

Start at home

Found pigment painting



‘I paint water designs. The water. As it crashes onto the rocks at high tide. Sending the spray into the sky.’

– Nongirrŋa Marawili

About the artist

The crash and spray of the ocean was as familiar to young Nongirrŋa Marawili as her many brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles. She was born on the beach and spent much of her childhood crossing tropical waters in a convoy of canoes, as her large family travelled between the islands and the mainland of East Arnhem Land. Now 81, Nongirrŋa is still never far from the water, as a highly respected senior artist of the coastal Yirrkala community.

About the work

Yolngu artists are instructed to only use art materials taken from the land. Rather than sticking to earth pigments, Nongirrŋa interprets this in an inventive way. She reclaims printer cartridges and mixes the magenta toner into vivid pink paints. These expressive paintings are inspired by Baratjala cove, a small rocky bay not far from her birthplace.

Baratjala is currently on display in Gallery 25

image Nongirrŋa Marawili, Yolngu people, Northern Territory, born 1938, Darrpirra, Northern Territory. Baratjala, 2019, Yirrkala, Northern Territory, earth pigments, recycled print toner pigment on stringybark, 135.0 x 230.0 cm; 202.0 x 96.0 cm; © Nongirrŋa Marawili/Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre.

Presented by





Materials you need

- Used coloured chalk (short or broken bits & pieces)
- Small reusable plastic bags
- A hammer
- A fork
- Cups, tubs or takeaway containers (recycled if possible)
- Paintbrushes
- White paper
- Black paper or brown kraft paper

Take it further

This paint is completely washable, just like chalk. Ask for permission to paint a temporary mural on an outdoor floor or wall!

Look for other found pigments in your home. Beetroot or spinach scraps can be boiled to make a dye and thickened with crushed white chalk. Coffee and turmeric make strong, earthy colours.

Create your own found pigment painting

- 1 Sort the chalk bits into plastic bags of similar colours. Seal the bags with a twist tie or rubber band.
- 2 Place the bags on firm ground outdoors and gently crush the chalk with the hammer. To avoid splitting the bags, take your time and don't hit too hard. Pound until the chalk becomes a fine powder.
- 3 In a tub or container, add water to the chalk powder – a little bit at a time, to make a slightly thick paint. Whisk the paint with a fork to smooth out lumps and bumps.
- 4 Start painting on the white paper. The colours will look vibrant and bright when wet, then dry to a more muted pastel.
- 5 Now paint on the black or brown kraft paper. The colours may look washed out and watery at first but will become more vibrant as they dry.
- 6 When the paint is dry, scratch away fine lines and patterns using the fork.

image detail photo: Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre.

We would love to see your work! Ask your parent or carer to post a photo on Instagram and tag the Art Gallery of South Australia. Or you can email your photo to us at public.programs@artgallery.sa.gov.au

@agsa.adelaide #agsastart