



This work depicts the concept of *bir'yun*, which is concerned with the metaphysics of spiritual power and its emanation, the actual materials – earth pigments on *Eucalyptus tetradonta* (stringybark) – have a special visual impact.

In the words of Dhalwangu artist Gawirrin' Gumana: '*I am the people of water, earth and mud*'. He further explained that his place was mud, rock, sand, earth, clay, and that painting, like earth and rocks, is not for fun but from the heart of the people. It tells us something, '*for the old people in the past and for people to understand today*.'

Gumana also explained that the *miny'tji* (paintings) displayed at the National Gallery of Victoria in the *Miny'tji Buku Larrnggay* exhibition in March 1995, made the room in which they were hanging *ngarra* (a sacred place) through their use in and association with ceremony and that the ochres are also deeply sacred, a source of sickness, a danger if touched.

For Gawirrin' Gumana, the ochres used in his *Barrama*, 1994, spell Gängän; his homeland, and the presence of *Barrama*, the ancestral creator of the Dhalwangu clan.

A bark painting's sound is quiet – from rock, mud, earth – and serious, serious of heart; it tells us something: it is *ngarra*. The aesthetic is a product of the materials and of what they mean to the Yolngu. As Raymattja, a Yolngu teacher, comments:

The symbolism behind the designs can be seen by someone who knows, to be in all the little details and shapes and colours of the work of art. The deepest knowledge is abstract ... it cannot be put into words.