

Mining a fresh seam of traditional bark painting



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Yolngu artist Gunybi Ganambarr, in Sydney yesterday for his second solo show at Annandale Galleries, says he is 'going forward' in his art practice

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A PIECE of discarded rubber from a conveyor belt used in mining operations in northeast Arnhem Land is gold in the hands of Yolngu artist Gunybi Ganambarr.

The belt supported the mining that was opposed in the Gove land rights case of the early 1970s. But in applying sacred clan designs to the rubber, Ganambarr is not trying to make a political statement about mining.

"What he's saying is our culture is real," said Will Stubbs, coordinator at Buku Larrnggay Mulka art centre in Yirrkala.

"We can really reflect our culture in whatever comes to hand. It could be this, because this conveyor belt is real."

Ganambarr, who won the 2011 Western Australian Indigenous Art Award, is now well known for his innovative approach to bark painting. The 39-year-old artist was in Sydney yesterday for his second solo show at Annandale

Galleries before heading to Canberra for the 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial at the National Gallery of Australia.

In the Annandale exhibition, *From My Mind*, Ganambarr is

showing some of his innovations for the first time, including ceremonial poles made of PVC pipe and brolga sculptures shaped from chicken wire.

While most of the community

had been supportive of his work, some members had questioned his use of materials that were not directly from the land, Ganambarr said.

"Well, I'm going forward; I'm

not going reverse. That's what I'm saying," Ganambarr said.

But he still finds ways to operate within cultural boundaries.

"In the course of this period represented in this exhibition he did suffer pressure — spiritual, political pressure — not to use foreign material on his mother clan's side," Stubbs said. "He withdrew and started using new media on his own clan's side, not his mother clan's side. He remains subservient to the law."

Ganambarr has four bark paintings showing in the National Indigenous Art Triennial, opening tomorrow. Curated by Carly Lane, the exhibition features works by 20 indigenous Australian artists including Julie Gough, Fiona Foley and Vernon Ah Kee.

The NGA's senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, Franchesca Cubillo, said Ganambarr's work was a new look at the tradition of bark painting from Arnhem Land.

ARTS P16-17