

NPA artist transforms grief into beauty for first solo exhibition

10 September 2024 | Chisa Hasegawa



Family, love and loss are the drivers behind award-winning Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) artist Colina Wymarra's first solo exhibition works.

After winning the 2023 Queensland Regional Art Awards Remote Artist Award, Ms Wymarra unveiled her first show, *Bloodlines*, in Brisbane at the Judith Wright Arts Centre on 7 September, with her second show, *Seasonal Bloodlines*, to open three days later at the University of Queensland Atrium.

Although she had been working as an artist for more than three decades, Ms Wymarra said she stopped painting for a while before the prestigious award win as life got in the way and other things became a priority.

When she lost her father last year, she decided to pick up her paintbrushes and create once again.

"After my dad died, I locked myself in my room for five weeks and I just started painting again," Ms Wymarra said.

"I didn't think anything was going to come out of it; I just thought I needed to paint for healing.

"This healing journey has taken me on a different path, and it's no longer about my grieving, you know, I want people to know my story."

The artist said the introduction pieces to *Bloodlines* were two portraits of her mother and father, in celebration of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, and the pride they instilled in her as a First Nations woman.

"My mum was a Murray Island woman and my dad was an Aboriginal activist," she said.

"[They] have both passed away, but I can continually celebrate them and who they made me to be as I present them through their family and tribal totems.

“My father and mother continue to live in me through these totems.”

Ms Wymarra shared that one portrait was based on her mother’s experience with cultural adoption, and not knowing she was an identical twin.

Her father’s portrait shared a glimpse into his final birthday party, when preparations for a fun country theme brought back memories of a culturally traumatic time.



"I did a portrait of him on his 80th birthday where he's wearing a cowboy hat, and how re-traumatising it was getting his head measured for the Akubra," Ms Wymarra said.

"He had his head measured as a kid – on TI (Thursday Island), they measured their heads to determine their intelligence and put them in the grades, so when he turned 80, we had to sort of tiptoe around getting his head measured again.

"I just wanted to tell people about what our parents went through, and there's quite a few stories like that."

Ms Wymarra said she was "over the moon" to have the opportunity to share her artwork, adding she was grateful for the support and encouragement of NPA Art Centre manager Dev Lengjel.

"I would never have thought about entering, but Dev, he just kept shoving this piece of paper in front of me [to enter the award], and I kept saying 'yeah, yeah, I'll do it', but I didn't do it until the very last day that it was closing" she said.

"He's really encouraged me to look beyond my grief and he said to me, 'girl, you got something'.

"It just means so much to me and I can't believe where I am today; something big is coming my way."

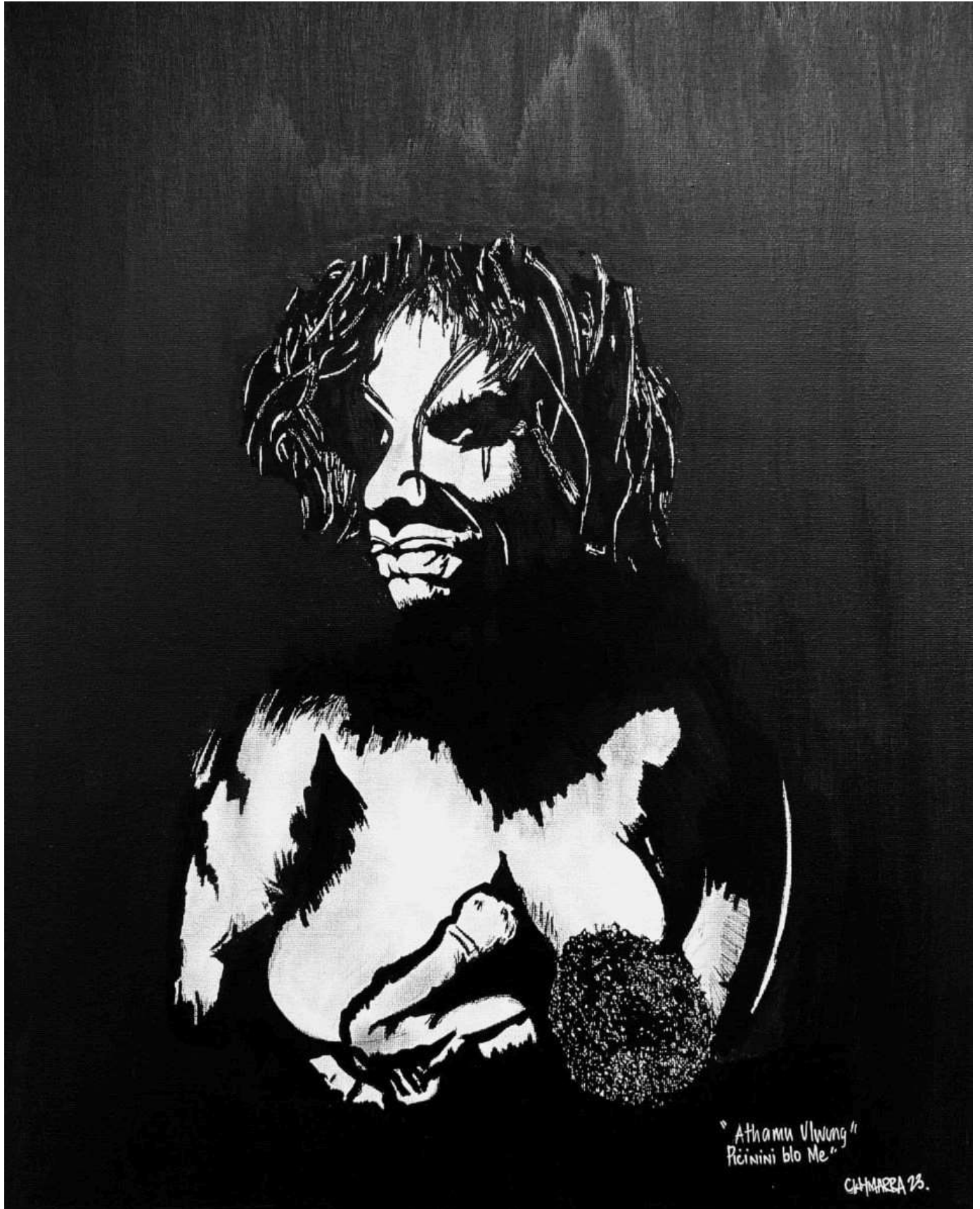
Mr Lengjel said Ms Wymarra's recent achievements were incredibly important in raising both her profile as an artist and the NPA as an art hub.

"She has a gift there, and I believe this is just the beginning for her to get great attraction within the art world," he said.

"With having reached this level, as in exhibiting at such a renowned gallery such as the Judith Wright Centre, it could go further, and with each step up,

things change for the artists, including the price for the artwork.

“The way the world is going to get to know her and her story, I think it’s a great opportunity for her to really explore her creativity and to be able to become a full-time artist.”



Portrait work by Colina Wymarra which won her the QRAA Remote Artist Award and kick-started her journey as an artist. Photo: Facebook.
