



***Too Deadly: Ten Years of Tarnanthi* to celebrate a decade of Tarnanthi through more than 200 works**

Adelaide, Australia: Tarnanthi, the Art Gallery of South Australia's festival of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, will mark its tenth anniversary in 2025 with the major exhibition *Too Deadly: Ten Years of Tarnanthi*, alongside a state-wide festival of exhibitions and events across twenty-five partner venues, and an in-person Tarnanthi Art Fair in a new CBD location.

The word tarnanthi (pronounced *TAR-nan-dee*) comes from the language of the Kaurna people, the traditional owners of the Adelaide Plains. It means to spring forth or appear – like the sun and the first emergence of light. Since it began in 2015, Tarnanthi has established itself as Australia's leading First Nations arts festival, with more than 2.2 million people visiting Tarnanthi exhibitions and events that have showcased the radical ingenuity and expansive practice of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and creatives. Over the last ten years, Tarnanthi has provided a platform for more than 9,000 First Nations artists to present their works of art, building understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture for audiences in Australia and around the world.

Opening on 17 October 2025 at AGSA, *Too Deadly* assembles more than 200 landmark works of art that have been acquired into AGSA's collection over the last ten years of Tarnanthi. Curated by Artistic Director Nici Cumpston OAM, *Too Deadly* not only reflects on Tarnanthi's first decade but also recontextualises and re-energises important works, allowing new dialogues to emerge between works of art, showcasing the artistic excellence of First Nations artists from across the country.

Too Deadly features major installations and works of art by over 200 artists including Tony Albert, Betty Campbell, Nyaparu (William) Gardiner, Angelina Karadada Boona, Iluwanti Ken, Vincent Namatjira, Judith Pungarta Inkamala, Motorbike Paddy Ngal, Thea Anamara Perkins, Ryan Presley, Reko Rennie, Darrell Sibosado, John Prince Siddon, Kaylene Whiskey, Garawan Waṅambi, Bugai Whyoulter and many others. In addition, AGSA's free activity space The Studio will feature Banjijma artist Layne Dhu-Dickie, whose hand-drawn comic book *Captain Hedland versus The Fisherman* will inspire visitors to create their own unique character for a collaborative comic book wall. Dhu-Dickie was the youngest artist to ever participate in Tarnanthi in 2019 at the age of 15. Six years later, this presentation of The Studio demonstrates Tarnanthi's commitment to supporting emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Highlights of *Too Deadly: Ten Years of Tarnanthi* include:

Kulata Tjuta (Many Spears)

Premiering at Tarnanthi in 2017, *Kulata Tjuta (Many Spears)* brought together 59 male Anangu artists to create a monumental installation made up of 551 kulata (spears) suspended in an explosive formation that hovers above a circular installation of hand-carved piti (wooden bowls) made by Anangu women. Contained within a darkened room with one central light source, shadows of the kulata bounce on to the surrounding walls, drawing an analogy to the cumulative and mushrooming effect of the atomic bomb testing on Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Country between 1953 and 1963. This groundbreaking work of art was the result of an ongoing cultural maintenance practice of carving spears and intergenerational sharing of knowledge that continues to take place across communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands today. Made specifically for the 2017 Tarnanthi Festival, this installation of *Kulata Tjuta (Many Spears)* has since toured extensively across the USA and will be a highlight of *Too Deadly*, offering visitors to AGSA the opportunity to see this work for the first time since 2017. An accompanying six-channel moving image work intersperses immersive footage of Anangu lands alongside deeply personal interviews with community members who were impacted by nuclear testing in the region.

Kungka Kunpu

As part of *Too Deadly*, selected works from the Tarnanthi touring exhibition *Kungka Kunpu (Strong Women)* will be presented at AGSA for the first time following its national tour from 2022-2024. Drawn from AGSA's collection, *Kungka Kunpu* showcases major contemporary works by celebrated women artists from the APY Lands, cultural custodians of an oral tradition that epitomises the art of storytelling. The exhibition includes works ranging from Tjanpi Desert Weavers' large-scale sculptural installations made from tjanpi (grasses) and found objects through to major new superlative paintings by emerging and established artists.

The Blak Laundry

Over the opening weekend of Tarnanthi in the AGSA Courtyard, Ngugi Quandamooka artist Libby Harward and Gamilaroi artist Dominique Chen will present *The Blak Laundry*, part-sculptural installation, part-functional laundromat, and part-site for community gathering. *The Blak Laundry* operates as both a literal and conceptual space for washing dirty laundry, transforming public and institutional spaces into working laundromats where conversations around sovereignty, cultural labour, capitalism, and everyday Blak life unfold. Audiences will be invited to interact by observing, washing, folding, listening, yarning, or joining scheduled 'agitations'—interactive performances, meditations, games and storytelling sessions.

Tarnanthi Art Fair

From 17-18 October, the Tarnanthi Art Fair returns as an in-person event, presented at a new venue, Union House at Adelaide University. The Tarnanthi Art Fair offers a unique opportunity to buy works of art directly from First Nations artists and art centres from across the country that have been made and sold ethically. Every dollar from every purchase goes directly to the artists and their community-run art centres, delivering vital economic benefits to communities where art production is an important source of income.

This year's Tarnanthi Festival additionally includes exhibitions of new works from more than 100 artists across twenty-five partner venues, making contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art more available to audiences in metropolitan and regional South Australia. These partner projects, spanning painting, prints, photography, ceramics, glass, weaving, jewellery, textiles, handcrafted furniture, sculpture, digital media, film and dance, will be announced over the coming months.

Regional Tarnanthi – Woven within Stars

Woven within Stars is the second exhibition outcome from Tarnanthi's award-winning Regional Tarnanthi program, presented in partnership with Country Arts SA. Curated by Tarnanthi Regional Curator Marika Davies, the exhibition includes new and existing works by nine First Nations artists from regional South Australia. Featuring the work of Regina McKenzie, Donny McKenzie, Jenna Richards, Vera Richards, Lavinia Richards, Patricia Fatt, Regg Dodd, Jonas Dare and Roy Coulthard, *Woven within Stars* reflects stories that connect Country and culture. Opening at Yarta Purtli Art Gallery, Port Augusta on 20 September, this exhibition will then travel to Fabrik in Lobethal from 28 November.

Tarnanthi Artistic Director, Barkandji curator, Nici Cumpston OAM says, 'Over the last decade, Tarnanthi has fostered opportunities for more than 9,000 First Nations artists at all stages of their careers, opening new pathways for creative talents. Tarnanthi has provided a platform for conversations, for deep listening and for important cultural sharing. Today, ten years on, Tarnanthi has its own ecology—ambitious, intergenerational, and embracing of both emerging and established artists working in any medium. It has been a privilege to champion artists' voices through Tarnanthi and to bring world-class experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to Australian audiences.'

Jason Smith, Director, AGSA, says, 'Since beginning as a one-off event in 2015, Tarnanthi has evolved from delivering acclaimed exhibitions in South Australia to reaching national and international audiences. Expertly and sensitively led by Artistic Director Nici Cumpston OAM over the past decade, Tarnanthi has set a benchmark in best practice with its commitment to working with First Nations artists and communities and it's an honour that AGSA is the vehicle for these important conversations.'

Premier of South Australia, the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP, welcomed the acclaimed Festival and says, 'I am delighted that the Art Gallery of South Australia will celebrate this landmark celebration of a nationally and internationally important cultural offering in 2025. Not only is this Festival a platform for our nation's important voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic talent, Tarnanthi has also generated \$126.5 million for our State's economy.'

The Hon Andrea Michaels MP, Minister for the Arts says, 'Tarnanthi is a wonderful statewide celebration of art that has created meaningful experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art for more than 2 million visitors to Tarnanthi exhibitions across South Australia and beyond, over the last ten years. We're proud that AGSA is home to this significant cultural event.'

AGSA Chair Sandy Verschoor says, 'A nation-leading event, Tarnanthi has only been made possible through the support of BHP and the Government of South Australia over the last decade. This commitment has been instrumental to elevating the artistic careers of thousands of First Nations artists and has allowed AGSA to set new benchmarks in working in respectful, ethical and culturally appropriate ways.'

BHP Olympic Dam Asset President, Anna Wiley says, 'For ten years, Tarnanthi has delivered meaningful, positive impact and inspiration to communities across South Australia. BHP has been a proud partner throughout this journey - supporting Tarnanthi's growth from its inception to the nationally recognised exhibition it has become. It's helped drive economic development, brought art to regional communities, and celebrated cultural excellence while fostering deeper understanding and respect.'

'Their commitment to thoughtful engagement with First Nations communities is truly special, and we're excited to continue supporting Tarnanthi's bright future,' Wiley says.

An accompanying publication, with new essays by First Nations writers, provides further insight and reflection on Tarnanthi's decade of showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

Tarnanthi Festival 2025 will run from 17 October 2025 to 18 January 2026 at AGSA and across twenty-five partner venues statewide. A selection of works from *Too Deadly* will then begin a national tour, travelling to six regional venues from 2026-2028 including Rockhampton Museum of Art and Caboolture Regional Art Gallery (QLD); Maitland Regional Art Gallery and Ngununggula Southern Highlands Regional Gallery (NSW); Geelong Gallery (VIC); and Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (WA). Visit agsa.sa.gov.au for further details.

About Nici Cumpston OAM

Tarnanthi is led by Artistic Director Nici Cumpston OAM, who was also the Art Gallery of South Australia's Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from 2008-2025. Nici is a proud Barkandji person from the Barka, the Darling River in far west New South Wales, who is also of Afghan, English and Irish heritage. Her career has been characterised by working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to bring new work and new ways of seeing to wider audiences. Nici is the Artistic Director of the 2025 Tarnanthi Festival and Director of Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Museum at the University of Virginia, United States, the only Art Museum outside of Australia dedicated to the research and exhibition of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art.

Tarnanthi at a glance 2015-2025

- 2.2 million people have attended Tarnanthi exhibitions and events
- 9,477 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have exhibited their work at AGSA and partner venues
- More than \$8.5 million of art has been sold at the Tarnanthi Art Fair, with all money going directly to artists and communities
- \$126.5 million in economic expenditure has been generated in South Australia since 2015.

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Header image: installation view: Tarnanthi 2017, featuring *Kulata Tjuta* by APY Art Centre Collective, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; photo: Saul Steed.

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