

JAKAYU BILJABU

Born: c1937

Price range: \$1,200 for small canvases;
\$5,000 to \$13,300 for larger works

Contact: martumili@eastpilbara.wa.gov.au

Web: martumili.com.au

Martumili Artists painter **Jakayu Biljabu** has been hiding in plain sight. Manyjilyjarra-speaking Biljabu was born around 1937 near Pitu, east of Well 25 on the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia. She grew up in traditional country along its route. Biljabu's family joined relatives at the Jigalong Mission in 1963 and moved to the Punmu community, where she currently resides, in 1982.

Biljabu paints her people's law and country along the Canning Stock Route and the stories associated with her pujiman (bush) days. She was married to the brother of **Eubena (Yupinya) Namptijin**, with whose work she shares certain stylistic and formal concerns and vitality, especially her rich surfaces and luscious colour. But Biljabu's dense compositions are more varied.

Martumili Artists was established in 2006 and Biljabu's work featured in the important genesis exhibition *Ngurra Kujju Walyja – One Country One People – The Canning Stock Route Project*, which was acquired by the National Museum of Australia in Canberra in 2008. Since this time her profile has been on the rise, with awards recognition, notable acquisitions and representation in over 35 group commercial and public exhibitions.

Biljabu won best work by a Pilbara-based artist in the 2009 Hedland Art Award and was again a finalist in 2011 and 2013. A large-scale collective work featured in the Adelaide Biennial's *Before and After Science* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2010 and *Living Water – Contemporary Art of the Far Western Desert* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2011. Over this period three individual works toured the country in the acclaimed exhibition from NMA titled *Yiwarra Kujju- One Road, One People*. Last year Biljabu was amongst a small group selected for inclusion in *Martu Art from the Far Western Desert* at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art and individual works currently feature in the celebrated exhibition *We Don't Need a Map: A Martu Experience of the Western Desert*, touring until 2016.

– JANE RAFFAN

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1. // Jakayu Biljabu,
Wantili. Acrylic on canvas,
183 x 183cm.

2. // Jakayu Biljabu,
Wantili. Acrylic on canvas,
121 x 76cm.

3. // Jakayu Biljabu, *Pitu
and Yarturti*. Acrylic on linen,
152 x 76cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND
MARTUMILI ARTISTS, WA

