

Coconut Studios  
presents

# *gwalwa mamadlema* (Larrakia: star country)

## A new exhibition by Cyan Sue-Lee & Nadine Lee



# Opening *17 March 6pm*

# (1) 17 March - 16 April 2023

*Nadine Lee*  
*Journey 2021*  
Mixed media  
dimensions variable

(2)  
*Cyan Sue-Lee*  
*darraballrra damaylala*  
*(Larrakia: spirit snake) 2023*  
Acrylic on canvas  
76 x 101.5 cm

Coconut Studios

[www.coconutstudios.com.au](http://www.coconutstudios.com.au)

8/18 Caryota Court,  
Coconut Grove, NT

Gallery hours  
10am-5pm Thurs-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun

Coconut Studios acknowledges the Larrakia people as the traditional custodians of the land upon which it operates and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging. *Sovereignty has never been ceded.*

Here, at Coconut Studios on Gulumerridjin Country, *gwalwa mamadlema*: an exhibition of paintings and sculptural works by Cyan Sue-Lee and her mother Nadine Lee, exploring coming into being, passage and return, these Larrakia words, meaning “star country”: *gwalwa mamadlema*.

Across the harbour, on the eastern side of the Cox Peninsula, glistens Mica Beach. It's here that Nadine and Cyan collect fine plates of mica, the silicate mineral, to stitch into their works, their shared lore and lineage, brightly reflected in this material.

The Serpent is the ground of *gwalwa mamadlema*. Cyan Sue-Lee recalls the diamond python that lived with her family when she was young – the origins of her lifetime fascination with the snake's form. She describes the meditative, hypnagogic state she achieves when painting the Serpent, and the elation of the process of “getting the curve just right”. The mesmerising and undulating forms of Cyan's line work seem to invoke this potent being, that surges off the canvas into full dimensionality in her large sculptural work, *balarr damaylala* (“serpent makes light”). Made from muslin and wire with a delicate scaling of mica tracing its back, *balarr damaylala* shines with possibility. With a twinkling eye of sand and a body like a blank canvas with brush in motion, the Serpent is being and becoming, creator and creation, braiding present and future. The Serpent is shards of rock and crystal, reflecting sea, fast-moving creeks, light dappling the trees, gwadbarra (“Milky Way”). The Serpent is darrandarra (“all of us”).

Scales of mica line the tunnel of Nadine Lee's sculpture *Journey* (2021). Its crystalline interior reflects the skin we grow individually and collectively, coming from within, expanding to the stars, reinforcing Nadine's belief that “it's what's inside that is beautiful and what counts”. In *Lineage* (2023), the colours featured in Cyan's work *darrandarra* (“all of us”) (2023), are painted by Nadine onto discs of fabric, suspended by bamboo embroidery hoops. Each disc represents one of Nadine's children. Like a planetary system, their family spins together. “It is the unity of these connections that makes the fabric of our life – fragile yet strong and open enough to let mostly the kind and respectful ways in” (Nadine Lee). The discs in *Lineage* are open at their core, while rings of mica frame and filter what passes through their centre. When encrusted with mica with its refractive powers, these sculptures, created by Nadine from quotidian materials – such as coat hangers, muslin and hessian – are elevated to a

mythic stratum. Their passageways and portals channel stories of culture and family, shared, sacred dialogue between her works and Cyan's, of which an observer will be lucky to glean only some of the flows. In *gwalwa mamadlema*, Nadine Lee's collaboration with her daughter brings forth a new artist, while illuminating the cycle of creativity across generations.

Cyan Sue-Lee is a Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman and Karajarri artist, born and raised on her traditional lands of Darwin, in the Northern Territory. Cyan's multicultural heritage, love of country, and ancient storytelling practices inspire and inform her paintings and sculptural works, which make use of acrylic paints, natural pigments, fabric, clay and wire. Emerging from a large, creative family, it has been a lifelong practice for Cyan to express herself and her culture through art. The exhibition *gwalwa mamadlema* (“star country”) with her mother Nadine Lee at Coconut Studios brings together a significant body of Cyan Sue-Lee's work, marking the next step in her journey as a professional artist.

Nadine Lee is a multi-disciplinary artist, curator, arts producer and arts manager. Nadine is from the Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman and Karajarri peoples of the Northern Territory and Western Australia, and also has Asian and European ancestry. Born and raised in Darwin, Nadine has exhibited her work locally and nationally. Her practice incorporates organic and ready-made materials to explore art as a healing modality. Nadine is part of the Larrakia Development Corporation working group for the upcoming Larrakia Culture Centre and an executive board member of the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF). Nadine is also an alumnus of several prestigious artist and cultural worker development programs. This includes the exclusive inaugural Encounters Indigenous Cultural Workers Scholarship with the National Museum of Australia, as well as the National Gallery of Australia Indigenous Arts Leadership Program (Wesfarmers). Nadine was also Associate Researcher for the Aboriginal Screen-Printing Textiles, Australia's Top End exhibition and publication with the Fowler Museum at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

Curated by Nadine Lee and Cyan Sue-Lee in collaboration with Coconut Studios.  
Coconut Studios gallery director: Stephanie Martin  
Graphic design: Madelaine Thomas (@quiggi.design)

Coconut Studios is located on Larrakia land. We pay our respects to Larrakia ancestors & Elders past, present & emerging & to all First Nation people. Sovereignty has never been ceded.



(1)  
Cyan Sue-Lee  
*Damanggwa mungudjin*  
(Midnight) 2023.  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30cm x 91.5cm

(2)  
Cyan Sue-Lee  
*Darrandarra (All Of Us)*  
2023. Acrylic on Canvas  
30cm x 91.5cm

(3)  
Nadine Lee  
*Journey*, 2021.  
Mixed Media  
Dimensions Variable