

THROUGH OUR EYES 22 OCTOBER–13 NOVEMBER, 2022

I come from a country shrouded in stories within stories, a place that has kept warrior battlefields warm over thousands of years. What this means for me I still don't fully know. There seem to be truths in all that gets told. It has been through shared art making that I have expanded my perceptions and delved into parts of myself that have been unconscious.

Through Our Eyes was born out of long conversations that took place during *Stories from the Future*¹—a workshop with people from First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds about the ancestors we want to become in hundreds of years, and about the legacy we wish to leave behind. Through exploring how we live that legacy now through art, the following things came up—slow art making, community groups making together and sharing old practices, places to gather and create, sharing art together with different groups, yarning circles, storytelling, art as a vehicle to revolutionise our thinking and our social and political constructs, healing through art and being together.

Connections formed with different community groups over the six months after the workshop—Bagot Community, Melaleuca Australia, Free Space Studio, Knuckey Lagoon, Larrakia Nation as well as individual arts professionals and members of the community. At the start of this year (2022) the concept of slow art making in community settings to enable the flourishing and unfolding of personal and social histories came to fruition. With storytellers from Gulumoerrgin, Naarm, Jabiru, Daly River, Maningrida, Congo, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and more we were able to create a holding space in community settings for this expression. Visual arts enable abstract, universally accessible ways of telling our stories. Through the work that was made we found poetic, sensory and emotive ways of illustrating moments in time and capturing the unspeakable.

These artworks have been shown in a series of exhibitions across Darwin on Larrakia land in 2022. The first exhibition, held at UNTITLED gallery+studio, Coconut Grove, focussed on stories of the land, ancestry, mythology and everyday life across the lifespan—

from 5 years old to aged care. The second was a pop-up exhibition and gig at Happy Yess, Brown's Mart in Darwin City, featuring live music and DJ's, art installations, paintings, and large-scale projections.

Through the eyes of artists and by their hands, in this final exhibition, we are exhibiting stories of personal, social and political experience—stories expressed across textiles, painting and photography. Over months we sat with the Congolese elders group. When eco-printing eucalyptus onto fabrics, the women shared stories from childhood about the diverse ways that eucalyptus had been used: as a dye, a hair cleaner and an edible medicine. From worlds apart, our Congolese family possess a shared language and connection with the land and flora kept alive by First Nations communities.

Children, young people and adults, all participants of Melaleuca Australia, joined these strong women. Some paintings they created together were brought forth from memories of resilience, strength, and hardship. Others illustrated worlds of a dreaming future. Some paintings were digitised onto fabrics with the intention of later constructing garments with the sewing group.

The disposable camera photography project collages the imagery from many lenses and many worldviews. With the help of a combination of storytellers, some newly arrived to Australia through the humanitarian visa program, and other arts practitioners of the Gulumoerrgin community, we are able to see that on the other side of the camera, we are all human. Though each of these storytellers—and each of us—follows a unique thread through space and time, the patterns of our greater movement are interwoven. What we call "community" is the weaver.

Shay Jayawardena
Flesh Equity in Arts, program coordinator
and Through Our Eyes project curator

1. Darwin Community Arts, 2021.

→ Melaleuca Australia is a specialist organisation that supports Humanitarian entrants, migrants and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds of all ages, settling in the Northern Territory of Australia. *Through Our Eyes* is part of the Flesh Program at Darwin Community Arts and is funded by Darwin Community Arts and the City of Darwin.



“I paint with the colours that remind me of my home. When I wake up I like to see these colours and painting them make me feel like I am there.”⁽⁰¹⁾

“I painted the flag of Ukraine in the shape of Australia with soldiers around it.”⁽⁰²⁾
“I painted my different selves.”⁽⁰³⁾

“This group has changed our experience of coming here. We are free to tell our story and people listen. Thank you, we want to keep doing this.”⁽⁰⁴⁾

(01) Busasa, Congolese Elder (02) Sasha, 5 years old, Ukrainian
(03) Anonymous (04) Oleksandr, Ukrainian

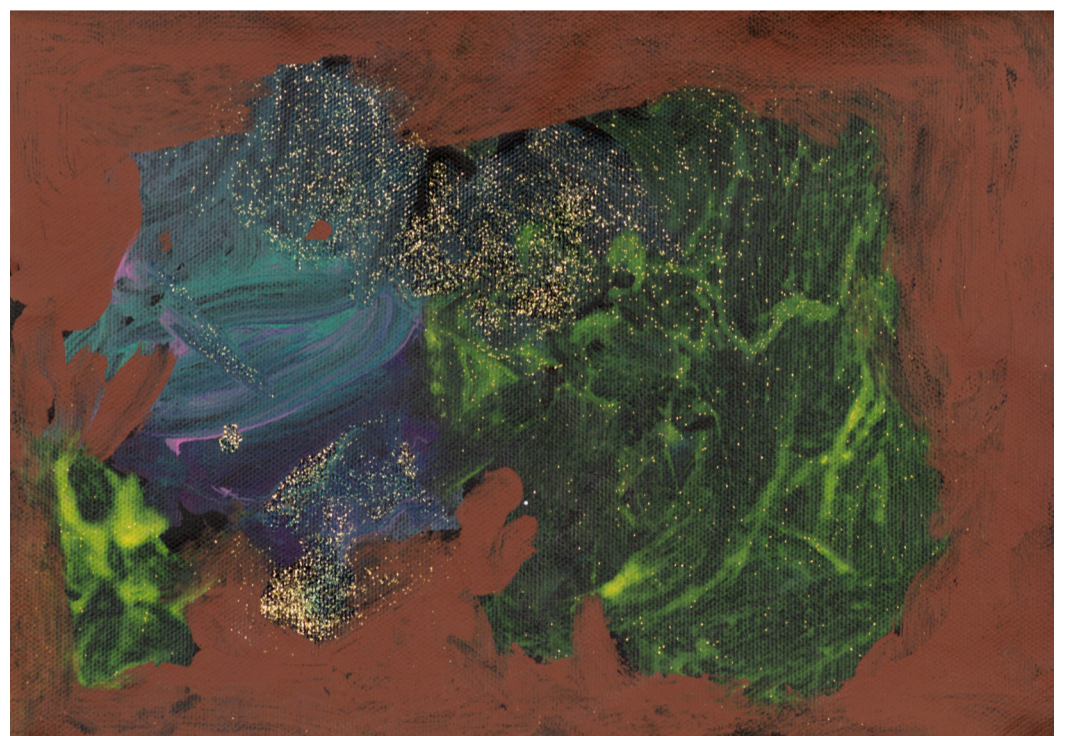
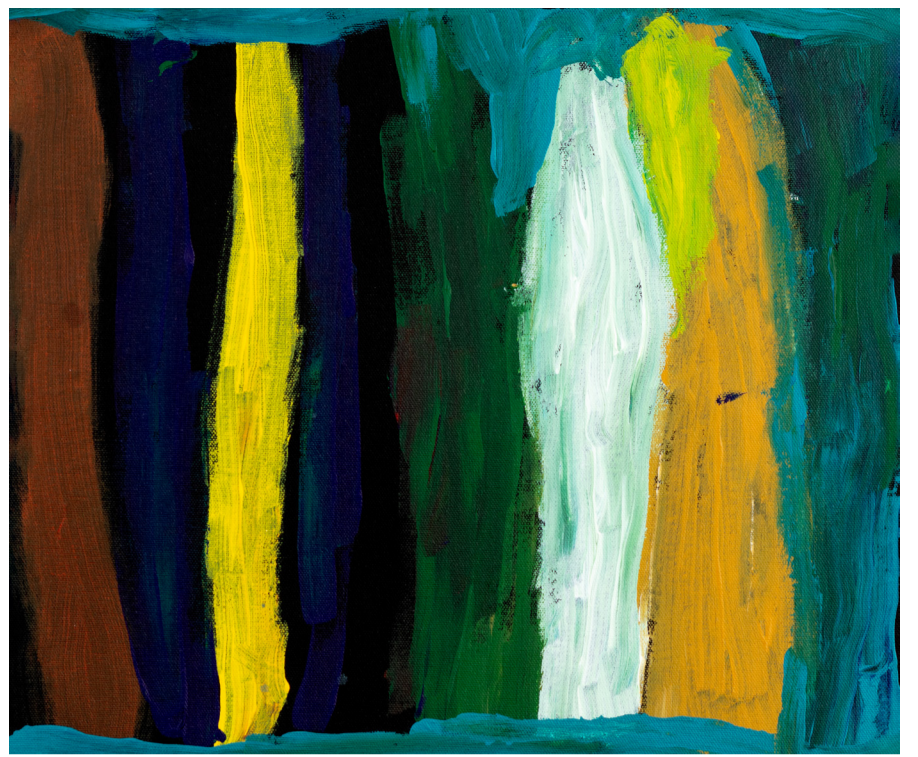
(Fig. 1) Melaleuca Australia painting workshop. Here members of the Pakistani, Ukrainian, Congolese, Somali and Ethiopian communities paint together, sharing stories. A Marythiel elder from Daly River participated in the first group, sharing language, stories, and painting techniques.

(Fig. 2) Larrakia Nation Aged Care group. The three groups meet every week with their facilitator Maria Scarlet. Larrakia Nation process (Reflections from Maria Scarlet):
The old girls and fellas were sharing old stories when they were making. Things that would likely not come up in conversation... I remember one day they talked for hours about glue. How their mothers used to make glue in the old days using rice and water or flour and water as glue was too expensive. They would do crafts like we do today.
When making the lizards, they reminisced about going hunting with their mothers and grandmothers. They used to kill goanna by swinging them by the tail and thumping them on the ground to kill it and put on the open fire. They recall being so excited waiting for them to cook because they loved the taste! Like chicken!

(Fig. 3) Congolese Elders Group, Melaleuca Australia. Eco-printing eucalyptus onto fabric. (Fig. 4) Slow art making with women and children from Bagot Community.

We went fishing and hunting and told stories of the old days. Eating pipis on the campfire by the beach brought back the stories from when we were young. Cynthia – I remember when I was young my uncle told me “Now don't you be silly that water going to take you, we jumped and swam, did everything he told us not to do and you know we did get sick. This installation tells a sacred story from our homeland near Belyuen community (which we cannot share). We have many portraits – physical, non-physical. This art shows this. Think beyond what you know.

→ Coconut Studios, the City of Darwin and Darwin Community Arts acknowledge the Larrakia people as the traditional custodians of the unceded land upon which we live and work and we pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. We are committed to working together for a more just and equitable community for all people locally and globally.



A Johana Masubizo, *Family*, 2022, photographic print, 21 x 15 cm
 B Eva, *Happy Days*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 38 x 36 cm
 C Bilal Muhammad, *Waiting*, 2022, photographic print, 21 x 15 cm
 D Safi Busasa, *Remembering home*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 38 x 34 cm
 E Kwame Selormey, *Untitled*, 2022, photographic print, 21 x 15 cm
 F Sasha Anstel, *Soldiers*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 21 x 15 cm

Through Our Eyes

22 October–
13 November 2022

Personal and social histories that unfold through collective art-making within the community

PAINTINGS

- Agnes Makendo
- Clarissa Campos
- Etabez Donato
- Eva
- Janine Kabwe
- Johana Masubizo
- Josephine Mwaka
- Joshua Lwesso
- Lidiia Shritiuk
- Luiba Krashinkova
- Olka Savka
- Oleksandr Shritiuk
- Olena Schedrovska
- Orest Bard
- Mariia Hutsol NNNII
- Mariia-Sofia Yankovych
- Maryna Krasnikova
- Mseme Mbelelo
- Marianna Umba
- Munyekelwa Njenje
- Nataliya Kaudyba
- Rose Kute
- Safi Busasa
- Sasha Antsel
- Sifa Assamba

INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHY

- Emma Lupin
 - Nadine Lee
 - Tristan Gone Fishing
- DISPOSABLE CAMERA PROJECT
 MELALEUCA PARTICIPANTS:
- Bilal Muhammad
 - Eric Byamungu
 - John Masubizo
 - Kashif Mehmood
 - Mansoor Ul Haq
 - Moses Assamba Kiza
- OTHER PARTICIPANTS:
- David Collins
 - Kwame Selormey
 - Larz Lauer
 - Lekaiya Rabbitt
 - Menah McKenzie
 - Shay Jayawardena

TEXTILES

- Agnes Makendo
- Clarissa Campos
- Eva
- Eve Pawlik
- Josephine Mwaka
- Janine Kabwe
- Marianna Umba
- Munyekelwa Njenje
- Patsy Que Noy
- Safi Busasa
- Shay Jayawardena
- Tarzan JungleQueen