



# CLEVER MEN

MELBOURNE

26 OCTOBER – 6 DECEMBER 2024

# CLEVER MEN

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Harry Tjutjuna  
Dickie Minyintiri  
Tiger Palpatja

**D · C**

## INTRODUCTION

Harry Tjutjuna (c.1930–2019), Dickie Minyintiri (c.1915–2014) and Tiger Palpatja (c.1920–2012) are the most significant Pitjantjatjara artists of their generation; their traditional lands, when combined, spanned the length of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands). All three men shared parallel lives and experience: they were born in the bush, and all lived a traditional life before moving to Ernabella Mission; they were senior lawmen and respected ngangkari – traditional healers. They all started painting at a late age during the mid-2000s, each developing a unique painterly style, and, at the peak of their careers, their cultural authority was unmatched, except by each other. It is truly a great honour for D’Lan Contemporary, Melbourne, to present *Clever Men: Harry Tjutjuna, Dickie Minyintiri and Tiger Palpatja*, a powerful single-owner collection of enormous cultural value and aesthetic beauty.

In Australian First Nations art history, the focus over the last fifty years has been on the phenomenon of the contemporaneous expression of the oldest continuing culture, not as one singular movement but as multiple identities shaped by regional and cultural specificity. Although the dominant narrative starts in the Western Desert at Papunya, the birthplace of sophisticated abstraction that took the global world by storm, regions such as the APY Lands have specific and equally significant luminaries who deserve similar recognition. In the turn towards a global art history, the Australian First Nations’ perspective was first embraced for its outwardly abstract ambiguity; these three artists, however, explicitly engage with overtly personal and cultural themes at the heart of their practice by asserting transcendent symbolic forms.

Abstraction has been king in the rise of Australian First Nations art internationally. Yet, these men’s approach to painting can be likened to portraiture, especially in works by Tiger Palpatja and Harry Tjutjuna, where the figures of principal ancestral beings are central to the composition. These beings are not only the chief protagonists in the Tjukurpa but also represent the artists themselves. Each painting traverses ancestral and autobiographical narratives to reveal mystical and spiritual aspects through their mythopoeic identities, which are shaped by the connection to their ancestral heritage.

Possessing powers that can be bestowed or developed, ngangkaris are revered and feared for their specialised skills,

which are employed to maintain the spiritual, emotional and physical health of their communities. Ngangkari are also known as ‘clever men and women’ who are gifted with healing touch and foresight and inspire faith and wellbeing through traditional practices. They have the power of sight, or clairvoyance; they grapple with and expel dangerous mamu-spirit forces; they physically remove objects from an ailing body; and they are present at the end stage of life to usher the spirit from one body into the next.

The totem associated with the artist’s birthplace and identity also informs and animates the figurative beings in the paintings in profoundly personal ways. The ancestral Spider Man is also Harry Tjutjuna, who, when painting his primary Tjukurpa, referenced himself – ‘I am the spider-man’, the ancestral ngangkari who is also responsible for the creation of his birth site and surrounding Country. The water serpent – the Wati Wanampi – of Piltati so closely ties Tiger Palpatja to his Country that it dominates not only his canvases but also his identity and physical body, Tiger revealing that he would feel the snake entering and exiting his body as if it were at times part of him. Dickie Minyintiri approached his painting from the position of a ceremonial leader; his paintings are at once maps of places and journeys taken, spiritual tracks of the ancestors, and remnants of the songs and dances that pass youths into manhood.

These three clever men embody a mythological status in art and life that only a few reach. They are also artists of a specific generation that will never recur, for each of the men shared lived experiences of first contact and modernity’s jolt as it swept across their lands. Therefore, this collection of works is historically and aesthetically significant and captures a raw, potent cultural knowledge and spiritual perspective unique to ngangkari.

### VANESSA MERLINO

Head of Research, D’Lan Contemporary





## HARRY TJUTJUNA: SPIDER MAN

Harry Tjutjuna was born in Pitjantjatjara Country around 1930 at a place known as Walytjatjara, north of Pipalyatjara, Mt Davies, near the western border of South Australia and the Northern Territory. As a young man, he moved with his family around the desert that stretches across the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. He would eventually move to Pukatja (Ernabella) to the far east, where the Ernabella Mission had been established in 1937. He went to school there and later worked as a bore sinker, fencer, gardener and stockman. He tended to the animals, caring for the sheep and mustering cattle for many years. The utilitarianism of mission life did not conflict with Tjutjuna's cultural obligations, however, and he travelled extensively throughout central Australia on ceremonial business.

Eventually, with his many wives and large family, Tjutjuna moved back to his Country in the far north-west, living in and around Irrunytju (Wingellina) in Western Australia and Pipalyatjara in South Australia. Harry's seniority and extensive knowledge of Tjukurpa associated with the land surrounding Pipalyatjara were unmatched by most during this time. Tjutjuna became a full-time artist at Ernabella Arts before moving permanently to Pipalyatjara in 2008, where he continued to paint for Ninuku Arts until 2016 when he moved into aged care back in Ernabella.

From his residence in the community of Pipalyatjara, Tjutjuna became Ninuku Art's most important artist and, at the peak of his painting career, was one of the most senior lawmen living and working in the community. His Tjukurpa subjects from his Country include Wati Ngintaka – Perentie Lizard Man – and Mutata Tjukurpa – Ant Men. However, Tjutjuna was to become more well known for his bold and provocative images associated with the Wati Wanka – Spider Man – and Wati Nyiru – Nyiru Man – who perpetually chases the women of the Kungkarangkalpa – Seven Sisters.

Spider Man is a powerful ngangkari who uses his webs to heal and treat skin injuries and abrasions. Tjutjuna describes his ancestral incarnation as a 'clever man' who hides in his nest when the rain comes and can change colour at night. Wati Wanka has many wives and children, represented by the round forms that occupy and surround the central figure of his canvases, and are a recurring motif across Tjutjuna's body of work.

This preoccupation with the female form is a thread that ran through and consolidated Tjutjuna's life as an artist, drawing the narratives together. Tjutjuna was a widower, having lost his wives by the time he started painting in earnest in 2005. Like Wati Wanka, he spent the rest of his life looking for a woman, the allusiveness of women signified by the marks left in the sand by their seated bottoms, which are the only remnant of the exclusive nature of their gatherings.

*This is a big spider man. Wati paluru Ngangkari (a male traditional healer). He is a powerful and clever man. When rain comes, he hides in his nest. At night time he changes colour. His name is Wati Wanka (Spider Man). Minyma wanka Tjuta (referring to a group of female spiders) are the women and all the children for this man. That's the story. I am the spider man.*<sup>1</sup> – Harry Tjutjuna

This permanent reference to women reflects the obsessive curiosity and preoccupation the Wati Nyiru had with the Seven Sisters. The lustful Nyiru is another favourite subject of Tjutjuna, painted with relish and humour from the male perspective, a 'three-legged man' floating, misdirected and frenzied, in a sea of female shadows. Always lusting after the women, Nyiru was driven to madness, the women teasing him as he relentlessly hunted them and shapeshifted to come up with ways to trick them in the hope that he would one day capture and possess one of them.

Although the subject of Wati Nyiru and the Seven Sisters is a cautionary, often menacing, tale, Tjutjuna's identification with Nyiru can be read as sympathetic. Tjutjuna's Nyiru appears small, harmless and inconveniently weighed down by his astonishingly large physical burden. Tjutjuna paints Wati Nyiru's desire for the women as one that is never realised. Instead, their forms are admired within the benign boundaries of the canvas. The round shapes always occupy the surface as dancing apparitions around the masculine yet chastened ancestral figure.

The gravity of Tjutjuna's themes, which border on being dark subjects, is buoyed by his bold colour palette. Characteristic of the APY Lands style, colour is employed, particularly by these senior men, to emphasise the power of the Tjukurpa, which is the responsibility of its custodians. Wati Nyiru and Wati Wanka are the two subjects that appear most frequently throughout Tjutjuna's paintings. They may be the singular subject of a

canvas, but at times, they share space, or appear with one of Tjutjuna's other ancestral identifiers – Wati Ngintaka – the giant Perentie Goanna Man. In these canvases, the ancestral beings congregate as men and as differing aspects of the artist's identity, personality or sense of self.

Wati Ngintaka, Wati Nyiru and Wati Wanka did not appear together until later in Tjutjuna's career. The congregation of these three figures acts like a medley of narratives in his repertoire. Yet, whether these three ancestors ever cross paths or occupy significant space in creation time is ambiguous. Excavating these truths is neither explicit nor necessary; rather, what is essential is the creative right to demonstrate flexibility in telling the spiritual narrative that only a man of cultural seniority can.

In his last years, Tjutjuna would express concern for the future care and maintenance, on his passing, of the many Tjukurpa stories to which he was dedicated.

*Old generation are here now and I am old generation too. Lots of old generation have passed away. What are we going to do? What happens when I pass away? New generation got to learn Tjukurpa.*<sup>2</sup>

Tjutjuna, the Spider Man, passed away in Ernabella in 2019.

### VANESSA MERLINO

1. Drawn from Ninuku Arts documentation.
2. Harry Tjutjuna, quoted in *Manta Iritijangku Nguna Kutjupalakutu: Ancient Land New Territory*, Ninuku Arts, gallery nine5 and Harvey Art Projects, New York, 2012.

**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019  
Pitjantjatjara

*Spiderman* 2008  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
116 × 142 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. HT167-08  
Marshall Arts, Adelaide  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2010

AUD 12,000



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019

Pitjantjatjara

*Wanka – Spider* 2010

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

150 × 180 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at

Kalka, South Australia

Ninuku Arts, South Australia,

cat. no. 10329

ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore

Private Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above in 2012

AUD 18,000



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019

Pitjantjatjara

*Wanka – Spider* 2010

synthetic polymer paint

on canvas

109 × 93 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at

Kalka, South Australia

Ninuku Arts, South Australia,

cat. no. 10063

Raft Artspace, Alice Springs

Private Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above in 2010

**EXHIBITED***A Watiku Show*, Raft Artspace,

Alice Springs, 19 November –

4 December 2010

AUD 8,800



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati Ngintaka, Wati Nyiru  
and Wanka* 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
183 × 167 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Kalka, South Australia  
Ninuku Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. 11080  
Outstation Gallery, Darwin  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2011

**EXHIBITED**

*Five Strong Men*, Outstation  
Gallery, Darwin, 16 September –  
15 October 2011

AUD 20,000



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati Nyiru munu Wanka* 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
183 × 183 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Kalka, South Australia  
Ninuku Artists, South  
Australia, cat. no. 11207  
Raft Artspace, Alice Springs  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2011

AUD 22,000



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019  
Pitjantjatjara

*Mututa Tjukurpa* 2012  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
168 × 183 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Kalka, South Australia  
Ninuku Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. 12190  
Aboriginal & Pacific Arts, Sydney  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2014

**EXHIBITED**

*Painting the Land: New Works by  
Senior Ninuku Artists*, Aboriginal &  
Pacific Arts, Sydney, 25 August –  
15 September 2012

AUD 20,000



**HARRY TJUTJUNA**

circa 1930 – 2019  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati Ngintaka Tjukurpa* 2012  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
183 × 168 cm

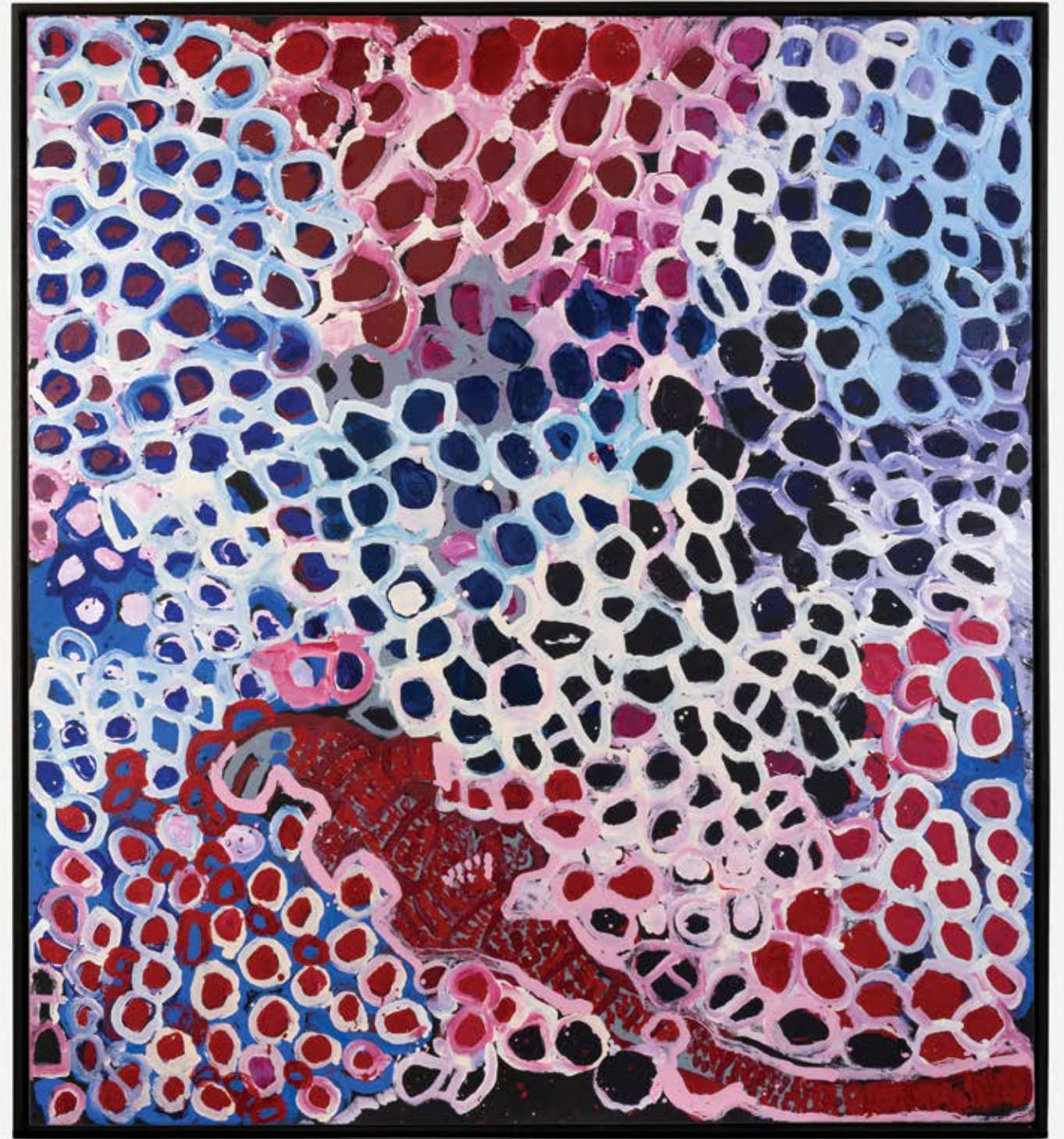
**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Kalka, South Australia  
Ninuku Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. 12229  
Raft Artspace, Alice Springs  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

**EXHIBITED**

*Ngintaka*, Raft Artspace in  
partnership with Ninuku Arts, Alice  
Springs, 6 – 29 September 2012

AUD 20,000





## DICKIE MINYINTIRI: PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

*I was given only one name when I was born and that is Minyintiri and white people gave me the name Dickie. My real and only name is Minyintiri and I am a ngangkari. I was a ngangkari as a child and have been known as 'Minyintiri the ngangkari' all my life. But you can call me Dickie Minyintiri.*<sup>1</sup>

Dickie Minyintiri was born in the bush at Pilpirinya in the Pitjantjatjara heartlands around the tri-state border region of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia in the centre of the continent. His birth – on the desert sand in a wiltja, a shelter of mulga boughs thatched with spinifex – predated written records and was estimated to have been around 1915–1920. Minyintiri became one of the oldest artists at Ernabella when, in 2005, he took up a paintbrush for the first time. No longer able to stride his Country, he could still travel there by singing the Inma – song cycles of the Tjukurpa – the Law and Dreaming – of his Country.

Minyintiri's paintings of the Wiilu Inma – the song and dance of the bush stone-curlew – held special significance for him, as he was a Traditional Owner and custodian of the Wiilu sacred site near his homeland of Puta Puta. He painted the men's night dance of this rare nocturnal bird with its distinctive loud, wailing cry that signalled the presence of water in the claypans and rockholes.

*Wiilu Tjukurpa, kapi tjuṯa, tjintjira tjuṯa.  
That night curlew song. Its rain filling up the claypans.  
The night curlew people celebrate the water.  
We all drank from claypans before there were billycans.*  
– Minyintiri

### ALL THE PAINTINGS HAVE TJUKURPA IN THEM

Dickie Minyintiri proudly spoke of the Tjukurpa in his paintings. He began by naming the places in his Country, his ngura walytja – places of his spirit, places created by his totemic ancestors, in the custodianship of his extended family. These were the birthplace names of his grandfathers and grandmothers, fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles – Arangna, Utjuri, Kalka, Pipalyatjara, Nyumpantja, Yalta Yalta, Puta Puta, Malara, Kinanarna, Ilitjata, Mapanpa, Kunatjara. Minyintiri knew this Country intimately and sensually through the soles of his bare feet from walking hundreds of kilometres as a child and young

man, guided by the unerring visual spatial knowledge and mnemonic songlines taught to him by his kinsmen.

*Tjukurpa is the Dreaming, not made up by men. Men were given the Tjukurpa, from the Creation Ancestors (the Dreaming). Men sing up the Dreaming through their Inma performance.*<sup>2</sup>  
– Minyintiri

Tjukurpa, 'the Dreaming', is the Anangu ground of all being, it is the sustaining life force of creation and the continuous being of all things. In the beginning time, these powerful animal-human beings created the Country, transmogrifying into rocks, hills, valleys, waterholes and trees, and leaving edible foods and water sources for their descendants.

As a senior lawman, Dickie Minyintiri had authority to paint the Tjukurpa and Inma songlines of his Country: Kanyala – euro or hill kangaroo, Kaḷaya – emu, and Wiilu – bush stone-curlew. His rights and responsibilities to Country were expressed as a lawman, a ngangkari – traditional healer – and later as an artist. Ngangkari speak of painting Tjukurpa as part of their work healing and nurturing walytja – their extended families.

*Ngangkari are gifted with healing hands. Mara ala – healing hands.  
These hands work with spirit.  
Ngangkari use their foresight, their eyesight and the touch of their hands.  
We also have paintings of Tjukurpa, culture, country, travel and mamu (bad spirits) ...  
All the paintings have Tjukurpa in them.*<sup>3</sup>

Dickie Minyintiri was taught healing ways early by his grandfather. He progressed through the Law to become a revered healer and leader of ceremonial Inma performance of his ancestral songlines. It was the public Inma, open for everyone to hear, that he sang as he painted, communicating the powerful spirit of his Country. His paintings hold multi-dimensional knowledge for his descendants and offer Westerners a partial view into the complexity and beauty of Tjukurpa.

### SONG AND DANCE ON THE PAINTED GROUND

Poised before a blank canvas, Dickie Minyintiri would pour his song into the paint – envisioning the men dancing ceremony on Country. Despite his deteriorating eyesight, his inner vision was clear as he confidently layered broad brushstrokes of paint, or

used puṅu – a stick to apply special marks. A puṅu stick or the hand is the traditional way coloured ochre designs are painted onto the bodies of men and women prior to dancing Inma. Using both techniques on his large canvas *Kanyalakutjina* (Euro–hill kangaroo tracks) that won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) 2011, Minyintiri painted the sound of men's Inma, the clapsticks and stamping dance reverberating powerfully.

*This is kuri-kuri design. Painted by men.  
The design of kuri-kuri, the sound of the song,  
round-around, round-around, round-around ...  
Kanyala–euro footprint body paint design is painted only by men.  
Men's song powerfully rings out for the women to hear.*  
– Minyintiri

The NATSIAA judges recognised the power of place in his work, saying Minyintiri's painting was a 'spontaneous and multi-layered expression of the artist's profound ancestral relationship to his country ... The opacity of harmonious, pale pigments and the dynamic reiteration of ancestral tracks through country, create a shimmering surface that radiates energy and spirituality'.<sup>4</sup>

### A CLEVER MAN OF MANY HATS

*I am a bush ngangkari. I'm wati putitja – a man of the bush.*<sup>5</sup>

Minyintiri was a man at home in many worlds. A nationally renowned artist in his elder years, he was a clever man of high intelligence, perspicacity and wit, a 'man of high degree' in knowledge of Pitjantjatjara Law and Tjukurpa. He was a skilled hunter, expert with spear and later rifle, a shepherd, a shearer, a bore worker, a miner, a policeman, a ranger, an expert puṅu (wood) carver, a tour guide and a loved father.

As a young man, Dickie Minyintiri was curious to learn about the new way of life at the Ernabella Mission. He combined traditional and new ways of life, continuing to participate fully in ceremonial life, performing Inma in the bush outskirts of Ernabella. Some dances were open to all the community, particularly those where young boys and girls were taught to dance. Dickie remembered these vividly and captured these happy communal scenes in his Inma Kanyala–euro and Kaḷaya–emu paintings.

*All the women and children go off hunting for meat, rabbit meat. They catch them and catch them and take them back to camp ... then they share the meat with the dancers. Some for the kids.*

*Alright kids, this meat is for you!*

*The men get the meat from the women, after the men have finished dancing.*

*This painting shows the men and boys, men and boys, standing in the smoke.*

*Little circles are boys, I painted these circles larger as the men.*

– Minyintiri

During the 1960s, Dickie and his wife Armunta moved west to the newly established government settlement at Amata. They were closer to their Country and he could visit his sacred places more frequently as the mining camp developed at Mt Davies. Dickie was a respected community leader and became one of the first police aides at Amata. During the 1970s, Minyintiri was a key figure in the Pitjantjatjara Council fight for land rights. He often wore his policeman's hat with his traditional red puṯuru headband to government meetings to signify his dual role as a 'policeman' in traditional and Western law – looking after Country and kin under both Aṅangu and whitefella law. He spoke often of the importance of Aṅangu men's traditional law and painted it powerfully as Watiku Tjukurpa Inma or Watiku Inma.

*Watiku walka, wati tjuṯaku walka kuri-kuri.*

*Men's designs, belonging to all initiated men, marks or strokes going round and round.*

*Walka Inma pulkala.*

*The painted designs increase the power of Inma.*

*Watiku laka, minymaku wiya.*

*Men's song and dance with clapping sticks,*

*This is not sung by women.*

– Minyintiri

In 1984, Dickie Minyintiri became one of the first Aṅangu Rangers at Uluru Kata Tjuṯa National Park. The rangers' hats were ex-Sydney Harbour Bridge toll collectors' peaked hats with official Aboriginal flag badges on the front. This hat was a proud statement of Aboriginal ownership of Uluru. Minyintiri with other senior Traditional Owners danced the Kaḷaya Inma at the

celebration of the Uluru handback to Aṅangu in 1985. This significant Inma in which boys are taught the men's stamping dance is captured in Minyintiri's *Kaḷaya Inma* paintings.

*Wati kalayangku tjitji winki kanyini; watingku tjitji utinyi, The male emu looks after lots of chicks; as men give life to children.*

– Minyintiri

Minyintiri's paintings of Tjukurpa song and dance are a vibrant visual library of song. He was a communicator between worlds, producing paintings that continue to speak to the world of the beauty and power of the ancient songlines of his Country.

#### DR DIANA JAMES

1. Dickie Minyintiri, in NPY Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation (NPYWC), *Traditional Healers of Central Australia: Ngangkari*, Magabala Books, Broome, 2013, p. 113.
2. Dickie Minyintiri interviews recorded and translated by Diana James, 2005–2011. (Note: all other Minyintiri quotes come from these interviews.)
3. Andy Tjilari et al., 'Introduction', in NPYWC, *Traditional Healers of Central Australia: Ngangkari*, 2013, pp. 16–19.
4. Jeremy Eccles, 'APY Triumph at NATSIAAS Again', *Aboriginal Art Directory, News, August 2011*, 2013. <https://news.aboriginalartdirectory.com/2011/08/apy-triumph-at-natsiaas-again.php> jupurrula (general painting).
5. Dickie Minyintiri, in NPYWC, *Traditional Healers of Central Australia: Ngangkari*, 2013, p. 116.

Dr Diana James is an Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Humanities and Arts at the Australian National University and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music at Adelaide University. Her research focus is the Indigenous song, story and dance of the Western Desert. Since 1975 she has worked as an applied anthropologist, fluent in Pitjantjatjara, with the Aṅangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) people in community arts, tourism, oral history translation, local governance and cultural heritage.



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Kanyalaku Tjina* 2008  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
120 × 90 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. DM217-08  
Marshall Arts, Adelaide  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2010

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 4 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 14,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati Wiilu-ku Inma Tjukurpa* 2010  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
100 × 170 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. 200-10 DM  
Aboriginal & Pacific Arts, Sydney  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2011

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 12 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Tjukurpa nyangatja ngananala unngu  
ngaranyi: These are our stories, they  
live inside us*, Aboriginal & Pacific  
Arts, Sydney, 25 June – 16 July 2011  
*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 40,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Watiku Tjukurpa* 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
97 × 179 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 524-11  
Short St Gallery, Broome  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

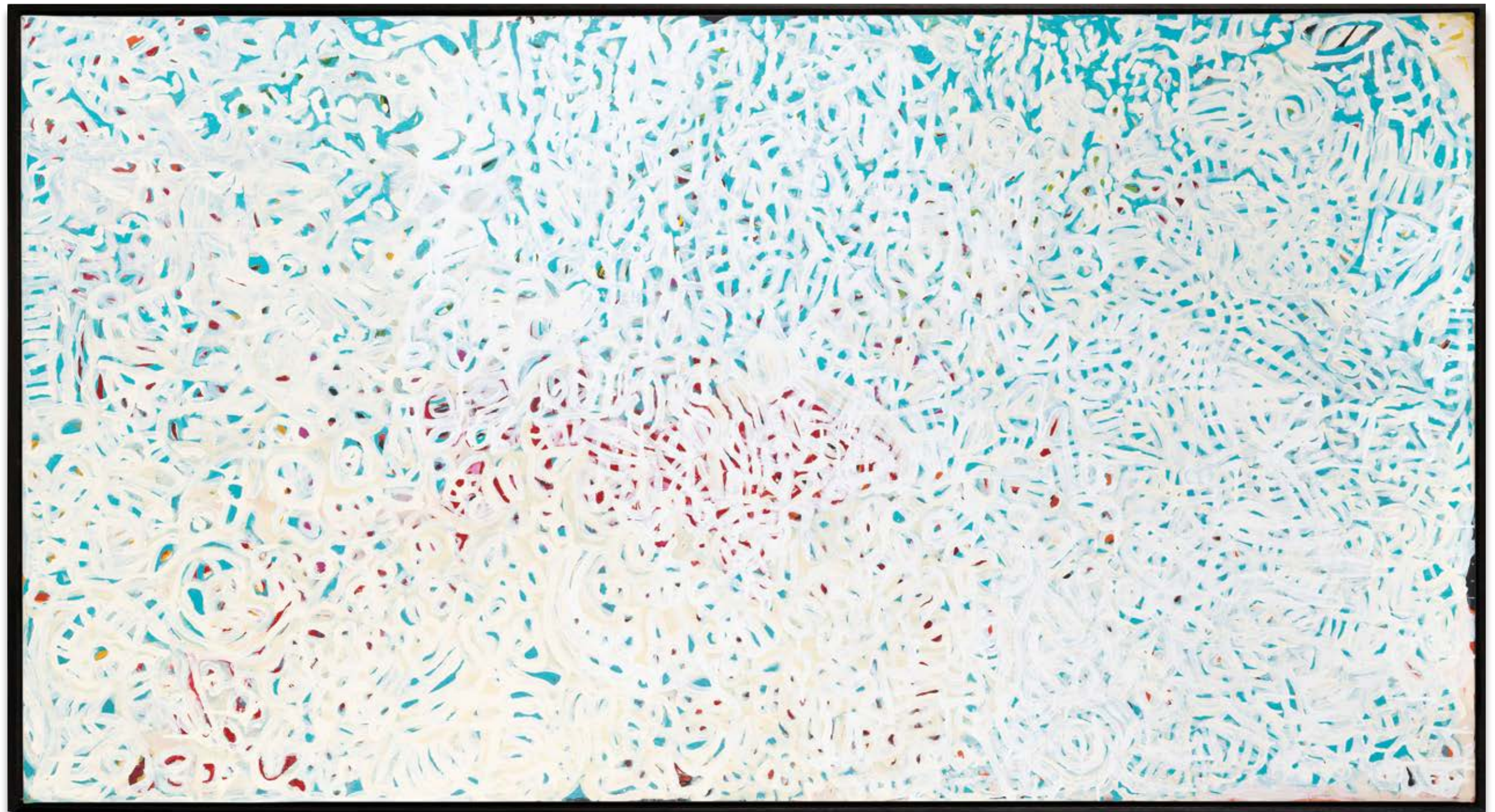
**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 22 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*One Song Different Tune: Artists of  
the APY & NG Lands*, Short St Gallery,  
Broome, 12 July – 9 August 2012  
*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 44,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014

Pitjantjatjara

*Wati-ku Inma* 2012

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

100 × 121 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 139-12  
Outstation Gallery, Darwin  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 26 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Tjamuku Kamiku Tjukurpa*, Outstation  
Gallery, Darwin, 13 April – 8 May 2012

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 25,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati-ku Inma Tjukurpa* 2013  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
120 × 182 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 512-12  
Marshall Arts, Adelaide  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2014

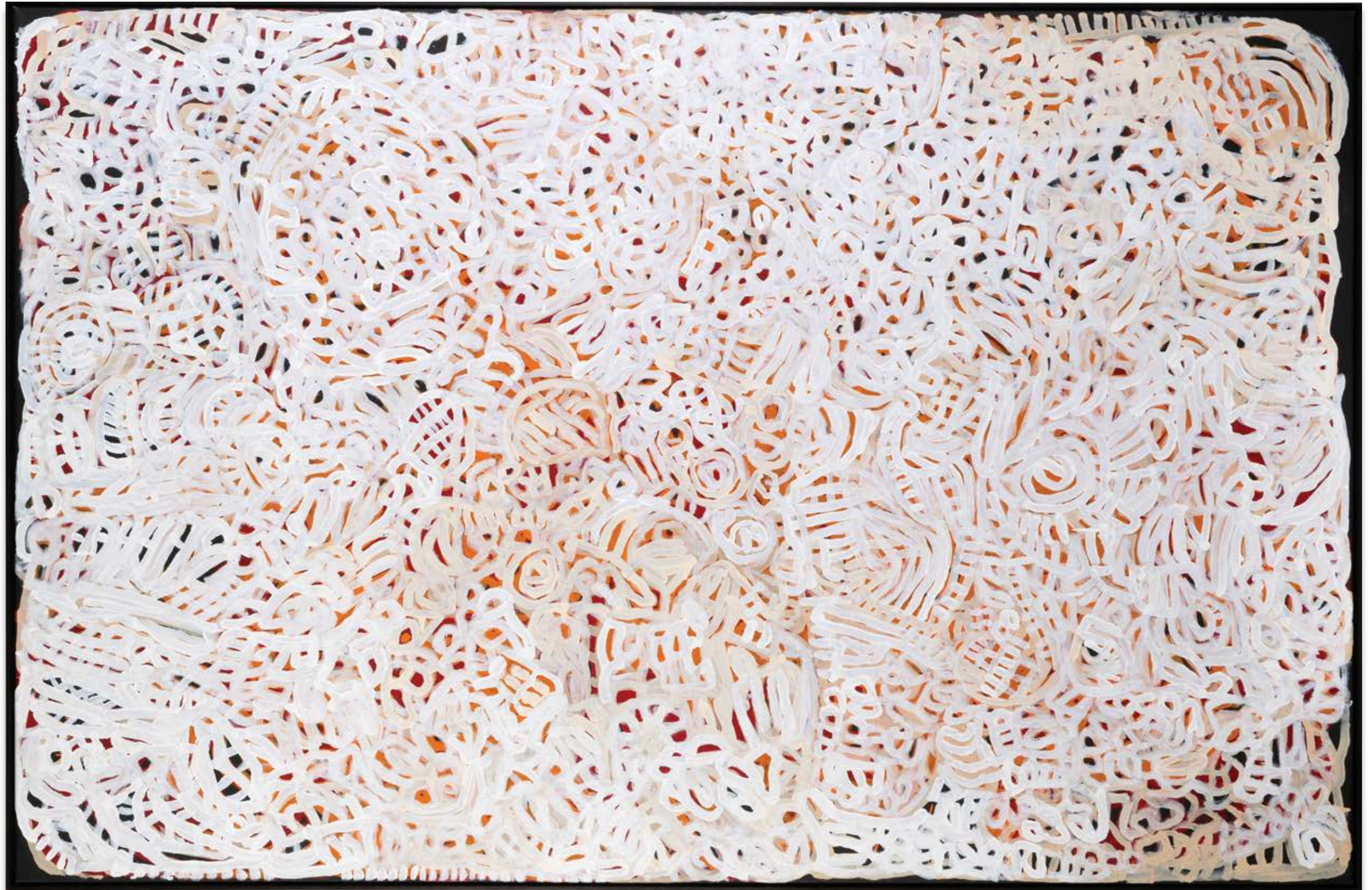
**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 40 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 50,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014

Pitjantjatjara

*Watiku Inma Tjukurpa* 2012

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

180 × 170 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 304-12  
Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 34 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Dickie Minyintiri, Pantjiti*  
*Lionel, Derek Thompson*,  
Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne,  
12 February – 1 March 2013  
*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 60,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wati-ku Inma Tjukurpa* 2013  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
180 × 170 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 614-12  
ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2013

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 36 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 60,000



**DICKIE MINYINTIRI**

circa 1915 – 2014  
Pitjantjatjara

*Watiku Inma* 2013  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
175 × 280 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Pukatja, South Australia  
Ernabella Arts, South  
Australia, cat. no. 181-13  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2013

**LITERATURE**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*, D'Lan  
Contemporary, Melbourne, p. 38 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Minyintiri: Life in Layered Time*,  
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne,  
25 March – 8 May 2021

AUD 180,000







## TIGER PALPATJA: WATI WANĀMPI

Tiger Palpatja was born in the bush at Piltati Creek around 1920 in his father's Country in north-western South Australia. As a very young boy, Palpatja was chosen to be a *ngangkari* – traditional healer – and grew up at Pukatja, where he first encountered Europeans, went to school and learned basic English. As a young man in Pukatja, Palpatja worked as a stockman and a shepherd and became a proficient shearer before he moved to Amata further west. A cattle station had been established at Amata in 1962 by the South Australian Government.

Palpatja initially produced *puṇu* – carved wooden objects – and spears, with lyrical designs – *walka* – burnt into their surfaces. *Puṇu*, meaning tree, wood or wooden objects, is a term that resonates with meaning for Anangu artists. The traditional skills of wood carving had found expression in pokerwork objects that have been a staple art practice for Anangu for decades. These art objects are associated with the 'open' stories that teach young children about Tjukurpa, where young women and men learn from *puṇu* through harvesting bush medicine and carving tools for everyday use. The prevalence of *puṇu* objects across the APY Lands reflects Anangu's initial hesitation to join the contemporary wave of painting that had started to the north in the Northern Territory's deserts.

Like the other authoritative men of the APY Lands, Palpatja was constrained from starting to paint due to the concerns raised by the revelation of secret and sacred aspects of men's Law in the work of the founding Papunya Tula movement. In the 1970s, many senior Anangu men spoke out against the open display of dangerous signs that were used symbolically in paintings exhibited in Alice Springs and Perth; the men regarded this as heretical. However, in 2003, a painting room was set aside for the men at Tjala Arts to maintain and document important ceremonies and Tjukurpa on their own terms, which gave rise to a distinct local aesthetic.

Palpatja's journey as a painter began in 2004, with his early mark-making displaying a raw, tentative quality reminiscent of the designs he would burn onto wooden carvings. Over time, his technique evolved into an animated and vigorous style. His passion for painting grew, leading to increasingly dynamic mark-making and a sophisticated sense of colour. After his debut exhibition in Melbourne in 2005, Tiger's career flourished, with

solo shows in Sydney and Melbourne, and he participated in various prestigious art awards. His work was featured in significant exhibitions highlighting the Anangu painting movement, such as *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law* at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide in 2010 and *Desert Country* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2010–2012.

Palpatja's work revolves around the rich and intricate creation story of his birthplace, Piltati, deeply connected to his personal and artistic identity. The Tjukurpa associated with this place is complex and nuanced, and is depicted using *walka* designs that are considered sacred under Pitjantjatjara customary law. The elaborate ancestral narrative explores the complex and evolving relationships involving nourishment, care and work, and intimacy between men and women. The story chronicles the escalating conflict between Wati Kutjara – two brothers – and their wives, Minyma Kutjara – two sisters – named Atatjara and Wanyinnta, which is forever embedded in the land's features, such as its vegetation, rocky formations, water sources and subterranean depths. This epic narrative of wrongdoing, transformation and justice unfolds to reveal itself beautifully through the artist's harmonious and distinctive compositions.

Palpatja's Wanampi paintings tell the story:

*Long ago, two brothers and their wives lived near Piltati. Every day, the women would hunt and bring food for their lazy husbands, who were only concerned with performing ceremonies. One day, frustrated, the women ate all the food they had gathered, which angered the men. To punish the women, the men transformed into wanampi – gigantic water serpents – empowered to travel above and below the ground and shape the landscape. The two men, disguised as serpents, tricked their wives into perpetually following their tracks and performing considerable fruitless digging. One brother provoked the women by exposing the end of his tail to entice them to hunt them. The younger sister fell for this and tried to grab the slippery tail; however, again and again, it escaped her grasp, and she eventually gave up.*

*The next day, the older sister, Atatjara, helped the younger sister dig to find the big wanampi they kept seeing but could never catch. After many days of digging, they dug a trench from Ataratjara to Piltati, now a 25 kilometre-long watercourse. The elder sister, Atatjara, excavated a pit, now the mouth of the Piltati gorge, which uncovered*

*the elder serpent. However, she was so frightened by its enormous coiled body that she hurled her stick at it, piercing the side of her disguised husband. The younger wanampi escaped and chased and swallowed Wanyinnta, the younger sister, while the injured snake rose in agony and swallowed his wife, Atatjara, at the gorge's mouth. The elder serpent is now a bloodwood tree; the lumps and swellings of the trunk represent the elder sister's body as it protrudes through the wanampi's skin, while the dry lateral limb symbolises her digging stick.<sup>1</sup> – Tiger Palpatja*

In many of Palpatja's artworks that delve into the Wanampi narrative, one or two snake figures command the length of the canvas. Palpatja's unique iconography is characterised by these massive, all-encompassing serpents, accompanied by multiple circles, symbolising the repetitive digging of the two women. The dialogue between these elements conveys a distinct and assertive sense of movement and action, depicting the pursuit and the ensuing battle to the death between the brothers and wives. The application of paint also mirrors or intensifies the Wanampis' chase both above and below ground, with the upper layer of paint being scratched or dug away to reveal a translucent lower layer of contrasting colour.

Two years into his painting career, Palpatja was interviewed for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and he spoke of his physical connection to the ancestral Wanampi. The flow of his paintings comes from a place within, pouring out of his brush, like the snake itself, onto the canvas.

*TIGER PALPATJA is pulling his shirt collar open, speaking quickly in his native language of Pitjantjatjara. The 85-year-old artist reveals a small fleshy dot near his collar bone and presses his gnarled finger to it.*

*'The Wanampi came out of that one,' he says through his friend and translator, Kaika Burton. 'He was come out of there and sometimes others stay in my arms, inside, running up. They sit inside me.'<sup>2</sup>*

In 2008, Palpatja moved to the neighbouring community of Nyapari, where he continued to paint for Tjungu Palya as well as Tjala Arts. A type of imprinting or signature often appeared in his work, suggesting Palpatja's identity and connection to his birthplace. The cross shape within a circle, according to

Amanda Dent, past manager of Tjunga Palya, is not a nod to the teachings of his mission days – rather, it signifies his monogram, ‘T’ for Tiger.<sup>3</sup>

Palpatja reached the height of his painting career in the years 2009–2011, producing canvases of spectacular fluidity and expansive fields of colour. Although his eyesight had deteriorated considerably by this time, intuition led his brush across the canvas to play out the eternal chase and drama of the Wati Waṅampi and their two wives. Palpatja passed away in 2012, leaving an electrifying and theatrical body of work, his dedication to keeping the Piltati Tjukurpa vivid for future generations remaining a legacy and cherished jewel in APY Lands art history.

#### VANESSA MERLINO

Reference: Judith Ryan, ‘Tiger Palpatja’, in Tjala Arts (ed.), *Nganampa Kampatjangka Unngu: Beneath the Canvas: The Lives and Stories of the Tjala Artists*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2015, pp. 248–253.

1. This narrative is based on Tjala Arts documentation.
2. Sunanda Creagh, ‘Tiger Painting Bright’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 2006.
3. Judith Ryan, ‘Tiger Palpatja’ in Tjala Arts (ed.), *Nganampa Kampatjangka Unngu: Beneath the Canvas: The Lives and Stories of the Tjala Artists*, 2015, p. 253.



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012

Pitjantjatjara

*Waṅampi Tjukurpa* 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

152.5 × 101.5 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at

Amata, South Australia

Tjala Arts, South Australia,

cat. no. 463-08

Marshall Arts, Adelaide

Private Collection, Melbourne,

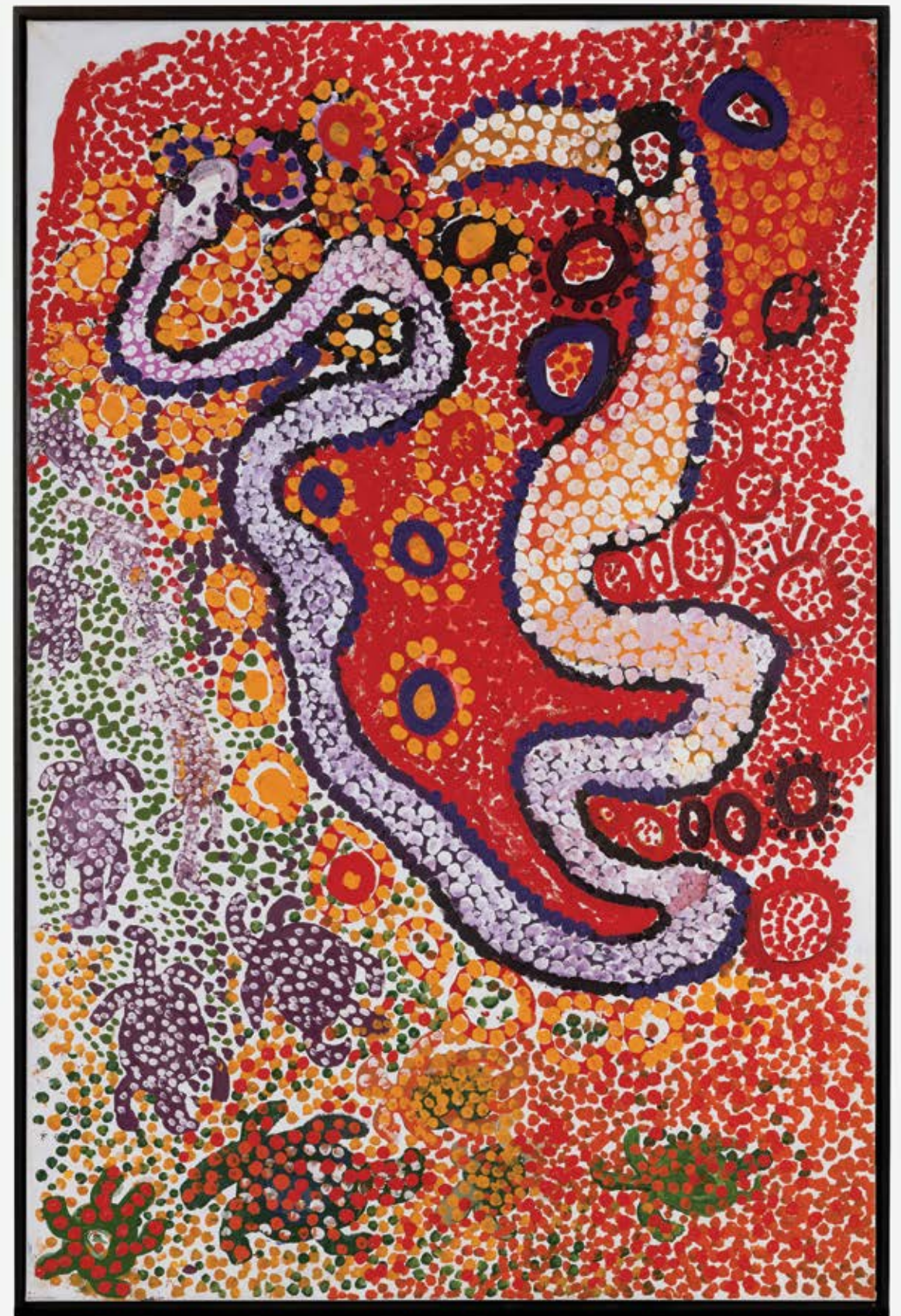
acquired from the above in 2008

**EXHIBITED***Western Australian Indigenous**Art Awards 2011*, Art Gallery of

Western Australia, Perth,

13 August – 19 December 2011

AUD 18,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012

Pitjantjatjara

*Waṅampi Tjukurpa* 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

122 × 122 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at

Amata, South Australia

Tjala Arts, South Australia,

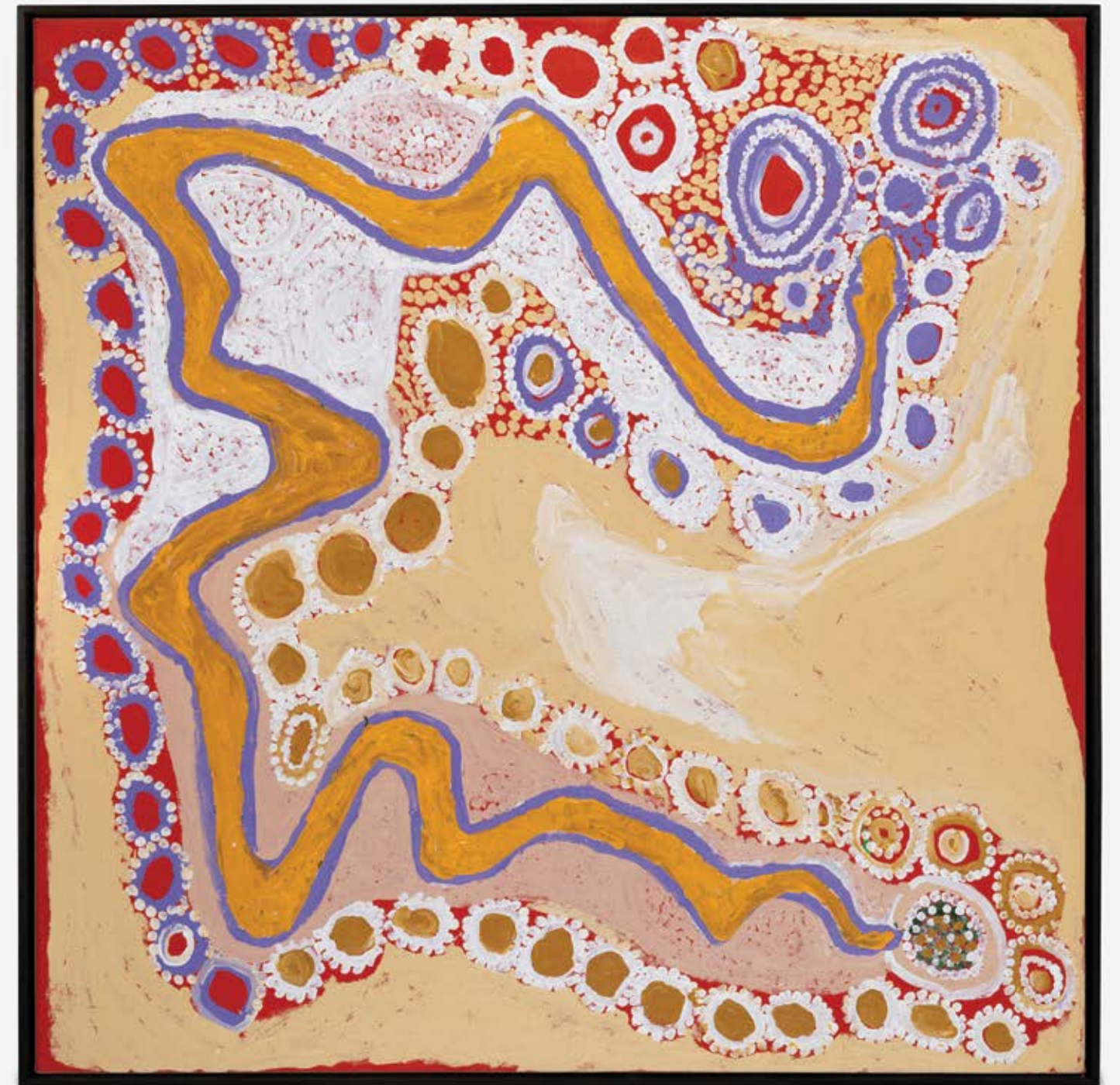
cat. no. 363-08

Marshall Arts, Adelaide

Private Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above in 2008

AUD 16,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012  
Pitjantjatjara

*Waŋampi* 2010  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
200 × 113 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Nyapari, South Australia  
Tjungu Palya, South  
Australia, cat. no. 10135  
Outstation Gallery, Darwin  
Private Collection, acquired  
from the above in 2010

**LITERATURE**

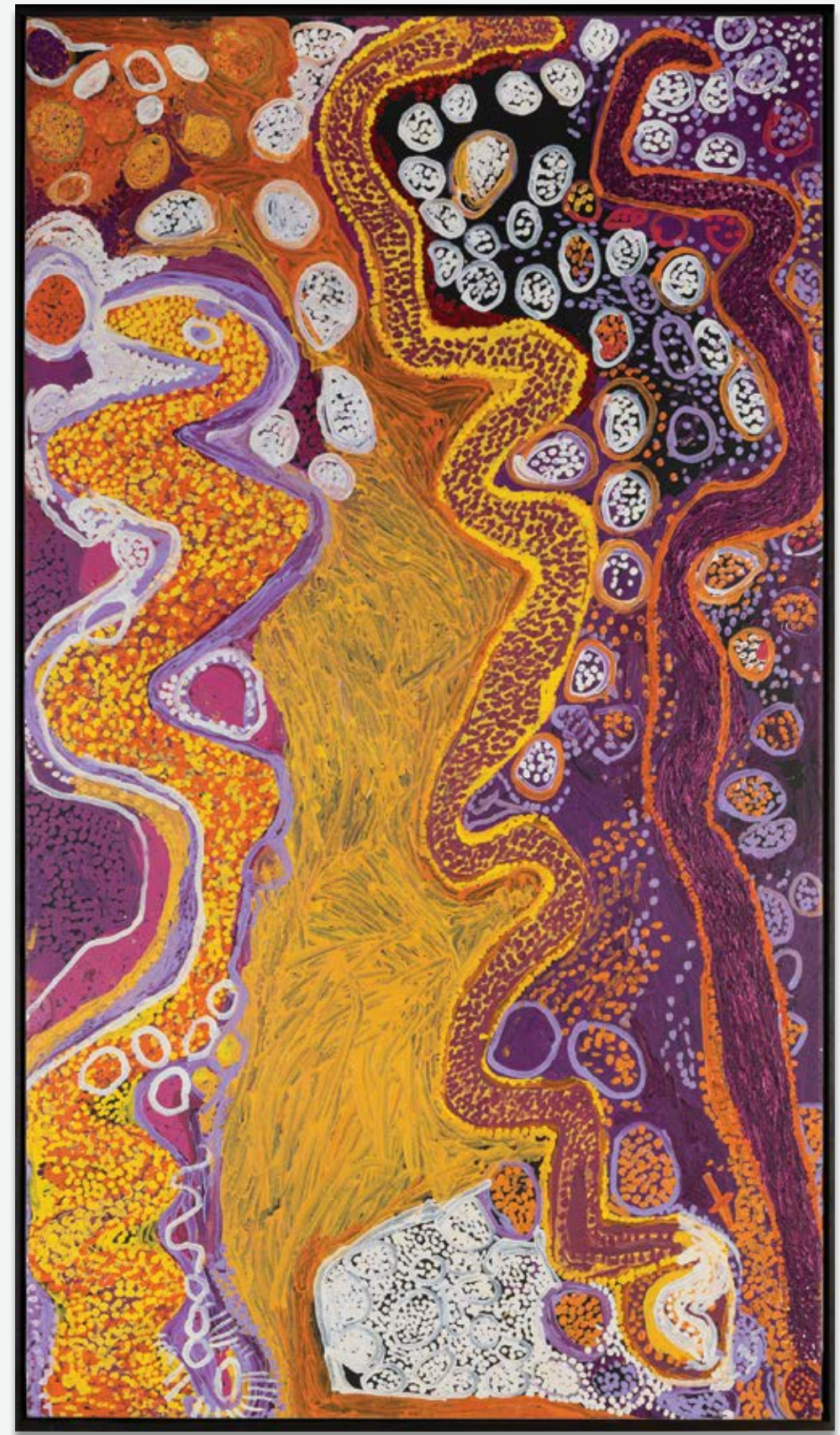
*Tjukurpa – Law*, Outstation  
Gallery, Darwin, 2010 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Tjukurrpa – A Group Exhibition  
from Tjungu Palya*, Outstation  
Gallery, Darwin, 10 August –  
10 September 2010

*The Western Australian  
Indigenous Art Awards 2011*,  
Art Gallery of Western Australia,  
13 August – 19 December 2011

AUD 30,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012  
Pitjantjatjara

*Piltatinga* 2010  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
195 × 132 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Nyapari, South Australia  
Tjungu Palya, South  
Australia, cat. no. 10454  
Marshall Arts, Adelaide  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

AUD 32,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012

Pitjantjatjara

*Wati Wanampi* 2010

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

200 × 120 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Nyapari, South Australia  
Tjungu Palya, South  
Australia, cat. no. 10247  
Short St Gallery, Broome  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2012

**LITERATURE**

*Western Australian Indigenous Art  
Awards 2011*, Art Gallery of Western  
Australia, Perth, 2011, p. 36 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

*Western Australian Indigenous  
Art Awards 2011*, Art Gallery of  
Western Australia, Perth,  
13 August – 19 December 2011  
*One Song Different Tune: Artists of  
the APY & NG Lands*, Short St Gallery,  
Broome, 12 July – 19 August 2012

AUD 35,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012  
Pitjantjatjara

*Wanampi* 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
94 × 90 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Nyapari, South Australia  
Tjungu Palya, South  
Australia, cat. no. 11022  
ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Singapore  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2011

AUD 12,000



**TIGER PALPATJA**

circa 1920 – 2012  
Pitjantjatjara

*Waṅampi Tjukurpa* 2011  
synthetic polymer paint on linen  
198 × 122 cm

**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at  
Amata, South Australia  
Tjala Arts, South Australia,  
cat. no. 020-11  
Marshall Arts, Adelaide  
Private Collection, Melbourne,  
acquired from the above in 2011

**LITERATURE**

Tjala Arts (ed.), *Nganampa  
Kampatjanga Unngu – Beneath  
the Canvas: The Lives and Stories  
of the Tjala Artists*, Wakefield Press,  
Adelaide, 2015, p. 77 (illus.)

**EXHIBITED**

Western Australian Indigenous  
Art Awards 2011, Art Gallery of  
Western Australia, Perth,  
13 August – 19 December 2011  
AUD 35,000





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Harry Tjutjuna. Photographer: Stephen Oxenbury

Dickie Minyintiri is Wati Ngintaka, Perentie Lizard Man, cheekily displaying the stolen grindstone. Photographer: Barry Skipsey, 1994, courtesy of Desert Tracks, Angatja

Tiger Palpatja. Photographer: Stephen Oxenbury

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#### ABOUT

Formed in 2016, D'Lan Contemporary sources, exhibits and sells exceptional works of art by leading and emerging First Nations Australian artists in Australia and overseas.

#### ETHICS

Our mission is to create a transparent and sustainable marketplace for Australian Indigenous art and to respect and protect the integrity of the artist, the buyer, the seller – and the marketplace – from fraudulent sales or unethical procurement.

We maintain strict ethical practices and only exhibit and sell works of art with a clear line of provenance.

D'Lan Contemporary allocates 30% of annual net profits to centralise and distribute proceeds from art sales back to Australian First Nations artists and their working communities.

#### PROVENANCE

Every work of art exhibited and sold by D'Lan Contemporary has a clear line of provenance.

Documentation we draw upon to establish provenance includes:

- Community Art Centre certificate of provenance/authenticity
- Transfer of ownership documentation
- Purchase receipt or invoice
- Inclusion in academic / art historical publications
- Inclusion in exhibitions, and exhibition catalogues (private and/or public institution)
- Collection/exhibition inventory numbers (private and/or public institution)
- Inclusion in auction catalogues
- Documented appraisals

D'Lan Contemporary's guidance on best practice for buying Australian Indigenous art is:

#### CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS ART (1980–PRESENT)

All contemporary Australian Indigenous works of art should be accompanied by documentation linking the artwork to the artist via their Community Art Centre or their primary gallery/representative.

Community Art Centres operate with an ethical focus and establish their own individual guidelines by which all artworks are sold.

**Primary market** artworks should only be bought from a Community Art Centre or an official artist gallery/representative.

**Secondary market** artworks should only be bought with a source of provenance from a Community Art Centre or an official artist gallery/representative.

#### MODERN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART (1950S–1980)

For artworks created prior to the establishment of Community Art Centres, such as bark paintings, Hermannsburg watercolours, Papunya boards and sculptural artworks made for sale, there is less necessity for Community Art Centre provenance.

However, artworks from this period with no traceable history are likely to have less market value than those that do – even when an artwork is clearly authentic.

Highly desirable provenance for artworks from this period includes Papunya Tula Artists, Stuart Art Centre and Maningrida Arts, or a clear link to a primary collector such as Geoffrey Bardon, Dorothy Bennett, Sandra Le Brun Holmes or Dr Scougal – who were all active in the 1950s–1970s.

#### ARTEFACTS AND OBJECTS (1880S–1950)

With artefacts, often much of the important collection history has been lost over time. Therefore, proven provenance can greatly impact value.

Before acquisition, research should be undertaken to ascertain the origin of the artefact or object, and how and when it left its country of origin.

Best practice in this segment is to obtain advice from a trusted industry expert before buying or selling.

#### PROTECTION OF MOVEABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT

The *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1985* (PMCH Act) implements Australia's obligations under the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 (1970 UNESCO Convention), to which Australia is a State Party.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention requires State Parties to ensure that no collecting institution accepts illegally exported items.

The Australian Government administers the PMCH Act through the Ministry for the Arts. The PMCH Act regulates the export of Australia's most significant cultural heritage objects by implementing export controls for objects defined as 'Australian Protected Objects'.

If you have any questions about acquiring or selling Australian Indigenous Art, please contact us at: [enquiries@dlancontemporary.com.au](mailto:enquiries@dlancontemporary.com.au)

