

syaw

Moving eloquently from weaving to painting, Peppimenarti artist **Regina Wilson**'s visual language remains deeply embedded in her country as **Diane Moon** and **Ruth McDougall** write.

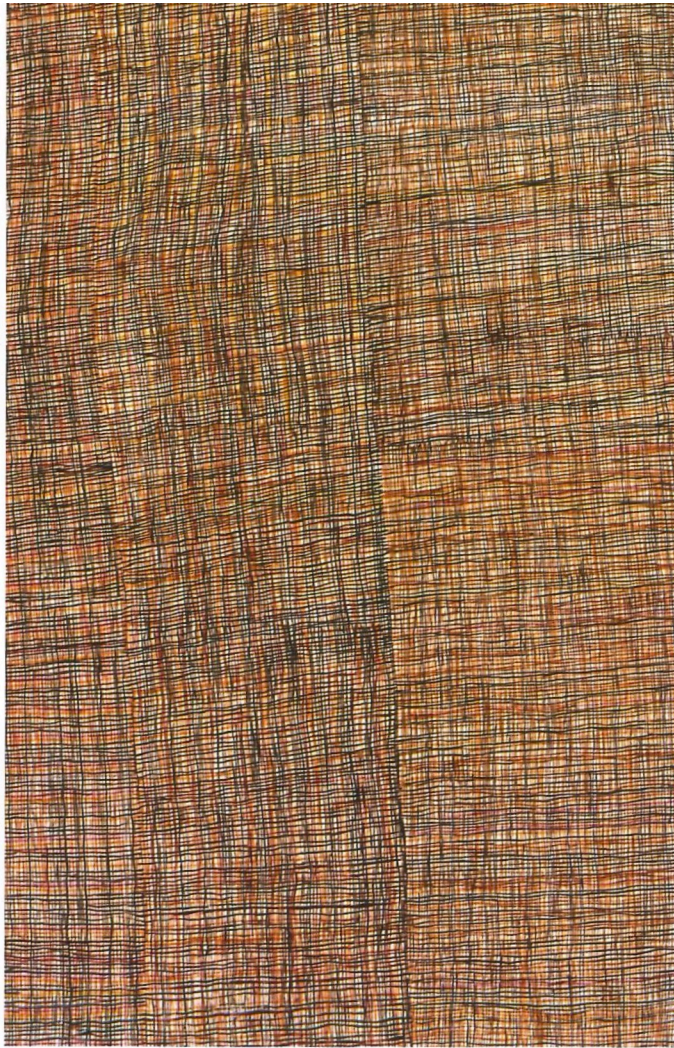
*It is told
that Peppimenarti 'Big Rock' is sacred,
the cool wide stream that slides around its base
being a creation site for the Ngangikurrunggurr
people.*

*That country Peppimenarti
up there at the top of this continent
is their country
to sing, to dream and to use*

Regina Wilson is a Ngangikurrunggurr woman and has lived on the wide, low coastal plains that surround Peppimenarti for most of her life. She is a master weaver, with a deep knowledge of the traditional techniques of her people. The fresh new leaf-shoots of the cabbage palm tree that Wilson weaves, knots and coils come directly from her country. The colour is infused from roots and corms dug from the earth, or flowers and berries gathered from native plants.

The bags, nets, mats and baskets that Wilson creates have a double life—they are made both for practical daily use and to grace the walls of museum and private collections. When hung in a white space, the vibrantly coloured designs held within these objects sing. Yet, no matter how painterly they may be, it is hard to completely distance them from the realm of uses and notions of carrying, gathering, sharing and comfort. As we regard them both as artworks and as everyday things, we shuttle backwards and forwards between the two, unable to fully place the works.





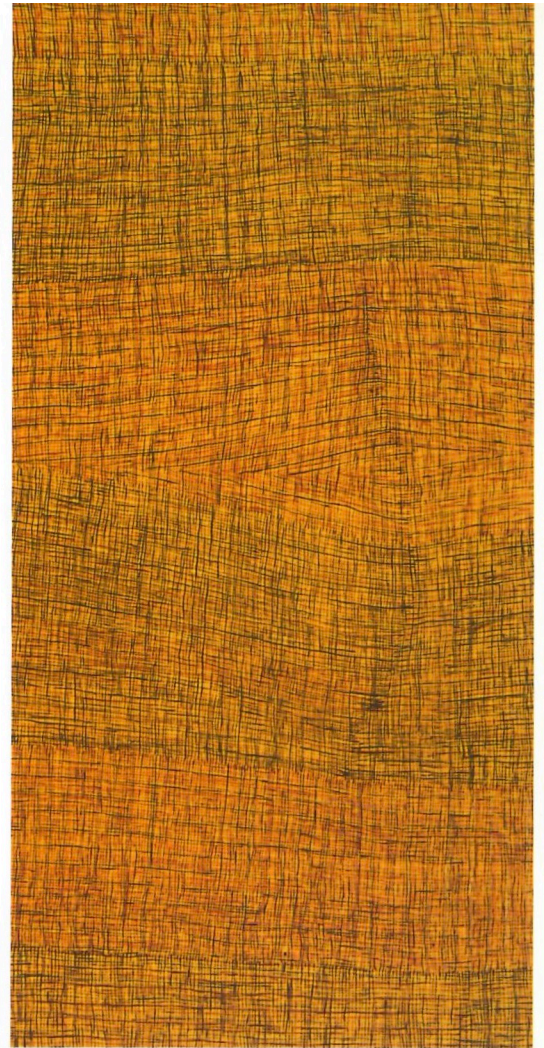
Last year Regina Wilson produced new work in a new medium for a group exhibition in Darwin. One of these works, *Syaw*, 2002, 'represents the stitch and weave of the syaw(fish net). The weaving method is the same as the stitch used in weaving the *warrgarri* (dilly bag), except bigger.¹

This painting introduces the viewer to a succession of textures and illusions that shift as the viewer moves closer to the work or further away. Up close, one is drawn into the materiality of the work, with Wilson's lines of colour almost mirroring the structure and weave of the canvas. At this proximity, it is impossible to forget that this is an image of a fabric; a fishing net, made possibly by her mother's mother, from materials collected, coloured and woven in Ngangikurrunggurr country. The painted texture substitutes for the finely-woven net. Moving further back, it is hard not to read *Syaw* as the documentation of experience of moving through country, as we have now learned to read some Aboriginal paintings. The powers of illusion take over, a vertical section seems to come forward and the painting becomes a landscape, although not a landscape in the traditional Western European sense—it is more an aerial view, giving a 'feeling' of country.

'*Syaw* Fishnet becomes *Syaw* design, a representation imbued still with the rhythmic motion of its travel through water.'²

Just as in a woven net, the coloured lines in Wilson's painting carry a story. They speak of the passing down of skills and knowledge, and an intimate, spiritual relationship with the environment. In this story, the world of uses and functions is directly tied to the world of coloured line.

A story of country,
Peppimenarti.



Diane Moon is a curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. A particular focus has been on Indigenous fibre arts, resulting in many exhibitions and major collections such as the Museum of Contemporary Art's *Maningrida Weaving, Carried Lightly* and *Spinifex Runner*. She is currently Associate Curator of Indigenous Fibre Art at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Ruth McDougall is an artist-curator who also writes on textiles for various publications. She was the curator of *Close Ties*, a travelling exhibition and conference addressing contemporary textile practice. Recent projects include *Readymade* at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2003. McDougall is currently Curatorial Assistant, QGoMA at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Endnotes

1. Regina Wilson, 'Interview with Kathleen Brown, May 30 2003', *Awa Yedi i Falmi Warrim Pek Durrimu* – May 30 2003, *Peppimenarti Community*, exhibition catalogue, Peppimenarti Community Council and Karen Brown Gallery, 2003.
2. Kathleen Brown, op. cit.

Opposite page: Regina Wilson, *Untitled*, (circular looped fishing net), 1997, merepen – sand/cabbage palm leaf fibre (*livistona humilis*), dyed with *yerrwirr* (*pogonolobus reitculatum*) bush roots and bamboo. © Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery Collection.

Above left: Regina Wilson, *Syaw – Fish Net*, 2002, acrylic, linen. Collection: Stephen Duncan. Photo: David Silva.

Above right: Regina Wilson, *Syaw – Fish Net*, 2003, acrylic, linen. Collection: Sam and Tania Brougham. Photo: David Silva