr dressed for performance at Nourlangie Safari Camp, c. 1960. The lower photo also includes Raburrabu (middle) and Nayombolmi (right). Toby Gangale is out of shot playing the didgeridoo (photo: Judy Opitz Collection).

in our camp, she expressed that it was very rare that her father left a shelter where they camped without leaving a new painting on the wall. To paint seems to have been an integral part of her father's and Nayombolmi's daily routine during the wet seasons when Josie was growing up.

People, time, method and materials

So, what does this new information tell us about the rock art, the artists and their lives? To begin, it tells us that this rock painting scene was not created by a single artist, but was a collaborative effort. Rather than the European idea of a lone artist creating their artwork in solitude, we find a story of family, friendship and collaboration. Accordingly, we now turn to the unacknowledged artist whose name should be as widely acclaimed as his friend Nayombolmi. Who was Djimongurr (Fig. 15)?

Old Nym Djimongurr

According to official records, Djimongurr was born about 1910 and he passed away in 1969 in Oenpelli (Gunbalanya). He was a member of the *Warddjak* (patri-clan name) and was *na-mardku* (matrimoiety) and a member of the *An-djarrabuma* matry. This is the same matrimoiety and matry as Nayombolmi. The totemic emblems of this matry include monsoon rains from

the north and *kukku* (water) (Chaloupka 1983, 1993; see also Harvey and Garde 2015). Djimongurr was fully initiated and well known for his singing and dancing skills (Fig. 15). He was also known for being a *Marrkidjbu*, a good magic doctor (Stewart 1969: 19). Previous rock art research in the area has mentioned Djimongurr as a rock painter, most famously for his painted schooner and fish at Nanguluwurr, situated just north of Burrungkuy. These and other paintings by him at this site are thought to have been created in 1958 and 1964 respectively (e.g. Chaloupka 1982, 1993; Haskovec and Sullivan 1986; Layton 1992: 160). He is also credited with painting at the site known as Blue Paintings in Kakadu (Chaloupka 1993: 241).

That said, we do not know much about Djimongurr's life, especially his early years. We know that he moved to what is now known as Kakadu sometime after World War II to seek seasonal work in the buffalo and timber businesses. It was then he married Molly, Josie's Kunwinjku and Jawoyn speaking mother. Molly was born and raised in Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), the town in which Djimongurr spent his final years and is now buried. As mentioned before, they had two children. When Josie was born, in the dry season of 1952, the family were working with a buffalo shooting team in a place known as Malabanjanjdju, not far from the current Djirrbiyuk outstation in Kakadu. Later, her father worked at Russ Jones' Arnhem Land Timber Camp (now known as Anlarrh), cutting cedar pine after the war. Molly worked in the kitchen. When there was a demand, the mill was also working in the wet season, and this attracted casual workers from the buffalo shooting industry, among them Nayombolmi and Butcher Knight who was then shooting for Keith Waldock and Bob Cole at Barrawambi and Djuwarr in Badmardi Country (Levitus 2011).

Nodes of cultural interaction: Anlarrh

It was during this period in the mid-1950s, when they stayed at Anlarrh, that we find the first historical records showing that Djimongurr and Nayombolmi were acquainted and worked together. However, it is likely that they had known each other a long time before this — most likely having come into contact as part of ceremonial gatherings.

Stewart bought the old sawmill at Anlarrh in 1958, and he turned it into Nourlangie Safari Camp a year later. Stewart's entrepreneurship brought in a totally new clientele to the Kakadu area — tourists (Stewart 1969: 18). For Stewart, Djimongurr was his 'right hand' man, a position that would be labelled camp manager today. Djimongurr was taking tourists out fishing, shooting buffaloes and crocodiles, and sometimes also taking them to Nangluwurr and Burrungkuy to show them rock art:

He was my song man and we used to have the didgeridoos and the singing sticks. And at night time it used to be wonderful to be able to hear these things up in the Aboriginals' camp at the back. They were about 500 yards behind my main camp. And I used

to summon them by the bugle when I wanted them to start work (Stewart 1985).

Molly also worked in the kitchen at this safari camp. In the evenings, Djimongurr often led corroborees with spectacular songs and dances for the tourists (Fig. 16). Often the whole Aboriginal camp participated in the dancing and singing. The Cheeky Yam Dance accompanied by didgeridoo and clap sticks was most often performed, and some of these occasions were also filmed (Stewart n.d.).

Stewart was a businessman who saw opportunities. Within a short time, he was selling bark paintings to tourists and art dealers such as Dorothy and Lance Bennett (1969; Taylor 2015). According to Stewart's own account, the art was easy to sell, and artworks from Djimongurr, Nayombolmi, Old Hector, and many more artists not mentioned here, ended up in living rooms, art collections and in museums all over the world.

Today, performances from the safari camps might seem staged and unauthentic. However, Anlarrh, Mudginberri, and the mission at Oenpelli can be seen as important nodes where people from different parts of western Arnhem Land could come together and share stories, histories and law. Many initiation rituals for young children were staged at these places. In times where traditional cultural practices were under threat, historic settlements such as Anlarrh became places where people, such as Djimongurr and Nayombolmi, could meet and discuss cultural issues, pass on traditional knowledge and laws, and more (Fig. 17).

Another link between Djimongurr and Najombolmi was their role as *djungkay* (also known as *nawiliwili*) for areas of land that belonged to their mother's clan. *Djungkay/nawiliwili* are the traditional land managers of an area, they are not Traditional Owners of the same land for which they are *djungkay/nawiliwili* but are always Traditional Owners for other areas. Some Indigenous community members have translated this role as 'cultural



Figure 16. A cultural performance at Nourlangie Safari Camp with Djimongurr leading the dance. His wife Molly is shown in the centre and daughter Josie, partially obscured, at the back to her right, c. 1959 (photo: Ern McQuillan).



Figure 17. One of very few existing photos of Djimongurr and Nayombolmi together. From left to right: Raburrabu (Mission Jack), Nayombolmi (Barramundi Charlie), Toby Gangale and Djimongurr (Old Nym), c. 1960. All of these men produced rock art during their lifetime (photo: Judy Opitz Collection).

police' working under the instructions of the senior Traditional Owners (Smith 1992). As Taylor (1996: 59–60) explains:

Djungkay must protect the sacred *djang* sites for the owning clan. In some cases, owners themselves may not visit their own most sacred sites for fear that the Ancestral power emanating from these sites would physically harm them. For example, Kurulk clan members do not collect white paint or *delek* from a site in their own clan lands during the wet season. The paint itself is seen to be the transformed faeces of *dadbe*, the King Brown snake, and the snake would harm any members of the owning clan who disturbed this site when the being was active during the wet season ... By contrast men who are djungkay for this site may talk to the snake and deflect its spiritual power so that they may collect the paint.

The Manilkarr clansman Jacob Nayinggul (now deceased) explains how the term *djungkay* was adopted from the east into the Kakadu region:

The concept of *djungkay* existed here in a ceremonial context only, in ceremonies such as Morak, Lorrkkon, Wubarr and Mankinjdek. Yes, we had an equivalent to the concept of *djungkay* but in this region it was called *nawiliwili*. And this area here was where that word was used [Kakadu region]. But today, the word *djungkay* has arrived from the east [in Arnhem Land]. We have copied the use and meaning of that word, but we used to talk about 'My *nawiliwili*, he is my *nawiliwili*' in the same way that we use the word *djungkay*. So today it is much easier for me to say to someone from the east or the south 'this person is my *djungkay*' rather than for me to say 'this is my *nawiliwili*' because if I used this word, they wouldn't know what I was talking about. That's what I would say to someone who has come to my country to work here for example. Let's say a young man from the south, from the plateau comes here and I say to him 'this man here is my *djungkay*' well he would know straight away what I was talking about. In the same way in a ceremonial context I can refer to someone's *djungkay* who is responsible for [or 'boss' for] someone [in the opposite moiety]. Ceremonies such as the Morak ceremony or the partimoiety ceremonies [of today], the *yirridjdja* and *duwa* moiety ceremonies (Jacob Nayinggul pers. comm. to MG).

Importantly, *djungkay/nawiliwili* have the right to visit sacred places, learn the ancestral stories, produce ritual objects and painting designs and subjects of an owning clan and '... may display their rights in this material in a context such as bark painting without seeking permission of owning groups' (Taylor 1996: 60). *Djungkay/nawiliwili* is a complicated and clever system. During the contact period, for example, it ensured the continuity of cultural knowledge and management of important places within the landscape even when a particular clan died out. *Djungkay/nawiliwili* were armed with the knowledge needed to protect the land, the people, the spirits and the future of an area. This is the case with the Burringkuy area where Djimongurr and Naylorbolmi were *nawiliwili* before and after the last Warramal people died. They knew the place and they could continue to ensure it was cared for and protected.

Techniques, tools and timing

Perhaps the most archaeologically informative find-

ings from this research relate to the first-hand accounts of the materials and tools used for art production. As mentioned previously, we have a first-hand account of rock painters using orchid juice as a pigment binder and then chewing the bulb to form a suitable brush for painting. This is contrary to Chaloupka's (1993: 85) argument that 'There is no evidence of the use of organic binders in the rock art. In the past, there have been many suggestions that binding agents such as blood, fat, orchid juice or resinous gums may have been employed, but this is not supported by the statements of the people who witnessed the traditional execution of rock paintings' (but see Taçon 1989a: 130, Fig. 21 on the use of orchid bulbs as a binder). Interestingly, we are also unaware of any previous records of orchid brushes. Josie Maralngurra's description of the use of the orchid was clear and precise and there is no doubt that, in this case, they were used alongside other brushes.

Likewise, there has been some debate surrounding the use of platforms or scaffolding to produce rock art in high places at sites (e.g. Welch 2015; Wesley et al. 2018). There is no doubt that platforms were used in other places (e.g. Wesley et al. 2018) but in this case a first-hand account suggests the artists simply used a forked stick. Considering the age of the artists at the time this is certainly quite a feat — squatting at the top of this stick for an extended period of time would have been uncomfortable and it is curious that they chose not to construct a platform as had been used at the nearby Blue Paintings site (see Edwards 1965). However, it may also be true that the Blue Painting site structure had another use, such as a burial platform and was never used for painting at all.

Finally, another important aspect of their work is that the men dedicated all of their time to painting at the expense of their other roles. The rest of the family picked up the extra work and, as Josie hinted, this did not bother the wider family group. This wide family support demonstrates that producing rock art was a highly valued social and cultural activity — one that justified other family members having to work harder to support the family and the two artists who were focused on one artistic activity. As Haskovec and Sullivan (1989: 71) point out, '... it can be said that it was probably no great economic burden to have a prolific artist within one's group ... The artist's role in increase ceremonies and in educating the young may in fact place him securely within the economic sphere'.

A rumour surrounding the Anbangbang Gallery and nearby Blue Paintings site is that the recent paintings were produced at the request of the tourism business operators in the area (for a discussion of this see Haskovec and Sullivan 1986: 8, 1989: 62; Chaloupka 1993: 85; Welch 2015: 132–134). We found no evidence to suggest this was the case. Likewise, the rumour that white house paint was used to create the paintings (as stated by Haskovec n.d.: 1 and discussed by Chaloupka 1993: 84–85) is not supported by this new information,

and is the subject of further research.

Motivations

These new findings suggest that the two artists had a clear vision for the panel and were unrelenting in their commitment to achieving this vision. During this week of painting the artists do not appear to have been using the art to directly share stories with their family. Instead, their actions suggest they had a different agenda. We propose that the artists had a variety of motivations for creating this art in this particular shelter. There is no question that they were both aware that tourists would likely visit this shelter in the dry season. One could assume then that their target audience was the new visitors to their lands, perhaps educating them on three of the key Ancestral and creator beings for this area — Namarrkon, Barrkinj and Namandjolk. Yet, there is much more to this story. While the artists most likely knew that tourists would see this art, we would argue that their message was multi-layered. Chaloupka (1982) offers an intriguing interpretation of Nayombolmi's motivations for painting at the Anbangbang Gallery. He states:

It was in this shelter that Najombolmi, known to Europeans as Barramundi Charlie, executed perhaps his best painting. For many years he worked for Europeans as a buffalo shooter, in a gold mine and on cattle stations, returning to his land whenever he could. In 1964, only a year before his death, he camped for the last time in this shelter. By then he had witnessed the impact of European contact on the Aboriginal sociocultural systems elsewhere in the Northern Territory, and now he saw changes happening within his own region. Bridges began to span the rivers, which were the actual barriers in the past, and each year an increasing number of outsiders were intruding into his land. He thought of the people who once used to live here, and of the Dreaming. In his swag he carried ochres which he had collected on his travels. He took them out, prepared the pigments and painted the people back into the shelter. There are two family groups, men standing amidst their wives, some of whom he depicted with milk in their breast, as if he really wished them to be alive, to procreate and to people the land again (Chaloupka 1982: 22–25)¹.

The idea of painting people back into the country is a romantic one but, we would argue, also an insightful interpretation of their work. Combining Ancestral Beings with the detailed depiction of men and women painted for ceremony sends a powerful and deliberate message from two elders to their own people as well as the newcomers to their land. As Haskovec and Sullivan (1989: 71) have shown, Nayombolmi's artistic legacy — with hundreds of known rock paintings — demonstrates a rejection of the European or colonialist world in which he had become enmeshed. While depictions of European subject matter in rock art are regularly scattered across the landscape (see, for example, Chaloupka 1993: 191–215; May et al. 2017), both Nayombolmi

and Djimongurr avoided these subjects in general, and in particular in creating the Anbangbang Gallery. In fact, by placing the new art on the rock, they chose to paint over a previously painted firearm (cf. Fig. 3 with 4 and 14), an act that speaks volumes in this context.

The multi-layered motivations to which we earlier referred may then be characterised as a re-emphasis on Aboriginal law and customs and the Ancestral Beings that embody this belief system, a demonstration of their power, and a subversive rejection of the colonial incursion into this sacred space. Djimongurr and Nayombolmi produced their equivalent of a neon billboard in Times Square with their final message — our law is still here, our ancestors are still here and our people are still here.

Conclusion

The ever-emerging stories behind the iconic Anbangbang Gallery paintings are multi-layered and add to its claim as one of the most important cultural places in Kakadu National Park and, indeed, Australia. The recent oral history recordings with Josie Maralngurra and Jeffrey Lee have added a deeper dimension to our understandings of this place and, more broadly, to our understandings of the social context of rock art production. These stories, we argue, have global significance for our understanding of rock art as a social and cultural medium.

During her youth, Josie Maralngurra was witness to the last large-scale rock art created in Kakadu and western Arnhem Land. While a handful of single paintings were produced after this date in other areas, this was perhaps the final large-scale work of two of Kakadu's master artists. The fact that Josie's story is only now being told is an indictment on the lack of female voices in the anthropological and archaeological records of this region. This case study demonstrates the unique knowledge that has been overlooked and lost in Kakadu because of this bias and the underlying assumption that rock art is just 'men's business'. In fact, the Anbangbang Gallery rock art was produced within a social context, as a valued role within a family group.

These new insights allow us to better visualise the week in 1963/64 when an extended family group camped, perhaps for the last time, in the Anbangbang shelter. Two old men, their wives, one grown son and an eleven-year old girl named Josie. As a witness and participant in creating this stunning artwork, Josie's recollections are irreplaceable and force us to rethink existing assumptions about the people behind the paintings and the role of rock art in their lives.

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¹ Note: Nayombolmi passed away in 1967, not 1965 as stated here (see Haskovec and Sullivan 1986, 1989).

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