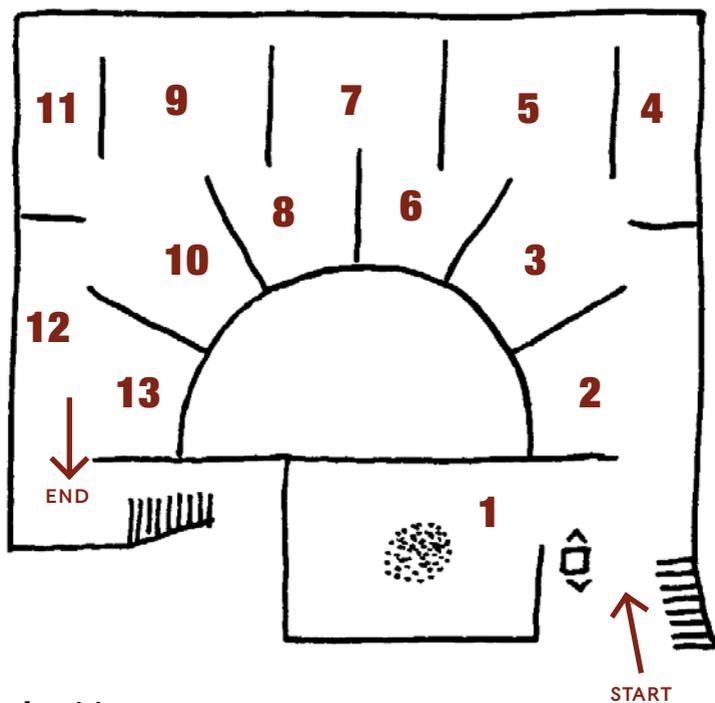


Aboriginalities



#expoaboriginalities
@FineArtsBelgium
fine-arts-museum.be

Visitor's
guide



Note to the visitor

In this short guide, each entry from page 10 onwards refers to one or more works in the exhibition. A coloured dot will enable you to locate the work/s on the map of the exhibition rooms.

The "intersection bubbles" that were created with some works from our modern art collections are indicated in small insets. The small symbol ♦ in the text indicates the locations identifiable on the map of Australia on pages 22-23.

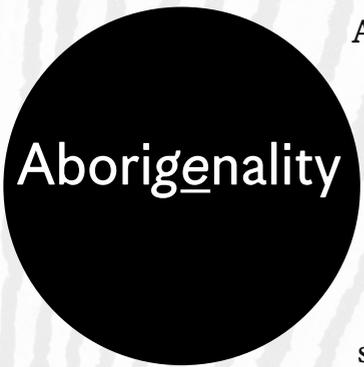
Aboriginalities

immerses you into the fascinating universe of Aboriginal painting – an art form that is both ancestral and contemporary, always rooted in spirituality. Far more than simply a physical and sensory experience, Aboriginal art invites us to rethink our connection to the earth and the universe.

As a window on the spiritual, Aboriginal art tells the story of the creation of the world – called “Dreamtime” – and the original link between humans and the earth. The numerous motifs (dotted lines, spirals, zigzags, crosshatching...) are passed down from generation to generation by members of the same community, concealing centuries-old secrets as well as a map of their territory.

This ancestral, highly ritualized and symbolic art form was originally concealed: drawn in the sand or applied on rocks at sites forbidden to laymen. But in the early 1970s, amidst struggles for recognition of Aboriginal identity, the Papunya Tula community translated their cultural practices and symbolic knowledge through painting. Using non-traditional methods (acrylics, brushes, cardboard and later canvas), the indigenous people of Australia found a modern form to express their political, social and economic struggles.

Vibrant and colourful, the exhibition *Aboriginalities* is built around part of the private collection of Marie Philippon, who has been passionate about Aboriginal culture and art for over 20 years. The exhibition presents over 150 paintings and objects, reflecting the extraordinary formal inventiveness of Aboriginal artists. In “intersection bubbles”, a dozen works from the RMFAB’s modern art collection echo the subjects addressed by these “Dreamtime” artists, questioning our relationship to the visible and the invisible.



Aboriginality

Aboriginality was claimed from the 1950s by the indigenous people of the Australian continent. This term encompasses all the political, social, and economic struggles undertaken to assert the basis of their cultural identity: languages, social practices, visions of the world inscribed in the “Dreamtime”, artistic creations, relationship to nature, the initiatory transmission of ancestral knowledge, rituals and ceremonies... The outcome was the recognition of the claims to the “land rights” which marked the advent of an aboriginal nation.

However, Aboriginality can pose a threat if it is understood as a form of essentialism that would only address the purity of the aboriginal condition. Anthropologist Clifford James demonstrated that cultures subjected to exposure to Westerners cannot trace back to an Edenic or idealised past. To be effective, aboriginality must integrate this inclusion in history that results in a form of cultural hybridity through a space for dialogue, exchange, and of becoming motivated by a desire for shared construction that would integrate an awareness of “modernity”.

By compressing the terms “aborigine” and “originality” and removing them from the Australian context, the debate falls within a contemporary, global, and artistic framework.

Aboriginality is not an updated form of primitivism. Instead, the term designates an aspiration to situate the future in an alternative trajectory to that of modernity: a return to Mother Earth in a certain form of sacralisation of nature threatened by destruction, a desire to go back in time to recapture a fantasy of harmony, a need to recreate an intimacy with the world by breaking away from the dogmas of free trade and capitalism, a desire to be liberated from the dictatorship of finance and economics to rediscover a knowledge that is lost for lack of initiated people...



Aboriginality

6. At one time, Australia was considered to be nobody's land. From the onset of colonisation during the late 18th century, the British Crown referred to Australia as *Terra nullius*, a concept that meant that the Australian continent had not been inhabited by humans. The land was not up for conquest as it belonged to no one. This view – contingent on the island's low population density – became the ultimate denial of the human status of indigenous Australians. Without status, they were in no position to claim ownership of a territory or property – even collectively – of the land.



5. Contemporary Aboriginal painting originated in the central and western desert. In other words, near the former religious missions created in the 1930s and inside the reserves where the Australian authorities had placed the nomadic tribes that they wanted to assimilate through forced settlement: Haasts Bluff ♦ (1941) Yuendumu ♦ and Lajamanu (1955), and Papunya Tula ♦ (1960).

A few pointers to Aboriginal art

1. The term **Aboriginal art** is used to describe both the art of the pre-colonial Aborigines of Australia and that of contemporary Aboriginal artists influenced by their traditional culture. It ranges from painting, woodcarving, and sculpture to ceremonial costumes and the ornamentation of tools and weapons. It is also indissoluble from the chants, dances, and mimes practised in a ritual context. For them, what we call “art” is essentially spirituality.

2. Aboriginal art is always connected to a territory.

It serves to actualise the creative ancestral spirit of the location in terms of topography and to reactivate this creative energy. Aboriginal creativity is also called into play during historically troubling events (see pp. 25, 40). The ancestral spirits can then convey new rituals, songs, dances, and paintings to the living through dreams. These new forms of artistic expression then become part of the immense repository of inspiration that constitutes the "Dreamtime."

3. The Aboriginals believe that the world was created by the "Ancestors."

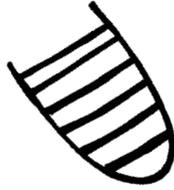
These Ancestors are spiritual and mythical beings predated human existence which they helped to form, just like nature, in the course of their peregrinations. These Ancestors can take any shape – human, animal, plant, or mineral – and can easily change their form. They are the source of all spiritual energy and are responsible for maintaining the order of the world through rituals and ceremonies. They therefore wield influence over the world. Moreover, the involvement of the spirits in the creation of individuals maintains a permanent bond between the present and the "Dreamtime."



4. Aboriginal painting seeks to reproduce the "Dreamtime", the mythical moment when the Ancestors created the world. While stories vary and evolve across the many different clans and language groups, they share a common central structure: the time of creation by the Ancestors. These tales will form the bedrock of the rites and beliefs that will be transmitted through specific initiations for both men and women. The term "Dreamtime" is the translation (by the ethnologist Karel Kupka) of the concept bearing the same name, which is itself a transposition by anthropologists Spencer and Gillen of the term "Altyerrenge", used among the Arrernte people to define the origins of the universe.

12. Private property is an alien concept to the Aboriginals.

Ownership can only be communal and also concerns the reproduction of ritually designated patterns. Therefore, there is an ambiguity in the fact that cooperatives sell works to institutions or to private individuals. Some aboriginal groups consequently object to the showing of such spiritual or religious works.



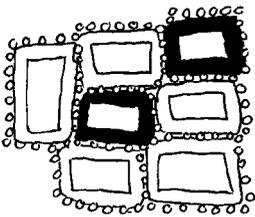
11. The clan is the fundamental building block of Aboriginal society. The clan is composed of a group of 40 to 50 individuals who identify with the same lineage – patrilineal, matrilineal, or related to a common ancestor or spirit, or even a totemic reference figure. The individual is not the norm and lineages can be duplicated according to the anchorage point of the individual in the community. For example, the Murnings living in the northern eastern part of Arnhem Land ♦ (North) use no less than 71 terms to explain their various family relationships! In many areas, land rights are administered by clans.

7. At the time of colonisation, one million Aboriginals spoke over 250 different languages. The spreading of the original populations across the vast Australian continent resulted in a wide variety of languages being spoken. Today, less than 70 languages are passed down to the new generations. Language is a fundamental element of the identity of aboriginals, although it does not play a role in political structuring. None of these languages are written.

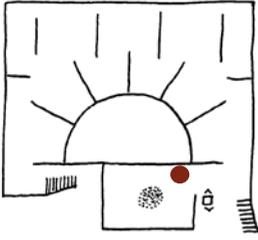


8. The Aboriginal people were only officially recognised as Australian citizens in 1967. Today, the Australian government defines the term "Aboriginal" as a person who fulfils three criteria: "being a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia, identified as an Aboriginal and accepted by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal". For many years, Australian governments pursued a deliberate policy of absorbing Aboriginal people into the lifestyle of the European Australian majority. This policy of assimilation was combined with a determination to marginalise Aboriginal traditions, even to outlaw their practices. In the 1970s, this assimilationist fixation was abandoned in favour of a policy of empowerment of indigenous peoples.

9. Aboriginal land rights were only granted in 1967. The campaign led by the Aboriginal communities to gain recognition of their existence only led to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1967. This Act restored the rights (including land rights) of the communities in the north and centre of the country. However, the relationship with the land continues to be problematic by the fact that the "Dreamtime" makes a sanctuary of the entire territory. Often, archaeological sites are demolished for the sake of economic and industrial interests.



10. The Aboriginal lineage system is one of the most complicated to study in the world. Patrilineal or matrilineal parentage is structured in halves. Each individual belongs to a group divided into four sections and eight subsections. Parentage also engages the spirits of the Ancestors in terms of the emblematic sites of the "Dreamtime". These participate in the creation of the individual by linking him to totemic entities. In this way, the individual emerges not only through his or her genetic descent but also through a network of ritual and symbolic connections that place him or her within a multiplicity of groups.



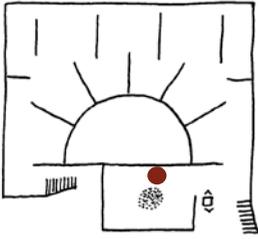
Born in the Central Desert region, Gabriella Possum Nungarrayi is the eldest daughter of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (see p. 18), one of Australia's best-known and most acclaimed Aboriginal artists. Gabriella Possum Nungarrayi is a modern artist who is true to her Aboriginal heritage, which was also championed by her father and grandfather. *Grand Mother Country* depicts the Gold Country bush, her grandmother's homeland in the Northern Territories ♦, where she spent part of her childhood. The eerie landscape consists of a vast sandy expanse studded with waterholes, rocks, forests, scrub such as spinifex and wild flowers. The whole thing is perceived as though the viewpoint were high up in the air and the painting had morphed into the cartography of a dream unfolded in colour and sound.

Sitting women symbolised by the light coloured "U"s are covered in body paint and sing, surrounded by brightly coloured cockatoo feathers. These rituals secure the survival of plants and animal life.

Both the colours and shapes refer to the bush's fertility and abundance of food, bush potatoes, *Nigella* seeds, honey ants, and traditional remedies. The artist portrays a state of symbiosis with the landscape and highlights the social role of women as custodians of the Bush Tucker.

Gabriella Possum
Nungarrayi (°1967)

Grand Mother Country,
2015
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson



Maisie Campbell
Napaltjarri (°1958)

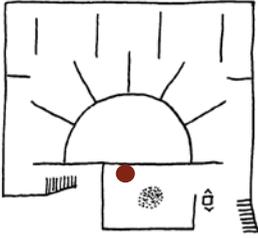
*Kapi Tjukurrpa, Myyma
Immaku*, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson

Maisie Campbell Napaltjarri grew up in Papunya Tula and began painting in the early 1990s. Her patterns refer to the sites associated with women’s ceremonies. *Myyma Immaku* (2011) depicts the “Dream of Water” and its ancestral Pintupi sites, a landscape where the spirit of the poisonous Liru snake and his warrior people lie dormant. The concentric shapes evoke the important places of the ceremonies. Also included are sand hills, rocky outcrops, and freshwater springs, which are vital to the peoples of the Western Desert. It is said that Maisie’s mother drank this water when she was pregnant. The artist’s identity is thus tied to this site, her spiritual birthplace. She refers not only to the physical aspect of the territory – an arid site with intense red rocks, situated in the bottom of a ridge – but also to the conditions of her creation and the chants performed during the ceremonies.

Richard Long (°1945)

Utah Circle, 1989
Stones from Utah (USA)
RMFAB, inv. 11335

As the figurehead of Land Art, Richard Long collects sand-coloured stones with wine-red streaks from the Utah desert. These stones reflect his communion with nature and the landscape, through which he walks slowly and respectfully. *Utah Circle* (1989) demonstrates the vital links – both ancestral and contemporary – that bind man and the earth.

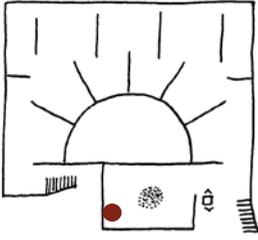


Tjawina Porter Nampitjinpa was born around 1950 on the north side of the Docker River in Western Australia. She is a half-sister of Nyurapayia Nampitjinpa and grew up in the bush with her family before moving to Papunya♦. Later, she moved back to her homeland. Renowned for her skills as a traditional basket weaver and for her paintings, she illustrates the dreams of her father and mother through the sites of Yumari, Punkilpirri, Tjukurla, and Tjalili, locations that are central for their springs and food supplies, and celebrated during important ceremonies.

Tjalili evokes the activities associated with the site of Punkilpirri, one of the many waterholes near Tjawina's place of origin on the edge of the Northern Territory♦. The symbols also refer to bush foods, such as bush tomatoes, which are prepared during rituals. There is also a digging stick painted in dark ochre that is used to find food. These intricately adorned sticks play a central role in rituals where they are used as clapping sticks.

Tjawina Porter
Nampitjinpa (c. 1950)

Tjalili, 2009
RMFAB, gift of the
Gallery Yanda Aboriginal
Art, Alice Springs
(Australia), 2020,
inv. 12599

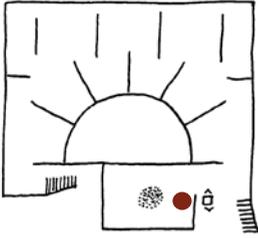


Sally Gabori, whose tribal name is Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda (i.e. the dolphin born in Mirdidingkingathi), is from Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria♦, north-east of Darwin♦. Born in 1924 and deceased in 2015, she was a member of the Kaiadilt ethnic group and enjoyed a traditional lifestyle far away from the Western sphere of influence. The traditional community lived from fishing and foraging but was displaced by missionaries to Mornington Island in the 1940s. Sally Gabori was too old to receive an education and never learned to read or write.

In the piece *Big Crocodile*, which she painted at the age of 81, she demonstrates non-figurative gestural energy. In reality, she represents essential elements of traditional landscapes, land or sea, inhabited by figures from the “Dreamtime”, such as this marine Crocodile Ancestor. This ancestral subject matter is echoed by a sense of colour and execution reflecting a feminine sensibility that associates her with the creations of Minnie Pwerle or Emily Kame. The internationally acclaimed work of Sally Gabori is proof of evolution in Aboriginal art which, without severing its ancestral roots, finds new forms of expression.

Sally Gabori
(1924-2015)

Big crocodile, 2005
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson



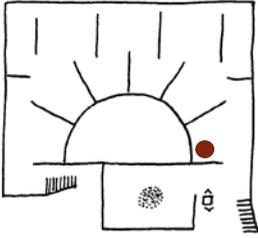
Belonging to a family of established artists, **Josie Kunothe Petyarre** was born in 1959 in Alhakere county in a community in Central Australia's Utopia region. Like many other Aboriginal women, she started painting on canvas in 1989, after having worked with batik on silk for many years.

As part of the *Utopia: A Picture Story* project, she produced 88 pieces that were subsequently purchased by the Holmes à Court Collection in Perth♦, Australia's fourth most populous city. In 2005, she also began carving wood with her husband. These sculptures represent animals and characters typically used in rituals. They are vividly polychromatic and dynamically executed.

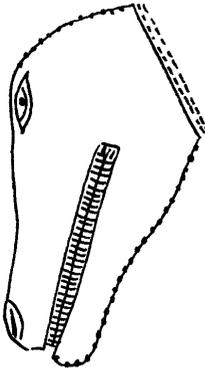
The *Sugar Bag* series is a reference to the production of honey by the bush bees, which is gathered from the trees or from the crevices of rock shelters into baskets made by the women of the community. In these designs, she plays with formal traditions, no longer limiting herself to the legendary cycles of the "Dreamtime", and broadening her themes to focus on everyday life and the present. Decorative spirit, the harmony of structures, balanced palette. She offers a certain sensibility to an extremely codified art that arose at the end of the Papunya Tula♦ adventure.

Josie Kunothe Petyarre
(°1959)

Sugar Bag, 2015
Acrylic on linen
Collection Philippson



Painting on eucalyptus bark is an ancient figurative practice, mostly produced in the Northern Territories♦, which were the last to be colonised. Made with natural pigments dominated by ochre, these paintings are all part of the “Dreamtime” and have enjoyed an increasingly wide recognition.

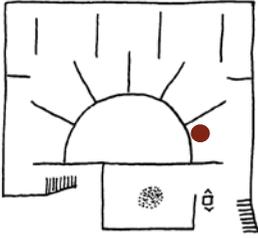


Born in 1969, Timothy Wulanjbirr belongs to a family of renowned artists and follows this tradition. Like others, he excels in the practice of rarrk: a polychromatic cross-hatching process in which the presence of the Ancestor and the brilliance of the tropical climate are revealed. This refined linear treatment also enhances the abstraction of this work. His *Rainbow Serpent*, an archetypal figure at the heart of “Dreamtime”, protects water, the most precious source of life. The combination of conceptual intensity and aesthetic sense revives the tradition of the Dangkorlo clan of Arnhem Land♦.

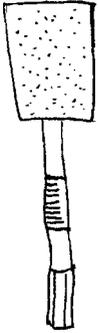
Timothy Wulanjbirr
(°1969)

*Ngalyod the Rainbow
Snake*, 2001

Natural pigments on
eucalyptus bark
Collection Philipppson



Timothy Cook Marntupuni was born in 1958 on Melville Island♦. He is a prominent artist of the Tiwi Islands, north of Arnhem Land♦, and has become renowned as a painter and sculptor with his lorrkkons hollow log coffins.



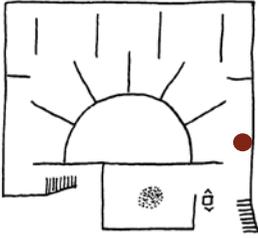
Traditionally, the bones of the deceased were laid in a hollow wood pole decorated with the clan's paintings several months after the funeral. At the end of a ritual including songs and dances, the pole was planted in the ground. There, the corpse slowly decomposed over the years according to the rhythm of nature. Cook has imposed himself as one of the most radical and contemporary interpreters of these ancient practices archived by museums.

Timothy Cook Marntupuni
(°1958)

*Untitled (Tutini and
Tunga)*, 2007
Natural pigments on
ironwood
Collection Philippon

André Willequet
(1921-1998)
Colonne d'amour, [1972]
Polychromed lime wood
RMFAB, inv. 9581

With his awareness of the vulnerability of wood, André Willequet celebrates life in this polychromed lime wood *Colonne d'amour* (1972). The verticality of the tree guides the form. It provides it with both majesty and elegance, conferring sensuality and eroticism.



Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula paints naturalistic totemic landscapes reminiscent of Western design and uses the dotted line as an analogy for desert vegetation. *Dingo Camp at Tinki* revives the memory of the transhumance through the western desert. In 1923, in an effort to protect the cattle, the government issued the *Dingo Destruction Ordinance*, whereby it agreed to pay for the scalps of slaughtered dingoes. This was one of the few sources of income for Aboriginal hunters.

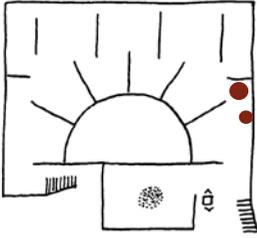


Like other Pintupi, the artist stalks and explores traditional abandoned sites: sand dunes, vast salt lakes, wooded plains, caves, rocky outcrops and crevices that retain the freshwater sought by the dingoes to make their lairs. Songline relates the story of the Dingo Ancestor. Here, an adult brings back meat to his den, where his puppies are waiting to eat, and whose footprints can be seen. The den is marked by concentric circles devoid of decoration. This piece reflects a dream linked to the Dinky site.

Johnny Warangkula
Tjupurrula
(c. 1918-2001)

Dingo Camp at Tinki,
1973

Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson



One of the most important figures of the first generation of artists working in Papunya Tula♦, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (c. 1932-2002) started painting in the 1960s. He was the first Aboriginal artist to win the Alice Prize. Clifford believed that promoting the invisibility of Aboriginal culture involved appropriating the codes of the “other” to make it understandable to the dominant culture. For Clifford, the recognition of the art market constitutes an expression of consideration of the Aboriginal identity in a compromise between what is shown and what is kept hidden.

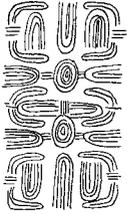


Untitled (Honey Ant Dreaming) depicts the symbolic patterns traced on the ground during a ritual associated with the “Honey Ant Dreaming” on Mount Allan. As the Honey Ant is being born, a group of Ancestors set up camp. The concentric circles in the centre signify the water well that established the destination of the place. Men (the “U” lying down) holding digging sticks are placing before them the decorated eucalyptus boards that tell the story of the insect. Footprints show the search for its nest. The wavy lines represent the woven hair belts worn by the young women as they prepare for the ceremonial dance. This is a reminder of the close relationship between man and the animal, which assures his survival by feeding 18

Clifford Possum
Tjapaltjarri
(1932-2002)

*Untitled (Honey Ant
Dreaming)*, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon

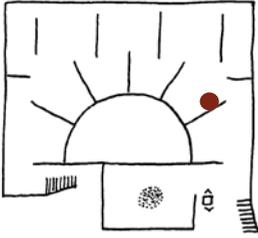
him. This link is continuously reinforced by ceremonies that maintain the natural cycle and the abundance of food.



Louie Cowboy Pwerle
(1941-2015)

Ngookwala Cave, 1992
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson

Born around 1941 into an Anmatyerre family, **Louie Cowboy Pwerle** became a prominent member of the Utopia♦ community where he administered the law and oversaw the reserves. A skilled horseman and leader, he also gained rapid recognition for his paintings whose fine detail and execution impressed the critics when he first exhibited in 1990. The artist died of a heart attack while performing a vigorous dance during a nightly ritual.



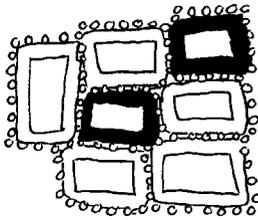
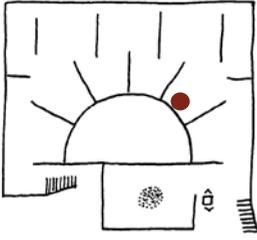
Born around 1951, David Miller is a Pitjantjatjara man who lives in the remote community settlement of Kanpi in the Western Desert♦. Throughout his childhood and youth, he made long journeys on foot across Western Australia and the Northern Territory, where he attended ritual ceremonies and dingo exchanges to procure tea and flour. He eventually returned to his native West to learn about traditional rituals and to take part in community-building initiatives.



In 2005, he discovered painting during a training programme offered to people living in Pitjantjatjara communities. In 2008, he made it his main activity. In the artist's own words, *Perenties Track* represents the area where his father was born, somewhere on the track near Perentie Waltjitjara, when his community was deported to a camp.

David Miller (°1951)

Perenties Track, 2012
Acrylic on linen
Collection Philippson



Thomas was born in 1964 and Walala in 1972. Until the age of twenty, the Tjapaltjarri brothers lived with their family in the Wilkinkarra region without ever coming into contact with Westerners. They moved from one waterhole to another, living naked and carrying spears and boomerangs. The “Pintupi Nine” roamed the Gibson Desert ♦, replicating the existence of the hunter-gatherers of 50,000 years ago. In 1984, they were relocated to Kiwirrkurra ♦, on the traditional territory of the Pintupi, which was returned under the *Right to Land Act*. There, they were reunited with several family members from whom they had been separated for sometimes more than two decades. Both brothers attended school and were part of a revival of Aboriginal spirituality. The latter is now closely linked to the ongoing expansion of painting in accordance with the canons initiated in Papunya Tula ♦ 15 years earlier.

Thomas Tjapaltjarri
(°1964)

Tingari, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson

Walala Tjapaltjarri
(°1972)

Tingari, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson

In 1987, the Tjapaltjarri brothers learned painting and represented Tingari “Dreams” that occurred on a path linking sacred sites. Through these mythical stories shared by the tribes living in the desert, a profound initiatory knowledge unfolds.

According to the tradition, the Tingari Ancestors were a people of men, women, and teenagers who undertook endless journeys

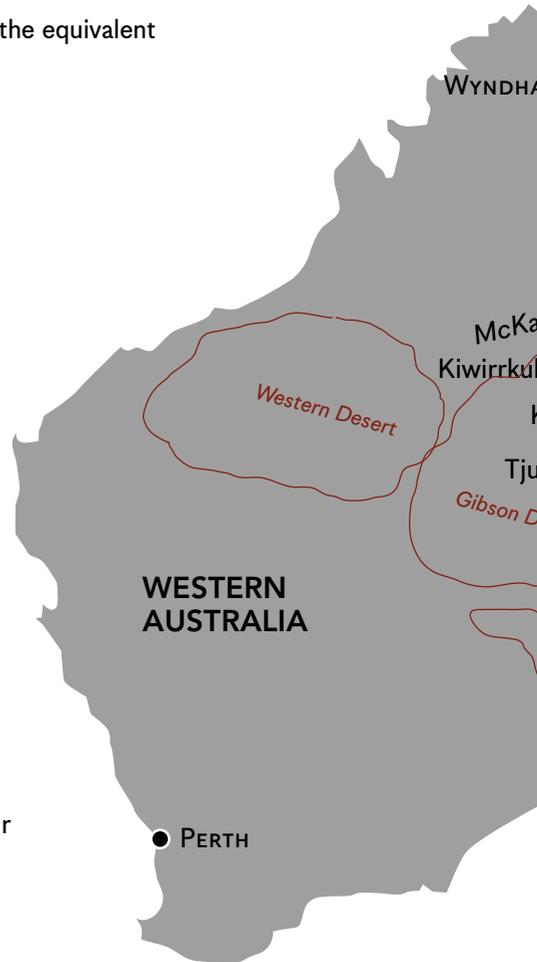
The map opposite includes the main sites ♦ mentioned in the texts, along with Australia's major cities and deserts. It highlights the long distances covered by the Aboriginal artists and their ethnic groups.

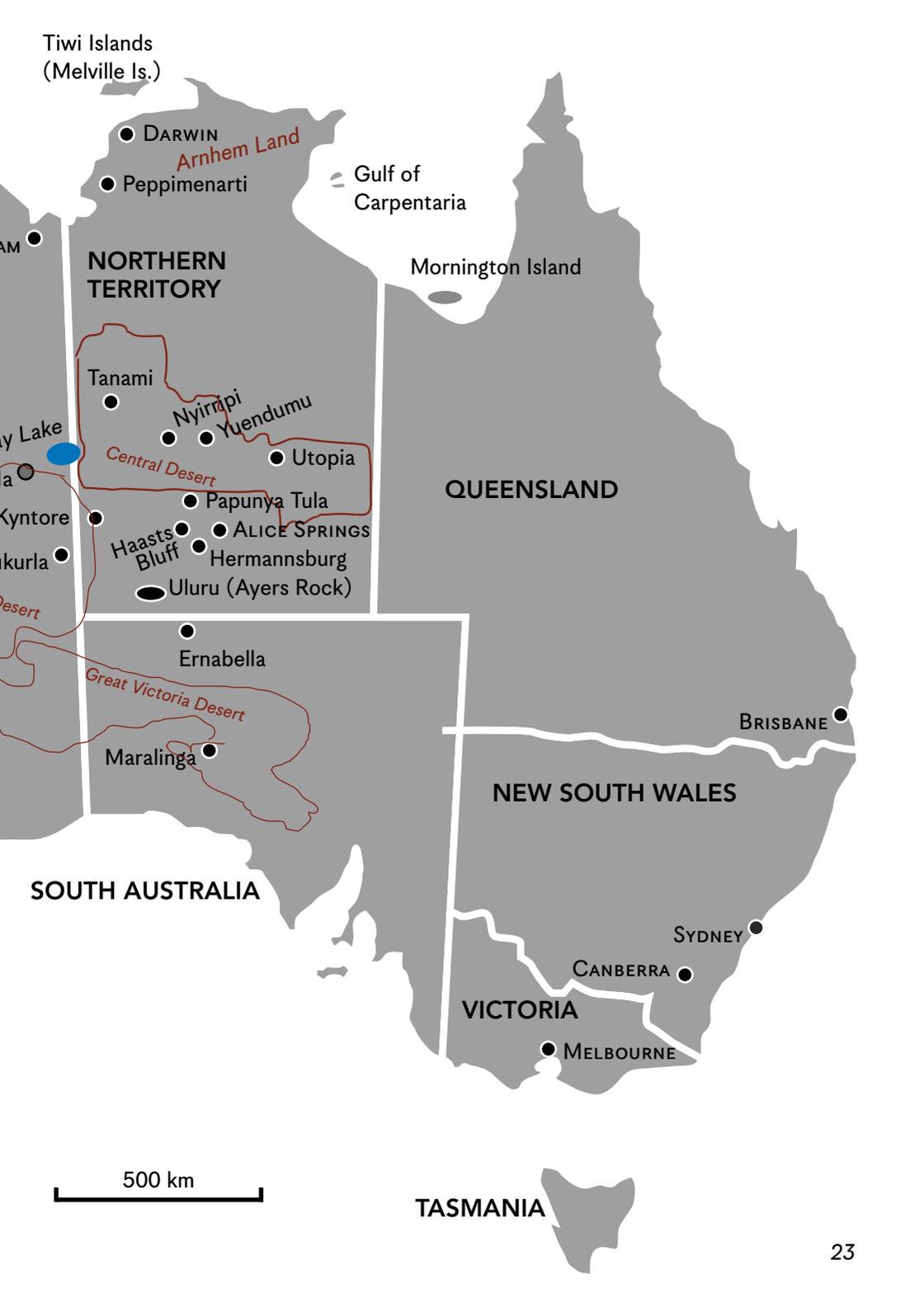
By comparison, the surface area of Belgium is the equivalent of half of Tasmania, on the bottom right.

Having drifted away some 50 million years ago, Australia is an island of 7.5 million square kilometres (almost as big as the United States and more than 250 times the size of Belgium!)

The fact that it was separated from the rest of the world thousands of years ago has turned it into an appalled, gigantic reservoir of natural species, both plants, and animals. Its diverse landscapes and climates are split into one-third desert, one-third savannah, and one-third forest. Only 5% of the territory is above 700 metres in altitude. It is the "flattest" of all continents, culminating at 2236 metres in New South Wales.

As colonisation progressed, the recent introduction of animals from other parts of the world (dingoes, rabbits, buffaloes, camels, etc.) led to numerous environmental imbalances.





Tiwi Islands
(Melville Is.)

DARWIN

Arnhem Land

Peppimenarti

Gulf of
Carpentaria

NORTHERN
TERRITORY

Mornington Island

Tanami

Nyirripi

Yuendumu

Utopia

Central Desert

Papunya Tula

ALICE SPRINGS

Haasts
Bluff

Hermannsburg

Uluru (Ayers Rock)

QUEENSLAND

Ernabella

Great Victoria Desert

Maralinga

BRISBANE

NEW SOUTH WALES

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY

CANBERRA

VICTORIA

MELBOURNE

500 km

TASMANIA

from the sea to the desert heart of the Australian continent, across the salt marshes of central Australia, as depicted in this tightly woven mesh.

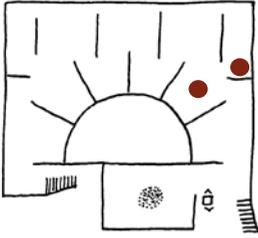
The symbols that **Thomas** uses are borrowed from the traditional repertoire of body paintings, rock carvings, shields, thrusters, and boomerangs. Here, representation is closely linked to the motif of the *Tali Tjuta* – large sand dunes – from the Marruwa region, west of Lake McKay.

Walala provides a more contemporary, abstract interpretation. In the centre of this weaving, the tortuous paths walked by the Ancestors as they created the first rites and laid the foundations of life in society emerge. Anthropologists consider the Tingari epic as the ultimate poetic memory of the last migration from Asia, which took place some 6,000 years ago.

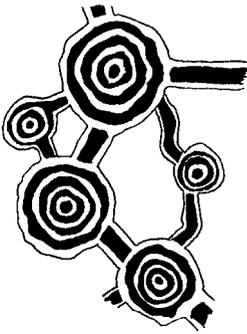
Jean Dubuffet
(1901-1985)

The Destroyed Castle, 1952
Oil on canvas
RMFAB, acquired in 1954,
inv. 6713

The Destroyed Castle (1952), unusually and mysteriously suggests a landscape whose inner structure appears drawn from the crust of the earth. The deep red heart of this “texturology” exposes its layers, signs, and traces. The inside and the outside fuse together until they absorb us.



Two pieces by Jonathan Kumintjarra Brown (1960-1997) evoke the topographical basis of Aboriginal painting. Presented on a plinth, *Broad Shield Design* (1996) takes the painting back to its ritual origins: a symbolic line drawn on the ground with the end of a stick and destined to be erased after the ceremony is over. The painting has no specific direction, one turns around it. The repeated concentric circles typical of Pitjantjatjara decorations are recognisable. When reproduced on shields, these circles become protective symbols.

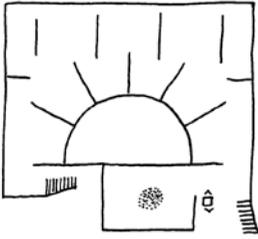


Jonathan Kumintjarra
Brown (1960-1997)

Broad Shield Design,
1995
Ochre on linen
Collection Philippon

Maralinga – Dead Emus,
1992
Pigments, emu feathers
on panel
Collection Philippon

Maralinga – Dead Emus (1992) evokes the tragic conditions of aboriginality in the aftermath of the Second World War. The painter was born in 1960 and was separated from his mother to be placed in foster homes in the city. As an adult, he was able to track down his family and community of origin, which he rallied in the early 1980s. He then found out that his home region, Maralinga ♦, had been the site for nuclear tests conducted by the British army between 1953 and 1967. Through the theme of the Emu Ancestor – whose death is represented here by the inclusion of feathers in the charred earth – his work reflects the devastation of nature. The concentric circles contrast with the lines around the dotted areas of the ancestral ritual with this matter painting centre, glazed by a heat that is a thousand times greater than that of the sun.



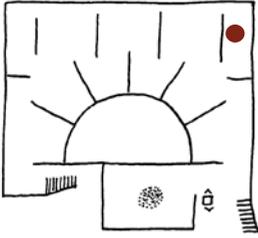
Charlie Tawara Tjungurrayi (ca. 1921-1999) was amongst the first in his community to emigrate to the East in the 1930s. He joined a Christian mission and worked as a builder on army construction sites where he met westerners for the first time.



He started painting at Geoffrey Bardon's invitation and named the settlement Papunya Tula♦, which means "a meeting place for all brothers and cousins." Economically, he believed that marketing ethnic artefacts could help improve the community's financial situation. With his unique energy and fluent English, he imposed himself as the spokesperson for Aboriginal painters. His openness established him as an intercessor between two cultures that ignored one another while his technical skills allowed him to address the paradox of combining an artistic practice perceived as new with a tradition dating back thousands of years. The controversy over separating what is representable from what is forbidden offered Charlie Tawara an excellent platform for displaying his sense of compromise.

Charlie Tawara
Tjungurrayi
(c. 1921-1999)

Untitled (Emu Dreaming),
1975
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippson

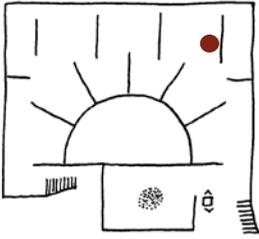


Judy Watson Napangardi (c. 1925-2016) is a member of the Warlpiri ethnic group. Although she was a small and fragile-looking girl, she immediately revealed a prodigiously strong character. Thus, she travelled through her family's territories on several occasions, visiting the sites of Mina Mina or Yingipurlangu, between the Gibson♦ and Tanami♦ Deserts. In this harsh environment, she learned the traditional knowledge reflected in her paintings. However, it was not until 1986 that she started painting for the benefit of the Artists Cooperative of Yuendumu.

She has retained the Warlpiri's rich palette of bright colours. As with the works produced by the Napangardi clan, her paintings refer to the stories of the Mina Mina site, of which the women are the custodians, and their ceremonies that perpetuate its memory. Her work is instantly recognisable with its distinctive backgrounds of large curved arabesques in shimmering colours. The representation provides a synthesis of the spirit of the Mina Mina sacred site: vegetation, water, topography and history all combine harmoniously.

Judy Watson Napangardi
(c. 1925-2016)

Mina Mina
Acrylic on linen
Collection Philippson



Bill Whiskey Tjapaltjarri (ca. 1920-2008) belonged to the Pirupa Akla community west of Uluru♦. As a child, his family was exposed to white culture but continued to pursue a nomadic lifestyle based on hunting. By the time he was 20, Bill was working as a cook at the Haasts Bluff♦ Lutheran Mission while also developing his expertise as a traditional healer.

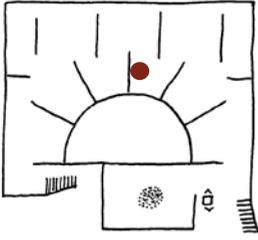


Nicknamed “Whiskey” because of his full beard and black whiskers, he started painting in 2004 at the age of 84! In less than 5 years, his brightly coloured, audacious, and energetic paintings achieved rapid recognition. His works tell the story of the creation of the great sacred sites and often feature the tale of three mythical birds.

The piece *Rockholes and Country near the Olgas* recounts how the Eagle saved the Cockatoo Ancestor from the attacks of the Raven, who was tempted by the large white larvae essential to his survival. The painting depicts the dazzling white rocks; the red and yellow dots represent the flowers that grow on Mount Conner and constitute most of the cockatoo’s food, while the concentric circles represent the bird’s birthplace. Although the Eagle, Cockatoo, and Raven are not actually portrayed, the overall symbolic topography refers to the “Dreamtime.”

Bill Whiskey Tjapaltjarri
(c. 1920-2008)

*Rockholes and Country
near the Olgas*, 2008
Acrylic on linen
Collection Philippson



Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910-1996) was born in Utopia♦ and started her artistic work with batik. In the early 1980s, she switched to painting and developed a personal style that broke away from the rigorous pointillism of Papunya Tula♦. She brings sensuality to Aboriginal cosmogony and claims an autonomous feminine interpretation of the tradition. By using the effects of braiding or the patterns of body decorations worn by women during rituals, she opens new perspectives.

In *Anooralya Yam Awelye*, she depicts the life cycle of a food plant in the Alalgura region near Utopia, showing an aerial view of the growing plant in clusters following the summer rains. The stream restores the Alalgura Basin and the river, as it moves forward, gains increasing speed. This tuber is an essential part of the community's survival. Its seeds bearing flowers are called Kame, from which the artist gets her tribal name identifying with the flower. In the crevices that cut through the earth, the plant reveals its presence, which will become a reality as long as the appropriate ceremonies and rituals are held.

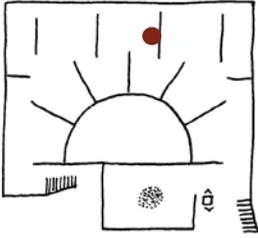
Emily Kame Kngwarreye
(c. 1910-1996)

Anooralya Yam Awelye,
1994
Acrylic on linen
Collection Philippson

Serge Vandercam
(1924-2005)

The Hanged Man, 1962
Oil on canvas
RMFAB, acquired in
1962, inv. 6965

Creating is a vital impulse! In *The Hanged Man* (1962) Serge Vandercam's hand liberates itself and follows the movement to produce a free, energetic, and contrasting abstraction. The colours, lines, and stains convey a poetic imagination.



Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri is a member of the renowned “Pintupi Nines.” Born around 1959, he is from a community that had no contact with western civilisation until 1984, when they were displaced to the locality of Kiwirrkura♦. There he began to paint at the community centre, joining the older Pintupi artists who had lived in Papunya Tula♦ since 1971.

His work meets the standards of Western Desert♦ painting, as elaborated in Papunya Tula: dot work, symbolic formal codes referring to the “Dreamtime”, the initiatory dimension of the representation and the upholding of ancestral traditions.

In 2015, a marked visual evolution is apparent: his latest paintings have only retained a basic outline from traditional practice, which evokes the patterns adorning the shields. The dot has become a line to convey the vital energy in an undulating movement. The traditional motif evokes sand dunes and clay deposits.

Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri particularly focuses on the swampy site of Minatapinya, where the Tingara people set up camp during their mythical wanderings. The area is known for its Water Snake Ancestors. In the artist’s own words, the network of wavy

Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri
(°1950)

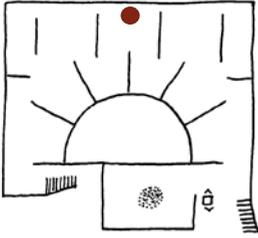
Tingara, 2015
Acrylic on paper
Collection Philippson



lines designates the watery areas around Lake McKay♦.

Sol LeWitt
(1928-2007)
Yellow & Red, Black & Blue, 1972
Coloured India ink, pen on paper
RMFAB, acquired in
1990, inv. 11292

For Sol LeWitt, ideas and concepts take precedence over execution. What is done in the mind cannot be undone. In *Yellow & Red, Black & Blue* (1972), the artist paints primary colours in regular lines. The repetition is intended as a narrative in its own right.



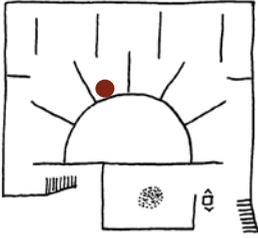
Debbie Brown Napaljarri was born in Nyirripi ♦, a remote Aboriginal community 400 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs ♦ in the Northern Territory ♦. She was raised and educated there for most of her life before spending several years at the Yirrara College boarding school in Alice Springs. When she returned to Nyirripi, she worked in the shop and as a caregiver to the elderly.



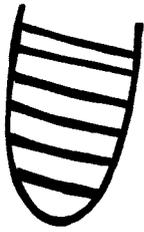
In 2010, Debbie moved with her husband and son Jarvis to Yuendumu, 160 kilometres further east, to be closer to her husband's family. There she works for the Women's Centre, preparing lunches for the schoolchildren. Initiated to painting by her grandparents, she has been involved with an art centre in Yuendumu ♦ since 2006. In the past, Debbie watched her grandparents paint while listening to their stories. In her paintings, she depicts her father's "Dreamtime", which is directly connected to her land, its characteristics, plants, and animals. *Tali Tjuta* represents many of the sandhills walked by her Ancestors.

Debbie Brown Napaltjarri
(°1985)

Tali Tjuta (Many Sand Hills), 2019
Acrylic on linen
RMFAB, donated by the
gallery Yanda Aboriginal
Art, Alice Springs
(Australia), 2020
inv. 12597



Minnie Pwerle was born between 1910 and 1922 on Utopia ♦ land and died in 2006. Since the 1970s, the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre Aboriginal communities have been regaining ownership of their land under the *Land Rights Act*.



Minnie Pwerle drew her inspiration from the symbolic patterns used in the fertility rituals of the land – Bush Melon Seed Dreaming and Bush Melon Dreaming. Painting becomes the setting for the sensations, impressions, visions, and experiences of these ancestral rituals. Yet, revealing this initiatory imagination to the public is not straightforward. Minnie Pwerle did not take the step until 1999, although Utopia’s painters had already been active since 1977.

In her paintings, the artist communicates vitality and energy through colour. Through the assurance of her strokes, she conveys a spontaneous vision of a subjectivity that is uncommon in traditional Aboriginal art. In the entanglement of large iridescent arabesques, the woman relives her “Melon Dreaming.”

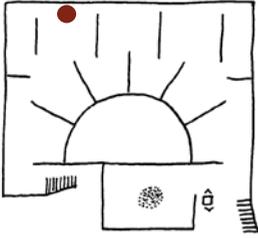
Minnie Pwerle
(c. 1915-2006)

Bush Melon Dreaming
Acrylique sur toile
Collection Philippson

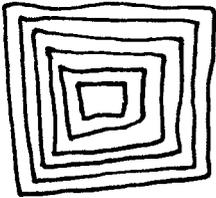
Louis van Lint
(1909-1986)

Autumnal Wildness, 1960
Oil on canvas
RMFAB, acquired in
1961, inv. 6917

Autumnal Wildness (1960) is a dynamic and spontaneous artwork, born from a confrontation with nature. The free interpretation of capricious autumn leaves is apparent in the juxtaposition of patches of ochre, black, grey, and white. Would the blue sky not stand in between them?



Mary Brown Napangardi was born in the Lapi Lapi locality, bordering Western Australia and the Northern Territory, in around 1953. Mary's parents led a traditional life in the Mina Mina area between Nyirripi and Lapi Lapi. In 1957, Mary and her extended family were taken by anthropologist Donald F. Thomson to Mount Doreen, a settlement of 8000 square kilometres.

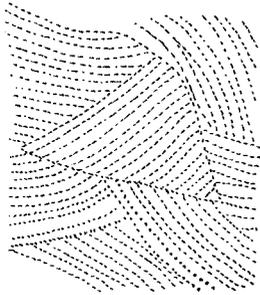
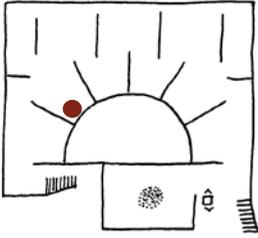


After the creation of the Nyirripi community (160 kilometres west of Yuendumu♦, and on the south-western edge of Mount Doreen resort), the family moved once again. Today Mary divides her time between Kintore and Nyirripi with her husband Ronnie Tjampitjinpa.

As there was no art centre where she lived, Mary started painting sporadically in the early 1990s. In 2005, she started working with the Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation in Yuendumu and produced a more consistent body of work. Her compositions incorporate themes and scenes associated with women's ceremonies and the "Dreamtime", pertaining to the land, its motifs, its flora, and fauna. These sacred legends have been passed down from her father's side for generations. Mary uses traditional iconography and an unlimited palette to create a modern interpretation of her dreams.

Mary Brown Napangardi
(c. 1953)

Women's Ceremony,
2019
Acrylic on linen
RMFAB, donated by the
gallery Yanda Aboriginal
Art, Alice Springs
(Australia), 2020,
inv. 12598



Kathleen Petyarre was born north of Alice Springs ♦ in 1947. She was raised in a region famous for its grasses and lived a nomadic existence with her large family. These migrations act as a school for her: she learns to find her way in the desert, to move around, and to find the food necessary to survive, albeit frugally and with respect for nature. In the course of these journeys, she learns about the traditions linked to the “Dreamtime”. Having settled with her family in Utopia ♦, she played a central role in the Aboriginal Land Rights campaign. Her activism enabled the Anmatyerre people to reclaim their ancestral territories in 1979, thus becoming the sole rightful owners of Utopia.

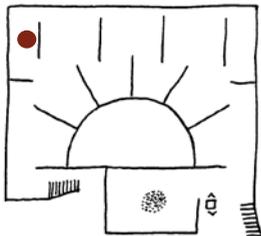
In 1988, she exhibited her first paintings in an exhibition held at Utopia. Her clan has been entrusted with the mission of preserving the legacy of the “Dream of the Lizard” through stories and songs. This small asexual lizard – also called *Moloch horridus* – lives on the ridges of the desert dunes and just like the chameleon, blends in perfectly with its environment.

In her paintings, the lizard is more implied than represented. It reinforces the monumental magnificence of this landscape of “nothingness.” Kathleen Petyarre lends a minimalist density to these mythical cartographies where the lizard provides a symbolic experience of the desert.

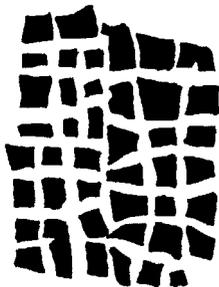
Kathleen Petyarre
(c. 1940-2018)

Devil Mountain Lizard,
2009
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon

Devil Mountain Lizard,
2012
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon



Born in 1972 in Utopia♦, Abie Loy Kemarre was taught to paint by her grandmother Kathleen Petyarre, a renowned Aboriginal painter who is also featured in the exhibition. She took up painting in 1994. Both women regularly travel and work together.



Abie Loy Kemarre
(°1972)

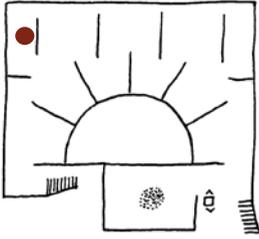
Woman's Body Painting,
2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon

Three essential themes dominate Abie's work: the Bush Leaf Dreaming, the Bush Hen Dreaming, and the Awelye body paint: a black-and-white, edge-to-edge drawing of the patterns traced on bodies during the women's ceremonies held in Utopia. Through the regular but not systematic play of forms, Abie Loy combines weaving and meshing, revealing a feminine fibre nurtured by minimalism.

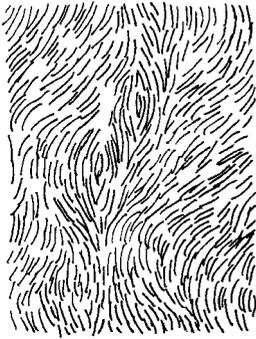
Marc Mendelson
(1915-2013)

Spanish Landscape, 1962
Mixed media and oil on
canvas
RMFAB, acquired in 1962
inv. 6966

Spanish Landscape (1962) bears the traces of Marc Mendelson's travels to Palamos on the Costa Brava, where he discovered the beauty of cracked walls. Not without recalling graffiti or signs on a map, the artist digs furrows and scratches the pictorial medium. Time and space intimately intermingle.



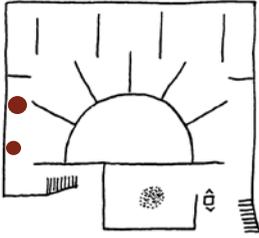
Born around 1940, Gloria Tamerre Petyarre is one of the seven Petyarre sisters who all share the same “Dreaming.” She started painting in 1988, first with Batik and then with acrylic, a technique she has used since the 1970s.



Wild Flowers and Bush Medicine Leaves draws its inspiration from the medicinal plants that flourish in the Central Desert ♦. With the October rains, the typically barren and arid space is blanketed with subtly and fragile hued vegetation. In black and white monochrome, Gloria’s paintings evoke the hypnotic sensation of ripples created by the delicate movement of the air through the early foliage. Here, painstaking attention is paid to rendering the presence of each leaf, which in turn becomes the figurative equivalent of the dot in classical productions. This sensual movement of foliage is also the course of the shamanic spirit in the smallest gifts of nature. Combined with rain, this oceanic flow transforms the desert into a source of life.

Gloria Tamerre Petyarre
(°1942)

*Wild Flowers and Bush
Medicine Leaves, 2005*
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon



Born in around 1945, **Regina Pilawuk Wilson** grew up in a Catholic mission south of Darwin♦. The intense pressure of the Jesuits, the interdiction to use her own language, to honour her ancestors, and to practice basket-weaving as her ancestors had done, made for extremely painful living conditions. In 1969, she fled from the mission with her husband and a group of people to her native lands. They established a community at Peppimenarti♦, 300 km southeast of Darwin, where they once again practiced traditional basketry and reinstated ritual ceremonies.

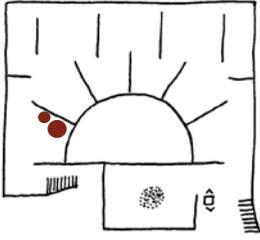
Painting enabled her to capture the forms of basketry in a perennial manner. Through this transposition, the artist affirms the importance of a practice generally associated with women. Sometimes her paintings evoke circular “sun carpets” that can be unfolded into cones to become garments or baskets, and other times nets whose weave allies the delicacy of the colours with the rigidity of an essential structure. The patterns are inspired by the mesh and weave of fishing nets and also refer to the body paints used for some women ceremonies.

Regina Pilawuk Wilson
(°1945)

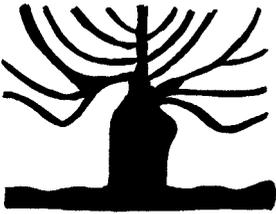
Syaw (Fishing Net), 2002
Acrylic on canvas
Collection Philippon

Walter Leblanc
(1932-1986)
Twisting strings – MX 36,
1975
Strings sewn on canvas,
all painted white
RMFAB, acquired in
1977, inv. 8912

The profile of the *Twisting Strings* (1975) creates an internal and vibrating movement under the effect of the light and the movement of the spectator. The simple and regular line, made from cotton thread rope and sewn onto the canvas, is covered in white to unify the whole.



Phyllis Booljoonngali Thomas was born around 1938 on the Turner River. She was raised on the Turner farm before moving to Wyndham♦. Together with her husband Joe Thomas, she founded a community in the Springvale area called Rugun, which is connected to the myth of Crocodile Hole, and which will play a central part in her work. Her husband became involved in the creation of a school and Phyllis endeavoured to teach the fundamental artistic values and techniques of Aboriginal culture: sculpture, painting, and dance.



In *Untitled*, she beautifully depicts an ecosystem made possible by the quality of the constantly flowing water. The depth of the springs ensures that the water is always fresh. Herds of cattle flock there from all over. The colonists used to fatten their animals there before driving them to the slaughterhouses in Wyndham. The artist pays close attention to the landscape with its rivers, waterholes, and pastures that simultaneously form a delicate topography of the site while evoking its greenery dominated by the baobab tree.

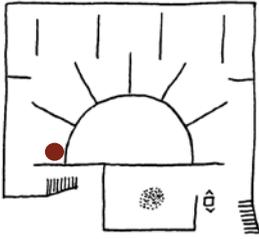
Phyllis Thomas
(1933-2018)

Untitled, 2014
Natural pigments on
canvas
Collection Philippon

René Magritte
(1898-1967)

The Apparition, 1928
Oil on canvas
Private collection,
courtesy Brachot Gallery

"Vague figures have a meaning that is as essential as precise figures", says the master of Surrealism, René Magritte. In *The Apparition* (1928), two dark spaces emerge as so many openings or passages to another dimension... Unless these arbitrary forms are replacing the image of an object? The mystery is unsolved...



Rover Thomas Joolama (1926-1998) grew up in the barest region of the Western Desert ♦. Firmly rooted in his traditional life removed from any Western influence, his father was killed by white men. The tragic episode marked his youth and left a lasting impression on him. In his painting, he portrays the abuses committed against his own people as well as the economic ill-treatment.

His first paintings made in 1981 evoke the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony, a ritual that was inspired by a deceased aunt who had visited him in his dreams a few months after Hurricane Tracy destroyed the white city of Darwin in 1974.

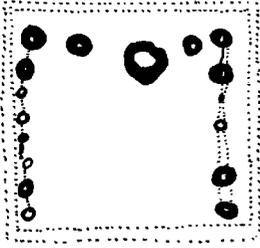
Injured after a car accident caused by the cyclone, she had died on the plane to Perth, while her spirit began a journey that would take her from sacred sites to major historical landmarks and ended at her home where she had seen the Rainbow Serpent Ancestor destroying Darwin. As the recipient of the new ritual, the artist instantly displayed such a powerful personal style that it immediately inspired the elders of the Warmun community, and they entrusted their stories to him so that Rover Thomas could paint them without resorting to excessive figuration.

Rover Thomas Joolama
(1926-1998)

Bubba Dog Dreaming,
1996

Natural pigments on
canvas
Collection Philippson

In 1995, Rover Thomas revisited his childhood home in Yalda Soak. *Bubba Dog Dreaming* 40



shows the site of the Wild Dog's "Dreaming." The composition shows the rock holes formed by Mother Wild Dog and her puppies. These crevices lead to wells connected by underground passages. They are associated with protruding rounded stones that are distinctive of the region and constitute essential springs for the herds in the middle of the desert. The "dreaming" place of Wild Mother unfolds in the centre of the painting.

Postface to the visitors

To give you a better understanding of the *Aboriginalities* exhibition, we would like to set the context for the presentation of Aboriginal art.

Showing Aboriginal painting is no easy task. After centuries of alienation, this ancestral artistic practice is today being recognised and protected. Aboriginal creation cannot be compared with Western genres: its anthropological roots in the "Dreamtime" confer it a sacred dimension that cannot be revealed to everyone.

Following a request from the Australian Embassy, we decided not to display the beautiful "tjurungas" (or "churingas") from the Africa Museum in Tervuren. This characteristic object of the Aboriginal peoples of central Australia is owned by a group, or an individual who receives it based on its totemic origin and the location where it was conceived by the spirit of the Ancestor. The "tjurunga" is presented at the end of an initiatory ceremony involving rituals and songs emphasising its sacred value. This present is regarded as a gift from the Ancestor and therefore constitutes a link to the "Dreamtime."

Contemporary Aboriginal painting is largely dependent on this same initiation knowledge. Since 2009, the Indigenous Art Code has stipulated rules for the application of respect for traditions and cultural interdictions in the production and marketing of this art. Art centres and other cooperatives that supervise and commercialise the productions of indigenous artists from the southern continent conform with this code to ensure that this market is equitable and respectful of the artists and their traditions.

Relayed by governmental authorities in Australia and throughout the world, the Indigenous Art Code aims to impose its status as the exclusive criterion for the recognition of Aboriginal art. In Australia, this market structure into a monopoly of art centres has provoked much debate. The consequence of this structuring is to open the membership of the circle formed by the Indigenous Art Code to private galleries. To adhere, these galleries must provide answers to a number of questions that we echoed in order to ascertain the integrity and transparency of the relationship that links galleries and artists:

- How was the artist or art centre that submitted the work remunerated, and is the payment fair?
- Was the indigenous artist informed as to the terms of the sale of their work?
- Does a written contract outline the terms of the contract and what form did it take?
- Were the sale and payment recorded and catalogued in a manner that clearly determines the nature and identity of the work sold and does this information remain accessible to the artist?

While some may interpret these questions as a desire for national control, many others believe that they constitute the fundamental condition for protecting the authenticity of Aboriginal art, which has been defended by generations of anthropologists.

In partnership with the collectors, the Royal Museums insisted on verifying the conditions for the introduction of the works presented on the Australian market and then, through the successive sales that shape the life of the artworks, the modalities under which they arrived on the Western art scene.

Imprint

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