

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
Tuesday 12 September 2023



## **Tarnanthi to feature more than 1500 artists in AGSA's festival of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art**

**Adelaide, Australia:** Tarnanthi, the Art Gallery of South Australia's festival of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, returns in October 2023. Acclaimed as Australia's leading First Nations art festival, Tarnanthi this year comprises exhibitions at AGSA; a state-wide festival with exhibitions and accompanying events across 27 venues; and the Tarnanthi Art Fair, an in-person and online event in 2023.

Tarnanthi's Artistic Director, Barkandji curator Nici Cumpston OAM, says, 'Tarnanthi fosters opportunities for First Nations artists at all stages of their careers, opening up new pathways for creative talents. Artists from across the country have been making new works that highlight the dynamism and diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and cultures today. It is a privilege to share their voices through Tarnanthi and to bring this world-class art experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to audiences again in 2023.'

The word '*tarnanthi*' (pronounced *TAR*-nan-dee) comes from the language of the Kurna people, the traditional owners of the Adelaide Plains. It means to spring forth or appear – like the sun and the first

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emergence of light. Tarnanthi presents the dynamism of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art from across the country and provides an energised platform for artists to share important stories. Since its inception in 2015, Tarnanthi has presented the work of more than 6000 First Nations artists while more than 1.6 million people have attended Tarnanthi exhibitions and events.

The first-ever survey exhibition of Western Aranda artist Vincent Namatjira will open on October 20 as a highlight of this year's Tarnanthi festival. With works that offer a wry look at the politics of history, power, and leadership from Namatjira's signature contemporary Aboriginal perspective, *Vincent Namatjira: Australia in colour* will premiere at AGSA, featuring new paintings by the celebrated satirical portraitist, works never before on public display and rarely seen works from public and private collections across the country. Vincent Namatjira has also selected works from the Gallery's collection by his great-grandfather Albert Namatjira, whom he cites as one of his greatest inspirations. Following Tarnanthi 2023, *Vincent Namatjira: Australia in colour* will travel to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in 2024.

Vincent Namatjira said, 'I believe in the power of art, the power of the paintbrush. I know that art can change lives – it changed mine – and I hope that art can change the world too. Painting is in my blood – my great-grandfather Albert Namatjira changed the face of art in Australia. I feel his influence when I paint, especially when I paint our Country. The connection runs deep and it has shaped who I am as an artist. I'm proud to be continuing the Namatjira legacy.'

'I respect the old people – their strong culture, their knowledge and their art – but a young fella like me doesn't want to make traditional paintings. Just like Albert Namatjira, I wanted to find my own way, to find my own voice and to be heard,' Namatjira said.

Tarnanthi 2023 features more than 1500 artists from across the continent, from as far north as Arnhem Land to the heart of the Great Victoria Desert and beyond. Working diversely in painting, photography, weaving, carving, sculpture, moving image, works on paper and textiles, the artists express traditional cultural knowledge through their contemporary works of art.

Premier of South Australia, the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP, welcomed the acclaimed Festival and says, 'Not only is Tarnanthi a platform for our nation's important voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic talent, Tarnanthi has also generated \$115.2 million for our State's economy. I am delighted that the Art Gallery of South Australia is able to bring together and share this remarkable and important artistic and cultural offering.'

Minister for the Arts Andrea Michael MP said, 'It's wonderful to welcome Tarnanthi back to the Art Gallery of South Australia. This is an incredible celebration of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art featuring more than 1500 artists and shining a light on First Nations' stories.'

As Australia's leading First Nations Art festival, Tarnanthi will again draw people from around the country and overseas to South Australia cementing our state's reputation as a cultural leader.'

BHP Olympic Dam Asset President, Jennifer Purdie says, 'BHP is proud to partner with the Art Gallery of South Australia through Tarnanthi. This partnership delivers vital income to regional communities – boosting economic self-determination, improving wellbeing and increasing artists' ability to stay and work on or near their traditional lands, which allows artists and their families to express their connections to Country and culture.'

Rhana Devenport ONZM, AGSA Director says, 'True to its name, Tarnanthi fosters emerging and mid-career artists, with their works exhibited alongside those of contemporary visionaries. Tarnanthi regularly facilitates mentorships and career development opportunities, opening up new pathways for artists' talents. It supports artists' projects as they grow, often from conceptual germination until material maturity.'

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'Tarnanthi champions artists as they activate and innovate contemporary cultural expression in a multiplicity of mediums and methods. It is a homage to our First Nations history and recognition of the first people of Australia',

'The 2023 Festival once again demonstrates itself to be a charged and porous space for contemporary expressions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Visitors can experience the potency and vitality of culture in Tarnanthi through 56 projects at AGSA and across the state in a wealth of exhibitions.' Devenport says.

At AGSA, Tarnanthi features more than 100 artists including independent artists and those working in Aboriginal owned art centres. One of the highlights, *Kala kunbolk (Colour Country)* will feature exquisite woven baskets by the Kunwinjku women of Gunbalanya in west Arnhem Land. They are exploring the profound world of fibre art through traditional weaving practice that can be traced back thousands of years. In their culture, colour is life, and brightness and vibrancy are highly valued. Drawing particular attention to the natural variations of dye, each of the baskets has been created using a single colour of dyed pandanus. Intricate knowledge of plants enables the intensity of each dye colour to be achieved, through sourcing the plants only at particular times of the year. The whole process has been mapped on a large-scale hand-painted banner created by one of the younger artists, which will be presented alongside the baskets, weaving together country, colour, and culture.

Janet Fieldhouse has crafted amuletic sculptures using clay, feathers and raffia in a series of cameo portraits carved from porcelain that relate to the artist's Torres Strait Islander and Chinese family history. Also working with clay is Judith Pungarta Inkamala, a renowned Western Aranda artist, who since 1993 has been working at the Hermannsburg Potters in her community of Ntaria (Hermannsburg) in Central Australia. Encouraged by her mother to share the remarkable story of her life, Inkamala has created a new body of work for Tarnanthi. Onto each of her hand-built clay forms, she has intricately painted scenes that depict poignant moments throughout her life.

Marlene Rubuntja joins her friends and family at Yarrenyty Arltere and Tangentyere art centres in a project that involves sixteen artists ranging in age from twenty to eighty. The Mpulungkinya project encompasses kinetic soft sculpture, newly rendered ceramics, and paintings in the unwavering optimism of the two art centres' palette.

Among the senior artists exhibiting at Tarnanthi in 2023 is Bugai Whyoulter, a Kartujarra artist who paints with Martumili Artists in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Her work depicts the seasonal changes across the salt lakes and sand dunes of Wantili, the Country where she was born. Alongside the subtly exquisite suite of paintings is a moving image component that transports us through her Country, across vast tracts of land where cultural knowledge is vital for survival.

The youngest artist in the Tarnanthi is twenty-three-year-old Ray Mudjandi, whose work expresses his Bininj and Western Arrernte culture and identity as well as his love of pop culture, contemporary film, comics and superheroes. For Tarnanthi this year, Mudjandi will reveal his latest superhero, *Black Speed*, who holds lightning in his body as djang (sacred power), represented on bark and relief sculpture.

Wally Wilfred, a Wägilak artist working at Ngukurr Arts in southeast Arnhem Land, is renowned for his extraordinary use of vivid colour in his paintings. He employs the traditional rarrk technique of cross-hatching, which artists across Arnhem Land mainly use with natural earth pigments. Wilfred's contemporary works on paper reflect stories handed down to him from his grandfather. The works speak of cycles, life and death, and the ongoing connection to strong traditions and culture.

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Tiger Yaltangki is a prolific Yankunytjatjara artist who works daily at Iwantja Arts in Indulkana, in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia. With bright, bold, energised brush strokes and texts, he has inserted himself and his community into the scenes of recycled AC/DC posters, as well as a series of self-portraits, bringing his idols into his life in the desert.

From the heart of Tarnanthi at AGSA, the festival stretches across South Australia with 27 partner venues presenting more than 36 exhibitions and events for Tarnanthi, from Port Pirie to Port Adelaide.

*Saltbush Country*, through a partnership between Country Arts SA and AGSA, brings together works by seven First Nations artists from regional South Australia, curated by Wangkanurra artist and curator Marika Davies. Each artist is different, and their works are different, but they all connect in ways that could easily be overlooked. The artists live and work in their communities and have strong connections to where they are from, what has happened in our shared history and what is affecting First Nations people now. The outcomes reflect deeply personal stories through weaving, embroidery, painting and the revival of traditional making practices using contemporary materials. *Saltbush Country* will open in Port Pirie on 23 September, before travelling to Adelaide for a four-month exhibition season from 16 November.

As well as group and solo exhibitions, this year's partner projects include a First Nations dance development opportunity with Australian Dance Theatre as well as opportunities for First Nations writers to engage with Tarnanthi exhibitions, involving Writers SA, the SA First Nations Writers Group and Our Words at the Adelaide Festival Centre. There are also projects that support arts in health, with children invited to make work that responds to the theme of 'what matters to me' at Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital, while Jackie Saunders from Tutti Arts presents a solo exhibition of new works at the Royal Adelaide Hospital with support of The Hospital Research Foundation Group – Creative Health. Meanwhile, the newly formed Kurna Women's Art Collective share their collective strength to present *Footprints*, a showcase of textiles, moving image, portraits and text at Hart's Mill in Yartapuulti (Port Adelaide).

Tarnanthi Artistic Director Nici Cumpston says, 'The wide array of partner programs is a cornerstone of Tarnanthi. We want the festival to be as accessible as possible to the public and these events provide such a great opportunity for learning and cultural exchange for all ages right across the state.'

'Partnerships such as these represent heartening developments for the future. Year after year, the number and diversity of potential project ideas for Tarnanthi continues to grow. Building sustainable partner relationships between artists and organisations ensures ongoing, trusted support for artists, giving their ideas time to mature and develop. Nurturing this creative energy strengthens culture, improves wellbeing, enriches communities and, through the shared experience of art, brings all of us closer together as we learn from and engage meaningfully with each other.'

One of Australia's most loved and celebrated singer-songwriters, Arrernte/Gurindji man Dan Sultan and his band will kick off the opening weekend celebration of Tarnanthi. Sultan will open the free public event on AGSA's North Terrace forecourt on the evening of Thursday 19 October, before audiences experience the Tarnanthi exhibition at AGSA alongside hundreds of artists from across the country, who will descend on Adelaide for the opening weekend.

For the first time since 2020, the popular Tarnanthi Art Fair also returns in person, at the Adelaide Entertainment Centre – offering a unique opportunity to meet and learn from artists firsthand about the thousands of works of art available for sale. This year we will also be presenting a public program with Ku Arts and Ceduna Arts to enable the public to collectively weave a leafy sea dragon, from marine debris collected off the coast of South Australia. The Art Fair is also held online in 2023, with all proceeds from the in-person and online sales going directly to the artists and their communities. Since 2015, more than

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\$6.6 million of art has been sold at the Tarnanthi Art Fair, with all proceeds going directly to the artists and their community-run art centres.

'An opening weekend highlight is always the panpapanpalya ideas forum, where visitors can hear important conversations from artists – this too will be available online so that audiences can experience the power of Tarnanthi wherever they are,' Devenport says.

Senior Kurna man Mickey Kumatpi O'Brien says, 'we can be afraid of the water and not step into it, or we can know what's in the water, and be more likely to live within it.'

'Tarnanthi allows all to step into First Nations people and its culture and know we can all walk together, as we live the Voices of a millennium. This year is a Voice of Generations. Together, Voices of Culture does not divide, it is what we gain from Culture that makes our lives greater for it.'

At its heart, the Tarnanthi Festival is a series of free exhibitions, artist talks, performances, and events, held at AGSA and across the city and state, showcasing and celebrating contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Visit [agsa.sa.gov.au](https://agsa.sa.gov.au) for further details.

**ENDS**

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**Image caption:** Bugai Whyoulter, Kartujarra people, Western Australia, born Pukayiyirna, Western Australia c.1939, Wantili (Warntili, Canning Stock Route Well 25), 2021, Kunawarritji, Western Australia, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 152.0 x 152.0 cm  
© the artist / Martumili Artists

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**KEY DATES** Tarnanthi 2023 | 20 October 2023 – 21 January 2024  
Media Preview | AGSA | 19 October, 11am  
Official Launch | AGSA | 19 October, 6pm | Dan Sultan and his band to open Tarnanthi Festival 2023 in a FREE event for all South Australians and visitors  
Vincent Namatjira: *Australia in colour* | AGSA 20 October 2023 – 21 January 2024  
Media Preview | Tarnanthi Art Fair 2023 | Adelaide Entertainment Centre | 11am  
Tarnanthi Art Fair 2023 | Adelaide Entertainment Centre | 20 – 22 October  
Panpapanpalya | AGSA Courtyard | Fri 20 Oct, 10am–12.45pm

**EVENTS  
& PROGRAMS**

**Panpapanpalya** - Fri 20 Oct, 10am–12.45pm, AGSA Courtyard, *Free entry*  
For centuries before colonisation, Kurna people hosted cultural conferences known as Panpapanpalya (pronounced banba banbalya). These knowledge-sharing forums continue as a critical part of Tarnanthi, with leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, curators, academics, writers and other creatives coming together to share their insights. Each 45-minute session is chaired by a leading First Nations artist or curator.

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### **Artist Talks** - 21–22 Oct, 11am & 2pm, AGSA *Free entry*

Tarnanthi's guiding principle is to let the artist's voice shine. Join us over the opening weekend to hear from exhibiting artists as they talk about their works on display at AGSA.

### **First Fridays** - First Friday of the month, 5-9pm, All ages, *Free entry*

A new publication released by Thames & Hudson on the acclaimed artist Vincent Namatjira will be launched at AGSA's monthly up-late First Friday on November 3. At other First Fridays during the Tarnanthi Festival, the December 1 event will celebrate the convergence of new and ancient First Nations art and on January 5 it will celebrate First Nations astronomy.

### **The Studio** - Open daily with facilitated workshops in school holidays and weekends, All ages, *Free entry*

The Studio, AGSA's free hands-on activities space for art lovers of all ages, will be transformed into a football fanatic's dream as exhibiting artist Vincent Namatjira takes over the space with his Indigenous All Stars Footy Card paintings. Visitors will have the chance to make their own football cards and have them immortalised on the Studio's wall. The All-Stars Studio runs until the end of January and is open every day except Christmas Day.

### **NEO** – presented by The Balnaves Foundation, Ages 13 – 17, Free, bookings online

#### **Neo Teen Takeover: Superheros** - Sat 28 Oct, 6–8.30pm

#### **Neo In Colour** - Sat 9 Dec, 6–8.30pm

Neo is an art, ideas and epic event for teens aged 13 – 17 years. It's an opportunity to hang out with friends, join in artist-led workshops, listen to live music and take part in performances and activities. The first Neo teen takeover of Tarnanthi will be guest-curated by the youngest artist in the Festival, 23-year-old Ray Mudjandi, who will program a superhero-themed event based on his own works.

### **Start** - First Sunday of every month, 11am–3pm, Ages 3–12, Free entry

Start at the Gallery, which happens on the first Sunday of every month for children aged three to twelve, offers a treasure trove of discovery. For the first Start event for Tarnanthi, on Sunday 5 November, Rudi Bremer from the popular ABC Kids listen podcast, Little Yarns, will host 'A Little Yarning Circle', which will be an opportunity to showcase and share stories of language, art, and culture.

### **Tuesday Talks** - Selected Tuesdays, 12.30pm, Free Entry

Join curators, artists, and experts for insightful talks about works in this year's Tarnanthi.

### **IMAGES**

<https://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/tarnanthi2023fullprogramimages>  
<https://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/tarnanthi/vincentnamatjira2023>

### **VIDEOS**

Tarnanthi Overview 2015-2022: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/781666287>  
Tarnanthi Welcome to Country 2021: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/629696226>

### **EVENTS & PROGRAMS**

<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/tarnanthi/tarnanthi-2023/>

### **MEDIA PORTAL**

<https://agsa.sa.gov.au/tarnanthi2023media>

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**SOCIAL MEDIA** @agsa.adelaide @tarnanthi #tarnanthi

### **About Nici Cumpston OAM**

Tarnanthi is led by Artistic Director Nici Cumpston OAM, the Art Gallery of South Australia's Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. Nici is a proud Barkandji person from the Barka, the Darling River in far west New South Wales, who is also of Afghan, English and Irish heritage. Her career has been characterised by working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to bring new work and new ways of seeing to wider audiences.

### **Tarnanthi at a glance 2015 - 2023:**

- 1.6 million people have attended Tarnanthi exhibitions and events
  - More than \$6.6 million of art has been sold at the Tarnanthi Art Fair, with all money going directly to artists and communities
  - 6000+ artists have been included in exhibitions, art fairs and events
  - \$115.2 million in economic expenditure has been generated in South Australia since 2015
-