

***Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)* – Overview of Provenance**

This provenance statement has been prepared using material available to the Museum as at November 2022.

The works

Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent) (1996) by Kukatja and Wangkajungka artist Rover Thomas (Joolama) (c1926 – 1998). See [Rover Thomas](#) and [Rover's legacy](#) on the Museum's website.

Painted at Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia, the painting measures 1,800 x 2,700 mm. The materials are natural ochres and synthetic binder on Belgian linen.

Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent) depicts the Rainbow Serpent penetrating the earth at the Ophthalmia Ranges, west of Mount Newman, in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia. The concentric circles are thought to represent topographic features of the vast plains, possibly referencing the massive mining operations of the region. Thomas masterfully blends aerial and front-on perspectives, depicting the Rainbow Serpent in motion, plunging into the earth's surface. The Rainbow Serpent is thought to have risen at Lake Waukarlykarly, north of Newman, or at Lake Dora to the east of Newman. The Serpent then dived into the Fortescue River and travelled towards the ocean.

This is the country where Thomas grew up, and after a lifetime travelling as a drover and as an artist in his adopted home of Warmun, Thomas returned to this country in the final years of his life. Following his last visit, Thomas painted *Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)*

Creation of the work

In 1995, Maxine Taylor and Terry Brooks arrived in Warmun to manage the Warmun Roadhouse at the request of the Warmun community coordinator. At that stage artworks were being created by community members and marketed by the Warmun community coordinator through Waringarri Art Centre, Kununurra, on behalf of the artists. Some of these artists approached Taylor and Brooks to set up a space for artists to work in. Taylor and Brooks were appointed as the first art coordinators at Warmun, with permission from the community and Warmun Council.

Taylor and Brooks operated a facility in the old post office building and assisted the Community Elders and artists to produce and market the artworks, trading under the business name Warmun Traditional Artists. Warmun Traditional Artists was funded by Taylor and Brooks personally and was not funded from external sources. They later set up a private company, Narrangunny Art Traders, through which they conducted their art trading business.

Rover Thomas painted *Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)* at Warmun under an

arrangement with Taylor and Brooks. This arrangement included Taylor and Brooks supplying all materials and arranging for the production and sale of the works, in exchange for a commission when the work was sold. Other artists who painted alongside Rover Thomas during this period included Jack Britten, Queenie McKenzie, Freddie Timms, Hector Jandany, Beerbee Mungnari and Henry Wambini. Although Rover Thomas's health declined towards the end of his life, he still painted when he could, at times sitting on the canvas to work.

Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent) is accompanied by a digital certificate of authenticity prepared by Warmun Traditional Artists. This certificate records the work as catalogue number RT0001 and notes its completion date as 26 March 1996. There are several existing photographs showing Rover Thomas with the painting taken in 1996, including one of him signing the work.

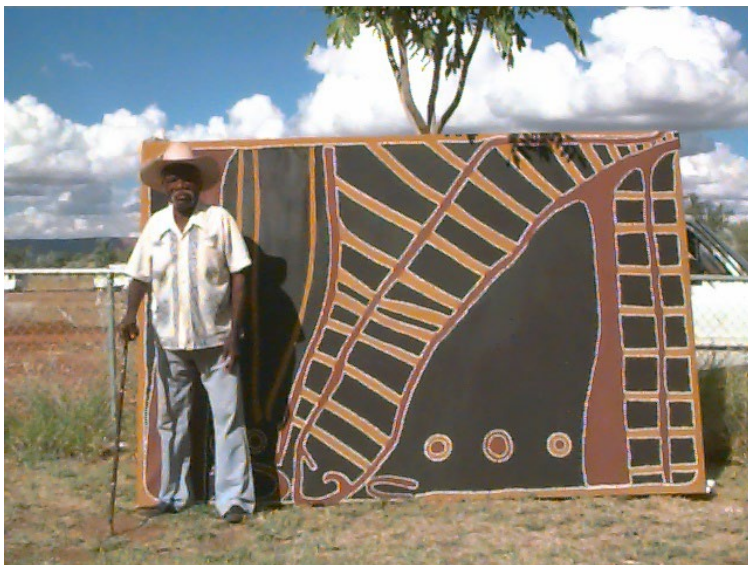


Photo caption: Rover Thomas with the *Jabanunga* painting, Warmun. Copyright T Brooks, 1996



Photo caption: Rover Thomas signing the back of the painting, Warmun. Copyright T Brooks, 1996

A condition report on the work undertaken in March 2020, by a firm contracted by the Museum, details that there is evidence of paint brush hairs, feathers, dirt and sand within the paint layers, and these were likely to be contemporary with the painting's genesis. The information provided to the Museum during the initial acquisition assessment and as part of the recent review indicates that the work was painted by Rover Thomas. There was no evidence provided that the work was created by, or should be attributed to, another artist.

Photographs taken by the National Museum of Australia in 2022 show that the marking and signature on the back of the painting *Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)*, align with the photographs taken in 1996 of Rover Thomas signing the canvas.

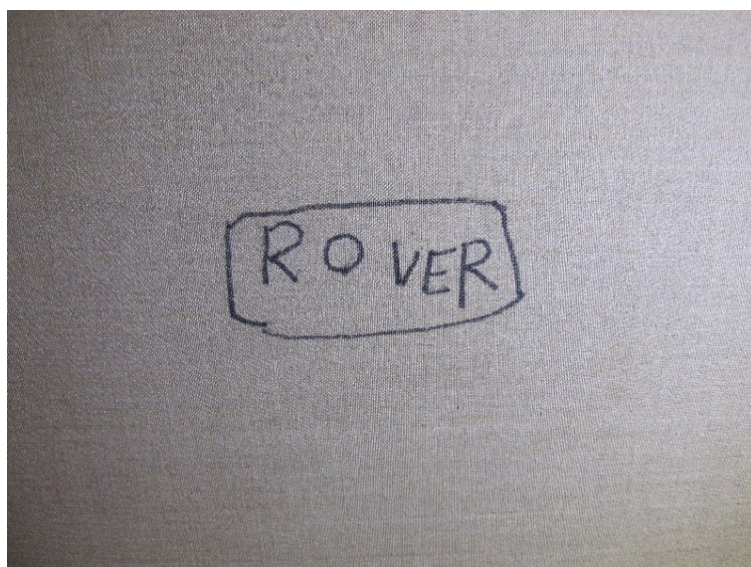


Photo caption: Photograph of Rover Thomas's signature on back of *Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)* painting, taken by the National Museum of Australia, 2022.



Photo caption: Photograph of back of *Jabanunga Goorialla (Rainbow Serpent)* painting, taken by the National Museum of Australia, 2022.

The Museum was provided with information which recounted the work being farewelled by elders in Warmun when it left the community. The presence of community elders in farewelling the painting was said to demonstrate the importance of the work and Rover Thomas as a painter.

Legal Title (Chain of Ownership)

Once completed, the painting was sent to a gallery in Melbourne on consignment. As the work remained unsold, Rover Thomas requested that it be returned to Western Australia so it could be shown at another gallery. The painting was stored and displayed for a short period of time at a gallery in Perth. In 1996, on instruction from the artist, Warmun Traditional Artists sold the painting to a private collector based in Western Australia, who had viewed the painting while on display at the Perth gallery.

The sale price, though confidential, was regarded as significant in comparison to prices for works by other major Indigenous artists at the time. The private collector kept the work in storage rather than displaying it.

With the then-owner's agreement, the painting was displayed for sale at several galleries in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne from around 2014. A Prospectus was published on the painting in 2014. In 2017, the painting was on display at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art Gallery. Lauraine Diggins, a founding director of Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, was a respected art dealer and influential champion of Indigenous art. Ms Diggins decided to purchase the work from the owner in 2017, with the sale facilitated through Maxine Taylor.

Ms Diggins passed away in April 2019. Her husband, Michael Blanche, continues her work at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, and in December 2019 offered the *Jabanunga Gooriella (Rainbow Serpent)* as a donation to the National Museum of Australia under the Cultural Gifts Program to honour the memory of his wife. Following a detailed assessment of the work, the Museum formally accepted the donation in June 2020.