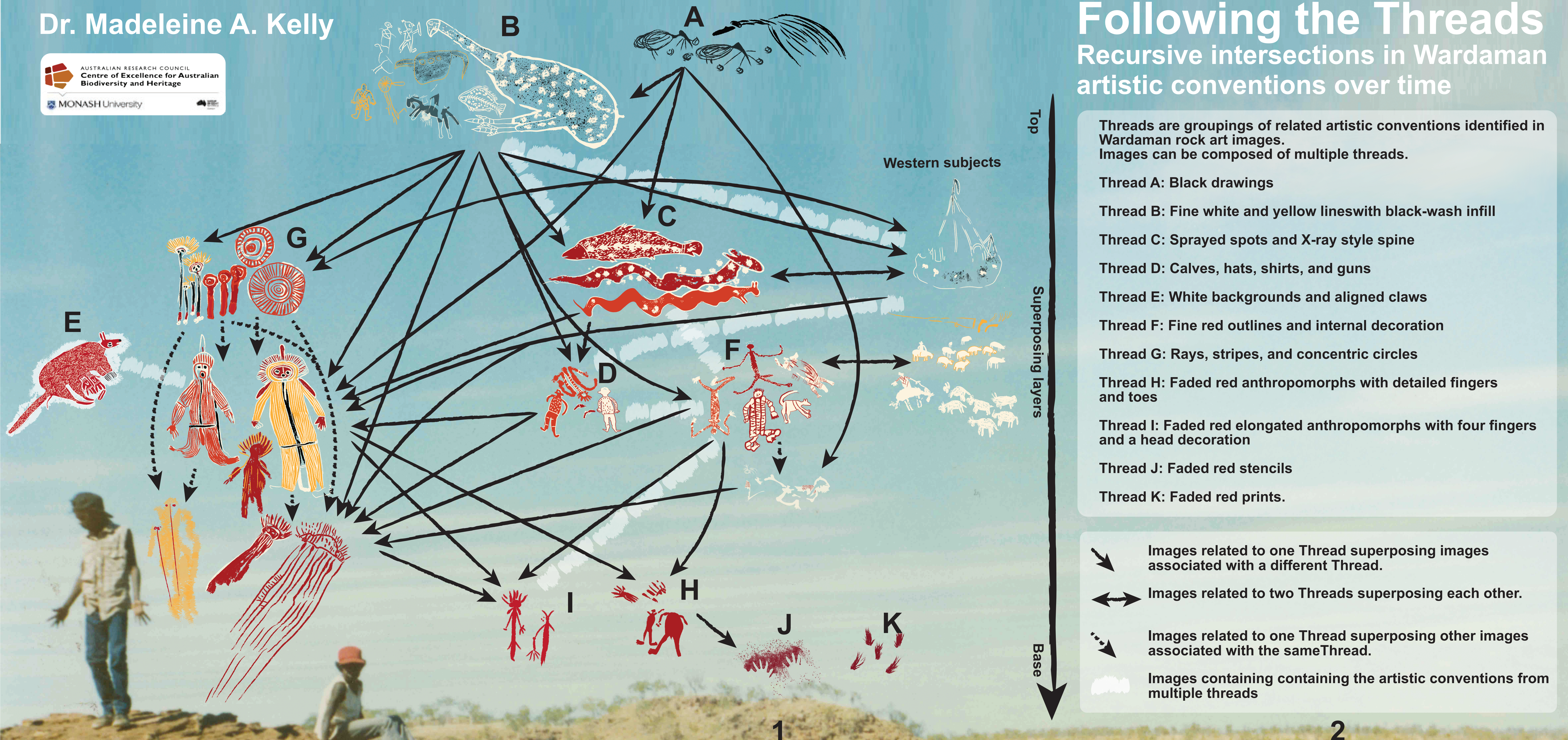


Following the Threads

Recursive intersections in Wardaman artistic conventions over time



- Threads are groupings of related artistic conventions identified in Wardaman rock art images. Images can be composed of multiple threads.
- Thread A: Black drawings
 - Thread B: Fine white and yellow lines with black-wash infill
 - Thread C: Sprayed spots and X-ray style spine
 - Thread D: Calves, hats, shirts, and guns
 - Thread E: White backgrounds and aligned claws
 - Thread F: Fine red outlines and internal decoration
 - Thread G: Rays, stripes, and concentric circles
 - Thread H: Faded red anthropomorphs with detailed fingers and toes
 - Thread I: Faded red elongated anthropomorphs with four fingers and a head decoration
 - Thread J: Faded red stencils
 - Thread K: Faded red prints.

- Images related to one Thread superposing images associated with a different Thread.
- Images related to two Threads superposing each other.
- Images related to one Thread superposing other images associated with the same Thread.
- Images containing the artistic conventions from multiple threads

1

Related spatial patterns and temporal trends emerged from the analysis of the artistic conventions of 177 rock art sites across Wardaman Country. Characterising specific artistic conventions within Wardaman rock paintings and mapping the presence of those conventions with Correspondence Analysis identified a number of related conventions. A Harris Matrix analysis of superpositions at 22 of the largest sites then revealed patterns in the distribution of those conventions across time.

However, the analysis did not show clearly distinct 'styles'. Rather, entangled threads of repeated associations between artistic conventions. These related artistic conventions have been labelled Threads.

The 11 Threads are recursive and intermixed; they intersect, overlap, and occur concurrently, changing over time. They represent a small portion of the images analysed. Two broader temporal trends also contribute to the relative sequencing:

- an increase in red-orange pigment in paintings and retouching in the top few layers of site sequences.
- An introduction of Western subjects following the arrival of Europeans to the region in the late 1800s.

2

The Threads are composed of entanglements between artists, their social and historical context, and the art already on the rock.

Threads trace the relationships that compose images just as anthropological genealogies trace the kinship relationships that comprised people. For Wardaman people, these kinship relationships trace not just human blood descent and marriages but also skins and responsibilities to ancestors, Dreamings, and Country. Rock art is part of these kinship relationships in an active way.

Reconceptualising the grouping of artistic conventions as interwoven threads rather than blocs of styles brings archaeological methodologies more in line with these Indigenous relational philosophies, allowing for a categorical analysis of images—which provide insight into changing relationships to place and people—while emphasising the relationships that comprise them.

Each thread tells a story (that are explored further in my thesis) which is interconnected with the stories of other threads, much like the web of Dreaming tracks that comprise Country, Law, and people.

Through multiple layers of contextual knowledge, these stories can provide a multivocal, and multivalent understanding of the relationships between artists and broader artistic, social, and Dreaming frameworks.