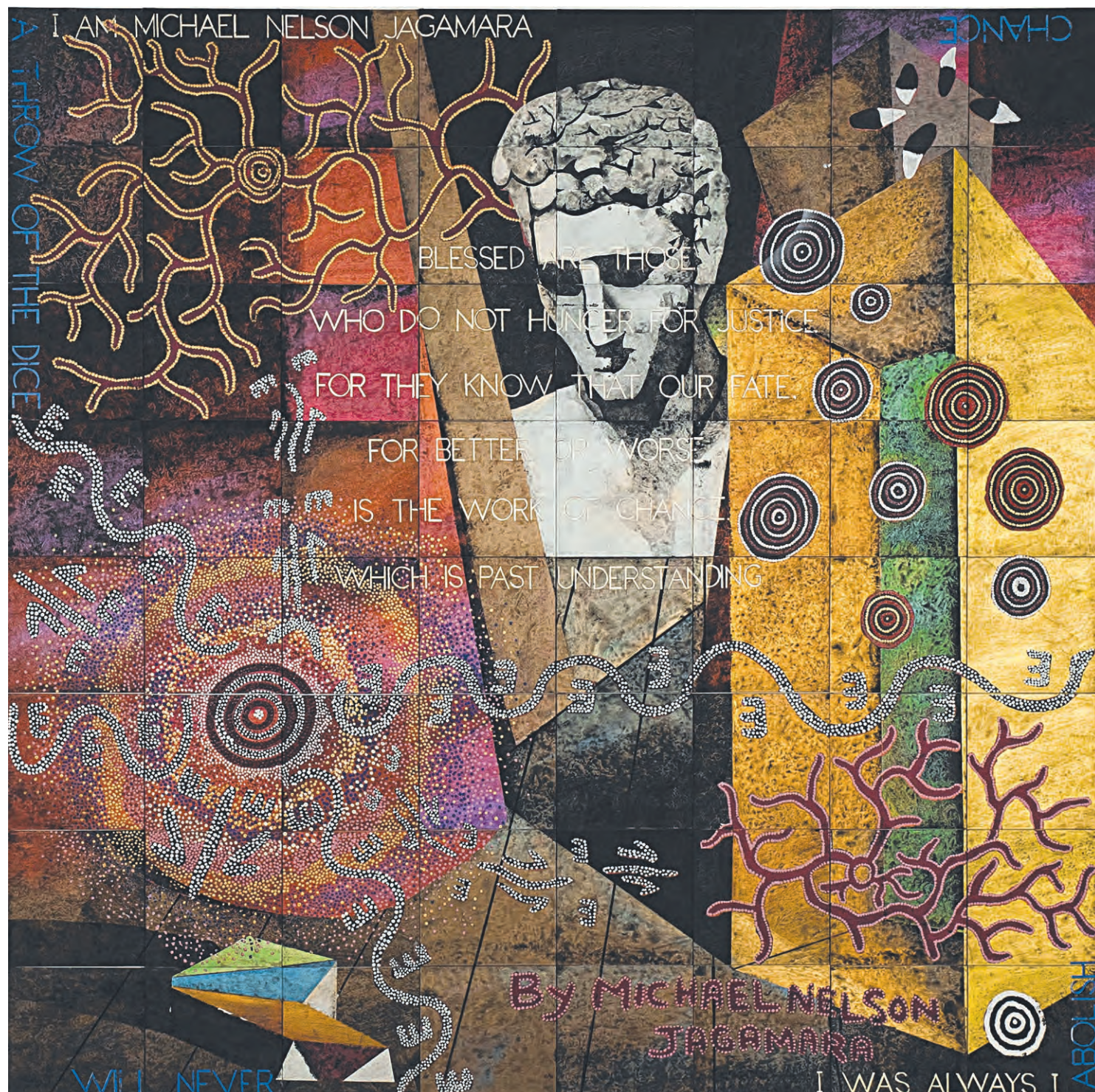


ARTS



WHITE MAN'S STORY, BLACKFELLA STORY, WE JUST COME TOGETHER

MICHAEL NELSON
JAGAMARA

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *The Messenger* by Michael Nelson Jagamara and Imants Tillers; Michael Nelson Jagamara and Imants Tillers' *Another Path IV (Yam)*, 2014; Michael Nelson Jagamara's *Big Lightning Storm Clouds at Papunya*, 2013.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Two artists reached out across the continent to work with each other with amazing results, writes **Phil Brown**

It is one of the great collaborations of Australian art – the cerebral Imants Tillers and senior Warlpiri desert artist Michael Nelson Jagamara.

Worlds apart in many ways, including geographically (Tillers lives in Cooma in southern NSW, Jagamara at Papunya in the Northern Territory) these artists have reached out across the continent to work with each other and the results are always amazing.

The latest can be seen in the major exhibition *Big Storm Between Two Places*, now on at Fireworks Gallery in Newstead, which has brokered this long, extraordinary collaboration.

The hero work in this show is the large-scale, sumptuous, *The Messenger*, which marries western art including Tillers' signature textual elements with Jagamara's Dreaming-inspired

patterns and motifs. Jagamara and Tillers first met at the 1986 Biennale of Sydney but it took 15 years for them to connect again and begin their collaboration, which Jagamara describes in refreshingly plain terms.

"White man's story, blackfella story, we just come together," Jagamara says.

"I can put my design on top of his work – white man's story – and my story on top of his, which is good to collaborate. I don't mind Imants because he's a good artist and I'm a good artist – we both good artists."

When their worlds collide on canvas the result is remarkable and that is evident in *The Messenger* and several other collaborative works. There are other elements to the exhibition however, which also showcases Jagamara as a significant solo act.

Take, for example, his stunning *Lightning Strikes* sculptures and the series dubbed *Brisbane Paintings*, a suite of stunning works featuring his unique iconography.

Jagamara has a long, fruitful association with Fireworks Gallery in Brisbane and has travelled here to paint many times sponsored by gallery director Michael Eather. In a studio supplied by Eather, Jagamara has produced some of the most powerful paintings of his career done in his gloss, resin-based, acrylic paint.

Away from his country the imagery seemed to flow unfettered and that can be seen in paintings such as *Big lightning storm clouds at Papunya* and *Lightning men at Pirliryanu*, major works of contemporary art enlivened with imagery from an ancient culture.

Jagamara is very much the messenger for culture. This is, of course, why the major collaborative piece is entitled *The Messenger*. This work comprises 64 canvas panels. The artists worked on them separately, with canvases posted back and forth.

This painting's familiar iconography includes Jagamara's tentacle-like yams and the familiar Dreaming imagery that visitors to Parliament House in Canberra will be familiar with. Jagamara's *Possum and Wallaby Dreaming* is the

major Forecourt mosaic there and was commissioned for the purpose.

In *The Messenger*, Tillers supplies text and imagery inspired by the classical symbolism of Italian master Giorgio de Chirico. Tillers says when he was thinking of possible relationships between Aboriginal Western Desert painting and European art de Chirico seemed to fit.

It's entirely appropriate that this work be seen here first, says Tillers, because Michael Eather has helped broker this artistic discussion and Fireworks Gallery has played an important role in Jagamara's career.

"Brisbane is central to this story," Tillers says. "A process like this wouldn't have happened in Sydney or Melbourne. There seems to be more freedom to experiment in Brisbane."

Eather is chuffed and proud and says it has been a pleasure to work with "two great senior artists", both in their 60s.

It's a long way from Papunya where Jagamara still lives to Brisbane but it's a journey Jagamara has made many times and he will do so again for this exhibition.

Big Storm Between Two Places - Michael Nelson Jagamara + Michael Nelson Jagamara and Imants Tillers, runs until December 5 at Fireworks Gallery, Newstead, fireworksgallery.com.au

