

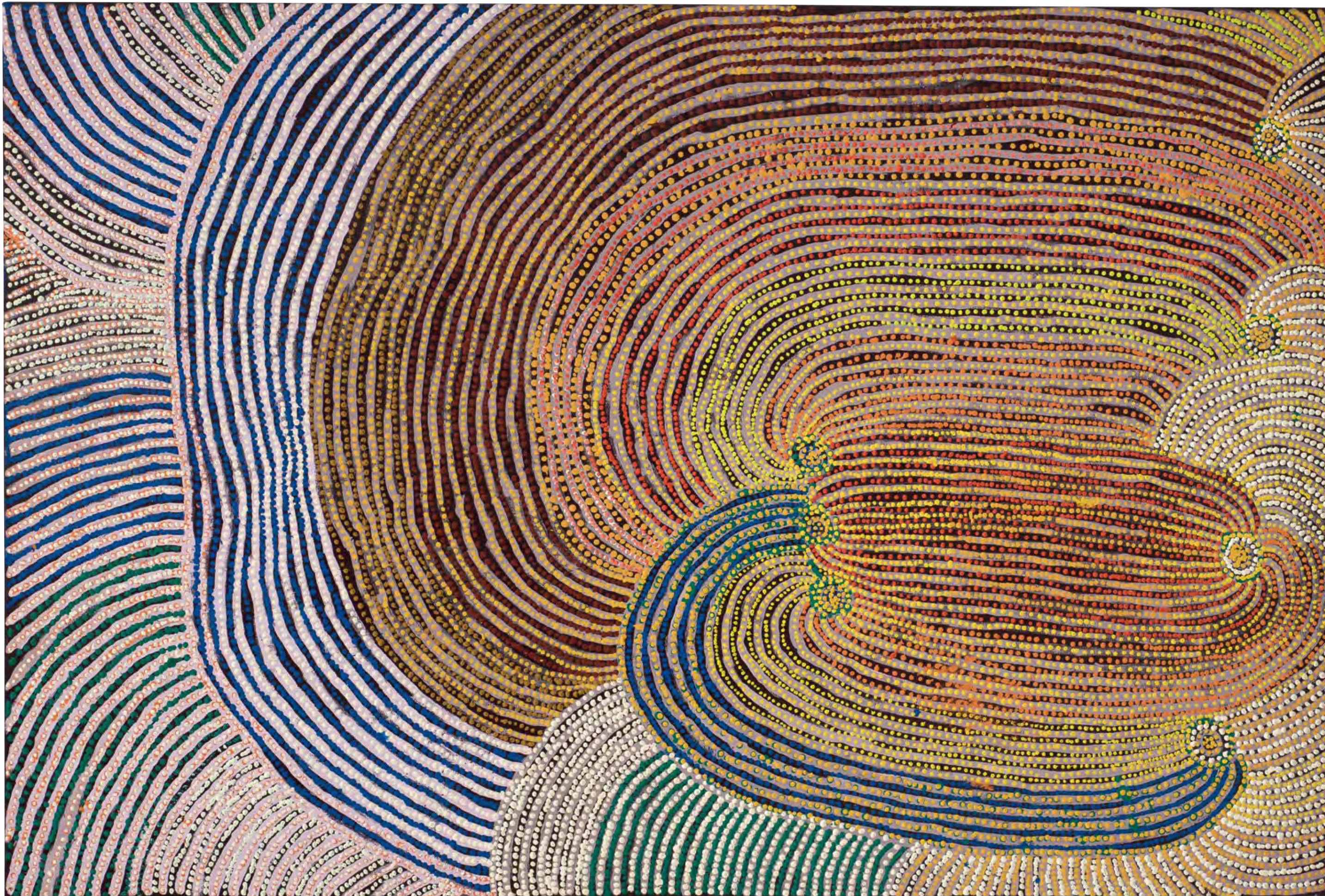
# ANCESTRAL MODERN

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART





ANCESTRAL MODERN



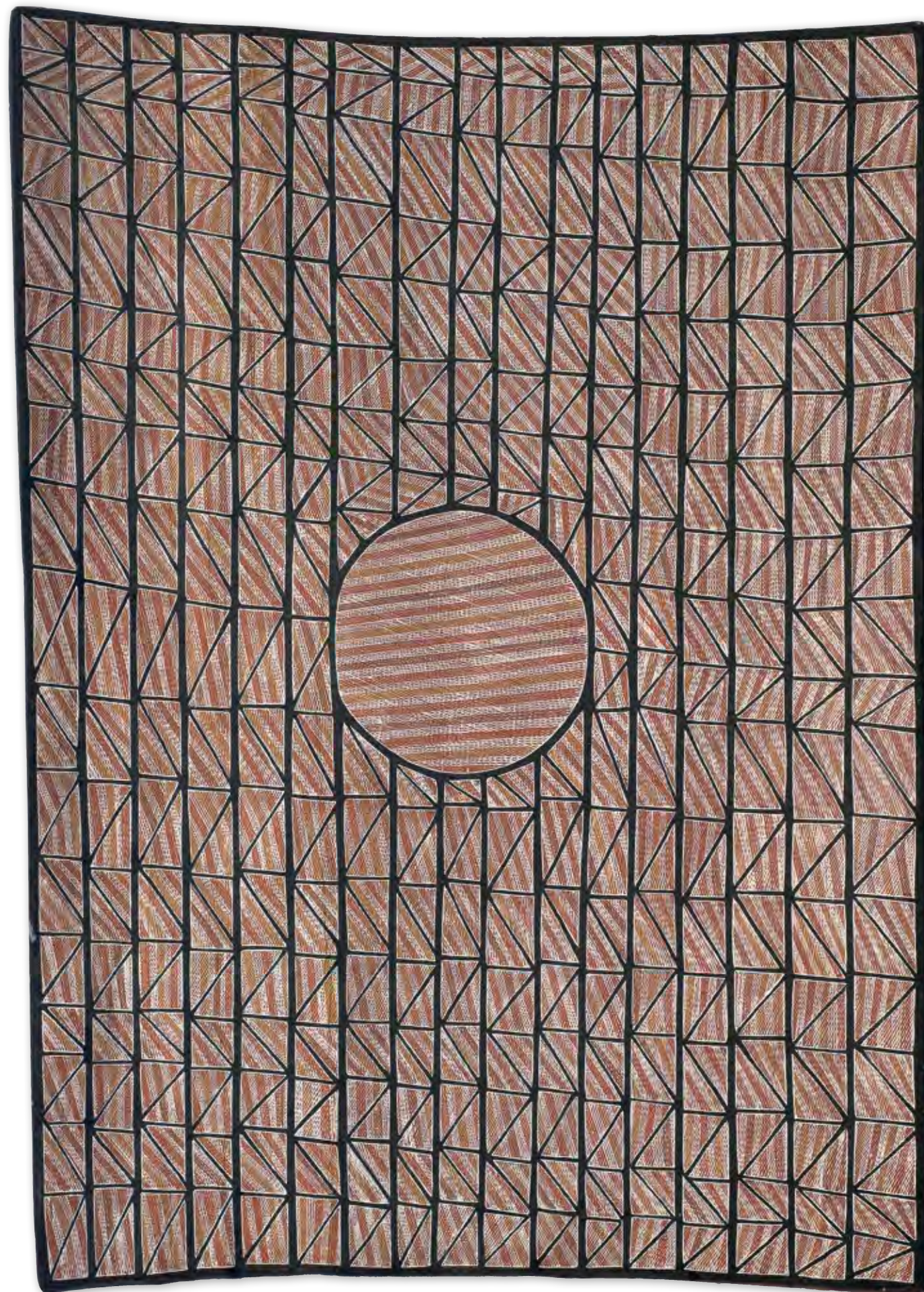
# ANCESTRAL MODERN

AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINAL  
ART

Pamela McClusky  
Wally Caruana  
Lisa Graziose Corrin  
Stephen Gilchrist

KAPLAN & LEVI COLLECTION

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM



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## FOREWORD

IT WAS A STROKE OF FATE when two Seattle collectors decided to pay attention to Australian Aboriginal art in the early 1990s. Robert Kaplan and Margaret Levi had the good fortune to become captivated not just by a single artist's work but by a continent full of artists new to American audiences. Together the couple set out to visit with artists, curators, scholars, and dealers who were in the process of exploring a new field—one that is very much of the present but also rooted in an artistic tradition dating back many millennia. The results of Bob and Margaret's efforts first found a home at the Seattle Art Museum when loans from their collection were put on display in 1996. They subsequently gave or promised fourteen works of art and have now taken the considerable step of pledging well over one hundred additional Australian Aboriginal paintings and sculptures, featured in the pages that follow. Their devotion to this field and their generosity in endowing the museum with a major body of work from this groundbreaking collection has put them in the distinguished company of numerous enlightened Seattle collectors who have chosen to share their passion with the public in this fashion. We could not be more pleased to mark this milestone by presenting *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art*, the first collection of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art to enter a major museum in the United States.

Building international alliances is a priority for the Seattle Art Museum. The museum is honored that Kim Beazley, Ambassador, Embassy of Australia, Washington, D.C., has endorsed our efforts. We are grateful for the guidance of Brendan Wall, Director of Cultural Relations at the Embassy. Other essential international support came from the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, Switzerland, which encouraged us in the early stages of developing the exhibition and followed through with a generous lead grant. The Visionary Circle of the Seattle Art Museum—Thomas W. Barwick, Jeffrey and Susan Brotman, Barney A. Ebsworth, Jon and Mary Shirley, Virginia

Wright, and Ann P. Wyckoff—provided crucial funding to make this exhibition possible. Thank you to The United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney for their support of this publication. And, as always, our gratitude goes to the contributors to SAM's Annual Fund.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the commitment, creativity, and persistence of Pamela McClusky, SAM's Curator of African and Oceanic Art. Pam has given careful thought to the documentation and the presentation of these works to an American audience for the first time. Thanks to her sensitive leadership, the exhibition and the accompanying book will help to ground this new and promising field within the United States.

Charles Wright  
Chairman, Board of Trustees  
Seattle Art Museum



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS COLLECTION BEGAN WITH ARTISTS who made a concentrated effort to bring us closer to their country. We offer our gratitude to all of the innovators who have passed away and to those who continue to expand our imaginations today. Your work is now mixing with other visions from around the world. The museum welcomes you, your family, and members of your community to this new home.

This book, which the Seattle Art Museum is pleased to be copublishing with Yale University Press, is intended to provide both a lasting record of *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art* and a springboard for further investigation and conversation. Collaboration with our Australian colleagues has been a hallmark of the project, beginning with the process of distilling a selection from the extensive Kaplan & Levi Collection. For this assignment, the collectors gave free reign to Wally Caruana, a respected curator in Australia who has long been involved in discussions about the collection and whose experience was invaluable to this publication. He called upon Stephen Gilchrist, another Australian curator, whose talents were applied to writing entries for many of the male artists. Other Australians who have gone out of their way to answer questions or provide connections that helped make this exhibition and publication possible include: Cecelia Alfonso, Glenn Barkley, Tina Baum, Roger Benjamin, Andrew Blake, Lissant Bolton, Karen Brown, Edwina Circuitt, Brenda Croft, Franchesca Cubillo, Bernadette Eggington, David Ellis, Wayne Fan, Dallas Gold, Bill Gregory, Christopher Hodges, Penny Hoile, Jennifer Isaacs, Darlene Johnson, Jonathan Jones, Kevin Kelly, Beverly Knight, Khadija Carroll La, Elizabeth and Colin Laverty, Gloria Morales, Keith Munro, Adrian Newstead, John Oster, Hetti Perkins, Michael Pickering, Matthew Poll, Roslyn Premont, Gabriella Roy, Judith Ryan, Margo Smith, Will Stubbs, Paul Sweeney, Peter Twigg, and Margie West.

In addition to the Australian curators, two Americans provided their own perspectives on this new arena: Pamela McClusky, whose visits to Australia have fueled her essay and her entries about the contributions of Aboriginal women artists, and Lisa Corrin, purposefully chosen because she was completely new to this field, who was asked to convey her reactions as an American curator of contemporary art. Nancy Grubb's editorial expertise was put to the test by a subject so little known here, and her decisions about what did need to be known and defined were essential. Ed Marquand was, as always, instrumental in the early stages of the book's conception. We thank him and his staff for seamless production. Dave Novacek and Gary Hawkey from iocolor were responsible for all new photography of the art work, which allowed John Hubbard's design to accent the unique qualities of this art.

The exhibition and publication would not have happened without the support and expertise of many committed staff members of the Seattle Art Museum. To name a few whose contributions made an impact on this project: Maryann Jordan, Vice Director; Chiyo Ishikawa, Susan Brotman Deputy Director for Art; Michael McCafferty, Head of Museum Services and Design; Phil Stoiber, Senior Registrar; Nicholas Dorman, Chief Conservator; Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Kayla Skinner Deputy Director for Education and Public Programs; and Matthew Renton, Director of Communications. In the curatorial and museum services divisions, this project could not have happened without the constant nurturing of Zora H. Foy, Senior Manager for Exhibitions and Publications; Sarah Berman, Collections Coordinator and Research Associate; Megan Peterson, Exhibitions Coordinator; Lowell Bassett, Rights and Reproductions Administrator; and Tina Lee, Curatorial Coordinator.



## COLLECTORS' STATEMENT

Robert Kaplan and Margaret Levi

OUR ROMANCE WITH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART began more than twenty years ago. Both of us grew up with art in our lives, thanks to mothers who believed in owning it and in supporting the institutions that displayed it. Both of us had collected contemporary art prior to our marriage in 1990, and Margaret had already acquired a small collection of Australian art during her regular visits to universities there. Our common commitment emerged during our first joint visit to Sydney in 1991, when we bought two of the pieces in *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art*. Margaret had been hit by an Australia Post courier car in 1985, and when she received a settlement in 1992, we committed the funds to developing a museum-quality collection. That the Seattle Art Museum believes we have succeeded in our goal makes us extremely proud.

Each year we return to Australia to explore its art and culture and to train our eyes and open our minds. At rock art sites going back thirty to forty thousand years, we learn about the precursors of the contemporary movement. Driving in land cruisers and riding in small airplanes throughout the desert and the tropics, we observe the country, fauna, and flora that the artists portray. These trips take us to public galleries and to retail galleries in all the major cities and to art centers and communities in the Outback. We purchase only where we have confidence that artists have been treated appropriately.

We have been privileged to meet many of the artists whose works are represented here. Some meetings have been in the cities and some

in their own communities. With the artists and their representatives, we have arranged expeditions to their traditional lands, the source of their inspiration. We have enjoyed the kangaroos, honey ants, witchetty grubs, mud crabs, and love mussels our hosts have hunted, gathered, and shared with us. They have also shared their ritual songs, stories, and dances and, in some instances, their personal experiences of atomic testing and of initial contact.

Such experiences enrich our understanding of the work and its production, but our basis for selection is always aesthetic. The ethnography interests us, but the quality of the art is what compels us. Our aim in collecting and exhibiting current Australian indigenous art is to expose a wider audience to a wondrous contemporary art movement, created by artists far from the Western tradition. Our desire for this work to receive appropriate recognition within the canon of world art drives us to seek the rigorous assessment and connoisseurship it deserves. This catalogue is an important step in that direction.

We are extremely grateful to the Seattle Art Museum and, especially, to curator Pamela McClusky for their long-term support. We thank Pam and Wally Caruana for putting together this exhibition and catalogue. We also acknowledge a huge debt to the artists, community art advisors, art dealers, Australian curators, and other collectors who have become our friends and mentors and have helped transform our initial flirtation with Australian Aboriginal art into an enduring love affair.



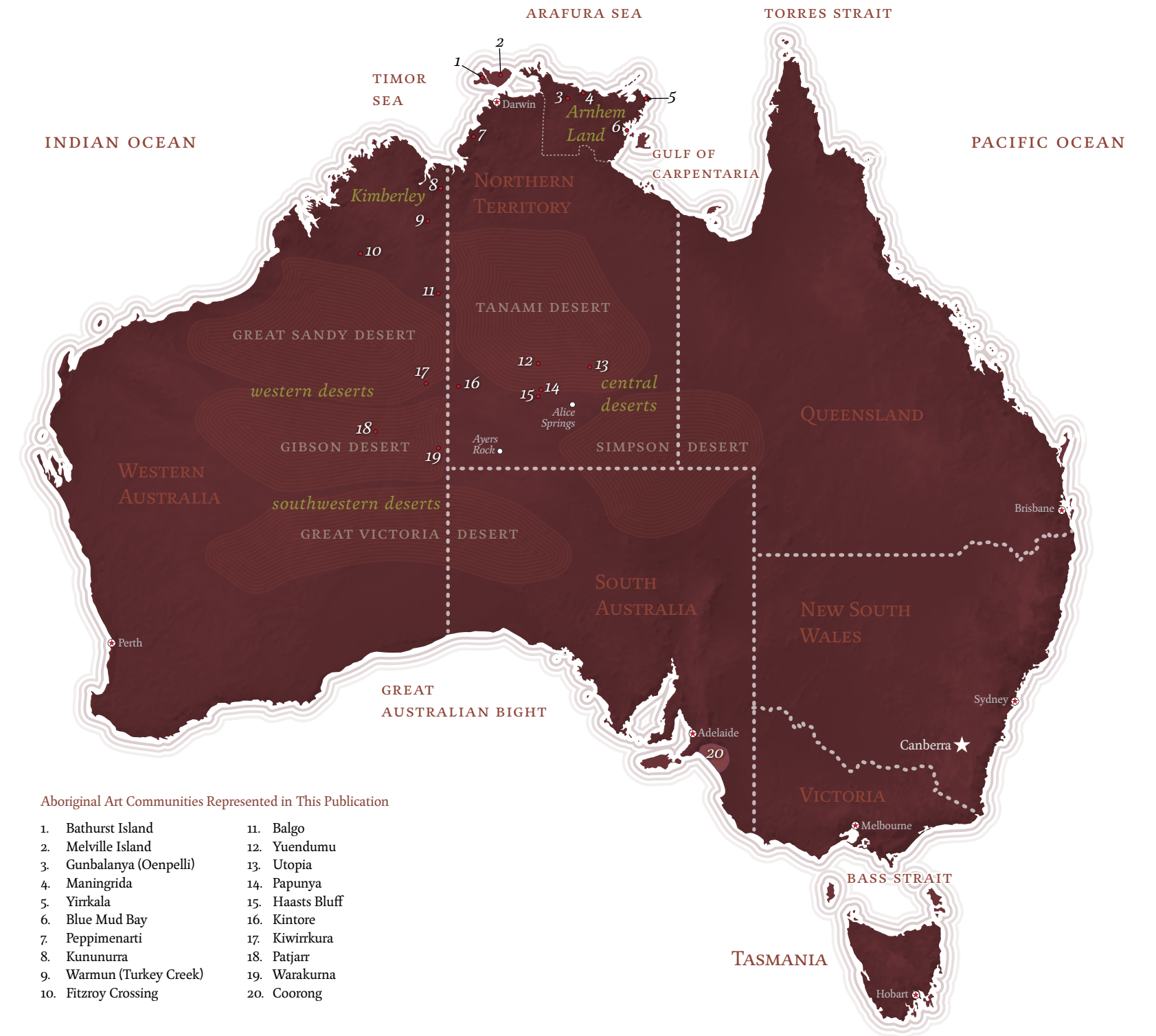
## WARNING

Members of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are respectfully advised that a number of people mentioned in writing, depicted in photographs, or whose art is illustrated in this publication have passed away.





## MAP OF AUSTRALIA



### Aboriginal Art Communities Represented in This Publication

- |                          |                  |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Bathurst Island       | 11. Balgo        |
| 2. Melville Island       | 12. Yuendumu     |
| 3. Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) | 13. Utopia       |
| 4. Maningrida            | 14. Papunya      |
| 5. Yirrkala              | 15. Haasts Bluff |
| 6. Blue Mud Bay          | 16. Kintore      |
| 7. Peppimenarti          | 17. Kiwirrkura   |
| 8. Kununurra             | 18. Patjarr      |
| 9. Warmun (Turkey Creek) | 19. Warakurna    |
| 10. Fitzroy Crossing     | 20. Coorong      |



# THE BRIDGE

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN ABORIGINAL ART

Wally Caruana

AUSTRALIA HAS WITNESSED an extraordinary new chapter in art history, one that bridges vast expanses in perception. When the British began settling the continent some 230 years ago, Aboriginal people were regarded as among the most miserable societies, possessing little in the way of culture. Without framed paintings or sculptures on pedestals (the European archetypes of art), they were considered a people with no art at all. In fact, because most Aboriginal art was being made for the restricted context of ceremony, it was intentionally hidden from public view. During the last one hundred years, Aboriginal artists have chosen to change that. While they continue to make art for ceremonies that are part of the longest continuing tradition of art known to humanity, they now also create art that is disseminated to an international audience.

In 1975 the American collector Louis A. Allen was astonished to discover the sophisticated nature of Aboriginal culture. In a book about his collection, *Time before Morning*, he wrote, “After fifteen years of learning to know and understand these people so recently from a Stone Age culture [sic], I find they embody much to admire and even to emulate.”<sup>1</sup> Just fifteen years later, the American collectors Robert Kaplan and Margaret Levi began formulating their own selection, during a time of enormous change in the perception and reception of Aboriginal art. The Kaplan & Levi Collection is emblematic of this major shift: it includes paintings from the seminal early periods, which have established the patterns for current and future generations of indigenous Australian artists, and contemporary work by artists who are at the forefront of their respective movements.

The oldest surviving examples of Aboriginal art are paintings and engravings on rocks located in caves or on stone overhangs and rock faces. Found across the continent in varying concentrations, the oldest sites—over thirty thousand years before the present—include the rock paintings of Arnhem Land and the Kimberley and several rock engraving sites located mainly in the desert regions. These are contemporaneous with or predate the famous Paleolithic rock art sites at Lascaux and Altamira as well as the recently discovered Chauvet cave in France. Styles have evolved over time, but this type of work continues: artists in this catalogue such

as Wally Mandarrk (plate 15) and Bardayal “Lofty” Nadjamerrek (plate 26) were renowned rock painters as well as painters who worked on flattened sheets of tree bark.

Aboriginal culture is not one homogeneous entity. At the time foreign settlement began, some six hundred distinct languages and dialects were spoken across the continent, many of which continue to be spoken today. (In many places the languages of adjacent groups are as different as French and German.) The language an Aboriginal person speaks is one of the main markers of identity since each language group possesses its own set of belief systems, laws, kinship patterns, customs, and styles of art.

The spiritual focus of Aboriginal life is the Ancestral Realm, commonly referred to today as the “Dreaming.” Aboriginal groups trace their descent from named ancestors with wide-ranging creative and supernatural powers, including the ability to change physical form, so a Rainbow Serpent may take the shape of a cloud or a human or even features of the landscape. The ancestors created human beings and gave them the civilizing attributes of language, law, and culture. The ancestors also left their life forces—their spiritual essences—in the land itself, which sustains generation after generation of Aboriginal people with spiritual and physical nourishment. Intrinsic and essential, this connection between people and their lands is another major marker of identity.

The Dreaming encompasses the cosmologies and belief systems of Aboriginal societies, and it also provides the great themes of their art. Even though there is no word for *art* in Aboriginal languages, visual literacy is an essential means of transferring knowledge over generations. Thus, from an early age everyone learns to draw and paint or weave, and although not all become practicing artists, each person is equipped to interpret the signs and symbols that appear in various forms of art. Aboriginal art is essentially spiritual in nature. Traditionally, it is produced in greatest volume on ceremonial occasions, but it can also serve the purposes of teaching, magic, and sorcery (whether to assure a successful hunt or to attract a wife or husband). And it can be made purely for pleasure. Apart from rock art, the main forms practiced across Australia include the making of paintings and sculptures on ceremonial grounds; paintings on the bodies of ritual participants as well as on weapons and functional objects; and weavings of fibers. Certain forms and techniques, such as bark painting, are specific to particular

Fig. 1. John Mawurndjul, *Dilly Bag* (detail), 2002. See cat. 30.

regions. While a number of innovations in materials have been introduced in the past century—acrylic on canvas being the most popular—the new art forms expand rather than replace older forms in the artists’ repertoires.

The colonization of the continent by the British during the period ironically known as the European Enlightenment was often misguided at best and at worst, brutal. With little heed taken of indigenous beliefs, customs, or systems of land tenure, the continent was termed *terra nullius*, or “empty land”—a convenience under British law that allowed settlers to annex land without any need for compensation or negotiated treaties with indigenous people. The original population of the continent, estimated to be over a million strong at the time, was decimated, primarily in the areas along the eastern and southern coasts where Europeans first settled. Introduced diseases such as influenza and smallpox, to which indigenous people had no resistance, spread along traditional trade routes and wreaked havoc among inland Aboriginal groups long before they even knew of the newcomers’ existence.

Nineteenth-century explorers and settlers collected Aboriginal weapons and objects as curios or examples of the technologies of a primitive society. By the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropologists saw Australian Aboriginal culture as a prime field worthy of study. While the official government policy was “to smooth the pillow of a dying race,”<sup>2</sup> anthropologists and researchers were beginning to discover the richness and depth of Aboriginal cultures, and in time it was they who first recorded, described, and analyzed Aboriginal art.

By the 1870s, bark paintings had been collected in northern Australia and in Victoria, and the first recorded exhibition of Aboriginal art, *The Dawn of Art*, was mounted in 1888. The beginning of the modern period of Aboriginal art, however, is marked by two unrelated events. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Pastor Johann Georg Reuther at the Lutheran Mission in Killalpaninna, near Lake Eyre in South Australia, commissioned local artists to adapt the forms of *toas* (direction markers) for sale to raise funds for the mission. In 1912 Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer, an art collector and director of the National Museum of Victoria, commissioned bark paintings from artists in the renowned rock art regions of Kakadu and western Arnhem Land. For the first time, traditional forms of art were adopted for an uninitiated audience—the public domain.

## ARNHEM LAND

The Kaplan & Levi Collection comprises art from Arnhem and the northern regions, the vast desert areas of central and western Australia, the Kimberley, the southeast, and the Torres Strait. In terms of portable art made for others, the art of Arnhem Land is characterized by figurative painted wooden sculptures, weavings of natural fibers colored with natural dyes, and paintings on sheets of flattened tree bark. Bark is stripped from eucalyptus

trees during the monsoon season, when it is easy to remove; the sheets are then cured over a fire and weighed down to be flattened. The rough outer strips of the bark are removed, and the inner surface is scraped smooth to receive paints made from natural red and yellow ochres, white from clay, and black from charcoal. Ochres are mixed with binders derived from sap, resin, or egg yolk—or more recently, synthetic water-based resin. Given the ephemeral nature of the materials in the outdoor environment, the longevity of the bark-painting tradition is difficult to ascertain, but bark paintings bear a direct relationship to paintings on the walls of bark shelters—which are murals, in fact. The cross-hatched and geometric patterns that appear in the paintings are also similar to those painted onto the bodies of ceremonial participants. These patterns identify the clan to which a person belongs: across Arnhem Land, each clan owns a series of designs much in the same way that tartan designs relate to specific Scottish clans. The ownership of and the rights to paint these designs are strictly regulated through inheritance, and it is an offense to reproduce a clan design for which one does not have rights, as it is to paint ancestral themes belonging to other clans. This individual and clan ownership of designs is a traditional form of copyright.

Bark paintings from the early twentieth century directly relate to the rock paintings of western Arnhem Land, featuring figurative drawings of ancestral beings, spirits, and flora and fauna set against monochrome, usually reddish backgrounds. Because artists were entering the public domain of art for the first time, they avoided highly esoteric or sacred images in favor of these apparently straightforward drawings, which nonetheless possess ritual and ancestral associations. These associations are hinted at through the use of areas of hatched line decoration and the so-called X-ray technique, whereby the bones and internal organs of the subject are depicted. This technique fulfills a number of purposes: it records the standard methods of butchering game and the customary distribution of the cuts among kin; it reflects the relationships between disparate entities; the bones and organs can symbolize sacred objects; and, in combination with decorative hatching, it yields an appealing aesthetic effect. This style is still evident in more recent paintings, such as Nammerredje Gumala’s *Female Spirit and Rainbow Serpent* (fig. 2) and Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurra’s exquisitely rendered *Nadulmi the Kangaroo* (plate 25), both from about 1970.

During this era a young artist named John Mawurndjul was learning at the feet of two great masters, Yirawala (1901–1976) and Peter Marralwanga (1916–1987). Mawurndjul’s early works feature naturalistic images of spirit beings and ancestral figures. As he accrued ancestral knowledge, his paintings became more elaborate, enabling him to create highly esoteric, non-representational images that dispense with figurative elements in favor of combinations of cross-hatched patterns, or *rarrk*. His clan patterns, based on ritual body painting, are an expression of his identity while simultaneously evoking the presence of ancestral forces in the land and, by extension, within the work of art itself.



Fig. 2. Nammerredje Gumala, *Female Spirit and Rainbow Serpent*, ca. 1970. See cat. 11.



Fig. 3. Yirrkala Church Panels, 1963.

Figurative imagery is one major hallmark of painting in western Arnhem Land. As one moves eastward to the lands of the Yolngu, bark paintings are usually composed within a geometric matrix of vertical and horizontal lines, as in Narritjin Maymuru's *The Marawili Tree Rangga (The Possum String Story)*, 1968 (plate 20). Clan patterns dominate the picture surface, and images are built layer upon layer, usually ending with white, to achieve the aesthetic aim described as *bir'yun*—to transform mundane materials such as bark and ochres into a painted surface that literally glows with ancestral energy.

Artists and clan leaders such as Maymuru and Mawalan Marika (plate 17) understood the power of art to communicate across cultures. Both were instrumental in two major political art statements. Fully aware of the potential impact of Christianity on Yolngu culture, the artists led fourteen clan leaders and painters to create what are now known as the Yirrkala Church Panels (fig. 3). To reinforce traditional beliefs, these two monumental paintings, which depict the major ancestors of the Dhuwa and Yirritja moiety clans, were placed on either side of the altar in the mission church. The panels were completed in 1963, the year the first land rights claim was made by the Yolngu, as the country around Yirrkala was being threatened by bauxite-mining interests. The Yolngu took the matter to court but were told that under Westminster law they had neither an economic relationship with, nor did they possess deeds of title to, the land in question. In response, the Yolngu (again led by Maymuru and Marika) created a series of bark paintings, the Bark Petitions (figs. 4 and 5), as evidence of their ancestrally inherited ownership of the land. Their case failed, but it did set Aboriginal people on a course to recognition of their traditional rights to land; this was achieved in the Northern Territory in 1976 and nationally in 1993.<sup>3</sup>

As Yolngu art began gaining a degree of popularity, elders became wary of how much ancestral knowledge was being disseminated in the public domain. Yolngu artists felt impelled to devise strategies to protect the sacred

nature of their art in the public sphere while retaining its cultural integrity and significance—anything less, it was thought, would devalue their culture. One strategy was to distinguish between the public interpretations of a work, the “outside stories” accessible to noninitiates, and the deeper interpretations, or “inside stories,” that are revealed only in restricted ritual circumstances. The second strategy was stylistic: figures of ancestors, people, and totemic fauna would be depicted only in monochrome in bark paintings, not decorated with clan designs. The method ensures that these figures stand out against the ground of a painting and therefore can be easily identified by the layperson: Marika's *Skyworld, Badurru Milky Way River*, 1966 (plate 17), is a case in point. The ultimate effect was to “desanctify” paintings without diminishing their cultural integrity. Similar strategies were later adopted in other communities as they too entered the public domain of art.

Three decades later, the Yolngu engagement in several spheres of public life, from politics to popular music, has resulted in a series of successful land claims; their rights and laws are being respected; and their language, ceremony, and other expressions of culture continue to flourish. The resulting confidence is reflected in work by a number of contemporary artists who have had extensive experience of the wider world. Over the past decade, Waturr Gumana (plate 10), Djambawa Marawili (plate 16), and Wanyubi Marika (plate 47), among others, have returned to a style predating the monochrome edict of the 1960s: the figures of ancestral beings in their paintings are covered in clan designs, resulting in more complex and ambiguous imagery that better expresses the layers of meaning and the sacred nature of the artists' subject matter. To paraphrase Wanyubi Marika, to look at these paintings is like looking into a body of water: if you have the knowledge you can read the currents, tides, winds, and depth; if not, all you see is sunlight reflected off the surface—that is, the pure aesthetic effect. Both are required to fully appreciate a work of Aboriginal art.<sup>4</sup>

### THE DESERTS

Artists of the vast central, western, and southwestern deserts of Australia use a much different visual language, in which a limited number of graphic symbols operate like a visual alphabet. Each symbol has a range of meanings that depend on the contexts in which it is seen and on the ritual standing of the viewer. The most common symbols are concentric circles, which can indicate a site, a camp, a ceremonial ground, or a freshwater hole (or “soak”); straight or meandering lines, which usually indicate travel but may refer to lightning, rain, vines, or digging sticks; U shapes, which indicate a person or an ancestral being in human form; arcs for windbreaks and caves; and human and animal tracks. These symbols are applied to the body in ceremony and to ritual ground paintings, sacred and utilitarian objects, weapons, and rock walls.<sup>5</sup>

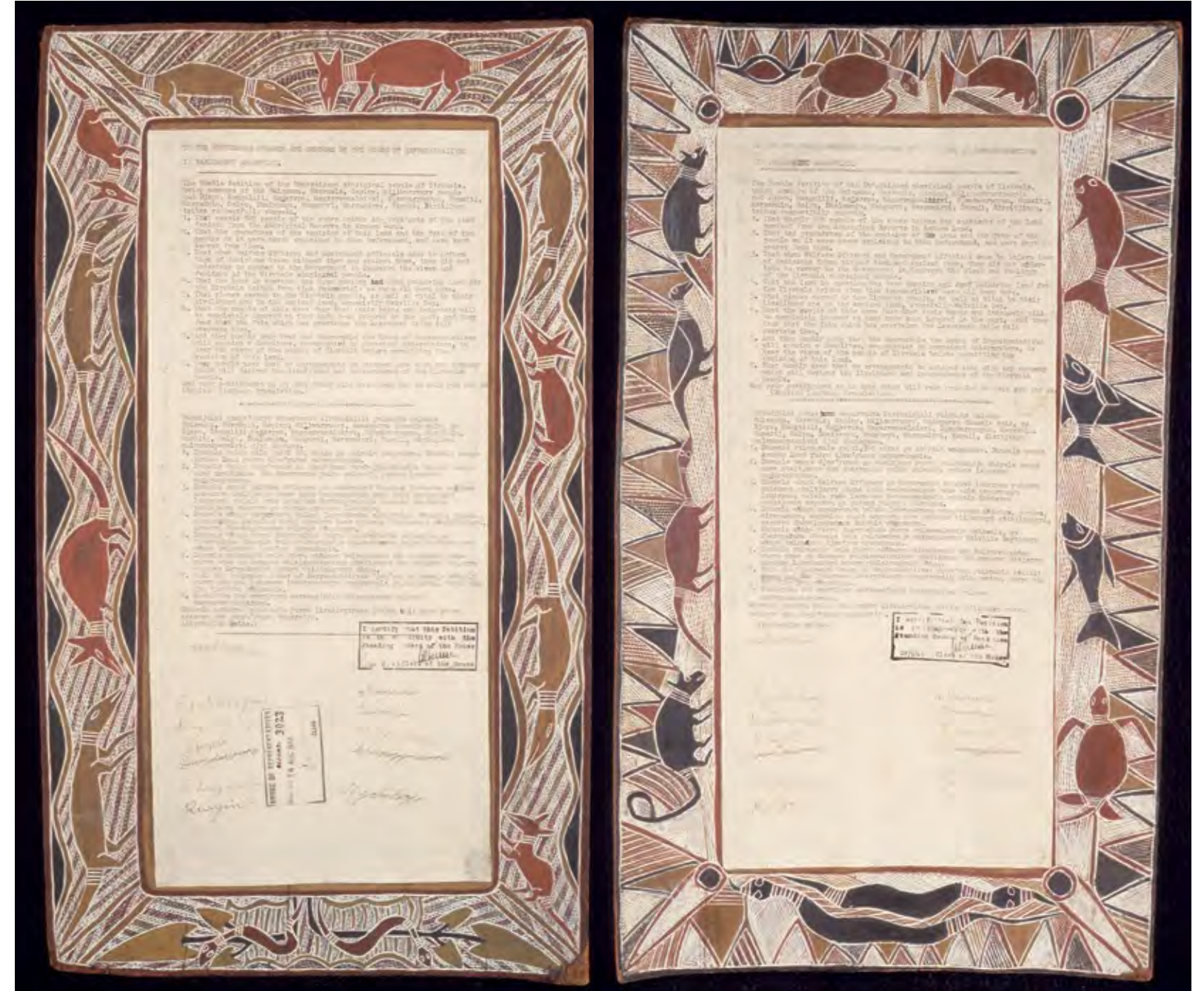


Fig. 4. Yirrkala artists (Dhuwa moiety), *Yirrkala Bark Petition*, 1963. Natural ochres on bark, ink on paper, 18½ × 8¾ in. (46.9 × 21 cm). House of Representatives, Canberra.

Fig. 5. Yirrkala artists (Yirritja moiety), *Yirrkala Bark Petition*, 1963. Natural ochres on bark, ink on paper, 18½ × 8¾ in. (46.9 × 21 cm). House of Representatives, Canberra.

Across the deserts, there was no long-standing tradition of flat, portable painting until 1971, when senior men began to paint in acrylic on rectangular panels at the settlement of Papunya, some 150 miles west of Alice Springs. Established under a government policy of assimilation in the 1960s, which specified that Aboriginal people were to be educated in Western ways, Papunya was an artificial settlement that brought together

disparate groups of people who had been removed from their traditional lands in the western deserts to make way for cattle grazing and mining. The separation from ancestral lands coupled with the discouragement of ceremonial activity and even of spoken Aboriginal language resulted in a dysfunctional community disconnected from its traditional ways of living.



Fig. 6. Honey Ant Mural, Papunya School, ca. July 14, 1972.

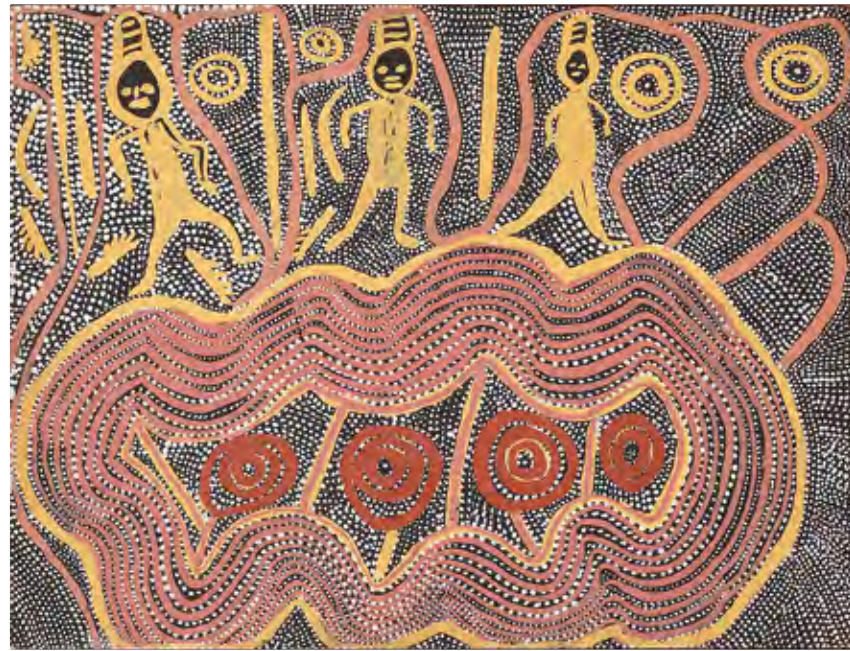


Fig. 7. Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula (Luritja/Warlpiri peoples, 1918/22–2001), *Old Man's Fighting Dreaming*, 1971. Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 21 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (41.5 × 55.5 × 4.5 cm). National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Morale was at a low ebb when an art teacher, Geoffrey Bardon, assumed a post at the local school in 1971. He noticed that his students would draw in a Western figurative manner and not in the traditional symbolic manner of desert art. After being informed that the children were too young to draw such sacred symbols, he deferred to the male elders in the community, who took it upon themselves to paint a series of murals, in traditional designs, on the walls of the school (fig. 6). The exercise encouraged the men to seek more painting materials from Bardon, who gladly obliged with acrylic and poster paints from the classroom plus flat boards (usually timber left over from the building of Papunya).<sup>6</sup> This effort gave rise to one of the great movements in modern Australian art. From Papunya, the original Western Desert art movement spread to communities throughout the central, far western, and southern deserts.

Artists at Papunya faced a dilemma similar to that encountered by the Yolngu a decade before. With little to no experience of the art world or understanding of the new audience for their work, they initially made paintings that often featured sacred and secret ritual objects, as well as depictions of ceremonial activity (fig. 7). Within twelve months, Papunya painters developed strategies to ensure the appropriateness of their imagery in the public domain. They adopted “inside” and “outside” interpretations of their work: by forgoing the literal representation of secret/sacred objects in favor of rendering only the graphic symbols carried by them, they created compositions of abstracted designs that could be interpreted on a variety of levels. In addition, the technique of covering areas of a painting with fields of dots in imitation of the construction of ceremonial ground paintings became more widespread to mask or conceptually disguise sacred symbols (fig. 8). By 1974 the introduction of canvas allowed artists to increase the size of their paintings to relate more closely to the large scale of the ritual ground designs. The larger formats also encouraged the production of collaborative paintings, much in the way that ritual ground paintings are made by artists in specific kin relationships working together. On canvas, this collaborative approach is extended to close family members and to artists' wives.

The majority of artists working through Papunya Tula Artists, the cooperative formed at Papunya in 1971, belong to the Pintupi group. One of the leading lights of the movement, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, was among the first to take the “masking” technique to extremes in his paintings. He dispensed with graphic symbols in favor of fields of dotting to create atmospheric effects, as in *Tjunginpa (Mouse) Dreaming*, 1996 (cat. 68), or by joining dots to form series of parallel lines that produce a visually mesmerizing image, as in *Old Woman Travels*, 1995 (plate 38). The intention of such works, akin to the effect of *bir'yun* among Yolngu artists, is to create a field of visual sensation that evokes the presence of ancestral forces within the landscape in which ancestral dramas are played out. In recent years other Pintupi artists, such as George Ward Tjungurrayi, have refined this approach



Fig. 8. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (Anmatyerr people, 1932–2002), *Bushfire II*, 1972. Synthetic polymer paint on board, 24 × 16 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (61 × 43 cm). National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



Fig. 9. A selection of doors from the Yuendumu School.

to produce large canvases that immerse the viewer in a field of pure optical sensation (plate 41).

The Land Rights Act of 1976 permitted Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to return to live on their traditional lands. Over the following years, most of the artists—who continued to work through the Papunya Tula Artists cooperative—left the settlement of Papunya to live on outstations in their own country. The Pintupi established two major outstations, one at Walungurru (Kintore) in 1981 and two years later at Kiwirrkura. By the late 1990s, many of the artists who had been part of the original Papunya Tula group had passed away, with the result that women artists, many of whom had assisted their husbands, began to paint under their own names. Elizabeth Marks Nakamarra, for example, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri's younger wife, elaborates on his method of constructing images from sections of angled parallel lines, to dazzling effect (cat. 44).

During the 1970s a community of Warlpiri artists at Yuendumu, some sixty miles north of Papunya, became aware of the new painting movement but were reluctant to participate, for fear of trivializing their culture. In the early 1980s women artists such as Bessie Nakamarra Sims (cat. 64) and Judy Napangardi Watson (cat. 72) began producing small-scale canvases, but the men resisted. By 1983 a group of elders, including Paddy Japaljarri Sims (cat. 65), decided to paint the doors of the local school with ancestral designs to remind the students of traditional knowledge in the face of the European

education they were receiving (fig. 9). The size of the painted doors encouraged the artists to paint on canvases that would be large enough for them to present the grand narratives of the Dreaming on an appropriate scale.<sup>7</sup>

The desert painting movement spread from community to community. By 1986 artists living at Balgo (Wirrimanu), in the Great Sandy Desert, staged their first group exhibition, at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Balgo is located at the crossroads of a number of major desert Dreamings and is considered to be a place of "high law," a fact reflected in the paintings of Wimmitji Tjapangarti (plate 40); his wife, Eubena Nampitjin (cat. 45); and Tjumpo Tjapanangka (plate 39), who were among the first public artists at Balgo. While they adhere to the visual language of the desert, their paintings are characterized by a broad palette and impasto paint, which gives their work a physical and visual tactility.

In the Australian summer of 1988–89, women artists at Utopia, an Aboriginal-owned cattle station northeast of Alice Springs, held their first commercial painting exhibition. Most had participated in an earlier series of batik workshops. Their paintings largely conform to desert composition and iconography; however, they are less formal and display the free-flowing forms achievable in batik. One of the standout artists in that first exhibition was Emily Kam Ngwarray, who (already in her seventies) produced paintings of fields of dotting and expressive gestural marks that elaborate on the body and ground-painting designs she had made in ceremony for

decades (plate 12). As with Djambawa Marawili, Mawurndjul, and Namarari Tjapaltjarri, Ngwarray had discovered a new way of painting, firmly rooted in traditional precepts of art.

Unlike the epic panoramic paintings by male desert artists, women artists tend to paint the detail of the landscape, and several Utopia artists have gone on to develop their own distinctive styles. Gloria Tamerr Petyarr elaborates on patterns found in nature, such as leaves blowing in the wind, as a metaphor for the presence of ancestral forces (plate 31). Kathleen Petyarr's formally composed canvases, which shimmer with fine parallel lines of dots, focus on a particular ancestral being in the form of a hand-sized lizard (plate 32). And artists are not reluctant to experiment, as in Abie Loy Kamerre's vertiginous rendition of sandhill country (fig. 10) or

Dorothy Robinson Napangardi's stark interpretations of salt-pan country (cats. 48–50).

As had happened at Yuendumu in the 1970s, Anangu artists—from a vast region that stretches from around Uluru (Ayers Rock) west to Patjarr (the most remote community in Australia) and south to the lands of the Spinifex People in the Great Victoria Desert—had been reluctant to paint their ancestral narratives for the public domain. However, in time they too found imperatives to take their art to the world. In 1990 the Ngaanyatjarra people at Warburton produced a series of large canvases, but these were not intended for sale; rather, they were made to encourage ceremonial practices and care for country. Among these artists were Jackie Kurltjunyintja Giles (plate 9) and Roy Underwood. In 1997 the Spinifex Project was established



Fig. 10. Abie Loy Kamerre, *Bush Hen Dreaming, Sandhill Country*, 2004. See cat. 18.

to document in paint people's relationship to their ancestral lands as part of a Native Title claim before the federal court. Paintings were being made, but not for public consumption. One exception is Roy Underwood's *Upurl-tjara* of 2000 (cat. 71); another is the collaborative *Wati Kutjarra (Two Men Story)*, 2003, which was one of the earliest public paintings to be sold by Spinifex artists (plate 34). The period between 2003 and 2005 saw a number of art centers established in communities throughout the region, leading to another renaissance in desert painting.

### THE KIMBERLEY

The Kimberley region in northwestern Australia has long been renowned for its rock art. However, the most recent defining moment in the region's art history—the establishment of a painting movement in the eastern Kimberley—occurred in response to changing social and cultural circumstances as well as environmental factors. In the twentieth century most Aboriginal people in the Kimberley worked on the local cattle ranches and were paid in kind rather than cash. Then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, conditions changed dramatically: as Aboriginal people were granted full citizenship, they were entitled to be paid the same as non-Aboriginal workers. This plus a combination of other factors, including the introduction of mechanization, resulted in the dismissal of most Aboriginal ranch workers. The resulting diaspora took them to the fringes of white townships such as Warmun, near Turkey Creek. Cultural practices were in disarray. On Christmas Eve 1974, Cyclone Tracy flattened the city of Darwin before wreaking havoc across the eastern Kimberley. Because cyclones are usually associated with ancestral Rainbow Serpents, and because Darwin is regarded by Aboriginal people of the Kimberley as the capital of European culture, local elders interpreted these events as a warning from the ancestors to maintain their culture, customs, and language. In response, a number of ceremonies, many interpreting the cataclysmic event, were performed in public as a sign of cultural renewal and affirmation.

Soon after the cyclone struck, Rover Thomas (a stockman living at Warmun) received a revelation from the spirit of an aunt who had died from injuries incurred in an automobile accident on a flooded road during the storm. The woman's spirit revealed to Thomas its journey across the Kimberley, visiting ancestral and ceremonial sites as well as places where Aboriginal people had once been massacred. At the end of the spirit's journey, it witnessed the Rainbow Serpent destroying Darwin. The narrative was relayed to Thomas over time in the form of a ceremony called the Kurirr Kurirr, replete with songs, choreography, and imagery. In public performances of the Kurirr Kurirr, dancers carry boards across their shoulders that bear the images revealed to Thomas. After repeated use, these painted panels were discarded, becoming collectible items. The leading artist after the cyclone was Paddy Jaminji (1912–1996), who worked alongside others,

including Hector Jandany (cat. 16). Rover Thomas did not paint on board until the early 1980s, when he quickly rose to prominence in the public arena with his intuitively dynamic compositions, earthy colors, and unique touch (plate 37). His constant theme was the land as a bearer of the scars of all those who walk on it—ancestral history overlaid with modern. Queenie McKenzie, who for years worked with Thomas on cattle stations, joined the painting group (plate 21); in 1998 Paddy Bedford joined another local artists' cooperative, Jirrawun Arts (plate 3).

Art centers have proliferated across the Kimberley to serve local artists as well as those whose traditional lands lie to the south. Fitzroy Crossing, for example, is home to a number of local artists such as Janangoo Butcher Cherele (plate 4), but also to those from the Great Sandy Desert, like Jarinyanu David Downs (plate 5) and Ngilpirr Spider Snell (plate 33).

### ART IN THE METROPOLIS

As waves of art streamed out of the Top End, Central Desert, and Kimberley regions of Australia, another scenario was enacted in the cities. A cultural revolution in the 1970s expanded the potential for urban-based artists, primarily in the southeast, to produce new work. Print workshops and studios proliferated, art schools thrived, and the first cooperative of urban-based indigenous artists opened in Sydney in 1987: Boomalli (meaning “to strike” and “to make a mark”) provided materials as well as studio and exhibition spaces, becoming a model for similar groups around the country.

A fresh crop of artists emerged from these cooperatives, many finding their way into the mainstream. There are a number of pioneers, including Thapich Gloria Fletcher, from Cape York in Queensland, who studied ceramics at art school in Sydney and aimed for cultural continuity through the adaptation of traditional forms and materials (plate 7). Yvonne Koolmatrie followed in Fletcher's footsteps, adapting the techniques of coil weaving sedge grass to new and inventive forms (fig. 11). Dennis Nona is one of a growing number of artists from the Torres Strait who transfers the techniques of engraved tortoiseshell and wood carving to monumental linocuts and, more recently, to life-size bronze sculpture (plate 30). Photography has provided another way for indigenous artists to revise perceptions: since the invention of the camera, Aboriginal people have been photographed for scientific purposes or mere curiosity. Ricky Maynard is one of several indigenous artists who have turned the roles around, enabling his subjects to actively assert how they wish to be represented (cats. 35–37).

With remarkable speed and sophistication, Aboriginal art has moved beyond the closed context of ceremonial life as Aboriginal artists have successfully managed to accommodate the public domain on their own terms while continuing traditional practices. Their art has proven to be a bridge not between the Stone Age and the present, but between Australian Aboriginal worldviews and those of the world at large.



Fig. 11. Yvonne Koolmatrie, *Eel Trap*, 2003. See cat. 21.

### NOTES

1. Louis A. Allen, *Time before Morning: Art and Myth of the Australian Aborigines* (New York: Crowell, 1975), 1.
2. This dictum has been traced to various sources dating back to 1906.
3. The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, 1976, and the Native Title Act, 1993.
4. Will Stubbs, “The Meaning of Buwayak,” in *Buwayak=Invisibility* (Sydney: Annandale Galleries in association with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Arts, 2003), 9–11.
5. Ceremonial ground paintings are constructed over a period of days by the repeated application of clusters of ochre mixed with feather down or plant fiber to a prepared flat ground of red earth.
6. See Roger Benjamin and Andrew Weislogel, eds., *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University Press, 2009).
7. The first large-scale canvases they made were exchanged for two four-wheel-drive Toyotas belonging to an American anthropologist working in the community at the time, Eric Michaels. The exchange yielded the title of the two paintings: *Toyota Dreaming*. The significance of the title lies in the fact that the cars allowed the senior men to visit traditional lands they had not seen for decades.



Fig. 1. Gunybi Ganambarr, *Baraltja*, 2009. See cat. 7.

## STOP AND SMELL THE AIR IN BLUE MUD BAY

Pamela McClusky

A LIZARD BROKE THROUGH the “tyranny of distance” that is said to surround Australia. She first appeared to me as a conglomeration of tiny dots in a painting, dots that obviously were important enough to spend countless hours putting in place. When I found out that the title of the painting was *Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming*, it inspired a quest to figure out what on earth that meant. Hearing that a lizard was involved took me back to childhood memories of living in a place where lizards roamed freely, in and out of the house. You found them peeking back at you from the depths of your underwear drawer or in the backyard almond tree. Now here was a lizard from another continent whose path was being honored. I learned that the artist wanted us to see the lizard marching through sandstorms, across a desert, taking a crooked route to prevail against adversity by finding what she needed to survive. Here was an invitation to look differently. Here was art that took me where I’d never seen art go before.

Indeed, Aboriginal art can take you underground to honor a tuber or put you in the middle of a desert with someone who grew up in what most people would consider harsh desolation and then transformed it on canvas into a place bursting with vitality. It can drop you in Blue Mud Bay (fig. 2), where you watch the stingrays and the herons and absorb insights about the sacred essence of water. Or you can swim down the Murray River with a fish as big as a person and end the day looking for white cockatoos. This art allows you to leap over the usual boundaries between species. It encourages you to consider how you might relate to a salt lake or a billabong, and how belief and fact interact.

When I saw my first exhibition of Aboriginal art, so much was completely new about it that it was almost too much to grasp. Many surveys of Aboriginal art turn it into a geography lesson, defining the different regions and then presenting each artist in the context of his or her region. As a newcomer to the field, I was bewildered by the magnitude of unknown names and places required by this approach. Nothing in this deluge of information really registered until I began looking beyond the who, what, when, and where to the why of these paintings and sculptures. So, following the lead of the mountain devil lizard, I’ve taken the indirect route across Australia. This book and the accompanying exhibition, *Ancestral Modern: Australian*

*Aboriginal Art*, provide a chance to put ourselves in the company of people who have inherited the longest enduring culture on the planet (at least fifty thousand years old) and on an island that has been floating with a unique cargo of plants and animals for forty million years. Part of this process required looking more closely at that lizard.

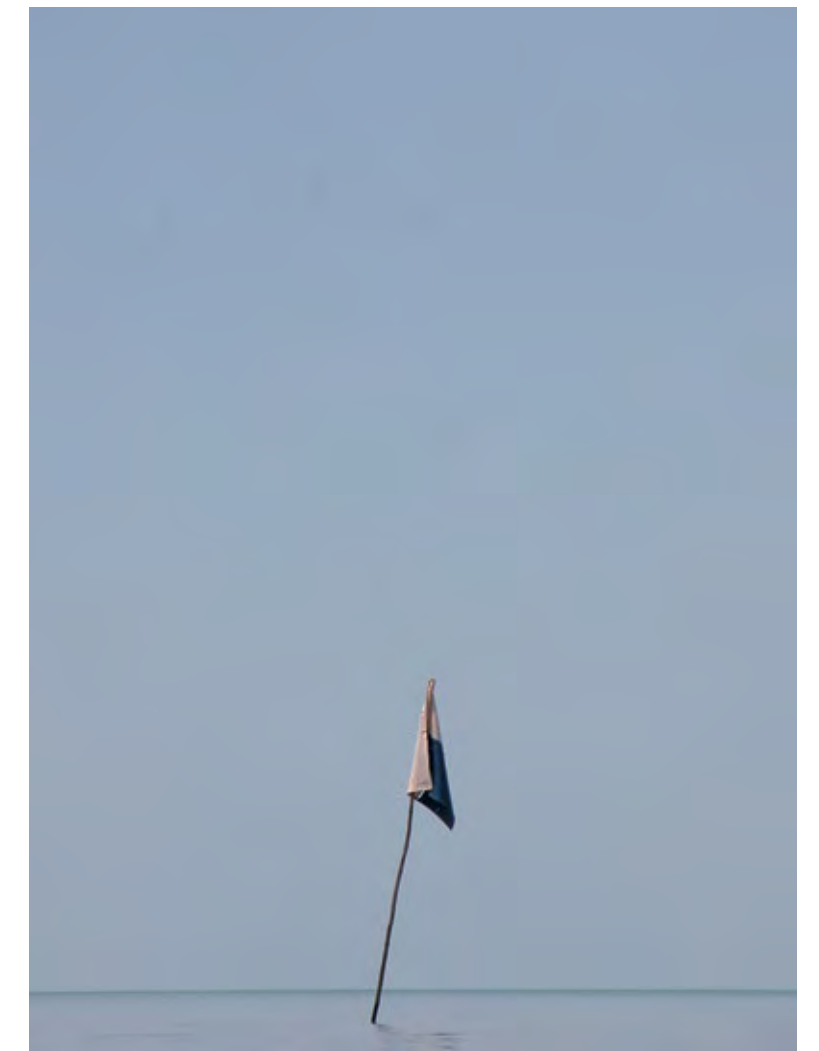


Fig. 2. Madarrpa clan flag in the waters of Blue Mud Bay, planted by Djambawa Marawili.



## STOP AND SEE THE LIZARD DREAMING

Eventually, I tracked down pictures of a mountain devil lizard and found her to be as glorious and glamorous as a lizard could ever be (fig. 3). In a part of the world with more huge lizards than anywhere else, she's no bigger than your hand, but her every feature is spectacular. She is covered in spikes and spots and can change color whenever she needs to blend in. Her actual eyes are hidden under false eyes, which are orbs that pop out of her forehead. She's able to drink the dew that gathers on her back at night through channels that connect to her mouth, so she doesn't even need to open her mouth if the time isn't right. The painter of *Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming—Winter Storm* (fig. 4), Kathleen Petyarr, grew up with this lizard as one of her many heroines and teachers. Her paintings record the lizard's unpredictable path through her homeland and serve as a reminder of what it was like growing up on a vast family estate where everyone navigated large stretches of land to forage for food. Ceremonies held to coincide with the proliferation of yams were a high art form, and Petyarr would watch her

grandmother paint designs on bodies and listen to her recite stories about the lizard as a tough old lady who sulked if young girls didn't pay attention to her. Such narratives underscored the need for connections between women and for their awareness of the seasons so that everyone would prosper. After one ceremony, Petyarr remembers encountering her first white man, who rode in on a camel they had to feed. Thereafter, she and her family watched other white ranchers turn more and more of their homeland into pastures for cattle.

When I met Kathleen Petyarr, after years of admiring her paintings, she was living in Alice Springs, still painting with minute dots to conjure up the lizard whose allure had made Australia a closer reality for me. Given that her subject was a wonder to behold—a petite dinosaur that had survived into the twenty-first century—the artist's choice not to showcase that flamboyant physique became a distinct clue that she was seeking a different reaction. It takes time to look at this painting, and it takes getting right up on the surface to recognize that the swaths of texture are, in fact, extremely tiny dots. Once you figure that out (people will stand in front of this painting for a long time to marvel at this aspect of it), there is no direct way to make sense of what the dots signify. If you don't like to go beyond the



Fig. 3. Thorny devil lizard (also known as a mountain devil lizard) on desert sand.



Fig. 4. Kathleen Petyarr, *Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming—Winter Storm*, 1999. See cat. 61.

## STOP AND COUNT THE SANDHILLS

visible evidence, this painting concludes as an exercise in mesmerizing dot patterning. If you are amenable to analogy, the message can be decoded: those dots are simultaneously spots on the lizard's body, sandstorms that get in her way, tracks of her progress across the Petyarr family's estate, and the food that would please the lizard as she makes her journey. If you are intrigued by the potential to go from a visual code to a moral message, then the painting takes you further. This seemingly timid creature offers a lesson about the need for collaboration: her tracks recall paths to the places where women have gathered for centuries to align their forces in ceremony.

Somewhere along this line of reasoning, I began to think of this painting as a quiet but emphatic stop sign. It contrasts vividly with the actual signs implanted in the lands of the Anmatyerr women, atop the fences that white ranchers used to corral the cattle when they took over and nicknamed this land Utopia. The Petyarr sisters all experienced the resulting shift in reality, seeing the sacred rockholes get torn up by hooves, watching fences go up, sensing that the emus, kangaroos, echidnas, blue-tongued lizards, goannas, bustards, skinks, and pythons were migrating away. Foraging for local bush foods became less viable, and the family began herding cattle instead. They were paid in rations of imported foods, like flour and tea, and soon came under pressure to assimilate into government settlements.

Kathleen Petyarr took part in a women's movement that advocated for land titles for her community, and Utopia was returned to traditional ownership in 1979. When she began painting on canvas in the late 1980s, she zeroed in on the need to convey her vision of the country that was undergoing so much change. In a 1993 interview she described the Mountain Devil Lizard as "traveling and moving to another place in the Creation time, taking the Dreaming. . . . The Dreaming journeys were made for real people, for Aboriginal people. And now we really follow that Dreaming."<sup>1</sup> In other parts of the interview, she describes how the Dreamings of dogwood tree seeds, desert raisins, dogs, emus, dingoes, and pencil yam all fit into her picture of her family's country. Each is present and accounted for in her mind; the creation-time foundation dramas are a part of the landscape. But what do you do when the powerful ancestors who established your world are not being taken seriously, when you see a multitude of people speeding through your country, not recognizing the danger of possible collisions with ancestors who are resting? Erect a stop sign. Stop and watch for the Lizard Dreaming. So, following her roundabout path, we'll make our way across the vastness of the continent to observe a few other signs.

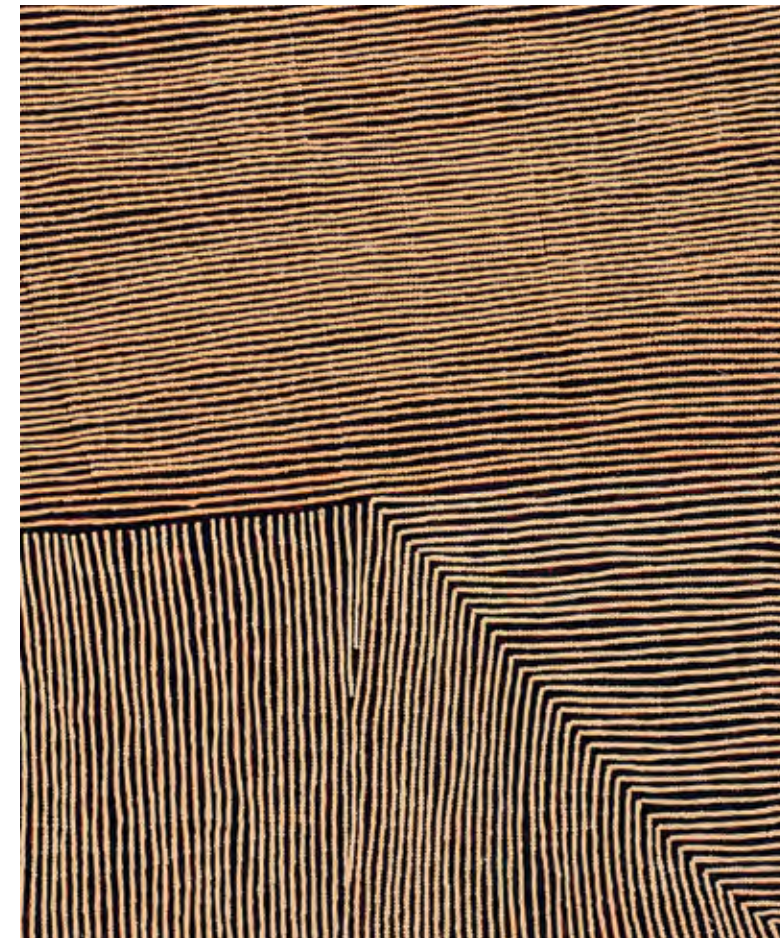


Fig. 5. Doreen Reid Nakamarra, *Marrapinti Rockhole* (detail), 2007. See plate 27.

Another woman artist who grew up in the immense expanse of the central desert is Doreen Reid Nakamarra, whose paintings can deliver the graphic punch of a stop sign (fig. 5). The lines that have taken over the canvas seen here are painted with an ever-so-slight waver to reassure you that no rulers were involved. Only the artist's patient hands have worked hard to keep them on track. She grew up in an isolated community that many would consider a place impossible to call home. Miles and miles of sandhills do stir up diverse responses (fig. 6). Early explorers were quick to condemn them, as in this account by a "gold finder":

There can be no walk, no journey of any kind, more monotonous than one through the bush. . . . Imagination is at a standstill—fairly bogged, as your body may be in mud-swamp. There are no sacred groves. . . . No time-hallowed fanes, sanctified by the recollections of hospitable deeds. . . . Nothing whatever to visit as a spot noted



Fig. 6. Great Sandy Desert near Discovery Well, Western Australia.

as being capable of exalting the mind by the memories with which it is associated. No locality, memorable as the haunt of genius. No birthplaces of great men. . . . Nothing of this kind; all is dully-dead, uninspiring mud-work.<sup>2</sup>

In her painting, Nakamarra portrays the sandhills as a delicate force field, suggesting that you can instead find comfort in long stretches of these unwavering hills, but you must stop to recognize the ancestors who created them and spend some time at the rockhole. Just as they once camped here to rest, so you should too. If you are able to follow their lead and dance

and sing with them, the site will welcome you. Such paintings invite us to stop and consider our own fixed definition of home. As another elder artist, Pincher Jampijinpa, once explained to a researcher, "A house is just like a big jail."<sup>3</sup> This comment pushed the researcher to observe: "In the West, we have a habit of thinking of home as a house. Walls make us feel secure. Individual rooms give us a sense of privacy. We tend to believe that living in a house is synonymous with being civilized. We have an ingrained prejudice against nomads and drifters. With proprietorial pride we will defend the privacy of our homes but fail to grasp that nomadic people feel just as strongly about the places they hold dear, the landscape they call home."<sup>4</sup>

## STOP AND VISIT THE LAWMAN

My definition of law evaporated into the hot air when this Lawman emerged. We met in Balgo (Wirrimanu) after I'd taken a long flight of many hours over miles and more miles of rust and pale gold sand whose main feature was spinifex grass—bristly cushions of gray-green and yellow-gray that dominate 25 percent of the Australian continent. It is the only nonedible grass on the planet, and each of its tips is covered with silica, which ignorant visitors don't pay much attention to until they realize their legs are covered in hundreds of slivers. From a distance, however, spinifex dots animate the surface of massive amounts of land.

Moving out of the pounding heat, I entered the Warlayirti Artists center. Paintings hung everywhere, and there was an abundance of acrylic paint in tubs of bright pinks, oranges, blues, and greens that were neatly stacked or placed in boxes marked with artists' names: Helicopter, Eubena, Wimmitji, Sarah. Several artists painting on the ground didn't look up at my entrance, but eyes turned when Tjumpo Tjapanangka—the famous artist, Lawman, president of the artists community, and traditional healer—walked in. You might not take him for a Lawman by appearance. He had indisputable style, with his wraparound sunglasses and worn but snappy clothes. Suddenly, he decided that I needed to see something, but he wanted everyone else to leave the room first. They moved on, and he began opening drawers in a flat file. Moving fast, he looked through stacked sheets of prints and fine papers, but they weren't what he was after, so he slammed the drawers shut. By the bottom one, I was beginning to wonder what the urgent missing piece could be. With a triumphant flourish, he pulled out a topographic map, rushed over to a table to spread it out, and then pointed to a sequence of sites. Watching to make sure I was registering every one, he marched me across the Gibson Desert and the Great Sandy Desert, then stopped at Lake Mackay, his country.

It was just a brief welcoming gesture, but I knew I could have walked out the door with Tjapanangka and made that actual march without hesitation. His knowledge of his country made him a Lawman. Born south of Balgo, he had been raised to know all the creation narratives and all the different kinds of waters—soaks, billabongs, and streams—whose names and songs were entrusted to him. He was a long-distance traveler who traversed the deserts to visit camps and outstations and observe the adjustments required as different government policies were used to assimilate Aboriginal communities. He watched the revelations coming out of Papunya in the 1970s, when senior men made the decision to paint a mural on the side of a school building where their children were being educated in everything but the ancestral rules to live by (see page 22). By 1986 he was painting his own versions of related scenarios infused with his intimate knowledge of the sites he had authority over. His canvases were recognized as significant

from the start and made their way into many exhibitions. By the 1990s he had become semi-settled in Balgo, a Catholic mission station, and served as president of a group of artists who painted in the former space of the Mission Sisters laundry. In 1999 his organization, Warlayirti Artists, opened an art center on the southern edge of town.

Tjapanangka's painting entitled *Wati Kutjarra (Two Brothers Dreaming)* provides more explanation of what being a Lawman entails (fig. 7). One author has described Aboriginal Law as a "dynamic jurisprudence of duty."<sup>5</sup> Others call its complex organizational structures "sacred" and "powerful," requiring years of rigorous training and physical initiation to comprehend. A shift occurs with certain words in Aboriginal English: business = serious ritual activity; manager = an individual who takes responsibility for running ceremonial business; an embassy = pockets of land on an estate; and an estate = country. Then, of course, there is the overarching word *Dreaming*, used as a rough approximation of the creation and foundation narratives that got everything started and that still guide everyone to this day and into the future. In painting, the Law is often translated not as rules about behavior but as descriptions of relationships—the good, the bad, and the ugly. The creators set in place moral regulations that cover everything from how to take care of a rockhole to how to bury the dead. And the ancestors haven't gone away. After taking extraordinary journeys, performing ceremonies, and staying up all hours, they became exhausted and lay down, at which point their heroic bodies would sink into the earth or become a mountain, rock, or grove of trees.

*Wati Kutjarra* is a beacon illuminating the story of two ancestral brothers who traveled throughout the western deserts. During their journey, they established the best practices of desert management: where to find game and bush foods, how to use fire to preserve vegetation, what relationships would hold each species in balance. Using electric yellow, Tjapanangka defined the scene with parallel lines. The two brothers travel to the area of Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), light a large fire, and then create the lake. Two central vertical lines indicate where the brothers camp and sleep. Across the center is a horizontal line that indicates the windbreak they construct to protect themselves. The many other parallel yellow lines represent water; the strong white lines represent sandhills.

Looking slowly at this painting, it becomes clear that it was made by a Lawman who walked across desert estates for much of his life. In getting to know people of Tjapanangka's generation, one researcher observed that those who have walked so extensively tend to speak of country as a narrative of movement, while those who rely on cars tend to speak of visiting country for specific purposes.<sup>6</sup> As they walk, they follow the ancestors' leads, as described in the origin myths, which "are meandering in style, often almost elusive: in them is a compulsive and vitally necessary mobility, of characters wandering from site to site, disappearing, 'turning into' something else, and usually reappearing."<sup>7</sup> The intersection of myth and



Fig. 7. Tjumpo Tjapanangka, *Wati Kutjarra (Two Brothers Dreaming)*, 2004. See plate 39.



Fig. 8. Murray Fredericks (Australian, born 1970). *SALT 108*, 2006. Pigment print on cotton rag, edition of 7, 47¼ × 59½ in. (120 × 150 cm).

reality in *Wati Kutjarra* reinforced my initial impression of a man whose knowledge made it so tempting to ask to walk with him to see his home at Lake Mackay. Knowing I would never actually get that chance, I did want to see more of what such an environment might be like. So it was a boon to find the work of Murray Fredericks, a documentary photographer who has spent long stretches of time on Australia's salt lakes (fig. 8).

## STOP AND PAY RESPECTS TO THE RAINBOW SERPENT

We leave the lizard behind as we move north to the Top End of Australia, to country where the smells, sensibility, flora, fauna, and art history shift dramatically. If there is one core concept here, it is the abundance of water, which is considered a sacred dimension of life. A literal stop sign signals another immediate difference: stricter protocol is followed here, requiring permission to visit Aboriginal lands and communities (fig. 9). In addition, the Rainbow Serpent is in charge here, her presence felt most keenly in the deep, dark pools and billabongs where people are not supposed to swim. She has an aversion to the smell of outsiders and may respond to their presence with a tantrum, sending storm clouds filled with heavy rain and high winds. To avoid inciting her anger, in one region a visitor must be introduced by a local person, who rubs a handful of water on the visitor's head and tells the serpent who she is, thereby neutralizing her difference.

After following such protocol, you have the chance to see greater Arnhem Land, a place saturated with art and with artists who contradict any stereotype that Aboriginality is stuck in the past. In a continent with over a

hundred thousand rock art sites,<sup>8</sup> Arnhem Land is a region densely packed with art as inventive and insightful as in any contemporary gallery abroad. Paintings, engravings, stencils, prints, and figures made of beeswax have been pressed into shelter walls and ceilings. Gallery after gallery is tucked into the rocks, each loaded with engaging figures and creatures who have been interacting and overlapping for a long time—an extremely long time. Tens of thousands of years of art have accumulated since the Aboriginal arrival over fifty thousand years ago.

The Rainbow Serpent is known to have appeared at least eight thousand years ago, predating Eve. She can be seen on sheets of bark from eucalyptus trees that have been cut and painted with local colors, including a white pigment derived from the feces of her real-life counterpart, the python. The notion of painting on the bark walls of temporary shelters probably goes back thousands of years; in the last one hundred years, this art form has evolved with lightning speed. A small bark by Nammerredje Gumala from about 1970 introduces the Rainbow Serpent as she arcs around a female spirit and an echidna (cat. 11). More demanding than Eve, she savors her primordial power as the first being who made the world. Having traveled everywhere to create rivers and water holes, she wants them to be protected. Even while she resides deep in a billabong, she stays



Fig. 9. Sign at Northern Territory Airport, Maningrida, 2009.



Fig. 10. John Mawurndjul, *Mardayin Design*, 2006. See plate 18.



Fig. 11. John Mawurndjul painting, 2004.

attuned to what happens on the surface through the water lilies attached to her back. If she witnesses people damaging her watery home, she will swirl up to devour them and then rise out of the water as a torrential downpour.

John Mawurndjul is an artist who lives in an outstation adjacent to a large billabong. His life has required many adjustments. He was born in the river-rich area of western Arnhem Land in 1952; as a child he traveled with his family around sites that were often rock shelters with an array of paintings. They moved to Maningrida, a permanent settlement, in 1957, where he haphazardly attended schools that discouraged indigenous language and culture, but his father taught him techniques for painting and made sure that he was able to leave school in order to participate in ceremonies as he grew. By 1973 government policy shifted, and his family was allowed to relocate to their lands on the Mann River. There, Mawurndjul married and resumed his commitment to traditional life skills and ritual responsibilities. Many of his paintings from this time depict the Rainbow Serpent as she twists around overlapping figures.

Despite his success as an artist working with recognizable imagery, Mawurndjul began to innovate a less literal form of painting. In the 1990s he began focusing more on *rarrk*—a repertoire of fine parallel lines, cross-hatching, diagonals, and herringbone derived from the patterns painted on bodies for ceremonies. Painting an initiate with *rarrk* revives the life of his ancestors and binds him to a specific site. *Rarrk* takes its brilliance from the surfaces that the Rainbow Serpent provides—water's reflections, shimmering surfaces, and haloing effects when something drops into its depths. Mawurndjul described his new work as a vision of Mardayin (a ceremonial cycle). His bark entitled *Mardayin Design* is a classic from this series (fig. 10). The only figural element remaining is the circle, signifying the water plants that grow in the billabong. He says that this bark refers to a particular outstation, Kakodbebuldi, where Mardayin ceremonies are held next to a large billabong covered in water lilies.

Mawurndjul created this painting the year after he had been the subject of a retrospective in Basel and the same year he was to present an installation at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. Instead of lingering over such accomplishments, he returns to family life in his clan lands. He cuts and prepares a section of bark from one of the huge eucalyptus trees nearby and then makes brushes from a few strands of human hair or from slivers of grasses and reeds. Ochres that he has dug himself are ground up, with a bit of PVA glue added to act as a fixative. Sitting cross-legged on the ground, sometimes with a cigarette in hand, he paints (fig. 11). His authority gives him the right to paint Mardayin designs for outsiders to see and keep, but he chooses patterns that are able to take this scrutiny. The rest we won't know, as they are reserved for use by the next generation. As part of his day, Mawurndjul always sets aside his art long enough to hunt and to teach others about how to connect with the forces that govern the landscape.

## STOP AND SMELL THE STINGRAYS IN BLUE MUD BAY

At last, we come to paradise. That's what an art advisor called it when I first spoke to him,<sup>9</sup> and that's how it's been described elsewhere:

Arnhemland struck me as a kind of paradise in which Bininj, Yolngu and Anindilyakwa people lived semi-traditional lives in what's mostly pristine country. There was water and fish and shade, dugong and turtle grazing over sea grass beds, lobsters on the reefs, oysters on the rocks, and slimy snotty worms in the mangrove roots. There were magpie geese, file snakes, long-neck tortoises and water lily tubers in the swamps, yams in the ground, and berries in the bushes, wallaby in the scrub, emus upon the plain and honey in the hollows of trees. The need for shelter and clothing was minimal, it being almost as hot in July as December.<sup>10</sup>

A flight out of Darwin to northeast Arnhem Land reinforces the impression of being at the top end of the continent, where land and water meet in bays, estuaries, floodplains, rivers, and the Arafura Sea. Stepping out of a small plane, one breathes in salty air infused with the scents of abundant vegetation, decay, and brine. There are no stop signs declaring the need for permission to visit, but on the road to the art center is a monster that signals trouble in paradise. It is an enormous bauxite mine—an otherworldly intruder with a body of metallic buildings, a head of blinking lights, a snout emitting steam plumes, and a belly fed by vehicles that tend to its needs.

The art center is its counterbalance, manifesting a remarkable decision made by the people of Yirrkala—who refer to themselves as Yolngu—to use art as a way to counteract trouble, particularly with outsiders (whom they call Balanda). The ability of art to carry meaning is elevated to a pinnacle of conviction here, and artists articulate their aesthetic choices with ease, orienting the Balanda to their goals. This has come with practice, after a history of epic exchanges with formidable opponents. Yirrkala took on Christianity in 1962–63, when sixteen senior clan leaders painted two public panels to describe their belief that the Yolngu come from ancestors who had established both the world and the structure to maintain it. These so-called Church Panels (see page 20), which asserted a sacred Aboriginal order and the need for its coexistence with Christianity, were installed on either side of a cross in a new mission church. Just days after these panels were unveiled, the clan leaders were told that the Australian government had excised rights to their land and granted a Swiss company permission to establish a bauxite mine on it. In response, the elders sent a petition to the Australian Parliament that was unlike any petition ever seen before, combining English and Yolngu, paper and bark, words and designs, human interests with those of sharks, turtles, snakes, dugongs, a bird, and wallabies,



Fig. 12. Gunybi Ganambarr, *Mundukul at Banaltja*, 2008. See plate 8.

all of whom have their eyes on eight well-worded claims (see page 21). Even though what became known as the Bark Petitions did not deter the mining company from bulldozing sacred sites to build their mine, the Yolngu nonetheless led the way in articulating land and sea rights. In the 1970s they established twenty-five community “outstations,” where men and women continue to live and paint, communicating to outsiders their vision of a creative paradise.

Gunybi Ganambarr’s painting is akin to a scintillating stop sign commanding us to stop and watch the swirls of the ancestral Lightning Serpent, Mundukul (fig. 12). His body circles like a whirlpool as he gathers force from an influx of freshwater into his lair, a watery hole in the floodplain that drains into Blue Mud Bay. After many months of dry heat, the waters of the floodplain begin to rot into a brackish mix; during this drying time, Mundukul lies down, creating a fish trap with his ribs. Now, however, the wet season is coming, and he is preparing for his most dramatic act: standing on his tail to herald the new season by spitting lightning into the sky.

Ganambarr paints this phenomenon to reinforce his clan knowledge about the movement of water, which is integral to their lives—in the Yolngu worldview, water is an essential medium of exchange. For outsiders, he paints to convey a larger picture. Look for the tiny diamond shapes that signify the freshwater that is coming up out of the land, which signifies the indigenous wisdom of the Yolngu. The diamonds are mixing with the elliptical shapes that represent salt water, water coming from outside, signifying an infusion of new thoughts from Balandas like you and me. In Blue Mud Bay, we are stirring it up with a Lightning Serpent. Yolngu art underlines a cosmology that allows this to happen and encourages the idea that this mixing of our thoughts with their thoughts yields the most fertile results.

THERE ARE MANY SIGNS to read in Australian Aboriginal art. Many of us will never have the chance to go to Australia, but the way of seeing embodied in this art has implications everywhere. It draws us into a continuum with the lizard who doesn’t follow a straight line, with a multitude of species in places we’ve never been. It questions human autonomy and looks more closely at the radical power of what may seem humble objects and creatures. It aligns our moral compass in a new way, which has become a part of recent art history.<sup>11</sup> These indigenous signs point to the conversations between living things that are happening on a constant basis. They encourage us to stop and listen in, taking time to contemplate the intense interdependence that prevails no matter where in the world we are.



Fig. 13. Footprints of thorny devil lizard on sand.

#### NOTES

1. Kathleen Petyarr, from a 1998 interview in *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, ed. Hetti Perkins and Margie West (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007), 210–17.
2. John Sherer, *The Gold Finder of Australia: How He Went, How He Fared, and How He Made His Fortune* (London: Clarke, Beeton, and Co., 1853), 246.
3. Pincher Jampijinpa, quoted in Michael Jackson, *At Home in the World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 84.
4. Jackson, *ibid.*
5. Deborah Bird Rose, “Sacred Site, Ancestral Clearing, and Environmental Ethics,” in *Readings in Indigenous Religions*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Continuum, 2002), 102.
6. “Those who had lived a life or at least some formative years of close, foot-walking experience of country tended to speak of country in ways that narratively modeled that experience, telling stories that involved the recounting of movement from place to place, while those who had not spoke of their relationship to country more in terms of visitation for specific purposes. Those who had lived the traveling mode of life tended to speak of knowledge as gained from observation, imitation and internalization of ways of doing things.” From Francesca Merlan, *Caging the Rainbow: Places, Politics, and Aborigines in a North Australian Town* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 102.
7. Ronald M. Berndt, “Traditional Morality as Expressed through the Medium of an Australian Aboriginal Religion,” in *Religion in Aboriginal Australia: An Anthology*, ed. Max Charlesworth (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 194.
8. Paul S. C. Taçon, “Marks on and of Land: The Relationship of Rock and Bark Paintings to People, Places and the Ancestral Past,” in *Rarrk: John Mawurndjul: Journey through Time in Northern Australia*, ed. Christian Kaufmann (Basel: Schwabe, 2005), 142.
9. Many thanks to Andrew Blake and Will Stubbs at the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre for their insights, always provided whenever asked, and for their exceptional documentation of the aesthetic brilliance at Yirrkala.
10. Andrew McMillan, *An Intruder’s Guide to East Arnhem Land*, rev. ed. (Nightcliff, Australia: Niblock Publishing, 2007), 9.
11. An excellent example of such recent analysis of African art is David T. Doris’s *Vigilant Things: On Thieves, Yoruba Anti-Aesthetics, and the Strange Fates of Ordinary Objects in Nigeria* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 129.

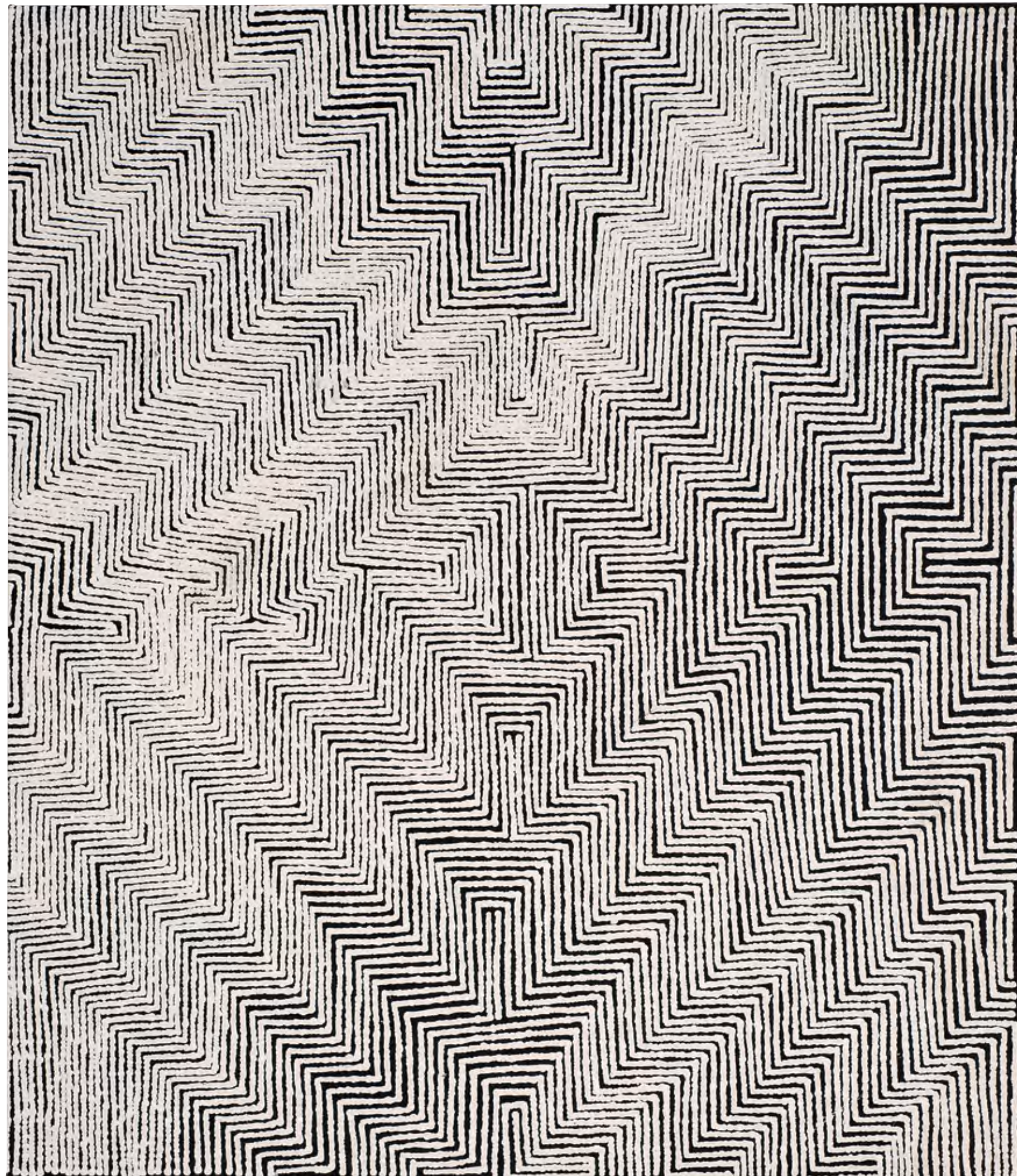


Fig. 1. Elizabeth Marks Nakamarra, *Kalipinyapa Rockhole*, 2003. See cat. 44.

# STAGING AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART

Lisa Graziose Corrin

AS THE KAPLAN & LEVI COLLECTION of Australian Aboriginal art steps into the public spotlight, I have been asked to consider how a curator of contemporary art might “stage” conversations between these paintings and other modern and contemporary works already in the Seattle Art Museum’s collection. My memory turns to an important albeit fraught model: the ambitious two-site exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, organized by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at Parc de la Villette, both in Paris, in 1989. This exhibition included one hundred works of art. Fifty were created by artists from art world “centers” such as New York, London, and Paris. Another fifty were drawn from the “margins”: artists from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Australia.

Today, the controversial legacy of this seminal exhibition is captured in a single photograph reproduced over and over whenever the exhibition is discussed. The photograph documents a circular mud wall painting by the British artist Richard Long displayed with a ground painting, *Yam* (1989), created in situ by six Aboriginal artists.<sup>1</sup> By his own admission, Martin’s intent in such a gesture was to “to play the role of someone who uses artistic intuition alone to select these objects from totally different cultures.”<sup>2</sup> The juxtaposition of these two works of art, produced contemporaneously but divided by a cultural chasm, became emblematic of all that was transformative and all that was problematic about Martin’s premise. He wished to create a level playing field for all contemporary art that would undermine concepts like “center” and “margin.” However, by failing to acknowledge the specific cultural contexts in which works such as the Aboriginal ground painting were made, he unwittingly reduced their meanings to mere visual affinities with Western art. Martin’s exhibition remained trapped within his Eurocentrism despite his frank acknowledgment of it.<sup>3</sup>

To bring this point closer to home: a contemporary curator at SAM might have a sense of déjà vu when encountering *Distraction* (fig. 3) by the Canadian-born artist Karin Davie beside *Bush Hen Dreaming, Sandhill Country* (see page 25) by Aboriginal artist Abie Loy Kamarre, or Mark Tobey’s *White Night* (fig. 2) beside Elizabeth Marks Nakamarra’s *Kalipinyapa Rockhole* (fig. 1). These four canvases share the aesthetic vocabulary we



Fig. 2. Mark Tobey (American, 1890–1976), *White Night*, 1942. Tempera on paperboard mounted on composition board, 22¼ × 14 in. (56.5 × 35.6 cm). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Berthe Poncy Jacobson, 62.78.



Fig. 3. Karin Davie (Canadian, born 1965), *Distraction*, 1999.  
Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in. (182.9 × 152.4 cm).

Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Contemporary Art Project, Seattle, 2002.13.

associate with Western abstraction of the past sixty years. A casual museum visitor might not recognize any distinctive difference. Yet how closely are these paintings really aligned?

Kamerre organized the semicircular swirls of color in her composition in a careful sequence.<sup>4</sup> Each bright acrylic line is distinct and is meant to refer specifically to the artist's homeland, where sandhills are a common feature. The painting documents a very specific place where a bush hen helped establish her country. Davie, too, employed a vibrant palette of acrylic paint for her undulating waves, which suggest the distorted reflections of fun-house mirrors. Her voluptuous curves also reference the performance of the artist's own body while painting.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Nakamarra's white painted maze bears comparison to the "white writing" of Mark Tobey. However, the artists' own explanations of their paintings contradict this visual congruity. Nakamarra associated her lines with a specific site formed during a mythic storm, when lightning

flashed and floods rushed across the land to create rockholes and small creeks. By contrast, Tobey's *White Night* represents something felt, not seen, in the energies of the modern city.

In her *New York* magazine review of *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, a landmark exhibition presented at the Asia Society Galleries in 1988, critic Kay Larson wrote: "Aboriginal art at its best is as powerful as any abstract painting I can think of. I kept remembering Jackson Pollock, who also spread the emotional weight of thought and action throughout the empty spaces of his canvases."<sup>6</sup> Such a reading of Aboriginal painting distorts meaning and, as Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis have argued, "naively maps modernist self-expression onto the cultural practices of non-Western artists."<sup>7</sup> While the two pairings I have suggested would no doubt be visually stunning, a conversation based on the superficial patterning common to them risks creating a misleading conflation. They cry out for interpretation that instead amplifies their cultural and historical dimensions.

Kamerre wants her stripes to evoke recognition of ancestral beings; Davie's curves reflect on notions of self and body within modernist abstraction. Nakamarra references the songs and stories that are embedded in the desert landscape of her homeland; Tobey's electrified lines celebrate the dynamism of machine-age urbanism. Although visually resonant when placed beside one another, their works inhabit culturally separate realms. "Who's that bugger who paints like me?" Aboriginal artist Rover Thomas (plate 37) asked curator Wally Caruana upon encountering a painting by Mark Rothko for the first time.<sup>8</sup> To subsume the vibrant dots, dashes, and geometries of Aboriginal painting into a linear history of Western abstraction is to utterly misrepresent them.

As critic James Elkins has argued: "What sense does the phrase 'the history of modernist painting' have when it excludes so much of the world, and so much of the practice that comprises modernism? . . . It is the sphinx in the road that has to be answered before it will be possible to imagine a truly inclusive multicultural history of twentieth-century painting."<sup>9</sup> However, the curator must first "acknowledge the Westernness of the Avant-garde and of modernism"—the ideology she has internalized—and become fully cognizant of her "dislocated and ambiguous position," of her own cultural subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> Any comparison between Kamerre and Davie made without examining how one has internalized a specific hegemonic canon of modernism or how one regards Aboriginal art on its own terms will ultimately lead back to a hierarchical language that values Western production over art created outside its borders—what Stuart Hall has called "the West and the rest."<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect, one can see that *Magiciens de la Terre* was, indeed, a harbinger of change. It questioned the very definition of "contemporary art" and ushered in a new era of art fairs, biennales, and museum exhibitions that emphasize a global perspective capable of transcending national boundaries and erasing distinctions between center and margin. It required

curators to step outside their own expectations and to become aware of territories where other assumptions are operative. In short, it demanded that a curator become a citizen of the world, with a usable concept of world culture that allows for communication across boundaries so that a deeper conversation between works of art can take place.<sup>12</sup> Today, a curator of contemporary art must learn other discourses, must be conversant in what Kobena Mercer has referred to as "cosmopolitan modernisms."<sup>13</sup> A truly cosmopolitan modernism would encompass not only Aboriginal art but also awareness of an Aboriginal perspective. So, to return to the question at the heart of this essay, how might this deeper conversation be staged at SAM?

What if we were to seek out shared motifs and metaphors in the Aboriginal paintings in the Kaplan & Levi Collection and in works in SAM's modern and contemporary collection in order to bring them into a mutually illuminating presentation? Take, for example, "the journey" or "migration."

For artists like Richard Long and Julie Mehretu, traversing great distances oneself or reflecting on the movements of other people across vast distances is a wellspring for their work. Similarly, Aboriginal songlines—ritual sites connected by a journey on foot and by song—as well as the ritual journey in the bush sometimes called a walkabout, have been important subjects in Aboriginal paintings.

Let us return to Long's mud circles, this time his *Puget Sound Mud Circle* (fig. 4), painted specifically for the Seattle Art Museum. Long has expanded the boundaries of what is considered a landscape by moving it off the canvas and reconnecting it to its surroundings. His process often begins with walks in remote places, where he records his thoughts and the path of his footsteps in journals, poems, photographs, and spontaneous works of art made with materials found along his route. At SAM, he created a wall mural by expressively manipulating mud from the Puget Sound



Fig. 4. Richard Long (British, born 1945), *Puget Sound Mud Circle*, 2002.  
Filtered mud on interior black paint, approx. diameter: 196 in. (4978 cm).  
Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Jeffrey and Susan Brotman, 2001.1056.



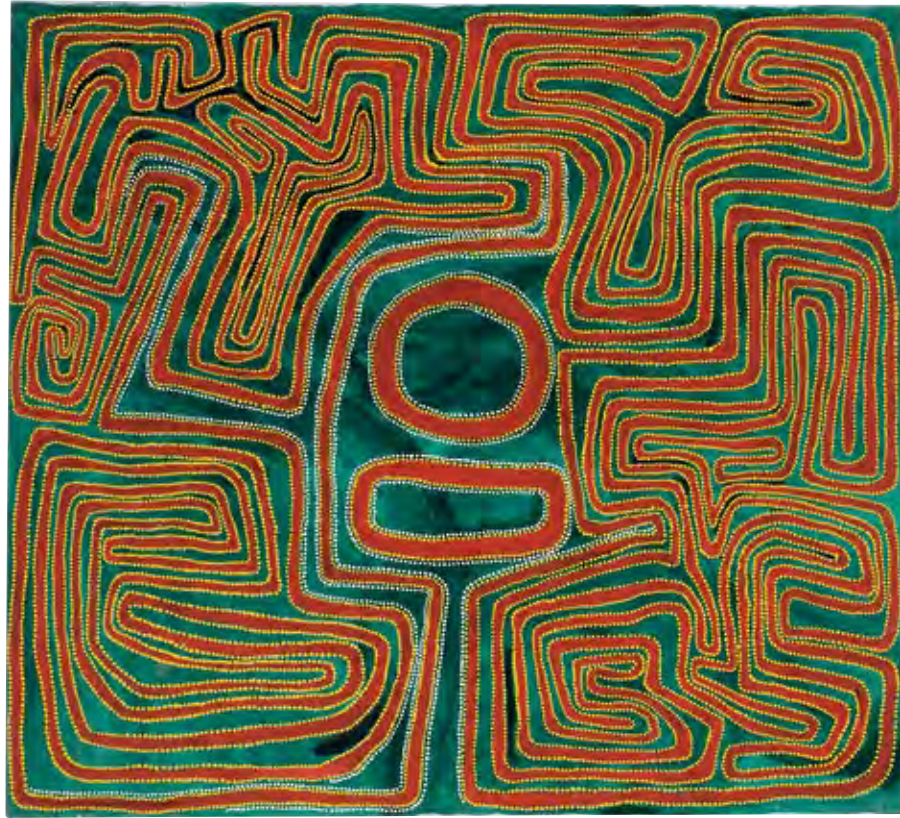


Fig. 5. Mawukura Jimmy Nerrimah, *Wayampajarti*, 2001. See cat. 52.

to shape a circle, a form with an ancient history that traverses continents and cultures.

Just a year prior, in 2001, Mawukura Jimmy Nerrimah painted *Wayampajarti* (fig. 5) in Fitzroy Crossing, his home in Western Australia. Nerrimah grew up in a community dedicated to enacting ceremonies marked by songs and dances. These are recalled in *Wayampajarti*, which depicts a site that he says he used to walk around when he was young.<sup>14</sup> Nerrimah lost his mother near this site, and he has described it as having a water hole with an ancestral snake who lives in the water and keeps it strong. For Nerrimah, depicting this site of walking is a critical means of maintaining a connection to the spirit world, a migratory path that allows the ancestors to be eternally present.

Mitjili Napanangka Gibson's *Wilinkarra* (fig. 6) refers to a ritual walkabout in her homeland. For Aboriginal artists, travel through the landscape is spiritual, something performed as well as painted. The ritual walkabout and the represented walkabout are equally significant mappings of sacred cultural experience. Both ensure the continuation of Aboriginal cultural memory that is deeply embedded in the topography of ceremonial places—some seen, and some known only through secret oral history.<sup>15</sup>

For the Ethiopian-born American artist Julie Mehretu, the dynamics of seminomadic cosmopolitan existence have taken on a ritual-like dimension that can also be mapped. According to Mehretu:

I think of my abstract mark-making as a type of sign lexicon, signifier, or language for characters that hold identity and have social agency. The characters in my maps plotted, journeyed, evolved, and built civilizations. I charted, analyzed, and mapped their experience and development: their cities, their suburbs, their conflicts, and their wars. The paintings occurred in an intangible no-place: a blank terrain, an abstracted map space. As I continued to work I needed a context for the marks, the characters. By combining many types of architectural plans and drawings I tried to create a metaphoric, tectonic view of structural history. I wanted to bring my drawing into time and place.<sup>16</sup>

In Mehretu's statement, "journeyed" is a metaphor—synonymous with "nomadic"—used to describe her own circulation as well as the global circulation of people more generally. Mehretu, like many Aboriginal peoples, is herself seminomadic, propelled by the forces of global cultural commerce

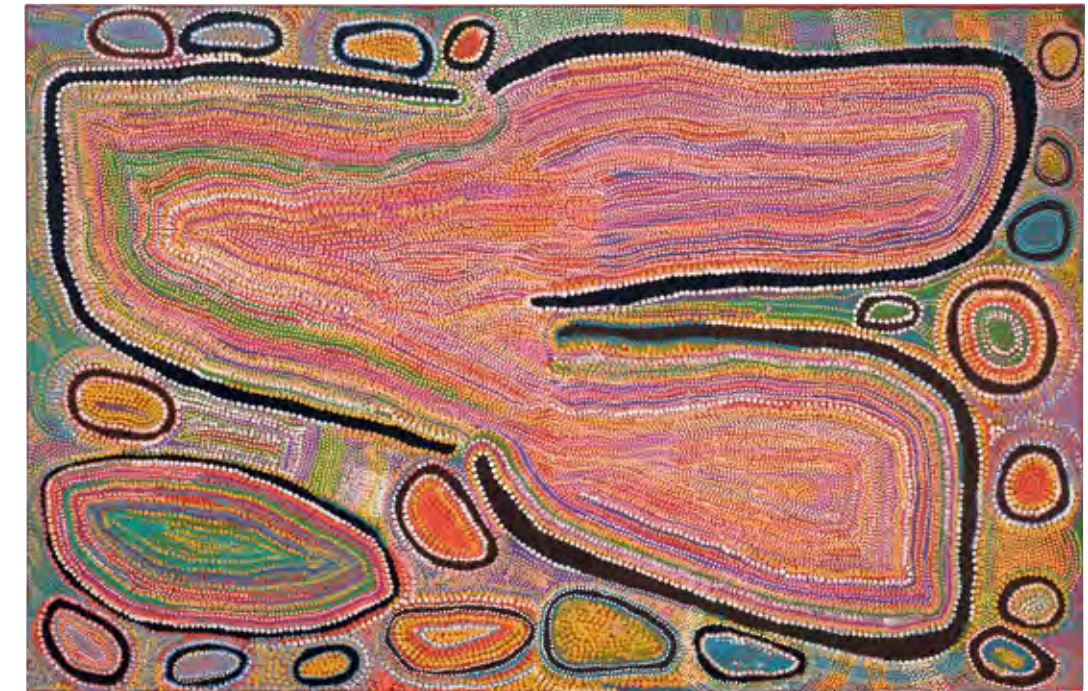


Fig. 6. Mitjili Napanangka Gibson, *Wilinkarra*, 2007. See cat. 9.

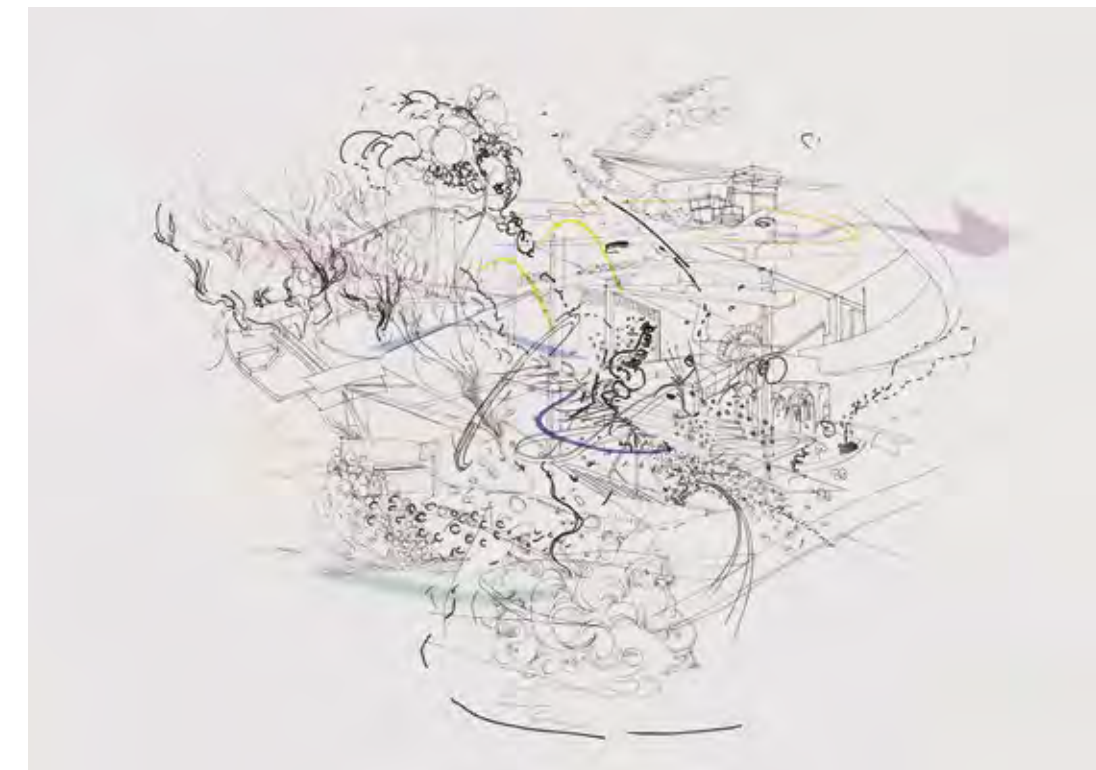


Fig. 7. Julie Mehretu (born in Ethiopia, 1970, resides in U.S.), *Untitled*, 2001. Ink and pencil on Mylar, 21½ × 27⅞ in. (54.6 × 69.5 cm). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Contemporary Art Project, Seattle, 2002.30.

to move among Manhattan, Berlin, upstate New York, and the arenas of the international art world. At one level or another, contemporary culture is a traveling culture, and her work attempts to both momentarily capture and momentarily stay this perpetual mobility, to chart its dynamic as a form of remembering this particular movement in human time, as in her ink and pencil drawing *Untitled* (fig. 7).

Here lines meet and cross in an explosive composition that suggests an eruption of energy. Mehretu's choice of Mylar as a support alludes to the materials of architecture: it is typically used in making plans because of its capacity for layering and revision. Her compositions also reference the architectural containers where crowds collide and disperse: airports, train stations, stadiums, military installations. Brightly colored shapes anchor the picture plane yet appear to flail within the chaotic space like national banners loosened from their poles. As in the paintings by Nerrimah and Gibson, the power of Mehretu's art is in capturing the complexities of visible and invisible migratory movement within a fast-changing world. Bringing together the four works by Long, Nerrimah, Gibson, and Mehretu encourages us to think in new ways about how human beings are experiencing and adapting to shifting economic and geopolitical borders.

The Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming is another motif that could help stage a productive interaction between Aboriginal paintings and works in SAM's collection. The Dreaming is the complex, untranslatable Aboriginal concept that structures the spirituality, laws, and lives of their communities. Encompassing a cosmology of generative ancestral beings, it is the principal source of imagery in paintings like Judy Napangardi Watson's *Mina Mina (Women's Dreaming)* (fig. 8), and according to Peter Sutton, such paintings "exhibit all of the faces of human virtue, vice, pleasure, and suffering."<sup>17</sup> Paintings of Dreamings such as Watson's can be compared to the work of contemporary artists like the artist Raqib Shaw. Born in Calcutta and raised in Kashmir, Shaw also creates worlds animated by his own iconographic language in which extremes of human behavior and desire commingle within his bejeweled cloisonné surfaces.

Watson has said of her *Mina Mina (Women's Dreaming)*:

This story is part of Kanakurlangu (Women's Dreaming) which belongs to the Napanangka/Napangardi sub-section. During the Dreaming, a group of Napanangka/Napangardi women travelled through Janyinki to Mina Mina, the site associated with this Dreaming, on their way east. They carried Karlangu (digging sticks) and collected bush tucker such as Jintiparnta, which they carried in their Parraja (food carriers). Jinti-parnta are a variety of edible fungus, also known as native truffle, that appear after rain. The growing fungus forces the earth above it to crack, exposing it. Women collect jintiparnta, squeezing out the juice before cooking. Jinti-parnta are represented in this painting by concentric circles. Ngalyipi [snake vine]



Fig. 8. Judy Napangardi Watson, *Mina Mina (Women's Dreaming)*, 2002. See cat. 72.

are also represented. They can be seen as the wavy lines. Ngalyipi are used to make shoulder straps to carry parraja laden with bush tucker.<sup>18</sup>

This vivid narrative not only offers a precise explanation of how to hunt native truffles but also illuminates the sumptuous visions reflected in Watson's painting. The Dreaming animates, and merges with, daily life.

Two years later, in London, Shaw created a work that is equally dense with flamboyant flora and fauna. *The Garden of Earthly Delights V* (fig. 9) is filled with hybrid creatures inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's 1505 triptych, in which a lush, heavenly garden metamorphoses into a nightmarish inferno. Shaw turns Bosch's morality tale on its head and his dream into an aqueous underworld. A sea creature, mouth agape in a silent scream, wears a crown and a black and white robe associated with a judge or priest. It rides a turtle-like creature that bares its teeth and is surrounded by hybrid attendants,

including a scaly figure with the tail of an amphibian and the furry head of a forest animal. With his topsy-turvy world, Shaw revels in perversely subverting hallowed symbols of authority, especially those with colonial associations, saying: "I think that authority is so funny and so camp. Look at all the military and royal rituals over the centuries—men as decorated birds. There is something so obvious, magical, stupid, and divine about rituals from the coronation of an emperor to Christ's crucifixion with the crown of thorns, from the Queen in her Garter robes to Yukio Mishima performing hara-kiri with great beauty. I love to play with these symbols."<sup>19</sup>

A cosmology expresses the human need to find order in the universe, to give structure and meaning to what feels beyond comprehension. Watson's painting is a reverential reflection on the powerful role of the Dreaming in Aboriginal life. Shaw's painting exposes the folly of our desire to order our world and the arbitrary hierarchies of power we construct. What is the value

in bringing works of art that represent such different worldviews together in dialogue? It underscores that, while the desire to construct meaning may be universal, what the universe means across cultures is not. In this moment of history, we can have the experience of cultural difference when we juxtapose two works of art as distinct as these and present them in the spirit of truly equal exchange.

This is a far cry from the attitudes of the early European settlers who considered Australia a terra nullius—land belonging to no one—despite the vast population of indigenous peoples who already inhabited the continent. This mind-set and its impact on the indigenous population has been the subject of many contemporary Aboriginal paintings. Connecting the political dimension of Aboriginal painting to that of a contemporary artist exploring the legacy of colonialism helps situate their works within the arc of this shared history.



Fig. 9. Raqib Shaw (Indian, born 1974), *The Garden of Earthly Delights V*, ca. 2004. Mixed media on board, 47% × 83% in. (121 × 213 cm). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Rebecca and Alexander Stewart, 2004.97.



Fig. 10. Brad Kahlhamer (American, born 1956), *Loser + Clark*, 1999.  
Oil on canvas, 84 × 120 in. (213.4 × 304.8 cm).  
Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Contemporary Art Project, Seattle, 2002.<sup>25</sup>

Queenie McKenzie was the daughter of an Aboriginal mother and a white father, although she was raised by a second Aboriginal father. Never forced to assimilate despite her light skin, she identified herself as Aboriginal, painting the landscape as well as topics related to the history and troubled present of her community. Her *Horso Creek Massacre* (plate 21) documents one of many hostile encounters between Aboriginals and whites over land and grazing rights. Mixing red ochre from the hills around her home in Warmun (Turkey Creek) with kaolin, she gave the picture its signature earthenware-hued palette and heightened its somber narrative. *Horso Creek Massacre* recalls a group of Aboriginal people from the 1880s who were shot by white police in retaliation for having killed a

young bull. Only one of the group (the man who had actually killed the bull) survived—by hiding in the body of the animal.

McKenzie's depiction of the massacre places the event in the rugged landscape of eastern Kimberley, her homeland. A great tree, hills, and rocks bear witness to the haunting scene. All the figures are flat black silhouettes, but the police are differentiated from the Aboriginals by their white helmets and weapons. Small, lifeless white figures, the bodies of the dead, lie on the ground, floating within dark oval cocoons. This sense of isolation—living from dead, black from white, man from landscape—is intensified by the contrasting profusion of closely spaced white dots adapted from Aboriginal body painting and applied with a matchstick.

Like McKenzie, Brad Kahlhamer is bicultural, a Native American raised by Caucasian parents. He favors an incongruous combination of high and low art forms—the loose, drippy paintwork of Abstract Expressionism with cartoonish images, childish scribbles, and graffiti. This allows him to create what he refers to as a “third place,” a meeting point where he can critically explore the perpetuation of myths of the Old West and their devastating consequences for Native Americans, continuing on reservations even today. The title of the painting *Loser + Clark* (fig. 10) is a pun on the name of Meriwether Lewis, who, with William Clark, completed the first expedition across the United States to the Pacific. Their actions ultimately led to the economic exploitation of Native lands and reaffirmed the belief in Manifest Destiny: the right of the United States government to “acquire” the land from coast to coast.

The ideology of Manifest Destiny embodies the same assumptions as the concept of terra nullius. To believe in Manifest Destiny is to presume that the entire territory now called the United States was, like Australia, “discovered” and had belonged to no one. McKenzie's *Horso Creek Massacre*

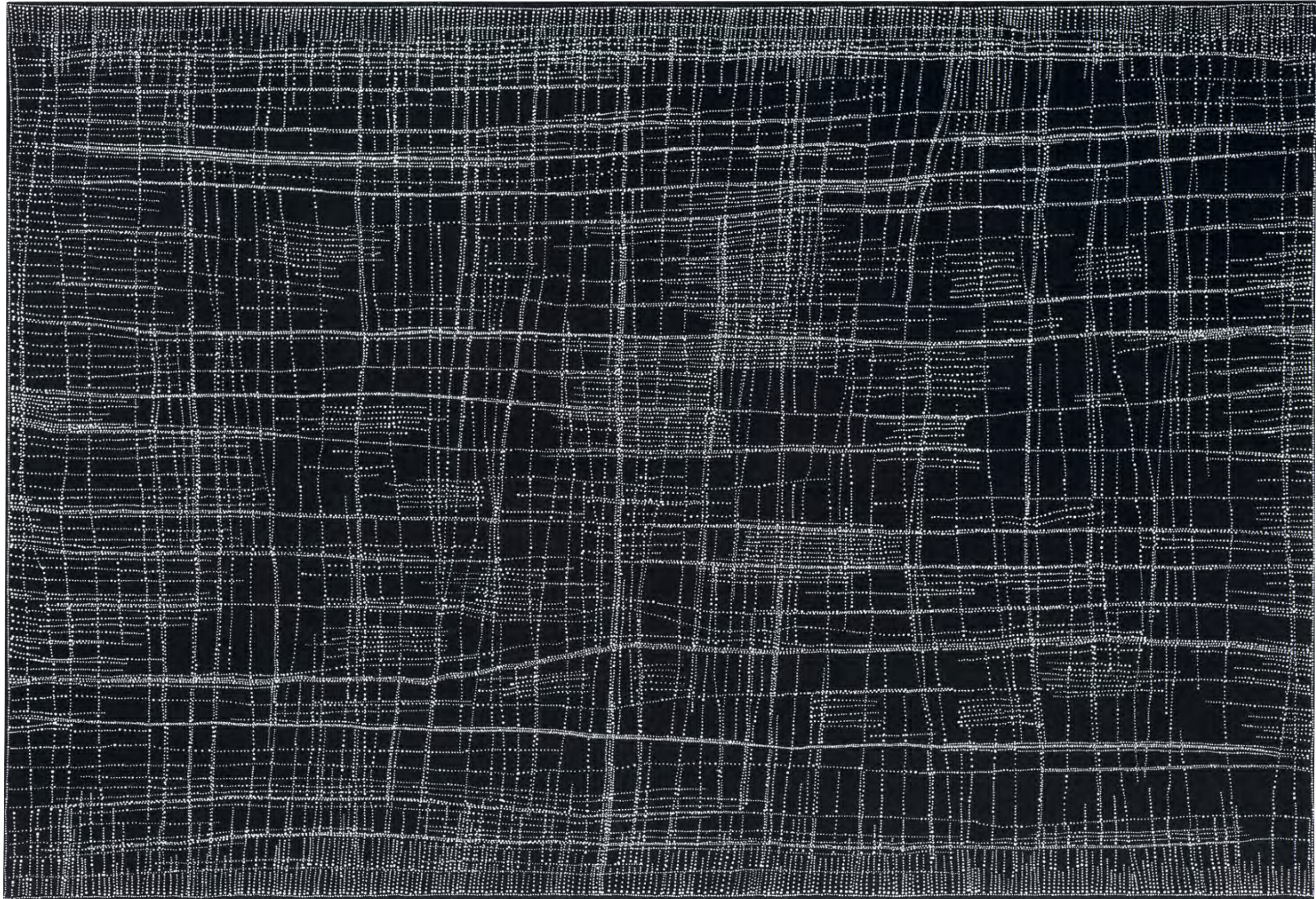
and Kahlhamer's *Loser + Clark* both reflect the violence inflicted on indigenous populations, on their land, and on their cultures. They urge us to see colonization as an ongoing tragedy, to recognize how its brutality continues to shape power relations within their respective countries.

The groupings I have suggested here—the journey, the Dreaming, and terra nullius—all derive from the culture and experiences of Aboriginal artists and find a correlative in works in SAM's collection created by their contemporaries elsewhere. To juxtapose them as such is, perhaps, one way of avoiding the Eurocentrism of *Magiciens de la Terre*. Such a strategy holds out the prospect of exhibitions that are substantively “cosmopolitan” presentations of current art worthy of the term. This new addition of Aboriginal painting to SAM's collection offers the museum an extraordinary opportunity to embrace a fresh strategy for exhibiting the art of our time in its galleries. SAM can stage an expansive conversation among an even more diverse collection of contemporary art in which Aboriginal creativity is part of a global dialogue. There its voice will be heard with a force equal to other voices.<sup>20</sup>

#### NOTES

1. It is notable that the six Aboriginal artists from Yuendumu—including Paddy Japaljarri Sims (cat. 65)—are not mentioned by their individual names in the catalogue. See Jean-Hubert Martin et al., *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1989), 266–67.
2. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Jean-Hubert Martin, “The Whole Earth Show,” *Art in America* 77 (May 1989): 152.
3. *Ibid.*, 150–59, 211–13.
4. Documentation by the Aboriginal artists about their works, provided to me by Pamela McClusky, was critical to the discussion of their paintings in this essay.
5. See interview with the artist by the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut, <http://www.karindavie.com/info/karin-davie-interview.html>.
6. Kay Larson, quoted in Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, “Aboriginal Art: Symptom or Success?” *Art in America* 77 (July 1989): 133.
7. Fry and Willis, *ibid.*
8. Wally Caruana, “Rover Thomas: ‘Who's that bugger who paints like me?’” in *World of Dreamings: Traditional and Modern Art of Australia* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2000), <http://www.nga.gov.au/Dreaming/Index.cfm?Refrnc=ch5>.
9. James Elkins, “Writing about Modernist Painting Outside Western Europe and North America,” in John Onians, ed., *Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art* (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), 193.
10. *Ibid.*, 195–96.

11. Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 185–227.
12. See David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2003).
13. Kobena Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), 9.
14. From documentation in the Seattle Art Museum Accession Files.
15. I am using the term “walkabout” here to suggest a ritual journey in the bush by an Aboriginal person.
16. Julie Mehretu, quoted in Lauri Firstenberg, “Painting Platform in NY,” *Flash Art* 35 (November–December 2002): 70.
17. See Peter Sutton, “Dreamings,” in *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, ed. Peter Sutton (New York: George Braziller in association with the Asia Society Galleries, 1988), 13–32.
18. From documentation in the Seattle Art Museum Accession Files.
19. “Raquib Shaw Studio Visit,” interview by Massimo Torrigiani, *Boiler Magazine*, no. 4 (2004), 27.
20. This essay is dedicated with love and gratitude to my husband, Peter Erickson. Our ongoing conversations about contemporary art and issues of race were critical to my thinking.



*SELECTED WORKS*

1

JEAN BAPTISTE APUATIMI, born 1940  
Tiwi people, Nguiu, Bathurst Island, Northern Territory

**YIRRIKAPAYI (CROCODILE)**

2005. Natural pigments on canvas, 47¼ × 47¼ in. (120 × 120 cm)

Out of the depths of a black background emerges a sequence of rectangular scales: the skin of an ancestral Crocodile. A founding hero of the Tiwi people, Yirikapayi was stabbed in the back with a spear at Cape Fourcroy. He crawled into the sea and was transformed into a crocodile, whose back and tail were forever marked by the serrations of the spear. Adapting the multiple ridges on the crocodile into a grid of cross-hatched and dotted squares is Jean Baptiste Aputimi's way of evoking this powerful character.

She recalls that her husband once got too close to Yirikapayi: "Long ago my husband was hunting and fishing when a big crocodile jumped out of the water and grabbed his arm. He save himself. He grab that inside part and pulled. That crocodile let go and died. He didn't want to eat that crocodile. He been chuck him away." Aputimi's husband was the artist Declan Aputimi, who passed his personal designs on to her, including the palette of red, yellow, black, and white pigments that are a hallmark of Tiwi art. She developed her own manner of focusing attention on crocodile skin as a matrix of rhythmic patterns that echo those placed on human bodies in ceremony.

PM



2

MARINGKA BAKER, born ca. 1952  
Pitjantjatjara people, Kanpi, Southwestern Deserts, South Australia

**MINYMA KUTJARRA  
(TWO SISTERS CREATION STORY)**

2009. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 47¼ × 77½ in. (120 × 198 cm)

Two small black U-shaped forms set themselves apart from the vivid colors bursting out around them to create a central focus for this painting. It describes the journey of two ancestral sisters back to their homeland. Saturated greens with red accents impart a dynamic view of the desert when vegetation is lush and blooming. As they travel, the little sister is relying on her bigger sister to reassure her about this new country they are passing through. The big sister carries her piggyback for a while, before they stop to perform ceremonies filled with sacred singing and dancing.

These two siblings are part of a larger Seven Sisters star system. Throughout Aboriginal Australia, songs about the Seven Sisters are sung into the night, when the stars come out and all can see the constellations. Maringka Baker is custodian of many sites associated with the time the sisters descended from the sky to leave their marks in the landscape. She also continues ceremonies that sing about the lustful old man who would constantly chase the sisters in his attempts to capture a wife. He tried to fool the sisters by wearing disguises, but they would avoid him by hiding in caves and tunnels. Fuming with frustration, he “sings” to make one of the sisters sick, and she dies. In their final escape, the sisters carry her body up to the sky, where they become the stars of the Pleiades. Orion is the old man who never gives up the chase.

PM



PADDY BEDFORD, ca. 1922–2007

Gija people, Kununurra, Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia

**JAWOORRABAN (COCKATOO DREAMING)**

2000. Natural pigments on canvas, 70% × 59% in. (180 × 150 cm)

Seen in both planar and aerial perspective, this painting is a narrative snapshot of a scene from the Dreaming. In the upper section, five oval shapes represent a group of ancestors traveling south for ritual law, and their monolithic forms prefigure their ultimate transformation into the landscape. The circular shape in the foreground is the permanent water hole from which the men quenched their thirst; the thin black columns that issue from it are the waterways and tracks they followed. At left, the ancestral White Cockatoo called Ngayilanyi is perched on top of a bell-shaped hill. An important Lawman, Ngayilanyi called out to the group: “Why do you want to go that way? That is Gooniyandi country. You should stay here in Gija country.”

With a restricted palette and a minimalist visual language, Paddy Bedford conjures up the austere beauty of the eastern Kimberley landscape. Related to an intricate network of associations and responsibilities, this and other of his abbreviated accounts allow the artist to pay public homage to the ancestors who inhabit his customary lands without betraying their cultural secrets. His paintings chronicle not only the actions of the ancestral beings in the Dreaming, but also the more recent and unspoken histories of chilling frontier violence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. One of his greatest achievements has been to visualize the permeable and looping nature of the Dreaming and to show how ancient and modern histories can and do coexist within this cosmological model.

SG



JANANGOO BUTCHER CHEREL, 1918–2009  
 Gooniyandi people, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, Western Australia

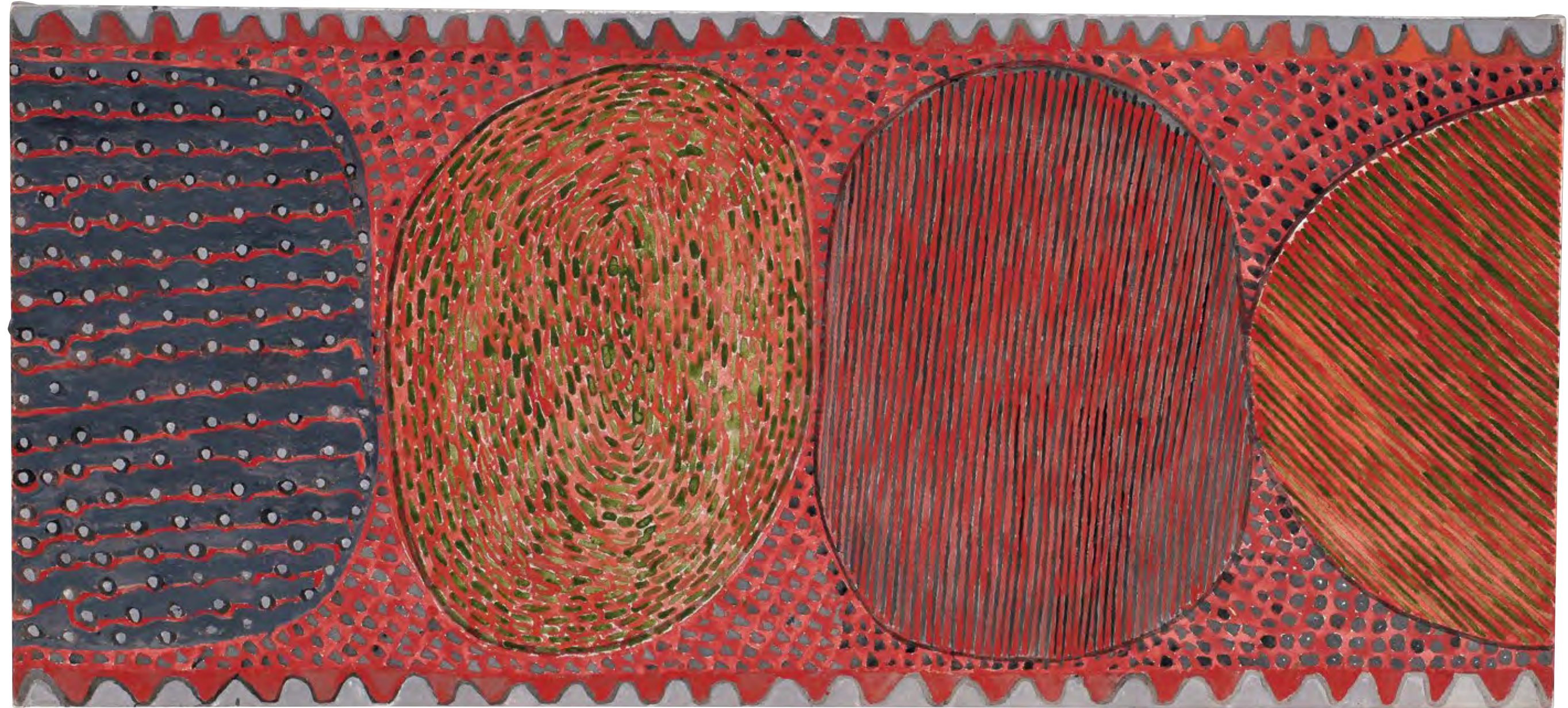
**GIRNDI (BUSH PLUM)**

2003. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 29<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (45 × 74.6 cm)

The sublime paintings by Janangoo Butcher Cherel offer a rich archive of his singular artistic vision and towering cultural knowledge. The translucent layers of paint that characterize his works often give them the appearance of being awash in soft morning light. An intentional colorist, Cherel would painstakingly mix and dilute his paints to achieve the most appropriate coloration, which contributed to the vitality of his oeuvre. Training his perceptive eye on patterns found in nature, Cherel emulated biomorphic shapes to invoke the ancestral narratives of the Dreaming. Many of his paintings, seemingly imagined in cross section, are magnified studies of plant foods that transform figurative elements into exquisite abstract forms. His work has an inwardness analogous to an Aboriginal philosophy that locates the essence of ancestral power deep within the land and organizes knowledge according to cultural standing.

With its red background embellished with dark gray flecks, this work illustrates the *girndi* (bush plum) and other plants and flowers that proliferate during and after the monsoonal rains of the Kimberley wet season. Looking like specimens mounted on a slide, four ovoid shapes are infilled with dots, dashes, and parallel lines. But Cherel eschews a dry scientific rendering of these botanical forms and focuses instead on their cultural signification. The ripening of the bush plum provides the artist with an opportunity to teach younger generations about the location, timing, and medicinal benefits of the sweet fruit, offering a tangible connection to the stories and practices of the Gooniyandi people.

SG





JARINYANU DAVID DOWNS, ca. 1925–1995  
Wangkajunga/Walmajarri peoples, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, Western Australia

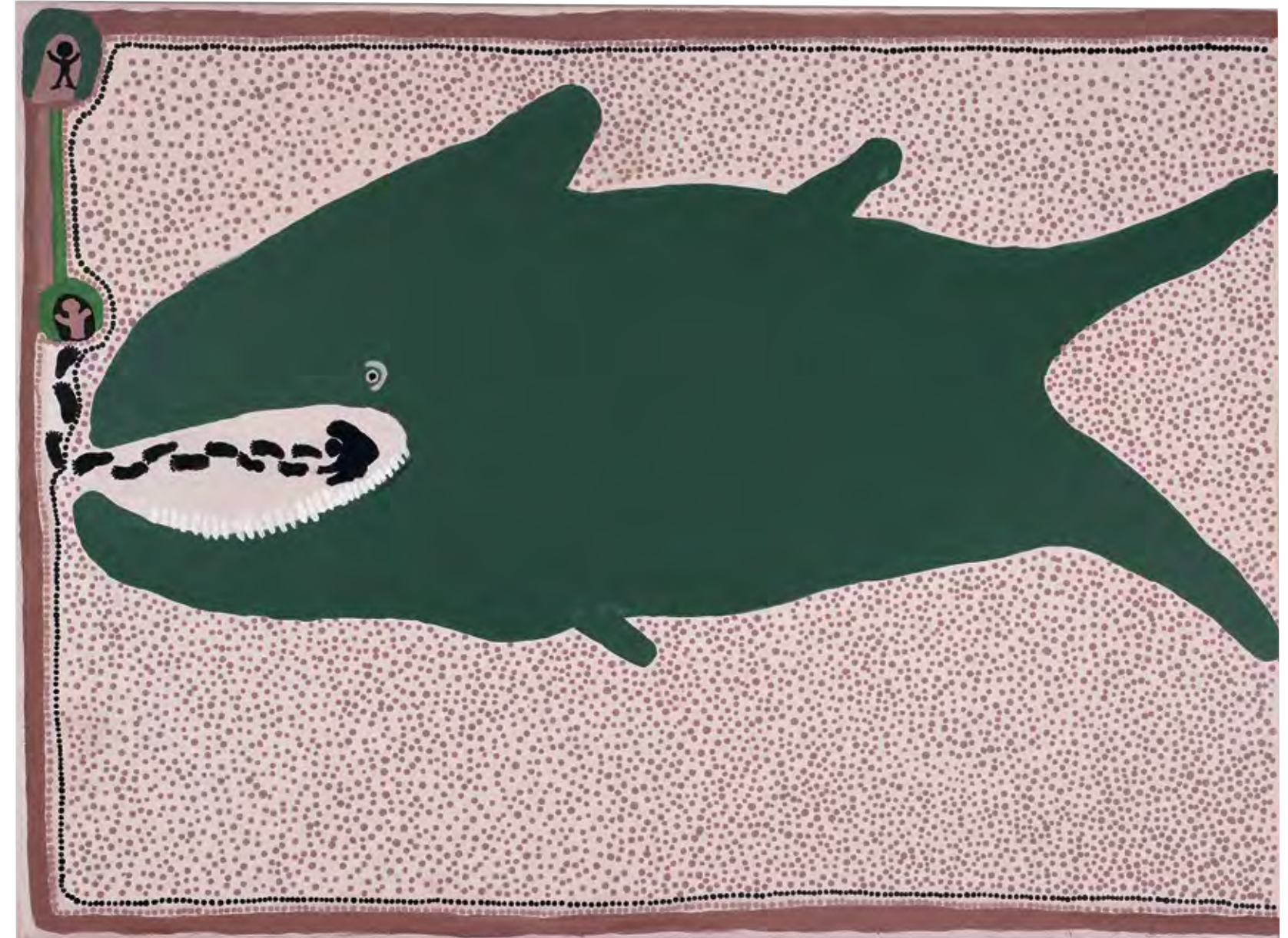
### WHALE FISH VOMITING JONAH

1993. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 44 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 53 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (112 × 137 cm)

Jarinyanu David Downs was born in about 1925 at Yapunu, south of Lake Gregory, in the Great Sandy and Tanami deserts. He spent his childhood and adolescence absorbing the ancestral narratives of the land and learning to live within its culturally delineated borders. After leaving the desert, he worked in mines and on cattle stations for the next twenty years. In the 1960s he settled in Fitzroy Crossing, where he began to make boomerangs, shields, and *coolamons* (bowls), decorating them with designs in ochre. In contrast to later generations of Aboriginal children, whose formative experience of Christianity through schooling was arguably coercive, Downs's decision to convert was made when he was in his forties. His work is significant not in its novel embrace of Christianity but in how he integrated it into his own Aboriginal belief system, which remained steadfast and resolute.

This painting reimagines the Old Testament narrative of Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of a great whale after refusing to obey God's commands. Concentrating on the transfigurative moment when Jonah, dwarfed by the colossal toothed whale, is vomited onto the shore, it perhaps mirrors Downs's feelings toward his own conversion. The Jonah narrative affirms both a Christian and an Aboriginal worldview, that of submitting to a higher being who is sovereign over nature. Teasing out and conflating some of the philosophical similarities between these two spiritual practices, Downs's paintings are powerful testimonies to his unconflicted engagement with the multiple worlds of the divine and his highly personalized endorsement of the ideology of free will.

SG



ROSIE NANGALA FLEMING, born ca. 1930  
 Warlpiri people, Yuendumu, Western Desert, Northern Territory

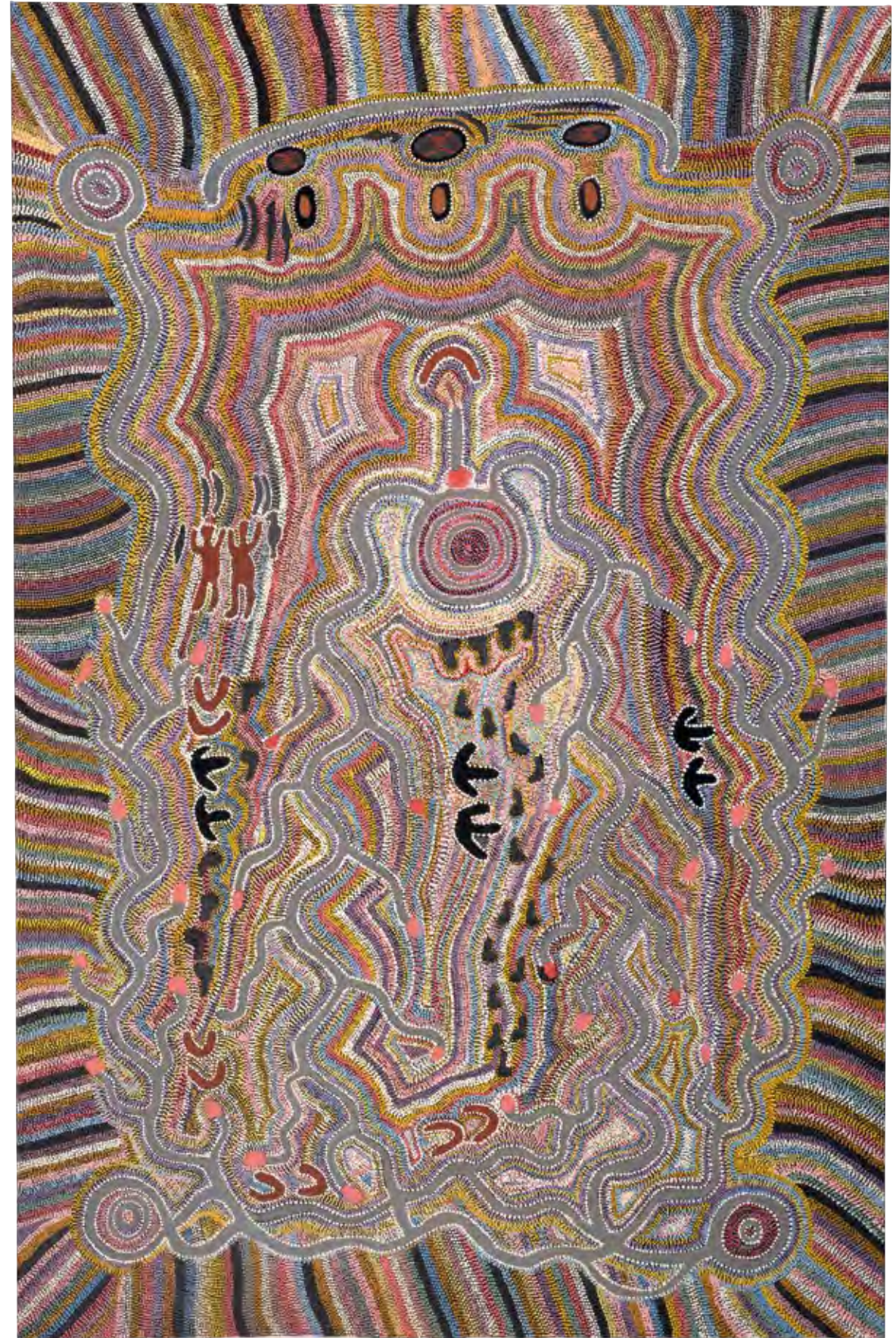
**THREE DREAMINGS: FIRE, MULGA SEED, AND EMU**

1993. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 71¾ × 46⅞ in. (181 × 118 cm)

Meet the Blue-Tongued Lizard Man. He's here, as a single red U shape at the top of the painting, having just come from the cave where he lives, depicted as a large arc containing his hunting implements. He has brought out a fire stick that extends in front of him and is using it to spread sinuous gray flames with pink tips that flare out around the country. This Lizard Man is singing a magical fire to chase his two sons, whose transgressions have ignited his rage. Shown as repeated pairs of red U shapes, the brothers drop small black mulga seeds wherever they go, which will sprout into the trees that grow in the artist's homeland. Three sets of black three-toed footprints show the route of an Emu Dreaming. In the exuberant visual iconography that the Yuendumu artists are known for, Fleming delivers a vision of her father's country. She is a senior custodian of the Warlpiri people but has also worked for twenty years as housekeeper for a Baptist missionary named Mrs. Fleming.

Ongoing research reveals that the effectiveness of the Blue-Tongued Lizard Man's fire should not be underestimated. An Aboriginal practice known as fire-stick farming, it developed over countless centuries as a way to enhance the diversity of large desert estates. Fires are set deliberately to burn patches of spinifex grass, which both enables hunters to catch game and regenerates the seeds of many types of vegetation. Just as this painting is a patchwork of interacting elements, so is the desert landscape.

PM



THAPICH GLORIA FLETCHER, 1938–2011  
Thainakuith people, Napranum, Cape York Peninsula, Queensland

**THE FISHERMAN**

1994. Stoneware, diameter: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (32 cm)



**UNTITLED**

1999–2000. Stoneware, diameter: 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (34 cm)

With these sculptures, the whole world fits in your hands. Each about the size of a crystal ball, they are covered with images that mold themselves to fit a perfect sphere. One depicts a day in the life of four men who go fishing, but they are not just any men—they are a stingray, chalk fish, fish hawk, and possum, in human form. They catch plenty of fish, rest by the fire, then set off to find freshwater. The stingray leads them to a special well filled with cleansing water, so they drink from it, bathe in it, and decide to change into their animal forms.

On the second sphere, the red kangaroo builds big hills with his enormous hands. His brother, the gray wallaby, hops along beside him, and they come to a vacant open plain, which they fill with water, grass, trees, rushes, reeds, lilies, and chestnuts. After they create the world, tribes gather, and the younger brother finds himself a mangrove goanna to take as his wife.

Thapich Gloria Fletcher invented this art form and the vocabulary to record the ancestral narratives and Law of her people. Her use of clay was unexpected. Thainakuith people traditionally baked balls of colored clay to use in creating paint for ceremonial objects and bodies, but forbade women from working with them. When she discovered ceramics during a college class, she was inspired to apply her knowledge to them. Thainakuith elders endorsed her efforts, which resulted in a series of distinguished spheres from the 1980s on.



PM

GUNYBI GANAMBARR, born 1973  
 Ngaymil clan, Yangunbi, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

### MUNDUKUL AT BARALTJA

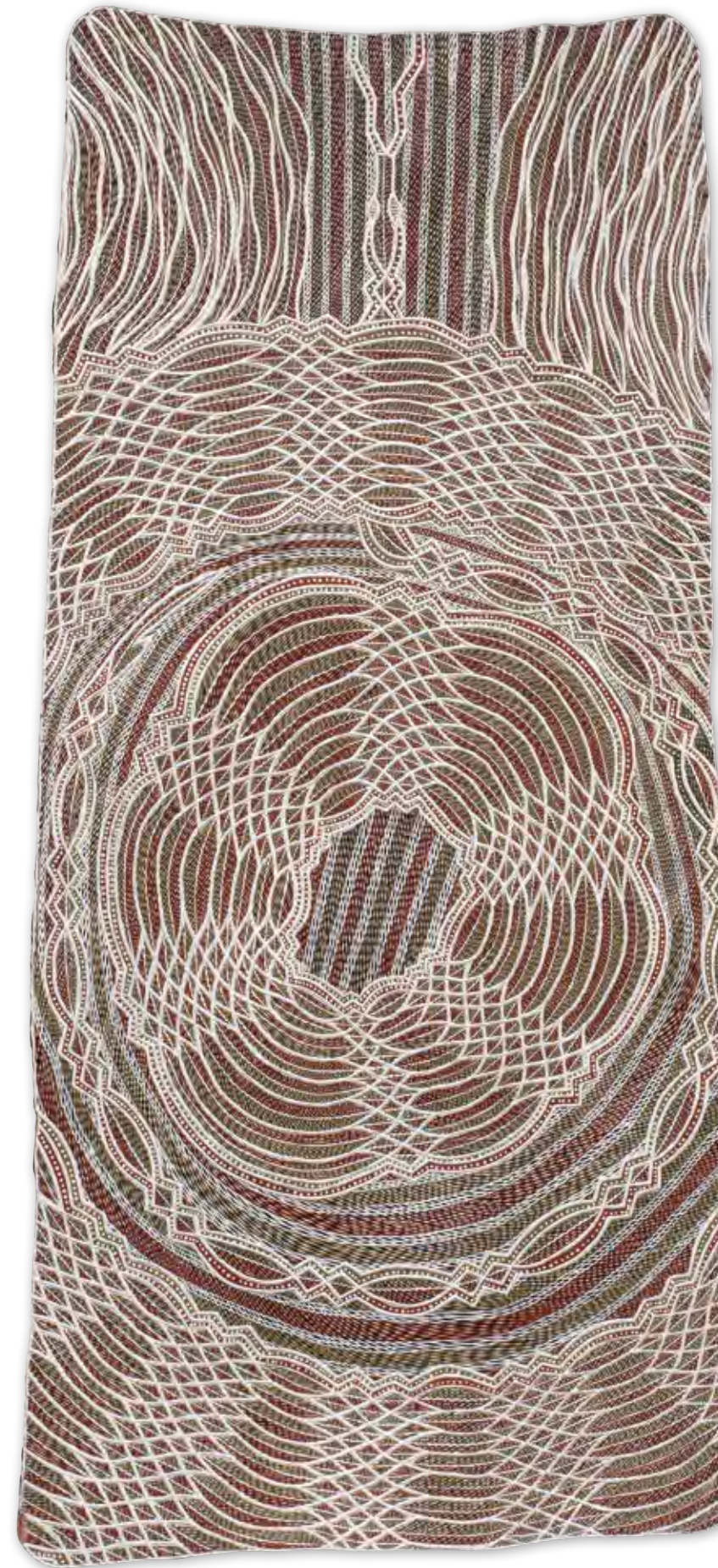
2008. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 68 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 29 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (173 × 76 cm)

Ancestrally created water holes are physically and symbolically the focus of a clan's identity. Lorr—located in the floodplain of Baraltja, which drains into Blue Mud Bay—is the water hole home of Mundukul the Lightning Serpent, who emerges at the top of this painting as two snakes. To determine the onset of each year's monsoon season, Mundukul tastes the waters of Lorr. Once he perceives the freshwater that heralds the coming of the rains, he stands erect and, with lightning created by his flickering tongue, signals their arrival to the Rainbow Serpents that belong to related clans.

The figure of Mundukul and the patterns of water in the painting are composed of parallel lines in a sequence of diamond shapes linked by an ovoid or elliptical form. These represent, respectively, flowing freshwater and still, muddied pools. It is a variation on the design used by Waturr Gumana in *Dhalwangu Law*, 2005 (plate 10), except that here the design runs in circles, as opposed to the straight lines seen in the lower sections of that painting.

Gunybi Ganambarr developed the technique of incising the surface of the bark as well as painting it, beginning in 2006. The technique relates to incisions made into wooden ritual objects, on painted hollow log coffins, and onto softwood carvings of animals and spirit figures. The combination of the incised lines with clan patterns gives the surface of his paintings a quality called *bir'yun*, or radiating brilliance, which visually animates the ancestral powers within the work—an effect much desired among Yolngu artists.

WC



JACKIE KURLTJUNYINTJA GILES, ca. 1944–2010  
 Ngaanyatjarra people, Patjar, Southwestern Deserts, Western Australia

### TJAMU TJAMU

2004. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 59<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 83<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (152 × 213 cm)

The graphic paintings by Jackie Kurtjunyintja Giles are intensely felt expressions of esoteric knowledge that hold deeply to the tenets of men's cultural lore. Like his father, Giles was a *maparnjarra*, a celebrated healer who was revered and sought after throughout the western deserts. His paintings are formidable sources of wisdom and have an almost incantatory power that is often visually unsettling. In this work, the repetition of stark black and white concentric circles in varying sizes seems to present an impassable doorway to other worlds and other ways of knowing. The spaces between are outlined and infilled with geometric designs in red, occasioning strange optical sensations. Resonating with ancestral presence, these paintings of metaphysical landscapes announce both the sacredness of Dreaming sites and the compositional skill of their maker.

Tjumu Tjumu lies east of Kiwirrkura in Western Australia's Gibson Desert. This site—the artist's birthplace—is deeply associated with the Kangaroo ancestor Dreaming/Tjukurpa. Having camped at this rockhole with a group of women who were his sisters, aunts, mothers, and grandmothers, the Kangaroo wanted to make them all his wives and for them to call him Kuril Kuril, which means “keep as a spouse someone who is not eligible.” The women, however, resisted his transgressive advances and addressed him as Tjumu Tjumu, meaning grandfather/grandson. Alluding to the complex kinship systems that govern Aboriginal social relations, Giles used this painting to reinforce the importance of respecting cultural lore as decreed by the eternal ancestors.

SG





10

WATURR GUMANA, born 1957

Dhalwangu clan, Gangan, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

### DHALWANGU LAW

2005. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 103<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (264 × 63 cm)

For the Yolngu, water is at once the source of life, a symbol of the human soul, and an analogue for ancestral power and knowledge. Barama, the main ancestor of the Yirritja clans of eastern Arnhem Land, came from the ocean, emerging inland at Gangan, on the Koolatong River (represented by diamond patterns, second row from bottom). There Barama established the laws that govern language, ceremony, clan designs, and clan estates, and he instructed his disciples to spread these laws among all the Yirritja clans.

Waturr Gumana used the metaphor of water in this epic depiction of the spread of the Law. The patterns in the work describe different states of water—the elliptical forms in the lower sections, for example, refer to muddied, opaque pools alongside the freshwaters of the Koolatong. From the inland, great torrents of river water make their way across the floodplains to the salt waters of the sea. There, water vapor (symbolic of human souls) impregnates the clouds of the wet season, seen at the top of the work, which brings life-sustaining rains to the land. This meeting of salt and freshwater is a Yolngu symbol of fertility.

The column leading up the center of the painting, in which the ellipses denote floating leaves, depicts the river flowing out to the sea. It also refers to the Lightning Serpent, with his tongue flicking bolts of lightning. The zigzag pattern at the top also refers to ocean waves whipped up by the southeast wind of the early dry season, which starts the seasonal cycle anew.

wc



NARPUTTA NANGALA JUGADAI, born 1933  
Pintupi people, Haasts Bluff, Western Desert, Northern Territory

### KAARKURUTINTYA

2006. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 47 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 59 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (120 × 152 cm)

Painting Kaarkurutintya, the place where she was born, Narputta Nangala Jugadai places an enormous salt lake in the middle of a procession of hills laced at the edges with vibrant colors in different combinations. There is a cadence to the painting that suggests the rhythm of walking, noting the subtle differences in hills that become evident only when traveling slowly on foot. Her notation of the hills also retains the residue of the graphic design tradition of sand painting, taking the form of a visual language that is neither an alphabet nor a glyph but something in-between. Here mountains and sandhills are evident as features of the landscape, but their repetition becomes a reminder of seeing them from a perspective that is moving, not fixed. The artist is fulfilling her obligations to honor a home that is not a single point under a roof but an ever-shifting place.

Jugadai grew up walking constantly through her father's country. She remembers leaving home to travel overland for many days to reach Haasts Bluff, a Christian mission that dispensed rations. She moved to Papunya with her husband, Timmy Jugadai Tjungurrayi (ca. 1920–1989), who painted at the artists' cooperative there. In 1992 she began painting and returned to depict this site, which is also known as the home of the Two Carpet Snake ancestors.

PM



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY, ca. 1910–1996  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory

**ANOORALYA (WILD YAM DREAMING)**

1995. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 59<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 48<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (152 × 122 cm)

Fluid tendrils move with uncontrollable vitality across this canvas. Seen in person, each tendril is as wide as a finger or a pencil. They issue an unusual invitation—to see a part of the artist’s home that has not been depicted in painting before. Emily Kam Kngwarray is taking viewers underground to witness a spreading network of yams that tangle their way through the deep red sands of the land now known as Utopia station. She often led other women in search of these yams, which offer a reward of sweet sustenance only to those who know where and when they proliferate.

Kngwarray was a respected senior custodian, or “boss,” of the knowledge embedded in her country. She devoted her life to art that was made out of ephemeral media to be viewed in ceremony, applying patterns in natural pigments on women’s bodies and on the ground. After a few years of working with the flowing wax of batik, she took up acrylic painting in the summer of 1988–89. For the last eight years of her life, she became a constant innovator, providing visions of the living landscape that she never stopped honoring. Exceptionally prolific, Kngwarray painted with a distinctive bravado. The charismatic pull of her paintings (particularly when seen face-to-face rather than in reproduction) is renowned. One can sense her physical effort, sitting on the ground and reaching across the canvas with a loaded brush, then pulling back to linger for only a moment before energetically stroking the canvas once again.

PM







13

YVONNE KOOLMATRIE, born 1944  
Ngarrindjeri people, Berri, Coorong District, South Australia

**PONDI (MURRAY RIVER COD)**

2003, Native spiny sedge grass, 27 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 47 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 7 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (69 × 121 × 18 cm)

Pondi is a mighty presence in southern Australia. He once swam with supernatural strength, whipping his tail to create the bends of the Murray River, a fertile wetland that was home to large indigenous populations. Here is a modest version of the Murray cod, which is referred to as the Old Man because it is able to live as long as a human, weighs as much as a human, and grows as tall as a human (five to six feet long).

Concern for the current state of the river, the fish, the grasses, and the weaving technique used to make this sculpture gives it a haunting poignancy—the Murray cod is now on the list of endangered species. Yvonne Koolmatrie watched the Murray River slowly degrade due to intensive agricultural and pastoral practices enacted throughout her youth. The sedge grasses that once flourished along the river have diminished, which requires that she search to find them and then request access to harvest them sparingly. She learned the coil weaving technique first from an elder in a one-day workshop and then from examples of coiled objects made by her ancestors that she located in museum storage. Koolmatrie now focuses her career on reviving the traditional weaving techniques by teaching others what she has learned.

PM





14

MICK KUBARKKU, 1920–2008

Kuninjku people, Mann River region, Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**LORRKKON, HOLLOW LOG MORTUARY CEREMONY**

1994. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 74% × 23% in. (189.5 × 60 cm)

Mick Kubarkku was one of the first artists in central western Arnhem Land to paint regularly for the public domain, soon after the establishment of the government settlement of Maningrida in 1957. Many of his earlier paintings were made on the bark walls of shelters or huts, in the traditional manner. At first he decorated his figures with dotted infill, as in the rock paintings of the region. Later he introduced *rarrk* cross-hatching, which his father had taught him, similar to that used in ceremony. In recognition of his talent, Kubarkku's father encouraged the young artist to paint for Mardayin ceremonies.

The bone mortuary ceremony, which is unique to Arnhem Land, marks the end of the mourning period for the dead, allowing a community to resume normal life (see plates 46–50). In the western Arnhem version, ritual singing is accompanied by men playing *karlikarli*—rhythm sticks in the shape of boomerangs that are used to drum on the hollow log: see the two figures at lower right; those on the left carry sticks in their belts. The two figures at the top of the painting are placing the bones of the deceased in a hollow log that features two totemic emblems: Ngard the Tortoise and Rumburre the Praying Mantis, who sang the ceremony into existence.

At dawn on the final day of the ceremony, the men carry the log coffin to the burial ground, where it is stood upright; women in specific kin relationships to the deceased then dance around it. The bands of *rarrk* divided by lines of dots in Kubarkku's painting suggest the rhythms of the ceremonial choreography.

WC



WALLY MANDARRK, ca. 1915–1987  
Kune/Dangbon peoples, Cadell and Tomkinson Rivers region, Western Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory

**NARRANGEM (LIGHTNING SPIRIT)**

ca. 1986. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 35 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 18 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (90 × 47.6 cm)

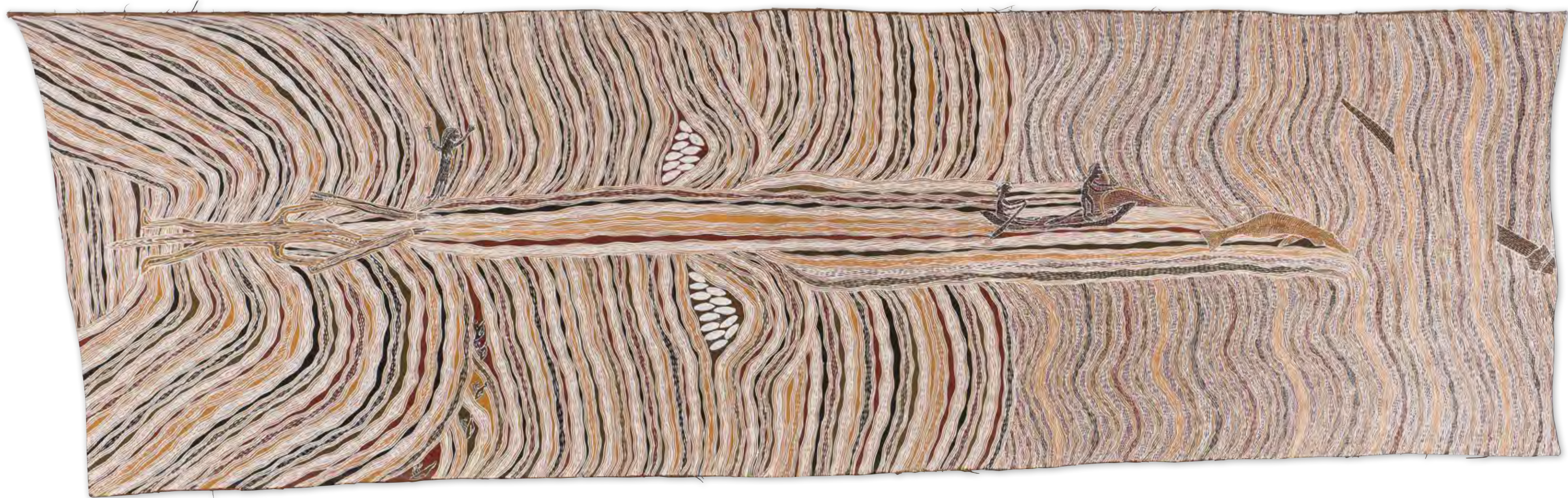
A *marrkidjbu*, or “clever man,” Mandarrk was a doctor who possessed extraordinary powers, including the ability to communicate with ancestral and spirit beings. He is said to have obtained his powers from the Rainbow Serpent when, as a younger man, he went to fetch a spear-thrower in a billabong and the spear-thrower transformed into the ancestor Ngalyod, who instructed Mandarrk in the ways of a *marrkidjbu*. He lived a very traditional life, avoiding the townships as much as possible. Nonetheless, he did execute some bark paintings for the American-Australian expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948, and his paintings were sold through the art center at the government settlement of Maningrida.

Mandarrk was also a renowned rock painter, and the subjects of his works on bark relate directly to the images he painted on rock surfaces and on participants’ bodies in ceremonies. Mandarrk’s *rarrk* consists of patterns made with broad lines, at a time when his contemporaries were refining such patterns by using smaller brushes to draw thin lines. And he steadfastly refused to mix synthetic binders with natural ochres to make paint, preferring natural resins that give his painted images a chalky texture.

Narrangem is the spirit who creates the lightning storms at the onset of monsoon season. He is shown here wearing the stone axe with which he makes thunder tied to his belt; from his elbows emanate streaks of lightning, which make smooth round stones when they hit the ground. The animated pose of the figure suggests the act of ceremonial dancing.

WC





16

DJAMBAWA MARAWILI, born 1953  
Madarrpa clan, Yilpara (Baniyala), Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**METAMORPHOSIS/DJIRIKITJ**

2006. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 103<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (90 × 262 cm)

The elemental forces that spread across this painting are almost palpable. The first wildfires of Arnhem Land were created by Baru the ancestor in a narrative that originates in domesticity and ends in cataclysm. Baru, in human form, is resting in a bark hut while his wife, Dhamilingu, gathers freshwater snails to cook on a campfire. On her return, a dispute ensues and the campfire spreads, burning the pattern of a crocodile's skin into Baru's flesh, whereupon he transforms into that mighty creature. Now the master of fire, Baru distributes it among other clans with the aid of quails who carry burning twigs, establishing the relationships between them and the Madarrpa. The fire spreads beyond nests of crocodile eggs out to sea to a sacred rock around which fishermen harpoon dugong. The variations on the Madarrpa clan pattern across the bark indicate the freshwater country leading to the salt waters of Blue Mud Bay.

The image of Baru adopting a human stance then metamorphosing into the crocodile, with his fire sticks propelling a torrent of flames out to sea, constitutes a cultural self-portrait of the artist. Marawili is a tireless and successful advocate for the rights of indigenous artists, a ceremonial and community leader, and a negotiator in land rights claims. His ritual authority brings with it serious responsibilities, for despite their engagement with Western society the Yolngu place great emphasis on passing along their traditions intact. Marawili's transformation into this role and the extensive cultural knowledge he has gained—the metaphorical fire—are reflected in the transformation of Baru and his powers.

WC

MAWALAN MARIKA, 1908–1967

Rirratjingu clan, Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**SKYWORLD, BADURRU MILKY WAY RIVER**

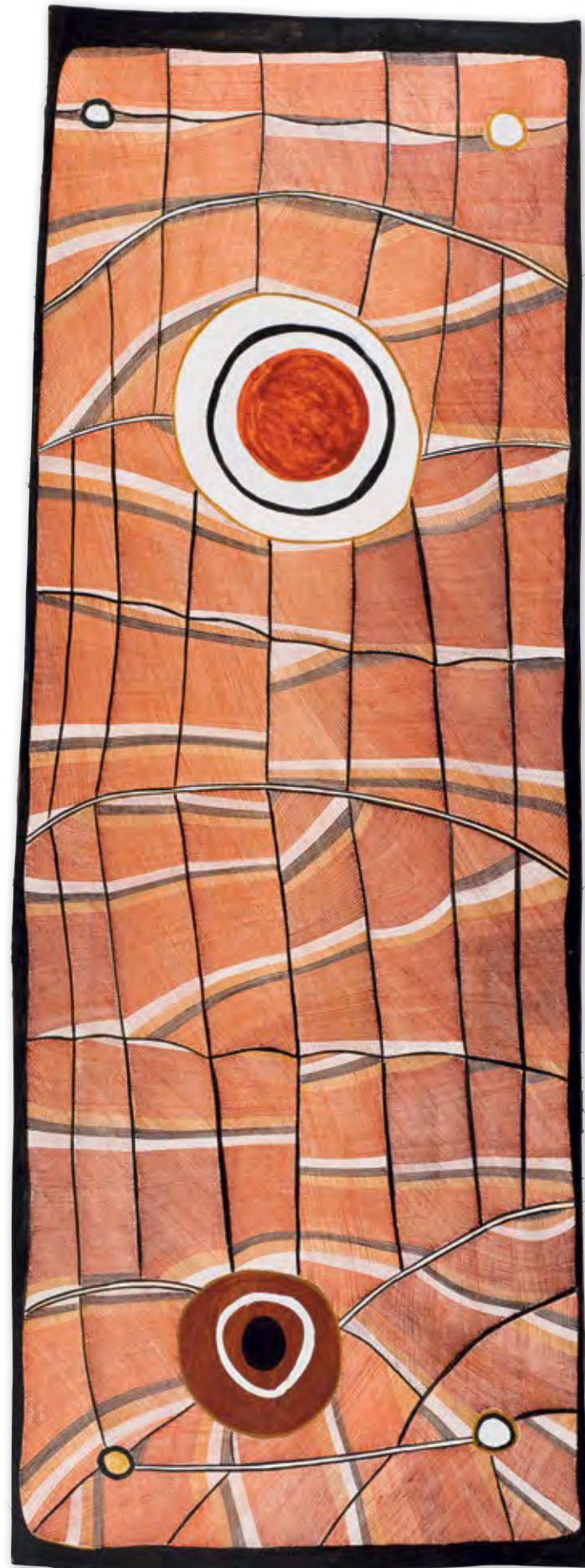
1966. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 17<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (102 × 44 cm)

Many Aboriginal groups in northern Australia envisage the Milky Way as a river teeming with fish and other creatures. Among the Rirratjingu and other Dhuwa clans, the origins of the Milky Way concern two brothers who were fishing out at sea when a strong wind capsized their boat. Both drowned, but the body of one was washed ashore, where it was discovered by Baru, the ancestral Crocodile. The brothers and Baru ascended into the heavens to become constellations in the Milky Way. Meanwhile, a group of Possum ancestors were performing a ceremony, singing to the musical accompaniment of didgeridoo and clap sticks while women danced; they too all rose into the sky. Two sacks of stars, called Djulpan, can be seen at top left in the painting: the top sack contains female stars, the one beneath male. The ground of the painting is covered in star shapes and clusters of dots representing distant stars.

Marika was a strong advocate for Yolngu culture and rights in the face of European presence and influence. Since a Christian mission had been established in northeast Arnhem Land in the mid-1930s, he recognized the need to show the newcomers the depth and significance of Yolngu culture, lest it be destroyed. He saw art as the most potent means of getting Yolngu messages across to the white community. Not only was he an innovative bark painter, but in the 1960s he took the unprecedented step of teaching his daughters to paint on bark too; till then, bark painting had largely been the preserve of men. The curvilinear outlines of several figures in this work suggest that Mawalan was assisted by his eldest daughter, Bayngul.

WC





JOHN MAWURNDJUL, born 1952

Kuninjku people, Mumeka and Milmilngkan, Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**MARDAYIN DESIGN**

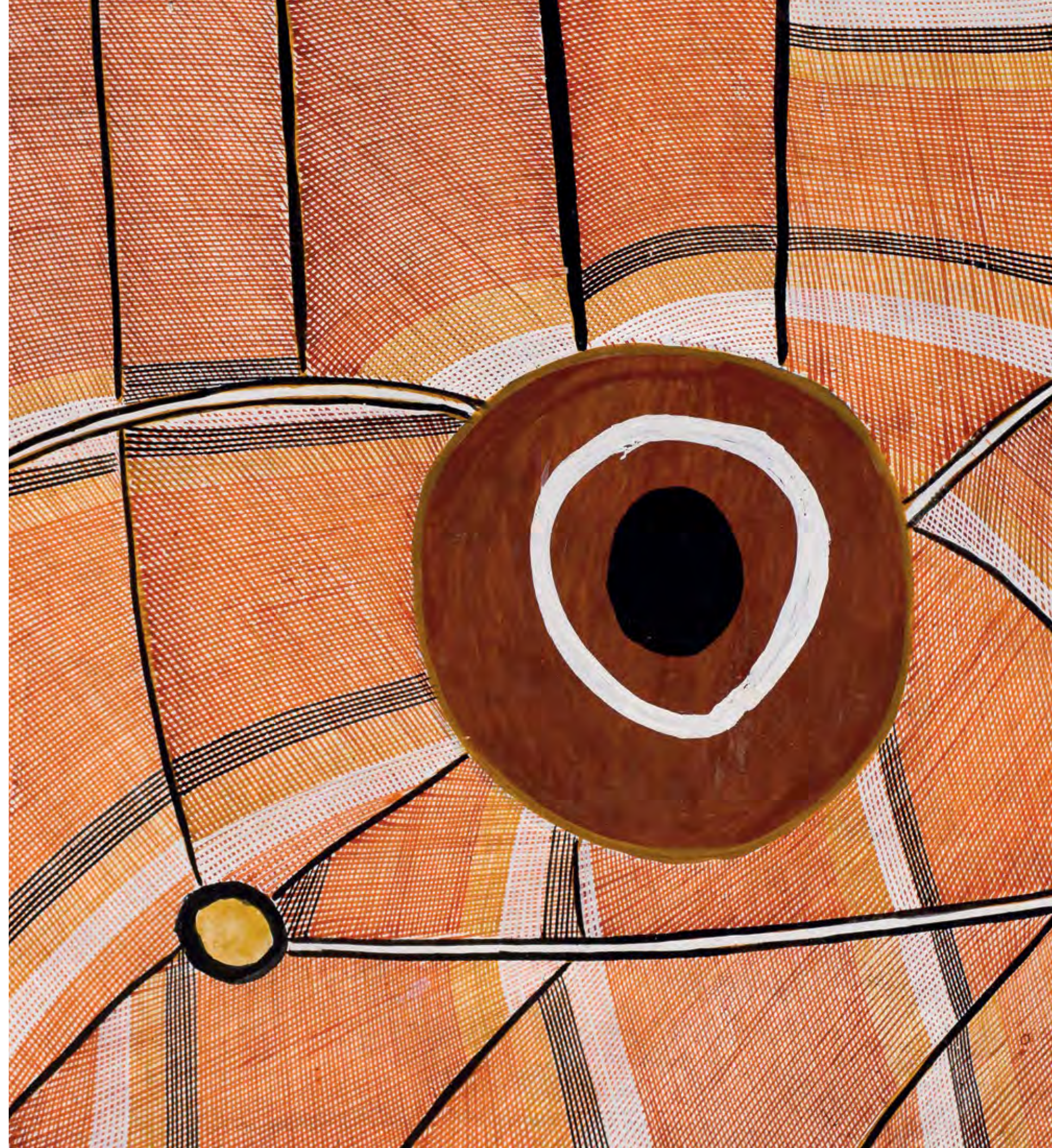
2006. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 79<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 28<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (203 × 73.5 cm)

John Mawurndjul could be described as the supreme traditionalist, yet he has taken the art of bark painting in western Arnhem Land into the contemporary era. Mawurndjul has had, and continues to lead, a conventional Kuninjku life, shunning the attractions offered by modern society to devote his time to working the bush, raising his family, fulfilling his ritual obligations, and painting. His career as an artist parallels his development in the religious sphere, from a novice to a ceremonial leader steeped in ancestral knowledge and Kuninjku law.

As a young artist, Mawurndjul was apprenticed to a line of major bark painters, the most influential being Yirawala (1901–1976) and Peter Marralwanga (1916–1987). Yirawala's eminence allowed him to introduce innovations in his paintings: most of his work is figurative, but his variations on standard clan designs and *rarrk* allowed him to create paintings that emphasize the highly sacred features of Kuninjku culture. Early in his career, Mawurndjul's paintings similarly featured figurative images of ancestral beings against monochrome grounds. As he rose in ritual rank, he turned his attention to creating ever more complex and sophisticated cross-hatching to infill his figures. Today, in his maturity, he has dispensed with overtly figurative imagery, and his paintings are composed entirely of variations on patterns of *rarrk*. They are intended to reflect the more esoteric aspects of ancestral Kuninjku beliefs.

Mawurndjul's paintings are about light: as a metaphor for spiritual knowledge and as an expression of ancestral power. Paintings such as the one seen here reflect the body-painting designs used in Mardayin ceremonies. His fields of *rarrk* are synonymous with the dazzling sunlight reflecting off the surface of a clan water hole—in this case, at Kakodbebuldi in the Mann River region.

WC





19

GALUMA MAYMURU, born 1951

Manggalili clan, Djarrakpi, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

### MUNURRU (ROUGH)

2005. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 64% $\times$  30% $\times$  30% in. (164  $\times$  77 cm)

It's high tide in the deep water, where currents are colliding. This evocative seascape is composed of tumultuous patterns that suggest the rough and dangerous sea surging forward. In the way she paints the flickering slivers of light in the water, Galuma Maymuru is using what has been described as a sacred clan signature: her cross-hatching is done in exacting patterns that belong to her clan and their saltwater estates. Women paint such clan signature patterns on each other's chests when they are in a state of fasting—for funerals or for initiations of their sons. They keep this signature in place until it is lifted with a cleansing ceremony of smoke or water. Painting delivers comfort, as when the fat of a stingray is painted on the chest of a mother who has lost her child.

Maymuru is the daughter of a prominent intellectual and artistic leader, Narritjin Maymuru, who moved his family off the Yirrkala mission in the early 1970s (see plate 20). He instilled a vision of reliance on clan estates and ancestral truths, which his daughter has magnified in her painting. She is part of an artistic movement that is shifting away from figurative images to abstract networks that underline the Yolngu code of seeing every atom of the world as part of an enduring pattern.

PM



NARRITJIN MAYMURU, ca. 1916–1981

Manggalili clan, Djarrakpi and Yirkala, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**THE MARAWILI TREE RANGGA (THE POSSUM STRING STORY)**

1968. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 78¾ × 22¾ in. (200 × 58 cm)

Narritjin Maymuru devoted his adult life to promoting the significance of Yolngu culture to Europeans through his own art and by encouraging his contemporaries to collaborate on major public works of cultural, social, and political significance. An instigator of the Yirkala Church Panels and the Bark Petitions (see pages 20 and 21), Maymuru was one of the first Yolngu to consider himself a professional artist in the public domain. He produced paintings of extraordinary complexity by incorporating a wealth of iconography, layers of interpretation, and visual puns in the best tradition of Yolngu art.

Ostensibly, this painting represents the site of Djarrakpi organized along a template of rectangles. It depicts Guwak, the ancestral Koel Cuckoo of the Manggalili, sitting atop the sacred Marawili cashew tree, located at the head of the lake at Djarrakpi on Cape Shield. The St. Andrew's Cross spiders—whose X-shaped web is a model for the string ceremonial breast girdles worn by Yolngu women—flanking the tree hint at the presence of female ancestors called the Nyapililngu, who transform lengths of string spun from possum fur into sand dunes.

On another level, the painting expresses the relationship between two Manggalili sacred sites: Djarrakpi and the Wayawu River, home of Nyukal the Kingfish, which is shown here decorated in a design representing *yoku*, the bulbs of an edible freshwater plant that grows in the river. Finally, because Guwak died at Djarrakpi, the Marawili tree is also regarded as a force connecting the living and the dead: cicadas and possums run up and down the trunk as messengers from one world to the other.

WC





QUEENIE MCKENZIE, ca. 1912–1998

Gija people, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia

### HORSO CREEK MASSACRE

1998. Natural pigments on canvas, 35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 64<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (90 × 165 cm)

Brutality is tersely expressed by these stark silhouettes, which convey deep feelings for the Gija victims whose blood saturates their land. Horso Creek runs through Queenie McKenzie's home, in an environment filled with the captivating forms of the Purnululu (Bungle Bungles)—a range of mountain faces striped in horizontal bands of color.

McKenzie's life was marked by clashes over land and human rights. The establishment of cattle stations throughout her homeland meant that water holes, creeks, and rivers became polluted, and local kangaroo and emu began vanishing. Gija people who interfered with the ranchers were massacred as recently as the 1920s. This painting commemorates an incident from the 1880s, when a group of Gija people were killed after they drove off a group of bullocks. White men in white hats are armed to shoot and burn the men, women, and children in order to hide any evidence of their revenge. A dark stain on the hill behind them is a reminder of the blood spilled when babies were thrown against it.

Raised to be a custodian of this country, McKenzie found her role especially tested when, in 1979, the biggest diamond deposit in the world was discovered in the local mountain range. For Gija people, this location is the epicenter of their identity, where the ancestral Barramundi fish laid her eggs and where she still fuels the fertility of the region. McKenzie became a leader in mediation with a mining company, while she also taught Gija children their language, oral history, songs, and ceremonies. After observing the success of her friend Rover Thomas, she painted to convey concerns about the clash between the laws she had grown up with and the new uses of the land under her care.

PM



GEORGE MILPURRURRU, 1934–1998

Ganalbingu people, Ramingining, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**GUNUNGU THE BLACK-HEADED PYTHON**

1987. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 82<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (210 × 60 cm)

Gunungu the Black-Headed Python is a master of the monsoon season. He brings on the rains by standing erect and seeding the clouds with his spittle, while his tongue creates electrical storms. Depicted four times here, to suggest the passage of time, the ancestor is shown in his territory within the Arafura Swamp. The sharp-leaved grasses there have a bladelike quality that is considered an analogue for the raspy edges of lightning that cut through the heavens. The northern coast of Australia is renowned for its so-called chain lightning, and the number of lightning strikes there per year is among the highest in the world.

The ecology of the Arafura Wetlands, Milpurrru's home territory, is unique, with a diversity of wildlife and flora, including rare species, that the Ganalbingu and related groups have maintained undisturbed for millennia and with which they have totemic associations. The area represents a landscape endowed with cultural significance. In *Gunungu the Black-Headed Python*, painted at the height of his powers, Milpurrru displays his mastery of the interplay between foreground and background, visually warping the surface of the bark: in the lower section of the painting, the stems and leaves of the grasses suggest a pattern of lightning, producing an image that bursts with electric energy.

In 1993, the United Nations International Year for the World's Indigenous People, the National Gallery of Australia first honored an Aboriginal artist with a survey exhibition: George Milpurrru.

WC



23

TOMMY MITCHELL, born 1943

Ngaanyatjarra people, Warakurna, Southwestern Deserts, Western Australia

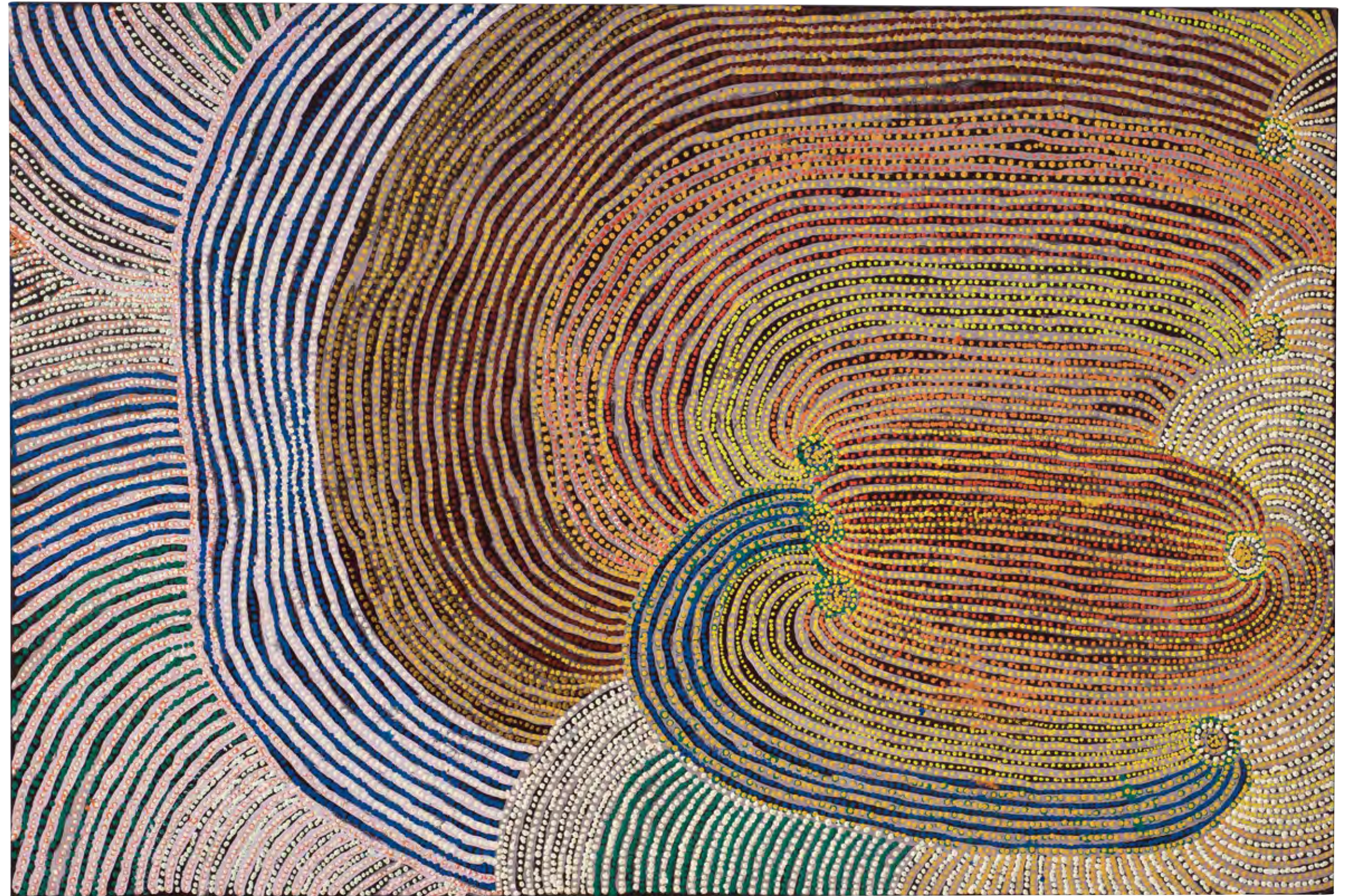
### WALU

2008. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 40 × 60 in. (101.6 × 152.4 cm)

Tommy Mitchell is one of the leading artists from Warakurna, one of the newest and most dynamic of the art collectives that have emerged in central Australia during recent years. For those who have been displaced from their homelands, many of these art centers have become sites where they can reconstitute their material culture. This in turn facilitates the creation of zones of cultural autonomy where the correct codes of social behavior can be demonstrated through the telling and retelling of ancestral narratives.

This painting chronicles the actions of a greedy young boy who stole meat from the Owl People's camp. He denied the accusation, and so his uncles became angry with the Owl People, who were then swept away by a tornado. Leaving the boy at the Walu rockhole, the uncles went out hunting again. They returned with the carcass of an emu, and as they were cutting it up, the boy stole the emu's heart. While he was running away, the blood from the heart vividly stained the rocks, and because of the little boy's misdeeds, he metamorphosed into the wind. From the seven small roundels that anchor the composition emerge trails of looping lines in an array of vibrant colors. Representing the punitive tornado and the elemental transformation of the boy, the windlike shapes thicken on their rotational trajectory, appearing to gain velocity. Overlying them is a cadenced dotting that enhances the painting's prismatic beauty and delicately captures the dematerialization of the boy, as a warning against our own human weakness.

SG



DHONGI MUNUNGGURR, born ca. 1936  
Djapu clan, Wandawuy, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**MARI/GUTHURRA (GRANDMOTHER/GRANDDAUGHTER)**

1997. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 63¾ × 21½ in. (162 × 55 cm)

Mari/Guthurra describes a specific kin relationship—between a maternal grandmother and her daughters' children—that determines the latter's rights to land, their role in ceremonies, and their use of clan designs. Dhongi Mununggurr's own country is Wandawuy, which is associated with a place called Dhuruputjpi in his maternal grandmother's country belonging to the Dhudi Djapu clan. Both are fresh-water sites associated with Mana, the ancestral Shark.

In this painting, Mana is depicted at Dhuruputjpi, surrounded by the Dhudi Djapu design for fresh-water. In the section above, the grid pattern of the Djapu clan refers to a fish trap that ancestral hunters used to catch Mana at Wandawuy, where he died: the shark thrashes his tail against the fish trap but to no avail. In his death throes, the shark is about to join the Ancestral Realm, via the circular clan water hole. Characteristic of Yolngu painting traditions, the shark in its living state is depicted figuratively. In the section above, at Wandawuy, the shark is not shown in physical form but instead is alluded to through the image of the fish trap and the arcs above it, which refer to rain clouds, various types of water, and the shark's domain. The visually animated Dhudi Djapu clan pattern of opposing rows of diagonal lines suggests a state of agitation and anxiety, in contrast to the serenity of the afterlife implied by the calm regularity of the squares of the grid pattern above. The shark has made the transition from the physical state to the spiritual.

WC



DICK NGULEINGULEI MURRUMURRA, ca. 1920–1988  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

### NADULMI THE KANGAROO

ca. 1970. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 33<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (58 × 85 cm)

Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurra was a master draftsman whose powers of observation and sure hand yielded exquisite drawings of human and animal figures. The artists of western Arnhem Land take particular care to render the physical traits that distinguish each species of animal. Even though Nadulmi is sometimes referred to as a euro or black wallaby, it is the male antilopine kangaroo that appears in this work, characterized by long, slender forearms and well-developed shoulder muscles. The clear outline captures a sense of imminent movement and three-dimensionality; the latter is enhanced by the manner in which the paws are drawn in parallel while the tail swings forward to create a sense of depth.

This appears to be a simple drawing of a kangaroo, but Murrumurra makes oblique references to the ancestral nature of the subject and its manifestation in ceremony. Nadulmi is considered the instigator of a major regional ceremony, the Wubarr, which incorporates initiations; its themes are the cycles of nature, fertility and the propagation of species, and death and decay. In the ceremony, a body painting that features a white silhouette of Nadulmi is referred to as the kangaroo in its “raw” state—see the areas of white in this painting. Ritual body paintings that depict the creature in X ray and decorated infill, also seen here, suggest the “cooked” state, which is indicative of change, such as the transition from one season to the next or from the profane state to the sacred, as in a ceremony.

WC



BARDAYAL "LOFTY" NADJAMERREK, ca. 1926–2009  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

### NGALYOD AND BARRAMUNDI

1988. Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 45 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 14 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (115 × 37 cm)

Like all major ancestral beings, Ngalyod is responsible for creating sacred sites and can change its own physical form in order to transform into features of the landscape. It also creates places by swallowing other species—here it is a barramundi (a type of pike)—and regurgitating them as new sites or landforms. In this image Ngalyod may be creating a sacred freshwater pond, although we do not have documentary evidence for that. This act of swallowing and regurgitation is a metaphor for metamorphosis. So, for example, a boy may be said to be "swallowed" by an initiation ceremony and spat out as a man.

Described as being male or female, Ngalyod has an androgynous aspect. Typical of Western Arnhem Land paintings, the figure of Ngalyod is drawn as a composite of different creatures. Here the ancestor is depicted with the head, body, serrated back, and tail of a freshwater crocodile, and the limbs of a kangaroo. Each animal part represents the powers and associations of Ngalyod—the strength of the crocodile, the agility of the kangaroo—and the combination reflects the relationships between groups who have totemic associations with these creatures.

Renowned as a bark painter, Nadjamerrek was also a gifted painter on the rock walls of the caves and overhangs in his country. He was taught to paint on rock by his father, Yanjorluk, in the 1940s and spent the last years of his life documenting rock art sites in his Mok clan estates.

WC



DOREEN REID NAKAMARRA, 1948–2009  
Pintupi people, Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory

**MARRAPINTI ROCKHOLE**

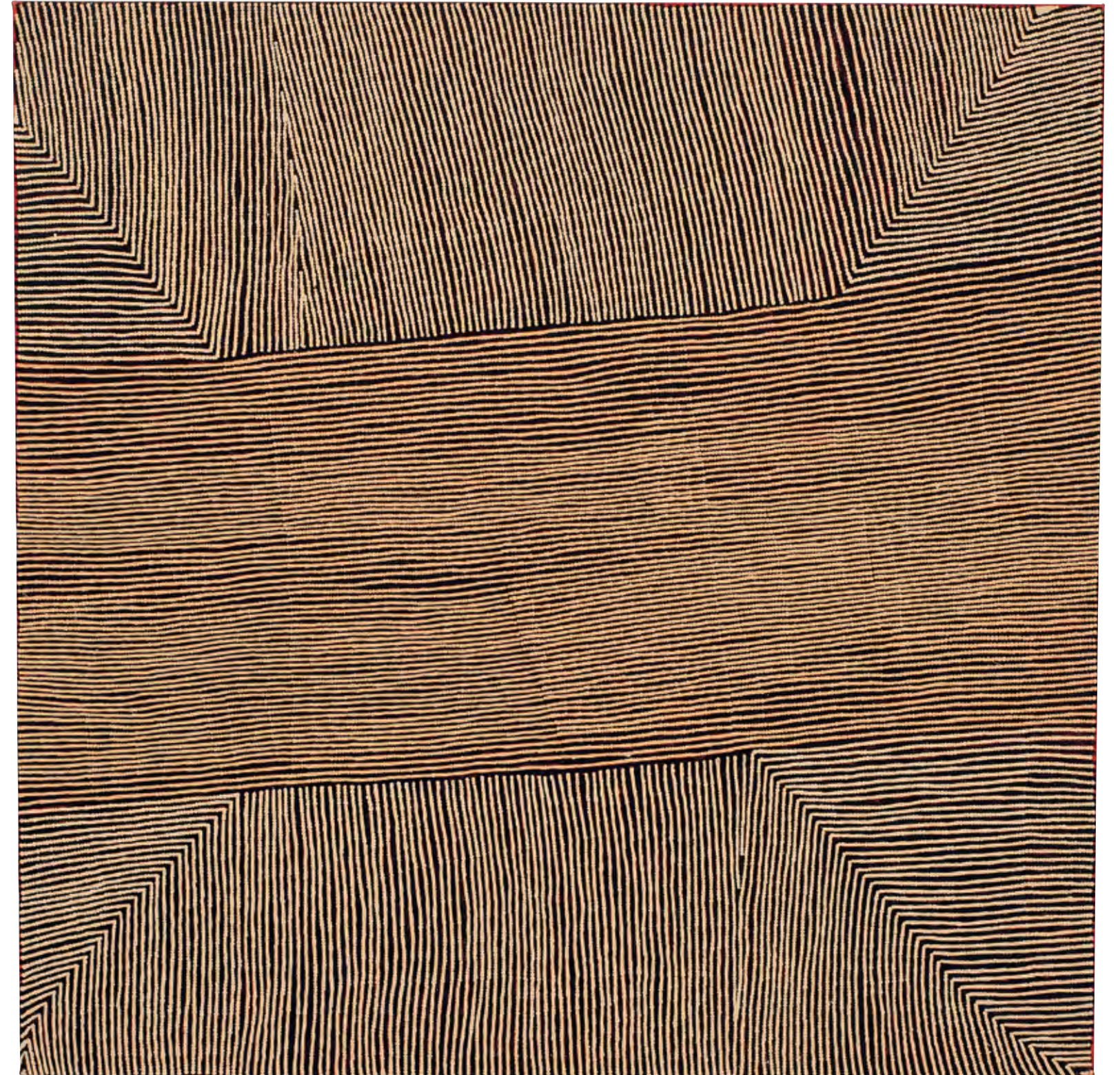
2007. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91 × 91 cm)

Hills and water meet in this essential depiction of a campsite. Eloquent lines laid out in a semi-symmetrical composition convey the flow of water in a creek and the surrounding ridges of sandhills. This painting honors an oasis that the ancestors designed as refuge for themselves and for their descendants. Natural formations surround a deep pool that interrupts the tall sandhills, offering water and a respite from the heat of the day.

Doreen Reid Nakamarra devoted many of her paintings to Marrapinti, a freshwater rockhole where ancestral women would camp as they traveled east from the Pollock Hills of Western Australia. Such rockholes are rare, jealously guarded, and respectfully kept clean of debris. They were a source of nourishment, both literal and spiritual, for the ancestral women and, by extension, for the artist herself. She remembered the site as a place for women to give birth and gather desert raisins as well as to perform the dance and sing the songs associated with the area.

The American artist Agnes Martin also had a penchant for lines as idyllic signs for endless open plains. In her words (quoted in *ArtNews*, September 1976): “I sort of surrendered. . . . I thought there wasn’t a line that affected me like a horizontal line. Then I found that the more I drew that line, the happier I got. First, I thought it was like the sea. . . . Then, I thought it was like singing!”

PM



YUKULTJI NAPANGATI, born ca. 1970  
Pintupi people, Kiwirrkura, Western Desert, Western Australia

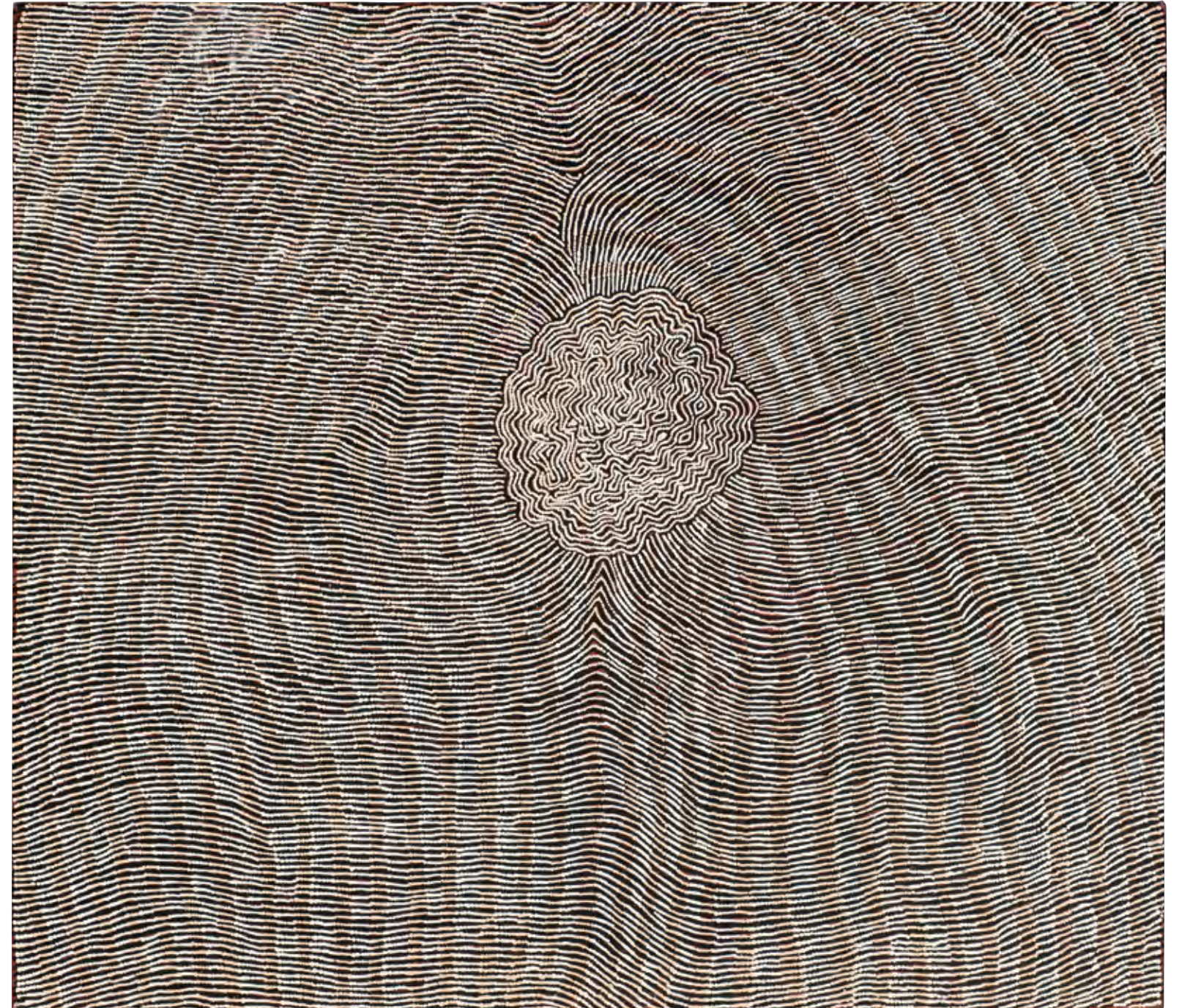
### YUNARLA

2010. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 42 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (107 × 122 cm)

Sandhills set a measured pace throughout this landscape, converging on a rockhole and soakage site called Yunarla. This is where a group of ancestral women would stop during their journeys to camp and replenish their energy. For food, they would dig up the edible roots of the bush banana, also known as silky pear vine or *yunarla*. A pear or a banana might sound familiar, but the fruits of the Australian interior are not full of sweet, juicy pulp. Nonetheless, a different palate prevails, and the women would savor these bush tubers. Their tangled vines form the magnetic core of this painting.

When she was about fourteen years old, Yukultji Napangati was one of a small group of Pintupi who walked into a remote community center in the Gibson Desert and were acknowledged as the last of their people to be living independently in the region. She recounts not knowing what to do with money or with tinned meat (which she buried in the ground, thinking it might be poison) and boiling soap powder to drink, thinking it was tea. She settled into this community, Kiwirrkura, where she began painting canvases in the late 1990s. Her mother's country remains her source of inspiration, and she traveled to Sydney once, in 2005, to see her paintings in an exhibition, but she generally prefers to stay in the desert, where she says: "I'm happy at home. I'm painting from home now."

PM





NINGURA NAPURRULA, born ca. 1938  
Pintupi people, Walunguru (Kintore), Western Desert, Northern Territory

### WIRRULNGA

2006. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 48 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 48 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (122 × 122 cm)

Distinct symbols communicate different aspects of this creation narrative. The core is Wirrulnga, a rockhole site shown as a large roundel, where ancestral women would stop to camp. Lines swerving out from the roundel suggest the extended belly of a pregnant woman who gave birth at the site. Women are positioned all over the camp, marked by the many arc shapes. Surrounding the roundel are comblike forms that represent what the women at camp have been doing to prepare for ceremonies: these forms are hair-string skirts, essential ceremonial attire, which are made by spinning human hair into threads. The women's choice of food is evident in the profusion of red circles, indicating desert raisins, which are gathered either to be eaten as the women travel or to be ground into a paste and cooked in coals.

This symbolic vocabulary is derived from sand drawing, an artistic tradition relied upon by women of desert communities. Symbols are sketched in the sand with the woman's fingers as she recites the ancestral narratives; as episodes evolve, the sketch is wiped out and a new one begun. Having been raised in the western deserts, Ningura Napurrula grew up with this immersive temporary art; her first contact with outsiders did not occur until 1962. Her husband, the late Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi (ca. 1926–1998), was one of the first elders to paint at Papunya in the 1970s, and she began painting her own canvases in 1996, when a project was devised to encourage women to paint.

PM



DENNIS NONA, born 1973

Kala Lagaw Ya people, Badu (Mulgrave Island), Torres Strait Islands, Queensland

**DADU MINARAL—TURTLE**2007. Bronze, 47 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (120 × 65 × 65 cm)

Dennis Nona belongs to a group of contemporary Torres Strait artists whose work is based on the retrieval and continuation of ancient customs, traditional knowledge, and ancestral narratives. Nona trained as a traditional woodcarver on Badu Island, a skill he transferred to linocuts in the late 1980s. Although he is a renowned printmaker, in recent years Nona has been working in three dimensions, creating life-size figures of ancestors, crocodiles, and sea creatures. The surfaces of his bronze sculptures are delicately incised with patterns based on traditional designs, in the same way that Torres Strait artists etch or engrave the surfaces of tortoise shells for ceremonial use.

The turtle in the sculpture is supported by decorated poles, or *dadu*, of the type used in initiation ceremonies of the Waru Agudal, or Turtle, clan on Badu Island. Although none of these poles still exist, Nona based the forms on descriptions by a Badu Island elder. In the course of the ceremony, the turtle would be butchered and then cooked in an earth oven.

On the underside of this turtle is an image of a *gapu* (suckerfish) that harkens back to the days when fishermen used *gapu* in an ingenious method of catching dugong and turtle. Young suckerfish would be caught, usually by women, and nurtured until grown. Then a rope would be tied around the fish's tail, and it was released into the deep, in the anticipation that it would latch onto a turtle or dugong.

WC





31

GLORIA TAMERR PETYARR, born 1938  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory

### LEAVES

2002. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 70% $\times$  157½ in. (180  $\times$  400 cm)

Seemingly endless white strokes of paint defy monotony as they align to form waves, eddies, and an uncanny illusion of depth. One choice guides their composition: none of the dashes merge; instead, each holds its own place in the maze of movement. It is obvious that patient dedication was required to accomplish this unique confluence. Given the title, this painting also suggests the experience of being engulfed by windswept leaves. As each leaf takes its place, the underlying respect for natural forces is unmistakable.

Petyarr belongs to a family of innovative women whose art focuses attention on the resources of their home country. She grew up learning traditional techniques of reading the landscape to identify foods, medicinal plants, and everything else that was needed to thrive. Sitting under mulga bushes, helping the elder women prepare their seeds for small cakes, she would see the leaves swirl overhead. At the same time, she could listen to elders discussing the days when grasses and wildlife were more abundant. When white settlers arrived in the 1920s and took over Anmatyerr land to graze cattle on a station they called Utopia, they disrupted centuries of foraging. A painting based on potent memories, *Leaves* pays tribute to the intimate experience of being immersed in a landscape that outsiders usually describe as arid and desolate but that is full of abundance in this artist's eyes.

PM



KATHLEEN PETYARR, born ca. 1940  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory

### MOUNTAIN DEVIL LIZARD DREAMING

1996. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 48 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 48 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (122 × 122 cm)

Pointillism is taken to new levels in this painting that showcases the journey of a lizard. Kathleen Petyarr starts with a satay stick, dips it in paint, and applies minute dots with meticulous care. Across the center, a wavy X marks the path of a very specific lizard, the Mountain Devil Lizard, known by the ancestral name Arnkerth. This lizard is a champion at adapting to circumstances. What is recorded here is its idiosyncratic habit of meandering, swerving around obstacles, never following a straight path. The dots that appear in dense clusters simultaneously convey the spotted pattern on the lizard's skin, the seeds or small ants it eats, and the sandstorms it passes through.

Petyarr identifies Arnkerth as a clever teacher and ancestral heroine who would use her intellect to triumph against all odds. This ancestor established features of the landscape in her pilgrimage of creation and can be seen in the rockholes designated here by larger dots. Women of this region follow her trail as part of a ceremonial cycle comprising a narrative emphasizing feminine fortitude and reliance on traditional leaders. In Arnkerth's honor, women custodians sing and dance at sites that are designated in the painting by more dots. The central X marks the spot where men and women each have ceremonial grounds. Relationships to Yam, Emu, and Dingo Dreamings are specified, as are the mountains and creeks they established. This painting is a map of multiple levels of existence, including the past, present, and future tense.

PM



NGILPIRR SPIDER SNELL, born 1930  
Wangkajunga people, Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, Western Australia

### KURTAL

2005. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 83 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 59 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (213 × 152 cm)

In this candy-colored painting, Ngilpir Spider Snell eloquently refutes any assumptions that Western Australia's Great Sandy Desert is a landscape devoid of life. The fields of dense background dotting indicate an environment teeming with bush foods, and the azure blue roundel represents a cool desert spring known as a *jila*. Often described as "living water," *jila* are revered as permanent sources of potable water, but it is their relationship to the Ancestral Realm that imbues them with their life-giving and life-sustaining properties. Through paintings, songs, and dance, Snell communicates with the potent snake spirit Kurtal, who resides in and around this treasured water hole.

The serpentine body of Kurtal courses powerfully over this landscape and mimics the subterranean waterways he created. Signaling the promise of rain, horseshoe-shaped clouds called *kutukutu* can be seen on the horizon, symbolizing Kurtal's dominion over them. Wearing long horizontal headdresses, senior men would perform ceremonies at Kurtal's water hole to celebrate the commencement of the wet season and the continuation of the cycle of life it represents. As the most senior custodian of the site and the last man to be taught these dances, Snell is now instructing his children and grandchildren about their customary obligations. Memorably photographed dancing for the Native Title Tribunal in 1997, Snell has an unwavering commitment to bridging worlds, cultures, and generations. Each new act ensures the survival of Wangkajunga cultural practices and breathes renewed life into the spirit of Kurtal.

SG



## SPINIFEX MEN'S COLLABORATIVE

(Ned Grant, born 1942; Kali Davis, n.d.; Ian Rictor, born ca. 1962; Lawrence Pennington, n.d.; Frank Davis, n.d.; Fred Grant, born 1941; Gerome Anderson, 1940–2011; Wilbur Brooks, n.d.; Simon Hogan, born 1930; Mark Anderson, born 1933; Roy Underwood, born 1937; Walter Hansen, n.d.; Loren Pennington, n.d.; Cyril Brown, n.d.; Alan Jamieson, n.d.; Lennard Walker, born 1949; Byron Brooks, born 1955)  
Pitjantjatjara people, Tjuntjuntjara, Southwestern Deserts, Western Australia

## WATI KUTJARRA (TWO MEN STORY)

2003. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 82<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 74<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (210 × 190 cm)

In 1997 the Spinifex People began an art project that led to the use of collaborative paintings as supporting evidence for a successful Native Title claim deep in Western Australia's Great Victoria Desert. In the 1950s and '60s, drought and British nuclear testing had contributed to an exodus from these customary lands. In order to demonstrate their ongoing connections to and responsibilities for this area of more than twenty-one thousand square miles, the Spinifex People created large gender-specific paintings as symbolic title deeds. Intermittent field trips to important tracts of land continue to prompt the creation of new collaborative paintings, which conceptually map these sites and effectively renew people's cultural obligations to them.

Although painted by seventeen senior Spinifex men, this work has a unified vision that sets it apart. It is dominated by the muscular forms of two giant snakes who reveal their lethal potential for constriction as they encircle the rockhole at Pukarra. The background is an abundant field of colored dots that delineate the contours of the land and evoke the ancestral forces that reside in it. Representing Wandirri and his unhinged son, Wintjirdii, these two snakes are the main protagonists of the Spinifex interpretation of the revered Wati Kutjarra narrative. The painting visualizes the tumultuous journey through sandhill country toward Pukarra for Wintjirdii's initiation. To this day, people approach the rockhole at Pukarra with great care and make sure that these two powerful snakes are settled, first by fires and then by smoke, before respectfully accessing the water.

SG



EILEEN YARITJA STEVENS, 1915–2008  
 Pitjantjatjara people, Nyapari, Southwestern Deserts, South Australia

**PILTATI TJUKURRPA**

2008. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 78¾ × 79½ in. (200 × 201 cm)

There is no lack of drama squeezed into this square canvas. Frenzied gestures and deep, rich colors tumble into each other in a riotous cavalcade. Some of this bravado is said to reflect the forceful character of this elder artist, who lived in a region south of Uluru (Ayers Rock), where the rocky mountains are likened to the bony ridges of a person's spine. Eileen Yaritja Stevens was born in a place her family designated as having been established by the Honey Ant, and she grew up milking goats at a mission station. When painting, she made use of cryptic iconography that enabled her to revisit the epic song cycles that governed her youth.

The artist named this painting after the Piltati rockhole in her husband's country and described the foundational story that is embedded in it as a struggle of wills. There are two brothers, who are married to two sisters. The men tend to sit around, perform ceremonies, paint, or sleep. Meanwhile, the women work hard gathering food and eventually become angry enough to leave. In spite, they go out farther and farther in search of food, heading to a big rockhole to gather honey ants and dig for burrowing bettong. When the brothers wake up, they turn into Rainbow Serpents, dig a hole to hide in, trick the women, and then devour them. Afterward, the women also become Rainbow Serpents and forever after watch over the Piltati rockhole, where a deep blue pool of life-sustaining freshwater hides from the scorching sun.

PM



BILLY THOMAS, born ca. 1920  
Wangkajunga people, Kununurra, Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia

**WARINGARRI**

2002. Natural pigments on canvas, 47¼ × 35¼ in. (120 × 90 cm)

The work of Billy Thomas bridges the Eastern Kimberley practice of painting with earth pigments to the aerial perspective of the Western Desert, to which he belongs. Emblematic of openness to cross-cultural interaction, many of Thomas's paintings depict the huge ceremonial events that were once commonplace in the region. These occasions, where important matters of cultural law would be discussed, were organized and attended by people of the Gija, Miriwoong Walmajarri, and Wangkajunga language groups. Repeated arc shapes, overpainted with white, symbolize the mass convergence of these different language groups, and Thomas has captured the kinetic exuberance of these events with his gestural brushstrokes. Despite this display of togetherness, the lines delineating each group never touch, and the painting becomes a celebration of the cultural specificities that constitute a collective Kimberley and Western Desert identity.

As with many artists of his generation, Thomas's knowledge of the land derives from a lifetime's communion with it. He was born near Billiluna, in the Great Sandy Desert, and absorbed its many ancestral narratives and sacred sites. He worked as a stockman, which afforded him constant passage through customary lands, and then as a police tracker, which demanded an extraordinary ability to read minute changes in the landscape. Reflective of Thomas's love of country is his commitment to using earth pigments. He slowly builds up the texture of his paintings to create rich surfaces that have an almost topographical quality and resonate with the insistent power of the land.

SG





ROVER THOMAS, ca. 1926–1998

Kukatja/Wangkajunga peoples, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia

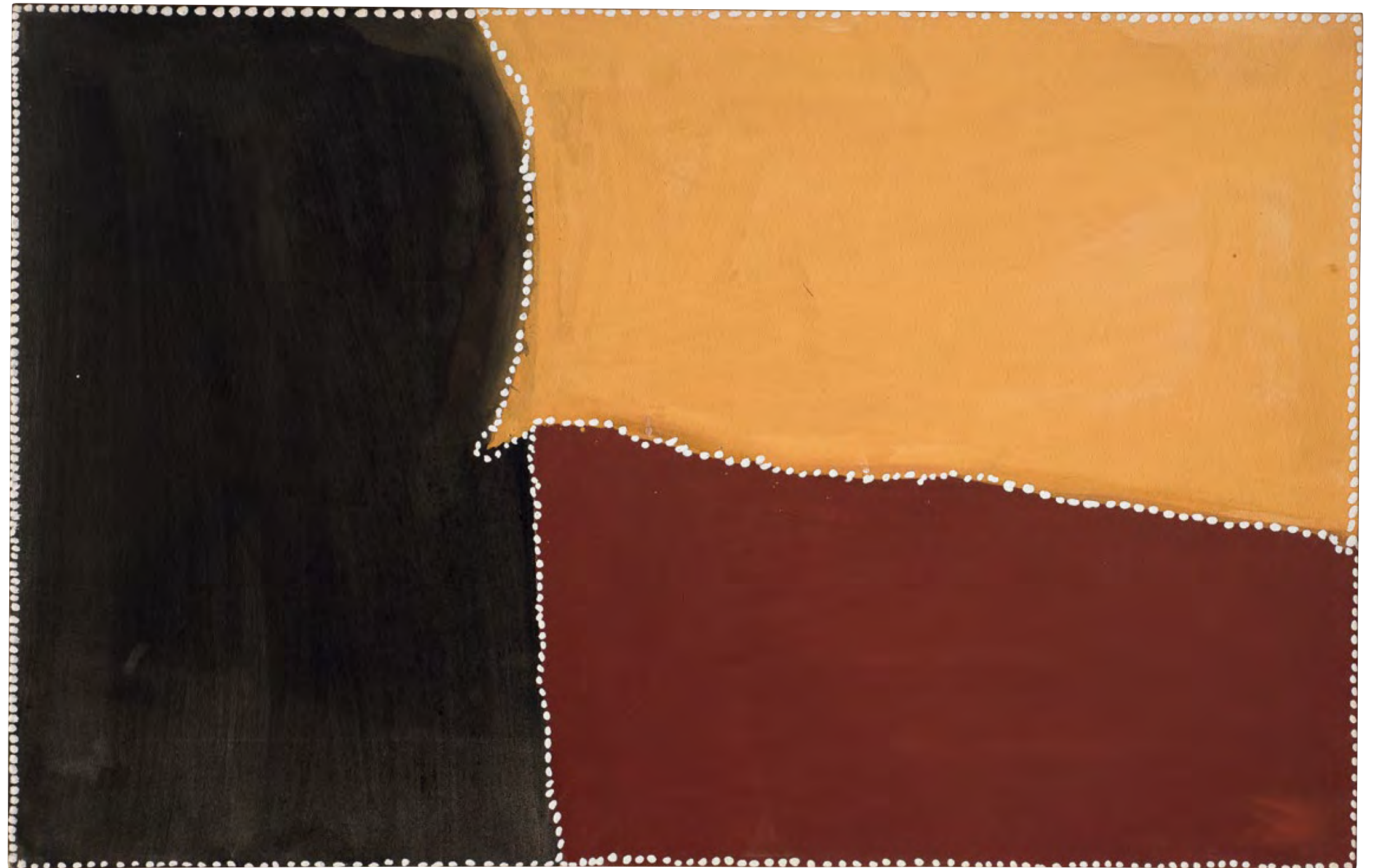
**HOME COUNTRY**

1984. Natural pigments on canvas, 53 × 68 in. (134.6 × 172.7 cm)

Throughout his distinguished career, Rover Thomas used locally mined earth pigments mixed with a resinous binder to create mood-soaked boards and canvases that conceptualize the rugged beauty of the expansive eastern Kimberley region. These material and geographic portraits of customary lands resonate with ancestral presence, cultural knowledge, social history, and the artist's own personal narrative. In the 1970s Thomas received a series of visions from the spirit of a relative who died onboard a plane destined for a Perth hospital. The journey of her spirit into the afterlife and back to her homelands developed into the Kurirr Kurirr ceremony, which chronicled the historical and contemporary events of the sites she passed over. This incident marked the beginning of Thomas's public painting practice and precipitated the growth of what has become known as the Kimberley art movement.

Painted in the early stages of Thomas's career, *Home Country* prefigures the elemental abstractions that became his leitmotiv. The rectangular blocks of color, heightened with dotted outlines, suggest the changing topography of the Gibson Desert, characterized by shifting red sand plains, gravelly ridges, and stretches of windblown dunes. Thomas depicts his birthplace at Kunawarritji (Well 33) as a nook nestled along the Canning Stock Route and the westward track that leads to the burial grounds of his family. A meditation on the poetics of life and death, it is also a reverent declaration of the enduring essence of the land as a site of all that one sees, knows, and becomes.

SG



MICK NAMARARI TJPALTJARRI, ca. 1927–1998  
 Pintupi people, Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory

**OLD WOMAN TRAVELS**

1995. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 35<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24 in. (91 × 61 cm)

With an unhesitating hand, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri crafted a sublime work of unbroken fluidity. Composed almost entirely of curvilinear brushstrokes, this painting notionally resembles the modulation of sound waves traveling across vast distances. Tjapaltjarri's formal experimentation with a minimalist aesthetic, which began in the late 1980s, has proven to be one of his most enduring legacies to the Central and Western Desert art movement, of which he was a founding member. Minimalist in style rather than in content, his paintings thwart any literal interpretation of his inherited ancestral narratives, being concerned instead with the agenda of deliberate codification and affirmation of his culture. Like those invisible sound waves, many of the associations and significations of this painting are imperceptible to a non-Pintupi audience, but Tjapaltjarri converses explicitly with those who can read the subtle cultural tonalities that extend beyond the flat picture plane.

In its abbreviated explication, this painting depicts events associated with the journeys of an old woman named Kutungka Napanangka. It is said that she traveled to Muruntji, which is known to be a reliable source of good water. While resting at this site, she was accosted by a group of young boys, whom she chased after and killed; the main delinquent, however, escaped and set out to Warren Creek. Despite his commitment to narrative abstraction, Tjapaltjarri offers visual tangents that suggest rippling water as well as endless tracks or mountainous topography, and these physical traces in the landscape are his proud embodiment of inscrutable cultural knowledge.

SG



TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA, 1929–2007

Kukatja people, Balgo (Wirrimanu), Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia

**WATI KUTJARRA (TWO BROTHERS DREAMING)**

2004. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 70% × 59% in. (180 × 150 cm)

The Wati Kutjarra are two brothers whose epic journey in the Dreaming is retold in important narratives belonging to many different language groups across the western deserts. During their travels they created many of the landforms, taught people about hunting, and gave them the correct laws of social behavior. Nuanced with inflections of gender and seniority, the story is dictated by the specific sites that these ancestral beings visited. The stories of these sites are handed down through generations and become signifiers of both familial and cultural identification.

In this version, Tjumpo Tjapanangka depicts the vast salt-encrusted lake known as Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), which was created when the Wati Kutjarra lit a fire that raged throughout the arid landscape. The purposeful lighting of fires for ecological regeneration is a common land management technique for Kukatja and Pintupi peoples, and it appears that this too was handed down from the Wati Kutjarra. Gently disrupting the all-over geometric patterning are two vertical lines that emerge from the top and bottom of the painting and indicate where the brothers camped. The horizontal white line that bisects the painting represents the protective windbreak they built. With the large concentric rectangular forms that dominate his paintings, Tjapanangka demonstrates his considerable flair for optical complexity, inducing sensations of movement that are suggestive of flickering flames, rippling water, and shifting dunes of sand. But most importantly, his paintings are a commitment to the custodianship of these stories and the sites from which they emerged.

SG



WIMMITJI TJAPANGARTI, ca. 1924–2000

Kukatja people, Balgo (Wirrimanu), Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia

## PIPPAR

1993. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 59½ × 29½ in. (150 × 75 cm)

Wimmitji Tjapangarti was one of the Kukatja cultural leaders at the Catholic mission established during the 1930s at Balgo in the Tanami Desert. He grew up leading a traditional life in the Great Sandy Desert to the west but followed other family members to Balgo in the late 1940s. A major contributor to the publication of a Kukatja-English dictionary, he also assisted anthropologists and researchers of Kukatja culture, social structures, physiology, and medicine.

A venerable traditional Lawman, Tjapangarti commenced painting for the public domain when an adult education course was introduced to Balgo in the early 1980s. He developed his own style of painting in acrylic, drawing in paint using his fingers, as one would in applying painted designs to a ritual participant's body or in making sand drawings. He would often sing about the land or ancestral events as he painted them. Tjapangarti's painted surfaces have a distinctive physicality—a visual sense of tactility. In combination with his subtle use of color, his paintings exude an intimacy with his subject matter, which the viewer is invited to share. *Pippar*, for example, shows a landscape abundant in a variety of bush foods (indicated by roundels) in the region of the Yigarra rockhole, south of Balgo, which is represented by the starlike form at top left.

During the 1980s Tjapangarti married Eubena Nampitjin (cat. 45), with whom he formed an artistic partnership—they often collaborated on paintings—that lasted until 1996, when his eyesight deteriorated and he became too frail to paint.

WC



GEORGE WARD TJUNGURRAYI, born ca. 1945  
Pintupi people, Walunguru (Kintore), Western Desert, Northern Territory

**KUTUNGKA NAPANANGKA (OLD WOMAN DREAMING)**

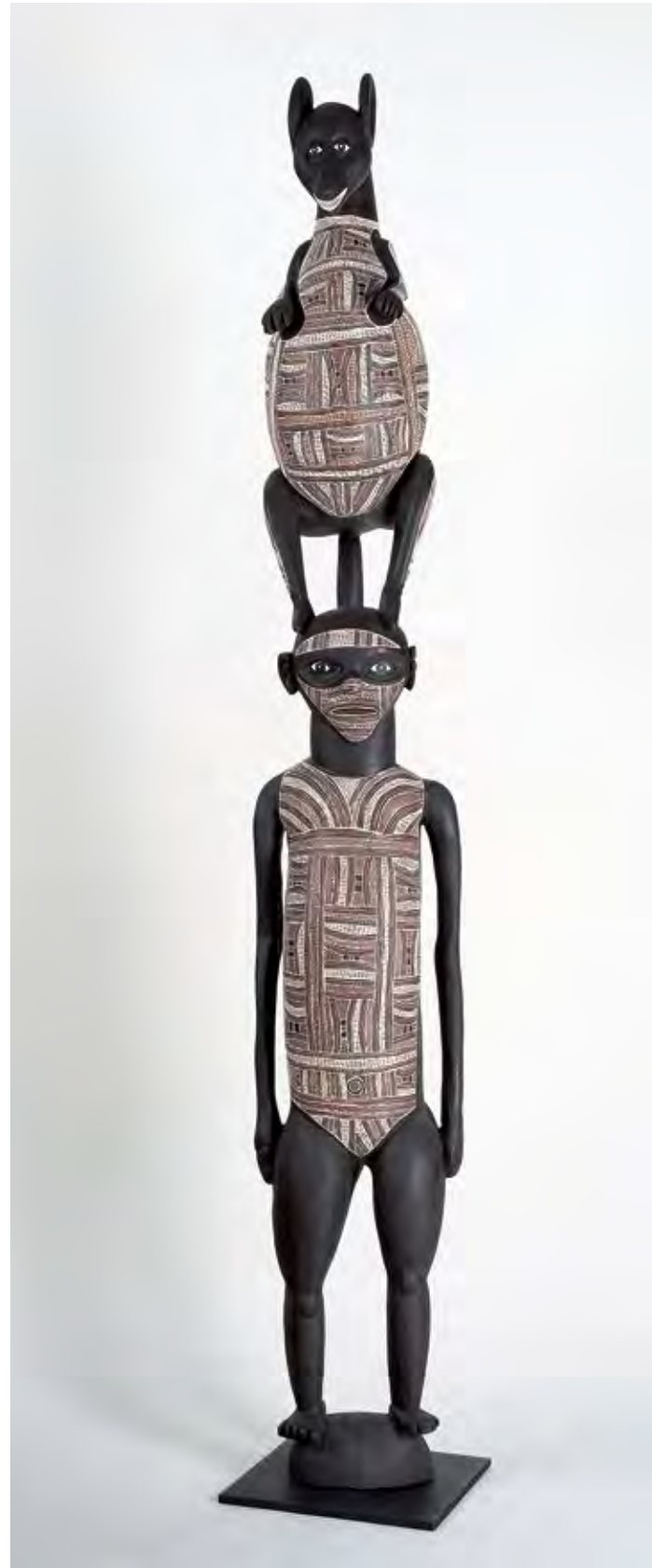
2004. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 96<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 72<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (244 × 183 cm)

A winner of the prestigious Wynne Prize for landscape at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, George Ward Tjungurrayi has established himself as one of the most accomplished Pintupi artists working today. With his dotted linear patterning, he invokes the parallel sand ridges that are characteristic of the Gibson Desert. Adapting designs associated with the Tingari cycle, he has forged a distinctive iconography that has become a bold personal signature and an emphatic cultural declaration. His painting career stalled early in the 1990s, but after the death of his artist brother, Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi, in 1998, the cultural imperative to document and to share the wisdom embodied by important ancestral narratives seemed more acute, and he renewed his commitment to his painting practice.

Methodically dotting over geometric underpaintings, Tjungurrayi constructs monochromatic works that appear to expand and contract, alluding to but never revealing their ancestral and ceremonial secrets. The concentric squares that characterized his earlier works have almost wholly collapsed and buckled. Rendered shapeless, they hint at the transformational power of the land and the ancestors cleaving to it. The intense moiré effect in this magisterial work replicates designs that were incised onto sacred stone objects and used to communicate the potency of the ancestral presence to male initiates. Purposefully detached from the work's multilayered significance, we can nevertheless enjoy the optical frisson cleverly created by an artist at the height of his technical abilities.

SG





42

DUNDIWUY WANAMBI, 1934–1996

Marrakulu clan, Gurka'wuy and Yirkala, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**WUYAL WITH DHULAKU THE EURO**

1991. Natural pigments on wood, 64 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 9 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 7 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (164 × 23 × 183 cm)

Wuyal, the main ancestor of the Marrakulu clan, is figuratively and metaphorically associated with sugar bag (wild honey). In the creation period he wandered through Marrakulu land at Gurka'wuy (Trial Bay), on the eastern coast of Arnhem Land, in search of wild beehives in the hollows of stringy-bark trees. Wuyal would use his stone-headed axe to split the trunks, the trees would fall to the ground, and rivers of honey would flow, soaking the earth. This image is a metaphor common to many Aboriginal creation chronicles. It describes the means by which the earth has been sanctified by the ancestors, their powers flowing into the ground, where they remain for eternity. The land is imbued with their sacred essences, which generation after generation of Aboriginal people draw upon for spiritual sustenance, particularly in the form of ceremony.

In this sculpture, Wuyal's face and torso, and the body of Dhulaku the Euro (a kangaroo-like animal), are covered in ritual Marrakulu clan designs that feature images of paired boomerangs. Wuyal is said to have named and created all the sacred places in Marrakulu country by the act of throwing the boomerangs. That Wanambi was an innovative sculptor is evident in the curvilinear articulation of the forms of the figures and the way he shows Dhulaku standing atop the figure of the ancestor, in a variant of the conventional image of the hunter carrying his catch across his shoulders.

WC





43

REGINA PILAWUK WILSON, born 1948  
Marathiel people, Peppimenarti, Daly River region, Northern Territory

### MESSAGE STICKS

2004. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 78% × 78% in. (200 × 200 cm)

Hundreds of linear filaments cross this painting to coalesce into the image of pointed sticks. Regina Pilawuk Wilson is an active fiber artist who has adapted the intersecting lines of a twining process as the subject of her paintings. Through her choices she maintains a loyalty to the flexibility of small strands of fiber merging together. This unique amalgam is a reflection of choices made by the artist, who with her husband established Peppimenarti, a community of two hundred people where mothers and grandmothers taught their daughters to weave. Wilson says that her weekly lessons began when she was ten, and by twelve she was producing her own fiber mats, baskets, bags, and nets.

Since the 1990s Wilson has adapted the intersecting warp and weft of fiber art to painting. For this example, she depicts the stitches woven from a bush vine that she gathers near rivers, strips into fibers, and then weaves into nets for catching fish, prawns, and other edible creatures. *Message Sticks* recalls the method of traditional communication by marking sticks that were carried to announce a time for ceremony. "Back in the old days we had no pen, paper, we only had message stick. All the writing was marked on the stick by stone axe. Today in our days we use hot wire or file."

PM



PEDRO WONAEAMIRRI, born 1974  
Tiwi people, Milikapiti, Melville Island, Northern Territory

**PWOJA, BODY PAINT DESIGN**

2001. Natural pigments on canvas, 61 × 41¾ in. (155 × 106 cm)

Characteristic of Tiwi artists, Pedro Wonaeamirri works in a number of media: he is a painter on both bark and canvas, a sculptor, a maker of ceremonial weapons, and, since 1995, a prolific printmaker. A strong believer in continuing Tiwi traditions for future generations, he also intends his art to educate non-Tiwi about his culture. To that end he has taken on the role of chairman of the local art cooperative, Jilamara Arts. He has also sought inspiration from older Tiwi art now held in museums around the country.

Wonaeamirri is an active ritual participant, and the imagery in his work derives mainly from the designs painted onto Pukumani funeral posts of the type that surround a grave. Such designs are usually related to the totemic and social affiliations of the deceased, and the posts are carved as abstracted versions of the human form. In contrast, the designs painted onto people's bodies in the ceremonies are intended to disguise the wearers to protect them from the malevolent aspect of the spirit of the dead. Tiwi do not associate body painting designs with any ancestral being or country, nor do they assign specific meaning to the motifs.

In this painting Wonaeamirri has prepared a black ground to imitate the color of his skin, upon which he has painted series of patterns with a *pwoja*—a wooden comb used by Tiwi artists to lay down rows of dots. Each *pwoja* creates a distinctive design that is a mark of the artist's individuality. In fact, Wonaeamirri likens the *pwoja* to a bone in his body. In the title of this work, *pwoja* is used as a synonym for a design that is painted on the body.

WC





YUENDUMU WOMEN'S COLLABORATIVE (Biddy Napanangka Hutchinson, born 1931; Betsy Napangardi Lewis, born ca. 1940; Judy Napangardi Watson, born ca. 1925; Rosie Nangala Fleming, born ca. 1930; Amanda Nangala Jurra, n.d.; Bessie Nakamarra Sims, born ca. 1932; and Pamela Napurrula Walker, born 1957)  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu, Western Desert, Northern Territory

**MINA MINA JUKURRPA (MINA MINA DREAMING)**

1999. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 59 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 47 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (150 × 120 cm)

Seven women collaborated on creating this canvas to depict the significance of their Mina Mina (home or living place). It is a location where ancestral women would stop to sit under the desert oaks, get water from the soakages, and then receive digging sticks to carry on their journey. As they moved along, the women would sing and dance and go without sleep. They would collect bush tucker, including edible fungi and bush raisins, and gather snake vines to strap around food bowls and to wrap around heads to cure a headache.

This painting was commissioned according to guidelines established by the Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation of Yuendumu. As an integral part of its creation, all the members of the women's collaborative journeyed to the Mina Mina it depicts. The women observed their laws regarding representation: three artists contributed as owners of the Dreaming (through their patrilineal line), and four managers (from the matrilineal line) acted as police. Together these women traveled with an entourage of younger family members. Along the way, just as in the mythic time, they stopped to gather goannas, grubs, bush tobacco, and fruits and to sing quietly. Lighting fires to drive away the blue-tongued lizards that sit under the spinifex grass also allowed them to roast whatever came from their foraging.

PM

Key elements in this painting can be deciphered as Warlpiri graphic notation:

- Long wavy lines = snake vines
- U forms = women
- concentric circles = desert oak trees
- straight lines = digging sticks
- small circles = edible fungus, except when they are seen next to a woman,  
as UIO forms = *coolamon* (gathering bowls)





46

BALUKA MAYMURU, born 1947  
Manggalili clan, Djarrakpi, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**DJARRAKPI**

2001. Natural pigments on hollow eucalyptus log, 88 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (225 × 16.5 cm)

47

WANYUBI MARIKA, born 1967  
Riratjingu clan, Yilpara (Baniyala), Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**RIRRATJINGU LARRAKITI**

2003. Natural pigments on hollow eucalyptus log, 114 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 9 $\frac{13}{16}$  in. (290 × 25 cm)

The burial practices of the people of Arnhem Land are unique. Funerals consist of two parts: in the first burial, the body of the deceased is painted in clan designs and laid to rest in a grave. In previous times, the body would often be laid out on a bark-sheet platform in a tree on the deceased's land. Death marks the beginning of the mourning period, and those associated with the deceased—his or her kin and clanspeople—are subject to a number of prohibitions, such as not uttering the name of the deceased and, in modern times, not displaying photographs of the dead person. The purpose of these prohibitions is to assure the safe voyage of the soul to the land of the dead.

A second burial occurs some months or even years later, depending on the social and ritual status of the deceased. In this second burial, the bones of the deceased are collected and painted in red ochre, then ritually placed in the naturally hollowed out trunk of a eucalyptus that has been cleaned and painted with clan designs relating to the deceased. The painted coffin is analogous to the human form. It is erected on the ceremonial ground, and at the end of the ceremony, it is left to the elements so that the deceased's remains rejoin the natural environment. The second burial is known by a number of regional and moiety terms that describe both the coffin and the ceremony, such as *lorrkkon* in the west, and *dupun* and *larrakitj* in the east. The ceremony marks the end of the mourning period: with the arrival of the soul in the ancestral domain, all prohibitions are lifted and normal life is resumed.

In 1988, the year Australia celebrated the bicentenary of European settlement, a group of artists around the community of Ramingining in central Arnhem Land—under the aegis of the curator at the local art center, Djon Mundine—created a monumental installation of two hundred

48

JOHN MAWURNDJUL, born 1952  
Kuninjku people, Mumeke and Milmilngkan, Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**LORRKKON HOLLOW LOG**

2005. Natural pigments on hollow eucalyptus log, 86 $\frac{5}{16}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (220 × 22 cm)

49

GUNYBI GANAMBARR, born 1973  
Ngaymil clan, Yangunbi, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**DHANBARR (HOLLOW LOG)**

2006. Natural pigments on hollow eucalyptus log, 96 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (244.5 × 14 cm)

50

YANGGARRINY WUNUNGURRA, 1932–2003  
Dhalwangu clan, Gangan, Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

**DHALWANGU BONE CONTAINER**

Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, fiber, 41 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (105 × 21 cm)

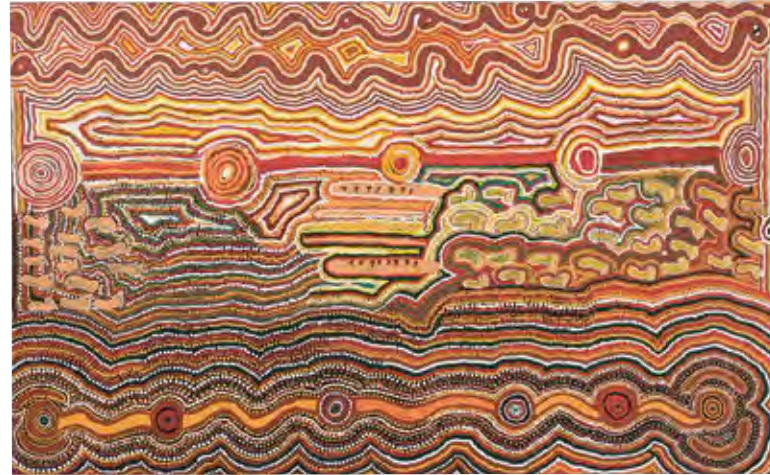
painted hollow logs known as *The Aboriginal Memorial*. A statement of cultural survival, the *Memorial* is intended as a symbol of reparation for all the indigenous Australians who had died defending their lands in the face of settler advancement and who had not been buried in a traditional manner. Just as the second burial marks a time of transition, from the state of mourning to that of normal life, so the *Memorial* stands as an appeal for change in Australian society at large: from an unjust and discriminatory past to a more egalitarian future, when the rights of indigenous people would be respected. The *Memorial* now stands at the entrance to the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Of the five bone containers illustrated here, John Mawurndjul's is decorated in his characteristic *rarrk* designs and features images of skulls. He was a contributor to *The Aboriginal Memorial*. Wanyubi Marika's features designs associated with Witiitj, the ancestral Rainbow Serpent of the Riratjingu clan who created the first monsoon. Baluka Maymuru's *larrakitj* depicts Djarrakpi, one of the major sites of the Manggalili clan (see plate 20). The subject of Gunybi Ganambar's hollow log is Minhala the Long-Necked Tortoise of the Dhalwangu clan at Gangan on the Koolatong River, where the artist lives: the diamond pattern represents flowing freshwater and intimates the ebb and flow of life and death. Yanggarriny Wunungmurra's bone carrier, made from a sheet of eucalyptus bark with two edges sewn together, also relates to Dhalwangu clan themes.

WC

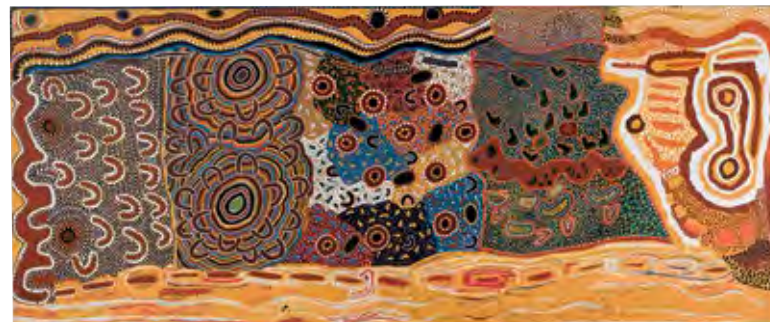


## ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST



### 1. BALGO MEN

(Tjumbo Tjapanangka, 1929–2007; Michael Mutji Tjangala, ca. 1940–2002;  
Jimmy Tchooga, born 1951)  
Kukatja and Pintupi peoples, Balgo (Wirrimanu),  
Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia  
*Wirrimanu (Balgo)*, 1999  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
71¼ × 116⅞ in. (181 × 296 cm)



### 2. BALGO WOMEN

(Tjemma Freda Napanangka, ca. 1930–2004;  
Margaret Anjulle, born 1946; Patricia Lee Napangarti, born 1960;  
Mati Mudgidell, ca. 1935–2002; Lucy Yukenbarri, 1934–2003;  
Eubena Nampitjin, born ca. 1920)  
Kukatja, Wangkajunga, and Warlpiri peoples, Balgo (Wirrimanu),  
Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia  
*Wirrimanu (Balgo)*, 1999  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
47⅞ × 116⅞ in. (121 × 295 cm)



◁ 3. PETER DATJIN BURARRWANGA, born 1953  
Gumatj clan, Elcho Island,  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Ganiny*, 1999  
Natural pigments and synthetic polymer  
paint on eucalyptus bark  
80⅝ × 22⅞ in. (204 × 57 cm)



▷ 4. JANANGOO BUTCHER CHEREL, 1918–2009  
Gooniyandi people, Fitzroy Crossing,  
Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Goongooloo, Boonarra Boonarra,  
and Galaroo (Blood)*, 2002  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
48⅞ × 29⅝ in. (122.5 × 76 cm)



◁ 5. DAWIDI, 1921–1970  
Liyagalawumiri clan, Millingimbi,  
Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*The Travels of the Sacred Wagilag Sisters*,  
ca. 1960  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
35⅝ × 18⅞ in. (91 × 48 cm)



▷ 6. JARINYANU DAVID DOWNS, ca. 1925–1995  
Wangkajunga/Walmajarri peoples,  
Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Kurtal*, 1992  
Natural pigments and synthetic  
polymer paint on canvas  
54 × 40 in. (137.2 × 101.6 cm)



7. GUNYBI GANAMBARR, born 1973  
 Ngaymil clan, Yanguibi,  
 Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Baraltja*, 2009  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 69<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 30<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (176 × 77 cm)



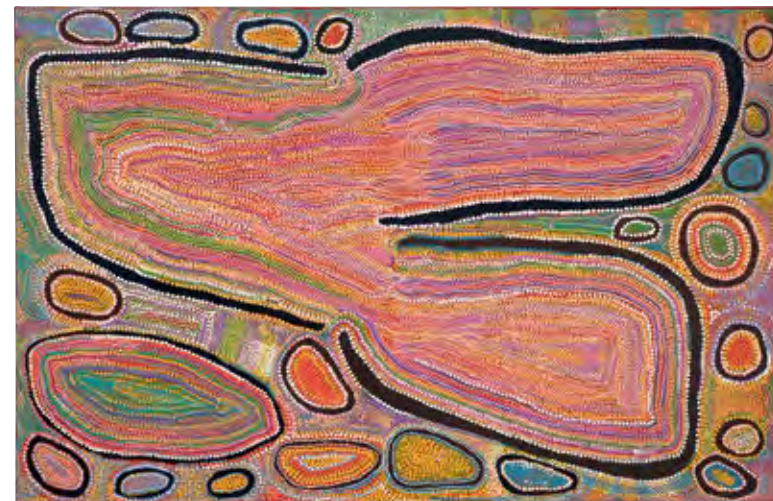
8. LARRTJANGA GANAMBARR, 1932–2000  
 Ngaymil clan, Yirkala, Northeast Arnhem Land,  
 Northern Territory  
*Constellation of Baru (Orion)*, 1960s  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 16<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (41 × 103 cm)



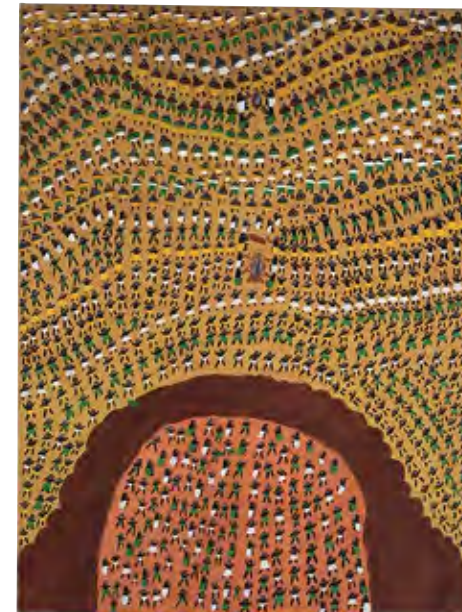
◁ 11. NAMMERREDJE GUMALA, 1926–ca. 1978  
 Kunwinjku people, Liverpool River,  
 Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Female Spirit and Rainbow Serpent*, ca. 1970  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 32<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24 in. (82 × 61 cm)



▷ 12. NAMMERREDJE GUMALA, 1926–ca. 1978  
 Kunwinjku people, Liverpool River,  
 Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Female Spirit, Ngalkunburri Yaymi*, ca. 1970  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 19<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (50 × 35 cm)



9. MITJILI NAPANANGKA GIBSON, born ca. 1940  
 Warlpiri people, Western Desert,  
 Northern Territory  
*Wilinkarra*, 2007  
 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 120<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (200 × 305 cm)



10. ALAN GRIFFITHS, born 1941  
 Ngarinyman/Ngaliwurri peoples, Kununurra,  
 Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Boornooloobun Cave*, 2000  
 Natural pigments on canvas  
 47<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (120 × 90 cm)



◁ 13. NAMMERREDJE GUMALA, 1926–ca. 1978  
 Kunwinjku people, Liverpool River,  
 Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Lightning Spirit*, 1970  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 22<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (57 × 48 cm)



▷ 14. MITHINARI GURRUWIWI, ca. 1929–1976  
 Galpu clan, Yirkala, Northeast Arnhem Land,  
 Northern Territory  
*Untitled*, ca. 1970  
 Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 38<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (98 × 52 cm)



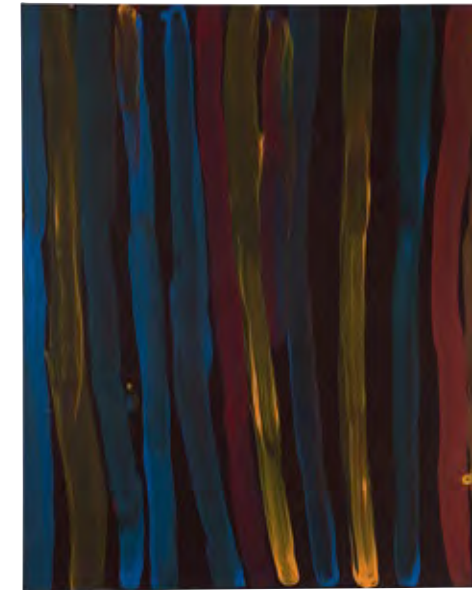
15. STEWART HOOSAN, born 1951  
Gangalida/Karwa peoples, Wandangula Station, Queensland  
*China Wall*, 2004  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
69<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (177 × 200 cm)



16. HECTOR JANDANY, ca. 1927–2006  
Gija/Miriwoong peoples, Warmun (Turkey Creek),  
Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Untitled*, 2002  
Natural pigments on canvas  
17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> in. (45 × 45 cm)



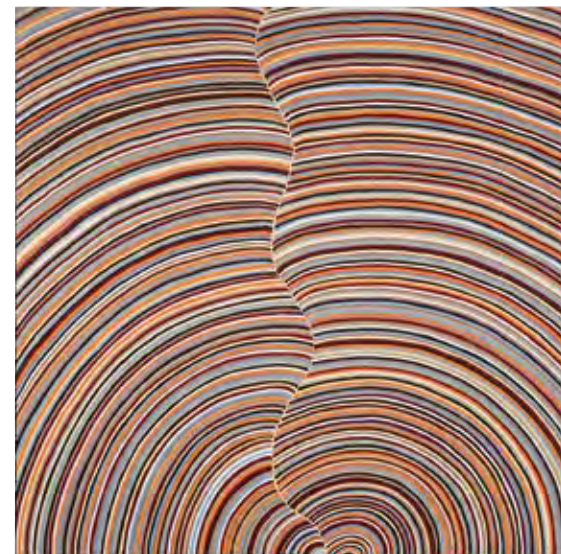
17. MICK JAWALJI, born ca. 1920  
Gija people, Warmun (Turkey Creek),  
Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Untitled*, 2004  
Natural pigments on plywood  
27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (70 × 59.8 cm)



20. EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY,  
ca. 1910–1996  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia,  
Central Desert, Northern Territory  
*Linear Series (Body Paint)*, 1994  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
30<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 22<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> in. (77 × 56 cm)



21. YVONNE KOOLMATRIE, born 1944  
Ngarrindjeri people, Berri, Coorong District,  
South Australia  
*Eel Trap*, 2003  
Native spiny sedge grass  
25<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 43<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (65 × 110 cm)



18. ABIE LOY KAMERRE, born 1972  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia,  
Central Desert, Northern Territory  
*Bush Hen Dreaming,  
Sandhill Country*, 2004  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
71<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 71<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (182 × 182 cm)



19. EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY, ca. 1910–1996  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia, Central Desert,  
Northern Territory  
*Awelye*, 1994  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
31<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 39<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (80 × 100 cm)



22. MICK KUBARKKU, 1920–2008  
Kuninjku people, Mann River region,  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Moon Dreaming from Dirdbim*, 1994  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> in. (132 × 90.5 cm)



23. MICK KUBARKKU, 1920–2008  
Kuninjku people, Mann River region,  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Namarrkon the Lightning Spirit*, 1994  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
65<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> × 30<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub> in. (166 × 77 cm)



◁ 24. DJAMBAWA MARAWILI, born 1953  
Madarrpa clan, Yilpara (Baniyala),  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Lightning Snakes of Blue Mud Bay*, 2004  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
72<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (183 × 63 cm)

▷ 25. DJAMBAWA MARAWILI, born 1953  
Madarrpa clan, Yilpara (Baniyala),  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Baru at Yathikpa*, 2007  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
76<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 22<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (194 × 57 cm)



◁ 26. DJAMBAWA MARAWILI, born 1953  
Madarrpa clan, Yilpara (Baniyala),  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Garranali*, 2010  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
75<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (191.5 × 70 cm)

▷ 27. WANYUBI MARIKA, born 1967  
Rirratjingu clan, Yilpara (Baniyala),  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Mumutthun*, 2008  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
65<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (167 × 75 cm)



◁ 28. WANYUBI MARIKA, born 1967  
Rirratjingu clan, Yilpara (Baniyala),  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Mumutthun*, 2010  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
72<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (185 × 70 cm)

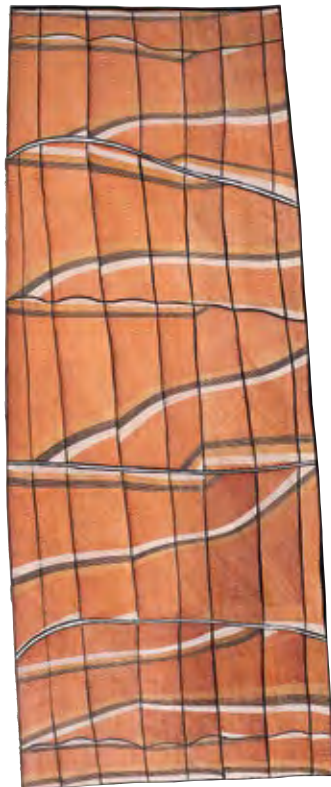
▷ 29. ANDREA NUNGURRAYI MARTIN,  
born 1965  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Janganpa and Jajirdi*  
(*Possum and Native Cat*), 2002  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
59<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (152 × 76 cm)



◁ 30. JOHN MAWURNDJUL, born 1952  
Kuninjku people, Mumeka and Milmilngkan,  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Dilly Bag*, 2002  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
47<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (121 × 58 cm)

▷ 31. JOHN MAWURNDJUL, born 1952  
Kuninjku people, Mumeka and Milmilngkan,  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Mardayin Design*, 2005  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
71<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (182 × 52 cm)





◁ 32. JOHN MAWURNDJUL, born 1952  
Kuninjku people, Mumeka and Milmilngkan,  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Milmilngkan Site*, 2006  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
63 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 23 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (161 × 60 cm)



▷ 33. GALUMA MAYMURU, born 1951  
Manggalili clan, Djarrakpi, Northeast Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory  
*Yingapungapu*, 1997  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
60 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 24 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (152.5 × 61.5 cm)



34. GALUMA MAYMURU, born 1951  
Manggalili clan, Djarrakpi, Northeast Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory  
*Yirritja Dhuwa Gapu*, 2005  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
26 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 22 $\frac{7}{16}$  in. (67 × 57 cm)



35. RICKY MAYNARD, born 1953  
Cape Portland and Ben Lomond peoples,  
Flinders Island, Tasmania  
*Wik Elder, Arthur*, from *Returning to Places  
That Name Us*, 2000  
Gelatin silver print  
37 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 47 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (95 × 120 cm)



36. RICKY MAYNARD, born 1953  
Cape Portland and Ben Lomond peoples,  
Flinders Island, Tasmania  
*Broken Heart*, from *Portrait of a Distant Land*, 2005  
Gelatin silver print  
16 $\frac{5}{16}$  × 16 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (43 × 41.5 cm)



37. RICKY MAYNARD, born 1953  
Cape Portland and Ben Lomond peoples,  
Flinders Island, Tasmania  
*Custodians*, from *Portrait of a Distant Land*, 2005  
Gelatin silver print  
16 $\frac{5}{16}$  × 16 $\frac{5}{16}$  in. (43 × 41.5 cm)



38. QUEENIE MCKENZIE, ca. 1912–1998  
Gija people, Warmun (Turkey Creek),  
Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Gija Country*, 1995  
Natural pigments on canvas  
39 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 55 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (100 × 140 cm)



39. GINGER RILEY MUNDUWALAWALA, 1937–2002  
Mara people, Ngukur,  
Southeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Ngak Ngak in Limmen Bight Country*, 1996  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
30 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 39 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (77 × 101 cm)



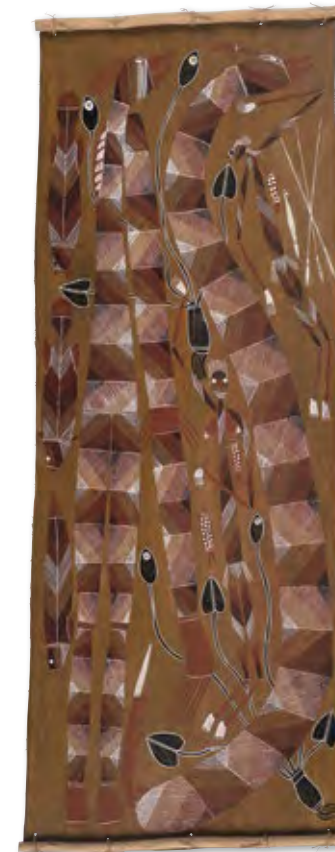
41. PETER NABARLAMBARL,  
1930–2001  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli),  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Sugar Bag Spirit*, 1992  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
30 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (77 × 39 cm)



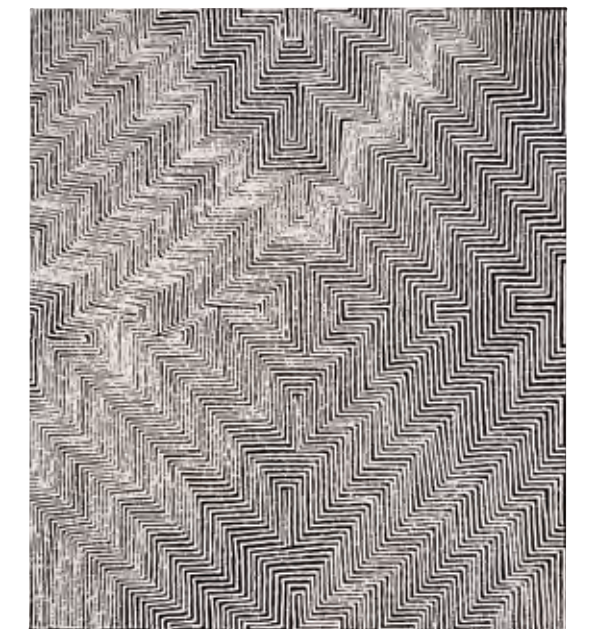
42. BARDAYAL "LOFTY" NADJAMERREK,  
ca. 1926–2009  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli),  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Namarnkol, Barramundi Ancestor*, 1976  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
17 $\frac{7}{16}$  × 47 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (44 × 121 cm)



40. RERRKIRRWANGA MUNUNGGURR, born 1971  
Djapu clan, Yirrkala and Wandawuy,  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Gumatj Clan Fire*, 2010  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
19 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 11 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (50 × 29 cm)



43. DJAWIDA NADJONGORLE,  
born 1943  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli),  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Nawura, Dreamtime Ancestor Spirit*  
— *Creation Story*, 1995  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
53 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 21 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (137 × 54.5 cm)

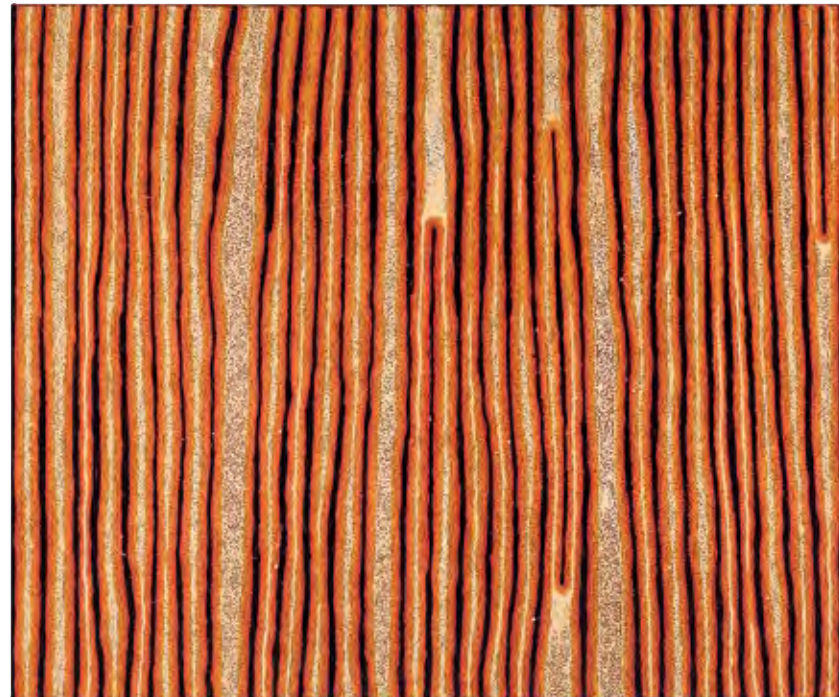


44. ELIZABETH MARKS NAKAMARRA,  
born 1959  
Pintupi people, Walunguru (Kintore),  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Kalipinyapa Rockhole*, 2003  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
42 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 35 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (107 × 91 cm)

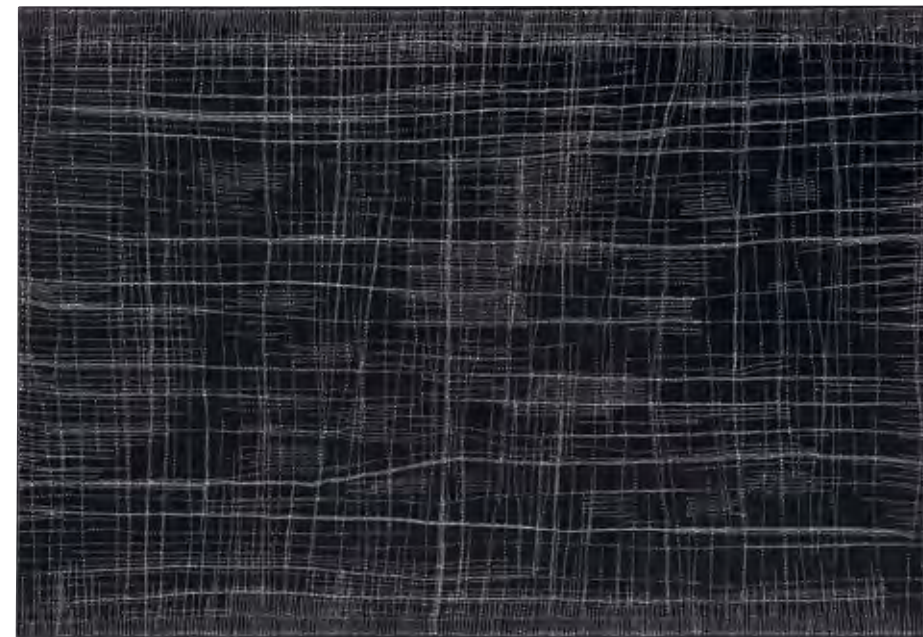




45. EUBENA NAMPITJIN, born ca. 1920  
Kukatja people, Balgo (Wirrimanu),  
Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia  
*Walganbudja Rockhole*, 1995  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
59 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 39 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (150 × 100 cm)



46. EILEEN NAPALTJARRI, born 1956  
Pintupi people, Haasts Bluff,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Tjiturrulpa*, 2005  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
60 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 72 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (153 × 183 cm)



49. DOROTHY ROBINSON NAPANGARDI, born ca. 1956  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Salt*, 2008  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
66 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 96 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (168 × 244 cm)



47. MAKINTI NAPANANGKA, ca. 1930–2011  
Pintupi people, Walungurru (Kintore),  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Lupulnga*, 2003  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
35 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 42 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (91 × 107 cm)



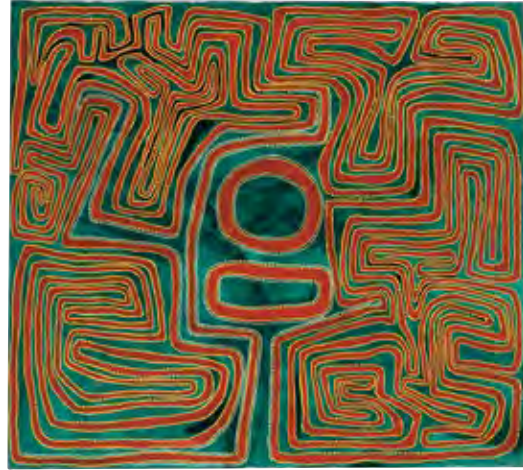
48. DOROTHY ROBINSON NAPANGARDI, born ca. 1956  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Sandhills*, 2006  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
48 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 77 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (122 × 198 cm)



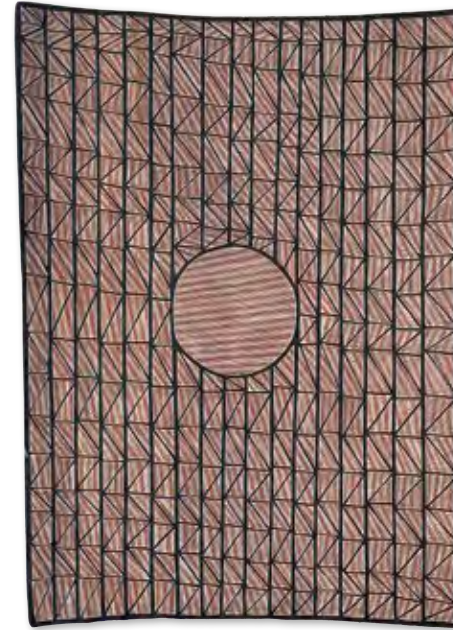
50. DOROTHY ROBINSON NAPANGARDI, born ca. 1956  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Sandhills of Mina Mina*, 2008  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
48 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 120 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (122 × 305 cm)



51. MITJILI NAPARRULA,  
born 1945  
Pintupi people, Haasts Bluff,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Watiya Tjukurrpa*, 1999  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
82 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (210 × 122 cm)



◁ 52. MAWUKURA JIMMY NERRIMAH, born ca. 1924  
Walmajarri people, Fitzroy Crossing,  
Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Wayampajarti*, 2001  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (91 × 102 cm)



▷ 53. TERRY NGAMANDARA, born 1950  
Burarra/Gun-nartpa peoples, Gochan Jiny-jirra,  
Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Gulach-Spike Rush*, 2004  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
31<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (80 × 58 cm)

56. DENNIS NONA, born 1973  
Kala Lagaw Ya people, Badu (Mulgrave Island),  
Torres Strait Islands, Queensland  
*Dhogai Zug*, 2005  
Linocut, hand colored, 35 in edition of 75  
42<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 102<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (108 × 260.5 cm)



57. DENNIS NONA, born 1973  
Kala Lagaw Ya people, Badu (Mulgrave Island),  
Torres Strait Islands, Queensland  
*Sesserae*, 2006  
Linocut, hand colored, 45 in edition of 75  
44<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (112 × 200 cm)



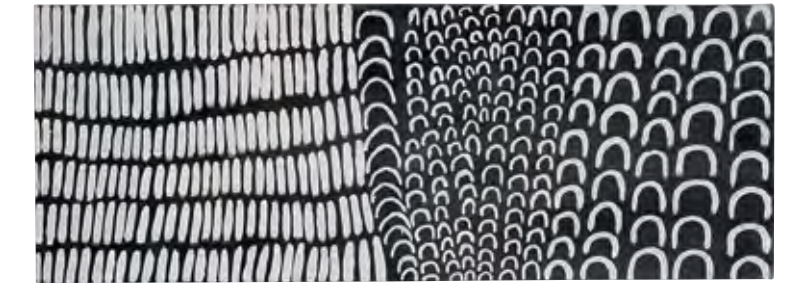
◁ 54. ROBIN NGANJMIRRA, 1951–1991  
Kunwinjku people, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli),  
Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Brolga Dreaming and Mimi Spirits*,  
ca. 1985  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
76<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (194.9 × 57.8 cm)



▷ 55. DULA NGURRUWUTHUN, 1936–2001  
Munyuclu clan, Yirkala,  
Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Rangga at Yarrinya*, 1995  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
92<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 41<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (234 × 105 cm)



◁ 58. DENNIS NONA, born 1973  
Kala Lagaw Ya people,  
Badu (Mulgrave Island),  
Torres Strait Islands, Queensland  
*Dugal*, 2008  
Etching, 13 in edition of 45  
64<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 39 in. (163 × 99 cm)



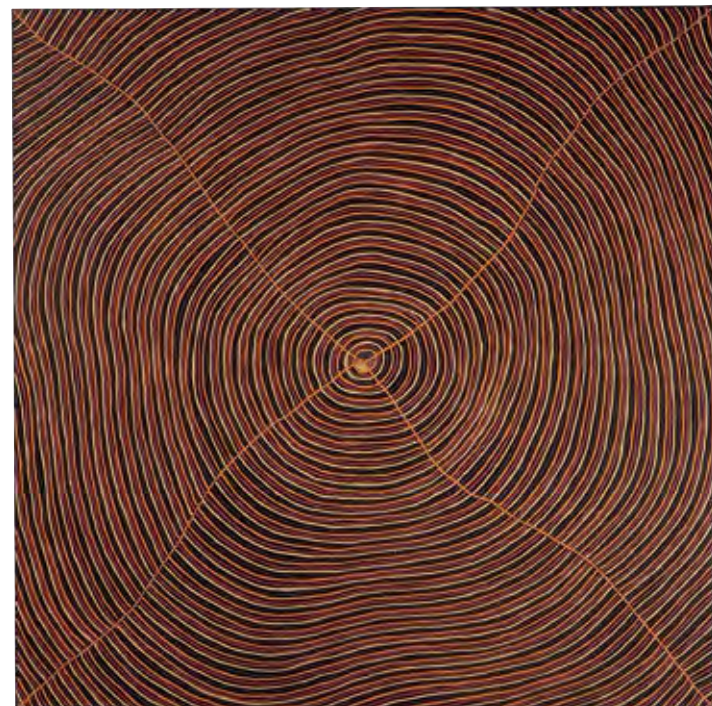
Δ 59. LENA NYADBI, born ca. 1936  
Gija people, Warmun (Turkey Creek),  
Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Lilmim and Jimbala*, 2002  
Natural pigments on canvas  
17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 47<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (45 × 120 cm)



60. ELIZABETH NYUMI,  
born ca. 1947  
Pintupi people, Balgo (Wirrimanu),  
Kimberley/Western Desert,  
Western Australia  
*Parwalla*, 2000  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
70 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 47 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (180 × 120 cm)



61. KATHLEEN PETYARR, born ca. 1940  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia,  
Central Desert, Northern Territory  
*Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming*  
—*Winter Storm*, 1999  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
59 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 59 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (152 × 152 cm)



62. VIOLET PETYARR, born ca. 1945  
Anmatyerr people, Utopia,  
Central Desert, Northern Territory  
*Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming*, 1999  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
72 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 72 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (183 × 183 cm)

63. SHORTY JANGALA  
ROBERTSON, born 1925  
Wardliri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Ngapa Jukurrpa*  
(*Water Dreaming*), 2006  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
72 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 35 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (183 × 91 cm)



64. BESSIE NAKAMARRA SIMS,  
born ca. 1932  
Wardliri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Yarla Jukurrpa (Bush Potato  
Dreaming)*, 2000  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
72 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (183 × 92 cm)

65. PADDY JAPALJARRI SIMS,  
1917–2010  
Wardliri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Yanjilypiri Jukurrpa*  
(*Milky Way Dreaming*), 2004  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
72 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 35 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (183 × 91 cm)



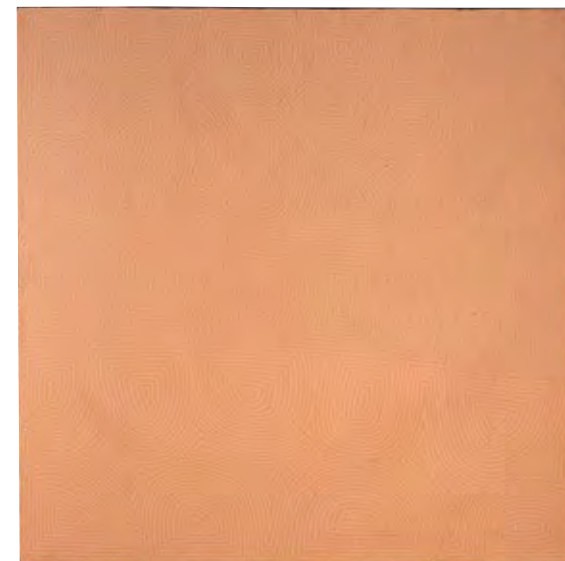
66. BILLY THOMAS, born ca. 1920  
Wangkajunga people, Kununurra,  
Eastern Kimberley, Western Australia  
*Waarlla*, 1998  
Natural pigments on canvas  
23 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 17 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (60 × 45 cm)



67. RICHARD YUKENBARRI TJAKAMARRA, born 1958  
Pintupi people, Balgo (Wirrimanu) and Kiwirrkura,  
Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia  
*The Rockhole Site at Karliarngu*, 2007  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
60 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (153 × 122 cm)

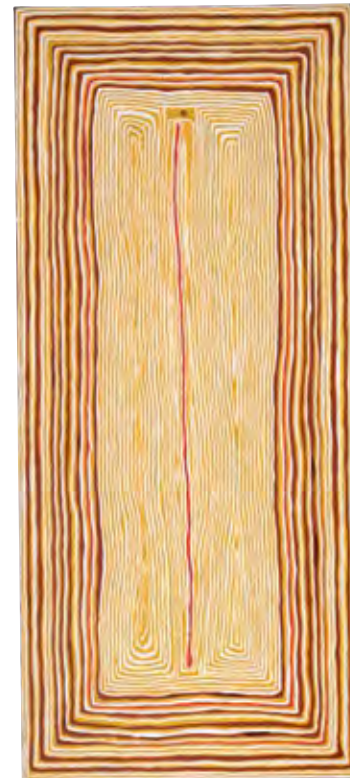


68. MICK NAMARARI TJAPALTJARRI,  
ca. 1927–1998  
Pintupi people, Papunya, Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Tjunginpa (Mouse) Dreaming*, 1996  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
48 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (122 × 122 cm)



70. GEORGE TJUNGURRAYI, born ca. 1943  
Pintupi people, Kiwirrkura,  
Western Desert, Western Australia  
*Untitled (Women's Ceremonies)*, 1998  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
48 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 48 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (122 × 122 cm)

69. TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA,  
1929–2007  
Kukatja people, Balgo (Wirrimanu),  
Kimberley/Western Desert,  
Western Australia  
*Wilkinarra*, 2006  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
118 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 51 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (300 × 130 cm)



71. ROY UNDERWOOD, born 1937  
Pitjantjatjara people, Tjuntjuntjara,  
Southwestern Deserts, Western Australia  
*Upurltjara*, 2000  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
68 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 60 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (173 × 154 cm)



72. JUDY NAPANGARDI WATSON, born ca. 1925  
Warlpiri people, Yuendumu,  
Western Desert, Northern Territory  
*Mina Mina (Women's Dreaming)*, 2002  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
59 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 35 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (152 × 90 cm)



74. JIMMY WULULU,  
ca. 1936–2005  
Gupapuyngu people, Ramingining,  
Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory  
*Niwuda (Yirritja Honeycomb)*,  
ca. 1998–99  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
41 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 23 $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (105 × 60 cm)

75. DJIRRIRRA WUNUNGURRA,  
born 1968  
Dhalwangu clan, Northeast Arnhem Land,  
Northern Territory  
*Buyku*, 2008  
Natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
50 × 28 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (127 × 72 cm)



73. REGINA PILAWUK WILSON, born 1948  
Marathiel people, Peppimenarti,  
Daly River region, Northern Territory  
*Sun Mat*, 2002  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
33 $\frac{7}{16}$  × 34 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (85 × 87 cm)



# VISUAL GLOSSARY



BILLABONG



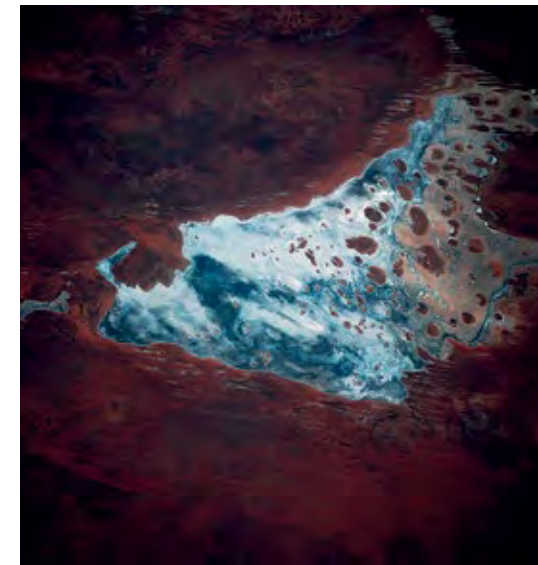
BUSH TUCKER



BLUE-TONGUED LIZARD



ECHIDNA



LAKE MACKAY



GOANNA (PERENTIE LIZARD)



MURRAY RIVER COD



PURNULULU (BUNGLE BUNGLE RANGE)



SANDHILLS, GREAT VICTORIA DESERT



EMU



HONEY ANT



EUCALYPTUS TREE WITH BARK REMOVED



SALTWATER CROCODILE



SPINIFEX

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

Aboriginal societies do not have written languages. Since the coming of Europeans to Australia, indigenous names and languages have been recorded in writing—originally phonetically, but in time using various systems of linguistics. The orthography of individual Aboriginal languages usually becomes standardized once a dictionary of that language has been compiled. This is an ongoing endeavor. In some cases, the same words may be spelled differently depending on the community where they have been recorded and standardized; for example, the word for Dreaming is spelled Tjukurrpa in most desert languages, but Jukurrpa in others.

**ANANGU:** The term used by Aboriginal peoples of the deserts to refer to themselves.

**ANCESTRAL BEINGS:** Supernatural beings who created the universe and the Aboriginal peoples, to whom they gave the civilizing attributes of custom, language, and law. Possessing divine powers that also reside in the earth, they have the ability to change physical form. Their influence is not restricted to the past but continues to affect the lives of Aboriginal people today.

**ANCESTRAL REALM:** The term commonly used to describe Aboriginal cosmology, encompassing the ANCESTRAL BEINGS, the laws of religious and social behavior, the spiritual forces that sustain life, and the chronicles that describe these (also known as the Dreaming).

**ART CENTER:** A studio space and gallery in an indigenous community, usually owned and directed by a cooperative of local artists, that serves the artists by providing art materials, organizing exhibitions and sales, documenting works of art in a culturally appropriate manner, and so on.

**BALANDA:** The term used by Arnhem Land people to describe non-Aboriginal people, derived from “Hollander.”

**BARK PAINTING:** The traditional technique of painting on flattened sheets of eucalyptus bark using NATURAL PIGMENTS; common today in northern Australia, especially in Arnhem Land, although it had also been practiced in parts of southern Australia.

**BIR’YUN:** The shimmering or radiating brilliance of painted CLAN PATTERNS that visually animate the ancestral powers within ritual objects and works of art.

**BODY PAINTING:** CLAN and associated designs painted onto the bodies of participants in CEREMONY.

**BOOMALLI:** The first urban indigenous artists’ cooperative, established in Sydney in 1987.

**CANNING STOCK ROUTE:** A cattle road, surveyed in about 1906–8, used to take herds of cattle from the Kimberley region to markets in the south of Western Australia. The route is 1,150 miles long and traverses the traditional lands of a number of Aboriginal groups in the Great Sandy, Little Sandy, and Gibson deserts. It consists of a line of freshwater wells each about one day’s travel from the next.

**CENTRAL DESERT:** An art-producing region around Alice Springs in central Australia; it encompasses the various communities at Utopia.

**CEREMONY:** Regional religious rituals that include male and female initiations and the revelation of sacred objects and ancestral knowledge.

**CLAN:** A group of people who are connected by descent from a common ancestor and who hold certain rights to land, ceremonies, Dreamings, painted designs, and so on.

**CLAN ESTATE:** The ancestrally inherited land belonging to a CLAN.

**CLAN PATTERNS:** The ancestrally inherited designs belonging to a CLAN.

**COUNTRY:** The ancestrally inherited land belonging to a person or a group; also called “customary lands.”

**CROSS-HATCHING:** The technique of applying sections of thin parallel lines of paint to a surface, overlaid with similar sections set at an angle. See also *RARRK*.

**CUSTOMARY LANDS:** See COUNTRY.

**DHUWA:** See MOIETY.

**DIDGERIDOO:** A traditional drone pipe.

**DREAMING, DREAMINGS:** See ANCESTRAL REALM.

**FAR WESTERN DESERT:** An art-producing region to the west of the CANNING STOCK ROUTE.

**HOLLOW LOG COFFIN:** A painted hollow tree trunk in which the bones of the deceased are deposited during secondary mortuary ceremonies in Arnhem Land; known by a number of regional names, including *dupun*, *larrakitj*, and *lorrkkon*.

**JUKURRPA:** The ANCESTRAL REALM, or Dreaming, in the Warlpiri language.

**LAND RIGHTS:** The recognition of the rights of Aboriginal people to their ancestrally inherited lands, which had been denied from the time of European settlement of the continent.

**THE LAW:** The rules of social and religious organization and behavior as laid down by the ANCESTRAL BEINGS.

**LAWMAN:** A man of senior ritual rank and authority in traditional LAW.

**LIGHTNING SERPENT:** An ancestral serpent who creates lightning and the monsoon season; see also RAINBOW SERPENT.

**LIGHTNING SPIRIT:** A spirit who creates lightning and thunder.

**MARDAYIN:** The sacred aspect of things; also, a ceremonial cycle prevalent in central and western Arnhem Land.

**MISSION STATIONS:** Christian missions that were established across the country in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**MOIETY:** The basic division of Aboriginal society into two halves (from the French *moitié*, meaning “half”). Each language group possesses its own names for its moieties—for example, Dhuwa and Yirritja in eastern Arnhem Land—although some groups do not name the moieties. Each individual belongs to one moiety or the other, and moiety affiliation is usually inherited from the father. Moieties govern social behavior—for example, one must wed a person of the opposite moiety. ANCESTRAL BEINGS, languages, CLANS, tracts of land, geological features, natural phenomena, inert objects, and every living thing are all classified as belonging to one moiety or the other.

**TO NAME:** In Aboriginal English, to summon ancestral power or to bring into existence by naming, to create. See also TO SING.

**NATURAL PIGMENTS:** The traditional palette consisting of a variety of naturally occurring red and yellow ochres, white pipe clay, and black made from charcoal.

**OUTSTATION:** A camp or group of dwellings on the owners’ CUSTOMARY LANDS, usually distant from a township or settlement.

**PAPUNYA:** A government settlement established in the western deserts during the 1960s to shelter various desert Aboriginal groups. An innovative painting movement commenced there in 1971, and this name is also given to the Western Desert art movement.

**RAINBOW SERPENT:** Generic name for ANCESTRAL BEINGS in their manifestation as pythons.

**RARRK:** Cross-hatched CLAN PATTERNS used in western Arnhem Land bark and body painting.

**ROCKHOLE:** A term usually used in the deserts to describe a well or soakage containing permanent freshwater.

**SACRED SITE:** A place or natural feature created by an ANCESTRAL BEING, where the powers of that being reside.

**TO SING:** In Aboriginal English, to summon ancestral power or to bring into existence by singing, to create. See also TO NAME.

**SOUTHWESTERN DESERTS:** An art-producing region around the junction of the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and South Australia.

**SPINFEX PEOPLE:** Inhabitants of the Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia.

**STOCKMAN:** Australian for “cowhand.”

**SUGAR BAG:** Wild honey.

**TJUKURRPA:** The ANCESTRAL REALM, or Dreaming, in the desert languages.

**WATI KUTJARRA:** Two Ancestral Men, who appear in a range of guises in the desert cosmologies.

**WESTERN DESERT:** A cultural region to the west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, stretching into Western Australia; also refers to the art movement that originated at PAPUNYA in 1971.

**X-RAY:** A style of drawing on rock walls and BARK PAINTINGS prevalent in western Arnhem Land and Kakadu; in it, the skeleton and internal organs of a figure are depicted.

**YIRRITJA:** See MOIETY.

**YOLNGU:** Term used by eastern Arnhem Land people to refer to themselves; also refers to the lingua franca of the region.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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