



## GABRIEL MARALNGURRA

Some people line up in city centers to visit art galleries or museums—not Gabriel. His gallery was something far older and more alive—Injalak Hill. Nestled quietly in Australia’s West Arnhem Land, this rugged hill is a natural cathedral of rock art, etched by his ancestors over 40,000 years ago. Here, stories breathe through ochre walls and ancient symbols whisper secrets of spirits, animals, and the land itself.

Cocooned in the rocky shelters and ochre walls, young Gabriel Maralngurra would gaze at the rock paintings of his ancestors for hours, marveling at their careful detail and limitless imagination. His uncle, Master Painter Thompson Yulidjirri, took him to Injalak Hill regularly, showing him how ancient lines and dots told stories of spirits, animals, and the land, an experience Gabriel later described as the spark that fueled his lifelong passion.

*Above: Gabriel’s work inspired by rock art. Below: This rock art from the Injalak Hills is over 8,000 years old!*

Source:  
Lords Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris





As an adult, his artwork on paper, bark and fabric drew directly from the Injalak Hill galleries. His deep knowledge of local stories, plants, and animals provided him with rich and vivid inspiration for his artwork.

In each piece, he used cross-hatching and dots to suggest the inner forms of animals—a style known as “X-ray art.” His technique showed the bones and organs inside the animals, just like the traditional rock painting methods. By revealing the hidden structures beneath the surface, Gabriel’s art connected science and storytelling.

His passion didn’t stop at painting. In 2022, Gabriel co-authored *A Kunwinjku Counting Book*, a beautiful blend of culture, language, and learning. Through twelve pages of ochre-hued dot paintings, children meet animals like crocodiles, echidnas, and wallabies alongside their Kunwinjku names and numbers.

“I really wanted to do this book to make children happy... to share my culture in Kunwinjku and English and help children learn how to count,” he said. Critics praised the book as “a stunning work of art that doubles as a nature guide,” capturing the heart of West Arnhem Land’s ecology and culture.

Even beyond art, Gabriel was a dedicated cultural ambassador. He served as a tour guide, translator, and board member at Injalak Arts, a community art center he helped establish in the 1980s. He worked to preserve and share his Kunwinjku culture, and his paintings were celebrated in exhibitions across Australia, Europe, and the United States.

Gabriel’s journey—from sitting beneath painted rock ceilings as a boy to teaching the next generation—was a testament to the power of connection: to land, language, and legacy. Though he passed away in 2025, his art continues to speak. In every dot and every line, he draws us into the timeless stories of the Outback and reminds us how science and storytelling live hand in hand.

To see Gabriel’s illustrations and talk about his counting book watch this short video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ppg\\_aC2LSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ppg_aC2LSI)

