



# Indigenous Uramat Identity

Papua New Guinea, est. 2012



## Day

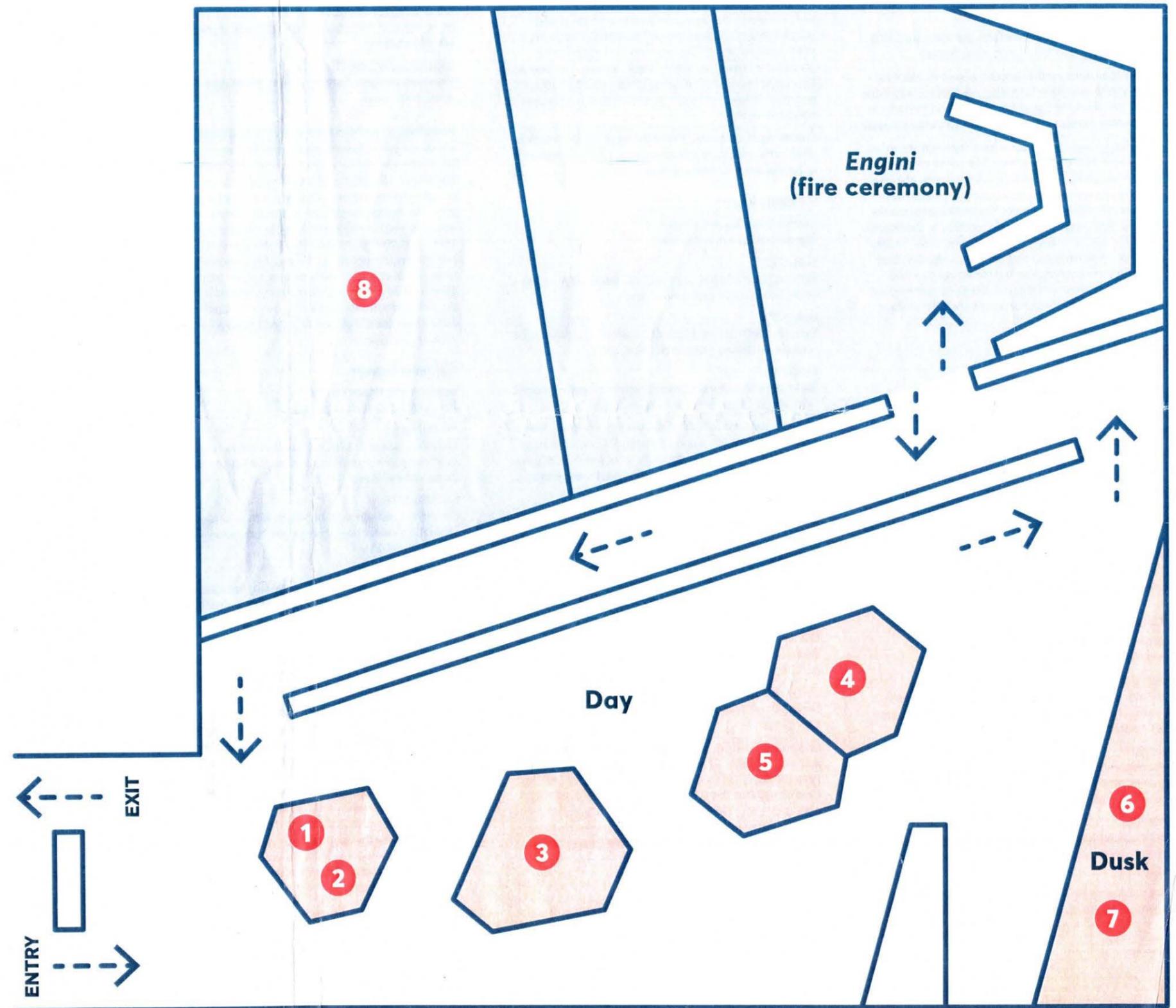
Day masks are the domain of the whole community: men, boys, women and children. There are many day masks, and each type is accompanied by singing, drumming and rapid two-step movements executed either in a line or around an object, such as a fire.

There are very strict fasting rules for a daytime dance. The most dramatic and extreme are for the *Madaska* (daytime performances), where dancers may fast up to two weeks before they perform in their *mandas* masks. During the performance, if something goes wrong – such as the mask being dropped due to fatigue – it is said bad luck, even death, may befall the transgressor.

Other dances are created and performed purely for fun.

## Engini (fire ceremony)

Both men and women have masks designed for night performances, known as *Engini*. These spectacular ceremonies are held around a large fire, accompanied by an orchestra, and may last the entire night. There is a very strict hierarchical order of dancers who present themselves to the audience and perform around the fire.



Lazarus Eposia (Chairman)  
Uramat Clan  
Papua New Guinea b.1981

With:  
Gideon Kakabin (Historian/Co-curator), Gunantuna people, Papua New Guinea 1956–2018  
Judy Kakabin (Project Co-ordinator), Gunantuna people, Papua New Guinea b.1967  
Glegn Burua (Camera), Gunantuna people, Papua New Guinea b.1997  
Garett Low (Audio), Gunantuna people, Papua New Guinea b.1981  
Juan Low (Camera), Gunantuna people, Papua New Guinea b.1978  
Joseph Yass (Camera), Uramat Clan, Papua New Guinea b.1995  
Keith Armstrong (Visual Design and Video, QUT), United Kingdom/Australia b.1965  
David Bridie (Sound), Australia b.1962  
Harley Coustely (Lighting), Australia b.1991  
Joanne Kenny (Producer and Lecturer, QUT), Australia b.1959  
Andrew Robinson (Sound Design), Australia b.1983  
Support: Ian Boas, Anis Pitilalai, Tiolam Wawage (PNG); Rebekah Coffey, Kayne Hunnam, Grace Liu, Michael O'Sullivan (Australia)

*Uramat Mugas (Uramat Story Songs)* 2021  
Immersive installation with multichannel HD video: 16:9, colour, 7:1 surround sound, 20 minutes (looped)

Commissioned for APT10  
Curator: Ruth McDougall

Courtesy: The artists

*Uramat Mugas (Uramat Story Songs)* is a Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Project developed for display in 'The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' with the support of the Indigenous Uramat Identity Group of East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. The project was achieved with the assistance of the Queensland University of Technology Creative Industries and supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Cultural Diplomacy Grants Program.

## Day

### 1 Ngari Isaac

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Goramgi* 2017

*Mandas* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, cane, bark twine, wood, feathers

*Namengaqa* 2017

*Mandas* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, felt pen, bark twine, cane, feathers

The cycle of daytime performances – known as *Madaska* – in which spectacular *mandas* masks are danced, originated in the big forest behind the village of Wunga in the Uramat region. Gunantuna Elder Gideon Kakabin recounts the story:

Walking through the forest, a local man was drawn to the sound of singing by a lake. Curious, he climbed a tree overlooking the lake and, to his surprise, the lake turned into a village. As he watched in amazement, he saw the village people dancing with the big masks and singing songs of the masks. Somehow, the picture of the masks and songs imprinted in his mind ... a bird sounded a warning call and the spirits, realising they had been discovered, restored the village to a lake. When the man returned to his village, he arranged for the creation of *mandas* masks and the performance of the *Madaska* dance.

### 2 Ngari Isaac

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Ruqi* (barkcloth) 2017

Barkcloth

*Ruqi* (barkcloth) 2017

Barkcloth

The skin on each of the masks is made over a period of three weeks from the bark of a special tree named the *Gabulungi*. After cutting the tree, men scrape off the outer bark, laying it over a log to soften it with beaters made from clam shells or, more recently, a knife handle. The rhythmic sound of the beating reverberates through the forest as the cloth becomes longer, softer and finer.

### 3 Ngari Isaac

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, wood, bark twine, cane, wood, feathers

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, wood, bark twine, cane, wood, feathers

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, wood, bark twine, cane, wood, feathers

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, cane, wood, bark twine, feathers

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, cane, wood, bark twine, feathers

*Varhit* 2017

*Varhit* mask and *ururaga* (aerial): barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, cane, wood, bark twine, feathers

The Uramat believe in a parallel universe where spirits exist in a world identical to, or a replica of, the physical world. A person living in the real world has a counterpart in the spiritual world. This counterpart can be both a protector and avenger. In their daily routines, the Uramat are fully conscious of the existence of their counterpart spirits and must follow regulations to ensure that the two worlds coexist in harmony.

Consisting of a face mask with a long aerial, the *Varhit* is often performed for public occasions, such as a wedding or the opening of a new building.

### 4 Willie Isaac

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Guki* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, wood, lichen moss, bark twine, cane

*Guki* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, wood, lichen moss, bark twine, cane

*Guki* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, wood, lichen moss, bark twine, cane

*Guki* is a playful dance that tells the story of small frog. According to the lyrics sung, someone has left this frog some cooked food to eat and it does not like it, so it leaves the food and enters the water to find something more appetising. Now it feels happy.

### 5 Willie Isaac

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Guman* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, wood, coconut husk, bark twine

*Guman* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, wood, coconut husk, bark twine

*Guman* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, wood, coconut husk, bark twine

Originating in Wunga village, this mask references the snail and is used within a line dance, where the feet are used to keep the dancer in time with the bamboo orchestra. The Uramat say that this is a dance move that you are born with, and is very difficult for an outsider to learn. When the dancers are dressed, the entire body is covered in patterns, as well as the mask, to highlight the complexity of the dancers' integrated body movements.

## Dusk

### 6 Paul Sape

Uramat Clan, Mega Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Irhu* and *Sapki* (pole) 2017

*Irhu* mask and pole: barkcloth with natural pigments, cane, wood, bark twine

*Irhu* and *Sapki* (pole) 2017

*Irhu* mask and pole: barkcloth with natural pigments, cane, wood, bark twine

*Irhu* and *Sapki* (pole) 2017

*Irhu* mask and pole: barkcloth with natural pigments, cane, wood, bark twine

Performed at dusk around a small fire, *Irhu* masks embody a group of primarily benevolent spirit figures who inhabit the physical world but cannot be seen. The Uramat believe that the *Irhu* live in special locations in the bush, with actual gardens and footpaths, and that they have the power to change the sizes of objects or the outcomes of activities, like hunting and fishing. As the *Irhu* are the twin of humans, the masks, with their barkcloth skin and fibrous hair, are uncannily familiar. Masked *Irhu* dancers carry large stalks of sugar cane and wear a *bilum* (string bag) filled with valuables, such as bejel nut and lime. During the *Irhu* performance, women run after the dancers to steal these items. Believed to be good-natured, the *Irhu* show no annoyance.

### 7 Paibe Tagaun

Uramat Clan, Ngoari Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Sivirhitki* 2016

*Sivirhitki* mask with skirt: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, bark twine, synthetic twine, natural fibres

*Sivirhitki* 2016

*Sivirhitki* mask with skirt: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, bark twine, synthetic twine, natural fibres

*Sivirhitki* 2016

*Sivirhitki* mask with skirt: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, bark twine, natural fibres

*Sivirhitki* 2016

*Sivirhitki* mask with skirt: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, bark twine, natural fibres

In Gaulim village on the Gazelle Peninsula, the arresting *Sivirhitki* emerge as part of evening ceremonies, preceding the celebrated male *Engini* (fire dance). Tribal dances were discouraged by missionaries, but in 1973, after a break of nearly 70 years, the women's dance ceremony and making of women's masks were revived by male Elder Marsang of Kainagunan. Growth- and fertility-oriented designs related to gardening decorate the masks, which are also distinguished by the use of a fringe of beaten pandanus fibre which, when worn with a skirt of the same material, completely enshrouds the dancer and enhances their rhythmic movements.

## Engini (fire ceremony)

### 8 Tade Boas

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Ebanit* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, wood, bark twine

*Qawat* or *kavat* are performed as part of the Uramat's pulsating night ceremonies in which spirit figures dance into and around a huge bonfire. The Uramat believe that the numbers of *kavat* dancers may increase during the night, as additional dancers enter the arena from the spirit world. In addition to the role they play in the initiation of young men, the evening *Engini* (fire dances) are performed to prevent these spirits causing havoc in the physical realm.

### 8 Paul Kivung

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Slavam* c.2017

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, wood, bark twine

### 8 Allan Muvana

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Gueradingi* 2016

*Kavat* mask with three heads: barkcloth with natural pigments, texta, wood, bark twine, cane

### 8 Stanley Robin

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Suqeimarhauvaski* c.2017

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, texta, cane, wood, bark twine

### 8 Febuar Samuel

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Qasingit* c.2017

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, cane, wood, bark twine

*Rangi* c.2017

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, cane, wood, bark twine

### 8 Elias Toban

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Luski* 2017

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, cane, wood, bark twine

### 8 Febuar Toban

Uramat Clan, Nguarhi Family  
Papua New Guinea b. unknown

*Manengmatka* 2016

*Kavat* mask: barkcloth with natural pigments, cane, wood, bark twine

*Ngoari* (Bamboo drum) 2017

Bamboo, hollowed

*Ngoari* (Bamboo drum) 2017

Bamboo, hollowed

*Ngoari* (Bamboo drum) 2017

Bamboo, hollowed, with synthetic polymer paint

The Uramat utilise rapid musical timing in all of their dance sequences. The *Engini* dances and some of the daytime dances are accompanied by a drum which consists of bamboo logs of varying lengths. These are held upright, and their closed ends dropped in time on wooden platforms to the accompaniment of voices. The timing of these *Ngoari* (bamboo drums) not only keeps the orchestra in time, but also provides a rhythm for the dancers' feet and body movements to follow. A dancer is always listening for the pattern and changes in the beat.

*Qarakparhaqi* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, bamboo, wood

*Qarakparhaqi* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, bamboo, wood

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Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, bamboo, wood

*Qarakparhaqi* c.2017

Barkcloth with natural pigments, synthetic polymer paint, bamboo, wood