*Draft: Slow Time: Nyaparu (William) Gardiner and the Strike Camps of the Pilbara*

The artist Nyaparu (William) Gardiner (c1943-2018) was born into the strike camps of the Pilbara. On 1 May 1946, when shearing should have commenced in sheds across the region, a strike began among Aboriginal workers. Negotiations commenced with pastoralists for better pay and conditions, but they typically responded by evicting Aboriginal workers and their families from the stations. Aboriginal shearers, station hands and domestic workers had been living on stations in the north-west of Australia since white settlement in the mid to late nineteenth century, a period that has become known as “‘station time”‘ among Aboriginal people today. The 1946 Pilbara strike marked the beginning of “strike time”, a political struggle against the poor conditions of employment on these stations.[[1]](#footnote-1) Subsequently, the struggle was to survive economically, as the West Australian state government and local pastoralists opposed them. There are three kinds of histories of the strike. The first emphasises its dramatic beginnings, replaying historic scenes of walking off the stations, being chained and locked up by police, and a striker’s’ march on the police station in Port Hedland.[[2]](#footnote-2) A second type of history documents the ongoing pressure from the state government and pastoralists on strikers to return to work.[[3]](#footnote-3) A third type of history is that of the strikers themselves, and tells of the frequent movement between mines, settlements and stations in the aftermath of 1946.[[4]](#footnote-4) This documents the complexity of this long political and social movement, as the strikers went on to run their own mining camps, pastoral stations and various other industries in the following decades. Gardiner adds to this third history by picturing not only the strike camps but painting portraits and landscapes of the north-west. Spending the 1950s and 1960s moving between the camps and pastoral stations, Gardiner documents the way that the strike was part of a wider history of itinerant labour. Rather than focusing on the drama of the strike and its history, he captures the sense in which the strike was one part of lives spent working across the north-west.

While the 1970s and 1980s brought more opportunities for Aboriginal people to access and establish services, in the 1950s and 1960s strike leaders struggled to feed everyone and mediate internal conflict. This was the “starvation time”, as strikers lived in impoverished camps and mined by hand in order to establish their economic independence.[[5]](#footnote-5) In his drawings and paintings, Gardiner places the strike into a wider landscape of labour, his portraits of workers creating an iconography of remote Australia. In this sense his work can be placed alongside non-Aboriginal, settler art that has long aspired to capture the character of desert and rural Australia. His pictures of the strikers can also be placed within the Aboriginal art movement that arose as part of the Aboriginal self-determination movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Gardiner, however, was not given the opportunities that others were to contribute to the Aboriginal art movement until long after it had been established. While in the north and east of the Pilbara, in the Kimberley and the Western Desert, artists were being exhibited and their work sold in the cities of Australia, an art centre was not built in Port Hedland until 2014, giving Gardiner a place to work. This is despite the place of the Pilbara strike camps in the history of the self-determination movements.[[6]](#footnote-6) The camps at 12 Mile and Moolyella, and then Strelley an Warralong anticipated the establishment of communities and outstations in the 1970s and 1980s. ,. Rather than these early settlements, the 1966 Wave Hill Walk-Off has instead been a more celebrated moment in Australian history, written into a popular ballad by Paul Kelly and memorialised by Mervyn Bishop’s photograph of then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pouring sand into Gurindji elder Vincent Lingiari’s hands. Photographs of the strike camps of the 1940s and 1950s are instead of people panning for minerals with wooden carrying dishes called yandys, and having community meetings to decide the future of their movement. . They do not feature prime ministers, and they precede land rights legislation by two decades. Gardiner’s drawings and paintings picture the anonymous and itinerant workers of the Pilbara, ‘drifters’ and ‘offsiders’ who do not occupy the centre of his compositions, but instead lean out of shadowy landscapes. In painting these figures into landscapes Gardiner gives some sense of the significance of the country to their lives, of the way in which a life on stations, roads and on strike camps was determined by a geography determined by industry. He pictures people building houses, branding cattle, shearing sheep as well as mining, collecting pearl shell and buffel grass.

Gardiner captures the “slow time” of the north-west, sitting in the heat of the day, walking through the country and holding a horses’ reigns. He documents strike camps, as well as the itinerant labour of the north-west through the decades that followed the dramatic events of 1946.[[7]](#footnote-7) Many of his pictures are of working, waiting and going hungry. They are of life not only on the strike camps but on stations and on the roadside, emphasising the way that the strikers came and went from these camps, to and from working camps. Gardiner left the strike camps of Moolyella and Strelley as a young man, returning twenty years later, and it is from the experience of both the camps and the north-west more broadly that he returned in his memory as an older man to draw and paint this itinerant life, beginning his career as an artist only when he reached his sixties. His work is made entirely through memory, his paintings appearing as if through a portal in time as they capture something of the typology of itinerant workers. In this sense they supplement the history of the strike with images of the lives of people who lived between settlements, stations and mines. He also paints specific landscapes from his memories of the region. His work is not so much about the politics, leadership or dramas of the strike, but about the everyday lives and landscapes of those who lived in its aftermath, and the places they lived. His people and landscapes are marked respectively by clothing and geographical features such as trees, rivers and hills.

<please insert figure 1> William Nyaparu Gardiner, *Three Men in a Shade*, 2016, 61x71cm, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

So it is that the three men of *Three Men in a Shade* (2016)are painted in grey, and merge with the shade of the tree that they are seeking shelter under. This is one of many pictures of people waiting, their postures of resting between work in the Australian heat. The landscape is bigger than them, and yet they are also a part of it, their shapes immersed in a painterly pool of darkness before the orange-pink of a rock face. This picture also illustrates Gardiner’s tendency to place his figures off-center, as if to remind us of the sheer expanse of the landscape that people traverse in remote Australia, the sense that people are not the centre of the world but inhaibt its edges. Of this painting, presumably set during the strike and before the building of the strike settlements, Gardiner says, “In those days we didn’t have any houses. We were getting the bush tucker, in the outside part”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Older ways of living here overlap with a modern story of pastoralism and mining. In *Hunting Without a Gun* (2014) men stand in a river, one with a lizard in hand and another shouldering a kangaroo. Gardiner says that, “This type of thing [hunting] was shown to me and now I show you in a drawing, this hunting, with a spear . . . This old man, he taking his son or grandson and training him how to be a hunter. It’s in the *pujiman* [bush/desert dweller] days”.[[9]](#footnote-9) The *pujiman* days did not finish when Aboriginal people moved onto stations, but carried on as a means of subsistence.

In another picture, *Cook him nicely* (2015)*,* a hunter uses wire to tie a goanna’s legs together to cook it on the fire, a *pujiman* using technology from stations, where wire is used to make fencing.[[10]](#footnote-10) There are other “starving time” pictures too. One shows Gardiner waiting on the road for a lift somewhere, anywhere, after he had run out of food.[[11]](#footnote-11) Along with hunting, gathering was also a part of survival. As Gardiner describes his *Mineral Country* (2015), “Our mothers used to get all the seed from the bush, put it in the yandy, and separate the good seed from the bad seed” before making damper. A yandy is a long, wooden dish used for separating seeds, and in the twentieth century came to be adapted to separate minerals from each other. Gardiner used a small yandy as a child, working alongside his father to keep the strike going.[[12]](#footnote-12) He recalls that, “They yandy out tin, iron, they could yandy easy! You see the heavy metal would go this way, and the bad metals go this [opposite] way. Most of the good stuff, heavy metals would go this way, right hand side. We would wash it out and take it to the Brockman store to sell the tin and the minerals”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Here classical ways of life, of separating seed, overlaps with a new quest for minerals. While it is tempting to call this adaptation of Indigenous technologies a kind of innovative modernity, it should be remembered that Aboriginal people have been mining the continent for much longer than the period of colonisation. If mining with Indigenous technologies is a sign of modernity, this modernity extends back for tens of thousands of years. As such, the use of the yandy was more a novelty to visitors to the strike camps than to the strikers themselves. When Donald Stuart named his 1959 documentary novel *Yandy*, it was to capture the idealism of the strike with this image of the modern yandy. Stuart lived in the strike camps for a time, and was inspired by its mass, communist style meetings and marches. In his novel, the yandy symbolises the convergence of an emerging politics around Aboriginal people, Western modes of labour, and a collectively driven revolt against capitalism.[[14]](#footnote-14)

<Please insert figure 2> Nyaparu (William) Gardiner, *Starting the 1946 Strike*, 2016, 76 x 122 cm, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

Stuart was but one of many visitors to the strike camps. The strike movement was well known and supported amongst the political left in Australia, and it attracted artists and writers. Dorothy Hewett’s poem, “Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod” (1946), is an early example of an artwork created after one such visit.[[15]](#footnote-15) It was recited at union meetings for decades after it was written, and used to raise money for court costs and the other expenses of the strikers.[[16]](#footnote-16) The poem emphasises the drama of the early events of the strike, telling of court hearings and protest marches in Hedland, building solidarity between union activists and strikers across different parts of Australia. Gardiner’s two portraits of the strike leaders are very different to Hewett’s dramatisation. They were made more than seventy years after the strike’s beginnings, and blur the figures of these leaders into the landscape, in an effect that emphasises their distance in time. In a first portrait in 2016, *Starting the 1946 Strike*, Dooley Bin Bin, Jacob Oberdoo and Don McLeod are painted blue like the sky, while Clancy McKenna stands in black outline against the brown earth. In a second, *1946 Strike* (2016), Bin Bin, Oberdoo and McKenna walk away from us as they go to meet McLeod. They are painted in brown and black so as to appear to merge with a black, rocky escarpment in the background of the painting, as if to disappear not only to organise the events of the day, but to disappear into history. For Gardiner, the strike’s leading personalities were known as much by local repute as by experience. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, he was at a generational distance from them, and experienced the strike itself only second hand, while his childhood was also shaped by it. This is why in *1946 Strike* the organisers are walking away from the viewer, as they conduct the business of the strike away from Gardiner’s childhood experience of them.

<please insert figure 3> William Nyaparu Gardiner, *1946 Strike*, 2016, 76x76cm, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

McKenna is significant in Gardiner’s two pictures of the strike leaders. In the first painting he stands apart from the group, standing atop what looks like a dirt road, while he is absent from the second picture. McKenna’s life story is not unlike Gardiner’s own, as he left the strike due to being dissatisfied with its management.[[17]](#footnote-17) Having been elected to represent the coastal, urban areas during the strike, McKenna would go on to play a part in splitting the movement into two groups in 1959.[[18]](#footnote-18) He blamed organiser Don McLeod for channeling too much money into legal battles, leaving workers worse off than those who remained on stations.[[19]](#footnote-19) He wanted to use machinery to relieve the hard labour of mining with hand tools.[[20]](#footnote-20) McKenna was also dissatisfied with the way food was distributed, his biographer documenting that, “He had been in gaol for these people. He had suffered, while many of them had gone free. He had worked hard to feed the mob, while others had done little or nothing, and still got fed. He thought that if people didn’t want to work, then they shouldn’t expect to get tucker from someone else. But Don [McLeod] had different ideas, he wanted everything to be thrown in one big heap, everything was sort of jointly owned”.[[21]](#footnote-21) McKenna rejoined the strike camps after they found the mineral wolfram, that promised to deliver the strikers from poverty. He was, however, dissatisfied when there was no meat to eat, meat that he was expected to hunt himself after a day hard at work mining. In Gardiner’s first painting McKenna stands apart from the other striker leaders, while in the second is simply not there, having long abandoned the leaders to their fate.

McKenna published his account of the strike in the late 1970s, as did Max Brown who had worked at Yandeyarra, one of the camps, as a teacher. Rather than the romantic tale of Stuart’s *Yandy*, or Hewett’s heroic ballad, these histories belong to a disillusioned phase of writing strike histories. Brown’s *The Black Eureka* gives an account of the long, highly charged meetings of the strikers as being riven by conflict.[[22]](#footnote-22) The documentation of Gardiner’s work adds to these histories. The Studio Manager of Spinifex Hill Artists in Port Hedland, Greg Taylor, undertook this documentation Over the course of the 2010s, Taylor encouraged his drawing and painting while writing down the artist’s stories about his work. Annotating the 2015 drawing *Waiting for Motor Car*, Gardiner told Taylor that, “In Strelley they used to give us $7 a week. We were working hard building the community up, but they used to take our money and just give us $7. There was plenty of feed, but no money to buy anything. We were doing hard work there. I went to the Kimberley then”.[[23]](#footnote-23) Gardiner walked away from Strelley after he was asked to fix a windmill, hot work that he had no appetite for, before going to work with his uncle on Warrawagine Station. *Waiting for Motor Car* is of the artist waiting for a ride, presumably at this moment he left Strelley, before beginning anew as a station worker in the north-west. Gardiner’s dissatisfaction with life at Strelley would have begun before then, as the strikers lived in poverty, eking out a dirty living mining, while other station workers of north-western Australia were at least provided with ‘flash’ stockman clothes and worked on horseback. Instead, Gardiner wore clothes made of potato sacks on the strike camps and felt less of a man because of it.[[24]](#footnote-24)

It is important to read the dissatisfactions with the strike camps, documented by Gardiner, Brown, McKenna and others who experienced them, in terms of the longer history of dissatisfaction with labour conditions in the Pilbara. Before the strike, the choices to walk away and work elsewhere were simply not available to station workers, who were confined to their stations, and picked up by police and returned if they attempted to leave. In this sense, the dissatisfactions with the camps and their governance expresses a newly found sense of autonomy. Anne Scrimgeour has traced the emergence of this autonomy as the strikers’ demands for better treatment and wages turned into a long political struggle. [[25]](#footnote-25) The strike was not only among male shearers and stockmen, but extended into the homes of pastoralists, where women’s labour was withdrawn, and everyday domestic duties fell to the wives and daughters of pastoral families.[[26]](#footnote-26) The argument for autonomy has most powerfully been made by strike organiser Don McLeod in his tour de force history of racial inequality in Western Australia, *How the West Was Lost.* [[27]](#footnote-27) While the strikers often report that they were motivated by the desire for better conditions, McLeod instead emphasises political demands of freedom and economic justice. Self-published in 1984, *How the West Was Lost* traces the exclusion and exploitation of Aboriginal people by state politicians, settlers and pastoralists back to the nineteenth century, setting the legal precedent by which Aboriginal people continue to be exploited and impoverished.[[28]](#footnote-28)

It may have also been that, like any young man, Gardiner’s departure from Strelley was due to the fact that he had simply come of age and wanted to experience more of the world. He explains his move from the Pilbara to the Kimberley like this, saying that “After a while I left my uncle because all the jobs run out and you know when you’re young and you like big space out on a part of the country? I went to find a job in the Kimberley”.[[29]](#footnote-29) *Waiting for Motor Car* (2015) is a portrait of Gardiner from a point of view above him, giving us the sense that he is subject to forces larger than himself, the road sweeping away into a vast world beyond him. The scene can be read simultaneously as a biographical painting, as an expression of dissatisfaction with conditions of working and living, and as the record of a newfound freedom that allowed Aboriginal people to make their own choices. Such paintings testify to the strike not as a history of solidarity between strikers, as Hewett’s poem does, but for the lived differences by which people moved into and out of its experience. Strike organiser Peter Coppin recalls this multiplicity as part of the experience within the strike camps too, as people worked different jobs at different places, “By now many of the people who walked off the stations split into groups and moved on from Tjalku Wara (Twelve Mile) to other areas to find work. Some went searching for gold, others went to work the tin fields at Moyella or collect buffel seed, and later oyster shell, to bag and sell”.[[30]](#footnote-30) The multiplicities of the strike’s history extends from the motivations of the strikers to their experiences of work.

<please insert figure 4> William Nyaparu Gardiner, untitled, 2015, 37cmx54.5cm, pencil on paper. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

Gardiner’s interest in portraiture, and the style of his portraiture, is significant as it individualises the experience of the strike’s legacies in the north-west. This is contrary to the emphasis on collective action and heroism written by its leaders and visitors to the strike camps. Instead, Gardiner’s portraits are of men whose names have been lost, and yet whose memories remain strong in the artist’s mind. As he tells independent curator John Cruthers , “I forget his name, this man, but I got his face”.[[31]](#footnote-31) In the absence of names, the portraits become descriptions of the types of remote Australia: ‘hard fella’, ‘resting man’, ‘local bloke’, ‘outside man’, ‘drifter’ ‘outside man’ ‘truck driver’ ‘number two man’ ‘offsider’ bastard’ ‘alone man’ and ‘young fella’ are painted to look lean and long, their figures elongated to appear proud and capable. There is, however, something more intangible at work in these portraits, that is best illustrated by his drawing of a man accompanied by a ghost, a work that won him a prize in a regional art competition, the Port Hedland Art Award, in 2015. The winning work is a small untitled drawing, an unusual victor in the world of art prizes, that usually go to big works. On the day following the award ceremony, Gardiner arrived at the Courthouse Gallery to give an impromptu talk about his drawing. He explained that it was of a man carrying a cooking pot with a woman sitting at his shoulder. Both figures are off-centre to the right of the page, and gaze into the distance into the paper to their left. The woman, Gardiner explained, was a spirit. The space of the drawing and the way that the figures are shaded suggests the mysticism of the subject.[[32]](#footnote-32) This ghostly quality extends to Gardiner’s other portraits, as they outline their subjects against the landscape, their bodies a part of the country. It is as if his memories of these people are inseparable from his memories of the country itself, figure and ground at one in his mind’s eye. .

To trace the origins of Gardiner’s style, it is possible to turn to several sources. The first is Gardiner himself, who recalls that, “I started drawing when I was a young man in Port Hedland, out in Two Mile. I had seen a couple of old people do drawing. ‘I like these things’ I would say to myself. I used to come near them and I would see how they do all this, and they were very smart. I found it interesting. I learned to draw from comic books”.[[33]](#footnote-33) Comics were not an uncommon influence for Aboriginal artists, as they were distributed across the country.[[34]](#footnote-34) It may be that Gardiner’s attention to figures, contrary to the more common focus on landscape among Western Desert artists, comes from this early influence. Another influence was a young Sam Fullbrook who was living at Pilangoora, a strike camp, in the 1950s. Fullbrook went on to become a successful Australian painter, whose light, colourful touch endeared him to collectors and public galleries alike. Cruthers reports that “William’s eyes lit up when I mentioned Sam. He told me that as a boy he watched Sam paint in the spinifex-thatched studio, and remembered Sam encouraging him to draw.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Fullbrook had worked his way across Australia to join the strikers, and because of his army training took up shooting kangaroos for meat while there. Two of Fullbrook’s paintings from this period, *The Butcher* (1954) and *Girl with Yandi* (1954) portray figures in the Pilbara landscape. In the first, a man walks with a dead kangaroo over his shoulders, feet bare on the earth, while in the second a girl sits with one of the metal yandis that were used to sort minerals from the dirt.

<figure 5> Sam Fullbrook, *Girl with Yandi*, 1954, oil on composition board, 56 by 45.5cm.

In these paintings the colours and shapes at work in figure and landscape are complimentary and muted, situating their subjects firmly within the Pilbara. These are exceptions in Fullbrook’s long career, as he later became more expressionistic and painterly, and less iconic. It may have been that the Pilbara itself demanded a clarity in imaging its people, the brightness of the north-west impressing itself upon the artist’s eye. It may also have been that Fullbrook was modeling his work from painters of Australian archetypes of the 1940s and 1950s, including Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan. Fullbrook’s focus on figurative, Australian themed portraits in the early 1950s suggests that he had seen Drysdale’s paintings of the period, that were being exhibited in Sydney and Melbourne at the time. As Drysdale exhibited pictures of storekeepers and station workers, Fullbrook was painting beachgoers and cane-cutters in front of distinctly Australian land and beachscapes. As with Drysdale, he draws upon lived experience, his portraits the result of an immersion in the working life of remote Australia. Unlike Drysdale, who drew and painted in places that his family had invested in, or on commission from newspapers, Fullbrook laboured across Australia to raise the money to keep travelling painting. “The history of Australia is the history of itinerant workers,” Fullbrook says, and it is this history that these portraits of the 1950s and early 1960s reflect.[[36]](#footnote-36) The tension here lies in the way that portraiture captures something of the particular person and the way that they are iconic, capturing a certain type of Australian worker. It seems that Fullbrook never resolved this tension, as after returning to Sydney he reworked a portrait of strike leader Jacob Oberdoo, obscuring his facial features, and exhibiting it as *The Head Stockman* (1957-60), as if in tribute to Drysdale’s many drawings and paintings of this Australian type. Later, he would exhibit the portrait with Oberdoo’s name as a title, returning from the general to the specific, from the type to the person.[[37]](#footnote-37) The contradiction here is one that reflects the tension of Gardiner’s own portraits, each of which represents a person that the artist remembers, and yet who are also part of a typology of itinerant workers of the north-west. Fullbrook’s *The Head Stockman* represents precisely this contradiction, as the portrait becomes a type, in this case a type popular in Australian art and media during the late 1940s and 1950s.

<insert figure 6> William Nyaparu Gardiner, *Outside Man*, 2016, 100cmx59.5cm, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

Fullbrook was not the only artist to visit the north-west during the 1950s and 1960s, and it may be that Gardiner saw others drawing and painting during this time. The artist James Wigley lived several times with the strikers over these decades. His first visit was in 1957 when he spent three months collecting pearl shell with them on the coast.[[38]](#footnote-38) The shells were once used to make buttons, before the use of plastic put this industry out of business. He set up a makeshift studio of tent and a spinifex windbreak, where he made drawings of the local people. When he returned to Melbourne Wigley made paintings from these drawings and exhibited them. One of his works from this time, *Don McLeod and His Mob* (1959) is reproduced as the dust jacket for the first edition of Stuart’s *Yandy*, and it may have been that Gardiner saw this cover after copies made their way back to the strike communities in the 1960s. *Don McLeod and His Mob* is stylistically similar to Gardiner’s paintings, as its Aboriginal figures blur into the landscape, making them appear a part of it. Whatever their influence, Gardiner’s work can be compared to that of Fullbrook and Wigley in the social realist sense, as all three artists strive to capture characters who populated the Australian landscape in the 1950s. The better-known works from this time are by Drysdale and Nolan, who pushed this type of painting to portray these characters as the ghosts of history. Nolan’s paintings of the doomed explorers Leichardt, Burke and Wills are painted so that they merge with the landscape that claimed their lives. These explorers are well known for the inadequacy with which they prepared to cross the inland of Australia, and Burke in particular for his unwillingness to take the advice of local Aboriginal people about surviving in inland Australia.[[39]](#footnote-39) The explorers disappear into tree lines and riverbeds, in a melancholic history in which the land erases all trace of them. Comparing Gardiner’s portraits with Nolan’s paintings of the iconic Australian bushranger Ned Kelly, Cruthers speculates that, “Many of them have passed away, and their figures are often ethereal, so light they seem to float in the landscape like spirits, or like Ned Kelly in Sidney Nolan’s 1946-47 series. He shares Nolan’s interest in the figure/ground relationship, and his confidence in placing a figure in a landscape”.[[40]](#footnote-40) Gardiner and Nolan paint figures standing or sitting tall, carrying themselves vertically and thus suggesting that they are not threatened by the landscape but are instead a part of its plains, rivers and hills (see for example *Outside Man* (2016)). There is a difference however in Gardiner’s landscapes, that are detailed to the point that one might identify their location. Many are indeed named for actual places: *Camballin* (2015), a river east of Derby; *Myroodah Station* (2016) (illustrated); a rockhole at *Kalyeeda Station* (2015) where Gardiner remembers that, “For the horses we’d fill up our hats with water . . .” and *Marapikurrinya* (2015) where the ships come into the entrance at Port Hedland, and where the Nyamal water snake “used to live in this Country”.[[41]](#footnote-41) Nolan’s landscapes are instead often very general, rendering only the vaguest of detail. Unlike Nolan, Gardiner like so many Aboriginal people of the time, lacked the Western style schooling and the experience of cities with their networks of collectors and galleries to have the opportunity to pursue art at a younger age.

<insert figure 7> William Nyaparu Gardiner, *Myroodah Station*, 2016, 61cmx60cm, acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Spinifex Hill Studios.

It is fortunate that Gardiner was commissioned to write an illustrated biography by the Wangka Maya Language Centre in Port Hedland. This, after returning to the strike camp of Strelley where he illustrated school books for the independent school there.[[42]](#footnote-42) From his biography, we know that Gardiner’s father was a horse breaker, and in this biography as in his later work he draws horses in stockyards, drinking water and being broken in. In these pictures the figures are more solid than usual, as if his memories of station work are clearer, his stockmen looking confident as they lead horses to a day of breaking horses, fencing, checking windmills, mustering or building yards. He also draws pictures of his father playing clapsticks in ceremony while he looks on from the other side of a fence, reminding us of the way classical life co-existed with station labour.

All of Gardiner’s subjects come from his life before he stopped work, probably in the 1970s, as Aboriginal people were evicted from stations across the country. Landscapes and portraits of men are most numerous of his genres, while figures within landscapes synthesise these two. There are many pictures of people waiting, sitting in landscapes or by the roadside, and pictures of strike life itself. The 1946 strike represents the beginnings of a movement to install better conditions for Aboriginal labour in Australia and would culminate in the strike camps that anticipated the remote communities of the self-determination era. These remote communities would however be places of chronic unemployment, while the strike camps were working communities,. Gardiner’s drawings and paintings give us some insight not only into the experience of life on these innovative new settlements, but into the way that they were part of lives which ranged across the north-west. His work offers a counterpoint to the top heavy, heroic history of the strike, while his portraits expand the iconic repertoire of art that pictures remote Australia. In the process Gardiner captures something of the way in which itinerant labourers populated the country during the 1950s and 1960s, workers moving from one station to another, from mines to roadside settlements, from one kind of work to another. In the process it is possible to glimpse the personal histories of the north-west, and the way that the strike was part of a greater patchwork of lived experience.

1. Monty Hale, Anne Scrimgeour, Mark Clendon and Barbara Hale, *Kurlumarniny: We come from the desert* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Bill Bunbury, *It’s Not the Money It’s the Land: Aboriginal Stockmen and the Equal Wages Case* (Perth: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002), 44-65; Stephen Muecke, “Don McLeod’s Law: The Genesis of the Aboriginal Concept of the Strike,” in *Frontier Skirmishes: Literary and Cultural Debates in Australia after 1992*, ed. Russell West-Pavlov and Jennifer Wawrzinek (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 2010), 71-79; David Noakes, *How the West Was Lost*, directed by David Noakes (Port Hedland: Ronin Films, 1987); Jolly Read with Peter Coppin, “Yandy,” (script), https://australianplays.org/script/ASC-825 (accessed 29 November 2018); and Anne Scrimgeour, “We only want our Rights and Freedom,” *History Australia* 11, no. 2 (2014): 101-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. G.C. Bolton, “Black and White after 1897,” in *A New History of Western Australia*, ed. C.T. Stannage (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 124-80; Michael Hess, “Black and Red: The Pilbara Pastoral Workers” Strike, 1946,” *Aboriginal History* 18, no. 1 (1994): 65-83; D.W. McLeod, *How the West Was Lost: The Native Question in the Development of Western Australia* (Port Hedland: D.W. McLeod, 1984); C.D. Rowley, *The Remote Aborigines* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1970), 252-259; John Wilson, “The Pilbara Aboriginal Social Movement: An Outline of its Background and Significance,” in *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and Their Present*, ed. Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1979): 151-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Peter Coppin and Jolly Read, *Kangkushot: The Life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1999); Hale, Scrimgeour, Clendon and Hale, *Kurlumarniny*; Kingsley Palmer and Clancy McKenna, *Somewhere between Black and White* (Melbourne: MacMillan, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Read and Coppin, *Kangushot*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears* (London: Reaktion, 2016): 117-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This phrase is taken from Greg Taylor, then Studio Manager of Spinifex Hill Studios in Port Hedland, in conversation with the author, 14 November 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. From the annotations to the painting *Three Men in a Shade* (2016) with Gardiner’s words documented by Greg Taylor. All subsequent annotations are from Taylor’s documentation. He had a close relationship with Gardiner while working with him at Spinifex Hill Studios. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gardiner, annotations to the painting *Hunting without a Gun* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gardiner, annotations to the painting *Cook him nicely* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gardiner, annotations to the painting *Starving time* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gardiner, annotations to *Starving Time* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. William Nyaparu Gardiner, “Old People,” exhibition catalogue, Susanne O’Connell Gallery, February 11 - March 2017, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Sally Clarke, “In the space behind his eyes: Donald R. Stuart: a biography” (PhD thesis, Edith Cowan University, 2004), 146-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Dorothy Hewett, “Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod,” (poem) *Australian Poetry Library*, https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/hewett-dorothy/clancy-and-dooley-and-don-mcleod-0050025 (accessed 18 January, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Maggie Nolan, “And who the hell are you?: Dorothy Hewett’s “Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod,” in *Telling Stories: Australian Life and Literature 1935-2012*, ed. Tanya Dalziell and Paul Genoni (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013): 106-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. McKenna and Palmer, *Somewhere between Black and White*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hess, “Black and Red,” 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Sarah Holcombe, “Indigenous Organisations and Mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: Lessons from a historical perspective,” *Aboriginal History* 29 (2005): 107-135 at 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hale, Scrimgeour, Clendon and Hale, *Kurlumarniny*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Palmer and McKenna, *Somewhere between Black and White*, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Max Brown, *The Black Eureka* (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1976), 66-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Gardiner, annotations to the pen and pencil drawing *Waiting for Motor Car* (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Greg Taylor, conversation with the author, 14 November, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Scrimgeour, “We only want our Rights and Freedom,” 101-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Victoria Haskins and Anne Scrimgeour, “‘Strike Strike, We Strike’: Making Aboriginal Domestic Labor Visible in the Pilbara Pastoral Workers’ Strike, Western Australia, 1946-1952,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 88 (Fall 2015): 87-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Sam Coppin in Noakes, *How the West Was Lost*; Palmer and McKenna, *Somewhere between Black and White*, 61-69; Read and Coppin, *Kangushot*, 35-43; [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. McLeod, *How the West was Lost*, 3-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Gardiner, “Old People,” n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Read and Coppin, *Kangushot*, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Quoted in John Cruthers, *Nyaparu (William) Gardiner: Outside Men* (Melbourne: Vivien Anderson Gallery, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The judges were artist Penny Coss, curator Kate Mullen and the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Gardiner, “Old People,” n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On the influence of comics, see for example Mary Anne Jebb, “Jack Wherra”s Boab Nut Carving: A Cross-Cultural History,” *Early Days* 12, no. 6 (2006): 696-715 at 709-710. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cruthers, *Nyaparu (William) Gardiner: Outside Men*, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. John Cruthers and Sam Fullbrook, “An interview with Sam Fullbrook,” *Sam Fullbrook: Delicate Beauty* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, 2014), 31-37 at 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See the exhibition history of this painting in *Sam Fullbrook: Delicate Beauty* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, 2014), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. James Wigley, interviewed by Barbara Blackman at Melbourne, 22-23 September, 1987. Session 4. https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2088894 (retrieved 13 April, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See H.M. Tolcher, H.M., *Seed of the Coolibah: A History of the Yandruwandha and Yawarrawarrka People* (Adelaide: H.M. Tolcher, 2003), 49-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. John Cruthers, *Nyaparu (William) Gardiner: Outside Men* (Melbourne: Vivien Anderson Gallery, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Gardiner, from annotations to paintings named in-text. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Hale, Scrimgeour, Clendon and Hale, *Kurlumarniny*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)