



SIGNIFICANT

10TH ANNIVERSARY

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MELBOURNE | SYDNEY | NEW YORK

7 May – 3 July 2025

D•LAN CONTEMPORARY

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Welcome to our most anticipated exhibition of the year, *SIGNIFICANT*, our annual showcase of the finest Australian First Nations art. This year, 2025, marks the 10th anniversary of what has become our flagship exhibition. For the first time, this exciting exhibition will launch simultaneously at our galleries in Melbourne, Sydney and New York. This will provide our valued clients with the opportunity to view a diverse selection of paintings, sculptures and multimedia in each individual location. This new format will give consigned artworks optimal visibility in Australia, and internationally, and result in *SIGNIFICANT* becoming the most anticipated event for First Nations Australian art worldwide.

In 2025, we are honoured to present our most ambitious sale to date – totalling eighty-three works with an approximate value of \$9 million.

Highlights of this year's exhibition include rare West Arnhem Land bark paintings from the Lance Bennett collection, an exceptional selection of figurative paintings from the Kimberley, and an important group of early Papunya boards from 1971–1973. Within the latter segment of works is Kaapa Tjampitjinpa's *Budgerigar Dreaming* 1972 – which Geoffrey Bardon proclaimed as the artist's 'ultimate achievement'. This artwork will appear in the upcoming dramatic feature film *Honey Ant Dreamers*, which will tell the genesis story of the birth of the contemporary art movement at Papunya in the early 1970s. D'LAN Contemporary is proud to announce that we have pledged the entire proceeds of the commission of this sale towards the production costs of this important film, which we believe is destined to become an Australian classic.

We also have a remarkable suite of paintings by some of Papunya Tula Artists' most celebrated contemporary artists, including Doreen Reid Nakamarra, Yukultji Napangati, Mantua Nangala and Patrick Tjungurrayi.

Three of Australia's most highly acclaimed artists, Gordon Bennett, Lin Onus and Daniel Boyd, are represented by major works. Boyd is now represented internationally by the highly regarded Marian Goodman Gallery. Major works by Rover Thomas and Paddy Bedford are complemented by a very rare offering of the suite of nine paintings by Ngarra.

We are honoured to be handling the sale of the monumental Bentinck Island Women's collaborative painting completed by Sally Gabori, Netta Loogatha, Ethel Thomas, Paula Paul and others. Further works of significance include the major work by Sally Gabori *Thundi – Big River Barramundi Story* 2008, and a formidable collection of works by the late, great Balang Nakurulk (John Mawurndjul AM), including *Freshwater Turtle* 2000.

We look forward to welcoming you at all three locations, in Melbourne, Sydney and New York, and hope you can join us in celebrating the 10th anniversary of *SIGNIFICANT*.

D'LAN DAVIDSON

DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, D'LAN CONTEMPORARY

ATTRIBUTED TO NYM DJIMUNGURR

c. 1910 – 1969

Kunwinjku language

Namarrkon Lightning Spirit circa 1965

earth pigments on eucalyptus bark

82 × 28 cm (32.28 × 11.02 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in West Arnhem

Land, Northern Territory

Dorothy Bennett Collection

The Thomas Vroom Collection,

The Netherlands

*Aboriginal Art – Thomas**Vroom Collection*, Sotheby's,

London, 10 June 2015, lot 27

Private Collection, acquired

from the above

AUD 30,000

USD 19,200

Born around 1910, Djimungurr, also known as Old Nym, grew up travelling throughout Arnhem Land with his extended family group. In the 1930s, he moved west (into what would become Kakadu National Park) in search of seasonal work. He primarily worked as a buffalo shooter until, in the mid 1950s, he found employment on a seasonal basis at a sawmill at Manlarr. In 1958, the sawmill transitioned into the Nourlangie Safari Camp, where visitors came to hunt and learn about Aboriginal life, with Djimungurr as a senior guide.

During the off-season, Djimungurr's family would make extended trips on Country. A fully initiated man and senior custodian for his clan, Djimungurr was charged with looking after Country and the ancestral beings that inhabited it. He played key roles in ceremonial gatherings across a wide region and was a sought-after marrikidjbu (clever man/healer), curing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Djimungurr was a renowned singer and dancer, and alongside his friend and compatriot Nadjombolmi he became one of the most significant individual contributors to rock art in West Arnhem Land. The Koongarra and Burrungkuy (Nourlangie) areas were important

for Djimungurr and his family and he repeatedly visited them to camp, hunt and paint rock art. In 1963, Djimungurr and Nadjombolmi created a rock painting scene at Nourlangie rock (Anbangbang Gallery, Kakadu National Park) that comprised eighteen figures including humans, fish and ancestral beings. The paintings in the Anbangbang Gallery are among the most visited, celebrated and recognised rock art globally. Admired by hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, they appear frequently in national and global overviews of rock art and remain a source of inspiration for Aboriginal people in Kakadu today.¹

Throughout this time, Djimungurr created bark paintings, initially to use to educate younger men. When the bark paintings had served their purpose, he would offer them for sale. Art collectors and dealers had been visiting the area since the late 1950s, including Dorothy Bennett, who became a primary collector of Djimungurr's work.

LUKE SCHOLES

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1. Josie Gumbuwa Maralngurra, Sally K. May and Joakim Goldhahn, in *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography*.



DIIDJA

c. 1900 – 1982

Kunwinjku language

*Namorrordo Spirits of the
Shooting Star* 1966

earth pigments on eucalyptus bark

94 × 54 cm (37 × 21.26 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in West Arnhem

Land, Northern Territory

Lance Bennett, acquired from the artist

at Mudjinberri (Mudjinbardi), 1966

The Thomas Vroom Collection,

The Netherlands

Aboriginal Art – Thomas

Vroom Collection, Sotheby's,

London, 10 June 2015, lot 21

Private Collection, acquired

from the above

AUD 28,000

USD 18,000

This extraordinary painting was collected alongside others in 1966 by the famous collector and interlocutor Lance Bennett (1938 – 2013) at the Mudjinbardi community in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

In the accompanying documentation that Bennett prepared for this painting, the following information is provided:

In large holes in the vast rocky Arnhem Land plateau, which the Aborigines refer to as 'the stone country' live malicious spirits called Namorrordo. These are long-haired people with very thin bodies ('just a little muscle over their bones') and long, slender fingers tipped with long nails. Namorrordo are considered to be dangerous to humans. In the daytime, they stay quietly in their cool holes in the stone country. At dusk they begin to prowl abroad, uttering a high-pitched cry: 'Go-wed!' After nightfall, they go on a 'sneaking walkabout' across the sky, looking for a solitary, sleeping Aborigine whose liver and kidney they will remove. This is a practice also favoured by malicious human sorcerers: when the victim awakens, there is no mark on his or her body. In three of four days the person dies. Namorrordo were sometimes glimpsed on their prowls by the 'old people' (past generations), who would subsequently paint the image on a rock face or on the inner walls

of their bark huts so as to show people what a Namorrordo looked like. Today namorrordo are always invisible to people except when, during their night-time prowls in the sky, they show themselves for a few seconds as a falling star diving across the heavens.

Bennett provided the following observations and biographical information on Diidja:

A good-natured, friendly man with a boyish engaging grin and a keen enthusiasm for the ritual life, Diidja displayed the lively and direct sense of humour typical of so many western and south-central Arnhem Landers. Born about 1890 in the country known as Godwaliwali at the headwaters of the East Alligator River, as a young man he lived for some years near Beswick Creek, he later worked on a peanut farm near Katherine; then on a tin mine near the township of Pine Creek.

This kind of painting is called *rungkalno* and it is common in the rock art of central Arnhem Land where images can be displayed as a simple white silhouette without any interior infill. Diidja's Namarnde figures, with elongated arms and fingers, have talon-like forms trailing from the back of the head. His graceful lines provide form and substance to their white silhouetted bodies.

LUKE SCHOLES



DJURRUBIGA

c. 1895 – 1972

Hunter Spearing Kangaroo 1966
 earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
 118 × 65 cm (46.5 × 25.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at Mudjinberri (Mudjinbardi), Northern Territory
 Lance Bennett, acquired from the artist in 1966
 The Thomas Vroom Collection, The Netherlands
Aboriginal Art – Thomas Vroom Collection, Sotheby's, London, 10 June 2015, lot 31
 Private Collection, acquired from the above

EXHIBITED

Australie: het land en de mensen, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, The Netherlands, 6 October 2005 – 27 August 2006;
 Gyeonggi Provincial Museum, Yongin, South Korea, 18 October 2006 – 25 February 2007

AUD 25,000

USD 16,000

In the accompanying documentation that Bennett prepared for this painting, the following information is provided: 'The artist has depicted a hunter spearing a male plains kangaroo. The animal has been painted in the so-called X-ray style, with some of the internal details shown. The heart is shown, with a lung on either side, and the backbone and ribs are seen.'



JIMMY KERINAUIA

working in the 1950s and 1960s
Tiwi language

Tapara circa 1958
earth pigments on carved ironwood
47.5 cm (18.7 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist
Dorothy Bennett Collection,
acquired from Bathurst Island,
Northern Territory, no. 59
Private Collection, Sydney, acquired
from the above by private sale
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 9 July 2001, lot 29
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

AUD 60,000
USD 38,400

Kerinauia has carved and painted the ancestral figure of Tapara, also known as the Moon Man. During the Parlingari (Dreaming), Tapara committed adultery with Bima, one of the first Tiwi people. One day Tapara and Bima left Jinani, Bima's son, alone, resulting in his death from thirst and exposure to the sun. Bima's husband, Purrukuparli, found their son dead and fought with Tapara, who returned to the sky.

In the late 1950s when *Tapara* was created, Jimmy Kerinauia was part of an extended family group, referred to as the Mandimbula, based at Paru on the southern coast of Melville Island. At the centre of this group was the fiercely independent Kerinauia family, who had developed an innovative sculptural practice featuring small carved human figures and animals. They quickly established a reputation as gifted sculptors, attracting the keen interest of collectors, including Dorothy Bennett, who acquired this sculpture in October 1958.

At the time, Bennett was secretary for orthopaedic surgeon Dr Stuart Scougall. Through their regular visits to the Tiwi Islands and Arnhem Land, both became passionate collectors of Aboriginal art.

Accompanying them on this trip was the deputy director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Tony Tuckson, and his wife, Margaret. They had come to check on the progress of a series of Pukumani poles that Scougall and Tuckson had commissioned for the gallery earlier in the year. During their six-week stay, they took the opportunity to acquire other work being made on the Islands. Bennett was a regular and prolific purchaser of carvings from Paru and Milikapiti (Snake Bay). Created during the formative period of Tiwi carving, *Tapara* is a rare and remarkable sculpture from one of the Tiwi Islands' most renowned artistic families.

LUKE SCHOLES



DEAF TOMMY MUNGATOPI

c. 1925 – 1985
Tiwi language

Pukumani Tutini 1970
earth pigments on carved hardwood
220 × 25 cm (86.6 × 9.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, commissioned
by Jim Wallace, of South
Australia, during the 1960s
Private Collection, New Zealand
Sunday Art Auction, Leonard Joel,
Melbourne, 21 June 2009, lot 127
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Judith Ryan AM (ed.), *Tiwi: Art & Artists*, National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne, 2020, p. 125 (illus.)

AUD 100,000
USD 64,000

Beautifully decorated, superbly carved and in remarkable condition, this Pukumani pole, sculpted by one of the Tiwi Islands’ greatest exponents of the form, Deaf Tommy Mungatopi, is one of the finest examples of its type outside of those in institutional collections.

Mungatopi was often charged with the revered task of creating Pukumani poles for funerals due to his abilities as a carver and his inventive patterning. Pukumani poles are placed as grave markers to symbolise the journey of the deceased into the afterlife and are typically commissioned or made by the in-laws of the deceased. There are personal family influences in the choice of decorations that may relate to the art of the family of the deceased or to their totem animals. The poles often relate to the story of Bima and her husband, Purrukuparli, the first Tiwi man and woman who witnessed the first Pukumani ceremony alongside the other ancestral beings. During the Parlingari (Dreaming), Bima committed adultery with Tapara, a single man who lived alone. One day Tapara and Bima left Jinani, Bima’s son, alone, resulting in his death from thirst and exposure to the sun. Purrukuparli found their son dead and fought with Tapara, who returned to the sky.

Mungatopi was at the forefront of the aesthetic evolutions in early Tiwi carving. This included the use of positive and negative space and experimenting with solidity of form and balance.

The two-pronged uprights at the top of this pole reference the clubs used by Purrukuparli and Tapara during their epic fight. The three central beams that separate the two finely decorated cylindrical forms suggest the three main characters: Purrukuparli, Bima and Tapara.

Because sizeable old hardwood trees were scarce on Bathurst Island, large Pukumani poles such as this example and those seen in the collections of major Australian institutions are most likely to come from Melville Island. The often-intricate decorations, made in earth pigments, were applied with the pwoja comb – traditional wooden painting tool – on both black and white backgrounds.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Mungatopi received extensive commissions as a result of the frequent visits by anthropologists, artists and collectors – including, in particular, Charles P. Mountford, Dr Stuart Scougall and Tony Tuckson. Many of the poles collected during this period are now in the collections of major institutions, among them the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Museum of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia, the Museum and Gallery of the Northern Territory, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Art Gallery of South Australia.

LUKE SCHOLES

detail



ATTRIBUTED TO TOM DJAWA

1905 – 1980

Gupapuyngu language

Model Canoe (Lippa Lippa) circa 1962

earth pigments on bark, wood,

cane and fibre string

25 × 121 × 33 cm

(9.8 × 47.6 × 13 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist

Private Collection, Sydney

Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,

Melbourne, 26 July 2004, lot 15

Private Collection, Melbourne

Australian & International Art, Gibson's,

Melbourne, 27 October 2024, lot 155

Private Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above

AUD 18,000

USD 11,500



Yolŋu people began selling objects of material culture and paintings through the Methodist Overseas Mission that had been established at Milingimbi in 1923. Prior to this, various missionaries and anthropologists had made large collections of objects that have since been deposited into cultural institutions in Australia and overseas.

Missionary Edgar Wells arrived at the mission in 1949 to begin his role as superintendent. He was a motivated collector who encouraged the production of bark paintings and utilitarian and ceremonial objects for sale, which led to him becoming known as ‘a patron of the arts at Milingimbi’.¹ It was during this period that small

model canoes, or lippa lippa, such as this example, began to be crafted for sale to the mission. The mission sold objects and paintings at the mission store in Darwin or through their own outlets in the southern states.

At the time, the miniaturisation of objects for sale had emerged at other active art-producing regions including at the Tiwi Islands, where small carved tutini (ceremonial) poles were erected on small slabs of timber for sale to interested buyers. Other objects including spears and clubs were also produced. Given the impracticality of full-sized canoes being produced for the market, the creation of small models may have been encouraged to service the missions efforts to educate the broader

Australian public about the traditional practices of people living on the northern missions.

It is likely that miniature canoes were originally made as a source of amusement for children. Their evolution into items for sale probably instigated the practice of adorning the hull with clan designs and figurative depictions of animals. Unusually large for an example of its type, this model canoe is expertly crafted using a single sheet of folded eucalyptus bark that has been finely stitched with cane binding at each end. At its centre is a thwart (structural crosspiece) created with several lengths of balgurr, a hand-spun bush string. The upper edges of the canoe’s sides are supported by small lengths of attached cane. The

fine decoration on the vessel’s sides is comparable to another example of a similar size held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The ability to craft a traditional bark or dugout canoes is based on ancient knowledge and technical skill believed to have been passed onto Yolŋu by the Macassan sailors that first began their social and economic relationships with Yolŋu people over four hundred years ago.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. Louise Hamby and Dr J. Gumbula, ‘Development of collecting at the Milingimbi Mission’, in P.G. Toner (ed.), *Strings of Connectedness: Essays in Honour of Ian Keen*, 1st edition, vol. 1, ANU Press, Canberra, 2015, pp. 187–214.

JACOB

working 1954
Worrorra language

Wanjina Makes Yams Grow Up 1954
crayon on rice paper
50 × 36 cm (19.7 × 14.2 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at Wotjalum,
Western Australia
Collected by Joseph Birdsell,
UCLA Physical Anthropologist,
in the Kimberley Region at
Wotjalum mission, July 1954
Thence by descent
The Thomas Vroom Collection,
The Netherlands
*Aboriginal Art – Thomas
Vroom Collection*, Sotheby's,
London, 10 June 2015, lot 49
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

EXHIBITED

Brook Andrew – Theme Park, Museum
of Contemporary Aboriginal Art
(AAMU), Utrecht, The Netherlands
17 October 2008 – 1 April 2009
Colours of the Kimberley, Museum
of Contemporary Aboriginal
Art (AAMU), Utrecht, 12 January
2014 – 5 October 2014

AUD 18,000
USD 11,500

Wanjina Makes Yams Grow Up 1954 is a rare crayon drawing of a Wanjina spirit from the collection of the American anthropologist Joseph Birdsell.

It's creator, Jacob, was a Worrorra man living at the Wotjalum mission, Western Australia. Wotjalum was established on the Yampi Peninsula in 1951. When water supplies at the nearby mission of Kunmunya began to fail, Worrorra, Wunambal and Ngarinyin people from Kunmunya and the government-run station at Manja all relocated to Wotjalum. After a succession of other moves, the population finally settled at the present Mowanjum community, on the Gibb River Road.

Birdsell and his wife, Esther Birdsell, spent over six weeks at Wotjalum. He first encountered Jacob in late June 1954 and spent time recording his genealogy, which captured fifteen family members of the Arngognaji (possibly Arngarrngoyu) clan. Little else is known about Jacob other than that he was related to Wattie Ngerdu, who, in the 1970s, was one of a small number of artists who begun painting Wanjina figures for the market.

Wanjina Makes Yams Grow Up 1954 and many other drawings were collected by Joseph Birdsell during the 1950s. Birdsell and his colleague Norman Tindale were part of the University of California at Los Angeles and

University of Adelaide Anthropological Expedition that travelled into Western Australia between 1952 and 1954. Birdsell worked with north Kimberley people at several locations including Wotjalum. At the time, eliciting drawings from Aboriginal people was a well-established anthropological method. It was Tindale and C.P. Mountford who developed a refined approach for encouraging crayon drawings of art, iconography and maps of Country as part of their fieldwork. Their intention was to gather drawings that captured Indigenous forms of visual expression with as little outside influence as possible.

Throughout the three-year survey, more than 600 drawings were collected across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Almost all were deposited into the collection of the South Australian Museum. Birdsell is known to have put aside three drawings for his own private collection, of which *Wanjina Makes Yams Grow Up*, one of the final drawings collected, was one.

The title of this work, and the summary of the information it contains, was attributed by the late Kim Akerman, an esteemed anthropologist who spent his life's work travelling and researching the Kimberley Region. Akerman located a near-identical drawing by a member of the Worrorra



people, and transcribed annotations from the South Australian Museum's example.

When writing about this work and the two other drawings from the Birdsell Collection, Akerman noted:

This and the following two drawings are a very important part of our understanding of the changes in the art history of the region, and they do have an aesthetic appeal that is quite their own.

This work is virtually identical to the one held in the South Australian Museum collections. The fact that, apart from other similar elements, the unusual construction of the asymmetrical feature (similar to a shoulder holster) occurs in both images reinforces the belief that not only were both drawings done by the same artist but that they represent a specific individual – for which the shoulder feature may be a defining element.

Jacob's figure is shown holding what is possibly the leaf of a yam that has been eaten. Other leaves from the yam plant are shown to the side of the figure. Historically, Worrorra people's diet consisted mainly of various kinds of tubers or yams (inja karnmangu), dug up by women; these seem to have provided the mainstay and bulk of what

people ate. As creator beings, Wanjina are primarily associated with rain and seasonal regeneration. The ability of Wanjina to impact upon the latter relates to the title attributed to this work: *Wanjina Makes Yams Grow Up*. Yams are sometimes depicted in Wanjina rock art, and the body of a large Wanjina figure may be covered with smaller Wanjina heads that represent edible yam roots.

The bands around the neck of Jacob's figure identify the Wanjina's collarbone, beneath which an ovoid shape depicts its heart. Remarkably, Jacob displays his Wanjina figure with a mouth. Of the hundreds of painted iterations of the Wanjina and its associated spirit figures on rock shelters throughout the Kimberley, few, if any, have mouths. Different cultural groups offer varied reasons as to why. In some western Wanjina areas, the Rainbow Serpent is said to have sealed the lips of the Wanjina. Elsewhere it is said that if figures were repainted with mouths, it would rain incessantly. The reasons as to why Jacob included a mouth in his drawing are impossible to determine. Later, towards the end of his life, Charlie Numbulmoore began to include the mouth and teeth in Wanjina paintings he made.

LUKE SCHOLES



CHARLIE NUMBULMOORE

c. 1907 – 1971

Ngarinyin language

Arkula Spirit Being 1970

earth pigments on cardboard

73 × 63 cm (28.7 × 24.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Gibb

River Station, West Kimberley,

Western Australia

Tom McCourt, South Australia

Private Collection, South Australia

Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,

Melbourne, 9 July 2001, lot 7

Collection of the late Duncan

Kentish, Adelaide

Greer Adams Fine Art, Sydney

Private Collection, acquired

from the above

AUD 75,000

USD 48,000

Best known as a masterful painter of Wanjina figures, towards the end of his life Ngarinyin artist Charlie Numbulmoore began illustrating other significant spirit beings. There is a wide variety of such beings, generically known as jimi, inhabiting the world of the people of the north Kimberley – some are benevolent and play an important role in ensuring there will be a regular supply of bush tucker, including wild honey or sugarbag. Others, however, such as the Arkula in this painting, are malevolent and very dangerous. According to the late Kim Akerman, an anthropologist who spent the duration of his working life in the Kimberley, Arkula are 'dangerous spirits, jealous of the living, which must be placated and driven away'.¹

The crouched posture of this depiction of Arkula may be intended to accentuate specific features of its anatomy. According to Akerman, 'At his joints – elbows, shoulders and knees – grew the poisonous fruits called punkoy. This fruit, which he also eats, has made him bitter, and with them he "shoots" his victims embittering them against other people. His hands and feet are equipped with wanti – talons with which he hooks up people.' The spiralling ashes surrounding the eyes of Arkula

provide a hypnotic gaze that suggests the spirit being's malevolent intent. The articulated claws and teeth identify them as figures to be feared. It is interesting to note that the figure has a black oval on the breastbone that characterises the artist's representations of Wanjina.

This painting was originally purchased by South Australian pastoralist Tom McCourt, during a field trip to the Kimberley in 1971. McCourt visited Numbulmoore at his home at the Gibb River Station in the West Kimberley of Western Australia. Prior to this, during the 1960s, Numbulmoore worked closely with anthropologist Ian Crawford, who recorded him repainting Wanjina images and collected a significant number of his works.¹ Works by Charlie were also commissioned by Helen Groger-Wurm on behalf of the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1970 and these are now held in the National Museum of Australia.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. Kim Akerman, in *Aboriginal Art – Thomas Vroom Collection*, Sotheby's, London, 10 June 2015, lot 57.



GEORGE JOMERI

c. 1922 – 1990

*Wanjina and a Child's**Hand Stencil* 1975earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
65 × 38 cm (25.6 × 15 inches)**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at Mowanjum,
Western Australia
Kim Akerman Collection
Mary Mächa, Perth
The Thomas Vroom Collection,
The Netherlands
*Aboriginal Art – Thomas Vroom
Collection*, Sotheby's, London,
10 June 2015, lot 52
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

LITERATURE

Michael Edols, *Aspects of
Life: Working with Indigenous
Australians*, 2011

FILMOGRAPHY

Michael Edols (dir.), *Floating ... like
wind blow'em about*, 1975, Eastman
colour 16mm, 72 mins, Ronin Films,
Australian Capital Territory

AUD 35,000

USD 22,400

There are few more iconic images of Aboriginal Australia than the Wanjina figures of the remote Kimberley regions of Western Australia. Wanjina is a generic term which refers to the spirit ancestors of the present north-west Kimberley peoples and their representation in anthropomorphic form. Wide-eyed and silent, they are characterised by halo-like headdresses and ovoid shapes upon their chest.

Historically painted (and repainted) on rock shelters, these images eventually began to be portrayed upon small sheets of bark, board or slabs of sandstone. Jomeri is first known to have painted Wanjina figures in 1970–1971; however, it wasn't until 1974 that, on behalf of Mary Mächa, the renowned anthropologist Kim Akerman commissioned Jomeri to produce a number of Wanjina paintings for Mächa's gallery in Perth.

In 1975, at the Mowanjum community, the filmmaker Michael Edols documented the concerns of a group of Elders who were anxious that their younger generation was 'not listening to ancestral Wanjina wisdom and the lore passed down to them ...'¹ The resulting film, *Floating ... like wind blow'em about*, was intended to 'hold up a mirror' to those who the Elders felt had 'left behind their

Aboriginal traditions and culture'. In a scene in the film, Jomeri can be seen working on this painting. In a poignant moment, a child places its hand on the raw bark below the freshly painted Wanjina and Jomeri blows white pigment from his mouth over the hand to create a stencil. In rock art shelters throughout this part of the Kimberley region, images of Wanjina and hand stencils are common. After the shoot was complete, the paintings were abandoned in the bush area behind Mowanjum, until being later re-discovered by Akerman, who was at Mowanjum photographing an important ceremony.

This remarkable depiction of a Wanjina evokes their appearance on many rock shelters on the north Kimberley plateau. The subtle use of red, black, yellow and white earth pigments gives the Wanjina a ghost-like appearance. Floating around the cranium of this figure is a minimally decorated headdress in yellow ochre. The hollow eyes provide the figure with an inquisitive, searching appearance.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. <https://www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/6543/floating-like-wind-blow-em-about.html>. Accessed on 20 December 2024.



ALEC MINGELMANGANU

c. 1905 – 1981
Wunambal language

Untitled – Wanjina 1976
earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
80 × 33 cm (31.5 × 13 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kalumburu,
north-western Australia
Kim Akerman, collected at
Kalumburu in 1976
The Estate of Kim Akerman, Tasmania

AUD 96,000
USD 61,400

Alec Mingelmanganu was regarded as one of the finest contemporary painters of Wanjina figures, the quintessential icons of the north and central Kimberley. He was a pioneer of the market for Wanjina paintings when Worrorra, Wunambal and Ngarinyin people began producing them on portable surfaces in the mid 1970s. The small number of works Mingelmanganu created on bark and canvas remain highly sought after by curators and collectors, with few remaining in private hands.

Anthropologist Kim Akerman, a close friend of Mingelmanganu, and the most knowledgeable non-Indigenous expert on the Wanjina ancestral spirit, collected *Untitled – Wanjina* at Kalumburu in 1976. Such was Akerman's regard for this example that it remained in his collection until his passing in 2024. Writing about Mingelmanganu prior to his death, Akerman reminisced about his genesis as an artist and the power with which he imbued his figures:

Recognised as an outstanding painter of Wanjina figures since 1975, Alec Mingelmanganu was among the first artists of the Kimberley to continue the tradition on canvas after he was introduced to the medium in 1979. At this time, having seen monumental works executed by non-Indigenous artists during a visit to Perth, Western Australia, Mingelmanganu expressed a desire to work on a similar scale ...

Mingelmanganu's Wanjinās confront the viewer. The close-set eyes appear to be hollow, tunnels to another dimension, gates to another world. In some images, including this particular example, there is an almost quizzical air that

asks the viewer, 'Who are you?' The raised, sometimes excurvate shoulders project an air of determination that is balanced by the relaxed arms, which in turn suggest a relaxed confidence, a surety of the power and strength inherent in each Wanjina.¹

In this example, Mingelmanganu has chosen to intimately render the torso of the Wanjina. The result brings intense focus to the eyes and its beaming 'halo' above. The Wanjina being a creator and controller of storms and rain, the fanning lines around its head may depict hair or clouds or lightning, depending on the artist and the specific Wanjina they are seeking to represent. Its deep, penetrating eyes stare outwards. The unusual, rounded shape of Wanjinās may reflect that of Dumbi, an ancestral owl, who is an intimate associate of the Wanjina.

Much like the artists who painted the rock faces on the north Kimberley plateau, Mingelmanganu appears to have blown white pigment from his mouth onto this bark in preparation for his depiction of the Wanjina. Dividing the eyes is a short line depicting a nose, and, like the majority of Wanjina, it has no mouth. Its typically hunched shoulders, evoking cumulus storm clouds, conform to the edges of the bark. A dark ovoid shape beneath its neck locates the breastbone and possibly depicts a pearl shell pendant used to conjure storms and rain.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. Kim Akerman, *Significant*, D'La Contemporary, 30 May – 12 July 2024, pp. 34–36.



JACK KARADADA
c. 1920 – 2003
Wunambal language

Wanjina circa 1978
earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
95 × 50 cm (37.4 × 19.7 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, painted at Kalumburu,
Western Australia
Private Collection, Tasmania
Important Aboriginal Art, Joel Fine
Art, Melbourne, 5 June 2007, lot 21
Private Collection, Queensland,
acquired from the above

AUD 25,000
USD 16,000

The Karadada family of the north-west Kimberley region of Western Australia represents a unique lineage of artists who dedicated their artistic practice almost exclusively to the image of the Wanjina. Jack, his wife, Lily Mindildi, his brother Lewis, and Lewis’s wife, Rosie Ngalirman, were members of the Wunambal-speaking peoples that occupied the Country between the Prince Regent River and the King Edward River. Their late brother Manila Karadada (Kutwit) had been one of the foremost painters of Wanjina pictures during the renaissance of north Kimberley art that occurred in the mid 1970s.

This is one of only a few larger examples of Karadada’s paintings to appear on the market and can be compared to the finest examples of other Wanjina masters including Alec Mingelmanganu and Charlie Numbulmoore. Karadada’s knowledge of Wanjina is fully articulated in this commanding figure. The subtle use of yellow ochre shapes the Wanjina’s head and torso, beneath which a cup-

shaped void locates the breastbone and possibly depicts a pearl shell pendant used to conjure storms and rain. The body has been gesturally stippled, and the heraldic headdress mirrors the unique outline of the bark, which has been hemmed with a length of supplejack vine that is neatly ‘sewn’ to its margin.

As anthropologist Kim Akerman previously observed, ‘Jack’s Wanjina figures can usually be distinguished from those of other artists by several features including the eyes that are separated by a nose that is reduced to a stroke of the brush.’ The stick-like figures surrounding this Wanjina may represent a human baby-spirit, yayalla. These spirits are said to inhabit areas of permanent fresh water, also typically associated with both Wanjina beings and Rainbow Serpents.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. <https://www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/6543/floating-likewind-blow-em-about.html>. Accessed on 20 December 2024.



ALBERT NAMATJIRA

c. 1902 – 1959
Western Arrarnta language

*Central Australian Landscape –
View of the Finke River
near Ntaria circa 1947*

watercolour, pencil, wood,
spinifex resin and sinew
66 × 14 cm (26 × 5.5 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in the
Hermannsburg region,
Northern Territory
Aboriginal Handicraft,
Northern Territory
Private Collection
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above
by private sale

AUD 25,000
USD 16,000



Albert Namatjira is one of Australia's most admired artists. Alongside lucid watercolour landscapes on paper, Namatjira also chose to paint delicate vignettes on the curved surfaces of amirre (woomeras/spear throwers). From his outset as a watercolourist in 1936, throughout World War II (with its attendant material shortages) and until at least 1950, Namatjira continued to carve and paint amirre. Namatjira's exquisitely painted amirre constitute a significant, if neglected portion of his intriguing oeuvre.¹

On close examination it is evident that the genre provided Namatjira with ongoing artistic satisfaction, most obviously because the oval 'window' onto an unfolding landscape offered

particular opportunities. What is more, a woomera was a potent object in and of itself, for, together with the spear, boomerang and stone knife, the amirre constituted the essential, everyday toolkit of Arrarnta manhood. I imagine that Namatjira was comforted by the feel of the freshly carved and polished stem of an amirre in his hand as he walked from his camp along the bank of the Finke River towards a familiar spot under the shade of a large river red gum, a favoured painting spot.²

As a prolific maker, Namatjira was crucial to the emergence of a craft industry at the Finke River Mission in the early 1930s. The goanna inscribed on the inside of this amirre is strikingly similar to images he painted on boomerangs

and coathangers in the first phase of his career. The text 'ABORIGINAL HANDICRAFT – HERMANNSBURG – CENTRAL AUSTRALIA' is written with pride near the handle of this amirre, as is the case with many of his other carved creations. Namatjira's chronicler, Ken McGregor, believes that Namatjira made the amirre himself, and that the object's fine sanded finish displays a finesse that the artist/craftsman brought to every aspect of his creative practice.³

In 1992, Ian Burn and Ann Stephen wrote extensively of the encrypted meaning that can be read into Namatjira's woomeras. Their essay discusses an example from the Powerhouse Collection that shows a view along the Finke

River that appears to be taken from the same viewpoint as the current example. Burn and Stephen highlight the dearth of analysis of Namatjira's artefacts, noting: 'Without exception, accounts of Namatjira's art have given precedence to a Western Cultural form, that of the watercolour painting on paper.'⁴ While there is now a more generous acceptance of the way Namatjira's images lead us towards an understanding of Country from a uniquely Aboriginal perspective, the particularities of his paintings on carved weapons remain poorly understood.

The surface, offered by the relatively pale sapwood of a mulga (*Acacia aneura*), provided Namatjira with a stable plane for the controlled

application of watercolour washes. Indeed, individual brushstrokes are even more apparent on the non-porous surface of mulga than on paper, which instantly accepts and subtly disperses watercolour pigment. What is more, Namatjira frequently used opaque white (probably titanium white) on his amirre, which appears all the more brilliant when contrasted with the sapwood's earthy yellowness.⁵ Recognising the potential of the opaque paint, he captured the gnarled yet powdery whiteness of the river red gums with particular effect. The vignette on this amirre focuses our attention on the trunks of a pair of gums; this treatment can be compared to numerous studies Namatjira made of individual gum trees, especially those from 1945 until the end of his life, by which time tree trunks had become a leitmotif, animating the surface of his works with human-like bodies showing the scars of prolonged exposure.

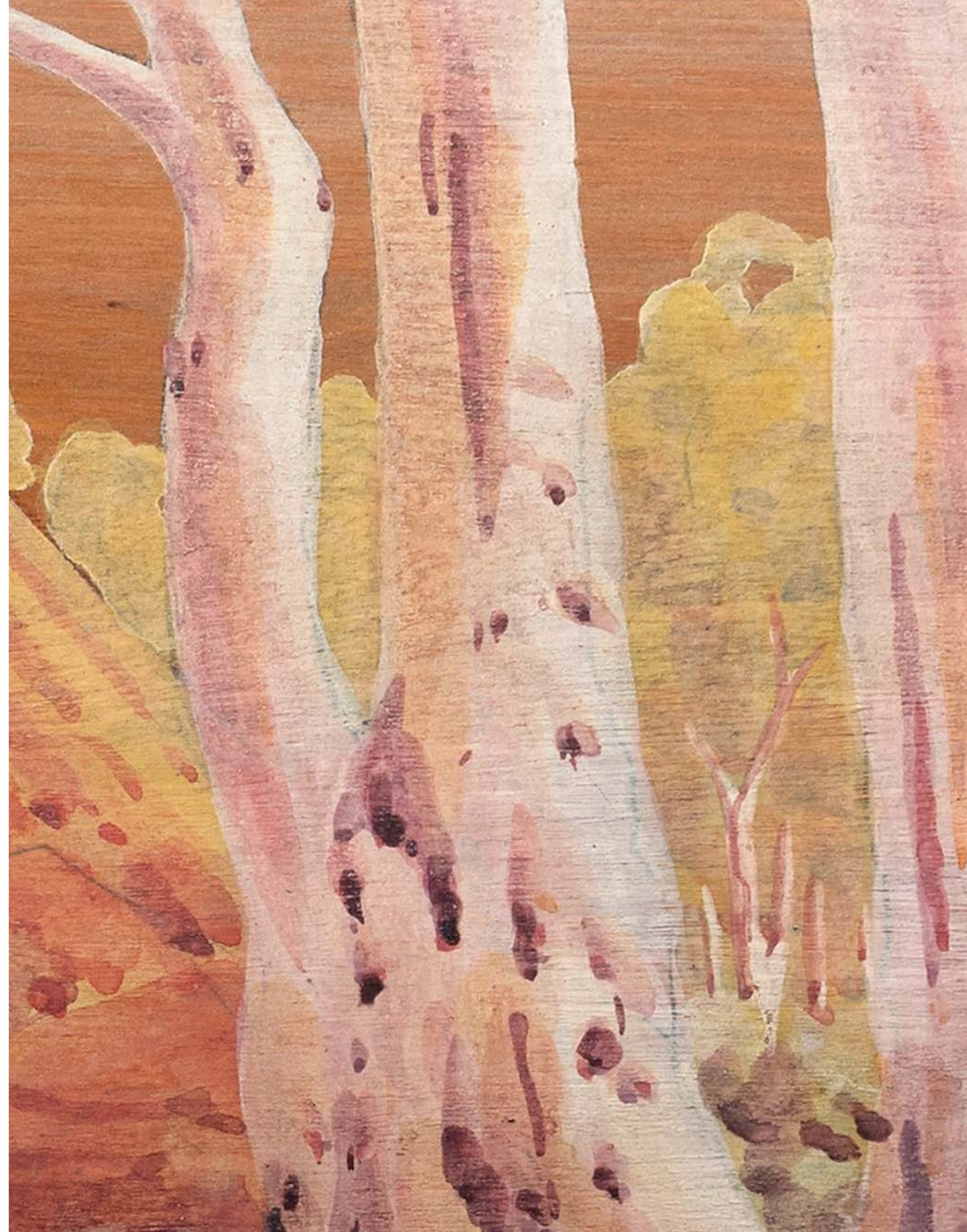
Realising that light is refracted very differently on the object's convex surface than on the flat brilliance of watercolour paper, Namatjira tends to use more dramatic forms on his amirre than is the case with his works on paper. Moreover, the oval window, created within the greater oval form of the woomera itself, is like a secret aperture. This viewpoint is subtly different to the openness of the rectangular frame of a sheet of paper, which we understand as a section 'cut' from a longer horizon. The attenuated oval encourages the viewer to feel the landscape wrapping around them – a more elastic experience of Country than the perspectival

views created within the conventional rectangular frame of Western art.

There is a particular intimacy when handling one of Namatjira's amirre, knowing that he polished the surface to his satisfaction, felt the weight of the form in his hand and probably rolled the amirre over his shoulder, recreating the action of his ancestors, who used amirre to hunt kangaroo in the area where he painted. Far from being a minor work, Namatjira's amirre reflects the totality of his practice, from its brilliant inception as Namatjira the craftsman, to his maturity as the artist who brought the enduring beauty of Central Australia to a national audience.

JOHN KEAN

1. Namatjira's chronicler, Ken McGregor, who is currently assembling the artist's catalogue raisonné, has recorded thirty-eight examples of Namatjira's painted woomera. In conversation with Ken McGregor, 5 March 2025.
2. Several of the woomera that I have seen feature images from the same viewpoint. See, for instance, Ken McGregor, *The Life and Times of Albert Namatjira*, Badger Editions, Melbourne, 2021, pp. 234, 235, 288, 289 & 223.
3. In conversation with Ken McGregor, 5 March 2025.
4. Powerhouse Collection, Object no. 91/13 – 1, Ian Burn and Ann Stephen, 'Namatjira's white mask: a partial interpretation', in Jane Hardy, J.V.S. Megaw and Ruth Megaw (eds), *The Heritage of Namatjira: The Watercolourists of Central Australia*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1992, p. 250.
5. As a purist, Namatjira rarely, if ever, uses opaque paint when painting on paper; rather, he leaves a negative (paper white) space when he wishes to emphasise the sun hitting the surface of a ghost gum (or similarly bright surface).



YALA YALA GIBBS TJUNGURRAYI

c. 1924 – 1998

Pintupi language

Two Old Men 1972synthetic polymer paint on
compressed fibreboard

61 × 45.7 cm (24 × 18 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,
Northern Territory
Stuart Art Centre, Alice Springs,
consignment 17, painting 14
Private Collection, Richmond, British
Columbia, Canada, acquired
from the above
Antiques & Asian Works of Art,
Maynards Auctions, Richmond,
Canada, 18 December 2024, lot 402
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

AUD 140,000

USD 89,600

Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi was in his mid thirties when he encountered government patrol officer Jeremy Long, the first non-Indigenous person he had seen. It was July 1962, and after confirming that his relatives had migrated east, Yala Yala, his wife, Ningura Napurrula, and their injured son, Mawitja Tjapaltjarri, travelled to Papunya with the government patrol to seek treatment for the boy's burns. It was at Papunya that Yala Yala was given the name Gibbs, a contraction of his home, the vast Gibson Desert.¹

The Pintupi experienced dreadful mortality at Papunya, especially among their children and Elders. That sadness, together with their loss of autonomy as hunter-gatherers, made this a most painful period. Yet, the Pintupi persisted, regrouped and dreamed of an eventual return to Country.² Paintings such as Yala Yala's *Two Old Men* 1972 are a physical manifestation of the artist's yearning for the places where he had been conceived and his old people had been buried.

Yala Yala was the tallest man in Papunya and the non-Indigenous functionaries he met were struck by contradictory aspects of his character. I remember seeing him first at Waruwiya outstation in 1977. He approached me slowly, barefooted, bearded and dressed in a tight-fitting business suit ingrained with red earth, his hair bound with a bright red headband to assert his manhood. Yala Yala's features were broad and his brows sheltered dark eyes. Despite Yala Yala's alarming physical presence, he was the quietest of the Pintupi men, who if he spoke at all, it was in brief whispers.

From July to September 1971, Yala Yala was among a group of senior Pintupi men who gathered under the verandah at Bardon's flat, drawing concentric circles with interlinking lines – the conceptual bones of paintings for which they would become famous.³ It is likely that these rough drawings were the first works Yala Yala produced with introduced materials.⁴



Yala Yala soon went on to complete his first paintings, sometimes using old floor tiles with discarded house paints, and on other occasions using more conventional art materials that Bardon supplied. Remarkably, these boards were painted just nine years after Yala Yala made contact with the ‘modern’ world, outside the Gibson Desert. Unlike other Pintupi painters, Yala Yala did not attempt to establish a relationship with Bardon, or other early art advisors, such as myself, who worked for Papunya Tula Artists. Nor did he confide in the anthropologist Fred Myers, who talked in depth to many of Yala Yala’s peers. Others, like the loquacious Charlie Wartuma Tjungurrayi and the savvy Nosepeg Tjupurrula, or Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi, also a quietly spoken man, actively sought out non-Indigenous agents whom they believed could advance their cause. Yala Yala, however, remained aloof, shunning contact with Europeans and expressing no interest in the operations of their society. Even when pressed, Yala Yala revealed very little about his paintings, sometimes uttering the name of a depicted site, or glossing the Dreaming represented in a single word: ‘Wati’ (men), ‘Tingarri’ (travelling parties of post-initiates), ‘Pilkati’ (poisonous snake) or ‘Malu’ (Kangaroo). When those whose task it was to document paintings learnt so little about the artist’s intentions, how should Yala Yala’s paintings be assessed? Indeed,

how should any such highly encrypted paintings, which we know so little about, be interpreted? *Two Old Men* has a spare, tensile energy that resembles some of the spidery works of the modernist master Paul Klee. The painting’s rugged materiality is also reminiscent of assemblages of Antoni Tàpies. Yet such comparisons to modern art can be misleading, especially when they do not take into account the context of the painting’s creation. Yala Yala had been painting for a year when he made *Two Old Men*. He knew nothing of Western art, yet creating fine lines on a flat surface offered new possibilities.⁵ Yala Yala, unlike Klee, had never been confined to a school desk and compelled to hold a pencil and write neatly in rows; the energy of his hand was unaffected. Therefore, the quality of Yala Yala’s brushwork, which may call to mind Klee’s aspiration for ‘An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk’s sake’ does not apply to the Pintupi artist’s lived experience. Yala Yala grew into adulthood beyond the contact horizon, where walking between water sources was a matter of life or death.⁶ While the compelling materiality of the work echoes some forms of modernism, its source at a remote and impoverished Aboriginal community, where two incommensurate cultures were colliding, is anything but romantic. We cannot come close to understanding Yala Yala’s *Two Old Men* through any formal comparison with twentieth century European art, though we can

enjoy the mysterious convergence of visual effects from otherwise dissimilar world views. Yala Yala’s paintings are best approached as particular expressions created within and from the visual culture of the Western Desert. The significance of the current work to the history of art rests in it being created in the first phase of contemporary Aboriginal art, at Papunya. It is revealing when *Two Old Men* is compared with earlier and less-known works on paper by Western Desert people. Produced as a means of communicating information to non-Indigenous ethnographers, these precious drawings, created with crayons on brown paper, are housed in museum collections.⁷ Like Yala Yala’s *Two Old Men*, these drawings evoke a way of living that has now passed.⁸ Yala Yala’s survival, before his fateful encounter with Jeremy Long, depended on his capacity to read cryptic environmental indicators, together with an ability to conceptualise vast distances via refined mnemonic signs. The disarming simplicity of *Two Old Men* is shorthand for the artist’s comprehensive understanding of his Country. Anthropologist David Brooks and art historian Darren Jorgensen have written eloquently that some paintings by older desert people are analogous to the images beamed back to earth from the Hubble Telescope – sublime signals from a distant, yet ultimately unknowable world.⁹ Yala Yala’s early paintings can be appreciated with that same wonder.

JOHN KEAN

1. Both Ningura and Mawitja (also known as Morris) would later become renowned artists in their own right. Vivien Johnson, *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2008, p. 60.
2. Yala Yala eventually returned to his Country, establishing an outstation at Mantarti in 1985.
3. Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 43.
4. For examples of these drawings see Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, pp. 95–104.
5. Designs were applied to the bodies of ceremonial performers and certain ritual objects in traditional Pintupi culture.
6. Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Faber and Faber, London, 1977.
7. For an overview of the crayon drawings produced for Australian ethnographers, see Peter Sutton, ‘Aboriginal maps and plans’, in G. Malcolm Lewis and David Woodward, *Cartography in the Traditional African, American, Arctic, Australian, and Pacific Societies*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, pp. 387–416.
8. The last group of Pintupi people ‘made contact’ near Yala Yala’s outstation at Mantarti in August 1984.
9. David Brooks and Darren Jorgensen, *Warnarn Painters of Place and Time: Old Age Travels in the Tjukurrpa*, AWA Publishing, Perth, 2015, pp. 2–3.

RONNIE TJAMPITJINPA

c. 1943 – 2023
Pintupi language

Man Ceremony 1972
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
46 × 30 cm (18 × 11.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,
Northern Territory
Stuart Art Centre, Alice Springs,
consignment 12, painting 7
Private Collection, Queensland,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Geoffrey Bardon and James
Bardon, Papunya, *A Place Made
After the Story: The Beginnings
of the Western Desert Painting
Movement*, The Miegunyah Press,
Carlton, 2004; for an illustration
of the original field notes and
diagram by Geoffrey Bardon, see
illus. p. 410.

AUD 120,000
USD 76,800

This early painting by Ronnie Tjampitjinpa relates to the Tingarri, a group of ancestors who travelled across vast stretches of the deserts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia shaping the landscape – creating languages, laws and beliefs. The title, *Man Ceremony*, relates to the ritual activity of the men as they journeyed. The network of interconnected lines, white roundels and ‘U’ shapes foreground the muscular geometries that Ronnie would create in the late 1980s.

According to documentation prepared by Geoffrey Bardon and, later, Patricia Hogan of the Stuart Art Centre in Alice Springs, the cascading series of white roundels flanked by adjacent ‘U’ shapes depict two men sitting at waterholes. The red and white lines that adjoin each of the roundels show the ‘tracks’ of the men as they travelled. The circle and line construction running along the left-hand margin of the painting is annotated simply as ‘Dreaming’, suggesting that details relating to this

part of the composition are restricted for men only.

Although no locations are recorded in relation to this work, throughout his career Ronnie referenced the expansive geography that surrounds his birth Country, at the rockhole site of Muyinnga. His later depictions of Tingarri narratives followed their journey to the large salt lakes of Pinari and Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), incorporating sites including Walungurru, Ngurrapalangu, Yumari and Tjamu Tjamu.

Ronnie created this painting in the autumn months of 1972, not long after returning to Papunya after a brief period spent in Alice Springs. During the summer of 1971–1972, Ronnie had been involved in a ‘tribal skirmish’ that required him to seek medical attention for a broken arm.

Ronnie’s foray into the use of newly introduced materials began in August 1971. A series of large murals had just been completed at the Papunya School by the senior men of the community, which



led to a surge of interest in painting on small pieces of timber salvaged from around the community. Added to this was the unexpected success of one of the painting men, Kaapa Tjampitjinpa, who had just won equal first prize at the Caltex Art Award in Alice Springs, resulting in a hefty financial windfall. These almost simultaneous events resulted in the congregation of several Pintupi men on the concrete verandah of schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon's flat. Ronnie was insistent on joining his Pintupi contemporaries in what quickly became a torrent of activity. Possibly owing to a shortage of artists' materials and his relative youth, Ronnie was at first provided with only pencils and typing paper, as he recalled: 'I was ignorant, I had seen them other men painting, my brother-in-law, Tjapangati [Timmy Payungka] and my uncle [Uta Uta], but I didn't start with paint, only pencil. Those first ones were miserable, messy.'

The majority of the pencil drawings that survive from these inaugural experiments on Bardon's verandah have not been definitely attributed, with the exception of several by Ronnie's uncle, Uta Uta. Uta Uta would later guide Ronnie in his initial endeavours to paint on composition board, so it is therefore conceivable that Ronnie, in Uta Uta's company, is one of the unidentified masters of these early pencil drawings.

During the early 1980s, Ronnie was a strong advocate of the Pintupi's move from Papunya to the

newly founded community of Walungurru (Kintore). His profound affiliation with this Country, which continually informed his painting practice, and the close proximity of several key landmarks, inspired him to settle at Yinintitjarra, an outstation just west of Walungurru that had been established by Uta Uta.

During the first decade of the Papunya Tula movement, Ronnie painted only sporadically, distinguishing himself rather as a carver of finely tooled shields, spears and boomerangs for use in ceremony and for sale to kartiya (outsiders). He began to paint in earnest during the late 1980s. As age brought cultural maturity, he sought to establish himself as a serious painter, at a point when he was young enough to reinvent himself and be receptive to the aesthetic innovations of senior artists, such as Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri. Ronnie took an independent direction and began to expand details of various motifs that are customarily incised and/or painted onto ceremonial objects.

Man Ceremony is a singular painting in Ronnie's early oeuvre. Unlike any other work from this period, its bold iconography has distinct resonances with his later practice, which established him as a significant Papunya Tula artist. Ronnie produced a handful of paintings during the critical genesis period of 1971–1972. Few remain in circulation, with most examples in institutional collections.

LUKE SCHOLES



TOMMY LOWRY TJAPALTJARRI

1935 – 1987

Pintupi language

Women's Dreaming 1972synthetic polymer paint on
composition board

45.72 × 63.5 cm (18 × 25 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,

Northern Territory

Stuart Art Centre, Alice Springs,

consignment 14, painting 8

Private Collection

Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,

Melbourne, 30 June, 1997, lot 211

Private Collection, Sydney,

acquired from the above

Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's

Melbourne, 31 July, 2007, lot 78

The Luczo Family Collection, acquired

from the above by private sale

LITERATURE

Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon,

*Papunya, A Place Made After the**Story: The Beginnings of the Western**Desert Painting Movement*, The

Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004; for

an illustration of the original field notes

and diagram by Geoffrey Bardon,

see illus. p. 367, painting no. 317.

Luczo Family Collection, Deutscher

and Hackett, Melbourne,

19 October 2016, pp. 66–67

AUD 120,000

USD 76,800

The artist, who after contact with Europeans became known as Tommy Lowry, was conceived at Patjarr, near the Clutterbuck Hills west of Warakurna in Western Australia.¹ A traditionally oriented man, known to his countrymen as Patjarrngurrarra (literally 'of the place Patjarr'), Lowry expressed very little interest in European affairs.² Although he is sometimes associated with Pintupi speakers, Lowry's Country is in an inaccessible portion of Western Australia, roughly equidistant from Kiwirrkurra, Warakurna and Warburton.³ The people of this region speak closely related dialects of the Western Desert language and regard each other as waltja (family). Ngaatjatjarra, Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi people are linked by marriage, history and their affiliation to the epic songlines that course through their Country.

Lowry was an occasional visitor to Papunya, where, instrumentally, one of his stays in 1971–1972 coincided with the inception of contemporary desert painting at the community. It was towards the end of that stay that *Women's Dreaming* was

painted. Lowry spent the majority of his adult life far to the south-west of Papunya, moving from his desert homelands to the Warburton Mission and later camping at Warakurna (a small community near Giles Weather Station) and the government settlement at Kaltukatjara (Docker River).

Lowry returned to Papunya and the nearby Pintupi outstation at Yayayi in 1978. A man of ceremonial consequence, he joined an influential group of Papunya-based Pintupi leaders (including Nosepeg Tjupurrula, Uta Uta Tjangala and Anatjari Tjakamarra) who were working towards the creation of homeland communities in the heart of the desert, across a vast region where they had grown into manhood. I first met Lowry at Yayayi, and later travelled with him and his family along an overgrown bush track via Sandy Blight Junction to deliver canvas and paints to Uta Uta and Anatjari, who were living at Kaltukatjara.⁴ Retaining the chignon, as worn by wati (initiated men) in pre-contact times, Lowry was a powerfully built man of formidable personality.



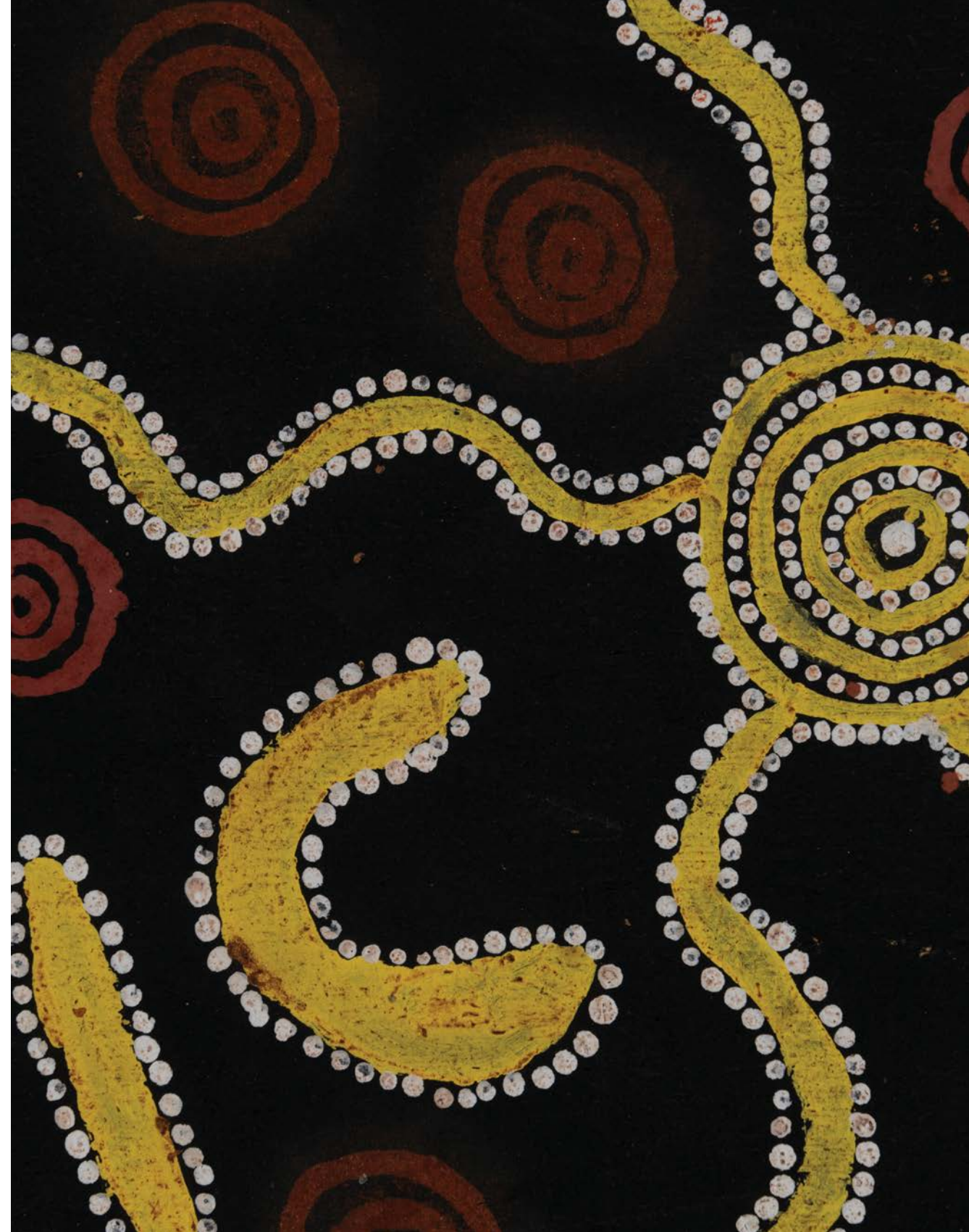
Tommy Lowry's *Women's Dreaming* is a diagrammatic depiction of a group of women and their camps, as seen from above. While apparently fixed as a painting in two dimensions, the image traces the dynamism of desert life as women move from site to site within and around a particular location. The women are represented by the 'U' shapes, either seated at a waterhole (as Geoffrey Bardon suggests in his original sketch of the work) or walking around the site with their digging sticks (single bars) and a carrying bowl (smaller oval).⁵ Bardon interprets the small red roundels as fires, and these may have been lit to illuminate an evening ceremony, or be the hunting fires of the women as they search for the tracks and burrows of small game. The possibility that the image represents an ancestral women's ceremony is heightened by the presence of large inscribed oval forms, which Bardon describes as 'ceremonial objects'. The objects are inscribed with different signs, perhaps suggesting various foods collected by the ancestral women.

Women's Dreaming has an undotted background that is characteristic of boards that were painted by Pintupi (and other men of closely related language groups) in the Men's Painting Room during the early months of 1972.⁶ It was only after Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula began to articulate patches of dots to represent various phenomena that the founding Papunya painters began to fill their boards with a variety of dotted bands and insignia that would later come to define Papunya Tula art.

Tommy Lowry's *Women's Dreaming* is among a handful of early works by an artist who is best remembered for his large pulsing canvases such as *Two Men Dreaming at Kuluntjarranya* 1984 (QAGOMA). It possesses the urgency of an artist uncovering the potential of a new medium.

JOHN KEAN

1. Also known as Tommy Larry, Tommy No 4, No 4, Tichiwan, Tjiyuwan, Titiuinya, Patja [and Patjarrngurrarra], Vivien Johnson, *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2008, p. 115.
2. According to the anthropologist David Brooks, Patjarr is a key ceremonial site to which many people have strong associations; personal communications with the author, 15 October 2020. It is now the location of a small community serviced from Warburton, and home to Kayili Artists.
3. The people of the southern Western Desert do not express kinship subsection names (for example, Tjapaltjarri, Tjakamarra, Napaltjarri, Nakamarra); rather, they use a slightly different six-group kinship that underpins marriage, ceremonial and familiar responsibilities. Lowry was assigned the kinship name 'Tjapaltjarri', to accord with his association with the 'Purungu' group in the six-group kinship system.
4. John Kean, 'A big canvas: mobilising Pintupi painting', in Philip Batty (ed.), *Colliding Worlds: First Contact in the Western Desert 1932–1984*, Museum Victoria Publishing, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 46–52.
5. See Bardon's original diagram of the painting, in Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 367.
6. Bardon confirms that *Women's Dreaming* was painted at Papunya between March and April 1972, Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 367.



UTA UTA TJANGALA

c. 1926 – 1990

Pintupi language

*Untitled – Yina at
Tiliranganya 1972*synthetic polymer paint on
composition board

113.2 × 53 cm (44.5 × 2.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,
Northern Territory
Warlpiri and Pintupi Art, Barossa
Arts Festival, Barossa Valley,
South Australia, 1973
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

EXHIBITED

Warlpiri and Pintupi Art, Barossa
Arts Festival, Barossa Valley,
South Australia, 1973

AUD 280,000

USD 179,200

Uta Uta Tjangala came to prominence among a cohort of Pintupi people who were born on Country, growing up there into adulthood, and only making their first contact with non-Indigenous culture as young men. Driven by hunger, and the urge to be reunited with relatives, Uta Uta left the Gibson Desert with other members of his family, making the 200 kilometre trek during prolonged drought, and reaching a small government outpost at Haasts Bluff in December 1956. Food and water were available at Haasts Bluff, but Uta Uta continued to worry for those members of his family who remained in an increasingly lonely desert. In July 1958, Uta Uta joined a party led by patrol officer Jeremy Long, with the aim of finding isolated Pintupi families.¹ Leaving the patrol, Uta Uta chose to stay on his Country, searching familiar water places until he located his family. After several months, and with his son-in-law, Timmy Payunka Tjapangati, Uta Uta led another group of relatives back to Haasts Bluff.

Three decades later, the Pintupi made a heroic return to their homelands, creating communities at Walungurru (Kintore) and Kiwirrkurra as well as a constellation of outstations. Uta Uta established himself at Muyin, an outstation near the Northern Territory/Western Australian border.² It was after

his return to Country that Uta Uta created a series of monumental canvases, three of which graced the Australian Embassy in Washington, and are now in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

The current *Untitled* 1972 board was created at the start of Uta Uta Tjangala's artistic career, in the Men's Painting Room at Papunya, a space I have previously referred to as Australia's most influential atelier. The board was painted during the 'interregnum', a period of intense creativity that flowered between Geoffrey Bardon's departure in August 1972 and the appointment of Peter Fannin as art advisor for the nascent Papunya Tula Artists in December of the same year. The interregnum is characterised by extravagant visual experimentation by the founding artists of the desert art movement. So, rather than being identifiable through any single stylistic trend, works produced during the interregnum are set apart by their diversity, as well as by fleeting trends that were passed around and across the art room, to then disappear. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the period is that many works were painted on asymmetrically shaped boards.³ Uta Uta's *Untitled* 1972 painting is among the largest of the works created during the interregnum and the board's gently curved edges add to the painting's thrusting dynamism.





The painting was hastily sketched by Patricia Hogan, director of the Stuart Art Centre, as she assembled 414 boards that together comprised Consignment 19, the largest and most diverse group of works ever to leave Papunya.⁴ The original documentation of the current untitled painting provides scant information. Significantly, there is no site name nor is the subject/Dreaming of the painting recorded, so an estimation of its content must be garnered from comparative analysis with other works from Uta Uta's oeuvre, and those of his countrymen.

Despite the paucity of information recorded when the painting was produced, it is clear that Uta Uta stocked its surface with a rich array of iconographic information, through which he intended to convey the power of his Tjukurpa (ancestral history). The following appraisal of the likely subject is based on an analysis of the painting's distinctive composition and the content of the turlku (sacred objects) described on its surface.

Uta Uta was among the most respected and forceful of the Pintupi artists; accordingly, when assessing this work, the anthropologist Fred Myers wrote: 'The designs on the churingas [turlku] look quite specific, as if they are reproductions of some actual ones, rather than just generic designs', adding, 'Uta Uta was probably more likely to do that than some others [of the founding Papunya-based artists].'⁵ Here, Myers is emphasising that Uta Uta's boisterous personality, together with his undisputed ceremonial authority, resulted in him depicting highly prized sacred iconography to a greater extent than is the case with more retiring Pintupi artists, who tended to disguise or omit potentially contentious sacred signs from paintings. Uta Uta was an assertive character, frequently pushing cultural constraints to the limit, and this work exemplifies how his personal charisma is transmitted, through bold composition and confident brushstrokes.

The strong vertical orientation of this untitled painting shares its directional linearity with other paintings that describe the westward journeying of Yina, a lascivious old man of the Dreaming.

Yina's journey starts at Kampurarrpa (Henty Hills), where his advances towards a group of ancestral women were ignored. Dismayed that the women perceived him to be too ugly to be of interest, Yina trudges through Tjukanyina, towards Malkunja, before continuing to Ngurrapalangu (the site of Uta Uta's conception), and on to Yumari and nearby Tiliranganya (near the Northern Territory/Western Australian border).

Many of Uta Uta's depictions of the 'Old Man Dreaming' have an intentional vertical orientation (Yina is a slave to his oversized penis). In 1971, for instance, when Uta Uta was first becoming acquainted with the rectangular format of Western art, he would use the long diagonal axis of his chosen board to describe the dominant sexual iconography of the Yina story. Early works that demonstrate this orientation are *Old Man Story* 1971, *Ceremony Dreaming for Yumari* 1971 and (the erroneously titled) *Bush Tucker* 1971 (all three works in the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory).⁶ Uta Uta's intended reading of these boards is revealed in a photograph taken in front of the Men's Painting Room in December 1971. Geoffrey Bardon stands with his arms folded alongside a group of twelve founding artists; whereas the other men hold their respective paintings to correspond with a conventional Western upright orientation, Uta Uta (fifth from the left) holds *Bush Tucker* 1971 diagonally and low, over his shorts, thereby emphasising the correlation with his own physicality and the painting's subject, Yina's penis.⁷

This vertical orientation of the 'Old Man' iconography is further exemplified in the straight-up composition of paintings of the same subject by Charlie Tarawa 'Wartuma' Tjungurrayi; see in particular *Medicine Story or Man Dreaming* 1971 and *Medicine Story* 1971 (both works at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory).⁸ There are also compelling compositional and iconographic similarities between *Old Man (Yina) Dreaming* 1972 (Private Collection) and *Untitled* 1972. Both *Old Man (Yina) Dreaming* and the current work are comprised of several vertical



Uta Uta Tjangala
c. 1926 – 1990
Pintupi language
Old Man's Dreaming 1983
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
242 × 362 cm (95.3 × 142.5 inches)
South Australian Government
Grant 1984, Art Gallery of South
Australia, Adelaide
© Estate of Uta Uta Tjangala/
Aboriginal Artists Agency 844P11

turlku arranged tightly to fill the available space.⁹ It is on the basis of these correlations that I suggest the Dreaming of the lascivious Old Man Yina is the most likely subject for *Untitled* 1972.

When questioned about the potential subject of the current work, Myers suggested the painting may be a depiction of Tilirangaranya, a group of large standing rocks associated with the Old Man Dreaming to the near south of Yumari. Both sites are located on a plain set within the endless parallel dunes that dominate the region. Whereas Tilirangaranya is characterised by the masculine verticality of its standing stones, Yumari is a deep interior space, its female form created by a cross-shaped fissure in a large flat rock that fills with water after rain. Both locations are sexually charged, for it was at Yumari that Yina finally unleashed the sexual desire that had been tormenting him on his long westward journey. Shockingly, Yina copulated with his Yumari (mother-in-law) on the flat rock described above, and their proscribed relationship lends its name to the site.¹⁰ After their prohibited coupling, Yina walked a few hundred metres to the south, to Tilirangaranya, where in the morning he lit a fire, decorated himself in the traditional manner, and shouted out, with his hand in front of his mouth (a formal proclamation, referred to as tjamarlangu).¹¹ Yina finally left Tilirangaranya,

moving towards his inescapable and excruciating punishment – the consequence of his sexual transgressions.

The story of Yina and his Yumari is a challenging account of uncontrollable lust and its aftermath. It is therefore important to note that Uta Uta himself would delight in recounting this tale. There is no doubt that Uta Uta understood how confronting the notion of sexual relations between a son-in-law and mother-in-law is in every society. Further, as Uta Uta revealed the climax of Yina's ancestral narrative, and the consequence of his transgression was foreshadowed, the artist appeared to enjoy watching the shock of recognition register on the faces of his non-Indigenous audience.

Myers' estimation of the episode as the most likely subject is based on a compelling visual correlation between the standing stones at Tilirangaranya and the vertical rows of sacred objects in the current painting – the sacred objects quite literally turned to stone in the contemporary landscape. Myers came to this interpretation through a comparison between the composition of one of Uta Uta's best-known works, *Old Man's Dreaming* 1983 (Art Gallery of South Australia), and the orientation of the objects in *Untitled* 1972. The six long vertical ovals in *Old Man's Dreaming* 1983 are a very clear and quite realistic depiction of

the prominent standing stones at Tilirangaranya. Rather than inscribing them with iconographic imagery (as is the case in *Untitled* 1972), the outlines of the standing stones/turlku in the 1983 version are infilled with powerful concentric bands. These patterns emanate power, whereas the iconography on the turlku in the 1972 painting exemplify truth.¹² I concur with Myers' reading of Tilirangaranya as the likely site referred to in *Untitled* 1972.

Uta Uta is most renowned for his largest canvases, most of which were created in the decade before his death in 1990. Such was his power as a painter, he tested the boundaries of even his largest commissions, wherein numerous concentric circles quite literally thrum and spin with ancestral energy. Uta Uta's presence, alternately emanating warmth or bubbling with incipient rage – his burning eyes looking through your gaze to the infinite horizon beyond – find form in his bustling compositions. One experiences Uta Uta's personality palpably when standing in front of his creations, for at an ontological level they are self-portraits. It is this directness that makes Uta Uta a unique and powerful artist.

In the darkness of the Men's Painting Room, Uta Uta gave voice to his ceremonial authority with this pared-back representation of the Old Man Yina, an epic with which he was intimately associated. Given his animated, insistent personality, it is no surprise that Uta Uta Tjangala grasped the largest board that he could reach, inscribing on its surface icons associated with the core of his being.¹³

JOHN KEAN

1. Vivien Johnson, *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2008, p. 25.
2. Personal communication with the artist, 1989.
3. The boards were cut in the Manual Training Centre, some 200 metres away from the Men's Painting Room.
4. Luke Scholes confirmed this work was included in Consignment 19. He accounts for the relatively high number of paintings as resulting from an 'ongoing

- consignment which began in approximately November 1972 and continued through until the end of that year'. Email correspondence, 9 October 2024.
5. Fred Myers, email correspondence, 3 October 2024.
 6. All paintings listed in this paragraph are in the collection of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and are reproduced in Luke Scholes (ed.), *Tjungunutja: From Having Come Together*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2017.
 7. Reproduced in Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 28.
 8. Both paintings are reproduced in Scholes (ed.), *Tjungunutja*.
 9. Uta Uta Tjangala, *Old Man (Yina) Dreaming* 1972 is illustrated in Judith Ryan and Philip Batty (eds), *Tjukurrjangu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2011, p. 138.
 10. There is a strict avoidance relationship between a son-in-law and their mother-in-law in the cultures of arid Australia. This restriction on direct social contact also extends to any potential mother-in-law.
 11. Fred Myers, email correspondence, 3 October 2024.
 12. For an extended discussion of meaning and value in Uta Uta's paintings of the Old Man Dreaming, see 'Truth or beauty: the revelatory regime of Pintupi painting', in Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002, pp. 17–53.
 13. While the author was art advisor at Papunya Tula Artists, 1977–1979, he worked with Uta Uta Tjangala, and maintained regular contact with the artist until his death in 1990.

SOURCES

Geoffrey and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004.

Vivien Johnson, *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2008.

Vivien Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010.

John Kean, 'A big canvas: mobilising Pintupi painting', in Philip Batty et al. (eds), *Colliding Worlds: First Contact in the Western Desert 1932–1984*, Museum Victoria Publishing, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 46–52.

Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002.

Judith Ryan and Philip Batty (eds), *Tjukurrjangu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2011.

Fred Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1986.

Luke Scholes (ed.), *Tjungunutja: From Having Come Together*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2017.

TIMMY PAYUNGKA TJAPANGATI

c. 1935 – 2000

Pintupi language

*Yala Tjukurrpa – Wild**Potato Dreaming* 1972synthetic polymer paint on
composition board

47 × 30.5 cm (18.5 × 12 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,

Northern Territory

Stuart Art Centre, Alice Springs,

consignment 14, painting 11

Private Collection

Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,

Melbourne, 30 June 1997, lot 247

Private Collection, acquired

from the above

AUD 85,000

USD 54,400

Timmy Payungka Tjapangati was the most physically graceful of the Pintupi artists. He had the bearing and gait of a man who could cover many kilometres on foot with minimal effort – appearing to float over the earth. The subtle tones and textures of this painting, which, as I discuss below, I am calling *Yala Tjukurrpa – Wild Potato Dreaming* 1972, communicate the acute observational skills of an artist who spent the first decades of his life as a hunter in an unforgiving desert environment.

In 1957, Tjapangati was living with his family in the vicinity of Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), the great saltpan, when a quietly spoken patrol officer, Jeremy Long, approached.

With the help of our Aboriginal guides [Nosepeg Tjupurrula and Tapa Tapa Tjangala], we found a family living near the West Australian border. It was early November and very hot. The people were resting in the shade when we walked into their camp. Alarmed at first at our sudden, unheralded approach, the two men settled to talk ...

We spent the rest of the afternoon and evening talking with the men and cooking and eating the kangaroo that we had shot that morning – a rare treat in this region. The well, Yarannya, was deep, and in the damp sand at the bottom,

three dingo pups [pets] were asleep. I remember being struck by how bright and alert the younger man's eyes were and how extraordinarily straight his back was. Living close to nature clearly had its advantages. He offered next day to lead us ... to another water, Yumari, where we might find another group. But there we saw only distant smokes to the west. This young man, later known as Tim Payungka Tjapangati, wanted to visit his mother, who had walked into Haasts Bluff a year earlier, so we gave him a lift to the settlement [400 kilometres to the east] on our return.

The next winter I took Tim back beyond the Kintore Range so that he could rejoin his family. I remember him leaving us with a load of supplies on his head and disappearing over the sandridge.¹

The government patrol officer, Jeremy Long (1932–2021), and Timmy Payungka Tjapangati (c.1935–2000) remained lifelong friends. In 2013, when documenting one of Tjapangati's paintings, Jeremy encouraged me to use this account of his first meeting with Tjapangati. The recollection is both vivid and telling, for the encounter offers a positive alternative to the hostility that too often



characterised the Australian frontier. Tjapangati's paintings share the sense of thoughtful enquiry that one senses when reading Long's account.

The singular quality of Tjapangati's paintings can be glimpsed from the outset, when he was among a handful of Pintupi men who gathered on the verandah of Geoffrey Bardon's flat in Papunya.² His compositions are frequently angular and employ harmonies and contrasts not seen in the work of his Pintupi peers. While Uta Uta Tjangala created characteristically explosive compositions and Anatjari Tjakamarra constructed geometrically precise spirograms, Tjapangati filled small sheets of paper with dense knotted forms. It is extraordinary that the visual personalities of these three founding Pintupi artists were discernible from the very first images they produced with transcultural media.

Geoffrey Bardon documented this particular painting in the winter of 1972, calling it *Bush Tucker Dreaming of the Wild Potato*.³ I will refer to it more simply as *Yala Tjukurrpa – Wild Potato Dreaming*, for it celebrates an unnamed site associated with Yala (*Ipomoea costata*), a moisture-filled tuber that, in certain conditions, grows profusely north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Yala Dreamings are sometimes associated with water/storm sites, perhaps because the growth of large tubers is dependent on the soil moisture that follows heavy rain.⁴ The iconography of *Yala Tjukurrpa* suggests that this Wild Potato story is embedded within a more complex Water Dreaming site.

The sinuous lines that link the painting's nine roundels are redolent of classical Water Dreaming iconography, especially in the central panel, where sinuous lines are interspersed by horizontal bars. Such lines can refer to lightning and flood water, phenomena associated with a storm, and, in this context, the roots of Yala spreading laterally in the moist earth. If this interpretation is correct, the dots of various sizes would represent precipitation (rain and hail) associated with the passing of an ancestral storm. Bardon's 1972 diagram confirms that a line of ovals, along the left-hand edge, and the elongated ovals at top and bottom are Yala tubers.⁶

In our discussion of *Yala Tjukurrpa*, Professor Fred Myers, who like me had worked with the artist, observed that the work's painterly treatment is likely to have been influenced by Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula, who was painting his famous *Water Dreaming* series in the Men's Painting Room.⁶ Confirmation that both artists were in the makeshift studio at the same time comes from photographs taken by Michael Jensen.⁷ Inspired by the creative excitement he witnessed during this period, Bardon recalled:

Inside our tin shed ... fire, earth, wind and water were being re-created within a set of ideas and signs and seasonal cycles ... Outside the rain made a glass-like shimmer on the Belt Range. There would be the splashing of rain drops on the stale dust and sand of the outpost ...⁸

It seems likely, that along with others of the assembled 'painting men', Tjapangati took the opportunity to imaginatively revisit one of the Water Dreaming sites in his own Country, while longing for the taste of Yala from that distant site.

JOHN KEAN

1. Jeremy Long, 'Meeting with Strangers', in Philip Batty (ed.), *Colliding Worlds: First Contact in the Western Desert 1932–1984*, Museum Victoria Publishing, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 31–33.
2. Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004, pp. 99 & 103.
3. Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 314.
4. Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula, Walter Tjampitjinpa and Long Jack Phillipus Tjakamarra painted Kalipinyapa (to the east of Lake Mackay) with both Water and Yala Dreamings, as did Mick Wallankarri Tjakamarra for Watikinpirri and Watlypurnyu (north-west of Papunya).
5. Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 314.
6. Email communications with the author, 11–13 March 2025.
7. See Jensen's photographs, in Roger Benjamin et al., *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2009, pp. 14–19.
8. Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 29.



KAAPA TJAMPITJINPA

1926 – 1989
Anmatyerr, Warlpiri and
Arrernte languages

Budgerigar Dreaming 1972
synthetic polymer paint and earth
pigments on composition board
91 × 64 cm (36 × 25 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,
Northern Territory
The W.L. Jackson Collection of Early
Western Desert Paintings, Victoria
Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 28 June, 1999, lot 69
Private Collection, Victoria
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 31 July, 2006, lot 81
The Luczo Family Collection,
United States of America,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Geoffrey Bardon, *Papunya Tula*,
Art of the Western Desert, McPhee
Gribble, Melbourne, 1991, p. 111 (illus.)
Geoffrey Bardon and James
Bardon, *Papunya, A Place Made
After the Story: The Beginnings
of the Western Desert Painting
Movement*, The Miegunyah Press,
Carlton, 2004, painting no. 216,
p. 280 (illus.), and a photograph
showing the artist painting this work
is reproduced on p. 278 (illus.)
Sotheby's, Melbourne,
31 July 2006, lot 81

Luczo Family Collection,
Deutscher and Hackett,
Melbourne, 19 October 2016
John Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame: The
Making of Papunya Tula Art*, Upswell
Publishing, Perth, 2023, p. 228

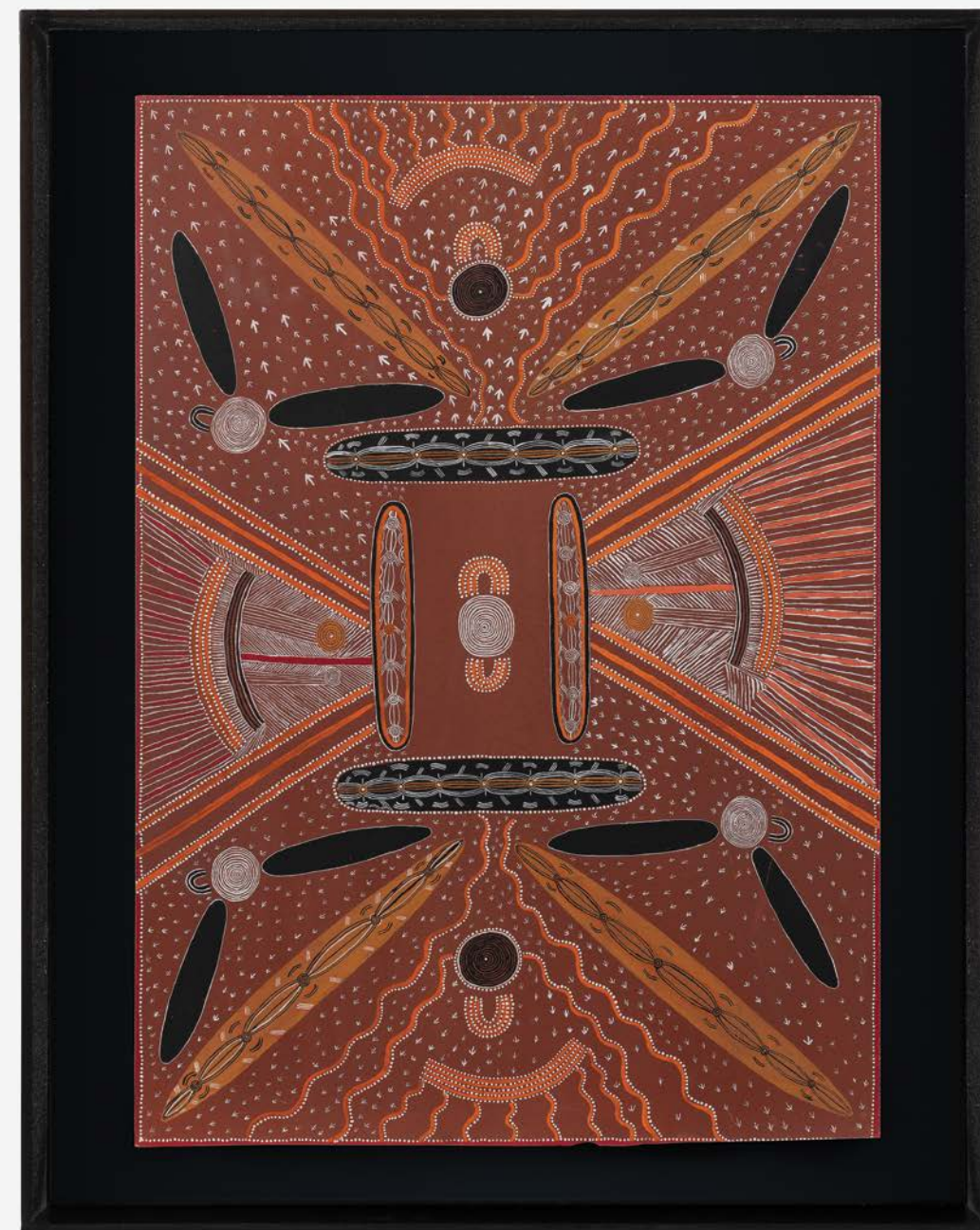
EXHIBITED

On long-term loan to the Art Gallery
of South Australia, Adelaide,
March 2007–2015 and exhibited
in the Collection Galleries, Art
Gallery of South Australia, 27
March 2007 – 27 August 2010
*Tjukurrjtjanu: Origins of Western
Desert Art*, National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne, 30 September
2011 – 12 February 2012; Musée
du quai Branly, Paris, 9 October
2012 – 20 January 2013
Big Country, Art Gallery of South
Australia, Adelaide, 31 August
2013 – 19 January 2014

AUD 1,200,000
USD 768,000

Kaapa Tjampitjinpa was the most influential
artist working at Papunya in the early 1970s.
Geoffrey Bardon, who played a critical role in the
development of the painting movement at Papunya,
regarded Kaapa 'as a man of fabulous brilliance,
a classically compulsive artist'. An impeccable
mimic with a caustic wit, Kaapa established a
revolutionary approach to painting that focused
on the depiction of performers on the ceremonial
ground.¹ The clarity of his conception together
with his impeccable technique ensured that

Kaapa's early works on salvaged materials found a
ready market. Kaapa's authority and expertise was
likewise acknowledged by senior custodians for the
Papunya area, who charged him with responsibility
as the 'principal artist' for the legendary *Honey
Ant Mural* at the Papunya School.² As a result of
his pre-eminence, Kaapa was able to secure larger
boards and better brushes than his peers; he was also
paid significantly more for his work.³ *Budgerigar
Dreaming* 1972 is an exceptional example of an
early phase of Kaapa's artistic achievement.



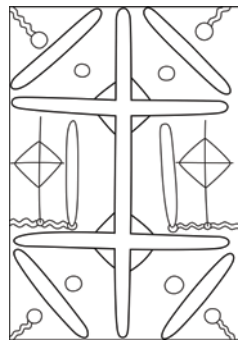


Fig. 1

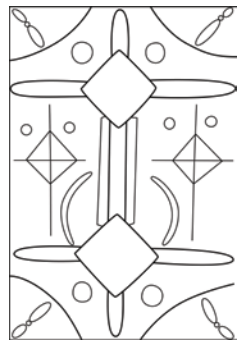


Fig. 2

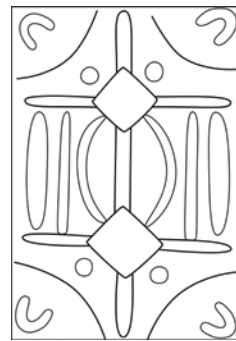


Fig. 3

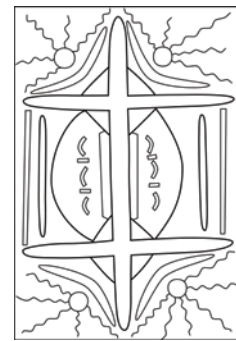


Fig. 4

Kaapa's first set of paintings, produced in the cooler months of 1971, were characterised by a rapid transformation from quasi-perspectival to planar viewpoints. His early masterpiece, *Men's Ceremony for the Kangaroo, 'Gulgardi'* 1971 (Araluen Arts Centre), won the Caltex Northern Territory Art Award in August 1971, and in the process ignited the interest of other senior men at Papunya, who rushed to become artists. Not content with replicating earlier success, in 1972, Kaapa and his cousin Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri embarked on a period of systematic experimentation and compositional innovation. *Budgerigar Dreaming* 1972 marks a high point of Kaapa's influential output during this critical juncture, as the scope and conventions of contemporary desert art were still in flux.

Up to twenty men gathered as equals to paint their Country in the Men's Painting Room. Yet Leura and Kaapa adopted distinctive postures that set them apart from the other men with whom they worked. Bardon writes of 'certain singular habits: Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri *sitting on a chair* in the north-east corner or Kaapa Tjampitjinpa in the centre of the room *at his table*'.⁴ In contrast, other men sat cross-legged, boards held in their laps or resting obliquely on the floor in front of them. Kaapa's and Leura's postures suggest their familiarity with drawing with pencil and paper in structured intercultural settings, such as adult education classes, but their chosen ergonomic relationship to

their work points to a more significant difference in their approach to painting. They were 'intentional' artists who were acutely aware of the intercultural significance of the painting project.

The 'singular habits' Kaapa and Leura practised were not limited to their posture when painting. Amid the hubbub of the Men's Painting Room, where most artists explored the diversity of inherited songlines and riffed on a variety of painting styles that pulsed through the room, Kaapa and Leura worked with particular rigour and focus. Like chemists in a laboratory, they experimented with variant combinations from a list of ingredients that, when judiciously mixed, could spark and fizz. The schema they constructed came via their focused collaboration. The clearest statement of their intent can be found in the incremental development of Kaapa's *Budgerigar* and Leura's *Honey Ant* paintings, series that were painted concurrently and with the artists in dialogue.⁵

Bardon recorded that Kaapa painted nine versions of *Budgerigar Dreaming* in May and June 1972, although he is known to have painted at least three additional works during the same period.⁶ Ten of these variations are composed around a vertical central axis established by dominant ceremonial objects. In each of these compositions, two shorter objects are arranged horizontally to create a double-ended crucifix (see figures 1–4, schematic diagrams of Kaapa Tjampitjinpa's *Budgerigar Dreaming*).

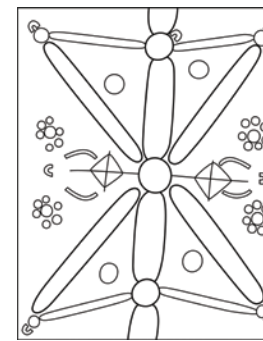


Fig. 5

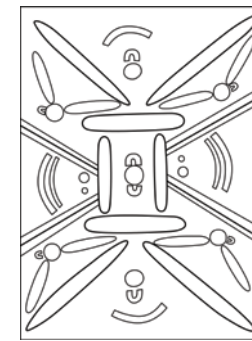


Fig. 6

Schematic diagrams of Kaapa Tjampitjinpa's *Budgerigar Dreaming*, in proposed sequence of production (left to right)

Unsatisfied with the stiffness of the early paintings in the *Budgerigar* series, Kaapa continued to experiment in search of a more dynamic format with which to capture the performative energy of ceremony. My reconstruction of the order in which the paintings were created supposes that Kaapa and Leura introduced transverse elements into their compositional vocabulary at the same moment, and that these diagonals instantly injected dynamism into previously static compositions. I propose that the current painting is the penultimate version created in the 1972 series.⁷

The *Budgerigar* series contains representations of a suite of objects associated with Atetherr (Budgerigar) ancestors. The objects include Tywerrenge (sacred objects), string crosses (sometimes encrypted into a pattern as is the case with the current painting) and roundels. Some paintings also include depictions of ceremonial poles, string lines and signs indicating ceremonial figures and their windbreaks. The series employs dots sparingly, if at all, but there is a trend towards increased elaboration at the conclusion of the series, where small (reversed) arrows indicate budgerigars moving from the wider landscape into the apwelhe (men's ceremonial area). Kaapa had challenging compositional problems to solve, and he pursued their resolution relentlessly, eventually reaching a conclusion that evoked the presence of the Atetherr ancestors and satisfied the dynamic nature of the

ceremonies he envisaged.⁸ Bardon regards the current work as Kaapa's 'ultimate achievement'.⁹ It is certainly the most exquisitely resolved of a series of the *Budgerigar Dreaming* boards Kaapa painted in the winter of 1972.

The sacred geometry of Kaapa's *Budgerigar Dreaming* is derived from equilibrium established along a vertical axis, along which objects are dynamically displaced, then mirrored. The centre of the composition remains unadorned, apart from a customary motif representing two Atetherr (Budgerigar) ancestors adjacent to a circular ground design, evoked by a perfectly executed set of concentric circles. Attenuated Tywerrenge (yellow ochre oval objects) radiate diagonally towards each corner, stretching the picture plane. Tiny white arrows are shown 'flying' towards the ceremonial ground, indicating the 'tracks' of Atetherr. They evoke vast flocks of budgerigars that congregate at water places across arid Australia. Not only do the traces of the Atetherr refer to a spectacular natural phenomenon, but they also prompt an analogy between the massing birds and the eagerness of post-initiate novices who congregate on the ceremonial ground, thirsty for the knowledge of the Elders.

Some of the sacred objects are shown with inscribed patterns on their surface, while others remained blacked out and unadorned, their slight asymmetry cutting into the composition like



whirring propeller blades (perhaps intended to represent bullroarers). As is the case with many of his early paintings, Kaapa treads a fine line between the revelation of restricted detail and its encryPTION.

When considering the creative frisson between revelation and concealment in works by senior Pintupi artists, Fred Myers writes:

The vitality of Pintupi painting seems associated with the rendering of the complex of ritual knowledge and experience onto a two-dimensional plane. In the initial periods, for example, one finds the greatest range of paintings, and one finds this range in the work of the men most dedicated to ritual ...¹⁰

Myers' observation is also true of Kaapa, and it is no accident that Kaapa's prominence as a painter is matched by the regard with which he is held as a songman. Kaapa had the knowledge, authority and hutzpah to push the limits of revelation, creating a revolutionary new form of painting at Papunya. The works he created in 1972 continued to explore the limits of representation of the sacred realm of Anmatyerr ontology. Accordingly, the visual appeal of *Budgerigar Dreaming* is derived from his willingness to articulate, in two dimensions, sacred ritual. While some of Kaapa's early paintings have been rendered inaccessible to the non-initiated, resting in the restricted shelves of state museums because they are considered to have breached customary protocol, this example of the *Budgerigar Dreaming* has been seen and approved for circulation by senior Anmatyerr custodians.¹¹

The compositional template on which *Budgerigar Dreaming* is based exerted a significant influence on Kaapa's peers.¹² Moreover, his use of Atetherr 'tracks' to animate the background prefigures the emergence of dotted infill, which, in the second half of 1972, would become a dominant feature of Papunya painting. *Budgerigar Dreaming* is a critical work in the history of desert art, for not only does it encapsulate a period of vibrant experimentation by the movement's first master, but it also forecasts key attributes that would come to define Papunya Tula painting.

JOHN KEAN

1. Early works that were produced under Kaapa's influence have been characterised under the moniker 'School of Kaapa'; Vivien Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010, pp. 11–43.
2. Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, 2004, pp. 12–19. See also John Kean, 'Digging for Honey Ants: revisiting the Papunya Mural Project', *Index Journal*, Issue No. 3, Monument, 2021.
3. Stuart Art Centre Stock Book, 1971–1972.
4. Kaapa's table was positioned to maximise his ability to see out and to access light, whereas Leura sat in the north-east, oriented towards his Country (Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, pp. 24, 29).
5. Based on text from John Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame: The Making of Papunya Tula Art*, Upswell Publishing, Perth, 2023, pp. 226–227.
6. Each of the 'versions' is a stand-alone painting, produced on a variety of different-sized panels (Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, pp. 278–281). Bardon's 'painting 215' is documented as being painted in August 1971, two months after the current painting. Other Kaapa works on the Budgerigar theme include the painting on the extreme right of Jensen's photograph (Roger Benjamin et al., *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2009, pp. 15–16). The dates are supported by a photograph showing Kaapa working on Version 6 with the already completed Version 7 in the background, taken in the Men's Painting Room by Rosalie Bayetto, who is known to have visited Papunya in May 1972 (Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 278).
7. See appendix 5, Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame*, p. 346.
8. For a more extended discussion of the series, see Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame*, pp. 227–230.
9. Bardon and Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 280.
10. Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002, p. 119.
11. The author discussed the work with Anmatyerr custodians during the preparation for the publication of *Dot, Circle and Frame*.
12. Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame*, pp. 234–236.

OPPOSITE: Pintupi and Anmatyerr artists in the Men's Painting Room, Papunya, 1972. Photographer: Michael Jensen

TIM LEURA TJAPALTJARRI

c. 1929 – 1984
Anmatyerr language
Hunting Rock Wallaby – Waru 1973
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
43.5 × 23 cm (17 × 9 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in Papunya,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice Springs
Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, Woden,
Australian Capital Territory
Private Collection, New South Wales,
acquired from the above circa 1975
Quarterly Fine Art Auction,
Lawson-Menzies, Sydney,
9 May 2013, lot 134
Private Collection, Western Australia,
acquired from the above

AUD 55,000
USD 35,200



KAAPA TJAMPITJINPA

c. 1926 – 1989

Pintupi language

*Wati Ngatitjirri – Budgerigar**Ancestor* 1973synthetic polymer paint on
composition board

51.5 × 46.5 cm (20.3 × 18.3 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,

Northern Territory

Papunya Tula Artists, Alice

Springs, cat. no. K730505

Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, Woden,

Australian Capital Territory

Private Collection, Germany,

acquired from the above

AUD 96,000

USD 61,400

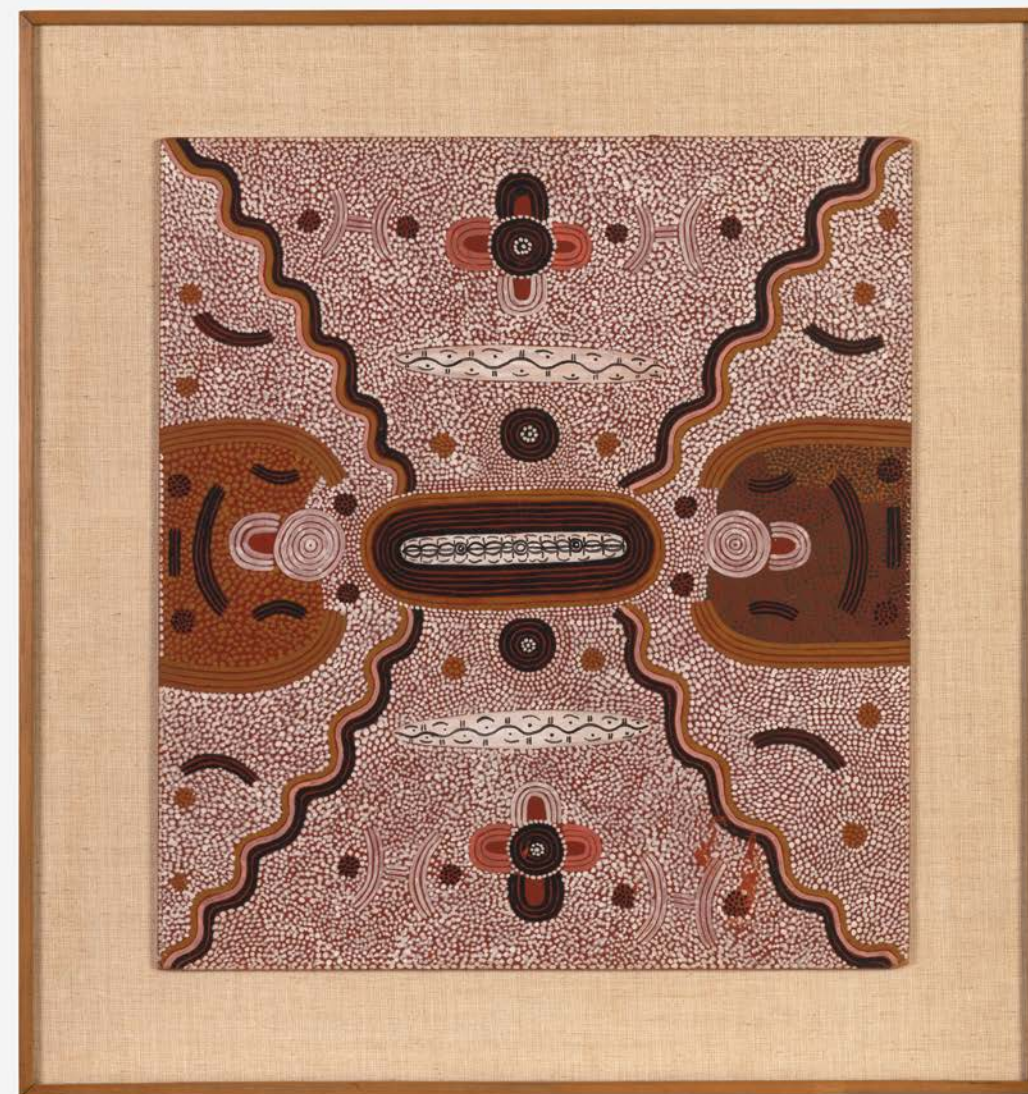
The 1970s were a period of great productivity for Kaapa Tjampitjinpa. Having experimented with the formal possibilities of Anmatyerr iconography in 1972 (see *Budgerigar Dreaming* 1972, pp. 54–59), Kaapa further distilled his approach, building on and augmenting his achievements. Relying on his gift for graphic clarity and immaculate technique, in 1973 Kaapa created a series of paintings of ceremonies associated with Western Anmatyerr and Ngaliya (Southern Warlpiri) Country. Kaapa's compositions during this period were invariably symmetrical, his nested circles were unwaveringly perfect and the suite of signs and icons used to represent ceremony were embedded in a semiotically significant field of dots. His subjects were derived from the sacred designs and choreography of amarleyarr ceremonies.

Kaapa and his peers referred to amarleyarr colloquially as 'high school', for this level of ceremonies is performed to communicate detailed knowledge of travelling songlines to young Anmatyerr men. More specifically, amarleyarr ceremonies are performed for a cohort of post-initiate novices, who, at a given moment, are isolated in a secluded area away from family. These fleeting, but elaborate ceremonies constitute the key sensory experience for young men, who otherwise spend the day huddled behind a windbreak or in the shade. In an adjacent area, but unseen by the

novices, older men intone the stanzas of ceremony while they prepare ground paintings, assemble ritual paraphernalia and decorate the bodies of performers. As twilight deepens, performers emerge from windbreaks to re-enact the deeds of totemic ancestors. During Kaapa's youth, seclusion in amarleyarr camps could last from one to two years.¹

As they reach maturity, Anmatyerr men are expected to arrange, perform and sing the amarleyarr ceremonies for which they now have authority.² For men of Kaapa's generation, immersion in prolonged and demanding amarleyarr provided each man with deep knowledge of numerous ancestral ceremonies. Knowledge of amarleyarr songlines is the bedrock on which the vast majority of paintings created by founding Papunya Tula artists were based.³ According to my records, in 1973, Kaapa painted ceremonies for Water, Wild Yam, Wallaby, Goanna, Serpent/Grub, Blue-tongue Skink, Emu, Witchetty Grub, Possum, Wild Orange and Budgerigar. He added many more songlines to this list in subsequent years.

The current painting, *Wati Ngatitjirri – Budgerigar Ancestor*, is the second of two boards featuring Budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) ceremonies that Kaapa painted in June 1973. The painting's title uses the term 'ngatitjirri' from the Luritja, the lingua franca of Papunya, where the painting was originally documented; the same bird



is called 'atetherr' in Anmatyerr. Admired globally as intelligent pets, atetherr are metaphorically potent in Anmatyerr Country, where vast numbers assemble and whirl near waterholes – a flock of iridescent-green birds passing across the desert sky excites the senses and the flash of their twisting flight is interpreted as a manifestation of the Dreaming. More specifically, the abrupt descent of the flock to water is likened to a group of enthusiastic post-initiates gathering on the ceremonial ground to learn Budgerigar Law.⁴

The composition of each of the *Budgerigar* boards that Kaapa painted in 1973 is subtly different, although calling on the same iconography. It is apparent that Kaapa was still experimenting, searching for the best way to represent the dynamism of the ceremony, while also giving appropriate emphasis to the details of various sacred objects that are manipulated in the ritual. Kaapa's brilliance is evident in the articulation of signs and icons to represent sacred objects, ground design, body design, windbreaks, fires, smoke, all of which lend emphasis to the central oval area where the post-initiate novices are gathered to learn. Each sign is granted enough space to breath and yet is close enough to vibrate against adjacent elements. A comparison with the mature paintings of Wassily Kandinsky is useful in this regard, especially as both artists were inspired by music – Kandinsky, the romantic music of Richard Wagner, and Kaapa, the verses of songlines he had learned in amarleyarr ceremonies.

Wati Ngatitjirri – Budgerigar Ancestor gains its strength from the balance between the painting's bold iconography and the vibrant field of white dots. Peter Fannin (Papunya Tula Artists' first art advisor and a botanist by profession) records that the dots represent wanguṇu (*Eragrostis eriopoda*), a grass that abounds in mulga country, the seeds of which are favoured by budgerigars. Desert people also collect wanguṇu and winnow it, the resulting seeds being ground and baked into damper as a staple.

The origin of paintings with a white dotted background can be traced to Kaapa's close friend and fellow rainmaker Johnny Warangula.⁵ At another level, the white dots in *Wati Ngatitjirri – Budgerigar Ancestor* refer to the use of crushed plant material to create the vast ground mosaics that form a key element in certain amarleyarr ceremonies.

JOHN KEAN

1. On Kaapa's invitation, the author attended a series of amarleyarr ceremonies to the north of Papunya in 1971.
2. Authority for Country and its associated Dreaming in Anmatyerr culture is generally derived from a paternal grandfather, as merek-artwey (owners of the Country), or through their maternal grandparents, as kwertengerl (caretakers of the Country and associated ritual).
3. The same level of travelling ceremonies was an equally important basis for the founding Pintupi-speaking artists, who use the term punyunyu, and Luritja speakers, who use the term maliyarra.
4. John Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame: The Making of Papunya Tula Art*, Upswell Publishing: Perth, 2023, pp. 248–271.
5. Kean, *Dot, Circle and Frame*, pp. 248–271.



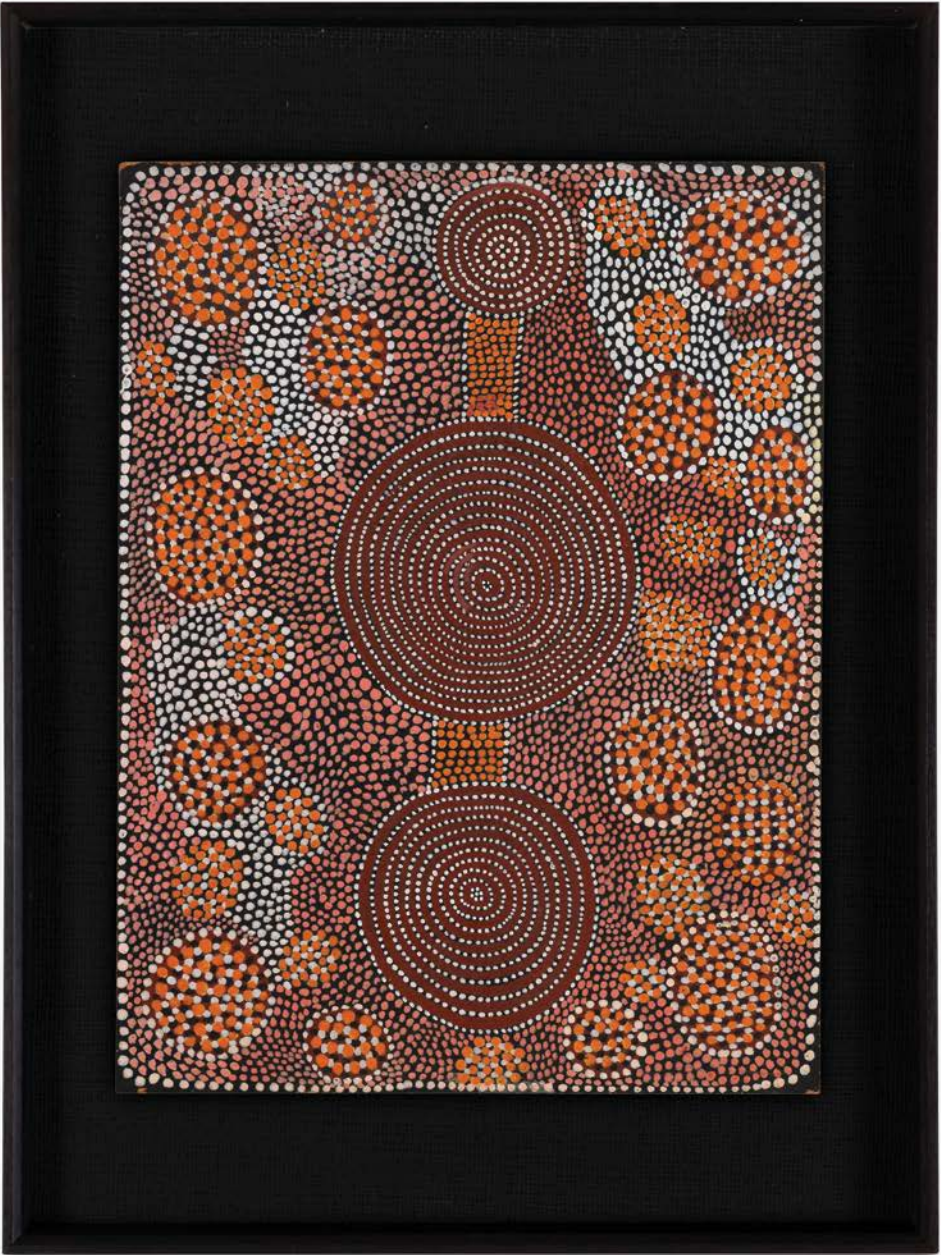
JOHN TJAKAMARRA

c. 1935 – 2002
Pintupi language
Claypans at Paratjakultjini 1973
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
57 × 43 cm (22.4 × 17 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. JJ731089
Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, Woden,
Australian Capital Territory,
The Anvil Gallery, Kergunyah, Victoria
Private Collection, New South Wales,
acquired from the above in 1975
Quarterly Fine Art Auction,
Lawson-Menzies, Sydney,
9 May 2013, lot 133
Private Collection, Western Australia,
acquired from the above

AUD 45,000
USD 28,800



MICK NAMARARI TJAPALTJARRI

c. 1926 – 1998
Pintupi language

Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming 1973
synthetic polymer paint
on particle board
122 × 91.5 cm (48 × 36 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Papunya
Tula, Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. MN731102
Peter Fannin, Northern Territory,
annotated diagram verso
Realities Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above in 1977
Important Australian Art, Bonhams,
Sydney, 10 September 2024, lot 13
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

EXHIBITED

*Paintings by the Desert Tribes
of Central Australia*, Realities
Gallery, Melbourne, August 1977

AUD 350,000
USD 224,000

Papunya, a small Aboriginal community anchored in arid Australia, lies close to the Tropic of Capricorn. In wet years, this part of the desert is reached by the trailing edge of monsoons that sweep down from tropical Australia. Isolated storm cells scud over the plain, lightning flashes and occasionally torrential showers flood red earth as clouds move inexorably towards the exposed backbone of the West MacDonnell Ranges. At the foot of deeply eroded mountains, Papunya smoulders in the heat, enjoying the run-off from these bare, ancient slopes.

One November afternoon in 1979, Mick Namarari asked me to drive him into the sandy country north of the community. He wanted to make a pair of boomerangs and, on his instruction, we pulled to the side of the road.¹ I followed this fit middle-aged man across the red earth to a tree, one among many in a stately forest of 'desert oaks' – large spreading trees with blackened trunks and whispering canopies. Namarari told me that lightning had struck this tree recently and, looking up, I saw a massive broken limb surrounded by scorched needle-like leaves. Passing without further comment, we stopped at a small stand of acacia; it was here that Namarari found the form for which

he was searching. Using a tommyhawk, he quickly chopped off and debarked a 70-centimetre section of the branch. Sitting down, Namarari proceeded to remove both outer edges of the gently formed curve. Then, aiming precisely at the centre of the grain, he delivered a few sharp whacks, splitting the branch into symmetrical halves – now recognisable as a pair of boomerangs ready for trimming and rasping. There was little waste.

Six years earlier, as the heat was building and the seasonal storms were approaching, Namarari sat down to paint *Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming*. This was an important commission on what was then the largest board available to the Papunya artists.² Namarari chose to paint the events at Marnpi, a small water place nestled among parallel sand dunes in his father's Country, about 400 kilometres west of Mparntwe/Alice Springs.

While discussing a painting of the same site in 1984, Namarari told me: 'I was born at Marnpi. That is where my mother had me ... This is the Red Kangaroo Dreaming place. This is the Hills Kangaroo place. This is the Owllet Nightjar.'³ Namarari's deep association with Marnpi, and the ancestral events that occurred there, make the site central to his sense of self and a key determinant



in the unfolding drama of his life. Namarari's birthplace is also enmeshed in a 'man-making' ritual that is pivotal to the Western Desert culture. Certain details of the site and the associated ceremonies are guarded with strict secrecy. What Europeans might regard as an accident of birth would profoundly frame the way in which Namarari shaped his artistic practice.

Despite these restrictions, Namarari turned to his birthplace for inspiration throughout his career, painting numerous variations of the Marnpi story. Each was related to the site's topography and the iconography associated with the ancestral activities that occurred there.

Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming 1973 is a particularly interesting example, for it was created soon after the initial burst of creative activity at Papunya when pictorial conventions were still malleable and were being elaborated upon to create the classical form of Papunya Tula painting (1973–1988). Whereas earlier paintings privileged sacred iconography, Namarari and his peers discovered that patches of dots could be arrayed as a supplementary but equally important narrative element. Significantly, the placement of these patches could be used to refer to esoteric and restricted aspects of the story deemed 'too dangerous' for explicit representation. The deep resonant palette in this depiction of Marnpi is unusual but key elements of the composition, such as the short arcs along either edge of the work, recur in other representations of the site. The motif refers to the marks left by the hill and plains kangaroos lying down in the shade of a tree as they rest during the heat of the day, each on a hip with one elbow on the ground. This version is also notable for the inclusion of a hairstring belt (the long oval at the top of the composition) and clouds (the two abutted ovals at the bottom). In this combination of features and textures, Namarari visualises his birthplace in all its environmental and cultural complexity, in addition to elements that relate more specifically to the ceremonial celebration of the site.

Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming epitomises how, in 1972 and 1973, patches of dots were brought

forward into balance with more semantically specific symbols on the same picture plane. The process resulted in richly satisfying compositions that address Aboriginal protocol and individual aesthetic preferences. It is revealing to consider Namarari's oeuvre via an analogy with improvisational jazz, in which certain structures are set, yet an artist's sensibility is expressed through the modulation of sonic elements within and around those structures. The analogy is especially pertinent, as paintings such as *Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming* relate to a verse/episode within an extended song cycle, in which the singer expresses their emotional attachment to the story/place through vocal modulation and inflection.

Mick Namarari is an artist of exceptional subtlety. His paintings frequently display a relaxed approach to compositional symmetry, in which the tension between order and informality is always at play. The viewer's eye never rests but shifts from negative to positive, line to dot, colour to colour. One senses the presence of natural phenomena through the subtle variation in the pressure of the artist's brush; Namarari's creative poise arises from his great skill as an observer. As was the case when he led me across the land one steamy November day – in search of the right branch to make a set of boomerangs – no incident is too small to be noted, for Namarari understood that the trace of any action points us towards Tjukurrpa (an ongoing process of creation), the eternal force that drives life in the desert.

JOHN KEAN

1. Kali (boomerangs) are traditionally made in pairs to be used musically as clapping sticks as well as for hunting and fighting.
2. Papunya Tula art advisor Peter Fannin supplied each of the major artists with two 122 × 91.5 cm (48 × 36 inches) hardboards in late 1973. The artists responded by creating a number of highly prized creations, several of which are in public collections.
3. Extract from an interview with the artist at Yamunturrngu / Mount Liebig in 1989, translated by Ken Hansen in 2001. Original tapes in the South Australian Museum.
4. Alec B. O'Halloran, *The Master from Marnpi*, LifeDesign, Sydney, 2018.



SHORTY LUNGKATA TJUNGURRAYI

c. 1920 – 1987

Pintupi language

*'Two Roads': Tingarri and Kangaroo**Dreaming at Tjukulanya* 1973synthetic polymer paint on
composition board

122 × 92 cm (48 × 36.2 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Yayayi,

Northern Territory

Papunya Tula Artists, Alice

Springs, cat. no. SL731088

Margaret Carnegie

Collection, Melbourne

Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, Melbourne

The Kohane Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above

D'lan Contemporary, Melbourne

Private Collection, Sydney,

acquired from the above in 2019

LITERATUREAnne Marie Brody, *Face of the**Centre: Papunya Tula Paintings**1971–1984*, National Gallery of

Victoria, pp. 19–20, cat. no. 8

Lauraine Diggins, *A Myriad of**Dreaming*, 1989, p. 48, cat. no. 45

Marcia Langton and Judith Ryan

(eds.), *65,000 Years: A Short History**of Australian Art*, Thames & Hudson,

Melbourne, 2024, p. 252 (illus.)

EXHIBITED*Face of the Centre: Papunya Tula**Paintings 1971–1984*, National

Gallery of Victoria, 7 September

1985 – 27 January 1986

Spring Exhibition, Lauraine Diggins

Fine Art, Melbourne, 25 October

– 16 November 1990, cat. no. 40

Reverence, D'lan Contemporary,

Sydney, 6–28 September 2019

*65,000 Years: A Short History**of Australian Art*, Ian Potter

Museum of Art, University of

Melbourne, 2025 (forthcoming)

AUD 550,000

USD 352,000

Dancer, singer and sorcerer Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi was a spelling-binding individual. Talking in a whisper, his eye fixed your gaze, demanding comprehension, even when speaking swiftly of esoteric matters in Pintupi. Lungkata remained embedded in customary culture, making few cross-cultural concessions, especially when addressing aspects of his Country reflected in painting. He released you from his spell only when he was satisfied that you had understood his message.

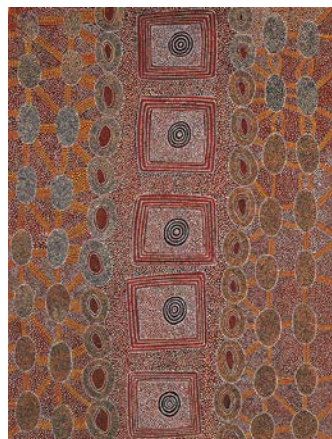
Lungkata was conceived at Tjulyurunya around 1912. He travelled widely around the south and east of the massive saltpan Kaakurutintja (Lake MacDonald) near the Northern Territory and Western Australian border. Fortunately, Lungkata described his desert journeying to Fred Myers, who subsequently published the account under the sub-title Maantja's Travels in the influential anthropological text *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*.¹ Lungkata's itinerary provides an invaluable testimony of an individual's life in the Western

Desert before contact with non-Indigenous people. Significantly, it demonstrates the intimate connection between lived experience and Lungkata's ancestral associations with those sites to which he returned when conditions permitted. These are the same sites he chose for depiction on board and canvas.

After four decades of moving between isolated ephemeral water places, Lungkata walked into the ration station near Haasts Bluff (c. 1950), where he made his first contact with non-Indigenous people. Despite the years spent with government officials and evangelists at Haasts Bluff (and later at Papunya), Lungkata remained traditionally oriented, living at various camps in the West MacDonnell Ranges, returning to his Country on foot when seasonal conditions were favourable.

By the end of the 1950s, most of the Haasts Bluff population were relocated to Papunya, where the Pintupi lived to the west of the settlement, in the direction of the Country for which they longed. In this era of the failed policy of





ANATJARI TJAKAMARRA
*Story of a Woman's Camp and
 the Origin of Damper* 1973
 National Museum of Australia Collection



MICK NAMARARI TJAPALTJARRI
Kangaroo (Malu) Dreaming 1973



SHORTY LUNGKATA TJUNGURRAYI
*'Two Roads': Tingarri and Kangaroo
 Dreaming at Tjukulanya* 1973

assimilation, to which the government settlement was dedicated, the painting movement famously emerged, a shining light. And Lungkata was prominent in the generation of Pintupi artists who made the graceful transition from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle to become one of the contemporary painters who revolutionised Australian art.²

The current painting was created in October 1973, shortly after the Pintupi moved to Yayayi.

Here they camped around a windmill, on the bank of a large creek, about 50 kilometres west of Papunya. After years of conflict and suffering, they sought to create an independent community, free of the intercultural tensions of settlement life. Instrumentally, the camp was close to a major Kangaroo Dreaming site on a songline linked to Lungkata's Country, further buttressing his considerable authority. Yayayi soon became the base for the young American anthropologist Fred Myers, who spent most of the next two years camping at the community. Within days of his arrival, Myers met Lungkata, then a remarkably fit man of about sixty-five years of age. Lungkata adopted Myers as a

grandson, becoming one of his closest confidantes. Much of what we know of classical Pintupi society is derived from the intimacy of their relationship.³

The move to Yayayi is a significant milestone in the history of Papunya Tula painting, for it was there that Pintupi men painted at a shaded site on the western bank of a wide creek bed. Free from the grinding constraints at Papunya, up to twenty artists created an environment with social dynamics that mirrored a ceremonial camp.⁴ It was at Yayayi that the Pintupi developed a distinctive style, making them among the most renowned of the founding Papunya Tula artists.

The current painting was among a group of twenty identically sized boards commissioned by Papunya Tula Artists art advisor Peter Fannin for the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) of the Australia Council. These were the largest boards to have been provided to the artists since the inception of painting at Papunya, and as such, they mark an important moment of transition from the spidery miniatures of the first years at Papunya to the monumental canvases of the mid and late 1970s. Eight of these works were selected for

Art of Aboriginal Australia, an exhibition that toured Canada from June 1974 until May 1976. Of the two boards that Lungkata painted for the commission, this work was acquired by the visionary collector of Papunya Tula art, Margaret Carnegie, and exhibited as *Untitled* in the ground-breaking exhibition *The Face of the Centre* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1986. The painting was later acquired by a private collector at the first major sale of Papunya paintings on the secondary market, where it was reproduced under the title *Corroboree Dreaming* in the accompanying catalogue, *A Myriad of Dreaming*.

At some stage in the journey from creek-side camp to prestigious art museum, the painting was separated from its original documentation, and its specific references to Country lost for four decades. However, the Indigenous significance of the painting could never have been in doubt, for the multiplicities of rings that comprise the painting's roundels proclaim its importance. As Myers has noted, 'multiplicity is potency';⁵ an attribute that is given particular force in this work where the significance of the central roundel resonates with twenty-seven sets of concentric circles aligned around its central core, tracing a gravitational force that echoes the orbital paths of the rings of Saturn.

Fortuitously, Myers arrived at Yayayi as Lungkata was completing this work; it was the tenth painting he documented. As was usual, Myers sat with the artist and his classificatory brother, Charlie Tarawa 'Wartuma' Tjungurrayi, in the shade of the ancient river red gums at the painting camp. On this occasion, the men's grandson, Long Tom Tjapanangka, a tall man in cowboy outfit and a broad stockman's hat, observed proceedings in the background.

Myers has generously agreed to provide his original notes to augment the little that was known of this work. It can now be confirmed that this painting maps events in the vicinity of Tjukulanya, a site where two of the most significant songlines in Pintupi Country converge. On reading Myers' documentation, it became apparent that the formal authority of the work issues from its considerable and weighty subject matter.

The painting refers to a large group of Tingarri ancestors, both men and women, who have gathered to enact revelatory ceremonies for the education of post-initiate novices. The central roundel is a cave at Tjukulanya. Some of the activities occur in the proscribed areas, details of which are restricted to those who have been inducted into this level of esoteric knowledge.⁶ Other events, such as the exchange of food, occur in an open context. When discussing the work, Lungkata and Wartuma remembered comparable Tingarri ceremonies that had been conducted at Papunya in the previous year, 1973, to 'school' all the 'younger men'. Unusually, Lungkata has also included episodes from the Kangaroo Dreaming trail that links sites from the Musgrave Ranges in South Australia, through Kata Tjuta to the west of Uluru, via Lungkata's Country at Tjulyurunya, north-east to Marnpi (where Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri was conceived) and on into an area towards the Tanami Desert. While the details of this Dreaming are typically restricted, it should be noted that this songline is followed to this day by ceremonial journeys that link distant people across the Western Desert and beyond. Lungkata's authority was such that he could manage the representation of episodes on the songline; in this instance he has included a representation of the tracks and body of the Kangaroo, 'sleeping' to the right of the central roundel.

'Two Roads': Tingarri and Kangaroo Dreaming at Tjukulanya was created at a critical moment in the transition from the small, occasionally representational works that Pintupi artists produced in the Men's Painting Room at Papunya in 1972 and the 'Yayayi style' that developed in 1974 and 1975 under Myers' watchful eye. This work still contains the complexity and texture of early boards but points to later, more expansive developments, based on the 'five-circle grid' and its variants.⁷

The work incorporates several elements that would later be standardised to produce a more consistently patterned overall style in the well-known 'Tingarri' paintings of the late 1970s to mid 1990s. *'Two Roads': Tingarri and Kangaroo Dreaming at Tjukulanya* hums with the excitement

of pictorial invention, prompted by the opportunity to paint for the first time at a significant scale. The roundels mark specific locales around Tjukulanya, presumably the size, and number of circles used in their construction, signifying relative importance. Most interconnecting lines denote the paths of the Tingarri and Kangaroo ancestors linking the sites, while other lines relate to specific objects associated with activities at that site. Whereas younger Pintupi artists developed a technique in which bands of dots enclosed, and were in turn enclosed by the 'travelling lines', Lungkata is more specific, dotting mysteriously shaped patches to signify objects and phenomena associated with ancestral activities at that area. His acute attention to the narrative provides this work with its unique texture, and signals his undisputed authority. Myers considers that 'the greatest range of paintings' were produced by men such as Lungkata, those who were 'most dedicated to ritual'.⁸ Rather than a fully resolved surface being produced, viewers are drawn into the modulations in the process of painting as an artist is alternately energised and mesmerised by the signs of his creation; Lungkata enacts an embodied performance of painting.

Lungkata's enormous billowing circles are another defining characteristic, the tension between centrifugal and centripetal energetics providing this painting with its commanding presence. A particularity of Lungkata's approach that makes its early appearance in *'Two Roads: Tingarri and Kangaroo Dreaming at Tjukulanya'* is that most of the roundels are commenced with an oval, rather than a circle. The attenuated form of the oval tends to reverberate through subsequent rings, resulting in a more 'elastic' form. This pattern remained a unique marker of the artist; that is, until Ronnie Tjampitjinpa adopted the practice several years after Lungkata's death.

It is on the basis of Myers' comprehensive documentation that this painting should be titled *'Two Roads: Tingarri and Kangaroo Dreaming at Tjukulanya'*. Myers' insightful documentation confirms that the power of the work is derived from important points of convergence, for it shows the

meeting of two songlines of overriding significance to Western Desert people at Tjukulanya. The noted cross-cultural broker 'Wartuma' Tjungurrayi, who, you will remember, was present as the painting was documented, referred to the painting as encompassing 'yiwara kutjarra' (literally, roads two). Wartuma's metaphor aptly captures the Indigenous significance of the painting and his interpretation is reflected in the proposed title, 'Two Roads'. Significantly, the painting was created at a key locale at Yayayi in Kukatja Country where the artist could assume his additional authority through the links from that site to his ancestral lands. Moreover, this work was painted at a critical juncture as Pintupi painting broke from its shared roots with Anmatyerr, Kukatja and Luritja expression at the Men's Painting Room at Papunya. The painting can therefore be understood to mark the commencement of an independent trajectory, a new road that propelled Pintupi artists, and their families, west, back to Country where they established independent communities at Walungurru (Kintore) and Kiwirrkurra in the early 1980s.

JOHN KEAN

1. Maantja is an early name by which Lungkata was known. Fred Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1986, pp. 79–89.
2. For an account of Lungkata's stylistic development, see Fred Myers, 'Graceful transfigurations of person, place, and story: the stylistic evolution of Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi', in Roger Benjamin and Andrew Weislogel (eds), *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2009.
3. Fred Myers, 'Graceful transfigurations of person, place, and story', Ithaca, New York, pp. 51–63.
4. Fred Myers, 'Painting at Yai Yai', 1974, in Vivien Johnson, *Papunya Painting: Out of the Desert*, exhibition catalogue, National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, 2007.
5. Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002.
6. Myers emphasised that aspects of this painting, including the names of the objects borne by the Tingarri, are secret and restricted and his documentation cannot therefore be published in full. Email correspondence with the author, 16 May 2018.
7. Myers, *Painting Culture*, pp. 86–95.
8. Myers, *Painting Culture*, p. 119.



ANATJARI TJAKAMARRA

c. 1938 – 1992

Pintupi language

Tingarri at Yawalyurru 1986

synthetic polymer paint on linen

182 × 121 cm (71.7 × 47.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, commissioned by
Duncan Kentish, Kaltukatjara –
Docker River, Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. AT870401
The Estate of Duncan
Kentish, Adelaide

LITERATURE

For comparable depictions of
the bush fruit yawalyurru, see
Untitled 1973 in Howard Morphy
and Margo Smith Boles (eds), *Art
of the Land: Dialogues with the
Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian
Aboriginal Art*, University of Virginia,
Charlottesville, 1999, p. 230 (illus.)

AUD 96,000

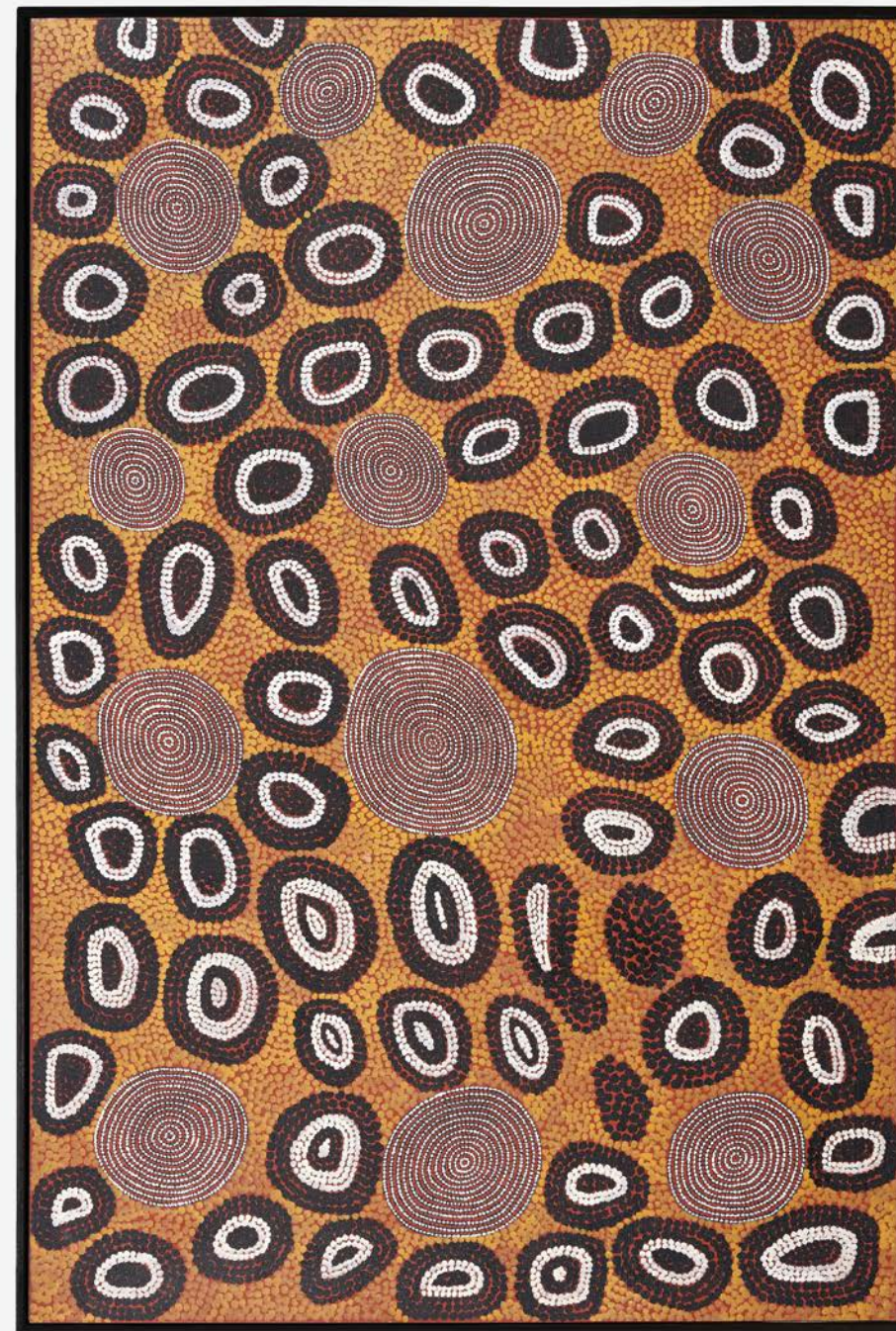
USD 61,400

The startling immediacy of Anatjari Tjakamarra's *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* 1986 conveys a sense of crisp modernity, especially as the painting's bold configurations rule the walls of a white-box gallery setting with supreme confidence. While the striking modernity of *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* accounts for its contemporary appeal, its deeper significance lies in the context of its creation, and the dense layers of meaning encrypted in the canvas's beguiling yet reductive forms. I will examine the painting's historic and symbolic attributes to reveal why *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* has enduring value, over and above its commanding visual presence.

The late 1970s and 1980s, when Anatjari was creating large works on canvas such as *Tingarri at Yawalyurru*, was a period of considerable consolidation and reconnection for Anangu (the people of the Western Desert). With the advent of private vehicle ownership in the early 1970s, together with more enabling changes to government policy, Anangu began to travel vast distances to see relatives and perform ceremony. While Anatjari remained geographically separated

from his homelands for much of this period, the act of painting rendered his Country tangible, and his loving reiteration of icons that signify particular rocks, ridges, trees and water-holding cavities allowed the artist to revisit sites of personal, spiritual and family significance. As a senior man of high degree, Anatjari was central to the 'outstation movement' that resulted in the creation of numerous small communities, including Walungurru, Tjukurla and Kiwirrkurra. Yet, Anatjari's own Country remained tantalisingly out of reach, except during rare and difficult expeditions over numerous sand dunes when sites including Kulkuta and Yawalyurru could be reached. Paintings such as *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* are a visual manifestation of the artist's yearning – persisting since his own exodus from the desert. Dazzling visions of named sites – beyond the western horizon – evidence Anatjari's desire to return to the Country of his birth.

For an individual who spent most of his life without the influence of Western modernity, Anatjari's achievements are remarkable. When his



Tingarri Cycle Dreaming 1988 was purchased for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1988, Anatjari became the first desert artist to have his work acquired into the contemporary art collection of a major international museum.¹ The following year, an array of Anatjari Tjakamarra's paintings was exhibited at the prestigious John Weber Gallery in New York, the first occasion at which a Western Desert artist was celebrated with an overseas solo show. *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* 1986 and a painting of the same title (painted in 1987 and described on pp. 82–84) were produced during this dynamic phase in Anatjari's life, an optimistic moment when the artist's painting captures his love for Country with compelling immediacy.

Tingarri at Yawalyurru 1986 describes an episode from the Tingarri saga, an epic narrative of a group of men who travelled the Western Desert, encountering various ancestral heroes and establishing rituals by which their descendants, the Pintupi, would live. Having travelled from Kulkuta through Karku, the Tingarri took shelter in a secluded underground refuge. Their seclusion was interrupted abruptly when a trickster, Kuninka (Western Quoll/*Dasyurus geoffroii*), arrived from the north. Kuninka saw smoke rising from the ground and realised where the Tingarri were hidden, so he summoned his awesome powers to blast the Tingarri out of their underground hiding place. Not content with the extent of his initial destruction, Kuninka continued to torment the Tingarri, rounding them up and marching them off to their fate at Kaakurutintjinya (Lake MacDonald), a huge saltpan to the north.²

The site envisioned is so named for the Yawalyurru (bush currant/*Canthium latifolium*), after the fruit that abound in the area. The large black circles represent the black fruit turned into stone by Kuninka's malevolent action. Historian, and friend of the first generation of Pintupi artists, the late Dick Kimber describes Anatjari's return to Yawalyurru in 1987, a year after this work was created.

We all stripped off our shirts and black body powder was applied in a special 'Pintupi

way' ... Then much as had occurred when visiting other sacred men-only sites, we walked single file, in silence. We reached the rim of Yawalyurru cave, an unusual but entirely natural feature in European terms but the site of the greatest importance, Winampa, Pintupi and closely related people's territories. Each aspect of the rock surface had significance beyond significance. Anatjari was the senior custodian but all other men had responsibility too. The ululating call came, and soon all the men were singing the Tingarri song.³

The visual components of *Tingarri at Yawalyurru* evoke key elements from the narrative. The tight concentric circles represent the sinkhole/cave in which the Tingarri hid. The looser black ovals refer to the bush fruit *Yawalyurru*, which was transformed by Kuninka into the distinctive rock forms that distinguish the site. The symbols are multiplied for emphasis. At another level, the patterns refer to the body decoration of the performers who gather to celebrate the site.

Anatjari was a ritually correct man, widely respected for his knowledge. Despite growing international acclaim, Anatjari's eyes remained fixed on his Country. Anatjari was critical to the creation of an outstation at Tjukurla, and successfully pressed for a hand pump and radiotelephone to be installed at Kulkuta, equipment that would enable more prolonged visits to the site of his birth. Appropriately, for an Aboriginal man of such extraordinary achievement, his life had come full circle.

JOHN KEAN

1. Subject expert Fred Myers confirmed the author's initial reading of the imagery as emblematic of Yawalyurru. Myers travelled to the site with the artist in 1974 and has followed his work closely since that time. Myers, email correspondence, 17 August 1920.
2. Fred Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1986, pp. 62–64.
3. Richard G. Kimber, 'Anatjari Tjakamara', in *Tjukurrjani: Origins of Western Desert Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2011, p. 72.



ANATJARI TJAKAMARRA

c. 1938 – 1992

Pintupi language

The Tingarri at Yawalyurru 1987
synthetic polymer paint on linen
182 × 121 cm (71.7 × 47.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, commissioned by
Duncan Kentish, Kaltukatjarra –
Docker River, Northern Territory
The Estate of Duncan
Kentish, Adelaide

LITERATURE

John Kean, *East to West: Land in Papunya Tula Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, 1990, un-paginated, cat. no. 96 (illus.).

For a related painting, see *The Tingarri at Yawalyurru* 1987 from the collection of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra

EXHIBITED

East to West: Land in Papunya Tula Painting, curated by John Kean, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, 4 March – 3 June 1990, cat. no. 96

AUD 96,000

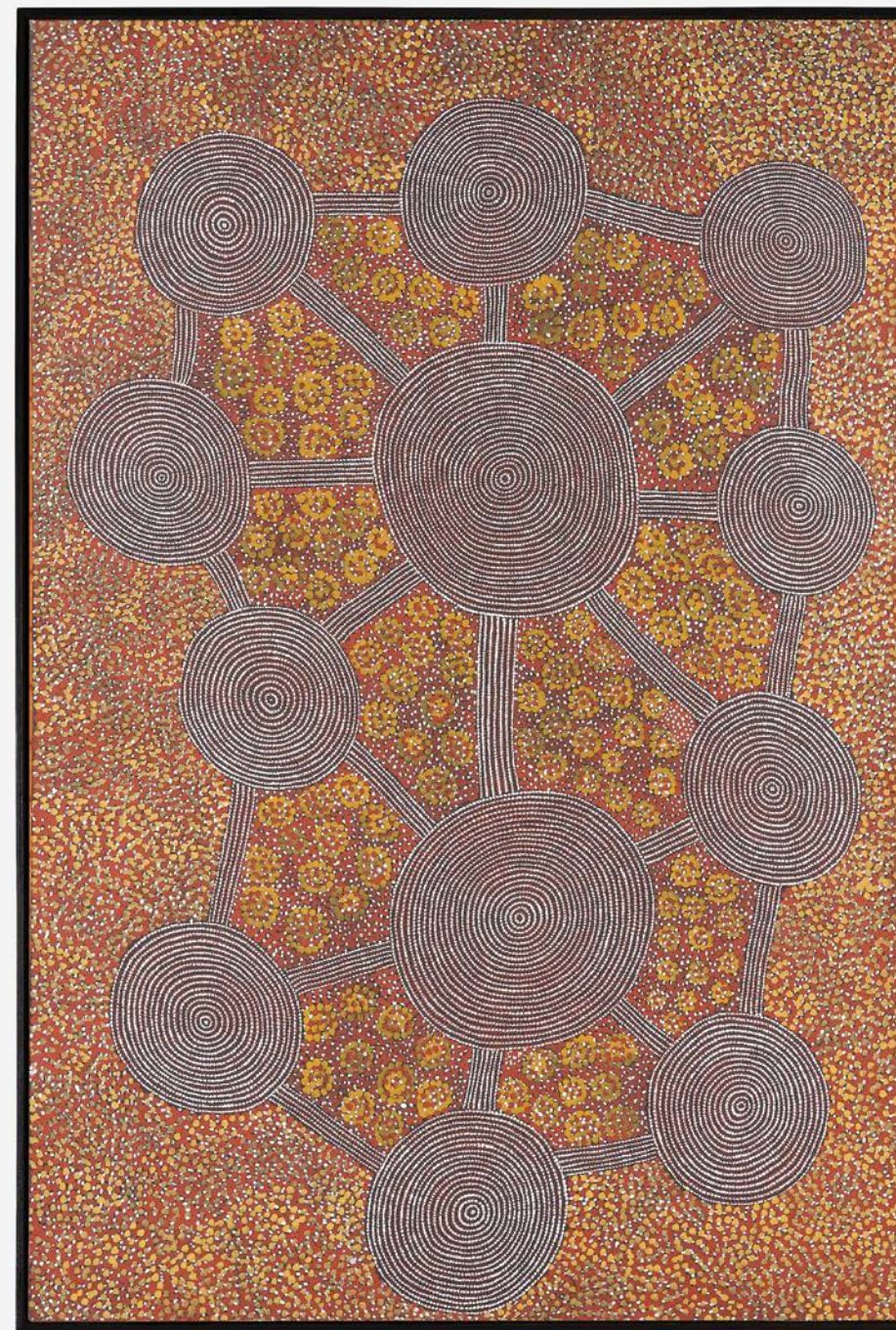
USD 61,400

I first encountered Anatjari Tjakamarra at Waruwiya, an outstation 80 kilometres west of Papunya, in the winter of 1977. He was a smallish man, with intense eyes below a red headband wrapped low over his brow. Despite the crush of Pintupi men demanding canvas, Anatjari remained silent, yet charismatic, on the edge of more boisterous personalities. It was some months later, during the artist's first visit to Alice Springs, that I had the opportunity to spend more time with Anatjari as we waited for a lift to his camp. Anatjari spoke infrequently and then only in whispers as we drove south, preferring to point with his lips to indicate direction.¹ He was not a shy man; rather, he was wholly focused on his goal, which, from a naive outsider's point of view, had to be divined. The world Anatjari occupied, even a decade after leaving the isolation of his remote homelands, remained mysteriously beyond my ken.

Anatjari was born near Kulkuta in Western Australian, some 120 kilometres west of the Northern Territory border, in some of the most inaccessible dune country in Australia. He and his extended family moved between a constellation of water places, the most important of which was Kulkuta. These water places are the subject of the current work, *The Tingarri at Yawalyurru* 1987. Gradually, as his countrymen moved towards the Warburton and Jigalong missions, or the government outpost at Haasts Bluff, Anatjari's ancestral Country

became an increasingly lonely place. In 1966, having recently made contact with non-Indigenous people, Anatjari and his family set off for Papunya, more than 500 kilometres to the east. Eventually the small party were picked up by a Weapons Research Establishment truck and transported to the newly established settlement at Papunya, where they joined relatives who were struggling to adjust to a confronting intercultural regime.

Remarkably, it was just five years later that Anatjari was among twenty Papunya-based men who commenced painting on scraps of paper and salvaged board, and in the process founded contemporary Aboriginal art. Anatjari was the most punctilious of the Pintupi-speaking artists, producing encyclopaedic representations of the ritual objects used in men's ceremony. Initially, at least, Anatjari appears to have been influenced by Kaapa Tjampitjinpa, the entrepreneurial Anmatyerr man around which the painting movement coalesced. Despite their contrasting personalities, both men were dedicated to symmetry and graphic perfection. By 1973, Anatjari and many of his Pintupi peers had relocated to Yayayi, 50 kilometres west of Papunya, to escape the relentless pressures of settlement life, and to gather themselves for an eventual return to Country. Significantly, the creation of an outstation at Yayayi also coincided with the consolidation of a distinct Pintupi approach to composition and adornment on



smallish boards supplied by Papunya Tula Artists. When I knew him in the late 1970s and 1980s, Anatjari was among the most accomplished and influential of the Pintupi painters, developing key compositional templates that informed the work of his fellow artists.²

The urge to return to his ancestral Country continued to drive Anatjari, making him among the most mobile of the founding Papunya Tula artists. In 1978, Anatjari relocated to Kaltukatjarra (Docker River) to be closer to his homeland.³ Because Anatjari was an original shareholder of Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd, and among the most sought-after artists, company managers, including myself, occasionally travelled to Kaltukatjarra to commission Anatjari. However, by the early 1980s when new communities were established at Walungurru (Kintore) and Kiwirrkurra, the demands of servicing such a diverse field of artists made it increasingly difficult to satisfy Anatjari's desire to paint. A solution came in the mid 1980s, when Duncan Kentish, a Department of Aboriginal Affairs field officer based at Kaltukatjarra, agreed to supply Anatjari with high quality materials.⁴ *The Tingarri at Yawalyurru* is among the finest of the canvases Anatjari produced at Kaltukatjarra.

The Tingarri at Yawalyurru marks the zenith in the artist's refinement of his inherited iconography. The exquisitely rendered 'Tingarri motif' that dominates the work exemplifies the pared-back aesthetic of Western Desert culture; the unmatched perfection of its concentric circles is intentionally mesmerising. On first encounter in a gallery, the painting's 'site-path' configuration may evoke thoughts of a distant constellation, or the structure of an atom. Indeed, such associations, at microcosmic and macrocosmic levels, suggest how Western Desert iconography can shrink and expand according to context and the level at which the narrative is retold.

While the names of the ancestral heroes depicted (ancestral Tingarri men) and the site (Yawalyurru) provide some indication of the painting's intent, Anatjari's image remains compellingly abstract.

When read at a cartographic level, however, the concentric circles can be understood to represent particular landmarks associated with the deeds of the Tingarri in the vicinity of Yawalyurru. Whereas, if viewed as a depiction of the ceremonies at Yawalyurru, the same iconography represents designs applied to the bodies of participants in Tingarri ceremonies that are integral to Pintupi identity.⁵ Understood in this context, the body paint of the individual Tingarri performers fuses to create a unified entity, the Tingarri tjuta (literally Tingarri 'many'). The multi-directional links between the roundels show the assembled performers joined as one, with shared purpose. The painting's scintillating surface is intended to evoke light refracted from designs applied to the chests and backs of the Tingarri as they move in the light of fires on the ceremonial ground.

Yawalyurru is so named for the presence of bush currants (*Canthium latifolium*) associated with the narrative of this place. Small rings of yellow dots embedded within the Tingarri motif reference the fruit. The presence of yawalyurru is further highlighted in the other painting by Anatjari of the same title on p. 79.

JOHN KEAN

1. See an account of Anatjari's reserved personality, Richard G. Kimber, 'Anatjari Tjakamara' in *Tjukurrutjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2011, pp. 70–72.
2. Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2002, pp. 86–106.
3. The Docker River settlement at Kaltukatjarra was established near the Northern Territory/Western Australian border in 1968, two years after Anatjari left the desert. Kaltukatjarra is south-east of Anatjari's Country.
4. The relationship between Kentish and the Papunya Tula Artists managers, Daphne Williams, was cooperative, despite occasional tensions, and ensured the continuity of Anatjari's artistic career. The provision of Belgium linen and artists' grade acrylic paints safeguarded the works' ongoing material integrity.
5. See, for instance, the Tingarri designs applied to the backs of performers in a photograph by Llewellyn Parlette, in Luke Scholes (ed.), *Tjungunutja: From Having Come Together*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2017, p. 182.



GORDON BENNETT
1955 – 2014

The Plough 1989
oil and synthetic polymer
paint on canvas
diptych
130 × 260 cm
(51.2 × 102.4 inches)
overall (diptych)

The upfront self-evident symbols in the left panel combined with a mandala-like diagram in the right give *The Plough* an iconic presence that makes it one of Gordon Bennett’s most powerful early paintings. Its scale is indicative of Bennett’s ambition for the work but also references academic ‘history painting’ of the colonial age – a term he adopted to describe his own work.

In academic history painting, size mattered, as did its appropriation of classical iconic images. Drawing on their mythic power was valued above the other more mundane descriptive genres of landscapes, portraits and still life. Following suit, Bennett adopts appropriation as a method to address the myths of Australian nationhood that had formed his sense of self, with the intent of critiquing what he called its ‘psycho dramas’.

PROVENANCE

The Artist
Bellas Gallery, Brisbane
Private Collection, Brisbane,
acquired from the above in 1989
Private Collection, Queensland,
acquired from the above in 2007

LITERATURE

Ian McLean and Gordon Bennett,
The Art of Gordon Bennett, Craftsman
House, Sydney, 1996, p. 16 (illus.)
Ian McLean and Gordon Bennett,
The Art of Gordon Bennett, Craftsman
House, Sydney, 1993, p. 38 (illus.)
Michael A. O’Ferrall and Rex
Butler, *Gordon Bennett Paintings
1987–1991*, Moët & Chandon,
Epernay, France, 1991, p. 22 (illus.)
Jennifer Isaacs, *Aboriginality:
Contemporary Aboriginal Paintings
and Prints*, University of Queensland
Press, Brisbane, 1992, p. 55 (illus.)

Gavin Jantjes, Elizabeth A.
Macgregor and Terry Smith, *History
and Memory in the Art of Gordon
Bennett*, exhibition catalogue,
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, and
Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo,
1999, pp. 10–21, 76 (not illus.)

EXHIBITED

Gordon Bennett, Bellas Gallery,
Brisbane, 7 – 25 February 1989
*History and Memory in the Art of
Gordon Bennett*, Brisbane City
Art Gallery, Brisbane, 29 July –
7 September 1999; Ikon Gallery,
Birmingham, 20 November 1999
– 23 January 2000; Arnolfini,
Bristol, 5 February – 19 March
2000; Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter,
Oslo, 9 April – 12 June 2000

AUD 350,000
USD 224,000

The Plough’s left-hand panel appropriates Hans Heysen’s small etching *Turning the Plough* 1920. Heysen’s images of arcadian rural life, monumental gum trees and sublime landscapes became popular icons of an Australian national myth that formed after World War I. Based on a drawing Heysen made in 1918, the etching’s title, a metaphor for starting anew, makes it an allegory of postwar reconstruction. Bennett’s appropriation reveals what Heysen’s allegory barely conceals: that the dead buried beneath the battlefields of Europe’s farmlands are the manure of a postwar future.

Painting *The Plough* shortly after the 1988 bicentennial calls for the nation’s war museums to memorialise the frontier wars, Bennett’s intention is explicit: the Australian nation is built as much on slaughtered Indigenous Australians buried



GORDON BENNETT *The Plough* 1989 (detail)

in its colonial battlefields as it is on Australian soldiers buried in Europe’s battlefields. Bennett’s pictographic shorthand in the top left reads as a ghostly signature left by the skulls being either ploughed into, or upturned from, the ground.

The right-hand panel’s single-point perspective diagram would become a signature Bennett symbol of colonial logic. The alphabetic letters in each coffin-like box allude to the grammar of academic pictorial rules evident in Heysen’s etching. The CVP (central vanishing point) from which perspective originates is a black hole of death that centres colonialism’s visual logic.

Painted shortly after he graduated from art school at the end of 1988, *The Plough* is an early strike in Bennett’s meteoric rise during the next decade. His ascent was astonishing. The art school had reluctantly accepted his application but quickly discovered that Bennett was an asset to them. An A-level student who rocketed through the Fine Arts degree, by his final year Bennett was the upcoming artist to watch. He flew out of the academy with an almost sellout graduating exhibition at Bellas Gallery in Brisbane and into an art world that couldn’t believe its fortune.

The creative energy of Bennett’s first decade as an artist is legendary. He dug up the repressed histories of the nation’s colonial origins with such lucidity that it is tempting to see *The Plough* as a premonition, even a manifesto, of what was to come. Catching the national consciousness by surprise,

Bennett’s timing could not have been better. He is one of those rare artists whose works made history while they were still wet on the canvas, to the point of forcing a generation of art historians to rethink the narratives of Australian art. If calling his art ‘history painting’ was tempting fate, it paid off.

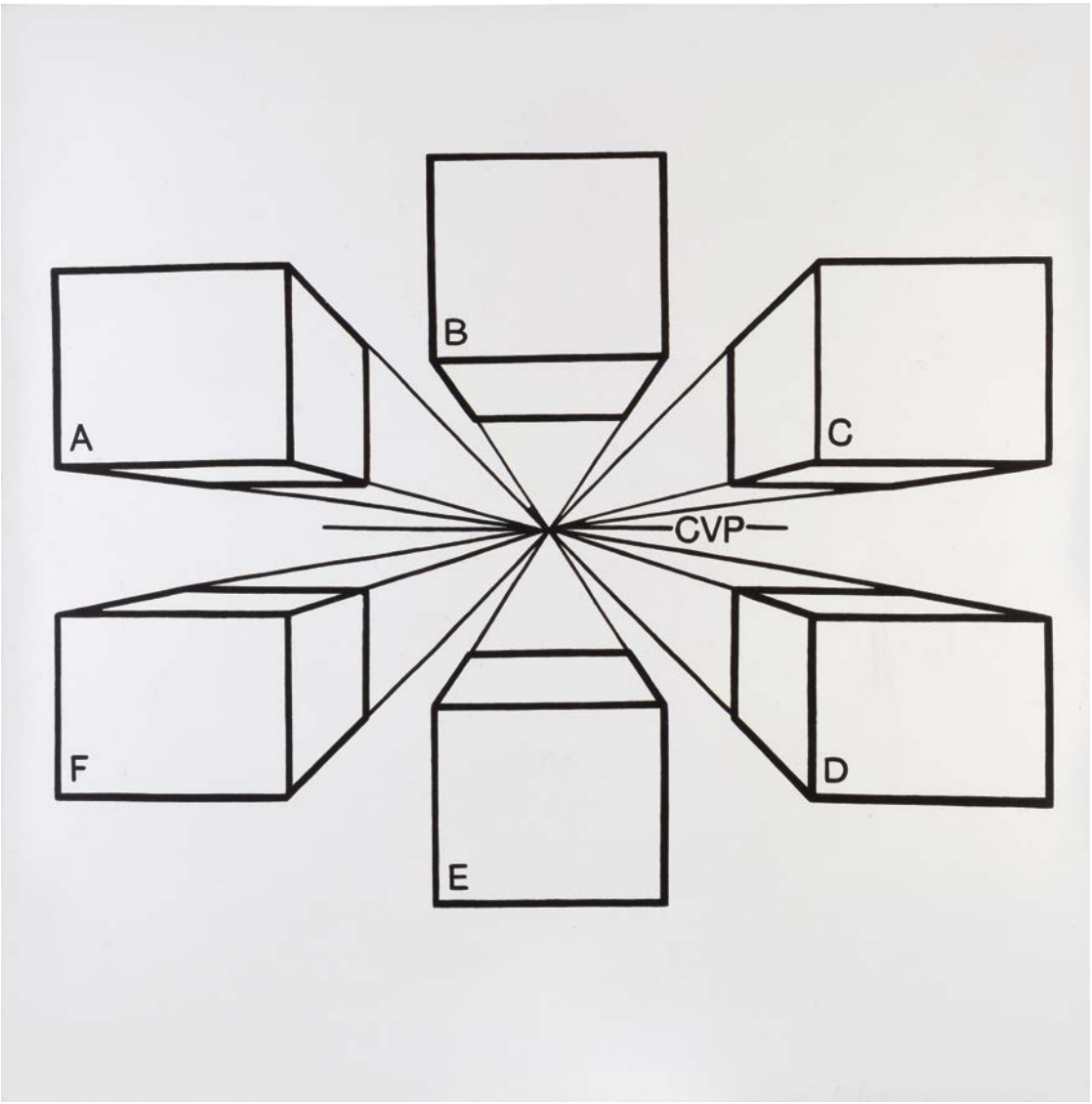
No doubt the ferment of the bicentennial years had contributed to Bennett creating a clear aesthetic agenda in his final year at art school, but the turning point came from filtering the personal psychological intensity of his early student work through an historical lens. It gave his vision a conceptual clarity that is evident in a set of pictorial elements that for the first time are fully articulated in *The Plough* and his other seminal work of that year, *Triptych Requiem, Of Grandeur, Empire* (Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery): a more conceptual and less emotionally felt appropriation of historical artworks, geometric diagrams, (including Western Desert pictographic symbols) and a hybrid coda of Aboriginal dotting and the dot-screen of the modern image printing process. They evidence Bennett’s close engagement with the art of Imants Tillers, then Australia’s leading contemporary artist. A year after *The Plough*, his challenge to Tillers with the coveted Moët & Chandon Australian Art Fellowship award-winning painting *The Nine Ricochets (Fall down black fella, jump up white fella)* launched Bennett’s reputation as the leading painter of his generation.

Bennett is the quintessential decolonising artist, but like several other artists with an Indigenous heritage, he refused the tag of Aboriginal artist. Highly sensitive to racism, he told me that all Australian artists should be addressing the legacy of colonialism. Indeed, his art inspired a generation of artists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous – including Tillers. However, his legacy is mainly evident in his impact on aspiring urban-based Indigenous artists who felt in his work that their time had come. But his disciples are in the desert too: even Vincent Namatjira saluted Bennett in his *Self Portrait with Gordon Bennett* 2018.

IAN MCLEAN



SIGNIFICANT



D'LAN CONTEMPORARY

LIN ONUS
1948 – 1996
Yorta Yorta language

*Guyi Rirrkiyan Minitji –
Fish in Rock Pool* 1993
gouache on card
49 × 74 cm (reveal)
(19.2 × 29.1 inches),
76 × 99 cm (framed)
(29.9 × 38.9 inches)

Lin Onus (1948–1996), or as I’ve always known him, Uncle Lin, was more than an artist; he was a visionary who reshaped contemporary South-Eastern or, as us Victorian Aboriginal folks like to say, ‘Koori’ art. A Yorta Yorta man with Scottish ancestry, he bridged cultural, political and artistic traditions, creating work that defied expectation and challenged the rigid frameworks of the Australian art world. His 1993 gouache *Guyi Rirrkiyan Minitji – Fish in Rock Pool* embodies his signature fusion of photorealism and Aboriginal iconography, pushing against market-driven expectations and asserting our identities on our own terms, on our own Country.

Deeply grounded in Yorta Yorta culture and history, Onus’s connection to Country was shaped by time spent at Cummeragunja Mission, a place of cultural significance for us Yorta Yorta people. There he learnt from his father, activist Bill Onus, and his uncle, Aaron Briggs, known as the ‘old man of the forest’. It was Uncle Aaron who gifted him the name Burrinja, meaning ‘star’. These experiences on Country formed the foundation of Onus’s artistic vision. His work captures the fluidity of our waterways, the resilience of our culture and the layered ways in which we see and experience the world.

Onus’s work was never just about aesthetics; it was deeply political. He grew up in the activist space of the Aborigines Advancement League, co-founded by his father, and his career was entwined with the struggle for Aboriginal rights. His first solo exhibition in 1975 was held within that very space. In 1986, while representing Victoria on the Aboriginal Arts Board, he travelled to Maningrida

PROVENANCE
The Artist
Estate of Lin Onus, Victoria
Cooeee Art Gallery, Sydney
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

EXHIBITED
The Collector’s Edition, Cooeee Art
Gallery, Sydney, August 2015
Cooeee Art Gallery at Australian
Galleries, Australian Galleries,
Sydney, April 2016

AUD 65,000
USD 41,600

and met senior artist Jack Wunuwun, who became his adoptive father and mentor.

Wunuwun and other Yolŋu Elders entrusted him with permission to incorporate rarrk (cross-hatching) as well as their Yolŋu language into his work. This cultural exchange is reflected in *Guyi Rirrkiyan Minitji* – the title itself being in Yolŋu – where fragmented reflections conceal and reveal, mirroring the complexities of cultural knowledge.

Uncle Lin had a rare ability to challenge dominant narratives with both sharp intellect and humour. As curator Margo Neale perfectly put it, he was a ‘cultural terrorist of gentle irreverence’. He lured viewers in with stunning realism, only to subvert colonial perceptions of Aboriginal art and identity through deeper layers of meaning.

His legacy remains cemented in the national canon. Today, his work is housed in major collections, including a dedicated space at Shepparton Art Museum on Yorta Yorta Country. Recent exhibitions, such as *Lin Onus: The Land Within*, co-curated by Yorta Yorta curator Belinda Briggs, reaffirm his ongoing relevance in dialogues around identity, place and belonging.

CHLOE JONES

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SOURCES
Belinda Briggs and Shelley McSpeddan, *Lin Onus: The Land Within*, Shepparton Art Museum, Shepparton, Victoria, 2022.
Margot Neale, *Urban Dingo: The Art of Lin Onus*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2000.
Personal interviews with Yorta Yorta Community and family members.



DANIEL BOYD
born 1982
Kuku Yalanji, Gudjal, Wakka Wakka,
Gubbi Gubbi, Wangerriburra,
Bundjalung, Ghungalu and Yuggera
languages and ni-Vanuatu heritage

Untitled 2015
oil, charcoal and archival
glue on canvas
213.4 × 167.4 cm (84 × 66 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist
Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above in 2016

LITERATURE
Isobel Parker Philip and Erin Vink
(eds), *Daniel Boyd: Treasure Island*,
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney, 2022, p. 46 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
*The future is already here –
it's just not evenly distributed*, Biennale
of Sydney, Museum of Contemporary
Art, Sydney, 18 March – 5 June 2016
Daniel Boyd: Treasure Island, Art
Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
4 June 2022 – 29 January 2023

AUD 150,000
USD 96,000

Born in Cairns, Queensland, in 1982, Daniel Boyd is a contemporary artist who lives and works in Sydney on Gadigal and Wangal Country. His artistic practice takes a reflective approach to Australian First Nations and Australian-European histories, drawing upon his Gudjal/Ghungalu heritage from North Queensland and North Pentecost Island in Vanuatu. Through his work, Boyd explores themes of time, memory and loss, and the enduring impacts of colonisation.

Boyd's art is both deeply personal and universally resonant, exposing the systems that uphold colonial agendas worldwide. Employing an archival approach to painting, he draws from family photographs, collective memories, and the cultural survival of his ancestors. His engagement with colonisation challenges historical narratives by appropriating imagery from science, art, history and geography – disciplines that have historically served colonial interests. Since 2011, Boyd has developed large-scale tonal paintings that obscure historical scenes with a veil of black dots in charcoal and oil paint. He explains, 'the circle acts as a lens, so it's about perception and multiple entry points into specific ideas of things that I wanted to work through'.¹

Untitled 2015 is part of a series of six paintings first exhibited in *The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed* curated by Stephanie

Rosenthal for the 2016 Biennale of Sydney. While seemingly abstract, the series is centred on Pemulwuy, 'a Bidjigal (Bidjigal) man from the Botany Bay area of Sydney who was a powerful warrior and activist against British colonisation'.² Painted in the same year as Boyd's participation in *All the World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor for the 56th Venice Biennale, *Untitled* 2015 was later selected for inclusion in *Daniel Boyd: Treasure Island* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This 2023 exhibition, Boyd's first major institutional show, featured over eighty works spanning nearly two decades of his career, offering a comprehensive exploration of his artistic journey. It traced the evolution of his distinctive techniques, from his early figurative works to his signature use of veiled dot patterns, highlighting the persistence of his practice in continuously interrogating dominant historical narratives. Through this expansive survey, the exhibition underscored Boyd's conceptual depth, demonstrating how his engagement with themes of colonisation, memory and perception has shaped his innovative approach to contemporary art.

ISABELLA WADLEY

1. Susan Acret (ed.), 'Daniel Boyd on decentralising perception', *Ocula*, 2024.
2. Daniel Boyd, Biennale of Sydney, 2016.



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

c. 1915 – 1996

Anmatyerr language

Untitled 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

151 × 90.8 cm (59.5 × 35.75 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Delmore

Downs, Northern Territory

Delmore Gallery, Alice

Springs, cat. no. 93D036

Barry Stern Gallery, Sydney

Private Collection, Scotland,

acquired from the above

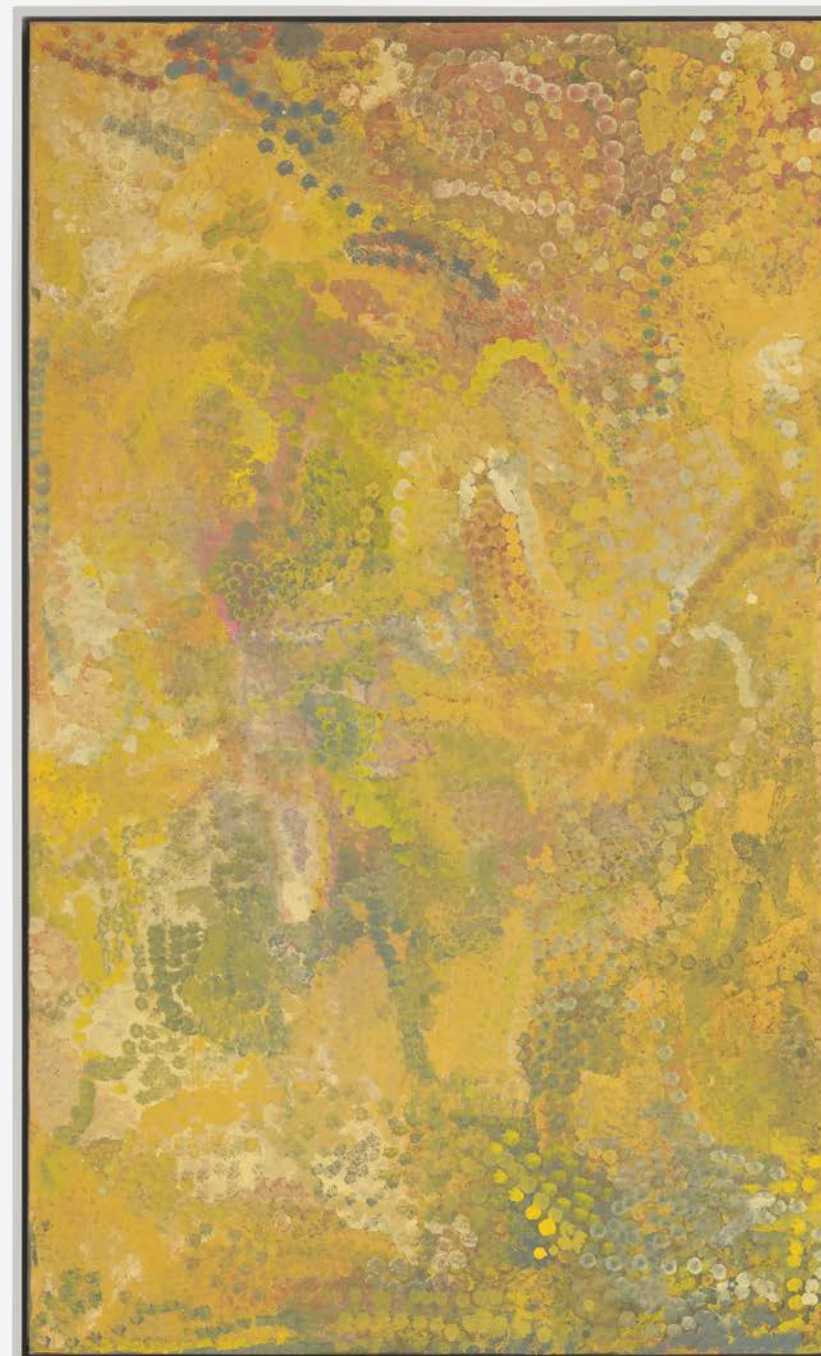
AUD 380,000

USD 244,000

Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Kngwarray continually refined her style and technique, producing countless scales, densities, colour mixes and tonal variations in her works. The finely dotted clouds produced from 1990 to 1992 were painted with small brushes dipped once in black, white, red and yellow pigments – with small dots of pure colour often applied within larger dots. In 1992, a radical change occurred as Kngwarray began streamlining her processes to increase her production rate. The characteristic dots and simple linear structures of batik-making that dominated the surface in Kngwarray's early years of painting on canvas gave way to expansive fields of dots. The graphic underlayer of the yam tracks and the lines around the stretching edge disappeared, and the number of paint layers diminished. Larger brushes were utilised, replacing the fine, concentrated application in earlier canvases, and Kngwarray started to improvise her technique by trimming the hairs of the brush around the edges while leaving the central hairs long. By double-dipping with the altered brushes, she produced 'florets of colour' by bringing

the brush down on the canvas vertically and then lifting it with a twist. By the end of 1992 and into 1993, Kngwarray entered a significant period known as the 'colourist phase', characterised by a succession of intensely bright paintings, followed by subtly contrasting works applied with a bouncing, dragging, paint-laden technique.

Kngwarray's *Untitled* was painted at Delmore Downs in April 1993, when the harsh edge of summer softens in anticipation of the cooler months ahead. During this period, the desert landscape transforms from the wet season towards the notoriously dry and cold mid-winter months. The light settles with clarity on the diverse textures and colours of the undergrowth, shrubs, bushes and soft sands. The vibrancy of works from this period reflects Kngwarray's joy and sensitivity to the colours available. This painting is an assertive yet earnest declaration of her land's subsistence, humming with the Country's vitality, growth and rebirth throughout all cycles of the seasons.

VANESSA MERLINO

EUBENA NAMPITJIN

c. 1925 – 2013
Wangkajunga language

Untitled – Tinnu Rockhole 1990
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
91 × 61 cm (35.8 × 24 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Balgo,
Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Balgo, Western
Australia, cat. no. 477/90
Dreamtime Gallery, Perth
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above in 1991
Important Fine Art + Aboriginal Art,
Deutscher and Hackett, Sydney,
2 December 2015, lot 105
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 35,000
USD 22,400

The paintings of Eubena Nampitjin are a song born of walking.

—
As a child, Eubena Nampitjin's footprints marked the warm red sands of her homelands around the middle stretches of the Canning Stock Route. As a young woman, with her first husband, Gimme, she walked the length of the Canning Stock Route with the drover Wally Dowling, working cattle from Kunawarritji south to Wiluna, and travelling back up to Billiluna Station. They stayed and worked again on the cattle station with whitefellas before walking their young family to nearby Balgo Mission. Here, while raising her children and the children of others, Eubena, with her husband, helped the local priest to compile the *Kukatja Dictionary*.

Eubena's enthusiasm for communicating across cultures was further explored in her partnership with her second husband, Wimmitji. The two painted together in the early 1990s, and their individual and collaborative works of this period left a sparkling tide line on the

shores of Australian painting. Distilling which was a solo work, or collaboration, remains a challenge – and perhaps ultimately a folly. For it wasn't simply a case of Eubena and Wimmitji painting separate works side by side, nor of helping to finish each other's paintings. They painted together – sharing technique, palette and compositions, refining a radiant aesthetic unique to their partnership.

Such was the affinity of their style, Eubena did not paint with the same technique or composition after Wimmitji died. Instead, she explored a new path, developing a brush-stroked kinti-kinti (close-close) technique of merging the dots, the dotting style pioneered by her stepdaughter Lucy Yukenbarri (Wimmitji's daughter from a previous marriage). This – along with the influence of Lucy's laddered compositions – is evident in the bolder, more primary and stylistic shift of *Near Jupiter Well in the Great Sandy Desert, WA* 1995, a landmark work in her solo trajectories as a painter.



EUBENA NAMPITJIN

c. 1925 – 2013
Wangkajunga language

Near Jupiter Well in the Great Sandy Desert 1995
synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 180 cm (47 × 71 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Balgo, Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Balgo, Western Australia, cat. no. 802/95
The Thomas Vroom Collection, The Netherlands, acquired from the above
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, New York, 13 December 2019, lot 19
Private Collection, Switzerland, acquired from the above

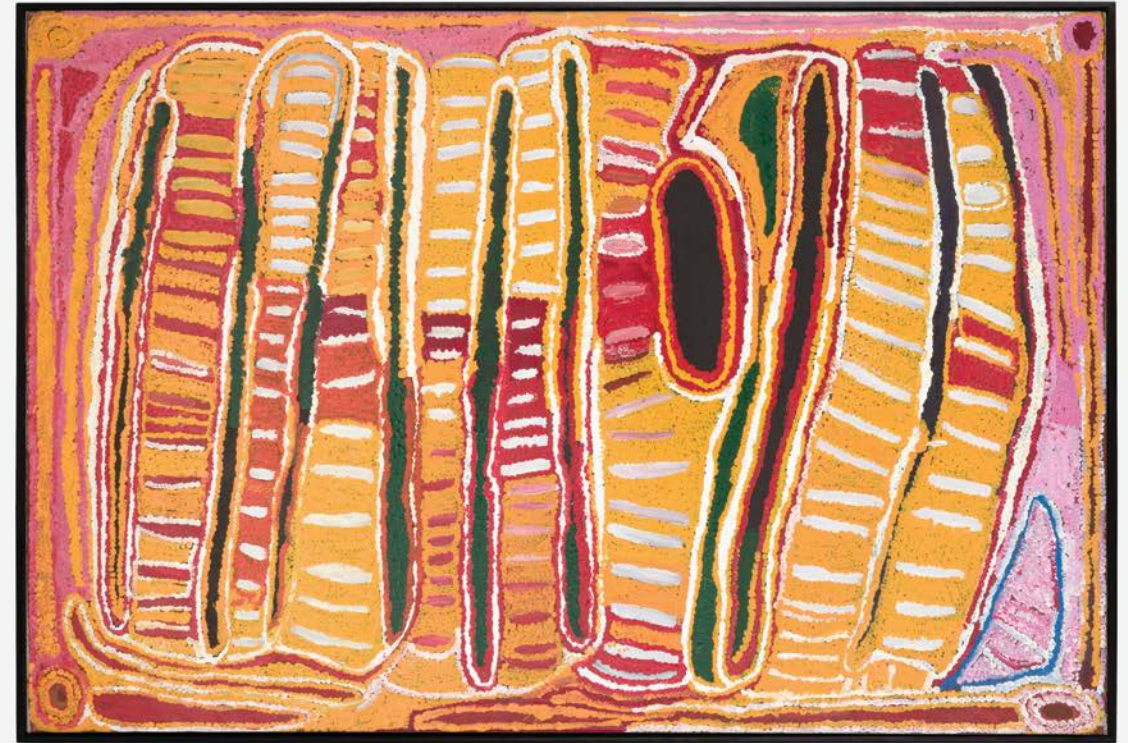
AUD 110,000
USD 70,400

From here, Eubena's work took a painterly turn: with a change from sticks to paintbrushes, her work moved from a fine dotting to a splodgier style in the mid to late 1990s, and by the time she painted *Kinyu* 2001, to a style that does not appear to use dots at all. Yet watching her paint revealed otherwise: Eubena was always dotting, but her paintbrush rarely left the canvas; pushing the paint across the surface, she sculpted florets of colour in the desert sands. Here these expressive gestures accumulate like busy footprints around the circular camps of the giant ancestral dingo, Kinyu, into the organic, petalled structures of the landscape. As if the dunes themselves flowered from its centre.

The sunlit reverie in these compositions is not without shadow: the places Eubena painted are remembered because they are sites of encounter and consequence. Sites of memory. Places where kartiya (white people) were speared for trying to steal Aboriginal women, or places where introduced camels that spoiled local waterholes

were killed by Kinyu herself. Eubena also painted the sites where her own family members – her mother, her sister – died. When narrating her paintings, she would point out, in the opulent sweep of a seeming abstraction, the specific place in a sandhill where these bones now lie, buried again in bright acrylic. Time, events, people all merge into places – Country – and this is the memorial geography of Eubena's oeuvre. Moving between these sites – Ikarra, Jupiter Well, Tjintalpa, Kunawarritji, Kinyu – on canvas as she did for so many years on foot, Eubena maintained her Country through the personal itineraries of her painting.

While Eubena travelled and painted vaster swathes of Country than most, Kinyu was her favourite: a place she identified with most strongly and to which she returned with greater relish and regularity than all others in her art. Kinyu – the mother dingo – is a fierce protector of her homelands and the humans who belong to it. She is held in such reverence, and fear,



EUBENA NAMPITJIN

c. 1925 – 2013
Wangkajunga language

Kinyu 2001
synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 100 cm (59 × 39.4 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Balgo,
Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Balgo, Western
Australia, cat. no. 711/01
Private Collection, United States,
acquired from the above

AUD 28,000
USD 18,000

that younger generations hesitate to say her name out loud unless necessary. Eubena, on the other hand, spoke Kinyu's name with a loving inflection as if it were her mother. She even declared that 'Kinyu was the one that grew me up', speaking of the ancestral dingo with an intimacy beyond the obvious English referents, beyond what such imported metaphors of relationship could encompass.

Eubena never bothered to speak much English, perhaps because she understood its failings well enough. She spoke 'high Kukatja' – an older version of the common lingua franca that developed between the desert peoples who settled at Balgo. At times, even her own family struggled to translate her more esoteric musings. But it suited her, the old tongue: it held the names of all the places, and the pathways between them that led home. She held onto its music. She painted it. This song born of walking.

JOHN CARTY



BOXER MILNER TJAMPITJIN

c. 1934 – 2009

Jaru language

Marduwarra – near Sturt Creek 1995synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm (35.4 × 23.6 inches)**PROVENANCE**The Artist, painted at Balgo,
Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Balgo, Western
Australia, cat. no. 582/95
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 12,000

USD 7,700

Boxer Milner is an outlier in the history of Warlayirti Artists. Where the old desert painters were focused on the concentric circles that depicted the rockholes and soak waters deep in the desert, Boxer Milner was caressing the canvas with lyrical swathes of paint. Where other desert men were painting the water found underground, Boxer was painting water that poured from the sky and surged through the landscape. He painted the *force* of water: the way its transformative power shapes the land and the people who belong to it.

Boxer was a river man, he was painting different Country, and painting Country differently. The river in question is the Sturt Creek, a central waterway for the Jaru and Walmajarri people. A gentle stream or sequence of billabongs for much of the year, monsoonal rains over its northern catchment bloat the Sturt into a force of nature: breaking its banks, inundating the flood plain miles wide and draining south to fill the great inland lake of Paruku (Lake Gregory) on the northern fringes of the Great Sandy Desert. These seasonal events transform the Country, giving it life and rhythm. The river and its flood, mythic in scale and creative qualities, is the stuff of story. And no one has told it better than Boxer.

In *Marduwarra* 1995, Boxer paints Country unfurling to the feel of water: water, flowing and spreading, pooling into billabongs and animating the dry earth with food, flowers and colour. This is followed by the less dramatic green-water phase after the rains, when the river retreats into pools, the mud of 'the wet' cracking into the scales of another season.

Raised to read such ever-changing Country, it is no surprise to find the artist obsessed with the nuances and minute gradations of colour. Distinct from his contemporaries painting straight from the pot, Boxer was fastidious in mixing his own pigments. He was especially fond of grading multiple shades of blue, yellow or purple; to mirror how silt tints the water, how green spinifex dries into shades of straw, how soils darken in the wet or change composition between river and desert Country.

Some of Boxer's early paintings of the river, such as *Marduwarra* 1995, had an anthropomorphic quality to them. The tributaries branch out in symmetrical arms, the river like a line of men dancing. Boxer's identity and history straddled the desert and river Country, and so did his imagery. While he was authorised to paint that desert Country further south, he tended not to; the old man identified himself with the river.

It's not a self-portrait in the land, but a portrait of self as land: the figure, the ground, and the water.

It is a portrait that includes the ancestral beings whose actions created the Country, and a portrait of the places where men recreate those actions in ceremony today. It is a portrait of water; of its power to transform the land and the story that remains when the water dries up.

JOHN CARTY

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Note: Aspects of this text have been adapted from an earlier essay, 'Boxer Milner Tjampitjin: portraits of water', published in Henry F. Skeritt et al. (eds), *No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting*, DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-London-New York, 2014.



TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA

c. 1929 – 2007
Kukatja language

Wati Kutjarra 2003
synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 180 cm (47.2 × 70.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Balgo,
Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Western
Australia, cat. no. 266/03
Tineriba Fine Arts, South Australia
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above
Australian Aboriginal Art,
Lawson-Menzies, Sydney,
14 November 2007, lot 46
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

AUD 80,000
USD 51,200

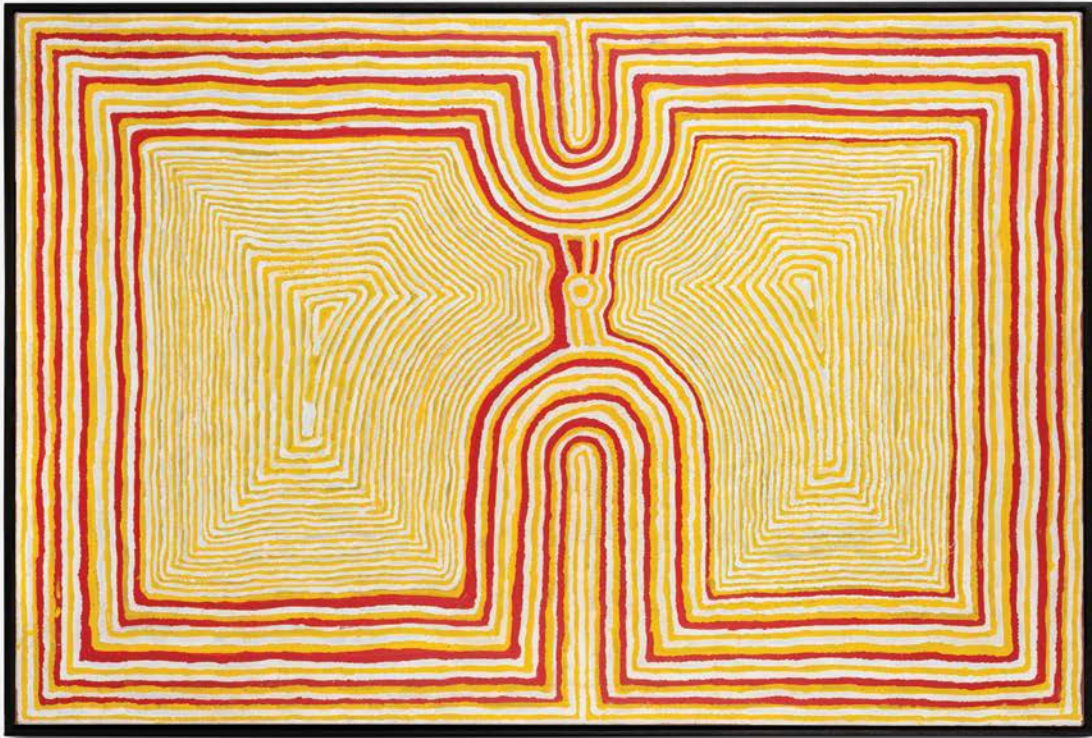
Tjumbo Tjapanangka was born around 1929 in Kukatja Country, between Balgo and the large salt lake Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay). Sources say that he was born at either Kanapir or Muruwarr, both close in proximity; either site lies in the stretch of territory that joins the Kukatja and Pintupi language groups. Tjumbo spent the first twenty years in this area's sandhill and salt lake country before migrating to Balgo in 1948 after the local priest sent people into the bush to attract the remaining nomadic groups to the mission. Tjumbo was a fully initiated Lawman and marpan – clever man – and one of the last senior Kukatja custodians for Wilkinkarra. He manifested his longing to return home through his focus on his inherited rights to water, rainmaking, soakage sites and Rainbow Serpents, adopting a dynamic painting style that established Warlayirti Artists in 1986 and gave rise to a sophisticated body of work of minimalist integrity.

Wati Kutjarra 2003 brims with the strength and authority of Tjumbo's later period, which focused

on the recurrent themes of Wilkinkarra or the travels of the ancestral brothers often identified as Goanna Men in Wati Kutjarra Tjukurrpa. These works are stripped back and linear in style, and continued to evolve towards a reduced palette of yellow and white, communicating Tjumbo's undisputed cultural seniority and integrity of purpose.¹ The last remnants of red still linger in this painting, which no longer features in works made after 2004. A steady, though not prolific, painter, Tjumbo was a husband and father, collaborator, doctor, teacher, magician and warrior. He balanced these responsibilities and demands on his knowledge as a cultural authority through a painting practice which also helped shape the artistic expression of the Balgo region.

VANESSA MERLINO

1. Una Rey, 'Tjumbo Tjapanangka: hunting Balgo's contemporary warrior', in Henry F. Skeritt et al. (eds), *No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting*, DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-London-New York, 2014, p. 146.



BAI BAI NAPANGATI

c. 1935 – 2020
Ngarti language

Untitled – Mulupuku 2006
synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 75 cm (59 × 29.5 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, painted at Balgo,
Western Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Balgo, Western
Australia, cat. no. 669/06
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 22,000
USD 14,100



MIDPUL – PRINCE OF WALES

c. 1935 – 2002

Larrakia language

Body Marks 1999

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

93 × 127 cm (36.6 × 50 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in Darwin

Karen Brown Gallery,

Darwin, cat. no. EP8

The Thomas Vroom Collection,

The Netherlands

Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, New

York, 14 December 2019, lot 24

Private Collection, United States,

acquired from the above

AUD 45,000

USD 28,800

Midpul, known as the Prince of Wales, was born in 1935. He served as a traditional landowner, ceremonial leader and a respected Elder of the Larrakia people. The Larrakia are 'saltwater people', sharing a vibrant culture based on their proximity to the Arafura Sea on the north coast of Australia. Their Country extends from the Cox Peninsula in the west to Gunn Point in the north, and from Adelaide River in the east southward down to the Manton Dam. Much of this region, which makes up the Larrakia people's territory, is known as modern-day Darwin.

Midpul inherited the custodianship of Larrakia ceremonial dances, songs, and body paint designs at a young age, after the early passing of his father, Imabul (Old King George). First and foremost a performer, Midpul became the principal dancer of the Belyuen dance group during the 1960s and 1970s. Performing throughout the Darwin region, the Belyuen dance group were known for their ochre body paint designs.¹

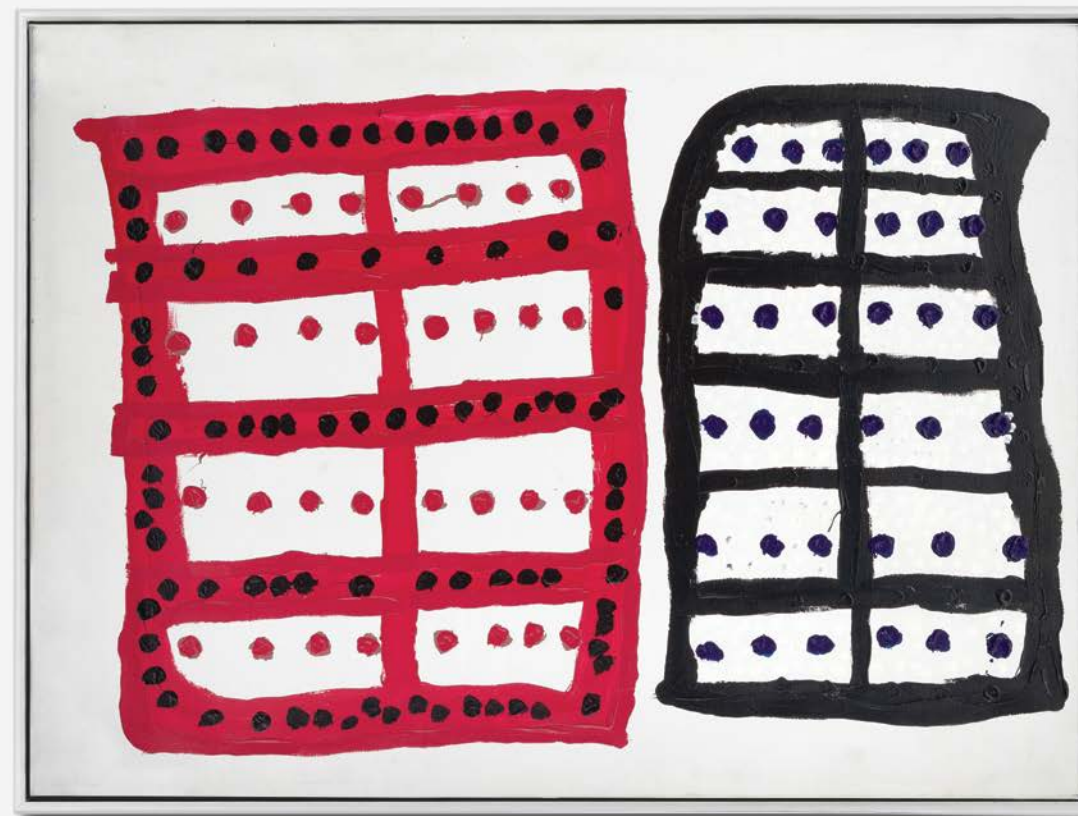
Midpul's role in leading song, dance, and body decoration in Larrakia ceremonies deeply influenced his visual art. For the Larrakia people, culture is

strongly tied to dance, song, and body decoration.

As a painter, Midpul focused on translating his clan's body paint designs onto canvas, capturing the rhythmic spirit that pervades the Larrakia traditions for generations to come.

After suffering a stroke that affected his mobility and his ability to lead ceremonies, Midpul turned to painting later in life to continue practising his culture. In September 1995, he participated in the Kululuk Community workshop at the Bougainvillea Festival in Darwin, now known as the Darwin Festival. It was here that he began his celebrated *Body Paint* series, transferring ceremonial body paint designs onto bark and cardboard. His art became a vital way to preserve and share the cultural heritage of the Larrakia people, even after his ceremonial role was limited by his health. Midpul continued to paint on canvas, at the Karen Brown Gallery in Darwin, until his passing in 2002.

Opting for a minimalist palette, Midpul rarely used more than three colours in his *Body Paint* works; he did not mix these colours, each mark has an end and a beginning. Instead, the power and resolve of his painting is in the uneasy



MIDPUL – PRINCE OF WALES

c. 1935 – 2002

Larrakia language

Body Marks 2000

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

85 × 52 cm (33.5 × 20.5 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in Darwin

Karen Brown Gallery, Darwin,

cat. no. KB0587

Private Collection, New South

Wales, acquired from the above

Selected Indigenous Art,

Deutscher and Hackett, Sydney,

24 February 2019, lot 11

Private Collection, United States,

acquired from the above

AUD 18,000

USD 11,500

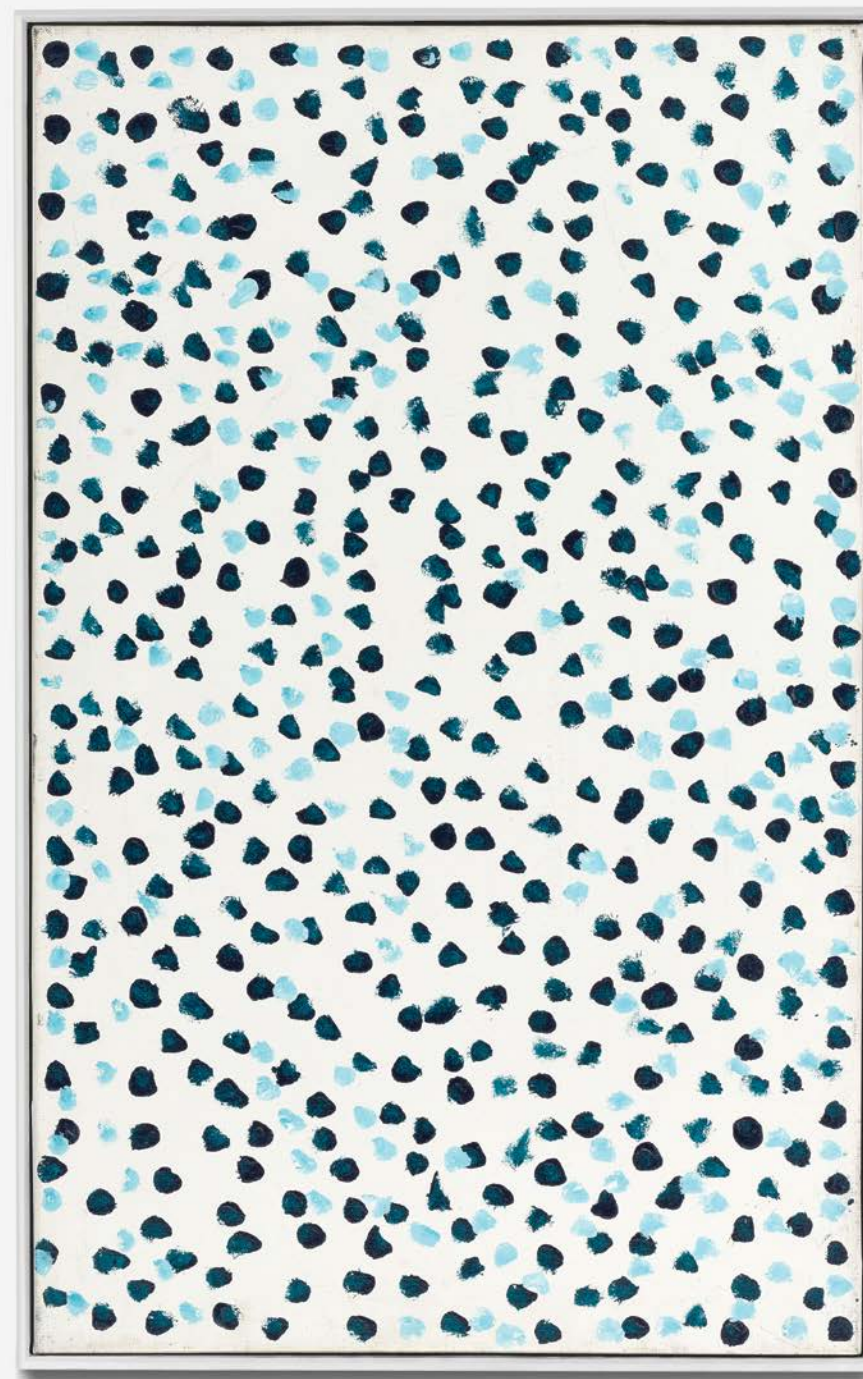
composition of floating forms that create movement by proximity. Alternating between deep teal and turquoise, the dots in *Body Marks* 2000 are arranged in the field as though random; energy surges where the forms collide, and space is felt where they are free floating. *Body Marks* 1999 is characteristic of his developed style that emerged in his practice during the late 1990s. Emily McDaniel, Wiradjuri curator, writer and educator notes that the loose grid-like form that structures the composition of these works is proportioned to resemble a torso, creating soft curvatures that contrast to the sharp edges of the canvas and reinvigorate the corporeal form that these works take their inspiration. Curator and writer Hetti Perkins also remarks that this compositional style can be ‘read like the sheet music for an improvised symphony’; the dots are intuitively arranged in contrasting colours and are layered with a sense of musicality, rhythm and sequence.² Read as sheets of music or painted bodies in motion, these rhythmic compositions re-iterated over the course of his celebrated career, attest to Midpul’s long commitment to Larrakia culture and its expression through ceremony.

Midpul was the first artist from the Larrakia region to gain prominence. According to Perkins the artist ‘upped the ante’ before his death in order to permanently ‘record a posterity’ for future generations. In 2001, the year before he died, Midpul was awarded the General Painting Award at the 18th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards and examples of his *Body Paint* works began being prominently placed in all major Australian National institutions. The legacy that Midpul built through his political activism and commitment to practising culture in long established and innovative ways has this year, in 2025, been recognised by the Charles Darwin University with a new gallery opening in the artist’s honour.

ISABELLA WADLEY

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1. Emily McDaniel, *Prince of Wales (Midpul)* “I Make the Marks”, in Henry F. Skerritt. [et. al.] (eds) ‘No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting’ DelMonico Books, Prestel, Munich, London, New York, 2015, p. 60
2. Hetti Perkins, *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2014, p. 66.



(Pages 114–115)
NGARRA
c. 1920 – 2008
Andinyin and Gija languages

A Suite of 9 Paintings 2004 – 2006
synthetic polymer paint on paper
sheet size: 35 × 49.5 cm
(13.8 × 19.5 inches)
53.4 × 66 cm
(21 × 26 inches) framed

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in Derby, Western Australia, for anthropologist Ken Shaw between 2004 and 2006
Mossenson Galleries, Perth
Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection, Miami Beach, Florida
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Henry F. Skeritt et al. (eds), *No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting*, DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-London-New York, 2014, pp. 88–103; pp. 94 (illus.), 96–98 (illus.), 100 (illus.), 103 (illus.)

EXHIBITED

No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting from the Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, 14 February – 3 May 2015; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Oregon, 20 June – 15 August 2015; Pérez Art Museum Miami, 17 September 2015 – 3 January 2016; Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, 18 January – 15 May 2016; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 11 June – 14 August 2016

AUD 85,000
USD 54,400



Ngarra, Photographer Kevin Shaw

Ngarra was born around 1920 at Kalkada, Glenroy Station, in the central Kimberley region of Western Australia. His full name is Ngarrangarri, which translates to Honey Dreaming in the Ngara Ngarrangkarni language.

Like many great Aboriginal artists, Ngarra (1920 – 2008) began practising art later in life, starting in 1994 at the age of seventy. Throughout his life, he worked as a stockman and bushman, navigating different worlds: one of white pastoralists, and the other the traditional knowledge and practices passed down by his grandparents in Mornington, located in the Kimberley ranges. As someone who transitioned between these two worlds, Ngarra gained a unique perspective from his Elders, allowing him to foresee the detrimental impact of European farming practices on the land.

His artworks reflect the stories of the old people, clan estates, bushmen, stockmen, the wet and dry seasons, and the diverse flora and fauna, all of which are saturated with deep cultural significance. Ngarra’s primary goal was to document his extensive knowledge of Andinyin law, geography and culture for future generations worldwide. His drawings and paintings serve as autobiographical records, rich with symbolism and metaphor, and exhibiting his ability to transform elements of his traditional culture into powerful visual and political statements.

Ngarra’s determination to become a prominent artist was supported by his good friend Kevin Shaw, who acted as his agent, and honoured Ngarra’s wish to be buried in a traditional manner after his passing in 2008. Many of Ngarra’s paintings depict highly coded landscapes, often viewed from above and in cross-section. These works challenge Eurocentric perspectives on landscape representation and the narratives conveyed through such depictions.

An artist of great versatility and subtlety, Ngarra encompassed a range of themes in his body of work, including important Dreaming stories such as *Yalyalji* and *Malngirri*, which tell of the dangerous Shuwar spirit and the lightning of the wet season. His symbolic metaphors also express the value of cultural knowledge, as in the two works *Datal*, which depict a poisonous plant known only to educated hunter-gatherers, and *Kurdi Karnghku*, which represents the nutritious white berries and the timber bowl used to collect them during the wet season.

VANESSA MERLINO

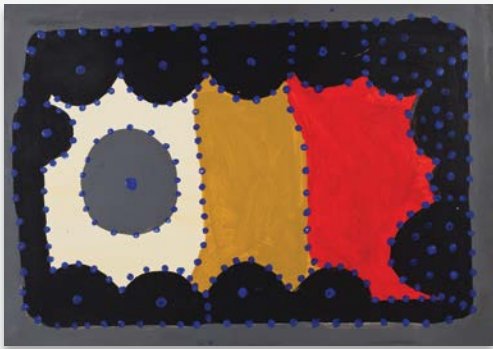
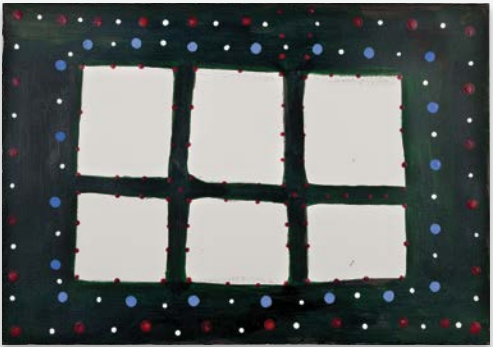
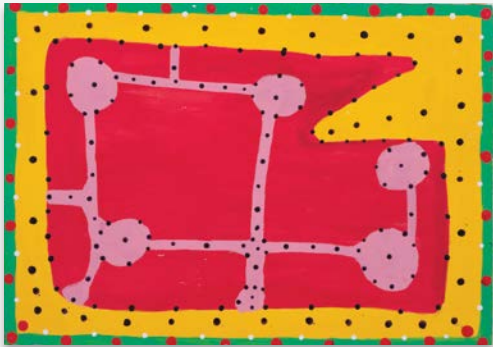
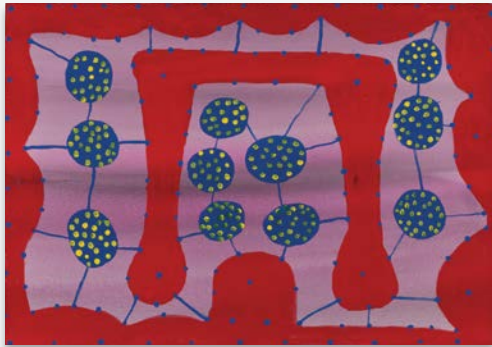
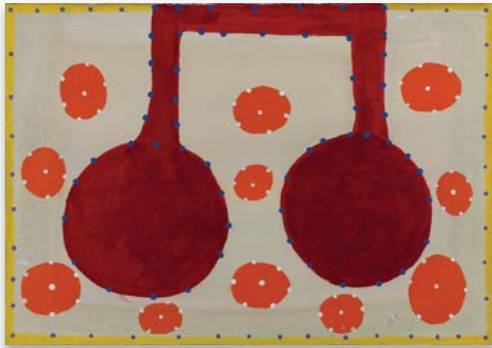
SOURCES

Henry F. Skeritt et al. (eds), *No Boundaries: Australian Aboriginal Contemporary Abstract Painting*, DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-London-New York, 2014.
Nick Tapper (ed.), ‘Ngarra: The Texta Drawings’ – *Artlink*, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4509/ngarra-the-texta-drawings/>

TOP: Left to right
Motaka.hedlyte (Motor Car Headlights) 2005
Djow (Bush Tobacco) 2004
Datal 2006

MIDDLE: Left to right
Ngamangray and Marri 2005
Yalyalji and Malngirri 2006
Barngalnganal 2005

BOTTOM: Left to right
Kungkaberri (Waterlily) 2005
Dancing Ground 2004
Ngamangray and Karngku in the Wet Season 2006



ROVER THOMAS JOOLAMA

1926 – 1998
Wangkajunga and Kukatja languages

Three Women Dreaming 1995
earth pigments and binders on linen
100 × 140 cm (39.4 × 55.1 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Warmun,
Turkey Creek, Western Australia
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra,
Western Australia, cat. no. AP0952
Private Collection, Tasmania,
acquired from the above

AUD 140,000
USD 89,600

Rover Thomas adhered firmly to the belief that one should ‘paint Country with Country’. While artists in other remote communities were using acrylic paints, East Kimberley artists continued to employ ochre, pigments and naturally occurring gums and resins as they had in rock paintings, ceremonies and object adornment before European settlement. Rover Thomas began his painting practice in the early 1980s. His hybrid style, featuring a reinvention of traditional East Kimberley art, developed through his travels across the vast terrain of East Kimberley as a stockman, far from his own Country of the Kukatja-Wangkajunga people. By intertwining different places associated with his mother’s and father’s Countries, Rover Thomas narrates their stories using broad areas of naturally sourced colour, including underground red from burnt red ochre or haematite, yellow from limonite, and white from kaolin clays, gypsum calcite or burnt selenite.

This painting depicts the Three Sisters site of Looma. The following description is drawn from the accompanying Waringarri Aboriginal Arts certificate:

In the Dreamtime, there were three old women: one of Nyawajarri skin, one Nawoola (her daughter), and one of Nyaminjili. They travelled around singing women’s corroboree, from the Goonyin Country on Louisa Downs, to Balgo and back to Mulan. Then they went to Yagga-Yagga and on to Ngaranyjanu, a large waterhole site situated in the bush. Some men heard them singing, stirring them into a jealous rage, in which they killed the women and left them by the waterhole. The three sisters are depicted as tree mounds against the black background to the left of the painting, with the creek running beside them. The red represents the Country over which they travelled, with the waterhole at the bottom right of the composition.

VANESSA MERLINO



PADDY BEDFORD

c. 1922 – 2007
Gija language

Garnkoorlbany – Jack Flood 2000
earth pigment with synthetic
binder on linen
122 × 135 cm (48 × 53.1 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in the Kimberley
region, Northern Territory
Jirrawun Arts, Western Australia,
cat. no. PB 8 2000.90
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above
*Important Australian Art, including
Sir Sidney Nolan: works from the
Estate of Lady Nolan, Part II*, Bonhams,
Sydney, 26 June, 2019, lot 8
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Linda Michael (ed.) *Paddy Bedford*,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney,
2006, p. 41 (not illus.), pp. 42, 148
(illus.).

AUD 140,000
USD 89,600

Innovation and experimentation are fundamental to Paddy Bedford’s practice. The global appeal of his work lies in the continuous innovation he demonstrated during the brief eight-year span of his career. The two paintings *Garnkoorlbany – Jack Flood* 2000 and *Twenty Mile* 2005 represent the two halves of Bedford’s stylistic trajectory and are exceptional examples of the visual vocabulary he developed, which clearly expressed his Country in a language that is both uniquely Gija and Australian. His paintings maintained fidelity to his laws and traditions while resisting comparison with modern Western art canons.

Between 1998 and 2003, Paddy Bedford and the Jirrawun artists directed their painting towards ambitious, politically charged projects that aimed to highlight the collective trauma and cultural disruption experienced by First Nations people in

the Kimberley region. Bedford and his brother-in-law, fellow artist Timmy Timms, became catalysts when they revealed the existence of the Joonba – a traditional song and dance cycle – recounting the Bedford Downs massacre, which was performed publicly for the first time in fifty years. The period from 2000 to 2003 marked an intensive phase of painting for Bedford, who committed to solo and group shows in nearly every state of the country. The works from this time are characterised by their direct composition and opaque palette, which conveyed the solemnity of their subject matter. Bedford meticulously developed what art historian Michiel Dolk described as the ‘symbolic repertoire of his Dreamings of his mother’s and father’s country’, which also addressed the harsh realities of overlapping ancestral narratives and the colonial histories of their lands.¹



PADDY BEDFORD

c. 1922 – 2007
Gija language

Twenty Mile 2005
earth pigment with synthetic
binder on linen
122 × 135 cm (48 × 53.1 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted in the Kimberley
Region, Northern Territory
Jirrawun Arts, Western Australia,
cat. no. PB 5 2005.221
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne
Paddy Bedford Trust
D’Lan Contemporary, Melbourne
Private Collection, New York,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Linda Michael (ed.), *Paddy Bedford*,
Museum of Contemporary Art,
Sydney, 2006, p. 157 (illus.)
*Paddy Bedford – Bury My Heart
at Bow River*, William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne, 12 February
– 20 March 2009, p. 29 (illus.)
Reverence, D’Lan Contemporary,
Oxford Street, Paddington,
6–28 September 2019, p. 31 (illus.)

EXHIBITED

*Paddy Bedford – Bury My
Heart at Bow River*, William
Mora Galleries, Melbourne,
12 February – 20 March 2009
Reverence, D’Lan Contemporary,
Oxford Street, Paddington,
6–28 September 2019

AUD 250,000
USD 160,000

Garnkoorlbany – Jack Flood 2000 is a site in
Bedford’s father’s Country associated with a wattle
tree (*Acacia pellita*) that is an integral aspect of a
fishing method used in the area. Small branches
of this tree, covered in tiny seed pods, are swished
through the water, creating a soap-like effect. The
fish rise, gasping for air, and can be easily caught.
The black areas of the composition represent
the abundance of these hunting grounds rather
than signifying mourning or death as this colour
traditionally suggests in Western art and culture.

While drawing on his ancestral past, Bedford’s
paintings do not serve as direct invocations of the
Ngarranggarni (the Dreaming in Gija language).
Instead, the Ngarranggarni represents the living
narrative that guides his hand to paint without
hesitation, infusing power into his abstract forms
and, in turn, renewing the present. In the painting

Twenty Mile 2005, Bedford evokes the black soil
country Girlingmanji of his mother’s land where
both a river and a road run through it. Unlike the
previous painting, *Garnkoorlbany – Jack Flood*,
Twenty Mile – which is associated with the death of
his grandfather – the site is depicted through the
luminosity and transparency of Bedford’s paint.
This technique became characteristic of his works
created after 2004, likely due to Bedford’s consistent
use of gouache as a fluid and spontaneous practice
alongside his larger canvases.²

VANESSA MERLINO

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1. Michiel Dolk, ‘Are we strangers in this place’, in Linda Michael
(ed.), *Paddy Bedford*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney,
2006, p. 29.
 2. Georges Petitjean, ‘In his Dreams’ in *Bonhams Magazine*,
issue 29, Winter 2011, p. 14.



TIMOTHY COOK

born 1958

Tiwi language

Untitled 2001

earth pigments with synthetic
binder on linen

91 × 103 cm (35.8 × 40.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Milikapiti,
Melville Island, Northern Territory
Jilamara Arts & Crafts, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 673-01
Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney
Private Collection, Queensland,
acquired from the above in 2002

EXHIBITED

Timothy Cook, Aboriginal & Pacific
Art, Sydney, 12 September –
12 October 2002, cat. no. 6

AUD 12,000

USD 7,700

Timothy Cook expresses himself through his loose and gestural designs. He paints exclusively with locally sourced ochre, and his artworks are highly sought after by significant national and international collections.

Cook won the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award in 2012 and has been shortlisted for many others, including the Hadley Art Award in 2019, the Wynne Prize in 2020 and the Sulman Prize in 2023.

Cook has been creating paintings, prints and carvings at Jilamara Arts & Crafts since 1999 and has represented the art centre in numerous high-profile solo and group exhibitions. His art is very personal to him; he likes parlingarri jilamara, 'old designs', which he learnt from growing up with the wulimawi (old people). These are the unique and striking combinations of kurluwukari (circles), pwanga (dots) and marlipinyini (lines) that make up jilamara – body paint design, and the complex visual culture of the Tiwi people.

For many years, Timothy has focused more specifically on the circular Kulama design. The

Kulama ceremony is the Tiwi initiation ceremony, which coincides with the harvest of wild yam. The ceremony is performed late in the wet season when a ring appears around Japarra (the moon). Elders of both sexes sing and call out to their ancestors for three days, welcoming children into adulthood. The circles in his work symbolise the moon, yam and ritual circles of the Kulama ceremony; the panga (dots) reflect the japalinga (stars).

Japarra is the moon – it also means Moonman. He is important to the Tiwi people, they know. Japalinga means stars.

I like painting for culture way – Kulama – that means painting culture. We teach culture. Kulama also mean yam – they eat that one, they get it from the ground and eat it. Kulama is a ceremony where they yoi [dance].

I paint Japarra, Kulama and Japalinga.

– Timothy Cook

—
Drawn from Jilamara Arts & Crafts documentation.



DOROTHY NAPANGARDI

c. 1956 – 2013
Warlpiri language

Salt on Mina Mina 2002
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
244 × 168 cm (96 × 66.1 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Alice Springs
Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, cat. no. 7540DN
The Austcorp Group Limited
Art Collection, Melbourne
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 24 November 2009, lot 100
Private Collection, acquired from the above by private treaty sale

AUD 65,000
USD 41,600

In the late 1940s or early 1950s, Dorothy Napangardi was born ‘out bush’ near Mina Mina, low rainfall Warlpiri Country bordering Pintupi Country, far north-west of Alice Springs. The earliest part of Napangardi’s life was spent with her parents and extended family, travelling on foot around their vast familial estate, comprised of rockholes, salt pans and a large salt lake called Ngayurru in the Warlpiri language, Wilkinkarra in Pintupi, and Lake Mackay in English. Only about once a decade would Ngayurru fill with fresh rainwater.

Despite its arid location, Napangardi recalled her Country providing an abundance of small game and bush vegetables, declaring that she never went hungry. When reminiscing about her early life around Mina Mina, Napangardi, usually a famously quiet, reserved and dignified woman, often commented on the sense of unconditional happiness and unqualified freedom she felt in those formative years, living on Country and keeping close to family.

The early days before the mid 1950s, when Napangardi and her family were forcibly relocated

to Yuendumu, provided her with the artistic subject matter that sustained her for a lifetime. Napangardi’s primary painterly focus was on the closely interrelated Karnta-kurlangu Jukurrpa (Women’s Dreaming) and Kana-kurlangu Jukurrpa (Digging Sticks Dreaming) located in and around Mina Mina. Her quasi-abstract depictions of Ngayurru and smaller salt pans on her salt-encrusted ancestral Country, with their unique beauty, also became part of her signature subject matter and style, ‘grounded abstraction’.

Among the many achievements of Napangardi’s life, which ended tragically in a car accident in 2013, was winning the 2001 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award and being honoured with a solo exhibition at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art in 2002. Today, Napangardi’s work is in many significant Australian and international collections.

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SOURCES

Christine Nicholls, ‘Grounded abstraction: the work of Dorothy Napangardi’ in *Dancing Up Country: The Art of Dorothy Napangardi*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2003.



KATHLEEN PETYARRE

c. 1935 – 2018
Alyawarr and Eastern
Anmatyerr languages

Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming 2005
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 122 cm (48 × 48 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Adelaide
Gallerie Australis, Adelaide,
cat. no. GAKP0405465
Private Collection, Queensland,
acquired from the above

AUD 40,000
USD 25,600

Born in 1944 at Atnangkere, to the north-west of Utopia Station, 275 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs, Kathleen Petyarre belongs to the Eastern Anmatyerr language group. Kathleen began making artwork in 1977, producing batiks along with a number of the other women at Utopia. In April 1989, Kathleen participated in an exhibition at the S.H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney, painting on a small masonite board supplied by Rodney Gooch of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). She then gradually developed her signature styles, refining her technique of layering fine dots in thin acrylic paint. This pristine, even surface is carefully prepared by the artist, resulting in works of remarkable depth and complexity.

Petyarre’s work was quickly recognised in Europe, with the Louvre being one of the first to collect her pieces which were later located in the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. The Musée des Confluences, Lyon, France; the Aboriginal Art Museum in Utrecht, The Netherlands; and Sammlung Essl Gallery, Austria, added her paintings to their collections, further cementing her global recognition. In the US, collectors were impressed by her work’s beauty, authority and originality. Early collectors were the Kelton Foundation, the Seattle Art Museum, the Levi-Kaplan Collection, Harvard University and the Kluge-Ruhe Collection at the University of Virginia.

Kathleen’s talent and originality have been acknowledged with numerous prestigious awards and accolades. In 1996, she was honoured with

the 13th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, a significant recognition in the Indigenous Australian art community. In 1997, Kathleen won the Visy Board Art Prize, another important award in the art world. In 1998, she won the People’s Choice Award for the Seppelts Contemporary Art Award at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, a testament to her growing reputation as an important Australian First Nations artist. Her achievements were further celebrated in 2001, when the book *Genius of Place* was published with a solo exhibition of her works at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, solidifying her status as a revered artist.

In 2005, Petyarre painted the current work *Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming*, with the following description:

The centre of this painting represents a sacred Women’s Dreaming site associated with the green pea (antweth). Depicted throughout the painting are seeds (ntang) of the pea, which are an important food for the ‘traditional healer’ (ngangkari), and the Mountain Devil Lizard (Arnkerrth). The elongated X shape represents two of the artist’s Mountain Ancestors Dreaming paths.

SOURCE

Christine Nicholls and Ian North, *Kathleen Petyarre: Genius of Place*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2001.



ARTHUR KOO'EKKA PAMBEGAN JR

1936 – 2010
Wik-Mungkan language

Untitled – Bonefish 2002
synthetic polymer paint on milkwood
15 × 87 × 10 cm
(5.9 × 34.3 × 3.9 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at
Aurukun, Queensland
Wik & Kugu Arts Centre,
Aurukun, Queensland
Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane
Private Collection, Sydney, acquired
from the above in 2008

AUD 12,000
USD 7,700

Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr was the senior Winchenam clan painter, sculptor and songman for many decades, from at least the 1980s through to his passing in 2010. Pambegan's Wik-Mungkan people are revered throughout the country for maintaining the strength of their traditional culture, with senior leaders and artists like Pambegan being essential to this line of cultural continuity.

Pambegan was the primary custodian of two important Aw/Auwa – story places with associated ancestral narratives, ceremonies, songs and sculptures: Kalben, the Flying Fox Story Place, and Walken-Aw, the Bonefish Story Place. Pambegan learnt his designs and sculptures from his clan Elders and particularly his father, Arthur Pambegan Sr, who was the ceremonial leader for these two sites and stories.

North Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands have a rich history of sculpture barely known to the outside world. From the earliest images and documents created by anthropologists, photographers and other interested settlers, elaborate sculptural headdresses and ceremonial figures featured heavily. Across mainland Australia, very few figurative sculptural traditions are found, but in north Queensland, perhaps due to the proximity to other Pacific cultures with strong



ARTHUR KOO'EKKA PAMBEGAN JR

1936 – 2010

Wik-Mungkan language

Flying Fox Story circa 2002

earth pigments and synthetic

binder on milkwood

160 × 152 × 35 cm

(63 × 60 × 13.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at

Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Arts Centre,

Aurukun, Queensland

Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Private Collection, Sydney, acquired

from the above in 2008

EXHIBITED*Walkan-Aw and Kalben*, Andrew

Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane,

6 February – 1 March 2008

AUD 40,000

USD 25,600

sculptural traditions, these carvings proliferated. Many of these sculptures are narrative aids, objects used in dance to animate parts of a story, bringing it to life for participants and ancestors alike.

Although small numbers of carvings have been collected from western Cape York since the early nineteenth century, the sculptural traditions of the Wik people did not become more widely known until the 1950s, following the staging of the first large-scale public ceremonial displays of Wik culture. In 1958, the Queensland governor, Sir Henry Abel Smith, visited Aurukun. To celebrate the occasion, local Wik and Kugu men and women performed songs and dances hitherto unseen outside of initiations or increase rituals. During the ceremony, men performed episodes of epic narratives with their carved wooden sculptures and afterwards the objects were collected by the missionary Reverend William MacKenzie, who sent them to the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum. Reverends MacKenzie and J.B. McCarthy, who were stationed at Aurukun for periods between 1923 and 1965, were responsible for building the majority of today's historical collections of Wik and Kugu carvings and for organising these public ceremonies.

As news of the first ceremony spread and an understanding of these sculptural traditions emerged, another public ceremony was planned for 1962. Now known as the 'Dances at Aurukun 1962', the ceremony was video recorded in full and has become the most comprehensive early documentary of these ceremonies and their sculptures, capturing many of the most important ancestral narratives from the region. Born in 1936, Pambegan was an initiated young man at the time of the recording. He assisted his father in producing the sculptures for the ceremony and featured as one of the main performers in the film. From this point onward, Pambegan has continued to perform, make art, and teach the next generation about his ancestral narratives and story places.

Although most Wik and Kugu totemic sculpture features individual animal ancestor figures, Pambegan's inherited traditions are by far the most complex, often featuring multiple pieces and armatures. Both the Bonefish and Flying Fox sculptures are held on a clothesline-like structure, where the totemic figures hang down from the crossbeam, supported by two forked upright poles. Far from being a recent display device, these structures were passed down to Arthur and



ARTHUR KOO'EKKA PAMBEGAN JR

1936 – 2010

Wik-Mungkan language

Untitled XII 2007

earth pigments and synthetic

polymer binder on linen

66 × 76 cm (26 × 30 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at

Aurukun, Queensland

Wik & Kugu Arts Centre,

Aurukun, Queensland

Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Private Collection, Sydney, acquired

from the above in 2008

EXHIBITED

Walken-Aw and Kalben, Andrew

Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane,

6 February – 1 March 2008

AUD 14,000

USD 9,000

their ceremonial forms can be seen in 'Dances at Aurukun'. Apart from the monumental 'Law Poles' that are produced for the deceased as part of the final stages of funerary ceremonies, these are the only complex multi-piece sculptures from the region.

Walken-Aw is made up of two interrelated elements – a narrative and a ritual. Walken-Aw is the Story Place of the Bonefish on the Small Archer River, where a battle between two brothers for the love of a woman ended in both brothers dying and entering the water at a particular fork in the river to become the Bonefish. In Pambegan's sculptures, larger Bonefish represent the older brother and smaller sculptures represent the younger. *Untitled – Bonefish* 2002 is a large-scale carving of Walken, the older of the two brothers.

At Walken-Aw a stand of bloodwood and ironwood trees is found on a bank overhanging the river waters. Here, an increase ritual is performed annually, where the trees are hit with a woomera or axe and the vibrations scare the bonefish from Walken-Aw and force them to the hunting grounds near the mouth of the river. This action ensures an abundance of food for the community. The name Pambegan means Pam (Pama/Bama) = Man and began = to hit, or the person who hits the tree.

The Pambegan family are therefore the specifically named custodians of this Auwa – this story, this ritual and this place.

Kalben is the story for the Flying Fox, which follows two young men undergoing a fasting period of an initiation ceremony. The two brothers break camp at night and make their way to a flying fox colony, killing far too many to eat. They place many in a ground oven, while others are strung up from trees. The senior men leading the ceremony learn of their absconding and call on the spirits of the Flying Foxes to punish the boys. The Flying Foxes return to life, bursting out of the ground oven and take them into the heavens, where their bodies were torn apart, becoming pieces of the Milky Way.

Flying Fox Story circa 2002 is an extraordinarily rare full installation of the Kalben story and sculpture. Here, the abstracted bodies of flying foxes hang from their clothesline-like structure, evoking the moment in the narrative where the boys were preparing them for roasting in the ground oven. This device, which allows the totems to hang freely, also conjures images of flying foxes hanging upside-down from the trees of their colonies. *Flying Fox Story* circa 2002 shows Pambegan Jr's mastery of these forms, with his unique sculpture reverberating



ARTHUR KOO'EKKA PAMBEGAN JR

1936 – 2010

Wik-Mungkan language

Untitled XVI 2007

61 × 46 cm (24 × 18 inches)

earth pigments and synthetic
polymer binder on linen**PROVENANCE**

The Artist, painted at
Aurukun, Queensland
Wik & Kugu Arts Centre,
Aurukun, Queensland
Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane
Private Collection, Sydney, acquired
from the above in 2008

EXHIBITED

Walken-Aw and Kalben, Andrew
Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane,
6 February – 1 March 2008

AUD 9,600

USD 6,200

with both ceremonial and aesthetic power. Almost all of these full-scale sculptures by Pambegan have been collected by major institutions, with only a few remaining in important private collections.

In 2003, Arthur Pambegan Jr was a leading senior artist in the 2003 exhibition *Story Place: Art of Cape York and the Rainforest* at the Queensland Art Gallery. Here, Arthur exhibited a set of specially commissioned and oversized Flying Fox and Bonefish sculptures which remain highlights of the QAGOMA collection. At that time Pambegan came into contact with a young Tony Albert (now a leading contemporary First Nations artist), who was working on the exhibition as a trainee arts worker. A special bond developed between Pambegan and Albert, and Pambegan 'adopted' Albert as a son to formalise their relationship. From this point until his death in 2010, Pambegan would often stay at Albert's family's house and work in his Brisbane studio when the humbug or daily pressures of life in Aurukun made it too difficult to produce work there. Today, Tony Albert remains active in the lives of the Pambegan family and often works closely with Pambegan's son Alair on his innovative installations of Kalben and Walken-Aw.

In 2004, Pambegan began producing paintings on canvas as an alternative to producing milkwood

sculptures. Much like his sculptures, the paintings were adorned with Winchenam body painting designs in bands of black-white-red-white pigment. Inspired by his newly forged relationships with younger contemporary artists such as Albert, these paintings began to take on innovative interventions – horizontal designs becoming 'framed' by vertical lines representing the walking sticks of an ancestral hero or cloud-like patterns entering the composition to evoke the Flying Fox ancestors escaping into the heavens.

Untitled XVI 2007 (Walken-Aw and Kalben designs) exemplifies the innovative nature of Pambegan's late work, with wavy lines framing the composition of Winchenam body painting designs. This work, designed to speak to both Kalben and Walken-Aw, is evocative of both the Flying Foxes travelling into the clouds and the banks of the river where the Bonefish ritual is activated. *Untitled XII* 2007 (Walken-Aw and Kalben designs) is split into two sections, one with a similar 'cloud-like' design as *Untitled XVI* evoking the flight of the Flying Foxes, while an additional component – a meandering white line on a red ochre background – incorporates the site of Walken-Aw and makes this work uncharacteristically asymmetrical.

BRUCE JOHNSON MCLEAN

DANIEL WALBIDI

born 1983
Yulparitja and Mangala languages

All the Jila 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
122 × 167 cm (48 × 65.7 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Bidyadanga,
Western Australia
Short St Gallery, Broome, Western
Australia, cat. no. 10909
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne
The Jacquie McPhee Collection,
Western Australia
*Aboriginal & Oceanic Works
of Art*, Art Leven, Sydney,
16 November 2017, lot 12
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

EXHIBITED

Daniel Walbidi, Recent Paintings,
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne,
30 May – 23 June 2006

LITERATURE

Jacquie McPhee, *Greatest Passion
of All: The Jacquie McPhee
Collection*, 2017, p. 236 (illus.)

AUD 120,000
USD 76,800

Born in Bidyadanga, on the northern coast of Western Australia, Daniel Walbidi developed a practice that is deeply informed by the landscapes and histories of his people. Raised in a community where desert and coastal traditions intersect, he is influenced by the wisdom of his Elders, who carried an encyclopaedic understanding of Country. At sixteen, he turned to painting as a way to explore and preserve his heritage, initially working with makeshift materials before gaining formal support. His art has since evolved into a visual archive of ancestral knowledge, bridging past and present through intricate compositions that embody the spirit of Country.

Walbidi's compositions are characterised by an intricate interplay of form and colour, where delicate dotting and layered pigment create an immersive field of movement and depth. His palette is both luminous and meditative, shifting between ultramarine blues and iridescent metallics that evoke the shifting light of the desert and the reflective surfaces of sacred waters. The precise, pulsating application of paint suggests an energy that is both elemental and spiritual, reinforcing the notion that his works are not static representations but dynamic manifestations of Country itself. Each composition becomes a carefully considered balance between abstraction and cultural mapping.



DANIEL WALBIDI
born 1983
Yulparitja and Mangala languages

Kiriwirri Jila 2015
synthetic polymer paint on linen
100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, painted at Bidyadanga,
Western Australia
Short St Gallery, Broome, Western
Australia, cat. no. 830621
Private Collection, Melbourne

AUD 60,000
USD 38,400

Water, a critical theme and spiritual element in Walbidi’s work, underscores his engagement with cultural preservation and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. Sacred waterholes feature heavily throughout Daniel’s practice, as he explains: ‘To desert people, water is like a religion. It is in our songs and stories; it is what connects us to our ancestors and survival.’¹ This sentiment reinforces the idea that Country is both a physical terrain and a spiritual entity that is maintained through storytelling, ceremony and artistic practice.

Daniel’s ability to translate ancestral narratives into intricate, immersive compositions has

positioned him as a leading figure in contemporary Australian First Nations art. His paintings are held in institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of Western Australia. As his work continues to gain international recognition, it serves as both a bridge between past and present and a powerful assertion of First Nations identity on the global stage.

LUCY FOSTER
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1. Daniel Walbidi, Interview with Emily Rohr, in *Yurlupirti: Forever Without End (Eternal)*, D’Lan Contemporary, March 2024.



DANIEL WALBIDI

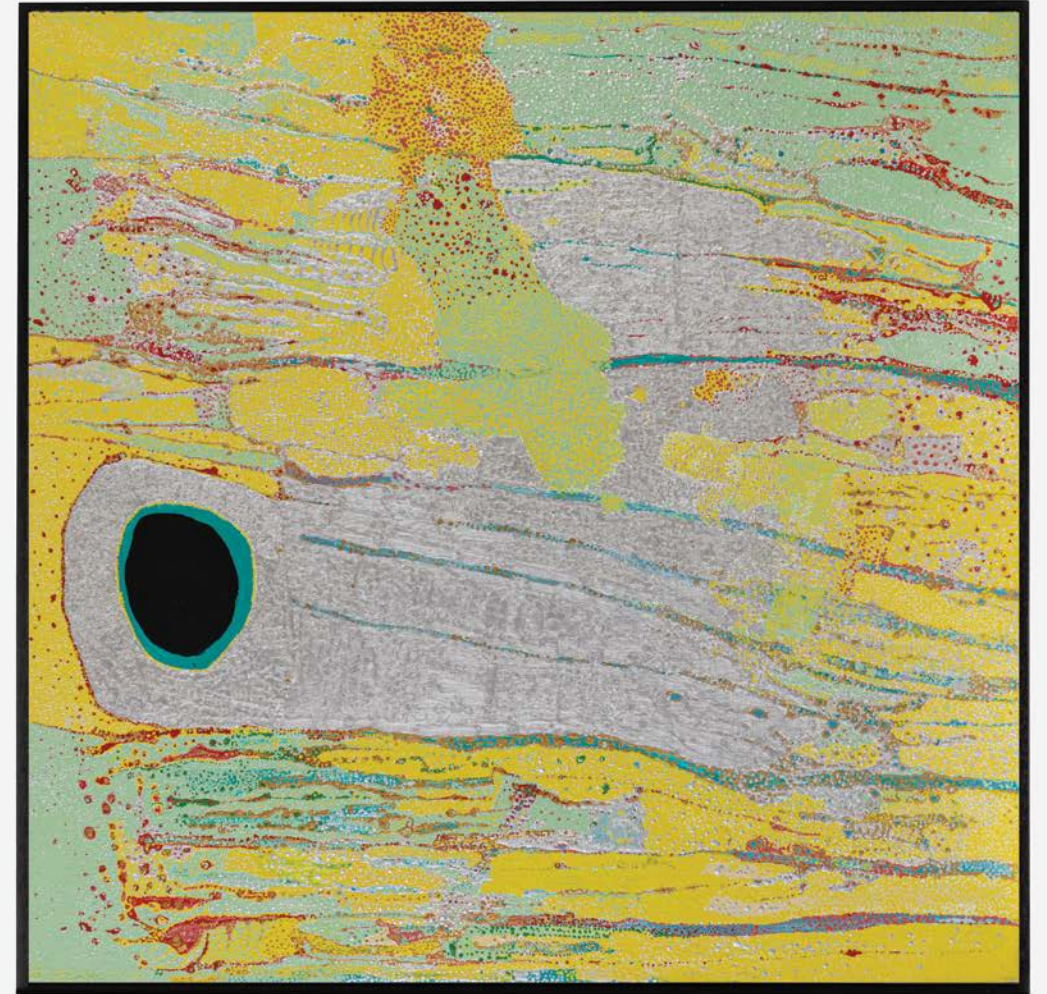
born 1983
Yulparitja and Mangala languages

Winpa 2020
synthetic polymer paint on linen
97.5 × 95 cm (38.4 × 37.4 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Bidadanga,
Western Australia
Short St Gallery, Broome, Western
Australia, cat. no. 841671
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above in 2020

AUD 60,000
USD 38,400



MAKINTI NAPANANGKA AM

c. 1920 – 2011

Pintupi language

Untitled – Lupul 2001

synthetic polymer paint on linen

107 × 91 cm (42 × 36 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kintore,

Northern Territory

Papunya Tula Artists, Alice

Springs, cat. no. MN0108030

Private Collection, New South Wales

Cooee Art, Sydney

Private Collection, New York,

acquired from the above

AUD 24,000

USD 15,400

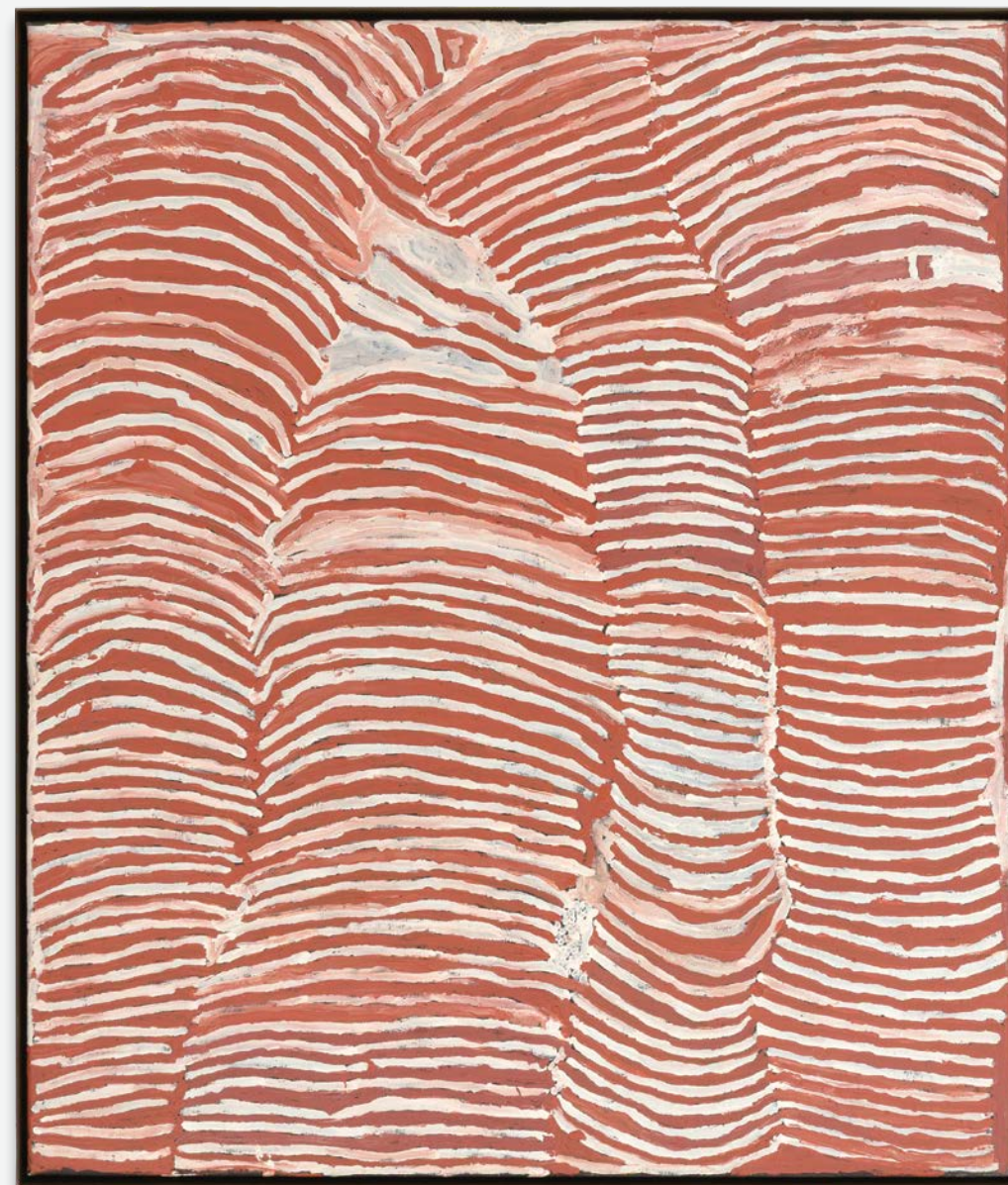
As one of the pioneering female Pintupi artists, Makinti Napanangka challenged and ultimately transformed the perimeters of Papunya Tula painting. Makinti's painterly style characterised the collective exuberance of the women painters of Papunya Tula Artists and sat in defiant opposition to the austere minimalism of her male counterparts.

With her singular and inimitable style, Makinti was driven by a daily compulsion to paint Country and the ceremonies that bound her to it. Using free-form gestural tangles of desert-hued blues, purples, yellows and oranges, Makinti would recount her deeply personal memories of the varied landforms of Kaakuratintja, Lampintja, Payarrnga and Mangari. Through time, glimmers of circle and line slowly merged to depict women's ceremonies at Lupul, the quivering painted lines mirroring the rhythmic movement of nyimparra (hairstring belts) swaying in song and dance.

Born at Lupulnga in the early 1920s, south of where the Walungurru community now stands,

Makinti spent her formative years living in Country south of the giant salt lake of Kaakuratintja (Lake MacDonald). In the company of her extended family group, she walked into the Haasts Bluff ration depot in the early 1940s, living there for a number of years prior to moving to Papunya, and later Walungurru in the early 1980s.

Between 2000 and 2007, Makinti's work featured in six solo exhibitions, and she was selected to exhibit in the monumental survey *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2000. She was awarded the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2008, after being a finalist numerous times. Her work has been acquired by all of the major collecting institutions in Australia. Much loved by those who knew her or came into contact with her extraordinary oeuvre, she passed away in Alice Springs in 2011.

LUKE SCHOLES

MAKINTI NAPANANGKA AM

c. 1920 – 2011
Pintupi language

Untitled 2002
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 122 cm (48 × 48 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kintore,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. MN0210249
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 45,000
USD 28,800



NAATA NUNGURRAYI

c. 1931 – 2021
Pintupi language

Karrilwarra 2004
synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 × 122 cm (59.5 × 48 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kintore,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. NN0408024
Private Collection, Darwin
D’Lan Contemporary, Melbourne
Private Collection, New York,
acquired from the above

AUD 80,000
USD 51,200

Naata Nungurrayi was born deep in the Gibson Desert at the rockhole site of Kumil, circa 1932. Together with members of her immediate family, Naata led a traditional bush life, travelling among the sandhills and clusters of rocky outcrops that erupt ceremoniously across the desert floor. The cycle of nomadic life continued until April 1964 when, amid severe drought conditions, the family decided to join the growing migration of Pintupi people who had made their way to the government settlement of Papunya, some 500 kilometres to the east.

During their journey into Papunya, Naata’s family was joined by another small family group which included Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi, his wife Ningura Napurrula and their family. Together they travelled nearly 400 kilometres to the foothills of Yamunturrngu (Mount Liebig). A Northern Territory Welfare Branch patrol led by Jeremy Long and Nosepeg Tjupurrula met the group there after spotting the smoke from their early morning fire.

The group arrived at Papunya during a particularly difficult period in the troubled settlement’s history. The ailing inhabitants, separated

from their traditional land and source of food, were experiencing a significant increase in their already high mortality rate. Naata, along with her sister Nancy, began working in the community kitchen, where they helped provide meals and rations.

In the dismal conditions that prevailed at Papunya, Naata would have witnessed the genesis of the Western Desert art movement in mid 1971. From such poor circumstance, a miraculous period in Australian art emerged, one that expressed most vividly the Pintupi’s deep desire to return to their distant homelands in the west.

Initially Naata and her family spent brief periods at the Pintupi outposts of Yayayi and Waruwiya, approximately 50 kilometres west of Papunya. Once the settlements of Kintore (Walungurru) and Kiwirrkurra were established in the early to mid 1980s, the Pintupi were at last able to relocate closer to the Country Naata had traversed in her early life.

Naata, along with a small group of women from Kintore and Kiwirrkurra, began painting for Papunya Tula Artists in June 1996. Her brother George Tjungurrayi and son Kenny Williams Tjampitjinpa



were already established painters for the company. Initially Naata was a reticent member of the women's painting group, often sitting quietly beside her inseparable late sister Ngangi (Nancy Nungurrayi).

Naata, like many of the new women painters, began painting the sites and narratives that chart the vast tracts of Country surrounding Kiwirrkurra. Many early works depicted the rockhole site of Marrapinti, which is a pivotal destination in Pintupi life, where men and women gathered to have their septums pierced for ceremonial purposes. As Naata's confidence grew, so too did her presence among the painters. She quickly emerged as an instinctive painter whose command of line, colour and form is immediate and breathtaking. Artist and art are rarely so inextricably linked, each a precious balance of cultural authority, artistic spontaneity, conviction and whim.

Few contemporary Aboriginal painters have sustained the attention of curators and collectors so feverishly. Naata contributed to many major national and international exhibitions including *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* at the Art

Gallery of New South Wales in 2000 and the landmark 2009 exhibition in New York City *Nganana Tjungurringanyi Tjukurrpa Nintintjakitja – We Are Here Sharing Our Dreaming*. A solo exhibition of her work appeared at the Papunya Tula Artists gallery in Alice Springs in 2011. Paintings by Naata have been acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. She was a regular exhibitor at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards and in 2002 her entry depicting the rockhole site of Marrapinti was highly commended by the judges.

This dramatic depiction of the site of Karrilwarra, painted in Naata's typical palette of desert hues, is dominated by cascading lines that identify the presence of large sandhills at this site. At either side are circle and line constructions that loosely reflect the classic Tingarri paintings made famous by the male painters of Papunya Tula.

LUKE SCHOLES



DOREEN REID NAKAMARRA

1955 – 2009
Pintupi language

Untitled – Wirrulnga 2009
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 153 cm (48 × 60.2 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kiwirrkurra,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. DR0904143
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

AUD 80,000
USD 51,200

Throughout her brief career as an artist, Doreen Reid Nakamarra was a significant contributor to a remarkable collective of women painters in the remote Aboriginal community of Kiwirrkurra. Here, 700 kilometres west of Alice Springs, Doreen and others developed a painting style that was unique among the clusters of women that painted across the vast reaches of the Central and Western Deserts. An absence of senior women created an environment free from expectation and open to the prevailing artistic legacy of the men of the community who created ‘minimal’ paintings of line, tone and structure.

After the passing of her husband, George Tjampu Tjapaltjarri, Nakamarra departed the community, temporarily returning to live with family near her birthplace south at Warakurna. ‘I thought a lot about what my husband told me’, she would later say. ‘He said I have to stay here and paint the country around Kiwirrkurra.’¹ Upon her return to Kiwirrkurra she began painting the significant sites of the region, inspired, she said, by her desire ‘for white fellas to see that country like I do’.²

This fine painting evokes the heaving rows of sandhills just east of Kiwirrkurra, at Wirrulnga, an important birthing site for Pintupi women. In 2008, she won the General Painting Award at the 25th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. She also exhibited in *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial* at the National Gallery of Australia in 2007, *Revolutions – Forms That Turn, Biennale of Sydney*, 2008, and at the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2009. She travelled to New York City in 2009, where she was the star of the *Nganana Tjungurringanyi Tjukurrpa Nintintjakitja – We Are Here Sharing Our Dreaming* exhibition. In 2012, she exhibited posthumously at the 13th iteration of the esteemed *dOCUMENTA* exhibition in Kassel, Germany.

LUKE SCHOLES

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1. In conversation with the author, 2008.
2. In conversation with the author, 2008.



YUKULTJI NAPANGATI

born 1970
Pintupi language

Untitled 2008
synthetic polymer paint on linen
121 × 152 cm (48 × 60 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kiwirrkurra,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. YN0803071
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection, Miami, Florida,
acquired from the above

AUD 65,000
USD 41,600

In 1984, a Pintupi family of nine, which included Yukultji Napangati, emerged from their life in the remote deserts of Western Australia. Most accounts suggest that Yukultji and her family lived on Country surrounding the large salt lake of Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), where they travelled and hunted based on seasonal conditions and cultural practice. Prior to this they had not directly encountered kartiya (outsiders), nor had they seen their Pintupi relatives in the decades since they had settled in the surrounding settlements and missions.

After time spent adjusting to her new life in the community of Kiwirrkurra, Yukultji married Charlie Ward Tjakamarra, a prominent artist with the desert painting collective Papunya Tula Artists. After a brief period of collaboration with her husband, Yukultji began her own career as an artist. In 2004, Yukultji began creating large-scale paintings of linear designs, each beginning with a single stroke marking its approximate centre. It is when making this mark – crouched upon an ochre-coloured canvas, lain upon the ground – that she conjures a rare focus. For Yukultji knows that the minute gestural characteristics of this initial line will dictate much of the composition that will follow. As the subsequent lines are added parallel to her initial mark, its subtleties are magnified, resulting in

the emergence of undulations, peaks and troughs. Then, upon completing her brushwork, she begins infilling her painted design with tiny cojoined dots. It is during this process that the subtle contours of each work finally surface. It is a mediative performance of slow revelation and a wonder for any observer to behold.

Yukultji’s paintings typically describe the journeys of ancestral karnaputa women who travelled throughout the Country surrounding the Kiwirrkurra community during the Tjukurrpa. In this example Yukultji has focused upon the soakage water site of Yunala. The use of repetitious line has been used to evoke the tubers of the bush banana or silky pear vine *Marsdenia australis*, also known as yunala. These lines also represent the large sandhills that dominate the landscape surrounding this site.

Yukultji shot to prominence when she was selected to exhibit at *Primavera* 2005 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Since then, she has been a multiple finalist at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards in Darwin and has been exhibited in New York, London and Singapore.

LUKE SCHOLES



MANTUA NANGALA

born 1959
Pintupi language

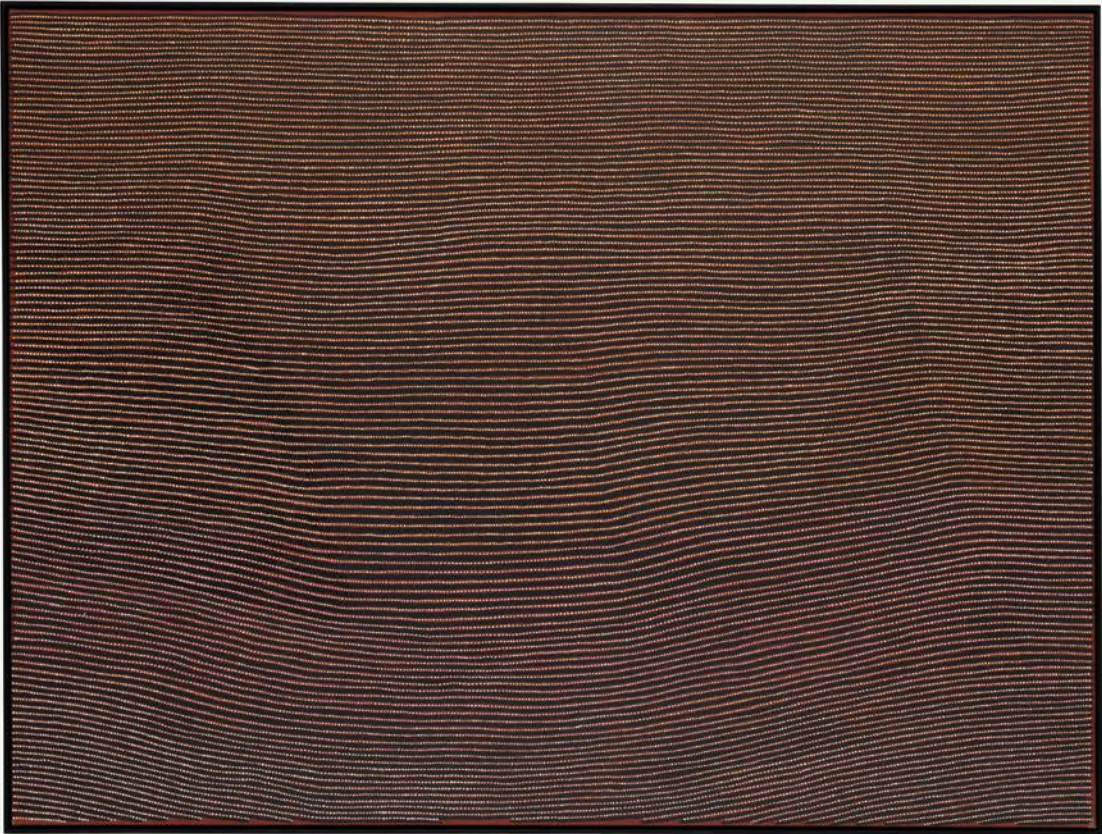
Untitled – Marrapinti 2019
synthetic polymer paint on linen
91 × 122 cm (35.8 × 48 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kiwirrkurra,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. MN1906043
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 60,000
USD 38,400

Mantua was born at Tjilurru, circa 1959. She is the daughter of Anatjari Tjampitjinpa and the sister of Ray James Tjangala, Yinarupa Nangala and George Yapa Tjangala, all of whom have painted for Papunya Tula Artists. Mantua lives and works at Kiwirrkurra in Western Australia. In 2022, Mantua was included in the National Gallery of Australia’s Indigenous Triennale *Ceremony*. The gallery commissioned and acquired her large-scale triptych, which represented the first time that any artist from Papunya Tula has produced work on such an ambitious scale.



WARLIMPIRRNGA TJAPALTJARRI

Born c. 1960
Pintupi language

Untitled – Wilkinkarra 2006
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 61 cm (48 × 24 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kiwirrkurra,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. WT0610185
Private Collection, Alice Springs,
acquired from the above
Important Australian Art, Bonhams,
Sydney, 12 May 2014, lot 50
Debra and Dennis Scholl
Collection, Miami Beach, Florida

LITERATURE

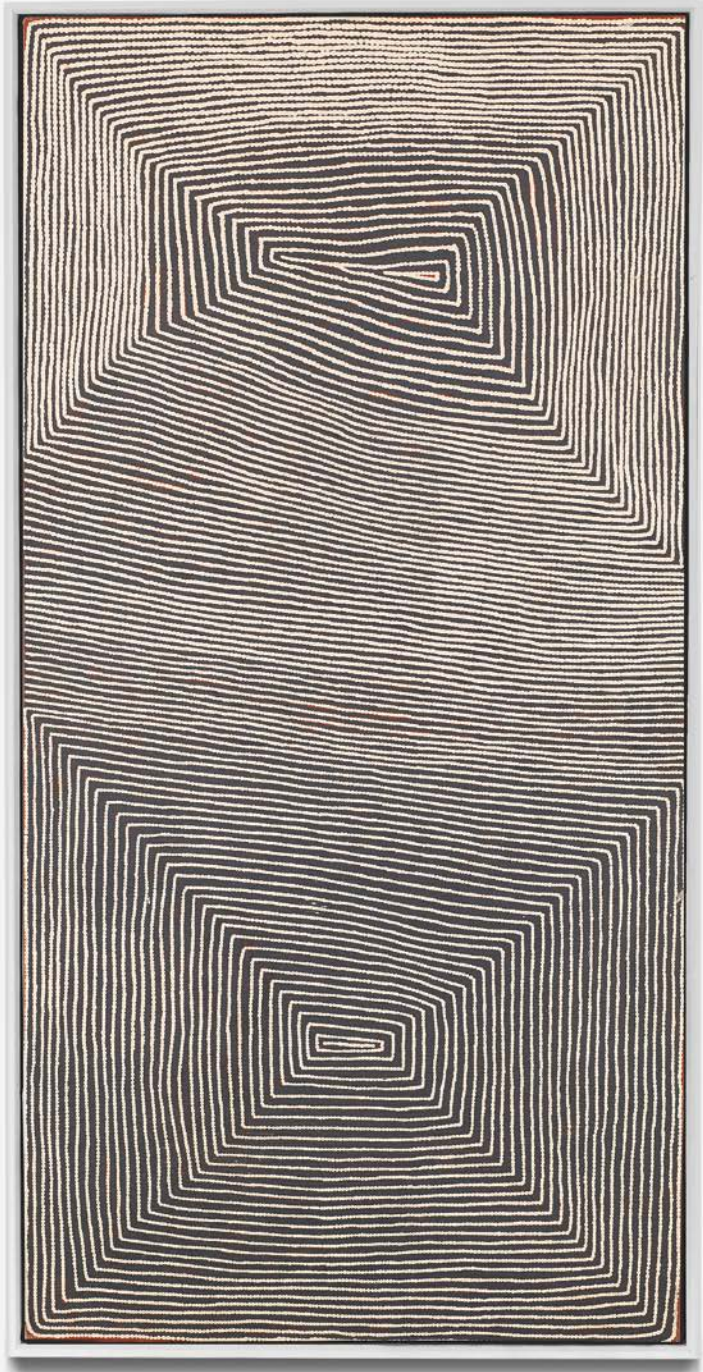
Henry F. Skeritt et al. (eds.), *No
Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian
Contemporary Abstract Painting*,
DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-
London-New York, 2014, p. 138 (illus.)

EXHIBITED

*No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian
Contemporary Abstract Painting
from the Debra and Dennis Scholl
Collection*, Nevada Museum of Art,
Reno, 14 February – 3 May 2015;
Portland Institute for Contemporary
Art, Portland, Oregon, 20 June –
15 August 2015; Pérez Art Museum
Miami, 17 September 2015 –
3 January 2016; Charles H. Wright
Museum of African American History,
Detroit, 18 January – 15 May 2016;
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of
Art Cornell University, Ithaca, New
York, 11 June – 14 August 2016

AUD 40,000
USD 25,600

Warlimpirnga Tjapaltjarri lived a nomadic existence untouched by European contact until 1984, when he and eight other family members walked in from the Gibson Desert to the remote community of Kiwirrkurra in Western Australia. With the art movement in this region having begun more than ten years prior, Warlimpirnga entered into this stream of artists with a great measure of reverence and respect. Almost immediately, his paintings had the resolve and strength of the veteran and most-senior Papunya Tula artists. His depiction of the sites and narratives of his homelands around Lake Mackay, a vast salt lake, draws from the ancestral realm and the power of these places.



PATRICK TJUNGURRAYI

c. 1935 – 2017

Pintupi language

*Wagutu & Kuningka Dreaming
at the Site of Ngaru 2007*
synthetic polymer paint on linen
244 × 183 cm (96 × 72 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Kiwirrkurra,
Northern Territory
Papunya Tula Artists, Alice
Springs, cat. no. PT0711198
Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above in 2008

LITERATURE

John Carty (ed.), *Patrick Tjungurrayi:
Beyond Borders*, UWA Publishing,
Western Australia, p. 15 (illus.)

AUD 180,000

USD 115,200

Patrick Tjungurrayi forged one of the most dynamic careers of all desert artists. He was one of the pioneering Balgo painters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, before returning to his home Country near Kiwirrkurra in the 1990s, where he painted for Papunya Tula Artists. He moved between Balgo and Kiwirrkurra over the ensuing decades, exploring different styles in both places, and ultimately a new artistic vision born between them.

The Tingarri ancestors are a cornerstone of artistic subject matter and aesthetics for Western Desert men, and for Patrick in particular. Their ancestral journeys across the desert can crystallise as the iconic circle–line itineraries synonymous with desert art, or as mazes, concentric squares, or combinations of these and other designs. In Patrick's paintings these narratives are commonly anchored by squared designs streaming across the Country. Often the squares are filled in as contrasting blocks of colour: one colour being the Tingarri men, the other colour being the young initiates who follow them. Colour is structure in Patrick's Country; it differentiates the elements and meanings of the world.

This conceptual hue in Patrick's work was subtle throughout the 1990s, masked as it was in the sedate contrasts of Papunya Tula's palette: yellow and white, red and brown, white and black. In 2000, Kiwirrkurra flooded and the whole community was evacuated. The rains that Patrick so regularly painted inundated the land on a mythic

scale. He relocated his family back north to Balgo during this time, and that is when the colour flowed back into his work. There he played with the diverse palette available at Warlayirti Artists. The pinks, purples and blues that may once have unbalanced his works suddenly gave them depth and force, a kaleidoscopic light and shade.

Patrick expanded these experiments into larger formats, pushing and stretching ambitious Tingarri compositions and a bolder palette into wider horizons. The success of these paintings pulled the Papunya Tula palette out to meet them. They also refocused the art world's attention on his influential oeuvre, and in 2008 Patrick was awarded the \$50,000 Western Australian Indigenous Art Award. An iconic work from this period, *Wagutu & Kuningka Dreaming at the Site of Ngaru 2007* embodies not only the ambition of Patrick's painting but the extraordinary life trajectories that underpin it: the heft of incomparable knowledge balanced at all corners of his compass by bold vignettes, dark humour, implacable authority. It is like a gallery of his greatest hits hung within another painting.

Such work reveals an artist operating beyond the geographic, aesthetic and conceptual boundaries not only of his audience, but of most of his contemporaries too.

JOHN CARTY

BILL WHISKEY TJPALTJARRI

c. 1920 – 2008
Pitjantjatjara language

Rockholes Near the Olgas 2008
synthetic polymer paint on linen
183 × 182 cm (72 × 71.7 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Amunturrungu
– Mount Liebig, Northern Territory
Watiyawanu Artists of Amunturrungu,
Northern Territory, cat. no. 77-08434
Nanda/Hobbs, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above
D'Lan Contemporary, Melbourne
Private Collection, New York,
acquired from the above

AUD 160,000
USD 102,400

Bill Whiskey’s art focuses almost exclusively on the ancestral white cockatoo story from his birthplace of Pirupa Alka, located 130 kilometres south of Kata Tjuta (The Olgas) in Central Australia. This story highlights three birds – the white cockatoo, his friend the eagle, and their adversary, the crow. The floating roundels, which are some of the most striking compositional elements of the design, symbolise the rock pools formed in the vast desert landscape during the battle between the ancestral birds. Bill Whiskey was the first to conceptualise and innovate stylistic depictions of his birthplace, developing specific iconography for this story within the broader conventions of Western Desert painting. These distinguishing features of his work are products of his mind’s eye, perceiving Country as a continuum.



WENTJA NAPALJARRI

c. 1945 – 2021
Pintupi language

Untitled – Rockhole 2009
synthetic polymer paint on linen
184 × 184 cm (72.4 × 72.4 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Amunturrungu
– Mount Liebig, Northern Territory
Watiyawanu Artists of
Amunturrungu, Northern Territory
cat. no. WMN77-09671
Private Collection, Sydney
Nanda\Hobbs, Sydney
The Dyer Family Collection,
Sydney, acquired from the above

EXHIBITED

Transcendence, Nanda\Hobbs,
Sydney, 12 –19 February 2015

AUD 120,000
USD 76,800

Wentja Morgan Napaltjarri was the daughter of Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi, one of the founders of the Western Desert art movement that came out of Papunya in the early 1970s. She was born in 1945 at the rockhole site of Malparinga, an important rockhole site associated with the Blue Tongue Lizard Man that is situated close to the south-west tip of the vast salt lake Wilkinkarra, or Lake Mackay. Initially an apprentice to her father while living in Papunya, Wentja began painting for the later-established Papunya Tula Artists in 1996. Her paintings depict the Tjukurrpa – a term that refers to the Dreaming or the ancestral stories and laws that are the foundation of First Nations Australian culture – entrusted to her by her father; they also depict the animals associated with those stories, including the bandicoot, echidna and goanna.

Wentja’s art, such as the mesmerising *Untitled* 2009, often features the roundel or oval shape, a technique she inherited from her father. This shape, used to depict the rockhole, creates a series of mandala-like shapes that serve as powerful meditative focal points. The innovation of Wentja Morgan Napaltjarri is evident in her ability to convey an authentic sacred narrative within these fully realised art objects, with their hypnotic power to captivate and engross the viewer.

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SOURCE

Professor Sasha Grishin, ‘Wentja Morgan Napaltjarri: The artist of the great heritage’, Nanda\Hobbs, <https://nandahobbspollen.s3.amazonaws.com/78c06199405212a658d43fb889556739.pdf>



MIRDIDINGKINGATHI**JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI**

c. 1924 – 2015

Kayardilt language

*Thundi – Big River**Barramundi Story* 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen

195 × 305 cm (76.8 × 120.1 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Mornington

Island, Queensland

Mornington Island Arts, cat.

no. 2985-L-SG-0208

Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

Private Collection, Melbourne,

acquired from the above in 2008

EXHIBITED*Better Nature – Virtue &**Virtuosity*, Cement Fondu, Sydney,

12 March – 22 May 2022

AUD 380,000

USD 243,200

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori was born around 1924 at Mirdidingki, a small creek and estuary on the south side of Bentinck Island, the largest of the South Wellesley Island group in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. The low-lying Bentinck Island, which measures just 20 kilometres from west to east and 12 kilometres from north to south, is largely flat and is shaped by the scrubby casuarina growth that meets the coastal sands, the mangroves along the tidal flats and the numerous salt pans across the island's small interior. The features of the island, which belongs to the Kaiadilt people, create sharp, visual boundaries that divide the landscape into blocks of colour which modulate in hue at different times of the day. Kayardilt, one of the most complicated and unusual languages in the world, has a rich vocabulary and system that divides space into abstract topological blocks, which reflect the visible topography of Kaiadilt Country.

Sally Gabori grew up living an entirely traditional life focused around the rich marine resources of Kaiadilt Country, nourished by

shellfish, fish, dugong and turtles that abound in the Arafura Sea. An elaborate system of ancient stone fish traps surrounds the island where epochs of oyster growth cement the structure together, trapping the fish that wash in with the high tide. This hunting method is a testament to the Kaiadilt people's traditions of fish farming and the investment and labour of the many generations who lived exclusively on the island. The island's isolation meant that stories and songs were transmitted through a unique physical and aural culture that was void of the graphic traditions of rock or bark painting found in many other mainland Australian groups. The unprecedented visual language of Sally Gabori is an expression of the sweeping colours of her Country, the physical landscape of Bentinck Island and the language that shapes the Kaiadilt world view. Both the landscape and the language of her Country reveal much about Sally Gabori's relation to her painting.

In Kayardilt language, Mirdidingkingathi means 'born at Mirdidingki', and Sally Gabori's totemic



name, Juwarnda, relates to the black dolphin – the creature who presaged her spiritual conception. Sally was the name given to her when she and the entire population of Kaiadilt people were evacuated to the Presbyterian mission on Mornington Island in 1947 after a series of disasters had befallen the islands. Being newly married, Sally was brought into the Western convention of taking a form of her husband's placename, Dibirdibi (Gabori), as her surname. Over the following sixty years, this Westernised nomenclature was a symbol of her disconnection from Bentinck Island and the disrupted transmission of the Kayardilt language to the next generations of Kaiadilt people, who were separated from their families.

In 2005, the eighty-one-year-old Sally Gabori, one of only seven remaining Kayardilt speakers, began to paint at the Mornington Island Arts and Crafts Centre at Gununa. In the early phases of her painting, Sally Gabori drew inspiration from the colours and forms of her birth Country and developed an electrifying topographical style that mapped the staggered fish-trap walls that surrounded Bentinck Island. Over the course of the next ten years, painting was a joyous performance of dance and song in communion with places on Bentinck Island that hold deep personal significance, her birthplace and those of her kin: her husband's Dibirdibi Country, her father's Thundi, her own Country and her older brother's Country, Makarrki.

The current work, *Thundi – Big River Barramundi Story* 2008, is representative of the shift in palette that began to evolve in paintings at this time. A series of ghostly pastel paintings with softly smeared and blurred surfaces were produced through the application of a final layer of white brushstrokes over brightly coloured wet paint. By working quickly alla prima (wet on wet), before the underlayer had dried, Sally Gabori created subtle shifts in tone that reflected the nuances of light and shadow, revealing further insight and sensation into an intimate landscape.

From her first solo exhibition, *Sally's Story*, at Woolloongabba Art Gallery in Brisbane, Sally

Gabori would be represented in all major Australian institutions and significant international exhibitions, including *Sally Gabori: Danda dulk ngijinda dulk – This Land Is My Land*, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA, 2010; *Mundamarra ngijinda dulk – My Island Home*, The Gallery in Cork Street, London, 2010; and the most recent, *Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris; and Triennale Milano, Milan, in 2022–2023.

When Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori passed away in early 2015, she had come full circle during her ninety or so years. Although she had returned to Bentinck Island a number of times from the mid 1940s on, she entered the earth on Mornington Island rather than at her birthplace. However, painting had made her whole, and through that act she reclaimed her land, strengthened the identity of her people and connected herself to those she loved. There are two distinct parts to her name, which represent and consolidate the different cultural aspects of her life story and history: her Kaiadilt culture and the Western disruption of it. The discovery of painting in the last ten years of her life reconciled the diaspora that she and her people had suffered in their dislocation: for it appeased the longing and manifested the return, a cycle of light to dark to light.

Speaking in her language, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori states:

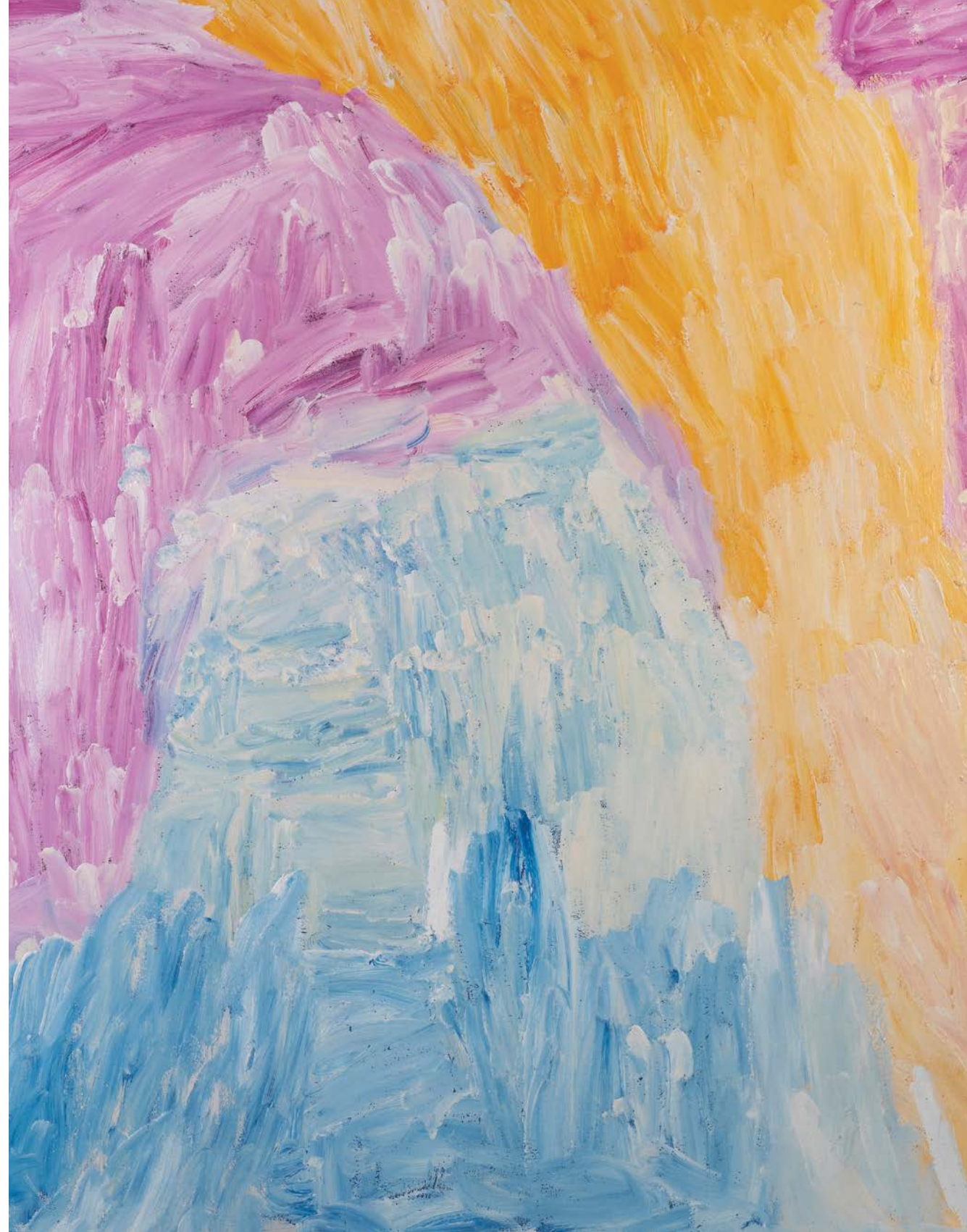
Danda ngijinda dulk, danda ngijinda malaa,
danda ngad – This is my Land, this is my Sea,
this is who I am.¹

VANESSA MERLINO

-
1. Quoted in Bruce Johnson McLean, 'Dulka Warngiid: The Whole World' in *Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori: Dulka Warngiid/ Land of All*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2016, p. 29.

SOURCE

Bruce Johnson McLean and Judith Ryan (eds), *Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, 2022.



BENTINCK ISLAND WOMEN'S COLLABORATIVE
Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha
c. 1942 – 2022
Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori
c. 1924 – 2015
Warthadangathi Bijarrba Ethel Thomas
c. 1946 – 2021
Kuruwarrinyingathi Bijarrb Paula Paul
c. 1937 – 2021
Thunuyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi
1929 – 2008

Wirrngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatjil
1935 – 2009
Rayarriwartharrbayingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha
born 1942
Kayardilt language

Sweers Island 2008
synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 × 600 cm (78.7 × 236.2 inches)



PROVENANCE
The Artists, painted at Mornington Island, Queensland
Mornington Island Arts, Queensland
Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above in 2008

LITERATURE
Bruce Johnson McLean and Judith Ryan (eds), *Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, pp. 234–235 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
Lines – Aligning Your Consciousness with the Flow, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, 22 July – 14 October 2024
Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, 3 July – 6 November 2022; Triennale Milano, Milan, 16 February – 14 May 2023
Home Ground: The Collection of Arthur Roe, Bunjil Place Gallery, Narre Warren, Victoria, 11 August – 11 November 2018

AUD 600,000
USD 384,000

In 2007, inspired by a return to Country (Dulka) mostly funded by the commercial success of her burgeoning art career, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori led a monumental effort to map many important Kaiadilt places through the creation of three monumental six-metre collaborative paintings undertaken alongside her sisters and nieces – Thunuyingathi Bijarrb May Moodoonuthi, Wirrngajingathi Bijarrb Kurdalalngk Dawn Naranatjil, Kuruwarriyingathi Bijarrb Paula Paul, Rayarriwarrrharrbayingathi Mingungurra Amy Loogatha, Birmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha and Warthadangathi Bijarrba Ethel Thomas – all of whom were born on Dulka Warngiid (Bentinck Island) before the Kaiadilt exodus in the 1940s.

The incredibly exuberant works focused on three separate but interconnected themes: *Dulka Warngiid*, mapping Bentinck Island through the women's ties to their dulkiiwatha, the places they were born and the ties that bind them to those places; *Sweers Island*, or Mundamuru, the second largest of the islands of their Kaiadilt Dulka, which includes the final resting place of Dibirdibi, the Rock Cod ancestor; and *Makarrki – King Alfred's Country*, mapping the place of King Alfred, the leader of the Kaiadilt people during their young lives on Bentinck Island, and a key figure in all of the artists' lives.

Of these three paintings, two were immediately acquired by private institutions. *Dulka Warngiid* was acquired by the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of

Modern Art, and *Makarrki – King Alfred's Country*, by the National Gallery of Victoria. Only this work, *Sweers Island*, was made available to private collectors and has remained with one passionate collector ever since.

Remarkably, Kaiadilt people are one of the few groups anywhere in the world with no traditions of mark making, and the first paintings by Sally Gabori in 2005 were the beginning of Kaiadilt art history. Her bold and gestural works represent pure artistic expression, Sally having had no exposure to the outside art world, nor really any interest in it, at her eighty-odd years of age. The rapid recognition of her genius provided the momentum for an entire community of women to enter an art movement in the incredibly energetic twilight years of their lives.

Although Sally Gabori became almost instantly renowned, many of the women painters she shared her studio and her life with never saw the same levels of recognition. Many were outstanding painters in their own right, with their own innovative styles of mark making: the thickly applied tacky paint of May Moodoonuthi and Dawn Naranatjil, which evokes the ceremonial cicatrices and keloid scars customary in Kaiadilt society; the densely layered landscapes of Netta and Amy Loogatha, built of brush-head daubs; and the energetic reefscapes of Paula Paul and Ethel Thomas, mapping the important rock-walled fish traps and coral bommies that sustained Kaiadilt life for



millennia. These extraordinary women all brought their own genius to the group, with a collaborative but slightly competitive attitude through which they stimulated each other to continue to improve and excel. Sally, though, remained their clear leader, as evidenced by her dominant central positioning in each of their collaborative paintings.

Sweers Island 2007 shows Mundamuru, the second largest of the islands of the Kaiadilt Dulka after Bentinck itself. Mundamuru is a place of important ancestral sites, family estates and complex intercultural relationships. Separated from Bentinck by a shallow channel named Investigator Road by Matthew Flinders, who anchored his HMS *Investigator* here for a fortnight in 1802, Mundamuru was the site of early but short-lived frontier settlements and skirmishes. Flinders' crew spent time on the island and carved the name of their ship into a tree, which became known as the Investigator Tree, now housed in the collection of the Queensland Museum. Some twenty-eight different early voyages that involved a visit to the island are reported to have been inscribed on this rite-of-passage tree between 1802 and 1866. In the 1860s, the entire population of the Gulf town Burketown was relocated to Mundamuru, which was used as a quarantine site following outbreaks of disease, and later the town of Carnarvon was established on the island until it was abandoned in the 1890s. Throughout this period, Kaiadilt

people generally kept their distance and stayed on Bentinck Island, though they continued to maintain connections to their special places on Mundamuru wherever possible.

Sweers Island is an exceptional work in the commercial market. It resonates with the love the 'Bentinck Island Art Gang' had for their Dulka, their Country, which the artists have expressed with full energy and colour. Here, Sally Gabori's dominant contribution shows the spine of the island, capturing the contours of Country, and the tall hills and she-oak scrubs on the eastern side of the island. Netta and Amy Loogatha's daubed dots build the sandy lowlands and reefs of the northern parts of the island. May Moodoonuthi's raw and intensely repeated circles build the flat, rocky shelf which extends from Bardathurr, at the base of a cliff under Investigator Hill, where the journey of Dibirdibi ended and his liver was discarded, creating a freshwater spring. This long, rocky tail of the island extends for over a kilometre into the sea to the south towards Dingkari, Sally Gabori's grandfather's site, and an important offshore reef in deep water to which Kaiadilt men would row flat log rafts in search of large pelagic fish to feed their families. Many of these men were swept away in the strong currents, and the writhing waves captured in the coarse brushstrokes of Dawn Naranatjil invoke the intensity of these seas.

BRUCE JOHNSON MCLEAN

MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA**SALLY GABORI**

c. 1924 – 2015

Kayardilt language

Dibirdibi Country 2006

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

121 × 91 cm (47.6 × 35.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Mornington Island, Queensland

Mornington Island Arts, Queensland,

cat. no. 1748-L-SG-1106

Short St Gallery, Broome

Private Collection, New South Wales,

acquired from the above in 2007

EXHIBITED*Mornington Island Artists*, Short St

Gallery, Broome, September 2007

AUD 48,000

USD 30,700

Throughout Sally Gabori's painting career, she focused on a handful of sites, the *dulkiiwatha* or conception places of her close relatives, yet the majority of her paintings focused on a single, but often fugitive and amorphous, subject, *Dibirdibi Country*. *Dibirdibi* is the name of the Rock Cod ancestor, one of the key *Kaiadilt* ancestral beings whose destructive and creative journeys carved great gorges in the landscape, which filled with water, creating their island territory. *Dibirdibi*'s journeys are extensive and take in multiple story places, though its key site is where it came to rest at the foot of a cliff at the southern tip of *Sweers Island*.

Dibirdibi was also a totem name of Sally's husband, *Kabararrjingathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori*, who was the leader of the *Kaiadilt* people in the

few years before their relocation to Mornington Island. Pat became the leader after he killed King Alfred and took his sister Sally as his wife. When Sally referred to *Dibirdibi*, she was often referring to Pat, and *Dibirdibi Country* could also refer to his *dulkiiwatha*, *Kabararrji*. Remarkably, out of many hundreds of named sites on the island, Sally's site, *Mirdidingki*, and Pat's site, *Kabararrji*, are located directly next to each other. Their places of conception lay at the western end of a long sandy bay, where a small creek empties onto a large sand flat and a rocky headland extends into the sea, transforming into vibrant reef. Although Sally's paintings are heavily abstracted, many do evoke the landscape of their special places, with hard features on the left-hand side, or the western side, of a painting bringing their sites to life.



MIRDIDINGKATHI JUWARANDA**SALLY GABORI**

c. 1924 – 2015

Kayardilt language

Dibirdibi Country 2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen

152 × 101 cm (59.8 × 39.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Mornington

Island, Queensland

Mornington Island Arts, Queensland,

cat. no. 4569-L-SG-0809

Raft Artspace, Alice Springs

Private Collection, South Australia,

acquired from the above in 2009

AUD 55,000

USD 35,200

Intriguingly, *Dibirdibi Country* 2009 shows a hard line, dividing sections of the painting. This device is extremely rare in Sally's later works, where colour fields melt into each other, evoking intertidal zones or the gradual changes in a landscape. However, here the hard line likely indicates a clear distinction between spaces, perhaps indicating a boundary or a line of travel. In terms of Dibirdibi, it could also be a rare indication of the journey of the Rock Cod ancestor, who carved out great channels with his fins as he traversed the Country.

Sally's abstracted compositions are rarely easy to decipher because of her unique style of abstraction. Her mindscapes always take a specific familial site as their foundation, but these are run through multiple cultural filters to form an image. Sally was a singer and often sung her paintings into being, therefore

many paintings are more a representation of a song of a story of a place rather than an attempt to map a site with fidelity. Her paintings are most often evocative as opposed to prescriptive. Occasionally there may be basic landscape features but many of her works will focus more on Sally's recollection of the colours of a particular fish caught here or the blooming of a particular flower at the site while she shared time there with a loved one.

Perhaps this has always been the most exciting thing about Sally Gabori's art. Fugitive hints of story or glimpses of places unknowable draw our attention to the sheer glory of Sally's mark making, where each gesture evokes her love of the people and places she called home.

BRUCE JOHNSON MCLEAN

OWEN YALANDJA
born 1962
Kuninjku language

Yawk Yawk 1997
earth pigments on carved hardwood
175 cm (68.9 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, created at Maningrida,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture,
Northern Territory
Collection of Colin and Elizabeth
Lavery, Sydney, acquired
from the above in 1997
*Important Aboriginal Art from the
Lavery Collection*, Deutscher and
Hackett, Sydney, 8 March 2015, lot 132
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above

AUD 45,000
USD 28,800



detail



BALANG NAKURULK
(JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)
 1952 – 2024
 Kuninjku language

Freshwater Turtle 2000
 earth pigments and synthetic
 binder on eucalyptus bark
 155 × 65 cm (61 × 25.6 inches)

PROVENANCE
 The Artist, painted at Maningrida,
 Northern Territory
 Maningrida Arts & Culture, Northern
 Territory, cat. no. 32862000BP
 Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
 Collection of Sir Roderick and
 Lady Gillian Deane, Sydney,
 acquired from the above in 2002

EXHIBITED
*rarrk: John Mawurndjul: journey
 through time in Northern Australia*,
 Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland,
 21 September 2005 – 29 January
 2006; Sprengel Museum Hannover,
 Germany, 19 February – 5 June 2006

LITERATURE
 John Mawurndjul and Christian
 Kaufman, *rarrk: John Mawurndjul:
 journey through time in Northern
 Australia*, Crawford House Publishing
 Australia, 2005, p. 136 (illus.)

AUD 96,000
 USD 61,400

In December 2024, the Australian art world lost a giant. One of the most recognised First Nations Australian artists, Balang Nakurulk (1952–2024), also known as John Mawurndjul AM, served as a conduit for spiritual, personal and creative evolution, which he channelled into his eminent artistic practice.

The exceptional, transformative qualities of Balang's work emerged from a complex interplay of spiritual, material and conceptual dimensions. The key to his unprecedented innovations and creative accomplishments lies in these specific transformative aspects of his work. The first transformation occurs in the painting materials sourced from the land surrounding Maningrida, where Balang lived and worked. The bark of stringybark trees, cut to larger scales throughout his career, is cured over fire and flattened to create the base. Trunks of stringybark, ironwood or woolly butt are burned down to cracked chunks of charcoal gathered for black pigment when cool. Red and yellow ochres are collected and powdered from the earth. The white clay, known as delek – from the site Kudjarnngal – possesses the most transformative quality of all his materials. This clay originates from the ingested bodies of spirits that Ngalyod – the Rainbow Serpent – excreted into the earth, where it is found in brilliant white lumps. Mined by the artist's hand, this radiant white clay serves as the foundation and

first layer of Balang's bark paintings, shining through the spectacularly fine cross-hatching, or rarrk.

The rarrk, as Balang states, represents the spirit of Ngalyod. Although it is only one component of the ancestral being, it is the most fluid and malleable for Balang's expansive representations. Just as Ngalyod is regarded as the first ancestor and protector of all other ancestral beings, its depictive power, represented through rarrk, forms the genesis of Balang's groundbreaking style.

Transformation is a critical aspect of Ngalyod's essence, so, unsurprisingly, the rarrk technique employed to capture this spirit propelled Balang's aesthetic explorations towards abstraction. In *Billabong at Milmilngkan* 2008, Balang has depicted the place near where he lives, the site where the powerful Ngalyod resides under the water. Ngalyod is very important in Kuninjku cosmology and is associated with the creation of all sacred sites. The fine rarrk cross-hatching contains Mardayin power and portrays the essence of this place; Balang mastered his cross-hatching technique in his dedication to pursuing the many iterations of an endlessly shifting spirit, a fluid essence, throughout his career.

The intricate cross-hatching that became so identifiably Balang's serves as the vehicle through which he transcends local aesthetic realms and captivates the imagination of Balanda



BALANG NAKURULK
(JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)
1952 – 2024
Kuninjku language

Billabong at Milmilngkan 2008
earth pigments and synthetic
binder on eucalyptus bark
185 × 68 cm (72.8 × 26.8 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, created at Milmilngkan,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 862-08
Private Collection, Perth, acquired
from the above 2008

AUD 140,000
USD 89,600

(non-Indigenous) audiences. Ultimately, the viewer's spirit is also transformed by Balang's work. Expanded and transformed, the explorations of the Mardayin designs, reflecting Ngalyod's spirit, occupy the late period of works. During this time, the secret design elements have been liberated into an 'open' realm, where they create a resonance that reverberates within the chests of uninitiated audiences. The rarrk serves as the primary vehicle for engagement with non-Indigenous people. To stand before a Balang Nakurulk painting is to experience a visceral response to power, self-confidence, creative belief and higher knowledge. One cannot help but be altered in the recognition of one spirit from another. His determination to remain on his land, where he could create, was integral to ensuring that his work upheld these transformative qualities and therefore authority.

In the 2000s, Balang started to garner the more substantial recognition that he sought – as the first Aboriginal artist to win the prestigious Clemenger prize, the first Australian artist to have, and attend, a retrospective at major European art museums in their own lifetime. In recognition of his contribution to the Musée du quai Branly commission in Paris, he appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine in 2006 and was referred to as 'the Michelangelo of

Rarrk'. In 2010, he was awarded an Order of Australia, and his major retrospective at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2018 revealed the cultural continuum between tradition – the Old – and modernity – the New. There are few Australian artists who have received such international accolades.

In a recent tribute by economic analyst and longtime friend to the artist Jon Altman, Altman reminds us of Balang's outstanding achievements: his drive to be recognised alongside other Australian contemporary artists, to politically and geographically demonstrate connections between his art, Country and Kuninjku values and spirituality, and his inspiration and mentoring of an entire generation of Kuninjku artists. His unwavering commitment to transfigure and reconceptualise the complexities of his Kuninjku culture broke new ground in Australian art history and gave shape to an ever-evolving spirit.

VANESSA MERLINO

SOURCES

Jon Altman, Clothilde Bullen et al. *John Mawurndjul: I Am the Old and the New*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2018.
Jon Altman, 'Balang Nakurulk (1952–2024): a tribute', *Artlink*, 5 March 2025.



BALANG NAKURULK
(JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)
1952 – 2024
Kuninjku language

Untitled – Lorrkon 2009
earth pigments on hollow log
255 cm (100.4 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, created at Milmilngkan,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 2104-09
Private Collection, Perth, acquired
from the above in 2009

AUD 35,000
USD 22,400

detail



BALANG NAKURULK
(JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)

1952 – 2024
Kuninjku language

Madayin Design at Dilebang 2017
earth pigments on hollow log
259 cm (102 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at Milmilngkan,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture,
Northern Territory, 2008-17
Private Collection, Miami
Beach, Florida

EXHIBITED

*The Inside World: Contemporary
Aboriginal Australian Memorial
Poles*, Nevada Museum of Art,
Reno, 9 February – 23 June 2019;
Charles H. Wright Museum of
African American History, Detroit,
18 July – 29 December 2019;

Fralin Museum of Art, University of
Virginia, Charlottesville, 24 January
– 28 June 2020; Patricia and
Phillip Frost Art Museum, Florida
International University, Miami,
11 July 2020 – 9 January 2021

LITERATURE

Henry F. Skerritt (ed.), *The Inside
World: Contemporary Aboriginal
Australian Memorial Poles*,
DeMonico Books-Prestel, Munich;
New York, 2019, p. 80 – 81 (illus.)

AUD 60,000
USD 38,400

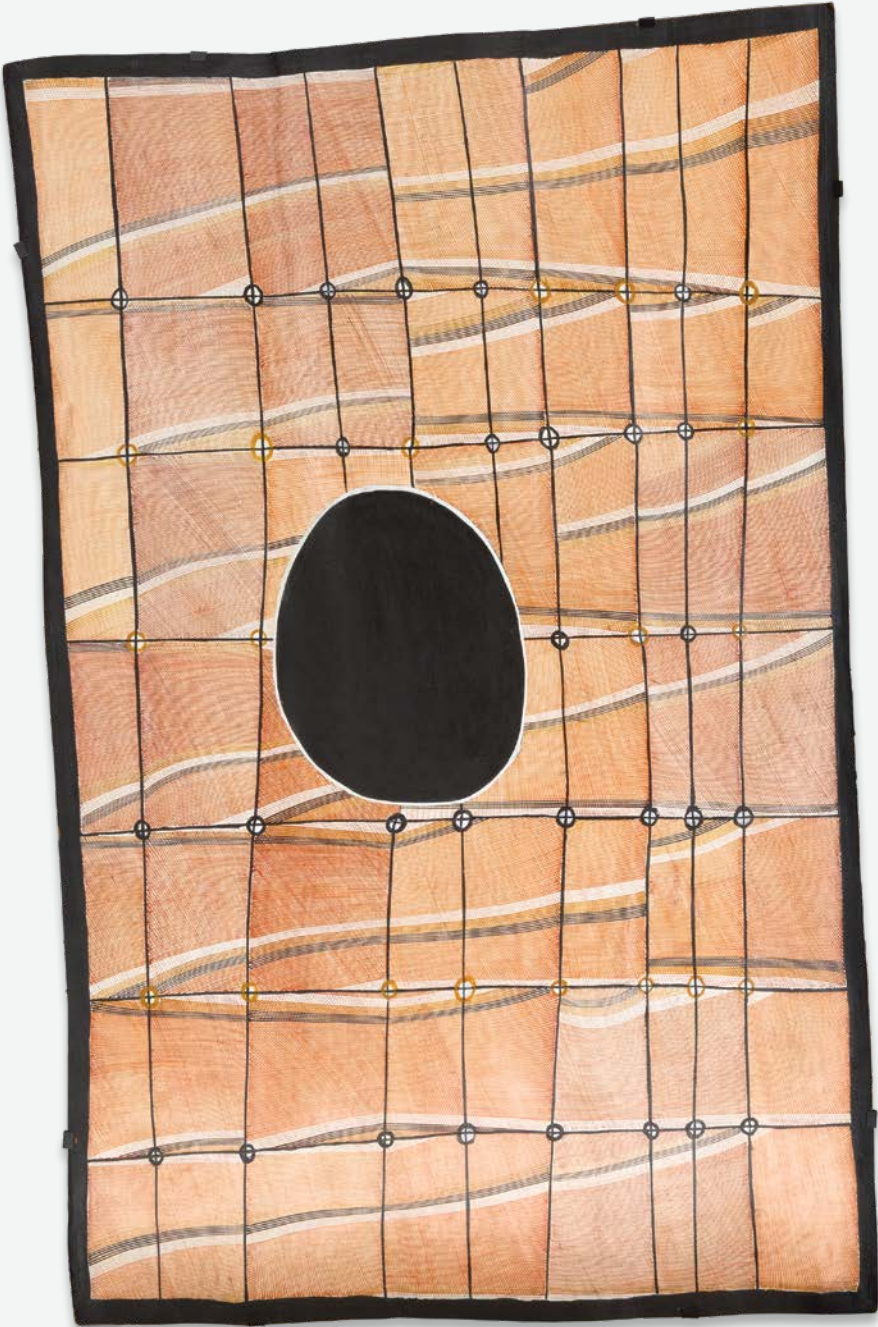
detail



BALANG NAKURULK
(JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM)
1952 – 2024
Kuninjku language
Dilebang 2009
earth pigments and synthetic
binder on eucalyptus bark
146 × 92 cm (57.5 × 36.5 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, created at Milmilngkan,
Northern Territory
Maningrida Arts & Culture, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 1414-09
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection, Miami Beach,
Florida, acquired from the above

AUD 130,000
USD 83,200



GULUMBU YUNUPIŊU

c. 1945 – 2012
Gumatj language

Ganyu 2008
earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
92 × 63 cm (36.2 × 24.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Yirrkala,
Northern Territory
Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala,
Northern Territory, cat. no. 3306N
Private Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above

AUD 50,000
USD 32,000

Gulumbu Yunupiŋu – also known as the star lady – was the daughter of major Gumatj artist Munḡurrawuy Yunupiŋu. Gulumbu grew up in Yirrkala, attending school at the old mission house before marrying Djapu artist Mutitjpuɹ Munungurr and having four children. As an artist, Gulumbu worked in a range of different mediums, such as weaving, jewellery and printmaking, before she began to focus on bark painting and sculpture. Gulumbu explored concepts of the universe that evolved from her knowledge of traditional Yolŋu stories transmitted through ganyu (stars), some of which, the artist explains, are special for Yolŋu.

In 2000, Gulumbu developed the star motif in the *Ganyu* painting depicted here, which became her signature style. Her celestial barks first came to public attention in 2004 when she won the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award with three ɭarrakitj (hollow logs). Since then, she has painted a screen of sixty small star-based bark paintings for the World Expo in Hanover, Germany, and has been represented through many solo and group exhibitions, including *Garak: the Universe*, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, 2004, and *National Indigenous Art Triennial*:

Culture Warriors, National Gallery of Australia, 2007. Gulumbu’s paintings refer to, yet do not specify, two Dreaming stories that the artist’s father told her as a child, each representing different constellations in the night sky. As she retold these stories for children of the next generation and the broader art-appreciating public, Gulumbu’s abstract paintings became unlike any other north-east Arnhem Land art, which was almost always based on refined cross-hatched sacred design. Even works that were considered to be decorative would employ lines rather than dots. What is unusual about this work compared with other paintings of the region being produced at the same time, and even with Gulumbu’s own work of that period, is the absence of any symbolic or figurative imagery. This bark can be read openly as a non-specific depiction of the Ganyu Dreamings, with no differentiation made between the two stories.

VANESSA MERLINO
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SOURCE
Myles Russell-Cook (ed.), *Bark Ladies: Eleven Artists from Yirrkala*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2021.



NYAPANYAPA YUNUPINU

1945 – 2021
Yolŋu language

Light Painting 2010
light (or animated white paint
pen on 110 acetates)
AP from an edition of 5 + 1 A/P
226 × 167 cm (89 × 66 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at Yirrkala,
Northern Territory
Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala,
Northern Territory, cat. no. 3589M
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Debra and Dennis Scholl
Collection, Miami Beach, Florida,
acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Henry F. Skerritt (ed.), *Marking the
Infinite: Contemporary Women
Artists from Aboriginal Australia*,
Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, and
DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-
London-New York, 2019, p. 173
Luke Scholes (ed.), *The
Moment Eternal: Nyapanyapa
Yunupinu*, Museum and Art
Gallery of the Northern Territory,
2020, pp. 59–72 (illus.)

EXHIBITED

*18th Biennale of Sydney: All
Our Relations*, Museum of
Contemporary Art, Sydney,
27 June – 16 September 2012
Ian Potter Centre, National
Gallery of Victoria, 2014–2015
*Western Australian Indigenous
Art Awards*, Art Gallery of
Western Australia, Perth,
13 August – 19 December 2011

*Marking the Infinite: Contemporary
Women Artists from Aboriginal
Australia*, Newcomb Art Museum,
Tulane University, New Orleans,
7 September 2016 – 1 January
2017; Patricia and Phillip Frost
Art Museum, Florida International
University, Miami, 28 January –
7 May 2017; Scottsdale Museum of
Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona,
23 September 2017 – 21 January
2018; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
17 February – 13 May 2018; The
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC,
2 June – 9 September 2018; Museum
of Anthropology, The University
of British Columbia, Vancouver,
1 November 2018 – 24 February 2019
*The Moment Eternal: Nyapanyapa
Yunupinu*, Museum and Art Gallery
of the Northern Territory, Darwin,
23 May – 25 October 2020

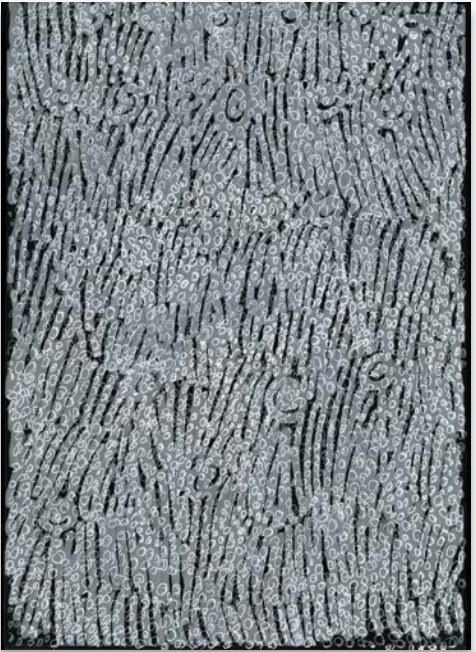
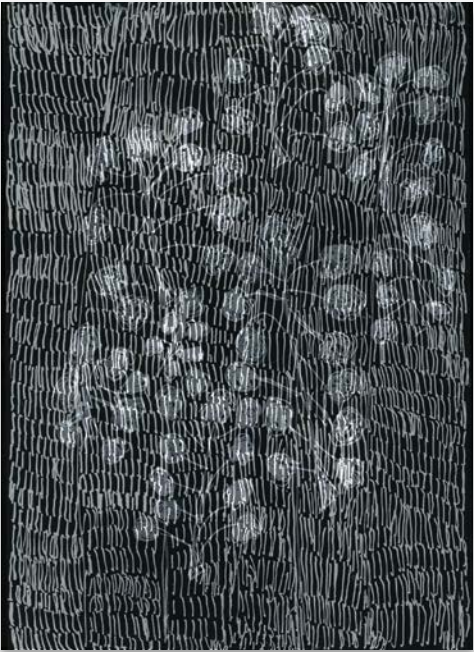
AUD 60,000
USD 38,400

This painting is sold with accompanying
documentation provided by Roslyn Oxley9
Gallery, reading in part:

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu’s *Light Painting*
2010 – 11 is a projection composed from a set
of 110 drawings in white paint pen on clear
acetates, made at Yirrkala Art Centre between
2010 and 2011. These drawings were scanned
into a custom made computer program which
uses a logarithm to randomly select three
acetates at a time, assigns an opacity to each,

then overlays against a second set of three. This
process continues at an almost imperceptible
rate, and only repeats after several hundred
million iterations. There is no start and no end.
Every time the work is viewed, it is different.
The result is a painting with light as its medium.

An edition of this work is held by the National
Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased by
NGV Foundation, 2013 and also the Chartwell
Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
New Zealand, purchased 2012.



NYAPANYAPA YUNUPINU

1945 – 2021
Yolŋu language

Circles 2014
felt tip pen and earth pigments on
discarded photography paper
76.2 × 55.9 cm (30 × 22 inches) (each)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, created at Yirrkala,
Northern Territory
Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala,
Northern Territory, cat. no. 4626Q
Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection,
Miami Beach, Florida, acquired
from the above in 2014

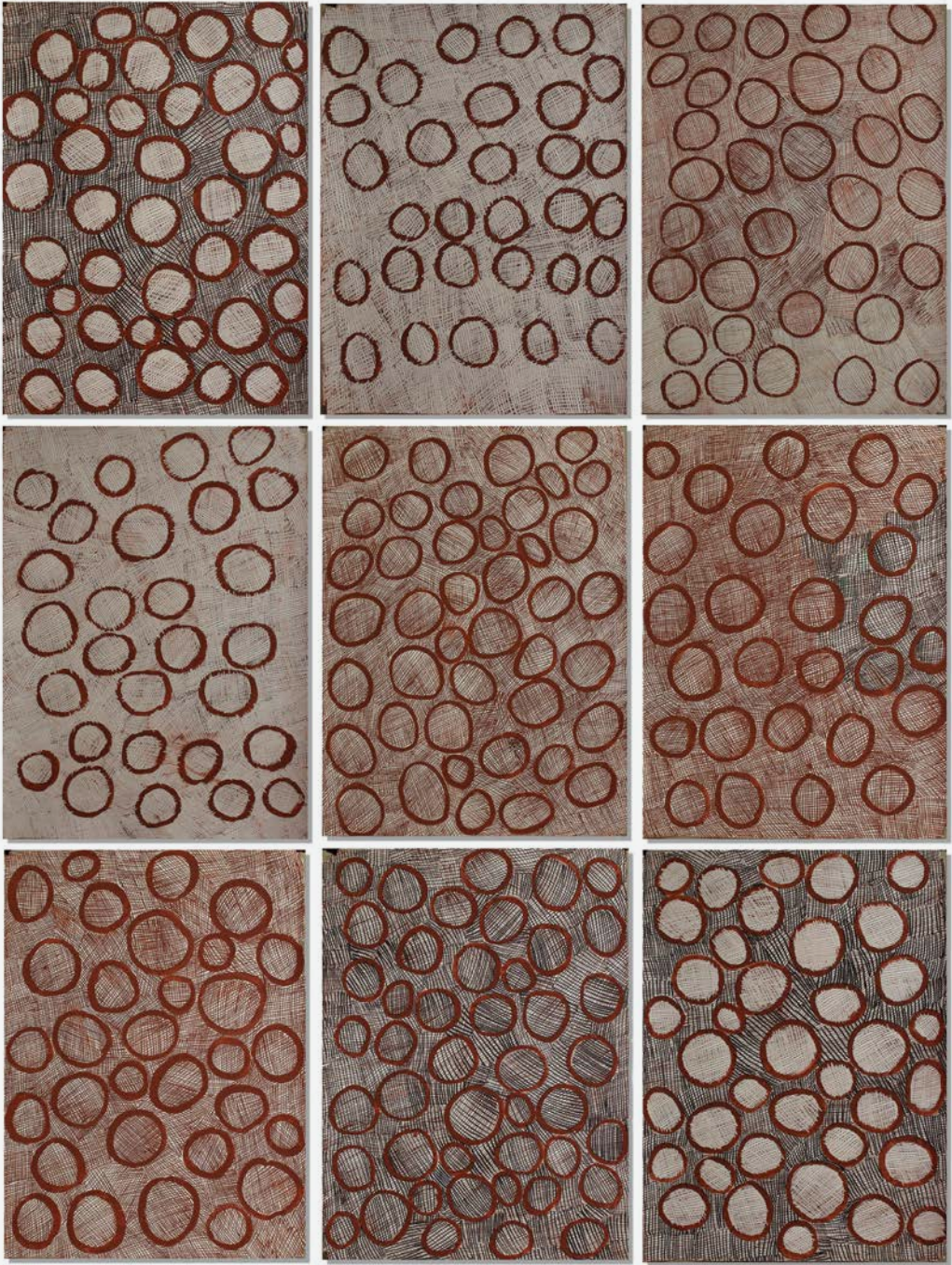
LITERATURE

Henry F. Skeritt (ed.), *Marking the
Infinite: Contemporary Women
Artists from Aboriginal Australia*,
Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, and
DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-
London-New York, 2019, p. 164

EXHIBITED

*Marking the Infinite: Contemporary
Women Artists from Aboriginal
Australia*, Newcomb Art Museum,
Tulane University, New Orleans,
7 September 2016 – 1 January
2017; Patricia and Phillip Frost
Art Museum, Florida International
University, Miami, 28 January –
7 May 2017; Scottsdale Museum of
Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona,
23 September 2017 – 21 January
2018; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno,
17 February – 13 May 2018; The
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC,
2 June – 9 September 2018; Museum
of Anthropology, The University
of British Columbia, Vancouver,
1 November 2018 – 24 February 2019

AUD 30,000
USD 19,200



NYAPANYAPA YUNUPINU

1945 – 2021
Yolŋu language

Untitled 2018
earth pigments on bark
168 × 77 cm (55.1 × 33.3 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Yirrkala,
Northern Territory
Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala,
Northern Territory, cat. no. 1064-18
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Private Collection, Victoria,
acquired from the above

EXHIBITED

Nyapanyapa Yunupinu:
Ganyu, Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney,
31 January – 16 February 2019

AUD 80,000
USD 51,200

This majestic bark, painted in the studio of Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala, captures an important transitional period in the singular practice of Nyapanyapa Yunupinu. Throughout her career, Yunupinu’s painting style evolved with relative speed and fluidity, challenging the conventions of Yolŋu art making in the process. *Untitled* 2018 pinpoints a passage in her career when she had long ceased depicting figurative compositions in favour of paintings composed of contrasting hues of cross-hatched lines and floating circles.

As these new non-figurative works began to circulate, curators and journalists offered various explanations and interpretations. For Nyapanyapa, however, these paintings were made for the sheer love of painting them. Though considered mayilimiriw (meaningless) by many Yolŋu, for Nyapanyapa the process of creation was what was central to their meaning. Oblivious to the dialogue that surrounded her practice, Nyapanyapa continued to paint until she passed away in 2021.

Yunupinu’s artistic practice began in 1996 when she was one of the very first artists to make a print for the new Yirrkala Print Space. Her

interactions with the centre intensified through the occasional delivery of small craft items such as carved sculptures, and painted rocks and shells. It was partly through her observance of her sister Gulumbu Yunupinu that Nyapanyapa became interested in bark painting. Eventually her persistent presence at the art centre resulted in her being provided with small barks, on which she would paint unique representations of various animals and personal accounts of her own history.

In 2020, a comprehensive retrospective exhibition of Yunupinu’s work, *The Moment Eternal: Nyapanyapa Yunupinu*, was mounted at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) in Darwin. The exhibition featured more than sixty works. This award-winning exhibition was the first solo exhibition at MAGNT to feature work by an Australian First Nations artist.¹

LUKE SCHOLES

1. Luke Scholes, in Luke Scholes (ed.), *The Moment Eternal: Nyapanyapa Yunupinu*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2020, p. 101.



WUKUŊ WAŊAMBI

1962 – 2022

Yolŋu language

Bamurrŋu 2002

earth pigments on eucalyptus bark

108 × 60 cm (42.5 × 23.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Yirrkala,

Northern Territory

Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala,

Northern Territory, cat. no. 2230N

Private Collection, South Australia,

acquired from the above in 2002

AUD 22,000

USD 14,100

Destiny drives Buku-Duŋgulmirri or Wawurritjpa, Sea Mullet, to travel from river to river and ocean to ocean to eventually be carried on the tide of the Gurka'wuy River into the mouth of Trail Bay. In sacred song, Bamurrŋu, a solitary rock in the mouth of Trial Bay, lies submerged within the waters of the bay, surrounded by these fish. Yolŋu of this area speak of a hole submerged under these rocks, from which bubbles are seen rising to the surface. The life force alive in these bubbles is a direct ancestral connection for the Marrakulu. When the Marrakulu clan perform the ritual dance for events depicted in this painting, participants move towards a held spear representing the steadfastness of the rock, which splits the dancers, who then surround the stone Bamurrŋu. The characteristic fish that stream around this Jarrakitj jump the 'trap' created by Bamurrŋu the same way that the soul slips its earthly bonds. These fish also form some of the detail of Wukuŋ Waŋambi's award-winning earlier works. A highly acclaimed artist, filmmaker and leader of the Marrakulu clan, his innovative work is in numerous important collections, including the British Museum and the National Gallery of Australia. Alongside Djambuwa Marawili, he was a leading curator of the recent exhibition *Madayin: Eight Decades of*

Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala.

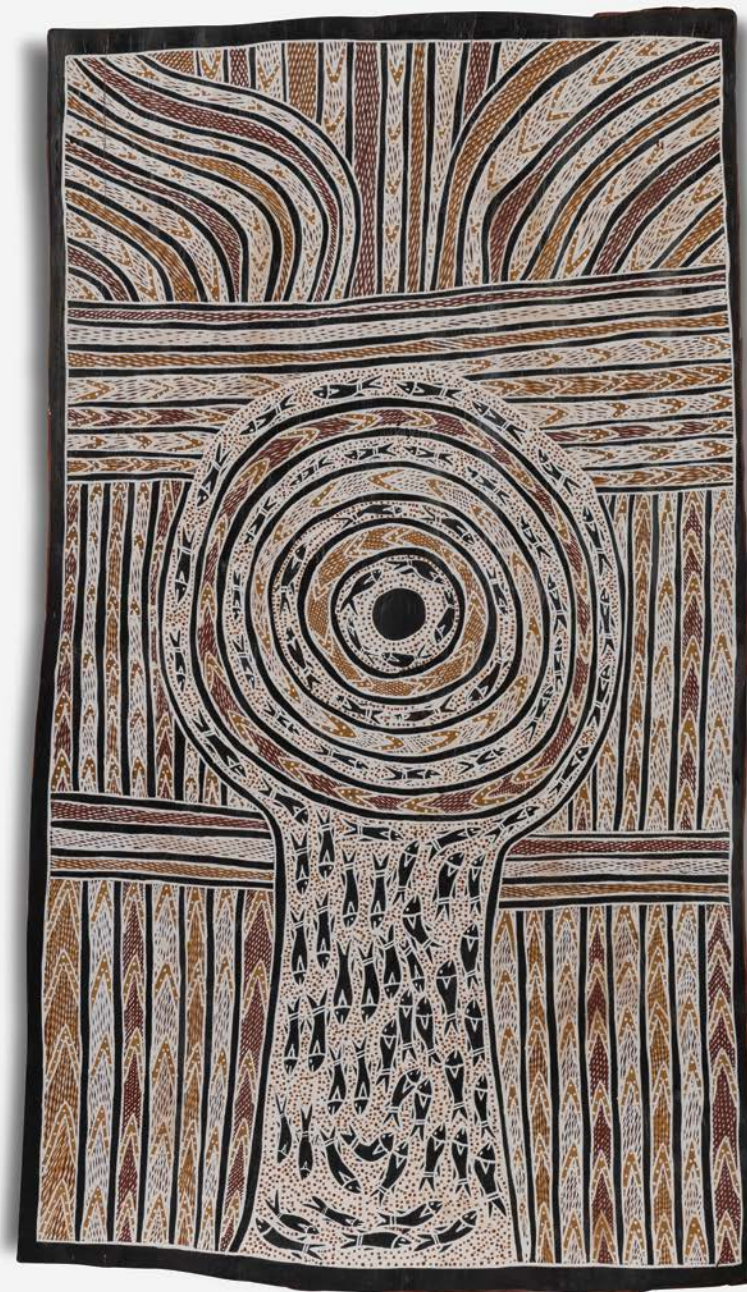
The inside cover of the catalogue reads: 'Dedicated to Wukuŋ Waŋambi, whose wisdom, courage and willingness to work across cultural and geographic boundaries made this project possible.' Wukuŋ's determination and generosity in his communication and sharing of Yolŋu culture can be observed throughout his oeuvre. Wukuŋ's father, esteemed clan leader and renowned painter Mithili Waŋambi, passed away before his son could learn from him. Yet, in 1997, the Djunggayi – caretakers and preservers of clan knowledge – taught Wukuŋ the designs he started painting and created for the 1999 *Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*. This collection of eighty bark paintings that share the sacred knowledge of Sea Country is now part of the Australian National Maritime Museum collection, Wukuŋ's paintings re-introduced motifs that had not been painted since his father's death.

VANESSA MERLINO

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SOURCE

Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, *Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Painting of Sea Country: Recognising Indigenous Sea Rights*, Jennifer Isaacs Publishing and Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, Neutral Bay, NSW, 1999.



CARLENE WEST
1944 – 2021
Pitjantjatjara language

Tjitjiti 2015
synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 × 290 cm (78.7 × 90.5 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, painted at Tjuntjuntjara, Western Australia
Spinifex Arts Project, Western Australia, cat. no. 15-127
Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection, Miami Beach, Florida, acquired from the above

LITERATURE
Henry F. Skerritt (ed.), *Marking the Infinite: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia*, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, and DelMonico Books-Prestel, Munich-London-New York, 2016, p. 104 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
Marking the Infinite: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia, Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans, 7 September 2016 – 1 January 2017; Patricia and Phillip Frost

Art Museum, Florida International University, Miami, 28 January – 7 May 2017; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Arizona, 23 September 2017 – 21 January 2018; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, 17 February – 13 May 2018; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, 2 June – 9 September 2018; Museum of Anthropology, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1 November 2018 – 24 February 2019

AUD 220,000
USD 140,800

For those who knew Carlene West, it was the force of her personality – fierce, funny and proud – an audacious and singular character, that you recognise in her paintings. For everyone else, that unfortunate majority who lived outside the arc of her laughter and her nulla nulla, the equation is reversed. It is in her paintings that you first recognise someone operating on an uncommon scale. Even her smaller pictures seem oversized, overflowing. *Tjitjiti* 2013 is one such work, its internal organs and opaque boundaries pulsing with tensions both absolute and ambiguous. It is a work that, as with all her resonant late oeuvre, emerged from the return of the artist to her homeland after a fifty-year absence.

Carlene West was born under a tree, under another name, in the sandhills on the western edge of Tjitjiti, a salt lake in Spinifex Country rimmed by high red dunes that rise like rusted bleachers around a stage. One of those dunes, the softest and the highest, juts out into the middle of a dry white sea: a desert island as improbable as it is beautiful. Carlene came of age in majestically strange Country. She then left it on the even stranger winds of Maralinga and missionaries that

blew through Spinifex lives in the mid twentieth century.

After decades of exile from their homelands, the Spinifex people returned in the 1980s and 1990s. But it was not until 2009 that they were finally able to carve a road through the bush back to Tjitjiti. Having last seen her home as a teenage girl, Carlene returned half a century later, to leave her adult footprints here for the first time. She and her family spent precious time here over the next few years in the shade of giant sandhills, on the horizonless lake, in the thick of her story again.

This history matters, because Carlene’s artistic vision was transformed by this return to Tjitjiti. Her paintings came to find their compass in the personal disorientations (both historic and topographic) of the lake, liberated from the conventions of desert painting by a deeply familiar aesthetics and poetics of place. The formal grid of her early compositions dissolves at this time and, in its place, the ancestral creatures that shaped the lake return in endlessly transforming ways. The ancient structures and tensions of story and place are being reimagined, rewritten.



CARLENE WEST

1944 – 2021

Pitjantjatjara language

Tjitjiti 2013

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

87.5 × 45 cm (34.4 × 17.71 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at Tjuntjuntjara,

Western Australia

Spinifex Arts Project, Western

Australia, cat. no. SAPCW13040

Private Collection, Sydney,

acquired from the above

AUD 25,000

USD 16,000

In this dance of abstraction, narrative decouples from form. Dots wander away from the forms they used to highlight or embed, becoming trails, footprints, tracks across the lake. Following them, the black outline that Carlene had employed to give definition to the lake, to separate it out from the red sandhills in her earlier paintings, bleeds out (and in) to dark space. In *Tjitjiti* 2013 it becomes the sunken centre of the lake (or arguably the central sandhill itself) around which ancestral narratives of the Two Women orbit. Then in the paintings that follow, including *Tjitjiti* 2015, a stark and final inversion unfurls as the whole black canvas becomes an outline for the lake. A surrogate sandhill.

The classic narrative forms recede during this period, giving way to the expressive act of painting. Yet this is not a one-way process towards a final point of abstraction, for the tensions in Carlene's creative practice play out in different ways in each of these late paintings. We find archetypal echoes in the inversions of black and white – figure and ground – the lake and the self. In *Tjitjiti* 2013 Carlene trains in on a section of the vast story of the Two Women who come to grief on the lake, whereas in *Tjitjiti*

2015 she pans out into an enormous aerial drama – and yet one in which those women reappear as classic little U-shapes, on the shores of the lake, anchoring the abstraction to their inalienable story.

Carlene, perhaps, was doing the same. This late period in Carlene's career, when her painting was at its most vivid, coincided with early-onset Alzheimer's. *Tjitjiti* became for her as an artist what it was in ancestral times, the arena for struggles with memory and meaning.

Abstraction takes many forms. The arc of life in the desert is not of progress towards an end, but of return. It is a process of returning to the place where you began – not of going up, or down, but of going back *in* – and becoming one with your Country again when your skin and bones are done. Carlene painted the lake, but the lake gave her form. The lake is everything in these late paintings, and we but stand on her shores.

JOHN CARTY

—
Note: This text has been adapted from the author's essay 'Carlene West', in the book *Sun and Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People*, edited by John Carty and Luke Scholes, and published by Upswell Publishing, Perth, 2023.



SPINIFEX WOMEN'S COLLABORATIVE

Estelle Hogan
c. 1937 – 2017
Myrtle Pennington
c. 1939 – 2022
Ngalpingka Simms
c. 1945
Lorraine Davies
born c. 1951
Debbie Hansen
born c. 1967
Tjaruwa Woods
c. 1954 – 2019

Kuru Ala 2016
synthetic polymer paint on linen
200 × 230 cm (78.7 × 90.5 inches)

A Spinifex collaboration holds as many aspects as it has contributors. It is consensus – a harmonious decision upon which direction to take and how best to arrive at the stated destination. It is biography – of one’s ritualised past: made all the easier by a shared history that still reveals itself today. It is a knowing expansion, where each can own and share all they have learnt. To collaborate is to be part of something far greater than the individual. This is a gift of not only cultural unanimity, but of individual artistic portrayals that converge to make a unique composition. For the whole can never be repeated.

Kuru Ala (a literal translation of ‘eyes open’) forms part of a powerful women’s creation narrative, Minyma Tjuta Tjukurpa (Seven Sisters Creation Line), with collaboration and cooperation at its heart. This significant site conveys a much larger recounting that follows the epic journey of a group of young women as they traverse the Spinifex Lands and beyond. They are being pursued by Nyiru, a lustful older man, who wishes to take the eldest of

PROVENANCE

The Artists, painted at Tjuntjuntjara, Western Australia
Spinifex Arts Project, Western Australia, cat. no. 16-6
Outstation, Darwin
Private Collection, Melbourne, acquired from the above in 2016

LITERATURE

Rawa Nyinanyi: Unbroken, Outstation Gallery and Spinifex Arts Project, catalogue, 2016, p. 15 (illus.)
Margo Neale (ed.), *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, National Museum of Australia, 2017, p. 155 (illus.)
John Carty and Luke Scholes (eds), *Sun and Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People*, Upswell Publishing, Perth, 2023, p. 16 (illus.)
Marcia Langton, *Welcome to Country*, Hardie Grant Travel, Melbourne, 2018, cover (illus.)

EXHIBITED

Rawa Nyinanyi: Unbroken, Outstation Gallery and Spinifex Arts Project, Darwin, 2–28 August 2016
Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 14 September 2017 – 28 February 2018; Western Australian Museum, Perth, 23 November 2020 – 26 April 2021; The Box, Plymouth, United Kingdom, 21 October 2021 – 27 February 2022; Humboldt Forum, Berlin, 17 June – 30 October 2022; Musée du quai Branly, Paris, 4 April – 2 July 2023

AUD 65,000
USD 41,600

the women as his wife. He has the metamorphic power of transformation and is able to trick the women. At one site he is a fig tree, at another a prized kuniya (carpet python), all the time trying to get the women to digest him.

All of the women, not just the eldest, have that same sense of constant pursuit. There is not a separation of Nyiru’s desire for one – at the exclusion of others – but more, it empowers them as a group in solidarity, in collaboration, where strength in cooperation sees the greater result. They band together to thwart his elaborate forms of capture and seduction, and to empower themselves as they move forward. Lessons learnt for future generations, no doubt.

At Kuru Ala the women take refuge in a cave, a safe haven from where they can spy Nyiru in the distance. They eventually follow the track of a large kuniya that takes them to the site of Kulyuru, where, once again, they realise the kuniya is really Nyiru, the trickster, the mask wearer, the deceiver.



Image credits: Amanda Dent 2016

But this is not their final destination. They stay together, and again move forward, this time to the site of Minyma Ngampi. It is here that the women take flight, up and away to the night skies, where they present themselves to us in the form of the Pleiades in the Taurus constellation, a mesmerising group of stars clustered together as a lone single star follows from a distance. A physical manifestation of an alliance steeped in shared experience and mutual cooperation. A collaboration that grows together stays together.

It is more than coincidence that this masterful painting depicting an abiding timeline of movement and travel – of allied kin shaping the landscape with meaning as they move throughout – should become a leading work in the exhibition *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, National Museum of Australia. This momentous exhibition has already toured the United Kingdom, Germany and France in an almost seamless expression of the exact Tjukurpa it seeks to tell.

BRIAN HALLETT

SIGNIFICANT



PATJU PRESLEY
born 1945
Pitjantjatjara language

Walkamata 2016
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
230 × 200 cm (90.5 × 78.7 inches)

PROVENANCE
The Artist, painted at Tjuntjuntjara,
Western Australia
Spinifex Arts Project, Western
Australia, cat. no. 16-68
Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection, United States,
acquired from the above in 2018

EXHIBITED
Tarnanthi, Art Gallery of South
Australia, Adelaide, 13 October
2017 – 28 January 2018
Vivien Anderson, Melbourne Art Fair
2018, Melbourne, 1–5 August 2018

AUD 55,000
USD 35,200

Patju was born in the bush at Itaratjara in the Great Victoria Desert in the 1940s. Like others of his generation, he and his family lived a nomadic existence, travelling the Country before the lure of the mission and its promise of food drew people from the desert. But it was not just the temptation of ample food that brought Patju, at the time a young boy, and his family into Warburton Mission and, later, led them to walk 800 kilometres further east to Ernabella. By the late 1950s, the desert was no longer safe as the British Government began detonating large-scale nuclear weapons near where Patju was born. Because of this, Patju was not allowed back to his Country for many years.

Patju Presley paints with the spiritual confidence of someone who knows their place in the Creation, often singing the associated songs of particular sites while rhythmically placing his

myriad dots to form his striking compositions. His paintings depict several of these sites, such as his birth site of Itaratjara, and Wikaru, both situated east of traditional Spinifex Country and holding the Wati Nyulu Tjukurpa (Golden Bandicoot Creation Line) and Tulu, which contains Minyma Ngiyari Tjukurpa (Thorny Devil Women Creation Line). Patju says, ‘This is a good country, lots of stories here, close up to Watarru.’ These narratives, these characters that drive Patju in his compositions, express his intricate knowledge of the vast landscape and the mapped moral environment it contains.

SOURCES

Drawn from Spinifex Arts Project certificate
John Carty and Luke Scholes (eds.), *Sun & Shadow: Art of the Spinifex People*, Upswell Publishing, Perth, 2023.



MICK WIKILYIRI

born c. 1940
Pitjantjatjara language

Ngayuku Ngura 2015
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 101 cm (48 × 39.8 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at
Amata, South Australia
Tjala Arts, South Australia,
cat. no. 37-15
Outstation Gallery, Darwin,
Northern Territory
Private Collection, Darwin,
acquired from the above in 2015

EXHIBITED

*Tjukurpa, Ngura, Waltja – Culture,
Country, Family*, Outstation Gallery
in collaboration with Tjala Arts,
Darwin, 18 April – 12 May 2015

AUD 14,000
USD 9,000

In Wikilyiri's language, Pitjantjatjara, 'Ngayuku Ngura' loosely translates as 'My Country'. When adopting titles like this, artists like Wikilyiri may or may not be attempting to represent a specific place; more likely they have created an artwork in response to their memories and experience of time spent living in or visiting the bush.

Born at Rocket Bore in South Australia, Wikilyiri spent his formative years living in the Country around where the Amata community is now established. Later he worked as a 'ringer', or stockman, at various cattle stations in the region, including Curtin Springs Station, north of Amata, and around Alice Springs and Timber Creek. He began painting as a senior Elder at Amata, where he is recognised as a Traditional Owner. Wikilyiri was married to Kunmanara (Paniny) Mick. Together they had nine children,

including the five Ken Sisters – Yaritji Young, Maringka Tunkin, Freda Brady, Sandra Ken and Tjungkara Ken.

This asymmetrical composition is an example of Wikilyiri's tendency not to fill the entire available space. The blue 'void' on the right-hand side of the painting provides the viewer with room to consider an endless continuum of possibility. The lively palette combines desert hues alongside deep blues and purples, all colours present in the landscape of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY) of South Australia. The winding, sinuous lines may suggest a creek, hairstring, plant or snake. Gestural roundels suggest water sources, knowledge of which is revered and is vital for survival in times past and present.

LUKE SCHOLES



PEPAI JANGALA CARROLL

c. 1950 – 2021
Pitjantjatjara language

Walungurru 2016
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 182 cm (48 × 71.6 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at
Pukatja, South Australia
Ernabella Arts, South
Australia, cat. no. 304-16
Aboriginal Signature: Estrangin
Gallery, Brussels
Private Collection, New York,
acquired from the above in 2017

EXHIBITED

*Pepai Jangala Carroll: Theatre
of Memory*, Aboriginal Signature:
Estrangin Gallery, Brussels,
11 May – 3 June 2017

AUD 80,000
USD 51,200

The primary inspiration for Pepai Jangala Carroll’s painting practice was his journey into the far reaches of the Western Desert in April 2017. For Pepai, it was a return to the Country of his grandmother and father, a tract of desert he had not visited since childhood. Like many Pintupi people of his generation, Pepai was born at the former ration station of Haasts Bluff. Pepai’s father, a Pintupi man, Henry Paripata Tjampitjinpa, and his Pitjantjatjara mother, Nancy (Anpulyura) Napangati, spent time living in Haasts Bluff before moving briefly to Areyonga and then Papunya.

For a time, Paripata was a dingo scalper and travelled long distances collecting their pelts, which he sold to support his growing family. On one such trip in the 1950s, Pepai accompanied his father to visit Paripata’s birthplace at Ininti. A few years after this trip came the unexpected death of his mother, which resulted in Pepai and his siblings being sent a long distance south to live with relatives at Ernabella (Pukatja). Paripata remained in Papunya but tragically passed away a short time later. A devastated Pepai remained at Ernabella and when old enough began work as a carpenter on a nearby sheep station. He married

Alison Milyika Carroll and together they raised five children.

Pepai worked in a variety of jobs before a twenty-year career serving as the Ernabella community constable, retiring from this role in 2007. Retirement did not sit well, so, soon after, Pepai took to painting and then ceramics, not surprisingly relying on Paripata’s Country as his immediate source of inspiration. Pepai quickly established himself as a stalwart at Ernabella Arts. As his artistic practice flourished so too did a desire to revisit the Country he had experienced so fleetingly as a child.

With the support of family and friends, Pepai devised a plan to travel to the Country far west of Haasts Bluff from which fate had taken him away. Pepai was also determined to connect with senior Pintupi men, who he hoped could bridge the personal, social and cultural gap that had persisted since his last visit. As an elderly man enmeshed in a patriarchal society that values knowledge of Country above almost all else, Pepai’s journey into the relative unknown was profoundly brave. It takes a rare human to knowingly position oneself to be so vulnerable



PEPAI JANGALA CARROLL

c. 1950 – 2021
Pitjantjatjara language

Yumari 2019
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122 × 183 cm (48 × 72 inches)

PROVENANCE

The Artist, painted at
Pukatja, South Australia
Ernabella Arts, South
Australia, cat. no. 550-19
Aboriginal Signature, Estrangin
Gallery, Brussels
Private Collection, United States,
acquired from the above in 2019

EXHIBITED

Performing Country, Kluge-Ruhe
Aboriginal Art Collection, University
of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA,
16 March 2023 – 25 February 2024.

AUD 90,000
USD 57,600

among their peers, but such was the measure of this unassuming man.

Pepai’s actions were immediately justified by the warm reception he received from the senior men, who welcomed him at Walungurru (Kintore), 500 kilometres west of Alice Springs. Many were inspired by his impassioned quest for knowledge and were in awe of the effort it had taken for him to journey so far. Pepai sat solemnly, listening with intent, absorbing the details of the impressive lineage of Tjampitjinpas and Tjangalas who spoke for this Country before and after the establishment of settlements and missions. *Walungurru* 2016, created a year before Pepai’s epic journey, was based upon his memories of this region when he visited as a child. The patchwork of shifting colours suggests the variable topography, its sandhills, grassy plains and monumental rock formations.

At the insistence of many he had spoken to on this journey, Pepai was encouraged to visit other related sites, most notably the rockhole site of Yumari.

I went to that place Kiwirrkurra and I was returning and we came half way to see my

father’s Country, to see my father’s and grandmother’s Country and the big rock hole, it’s really long. I was looking at it and after seeing it I thought, ‘Well, I might paint this one.’ The name of the place is Yumari. That place Yumari. I’m painting that one now.’

The large X-like icon in *Yumari* 2019 depicts the shape of the deep rockhole at this site. Pepai clearly being a man of innate sensitivity to landscape, his striking depiction, perhaps knowingly, or unknowingly, bears designs like those used by senior Pintupi men before him to identify Yumari.

The subsequent body of work inspired by this journey established Pepai Jangala Carroll’s reputation as an illuminating painter and maverick ceramist. His untimely death in 2021 occurred just as his work began to be included in major exhibitions in Australia and internationally.

LUKE SCHOLES

1. Belinda Briggs, Alison Milyika Carroll and Luke Scholes, *Pepai Jangala Carroll : Ngaylu Nyanganyi Ngura Winki : I can see all those places*, Jam Factory/Wakefield Press, Mile End, South Australia, 2021 p. 52.





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Established in 2016, D’Lan Contemporary presents exceptional modern and contemporary art by leading and emerging First Nations artists at its galleries in Melbourne, Sydney and New York alongside an international program of exhibitions, educational talks and events that celebrate and promote the rich art and culture of Australian First Nations peoples.

ETHICS

D’Lan Contemporary maintains strict ethical practices and is committed to creating a sustainable marketplace for this important segment of Australian art and culture. The gallery contributes 30% of its annual net profits to artists, artist projects and their 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 First Nations art is:

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN FIRST NATIONS ART (1980–PRESENT)

All contemporary Australian First Nations 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 AUSTRALIAN FIRST NATIONS 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 Scougall – 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.

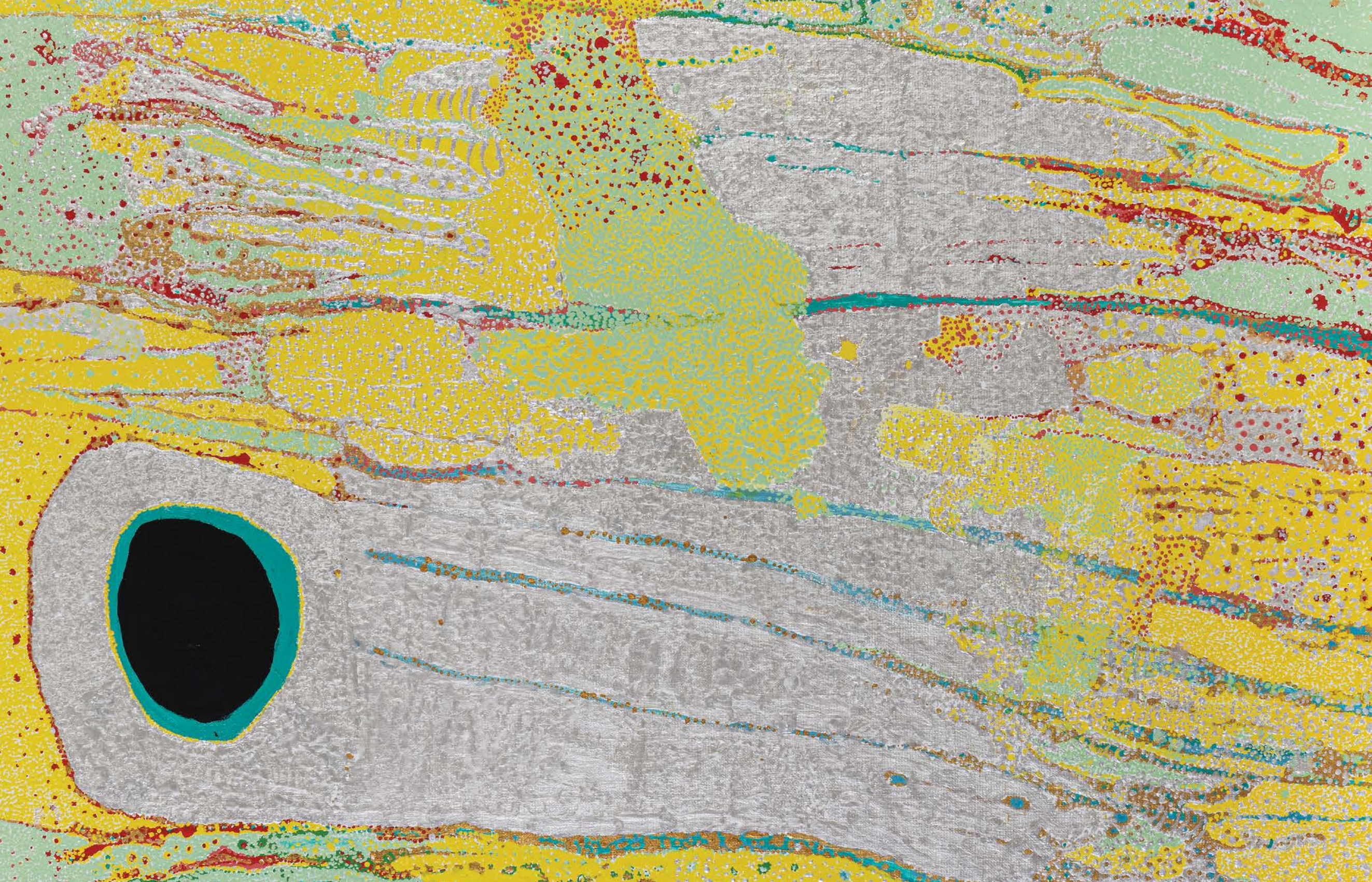
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