



Citation for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*

Dr B Marika

Dr B Marika was among the first Yolungu women to be encouraged by their male relatives to paint ancestral creation stories.

From those tentative beginnings emerged not just a successful and respected artist, but also a cultural and community leader who has done much to encourage and assist other artists to develop enterprises and find new outlets for their work.

Dr B Marika has served on many high-profile boards, spoken at national and international conferences, and played a role in the fight to ensure Indigenous art is protected by copyright. She was artist-in-residence at Flinders University in 1986.

Born at Yirrkala mission in northeast Arnhem Land in 1954 and received a traditional education as well as attending the local mission school.

She and her sisters were taught to paint by their father Mawalan, a noted artist, statesman and ritual leader. As a child, she would sit by his side while he painstakingly covered his bark paintings with the grids of cross-hatched sacred designs of their clan, Riratjingu in northeast Arnhem Land.

Dr B Marika moved to Darwin in 1972 to pursue a career as an artist – and also serve as secretary of the Northern Land Council. Eight years she moved to Sydney, where she made her first prints. Since then she has actively pursued printmaking rather than painting. Her work still adheres to the pictorial traditions of her clan, and include the stories of Djankawu, the Wagilag sisters creation story and the turtle hunters.

She has had a number of solo exhibitions and has been an artist-in-residence at the Sydney School of Art, East Sydney Technical College, the Canberra School of Art and Warrnambool TAFE, as well as at Flinders. She also has worked as a translator with Film Australia and appeared in three films.

In 1988, Dr B Marika returned to Yirrkala to manage the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Arts Centre and Museum, though still travelled regularly to work with master printmakers in other cities.

In 2001, she received the Australia Council's Red Ochre Award. This annual award was established by the Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board to acknowledge an Indigenous artist who has made an outstanding contribution to the development and recognition of Indigenous arts and culture.

Dr B Marika together with the Rirratjingi clan of North East Arnhem Land and The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, worked very hard and closely together to publish *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang'kawu* which was launched at Government House, Darwin in 2009.

The book focused on the important ancestral site of Yalangbara (Port Bradshaw), some 210 square kilometres of land and coastal waters adjoining the Gulf of Carpentaria south of Yirrkala. It strongly examines aspects of Yolngu aesthetics, history, ancestral tradition, and custodial relationship to land and copyright, and depicts artwork of the creative activities of the Djang'kawu (the three powerful

supernatural beings, a brother and two sisters who named Yalangbara) by three generations of the Marika artists.

In Dr B Marika's words:

'Yalangbara is a project that I thought about back in 1989-90. I wanted to see it become a reality because Yalangbara is the most important site in the North East Arnhem Land for the Dhuwa moiety people. It's the site where the first ancestors, the Djang'kawa landed, and people as far away as Western Arnhem Land and south down to Numbulwar refer to Yalangbara as the place of the first people, the first people who were born or created there – these people were Rirratjingu, my own family group. In the context of environmental importance and heritage, I thought that Yalangbara should be listed on the national estate... So I started working towards the heritage listing with Colin Lane at Landcare in 1999...'

....So this was done and finally Yalangbara was listed in 2003 on the Australian Heritage Commission's register of the national estate... So it was always in my mind to follow through with the second stage, a publication then an exhibition on Yalangbara. This story is important and this is why our fathers painted all these artworks, to show how these paintings relate to particular sites and what they mean. At the time they did not have a translator to tell their stories properly and so we want to tell their stories properly now and hopefully, through this publication, Yalangbara will get the protection and the recognition it deserves.'

In 2014, Dr B Marika appeared in an SBS documentary series on Aboriginal languages, *Talking Language*, and shared how the passing down of Yolngu, her native tongue, had taught her how to care for her country and people. Dr B Marika revealed how whenever someone from her Rirratjingu clan dies, the whole clan will 'sing' them under the local trees, to bring their spirit back to the forest. Dr B Marika said that *'The meanings of these songlines, I'd imagine, could never really be fully captured when translated into another language. There are reasons why Dante's Commedia has been translated into English on nearly 102 separate occasions – and I suspect the reasons are not that dissimilar.'*

Among Dr B Marika's many accomplishments are appointments to the boards of the National Gallery of Australia, the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council.

Dr B Marika is currently a Board Member of the Indigenous Art Code, and former board member of the Australia Council. She is part of a team of artists, curators, and arts and legal organisations lobbying the federal government to take action on the scourge of fake art and cheap, touristy tack that has no connection and gives no benefit to Indigenous Australians.

The award of Doctor of Letters from Flinders University acknowledges the hugely important historical link that Dr B Marika had to Flinders, as well as recognising the long-term impact she has made to Indigenous Australian art as a successful and respected artist, and as a cultural and community leader who has done much to encourage and assist other artists to develop enterprises and find new outlets for their work.

Amended 17 July 2021 – update to name