

Layered Histories: Indigenous Australian Art from the Kimberley and Central Desert

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Layered Histories: Indigenous Australian Art from the Kimberley and Central Desert

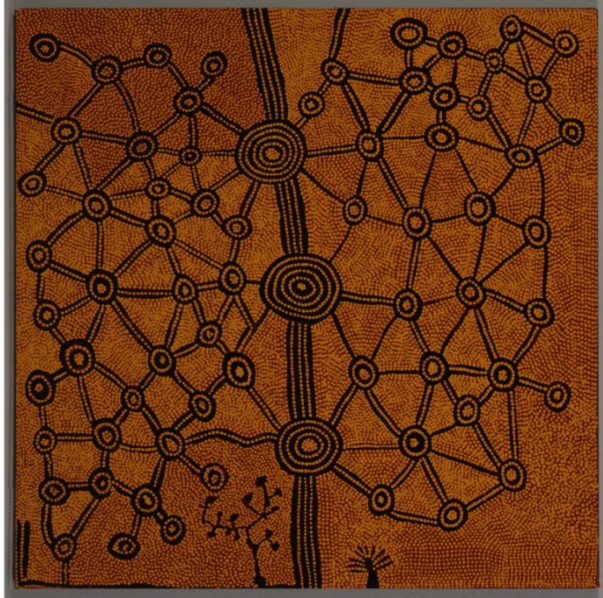
This exhibition shares work by Indigenous artists from the Kimberley and Western Desert regions of Australia with a particular focus on Gija and Warlpiri artists. These paintings present a worldview, sometimes referenced as “Dreaming,” but known to the people of the Kimberley as Ngarrarngkarni and the Desert as Jukurrpa. This knowledge spans thousands of years and encompasses responses to more recent settler colonial events from the twentieth century. The artists deftly use color, pattern, and abstraction to create a sense of place that layers images of the land (known as Country) with creation stories, historical events, and important animals, plants, and people. Unlike Western ideas of

history which separate these categories, often drawing a firm line between events of the past and the present, these Indigenous artists express more comprehensive and integrated world views. They are both constructing history and providing an alternate model of how the idea of history can be understood.

Amelia Kahl

Barbara C. and Harvey P. Hood 1918 Curator of Academic Programming

This exhibition is organized by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, and generously supported by the Cissy Patterson Fund.



George Tjapanangka

Pintupi/Australian,

about 1938–2002

Rockhole at Kwala

2001

Acrylic on canvas

The expansive designs of this work are linked with the extensive rockhole site of Kwala on the north side of Wilkinson (Lake Mackay), the largest salt

lake in the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia. The trees at the bottom are desert oaks. Some of the information associated with this site is public, such as when the Tinagarri, a large group of ancestral men whose travels and ceremonies created Country, visited the site on a rock-wallaby hunt. But other knowledge is accessible only to particular or initiated members of the community. Teachings of the Tingarri ancestors explain to novices the why and how of contemporary cultural practices.

Thinking about the accessibility of information and knowledge of the land, compare this image of Country with Jonathan Brown's Maralinga displayed nearby.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2014.77.7



Jonathon Brown

Pitjantjatjara/Australian, 1960–1997

Maralinga

1994

Acrylic, sand, and ochre on canvas

The Tjukupa (Dreaming) imagery that defines this land, the black and white concentric circles and the paths that connect them, has been obscured. The artist used ochre, a material of the land, to show Maralinga's desecration and the loss of history, memory, and culture. In the early 1950s the British government began testing missiles and nuclear weapons in an area that was previously designated as an Aboriginal Reserve. The Indigenous people, mostly Pitjantjatjara and Pintupi, were forced off their land where nine nuclear devices were exploded between 1952 and 1975, making the area around Maralinga uninhabitable. Brown's painting both preserves the memory of the land and laments for what has been lost.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.152

The Dreaming

“The Dreaming” or “Dreamtime” is cultural knowledge and a way of life that spans multiple categories: historical, spiritual, and educational. It is of the past, informs the present, and secures the future simultaneously. As a western concept it encompasses, and can oversimplify, the diverse worldviews of many different Indigenous Australian cultures. The Dreaming is based in land, called Country, and all its living and non-living inhabitants including rocks, stars, water, plants, and beings (human, animal, and supernatural). Ancestral beings, historical events, and the rhythms of life, including ceremony, shape the land and its histories. Although artists only started creating paintings with these stories and designs in the mid-twentieth century, the Dreaming is a way of understanding the

world that Indigenous peoples of Australia have known and shared verbally and visually through art and other cultural practices for thousands of years.



Bessie Nakamarra Sims

Warlpiri/Australian, 1932–2012

Yarla Jukurrpa (Bush Potato Dreaming)

1996

Acrylic on canvas

This painting shows Yumurrpa country and celebrates the *yala* (desert yam, *Ipomoea costata*), a low bush with potato-like tubers and purple-blue-pink flowers. The two central circles are specific places, *Yumurrpa* (top) and *Waputarli* (bottom), as well as the *yala* plants. The straight lines between them represent both the Jukurrpa (Dreaming) paths between the locations and the plant's roots. The yams are also shown as the small black circles connected by the wavy lines. Women, shown as a u-shapes, are traveling around the area looking for *yala* to harvest. Here the painting makes visible the overlay between plant, Country, history, and human practice, all held within the Jukurrpa (Dreaming)

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.31



Andrea Nungurrayi Martin

Warlpiri/Australian, born 1965

Jajirdi manu Janganpa

(Native Cat and Possum Dreaming)

2007

Acrylic on linen

This painting shows the journey to a Kurdiji (initiation ceremony) followed by a fight. The u-shapes traditionally represent the Jajirdi, or Native Cat ancestors. They started out from the south and then gathered to make spears at Warrunungu near Kirrirdi Creek (shown at the bottom left). Holding spears, the Jajirdi continued to Yamirringi to conduct the secret ceremony, shown by the largest group of concentric circles. The Janganpa (common bushtail possum) ancestors then interrupted the proceedings and a large fight erupted. Afterwards, the Janganpa forced the Jajirdi to join the initiation ceremony. This work references many specific geographical sites that would be familiar to the artist and her people, the Warlpiri.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2016.1.37



Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi

Manyjilyjarra/Kukatja/Australian, born about 1947

Parwalla

2000

Acrylic on canvas

The artist has painted an abstract rendering of her father's country, Parwalla, highlighting its natural features, living and non-living, plant and human. The white areas are sand dunes colored by the white seeds of spinifex grass that mask the red desert sand. A pink circle near the upper center is Parwalla itself the tjumu (water source) and there are campsites with women (shown as u-shapes) seated in circles with coolamons (oval carrying vessels) and digging sticks nearby. The land surrounding them is rich in the bush tucker (traditional food sources) they have collected. Nyumi is an expert in plant life, both as food and medicine, and this is a major theme in her abundant, energetic paintings.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.81



Michael Nelson Jagamarra

Warlpiri/Australian, born 1949–2020

**Goanna, Snake, and Possum Dreamings
in Mt. Singleton Country**

1995

Acrylic on canvas

The three animals referenced in this painting: the rainbow serpent, possum, and goanna (monitor lizard) all signify various Jukurrpa (Dreamings) demonstrating how the Jukurrpa encompasses animal and human beings as well as the land and sky. In one Dreaming, shown in the center, a Possum man ran away with the wrong woman, and all the other men of the tribe and the serpent's storm chased him to Jangankurlangu, where he was killed. The thunderstorms were caused by the rainbow serpent Warnayarra on the left. The goanna on the right is from near Mt. Singleton.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.218



Mary Dixon Nungurrayi

Warlpiri/Australian, born 1960

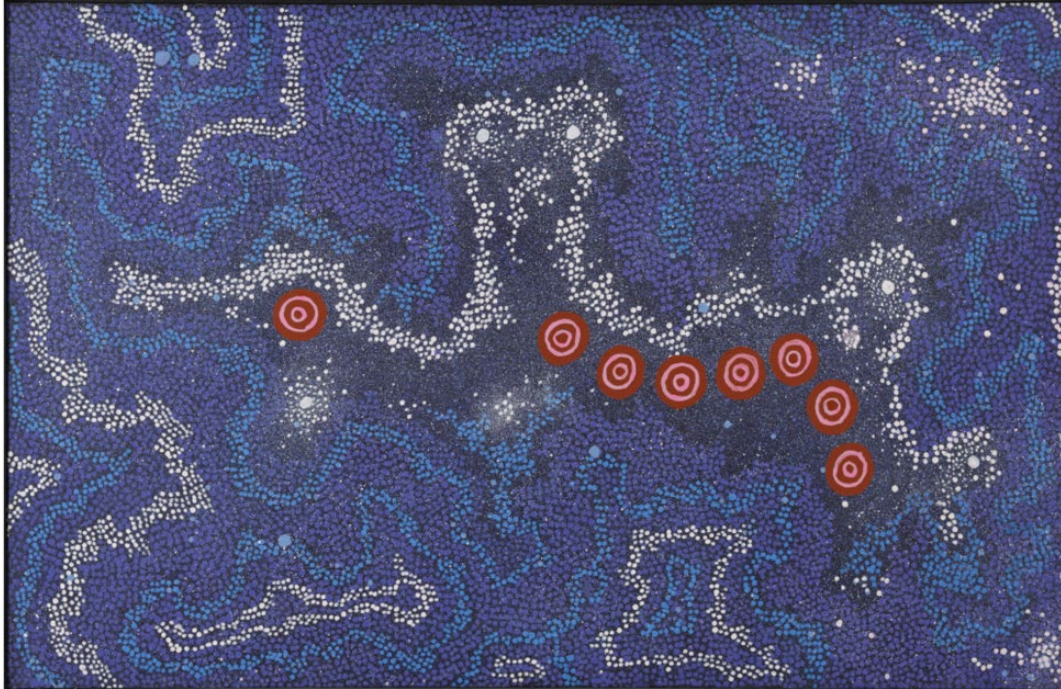
Seven Sisters Dreaming

1996

Acrylic on canvas

The Milky Way divides the middle of this painting with the central roundel representing Jilbi, the Ancestral man who pursued the Seven Sisters; they would eventually become the Pleiades star cluster. The roundels at either end represent the morning and evening stars. The sisters are shown at either side, camped around the sacred site Uluru (known previously to westerners as Ayers Rock, though the name has now officially been returned). The design around the sisters is drawn from women's ceremonial body paint, and they remain connected, seemingly protected by the oscillating bands of color.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.205



Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi

Anmatyerre/Luritja/Australian, born 1967

Milky Way Seven Sisters Dreaming

1998

Acrylic on canvas

Represented by pink and red concentric circles, the Seven Sisters float in the pulsing night sky as their pursuer, the old man, trails behind. As a child, the artist learned to paint from her father, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, and has gone on to have a long and impactful career. After winning the Alice Springs Art Prize as a sixteen-year-old college student, she began showing internationally. In 2006 Nungurrayi was featured in the first major US exhibition of Indigenous Australian women artists, Dreaming Their Way: Australian Aboriginal Women Painters, a show organized by The National Museum of Women in the Arts and shown at the Hood Museum.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.97



Estelle Hogan

Pitjantjatjara/Australian, about 1937–2017

Minyma Tjuta (Seven Sisters)

1999

Acrylic on canvas

The Seven Sisters flee across Tjuntjuntjara country in the Victoria Desert of Western Australia. The dramatic contrast of red and blue mark the contours of the land, rather than the sisters' final destination, the night sky. In referring to the land, Hogan also references the history of this place and the Spinifex people who were forcibly removed in the 1950s for British nuclear tests. This work was part of a successful Indigenous title claim in the late 1990s, the Spinifex Art Project, that returned a large area to their care. In 2000 the Spinifex people were the second group in Western Australia to receive land rights recognition.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.87

The Seven Sisters

The Seven Sisters Jukurrpa (or Dreaming) is a significant ancestral narrative throughout the communities of the Central and Western Desert and has particular significance for women. Although there are many variations, it tells the story of a group of young Ancestral Women who are being pursued by an older Ancestral Man who wants to marry one or more of them, despite being of the wrong kin group. The women run through the desert and up into the sky where westerners know them as the Pleiades star cluster. Here, three different female artists from three different communities paint this celestial subject.



Billy Duncan

Jaru/Gurindji/Australian, born 1941–2020

Road to Old Kirkimbie Homestead

2003

Ochres on canvas

Using a dramatic palette of black, red, yellow, and white ochre, this painting depicts a “rugged bush

track” surrounded by two mirrored mountain ranges, a path that Aboriginal people used to navigate the terrain. The road leads to Kirkimbie Station, where Duncan worked for many years with cattle as a stockman. This painting can be seen as an interlayering of Aboriginal and colonized space.

Duncan’s art is inspired by his work as a stockman, the drowning of his country from the creation of Lake Argyle, and the struggle for Indigenous land rights at Wave Hill. During the Wave Hill Walk-Off he delivered critical supplies to his Gurindji countryman. The seven-year strike resulted in the return of a portion of their land in 1975. The walk-off also catalyzed the first legislation for Aboriginal people to claim land title, though it was not until 2020 that the Gurindji were granted Native title.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.34



Goody Barrett

Gija/Australian, born about 1930

Lissadell Hill

1999

Ochres on canvas

In the Ngarrangkarni (Dreaming) a man went hunting with his two dogs. The dogs chased after a kangaroo and disappeared. The man sat at the top of a hill, high above the Bow River, and called out for them to return. He turned into a rock and can still be seen standing there, calling out for the dogs, who, along with the kangaroo, also became rocks, marking the landscape. Notice how Barrett has used repetition to create the hill and the man (in rock form) as well as her dramatic application of the black background.

Goody Barrett grew up on Lissadell Station, an area deeply affected by the Argyle Diamond Mine and the damming of the Ord River, subjects also addressed by Freddie Timms in *Lake Argyle Country*, displayed nearby. Her paintings record Country lost due to the environmental devastation of the mine and the lake.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.112



Freddie Timms

Gija/Australian, 1946–2017

Lake Argyle Country

1998

Ochres on canvas

This painting shows Lake Argyle, created by white men in the 1960s who dammed the Ord River to develop farmable land. Notice the lake, large, empty, and white, while its surroundings show the living Country of black and red soil, waterholes, hills, and creeks. Like Goody Barret, whose work is nearby, Timms grew up in this area, working on Lissadell Station, which eventually closed due to the environmental effects of the dammed river and the Argyle Diamond Mine. Many of Timm's works are memorials to this vanished land.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.96ab



Paddy Bedford

Gija/Australian, 1922–2007

Emu Dreaming at Mt. King

1999

Ochres on canvas

“I always paint my mother’s country and my father’s country. I don’t paint other people’s country. The emu is one of my Dreamings. That emu place is a dangerous Dreaming place, which people should not touch. When we die, the country speaks, the emu cries from up on top. . . . Maybe when I die the Dreaming will cry for me.”—Paddy Bedford

The narrow gorge and hills depicted in this painting memorialize a tragedy for the Gija people. In the 1920s a white station manager massacred Bedford’s relatives using strychnine poisoning. Bedford documents this historical event using the Emu Dreaming, a creation story where the Emu separated day from night. But the layers of Dreaming and painful history intertwine, joining with the land and its people to define this place.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.249



Rusty Peters

Gija/Australian, 1935–2020

Jawigin (Billy Mac Spring)

2006

Ochres with acrylic binder on Belgian linen

This seemingly abstract depiction of Country, with its dramatic red, white, and black curved forms, honors a significant cultural site in the Kimberley. Jawigin sheltered an important rock that Gija people rubbed to keep the kangaroos fat and abundant. Peters also remembers it as a traditional pre-colonial camp site and as a part of Springvale station, where he worked as a teenager. In the 1980s the artist was devastated to discover that the station owner had bulldozed many of the sacred trees. As the site was irreversibly damaged, it now falls to the painting to hold the different layers of knowledge tied to Jawigin, allowing history and memory to be passed down to future generations.

Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2011.60.55