

# Basic Detail Report

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## Title

Lunggurrama - Body Designs

## Date

c 1994

## Primary Maker

John Bulun Bulun

## Medium

Ochre, eucalyptus bark

## Dimensions

914 x 410 x 65 mm, 1.2 kg Display Dimensions: 916 x 430 mm, 5 mm, 1200 kg

## Name

Bark painting

## History

Throughout Arnhem Land there are many versions of what are sometimes called 'diplomacy ceremonies'. Their purpose is to establish or reaffirm friendly relations between people of different communities. Diplomacy ceremonies are presented by one group to another with dance and song. The Ganalbingu of Arnhem Land remember welcoming the Makassans trepang fishers every year with a ceremony called the Marayarr Murrukundja. They offered friendship to the Makassans annually for over 150 years, explained who owned the land, how it was made, how to travel safely and what foods to eat. They mapped out to the Indonesians the local plant, land and sea bed formations. The Makassans were able to use the Marayarr Murrukundja ceremony to claim a relationship to the Ganalbingu and their land and be successful traders. They became part of their world, and the Ganalbingu contrast their behaviour with that of the Balanda who followed. John Bulun Bulun is an acclaimed artist, ceremonial leader and songman of the Ganalbingu people. He is acknowledged as one of the most important custodians of his people's diplomacy ceremonies as well as being a respected doctor. As an artist he is known primarily as a bark painter. This series of 12 works John Bulun Bulun illustrates a song cycle connected with a ceremony celebrating the Ganalbingu language group creation story and the Makassan story—the Marayarr Murrukundja. Links between Arnhem Land and Makassans had been reestablished in the 1980s when some north-east Arnhem land Aboriginal people made private visits to South Sulawesi to find long-lost relatives, descendants of Makassan seamen who married Aboriginal women during the period of the trepang trade. A Northern Territory historian Peter Spillet who had undertaken extensive research in this area (and is also known by his Makassan name Daeng Makkule) initiated a project to build a replica of a Makassan padawakang—one of the vessel types involved in the centuries old trepang fleets—which he sailed with a Makassan crew to Arnhem Land in

1988, at the time that the mis-named First Fleet Reenactment was approaching Sydney for Australia Day celebrations. Makassan fleets had long preceeded the English one. In October 1993 John Bulun Bulun lead the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and Maningrida Arts and Culture cultural exchange visit to Kupang and South Sulawesi, accompanied by a group of singers, didgeridoo players and dancers. In Kupang they performed at the Loro Cultural Festival then flew to Ujung Pandang in South Sulawesi. Here Makassan traditional boatbuilders still build timber craft using the same hand tools and techniques of their not-so-distant ancestors who built and sailed prahus to Australia. In Ujung Pandang they performed the Marayarr Murrukundja diplomacy ceremony over three nights at the Museum La Galigo. 'For Bulun Bulun and his group, this was a profound time. Finally he was in the land of the Makassans, a people who had played a significant part in his people's history and culture. As a child he had heard about the Makassans from his parents and grandparents and for years had painted Makassan themes in his art. He saw now the huge prahus in the port, the handcrafted knives, traditional swords and machetes in the markets, the old Makassan pottery in the antique shops and the roadside stalls selling baskets of cut tobacco. All these had become icons in his own culture and the words for many of these objects had become part of Ganalbingu language.' (Garde, Murray. The Marayarr Murrukundja ceremony goes to Makassar; a report of the Bawinanga cultural exchange visit to Kupang NTI and South Sulawesi, Indonesia. 1993) The performance of the Marayarr Murrukundja ceremony was an emotional time for the group. Preparations were complex, calling for elaborate body painting and decorations. 'The beautiful and moving finale of the ceremony consists of the public display and presentation of a large decorated sacred pole, the marrajiri, which represents the mast of a Makassan prahu on rough seas. People mourn the loss of the pole when it is presented to the recipients, just as they feel sadness at the departure of their Makassan friends and family at the end of each trepaning season.' This series of barks by John Bulun Bulun can be divided into four groups: body paint designs, people and ceremony, creation stories and hunting and gathering, all of them explaining the meaning of the ceremony.