ART WINNER NAMED AT CONVENTION CENTRE OPENING CELEBRATION

An Arnhem Land artist has beaten 124 other entries to win the third annual Togart Contemporary Art Award, Chief Minister Paul Henderson announced tonight.

Arnhem Land artist Djirrirra Wunungmurra was named the winner of the $15,000 prize at a ceremony held at the Darwin Convention Centre as part of a five-day community celebration.

“The new Convention Centre and the Waterfront development is changing the face of Darwin, creating a vibrant lifestyle precinct that will be a great destination for locals and tourists alike,” Mr Henderson said.

“These awards are the culmination of a commitment from both the Territory Government and developer the Toga Group, to make the Waterfront more than just a collection of buildings by using art to add beauty and vibrancy to the precinct.

“The first of 33 pieces of public art to be installed at the Waterfront under a joint partnership between Toga and the Government was unveiled this week, and the Togart Awards take that commitment from Toga further.

“Djirrirra Wunungmurra’s Dhalwangu Gapu 5 Memorial Poles is a worthy winner of this year’s prize and I commend her on the piece.”

This year’s competition was the biggest yet, with 125 pieces submitted and 33 finalists selected for an exhibition on show at the Convention Centre.

Executive Chairman of Toga Group, Mr Ervin Vidor, said the Toga Group was honoured to be part of the delivery of the art commitment to the Waterfront.

“These are exciting times for arts in Darwin with the high quality of the Togart Awards on display and the recent unveiling of the first piece of public art for the precinct,” Mr Vidor said.

“Congratulations to Djirrirra Wunungmurra for her stunning piece and sincere thanks to our distinguished judges for accepting the most difficult role of choosing the winning entry for 2008.”

All the pieces entered in this year’s Togart Awards will be on display in a free exhibition at the Darwin Convention Centre until 6 July 2008, and will tour Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek later in the year.
Djirrirra has been painting the traditional designs of her clan for well beyond a decade and living the tradition all her life at Gangan, the source of her work. Her father was Yanggarriny, one of the truly great Yolgnu artists and on whose painting he had Djirrirra learn the skills of the mawat – the fine human hair paintbrush. In this she has followed her near-pedantic style of her father and since his death in 2003 she has successfully embarked in making a name for herself.

She is one of the senior artists working out of Gangan today and continues to develop a following. In 2007 she was chosen to participant in ‘Cross Currents: Focus of Australian Contemporary Art’ at the MCA.

Djirrirra paints water with straight lines. The designs generally refer to the sacred waters around Gangan and differing states such as levels of salinity or silt contamination and flow. Encased in these strong lines is the structure of the fish trap made during Mirrawar (early dry season) with Tangan (paperbark) and wooden stakes.

This is the Buyku of fish trap area which is ‘company’ land ie: shared by all the people who live by/sing the river.). The Dhalwangu and allied groups who participate in this song cycle and fishing activity are hunting Baypinga (Saratoga) as does the Gany’tjurr (reef heron) which they identify with as the archetypal Yirritja hunter.