

What do you see?

4 February to 8 March 2025

An exhibition of paintings by twelve First Nations contemporary artists.



Wally Wilfred, *Mokuy*, 2022, acrylic on metal, 121cm x 81cm.
Image courtesy of Studio Adamson.

of the exhibited works is what each communicates about the artist's specific relationship to these geographies, and to their peoples' art histories and enduring traditions. These relationships are expressed through practices which both continue and expand 'traditional' culture.

The paintings of Wägilak artist and Chairman of Ngukurr Arts, Wally Wilfred, and Dhalwangu artist, Manini Gumana, for example, share an aesthetic sensibility but also differ on several counts. Wilfred and Gumana both infill marked out designs with fine linework, achieved through the use of a *marwat*, a thin brush often fashioned from human hair and a common instrument for the practices of Yolngu artists. Yet, while in Wilfred's *Mokuy* and *Bones* lines run parallel on a diagonal, in *Garrapara*, Gumana crosshatches using black and white ochre pigments on bark. Wilfred and Gumana's diverging approaches to linework arguably reflect the two *miny'tji* (ceremonial clan designs) of the Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties of the Yolngu peoples, of which Wilfred belongs to the former and Gumana the latter.

Both artists thus reference local customs, however, other streams of innovation and influence also converge in their work. From 2012, Gumana was the first Yolngu artist to paint directly on bark without an earth pigment base layer and to outline her designs with a *marwat* instead of a thick brush. Wilfred's graphic figures and fluorescent palette bear the influence of his grandfather, a respected Yolngu custodian and artist, Djambu Barra Barra, who painted in a style and medium which shared a greater affinity with art of the Roper River region than to Yolngu aesthetic sensibilities. The experimentation with 'traditional' Yolngu methods of representation in Gumana's work, and the merging of these principles with features of work from Roper River in Wilfred's, suggest the duality of Yolngu culture and more expansive sources of influence in the work of both artists.

Seven paintings by four female Warlpiri artists demonstrate the strengths and consistency of work from Lajamanu in the Tanami

LONDON, 4 February, 2025 – JGM Gallery presents *What do you see?*, an exhibition featuring the works of twelve First Nations contemporary artists.

What do you see? follows John Berger's assertion that "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger, 1972). The reception of Indigenous contemporary art has historically been mediated by assumptions that work in this category is isolated from global influence, stylistically homogeneous, and 'traditional' as opposed to contemporary. This exhibition seeks to counter these beliefs by presenting a suite of works which embody some of the complex networks of influence, diverse and specific cultural contexts, and permutations of sacred culture that exist in the Indigenous contemporary art field. As JGM Gallery Director, Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi, says, "The works exhibited in *What do you see?* demonstrate the plurality of styles and aesthetics of Indigenous contemporary art, and invite us to question both how and why these manifest in different geographic regions of the Australian continent."

Artists from seven distinct Indigenous language, social and nation groups are exhibited in *What do you see?*, their uses of medium, form and content as varied as the cultures to which they belong. Their Country collectively extends from Blue Mud Bay in the north to Bentinck Island in the east, to Coober Pedy in the south, and the Great Sandy Desert in the west. A facet

Desert where these artists live and work. Formally, these paintings resemble each other closely, every artist recreating their different *Jukurrpa* (Dreaming, or creation time) in a hallucinogenic palette. Multivalent, curvilinear figures are unanimously represented with layers of surrounding radials, as if they emanate a visible aura. In these works is thus an overwhelming sense of the power of the earth's surface as it is seen and felt by the artists.

Above all, *What do you see?* asks the viewer to consider how their perception of Indigenous contemporary art changes through contextualisation, and what other possibilities for seeing the world and being in it are opened by this process.

Exhibiting artists: George Cooley • Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori • Manini Gumana • Lily Nungarrayi Hargraves • Myra Patrick Herbert • Margaret Pamparriya Martin • Alison Munti Riley • Rosie Napurrurla Tasman • Clifford Thompson Japaljarri • Alma Kalaju Webou • Wally Wilfred • Julie Yatjitja.

About JGM Gallery

JGM Gallery was founded in 2017 by Australian-born Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi, one of the United Kingdom's leading specialists in Indigenous Australian Art. Guerrini Maraldi has more than 20 years experience in collecting, dealing and promoting Indigenous artists from across Australia.

Through its exhibition programme, JGM Gallery sheds light on the contemporary art and history of First Nations artists, with a focus on the use of sacred processes and traditional techniques. The gallery seeks to counter the pervasive and misplaced perception that the art of First Nations Australians is homogenous. In the words of Guerrini Maraldi, "The styles of this movement's leading figures are as varied, complex and sophisticated as any in the Western Canon." As well as championing Indigenous artists, the gallery has a roster of contemporary artists from Britain and elsewhere. These artists reflect the multifaceted nature of the contemporary art scene and, since its inception, JGM Gallery has promoted and placed their work in significant private and institutional collections.

Part of JGM Gallery's mission is to adequately contextualise the practices of the artists it represents. In alignment with this approach, it produces a variety of publications, with a focus on artist collaboration, editorial design, and scholarship. A commitment to publishing expands the gallery programme beyond its exhibitions – an ethos which fosters reflection and further conversation from our wider audience and community.

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For further information and press enquiries, please contact the gallery at info@jmgallery.com or + 44 (0) 207 228 6027.

Opening Reception:

5 February 2025, 6:30pm to 8:30pm

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