

Paul Nabulumo Interview Transcript

At Maningrida Arts and Culture

Artworks

Translated and transcribed by Murray Garde, 18, 19 May 2023

Yes, I will tell you about a sacred site at Kubumi, relating to mermaids

We call these beings 'Ngalkunburriyaymi'

We paint images of these female beings

In the distant past, they would camp on the sand they camped in the rock country

and they were attracted to the water, to swim in it and so now they live in the water

At night they come out and walk around

The women who have tails like a fish

yes, the Raibow Serpent pulled them into the ground under the rock

so we do paintings of the sacred sites associated with them

they are connected to a sacred site called Dilebang

we paint images of the Rainbow Serpent at that site

where our sacred place has always been

we share that place with another clan and we all have the right to paint it

a sacred site

We paint images of the rocks at that place

and things like the waterfalls, the Rainbow Serpent and mimih spirits

we share ownership of these things with another clan

yes ... I will now tell you about the rocks there

and a waterfall where the Rainbow Serpent stood on a rock there

she became trapped in a cavity in the rock

and she pierced a hole through the rock which we now refer to as the entrance to her dwelling

that water hole

she was stuck inside that rock and could not get out that Rainbow Serpent

and so she turned to stone under the ground there we she remains today

yes ... my family living at Mumeka used to paint this story

all the brothers

the brothers of my father

Johnny Mawurndjul and Jimmy (Njiminjuma)

They painted this story long ago

and we were just children at that time

then my family moved upstream on the river to Kubumi

then we started painting, we sons of those men

they taught us how to paint

to paint that story, that sacred site of ours

our elders, they taught us the story

our father and his brothers

and our grandparents

and our great-grandparents, they all taught us the story of that sacred site

and now we are painting it

we are painting the story of our sacred totemic site

yes my feeling is that I want to do bark paintings

I am happy when I am painting, it makes me feel good

I enjoy painting

I love the things my father showed me, when I was a little boy

and I was painting

and I want to do more painting

yes

I really like to do painting

I enjoy doing my own cross-hatching

Sometimes I will depict subjects of either patrimoiety— duwa or yirridjdja

I want follow my own feelings

yes

My name is Paul Nabulumo

My country is at Yikarrakkal

My skin (kinship subsection) is Kamarrang

I was born at Bulkay on the Tomkinson River flood plain

that's where I was born

Bulkay

I was born the old fashioned way, no blanket

I was wrapped in paperbark

my father made a bed for me as a baby

The Ngalkunburriyaymi mermaids

We paint them, that sacred site for them

and the Rainbow Serpent

we paint that story

They are the main things we paint

the Rainbow Serpent and the Mermaids

Sometimes we paint the story of the ancestral bones

Those ancestors lived there in the rock shelters

A long time ago, we call them 'Djulng'

Their bones are still there, and we paint that story

I paint that story too and sometimes I paint the lightning man
story as well

or the moon story

The Wardbukkarra-wardbukkarra story

is about a man who went out hunting kangaroo

he went out for kangaroo

the kangaroo was for him, the Wardbukkarra-wardbukkarra

they were what we call the 'Nayuhyungki', the 'Old People'

Another one grabbed him to kill him

And cut the cheek on his face

He was taken back to the camp of the others, where they wanted to
eat him

but he escaped back to his family

His father was a clever man

And he sang up a powerful storm

And called lightning down to explode the rocks which fell on them
and crushed them

And so today they lie beneath the earth there in the rocks

The Wardbukkarra-wardbukkarra look after the kangaroos

They look after them

The other character in the story, he went hunting

and the Wardbukkarra-wardbukkarra watched him killing all the
kangaroos

and so he captured the man and cut him here on the cheek

cut him on the face

The mermaids have long hair

The Old People once captured some of the mermaids

The mermaids would stay with the men one or two nights and then go
back into the water

they swim

A long time ago, the Old People, they told me, my father told me

about these Ngalkunburriyaymi mermaids

The Old People took them from the water and would sleep with them
for a night

for one night, like their friends

Then they go back to swim again

Those mermaids, they can give birth to your child

Those young girls, they can give you a baby

The yawkyawk, they might be half non-Aboriginal and half
Aboriginal

That place is there at Kubumi

That's where the mermaids live

They come out of the water and dry out in the sun, then they swim
in the water again

Women who have a tail like a fish

They give birth to new females

They are the new people who give us children

Anniebell is the mother's country manager of that totemic emblem
and so she depicts that story too

She watches over that story, because it is from her mother's
country

What we call the Djungkay

So she makes the images of them and she manages the story on our
behalf

all of that story