

## About the Cover

# Cover Essay: Warrnyu, the Fruit Bats

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Six fruit bats grace the cover of this issue, in *Warrnyu—The Fruit Bats*, a painting by indigenous Australian artist Rose Laynbalaynba. Many stories hide among the leaves and wings, but Laynbalaynba describes the painting as a story from Arnhem Land, on the northeast coastal tip of Australia's Northern Territory. It is a story of two flying foxes, or fruit bats, which lived in a place called Naliyindi. Although they lived in Naliyindi, these bats spoke a different language than their neighbors. These two bats spoke Ganalbingu.

One day, the two bats decided to seek a new home. They flew toward the beautiful island of Milingimbi, where they thought they might land. As the bats drew closer to Milingimbi, they suddenly heard a voice, which spoke to them and said, "This is my land, it is Nurruwulu land." The two bats quickly apologized for the trespass, and they continued their journey.

This time, the two bats flew south, toward the inland place called Ramanging. As they flew across to the big river, they saw that the land was beautiful. They decided to land and look around. There was no one else to be found, and so they claimed the place as Gupagupa and said, "This place now belongs to us, and it is now Balatjini country." This is how the land of the Balatjini people, known as Gupagupa, earned its name. The six fruit bats in the painting represent the six tribal leaders from each of the communities: the Gamal people, the Warrawarra people, the Balatjini people, the Ganalbingu people, the Ritharrngu people, and the Ngurruwulu people. By telling the story of the bats, this painting teaches the history of the people and the country.

Laynbalaynba's painting not only recounts the roots of her people, it also calls to mind the timeless connection that binds us, as humans, to the fate of our ecosystems—whether or not we tell the stories of ancient memory. More often vilified or hunted than honored in stories, bats are particularly important, if controversial, players in our ecosystems. They serve crucial roles in seed dispersal and pollination. However, bats are also flying reservoirs for many zoonotic diseases, including Nipah and Hendra viruses and Australian bat lyssavirus.

In *Warrnyu—The Fruit Bats*, the fruit bats roost among leafy branches. They exist without any sign of human activity. The trees are dark and, but for the flutter and chatter of the bats, undisturbed. Today, there are few places in the world left untouched by humans, and large populations of bats often roost in proximity to people. Viruses such as Nipah virus and Hendra virus are typically transmitted from bats to humans when infected bats urinate or defecate near livestock. The zoonotic diseases carried by fruit bats represent only a small portion of the emerging diseases that affect animals and humans today, and the drivers of these diseases span myriad fields of research. By their interdisciplinary nature, the Ecohealth field and the One Health Initiative bridge the research gaps to find preventative solutions. Like the tapestry strokes of Laynbalaynba's painting, the different components of One Health weave together the strands of our ecosystems and communities, as well as the people who work within them. We will only be able to fully protect animal, human, and ecosystem health when we understand how the strands connect to form the greater pattern.

## THE ARTIST

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Rose Laynbalaynba is an indigenous Yolngu woman from the Milingimbi community. Milingimbi is an island in the Arafura Sea, about half a kilometer from the central Arnhem Land coast of the Northern Territory, Australia. Milingimbi forms part of the Crocodile Islands. The Yolngu people are identified by smaller clan groups, and Laynbalaynba's clan group is the Gupapuyngu.

In addition to practicing the art traditions of the Yolngu people, Rose Laynbalaynba is a highly regarded and accredited professional interpreter with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. Her particular translating expertise

lies in the health, legal, and court arenas. She translates between English and Burarra, as well as English and Djambarrpuyngu. She also speaks the Yanhangu, Kriol, and Tjinang dialects.

### Cover Art

*Warrnyu—The Fruit Bats* (2005) by Rose Laynbalaynba, acrylic on canvas, 125 cm × 81 cm. The painting is reproduced with the permission of Rose Laynbalaynba, the artist; the Mimi Arts and Craft Aboriginal Corporation; and John and Isobel Mackenzie, the owners of the painting.

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