



Object number:
00033822

Title: Wangurri Monuk
Date: 1999



Date: 1998

Primary Maker: Buwathay'
Munyarayun

Medium: Natural pigments
on bark

Name: Bark painting

History: The Yolnu people of Arnhem Land inhabit a landscape that was formed by the actions of ancestral beings, who can take both human and animal form. For instance water now flows where these creatures walked and hills have formed where they died. Ancestral time is not just in the past but also the present and future. In light of this the sacred landscape and stories of East Arnhem Land are central to the Yolnu people's way of life and prominent themes in their bark paintings. The Saltwater Project began in 1996 when an illegal fishing camp was discovered at Garranali, a sacred Aboriginal site in East Arnhem Land. This sacred area is home to the ancestral crocodile Bärü and found among the litter of the illegal camp was the severed head of a crocodile. This discovery prompted the local Yolnu people to produce a series of bark paintings that expressed the rules, philosophies and stories of their region. The project culminated in the production of 80 barks and allowed the Indigenous community to educate

community to educate others about the social history, geography and personal stories of their traditional homeland. They stressed the importance of Yolnu land ownership, laws and codes of behaviour for those who interacted with the landscape and sacred Indigenous places. The Yolnu have been involved in the land rights struggle since the 1960s. They currently are recognised as the traditional owners of northeast Arnhem Land under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. This act was passed in the Northern Territory in 1976 and is seen as the benchmark in the recognition of Aboriginal land ownership in Australia. Despite this the issues of Indigenous land ownership, rights, customs and law continue to be contentious in the Australian legal system and wider community.