Chief Minister Paul Henderson announced a Tiwi artwork by renowned artist Jean Baptiste Apuatimi would be presented to US President Barack Obama to mark his historic visit to Darwin.

The painting was chosen as a gift to the President because of the Tiwi Islanders unique connection to the Bombing of Darwin, which is one of the things he is coming to Darwin to acknowledge.

Jean Baptiste Apuatimi is an internationally acknowledged artist and a senior Tiwi woman of Bathurst Island.

The painting is a representation of Tiwi body markings that feature in traditional Tiwi ceremonies.

The painting has been sent to US Protocol people and President Obama will be told about the gift.

The gift features a plaque that reads:

Presented to The Honourable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
by  
The Honourable Paul Henderson MLA  
Chief Minister of the Northern Territory  
Australia  
To mark the visit to Darwin  
17 November 2011

Background on artist:

Jean Baptiste Apuatimi is regarded as one of the Australian nation’s senior Aboriginal female artists and, as such, her work is a worthy gift to our important visitor, the President of the United States.

However, such a gift should not be regarded as a mere “present”, but as part of millennia old ritual exchange traditions in which important visitors from other clans/tribes/nations would be presented with gifts to take back to their home country.
As a senior woman from the Tiwi language group this painting is—in a very real sense—a gift.

The Tiwi people have had a long relationship with Darwin’s Traditional Owners, the Larrakia, both commonly known as "salt water people". The impact of World War II on the Tiwi was significant. A Tiwi man was the first Australian to capture an enemy serviceman on Australian land. He was shot down over Bathurst Island. To this day, “the Bombing of Darwin Dance” is re-enacted by the Tiwi people.

The Bombing of Darwin, of course, has important resonances with the American people, who lost so many lives on that fateful day.

Born in 1940, Jean Baptiste began painting—as is so often the case with senior Aboriginal artists—later in life, beginning work at Tiwi Design in 1997. She has had 12 solo exhibitions in Australia and overseas. Her work is held in many major art collections around the world, including the Kelton Foundation, the Kluge-Ruhe collection, both in the USA, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, and the Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, USA. Jean is the custodian of an arts practice in her Tiwi traditions of art and culture which was passed on from her late husband Declan Apuatimi.

As a contemporary artist Jean draws upon the traditions of Tiwi body painting and ceremonial practice to inform her work.

Jean and Declan passed on their artistic talent to daughters Maria Josette Orsto, Carmelina Puantalura (deceased), their son Declan Apuatimi and granddaughter Natalie Puantalura. In 2007, Jean was included in the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial exhibition at the National Art Gallery of Australia, “Culture Warriors.”

To quote Jean: “I love my painting, I love doing it. My husband Declan Apuatimi taught me to paint. The designs are ones he taught me - he said ‘one day you will be an artist, you will take my place’. Now I am doing that. Painting makes me alive.”

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