



**Two Girls From  
Amoonguna:** Exhibition Kit

**acmi**



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development and Communications  
Office for the Arts



**CREATIVE VICTORIA**

# About The Exhibition

***Two Girls from Amoonguna* is an exhibition about two of Australia's leading artists and their journey to get there.**

Arrernte and Southern Luritja artist Sally M Nangala Mulda and Arrernte and Western Arrarnta artist Marlene Rubuntja have developed their practice to be completely recognisable and representative of the place in which they live, Mparntwe/Alice Springs. Working from Tangentyere Artists and Yarrenyty Arlttere Artists (art centres), these senior women have established themselves as two of Australia's leading visual artists.

Sally and Marlene grew up together in the 1960s at the settlement of Amoonguna, approximately 15 kilometres north of Mparntwe/Alice Springs. They would eventually part ways, with life taking them in different directions, but in terms of their lives' work and artistic practices, they still shared the same path. Eventually Sally became a celebrated artist, represented by and working out of Tangentyere Artists, where she developed her iconic commentary through painting. Marlene would also go on to pursue a successful artistic practice, which would come to nurture and heal, enabling Marlene to become a leader in her community. Years later, when they were both in their senior years, Marlene visited Tangentyere Artists and rekindled her relationship with Sally. Ever since, the two have been catching up on their life journeys. "Those two girls were just walking through their life," Marlene remarks in the animation *Arrkutja Tharra Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls* which tells their interwoven story.

Both Marlene and Sally's practice is self-referential and observationalist. Marlene's bush-dyed soft sculptures are indicative of the Yarrenyty Arlttere Artists' practices. She brings to life the animals of Mparntwe, from camp dogs and goannas to birds. Marlene hand sews many women too, often asymmetrical with dilly bags on their heads, which have become a trademark of hers and attest to her wicked sense of humour. The interplay between paint and fabric is visually rich; captured in detail are the lumps and currents of Sally's painted cursive writing, and the wool frizz of Marlene's creatures.

The third [Artbank + ACMI Commission](#), *Two Girls From Amoonguna*, encompasses video, soft sculpture and paintings, with the centrepiece the animated work titled *Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls*.

This exhibition is curated by Jenna Rain Warwick (Luritja).

This exhibition kit has been written by Merindah Funnell and Emma Hicks with FLENK Collective and produced in partnership with ACMI.

This resource offers:

- insight into the art practice of Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja
- a guide to cultural safety and an Acknowledgement of Country
- activities for students and teachers for use in the classroom or gallery to connect with the exhibition
- links for further reading and research

The Visual and Media Arts activities may be undertaken before, during or after your exhibition visit. While they are designed for students in Years 4–8, you are encouraged to adapt these activities to suit your learning program and context. This resource builds learning around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

# About The Animation

Two artists recount their intertwining journeys of friendship and resilience in the Central Desert through the medium of animation.

*Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls* delves into the reality of First Peoples' experiences in Central Australia by telling the story of the artists' successes and struggles. The animation brings together Sally and Marlene's artworks to tell the story of their lives. It is animated by Ludo Studio, the Emmy award-winning production company behind *Bluey, Robbie Hood* and *The Strange Chores* in collaboration with script writer Courtney Collins, Left of Elephant Sound and Tangentyere Artists producer Ellanor Webb.

Figures from Marlene's soft sculptures and Sally's acrylic-on-linen paintings star in the animation, embedded on top of Marlene's ink-on-paper works of the Central Australian landscape. Sally and Marlene's voices are at the centre of the animation, and we also hear the voices of their younger family members. Bringing together both artists' practices, Sally's iconic cursive painted lettering produces the subtitles.

At the heart of this film is the healing nature of love and friendship, and a celebration of all the bright and beautiful elements of town camp life. Having grown up at the Amoonguna Settlement outside of Mparntwe/Alice Springs in the early 1960s, the two friends didn't reconnect until much later in life, after they had both experienced more than their fair share of hardships. Now, having achieved so much, they are immensely proud of one another.

There is a scene in the animation where the artists are marching to the beat of a metal drum, "marching, marching... always marching", a small voice says (voiced by Marlene's grandchildren), the monotonous direction alluding to institutional control. In 1963, Amoonguna was established as a government reserve, where First Nations residents were subject to colonial authority – hence the marching to the beat of the drum. The legacy of such policies is potent today and the work offers a contextualisation that the Australian media often neglects. Culturally uninformed policies aimed at remedying violence and alcohol abuse within communities often exacerbate and criminalise First Nations communities. These are the realities depicted by Sally in her observationalist works. Political by nature, though not necessarily Sally's overt intention, the works stand witness to the ongoing brutality of colonial violence, which is balanced with the freedom and familial comfort centred in her paintings.

**Jenna Rain Warwick (Luritja)**

# About The Artists



Click here to watch a "Meet the artists" video  
Photo by: Bec Capp

**Sally M Nangala Mulda**  
Arrernte and Southern Luritja

Sally M Nangala Mulda was born in Titjikala in 1957, and currently resides in Abbott's Camp by the Todd River in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. Her figurative paintings of bold fluid movement, layering of colours and cursive descriptive text candidly depict lived experiences within this camp. She lays bare her reality, cataloguing domestic scenes- cooking damper and talking story- alongside snippets of life since the 2007 Northern Territory Intervention- police pouring out grog and camping in the riverbed. Mulda reserves a didactic approach, and paints her stories, shared by many Indigenous Australians, with emotional and political honesty. Having only taken up painting later in life in 2008, Mulda's career has been met with much success, and seen her celebrated as one of the nation's top contemporary artists.

**Marlene Rubuntja**  
Arrernte and Western Arrarnta

Marlene was born in Mparntwe/Alice Springs in 1961, and grew up at Amoonguna community, east of Alice Springs where she went to school. Rubuntja is the daughter of Wenton Rubuntja, the well-known painter and activist. It was her father who fought for the rights of people to settle Town Camps in Alice Springs. In the 1970s her family, the Rubuntjas, along with the Ebatarinjas and the Lynches were the original families to settle Yarrenyty Arltere Town Camp. Rubuntja has been here ever since, and she is proud to call this place home. Rubuntja learnt to sew at Yirara College, Alice Springs, however she only began making soft sculptures at Yarrenyty Arltere in 2009. She says she draws inspiration for her soft sculptures and her works on paper from what she sees around her in her daily life at Yarrenyty Arltere Town Camp, stating that "... some things are good for people and other things make people really mad." She also draws inspiration from her father's Country and from her husband's Country at Wave Hill. Rubuntja is interested in proudly telling the stories of her people; her art is helping her to do this. Rubuntja is a proud spokeswoman for the Art Centre and is happy to tell people how important it is in her life in helping her stay strong and healthy.

## About Amoonguna Camp

From 1880, colonisers forcibly displaced First Peoples from their Countries into designated camps. Amoonguna – which is 21 kilometres from Mparntwe/Alice Springs – was established as a government reserve in 1963. Known as town camps today, reserves like Amoonguna make up the Alice Springs Aboriginal housing associations.

These town camps are home to many artists who are extremely proud of their communities. English is often the third language of Amoonguna residents. The major language groups are Arrernte (pronounced Arenda), Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara.

Government policies and intervention have affected First Peoples communities in Mparntwe. The Australian media often portrays this part of the nation negatively, without showing the historical impact of racist dispossession and institutional violence. The strength, talent and resilience of First Peoples and the beauty of the Central Desert are ignored by Australian media.

## About The Art Centres

At the centre of the exhibition *Two Girls From Amoonguna* is the animated video work *Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls*. The work reminds us that Mparntwe is also filled with joy and laughter. From camping and travelling to town to finding bush tucker, this place is home.

The art centres Tangentyere Artists and Yarrenyty Arltere Artists are community hubs. Not only are they gallery and commercial spaces, but they are also places for young ones to learn and spaces for important community discussions. For Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja, their art centres reflect their artistic practices.

The soft sculpture, sewing and bush dyeing seen in Marlene's works are synonymous with Yarrenyty Arltere Artists. Tangentyere artists like Sally are renowned for figurative paintings, which are often autobiographical and depict scenes in and around Mparntwe.

These centres provide culturally safe places for artists and community. Both artists have become successful and prominent figures in their communities. They teach many young people within their kinship structure. Intergenerational knowledge sharing is integral to First Peoples' ways of life – you can even hear the voices of the artists' nieces and nephews in the animated work.

## Find Out More:

[www.macdonnell.nt.gov.au/communities/amoonguna](http://www.macdonnell.nt.gov.au/communities/amoonguna)

[www.tangentyere.org.au/tangentyere-artists](http://www.tangentyere.org.au/tangentyere-artists)

[www.yarrenytyarltereartists.com.au/marlene](http://www.yarrenytyarltereartists.com.au/marlene)

[www.acmi.net.au/collection-preservation/commissions/acmi-artbank-commission/](http://www.acmi.net.au/collection-preservation/commissions/acmi-artbank-commission/)

## Cultural Safety:

It is important to ensure that you are creating culturally safer spaces. Cultural safety is largely about examining your own cultural identities and attitudes, and being open-minded and flexible in your attitudes towards people from cultures other than your own.

Cultural safety requires actions that respect, recognise and support the specificity of the cultural identity of a person to appropriately and safely meet their rights, needs and expectations.

1. Remind students that they are welcome to share their responses only if they feel comfortable to do so.
2. Never expect any individual – whether they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or not – to speak on behalf of their culture.
3. Create a safe space for students to check in about how they're feeling before, during and after engaging with the education resource.
4. Teachers are encouraged to participate in the activities and share, as a way of creating a safer space for students.
5. Respond promptly to any behaviour that could be considered prejudiced, biased or discriminatory.
6. Give everyone the time and space to respond in their own way, without placing time limitations on them.
7. Be critical and aware of language used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

## Activity: Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledging Country is one way of showing your respect for the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and sky where you live. If you do not already know, find out who the Traditional Custodians are of the Country you live and learn on.

Materials: paper, pen

1. Look at what you can see outside and note features, shapes and colours in the built and natural environment.
2. Take a few minutes to connect with this place.
3. Using a piece of paper, tear or rip out the silhouette of something that you are drawn to or notice outside such as the horizon, a tree or a rooftop.
4. While you're working, keep looking and connecting with what you see around you.
5. What is the name of the Country you are on? Write this name on your paper shape.
6. Take a moment to Acknowledge the Country you are on and pay your respects to the Elders of that Country.
7. Remember to carry this respect with you as you learn, work and move on Country.

ACMI acknowledges the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, on whose land we meet, share and work. We pay our respects to past and present Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Elders, as well as the Elders of the Nations to which this exhibition tours. We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all nations of this land.

## Warm Up: Staying healthy

"When we sew it makes us feel really good. We don't think of anything except what we are making."

*Marlene Rubuntja*

"In 2009, I came to the art centre, I thought, I'll try this. And now I come everyday. Then I got strong for this art centre, I love this art. In 2009 I didn't see properly what was happening, how this art was getting me strong. In my head and heart I grew all these ideas and I started feeling well again. "

*Marlene Rubuntja*

The artists Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja make art as a way to stay strong and connect with their community at the art centre.

Can you think of something that you do in your life with your family, friends or community to stay healthy and/or happy?

- Do you read, play games, cook, write, garden, create art or fish?
- Think about how the activity is done.
- Close your eyes and make the movements of this practice with your hands or body. Do it slowly and thoughtfully.



Courtesy the artist & ACMI

# Look Closer

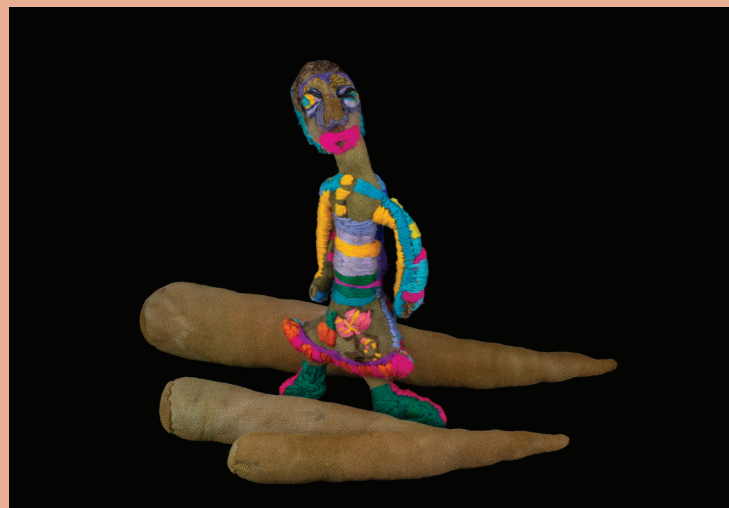
What do you notice first in Sally and Marlene's artworks?

What is your first response when looking at the artwork?

In pairs, choose one of Sally's paintings and take the time to look closely at all the elements such as shape, colour, texture and small details.

- What do you notice in the paintings? How does it make you feel? Discuss with your partner. Have you perhaps noticed something different from your partner?
- Did you see and notice more in a pair than if you had looked at the painting on your own?

Now choose one of Marlene's sculptures and take a closer look. Use the same discussion questions to see what stands out for you and your partner.



courtesy the artist & ACMI



Photo by: Bec Capp

# Colour Stories

The artists Sally and Marlene have been through hardships and both use bright colours in their art practices with painting and textile sculptures and video to help them tell their stories and highlight the beauty of town camp life.

"When you are an artist you have got to think in bright colours and lift things up."

Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja in Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls

"Sometimes things don't work out but she still keeps walking through her life"

Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja in Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls

## Talking Points

- Connecting colour with time, place and memory
- Telling personal stories with colour
- Using colour for healing/wellbeing

## Materials:

Coloured pencils and paper

1. Think back to a time you went through a difficult experience. Sit with this memory for as long as you feel comfortable. If you associated this memory with a colour, what colour would it be? Use your coloured pencils to draw the colour you are thinking of. You might like to mix several colours together and build up layers of colour to make the colour as specific as you can.
2. Now think back to what gave you strength to get through the hardship. Sit with this for as long as you feel comfortable. If you associated this memory with a colour, what colour would it be? Draw with the colour you are thinking of.
3. Can you think of a place or time that makes you feel safe or happy? If you associated this with a colour, what colour would it be? Draw with the colour you are thinking of.
4. Lastly, think of a time that you felt proud. Draw with the colour you are thinking of.

You have created a colour palette that represents some of your memories. Colour can help us to creatively tell our stories and transform how we connect with our memories. You might like to carry the personal colour story you've created with you to continue to connect and remember these feelings.

Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja use bright colours in their art practices with painting and textile sculptures and video. Experiment with using your colour palette with painting, digital drawing, textiles and/or objects to tell your story.

## Colour Stories Extension

The colours you used to describe how you felt when you struggled, felt strong, happy and proud is now your personal colour palette. Use these colours to create an artwork of your own.

## Look Closer

Take a moment to watch the *Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls* animation and consider what happens in the story.

What part of the story did you connect to most?

Share your impressions in a group discussion or with a partner.



## Story Of a Friendship

Sally and Marlene have a friendship that is a result of many journeys and their new video artwork tells the interwoven story of them walking through their lives.

“We were just walking through our lives.”  
“And now we are artists, sitting down in our life ...”  
“Telling our stories about our lives.”

Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja  
*Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls*



## Talking Points

- Importance of connection
- Developing a personal creative language
- Art as a gift
- Storytelling

Think of a friendship in your life. This friendship could be with a person, plant, animal or object.

## Materials:

String, paper, coloured pencils, glue stick, scissors

1. Think of moments in your friendship, such as what made you laugh, when you were together or apart, or maybe even a time you travelled. What are some of your strong memories of this friendship and how does it make you feel?
2. Map out a journey of this friendship. Use a piece of string or a coloured pencil to make a line to represent this journey. Make marks for different memories or important moments along the way.
3. Using your coloured pencils, write one word that you associate with each of the memories you have marked in your journey. Choose a colour for each word that you feel connects to each memory. You might like to use some of the colours from your personal palette you created earlier in the 'Colour Stories' activity.
4. You have now created a word library to describe your important relationship.
5. Fold, tear or cut the words out of the paper, so that each word is on a separate scrap.
6. Spend some time assembling these scraps into an order that creates a poem that represents this story. You can also glue them down onto a fresh sheet of paper.

## Reflection

How does it feel to represent your friendship in this way?

Has it changed how you feel about friendship?

## Extension

Give the poem to your friend to show the importance of their friendship and the role they have played in your life.

# Collaborative Conversation with Place

Marlene's textiles sculptures of Country are made using natural materials and reveal stories of her experiences of place as they move through the animation and Sally's painting of Country are seen throughout *Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls*. Both artists use different media to tell stories of their connection with place.

## Talking Points

- Colonisation
- Colonial impacts on the environment
- Caring for Country
- Discussion and collaboration

Materials:  
Paper, pencils or pens

1. Take a piece of paper and pencil or pen.
2. Talk a walk outside to a place you are familiar with. It can be a place where you spend a lot of time and/or that is important to you.
3. Move through this place and make a list of things that stand out around you.
  - What was always here?
  - What is the newest?
  - What is something that will be here forever?
  - What is something that will disappear?
  - What is something that moves the slowest?
  - What is something that moves the quickest?
  - What is the loudest sound you can hear?
  - What is the quietest sound you can hear?
  - What is something you can smell?
  - What is a sound that you know is here but is too quiet for your ears to detect?
  - What is a sound that you can't hear now that you probably would have been able to hear a long time ago?
4. Come back together and work in pairs. Look at the lists you have made; everything on the lists is part of this Country. In your pair, discuss and consider your lists and then consider the questions below:
  - What are some things that have changed?
  - What is the same on your lists, what is different?
  - What are some of the causes of these changes?

These questions have put you in conversation with this place and it will always remember you. Country is constantly changing; what we do on Country has and will continue to have an impact. It is important to always have respect and care for Country.



courtesy the artist & ACMI

## Reflection

- How can you find out more about the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander histories of this place?
- Is there more about this place that you already know?
- How could you care for this place going forward?
- Are there any endangered animals or plants that you could bring awareness to?
- Are there any invasive plants that people may not know about that you can educate about?



courtesy the artist & ACMI



# Sharing Your Story

“I’m just painting my stories,  
what I see around me every day”

Sally M Nangala Mulda

Sally and Marlene’s art practices are both embedded in personal story and truth-telling.

Sally paints her own experiences, using large cursive script to describe her experiences and bold imagery of her community. She tells her stories powerfully and honestly.

Marlene takes her inspiration for her imaginative storytelling from what she sees around her everyday and uses humour, story, warmth and place to express life and culture through the colourful stitching in her soft sculptures.

## Talking Points

- Agency
- Why it’s important to tell your story the way you want to
- Artist voice
- Truth-telling
- Different perspectives

## Materials:

Paper, pencil/coloured pencil

1. Think of a memory you feel comfortable sharing with the person next to you that is important and has shaped you as a person. For example, moving house, getting a pet, visiting family, making a good friend.
2. Share the story or describe this memory you have experienced with the person next to you.
3. Have the person next to you draw your story on a piece of paper.
4. Together look at the drawing they have made.
  - How does this make you feel?
  - Has your story changed?
  - Have they captured what you felt was important in this story?

## Reflection

What stories do you want to share?  
How can you share them in your own way?  
Why do you think it might be important for the artists to tell their own stories?

When making your own art about your own stories remember it is your story and you can share as little or as much as you want. When you tell your story, it is important to tell it on your own terms and have it represented in the way that you want.

## Extension

Draw a storyboard of this important story.

- Think about how the story moves and what comes at the start and end.
- Think about how you would like your story to be represented.
- Visualise how you would tell your story, go through this list to see how these elements might help you to tell your story:
  - Shape, colour, texture, size
  - Character, setting, story
  - Sound, music, movement

Now that you have created a storyboard, you can use [ACMI’s ‘Film it’ toolkit](#) to create your own video artwork. Filming can take a long time, so it can be fun to collaborate and help each other to film your own stories!

## Reflection

Find your “Colour Stories” colour palette. Is there a colour you would like to add to your collection to remind you of something important you would like to remember from today?

“An artist, she has to use her imagination and she has to tell the truth”

Sally M Nangala Mulda and Marlene Rubuntja  
in Arrkutja Tharra, Kungka Kutjara, Two Girls





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