DREAM

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL PAINTINGS

Nicholson
Halls Creek
JARU
Lajamanu
Parnta
Kurlungalinpa
WARLMANPA
WARUMUNGU
TABLELAND
Billiluna
ALMATJARRI
Tanami
WARLPIRI
Tennant Creek
Malan
Balgo Hills
The Granites
REAT SANDY DESERT
DAVENPORT RANGE
ALYAWARRE
Ali-Curung
Puyurru
Willowra
KAYTEJ
KUKATJA
Lapi Lapi
Chilla Well
Yumurrpa
Stirling
Ti Tree Station
Coniston
Utopia
LAKE MACKAY
Yuendumu
Mt. Allan
Napperby
ANMATYERRE
Wayilinpa
Central Mt. Wedge
Harts Range
Kiwirrkura
Papunya
Jupiter Well
Kalipinypa
Mt. Liebig
Kintore
Ilypili
GIBSON DESERT
Haasts Bluff
MACDONNELL RANGES
EASTERN ARRERNTE
Glen Helen
Alice Springs
PINTUPI/LURITJA
Hermannsburg
Areyonga
Palm Valley
SOUTHERN LURITJA
Tjukula
WESTERN ARRERNTE
LAKE AMADEUS
Tempe Downs
Docker River
Angas Downs
Ayers Rock
NGAATJATJARRA
FINKE RIVER
Finke
MUSGRAVE RANGES
Ernabella
Fregon
NGAANYATJARRA
PITJANTJATJARA
YANKUNYTJATJARA

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From the Current Distribution of Central Australian Languages (Map).
Published by the Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs.

the painted dream

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Turkey Tolson TJUPURRULA c.1942
Pintupi/Luritja, Haasts Bluff
Mitukatjirri Warrior 1988
Acrylic on linen, 209 x 121 cm

Tjupurrula has depicted one of his direct paternal ancestors (the artist refers to him as his father) at the cave site Mitukatjirri. He is fully armed with woomera and spear. His hair is tied back in traditional Pintupi style, while his full beard indicates seniority. He is wearing a pubic apron tipped with bilby (a small marsupial) tails.

The Mitukatjirri men were gathered at the site to perform Punyunyu (post-initiatory instruction ceremonies). Some of the men were burnt to death at Mitukatjirri, while others lived to fight the Tjikarri men at Ilyingaungau. *(Annotation written by John Kean for* East-West, *Tandanya Centre, Adelaide, 1990.)*

Turkey Tolson's paintings are always exhaustively painted even when minimal in terms of content. He often reduces designs to bare essentials, allowing colour, texture and conceptualisation of the painting process itself to become the subject matter. Many Pintupi artists use figuration — it is an accepted part of the tradition. Here however, the figurative content is treated within a traditional approach to painting: the figure is painted as if it were a traditional design. Such a painting is extremely rare, even in the work of an artist who has always tackled unusual approaches, without losing his close links with the ceremonial base of the paintings.

Stories of Australian Art Commonwealth Institute, London 1988.

the painted DREAM

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL PAINTINGS

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from the Tim and Vivien Johnson collection

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foreword

Aboriginal rock engravings are among the most ancient works of art in human history and mark the beginning of one of the world's oldest continuous cultures.

The enthusiastic reception given to paintings by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri in *Advance Australian Painting*, organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1988, provided the initial stimulus to put together an exhibition devoted uniquely to Western Desert Aboriginal painting. Our direct contact with Tim Johnson, who also featured in the earlier exhibition, happily introduced us to one of the most important and extensive private collections devoted to this art, that of Tim and his wife Vivien.

The acrylic painting movement in Australia's Western Desert is an example of spiritual, cultural and aesthetic renewal and revitalisation unique in Aboriginal history and possibly in the traditions of any indigenous people. The dot painting, pioneered by the Panunya Tula artists and now flourishing in other centres like Yuendumu is not the only contemporary Aboriginal art development. But it is Western Desert painting that most conforms to and extends our own perceptions of what constitutes contemporary painting and is therefore at this time so appropriate to examine in the context of painting around the world.

Tim Johnson, an artist himself, states: 'The paintings worked as modernist art, but there was cultural content with its own language — a sort of conceptual narrative.' In a period when much new international art, painting especially, appears to many people to be obscure and inaccessible, fashionably ephemeral and so self-referential as to be post-cultural, it is exhilarating to see an art that is not only deeply connected to the ancient culture that is its progenitor but also transcends theory and is approachable to the innocent eye.

The Gallery's admiration and appreciation must go to the artists who are included in the exhibition and our apologies to the many others represented in the Johnson Collection who had to be omitted through lack of space. To Tim and Vivien Johnson we owe our thanks and gratitude for selecting and lending the paintings and providing through their essays and the interview in this catalogue such a thorough and stimulating context, from quite different perspectives, for the works of art. Their detailed notes to the works will provide an invaluable contribution to scholarship in this field for many years to come. We also thank Christopher Anderson of the South Australian Museum for his insights into the collecting of Western Desert art, and Jim Sheldon for allowing us to reproduce his excellent photographs of the artists in this catalogue.

The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand has supported the exhibition with an important grant, as have the Australian branch of the Australia/New Zealand Foundation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

For his role in developing the exhibition, I am pleased to thank Andrew Bogle, Senior Curator of International Art.

Christopher Johnstone
Director
Auckland City Art Gallery

introduction

The role of the collector in Aboriginal art has always been considered an equivocal one. Perhaps for this reason it has also often been somewhat covert. Critics, both black and white, have viewed collectors with some suspicion, largely because of the unequal power relationships between Aboriginal artists and buyers. The latter are seen primarily as representatives of a dominating culture taking away important expressions of Aboriginal culture. Collecting, in this view, is nothing more than a new colonial expropriation: destroying through consumption.

However, although they were not presented as such, the major exhibitions and publications of contemporary Central Australian Aboriginal art over the last twenty years have by and large been exhibitions of collections made by individual persons central to the development of the acrylic movement: Geoff Bardon,[1] Andrew Crocker,[2] Robert and Janet Holmes a Court.[3] There are also other collectors whose collecting is even more hidden within the history of acrylic painting, but which was crucial nonetheless. I am particularly thinking here of Robert Edwards through the Aboriginal Arts Board, Pat Hogan and Dick Kimber. There is no sense in which these people 'began' the acrylic 'movement' — unquestionably Western Desert people and their culture are too strong for that. The collectors were critical, however, as focal points, as *reasons to paint*.

The orthodox view of the collector as exploiter is, if not always inaccurate, then a misunderstanding of the nature of 'Aboriginal art' over the last century or so. Without a doubt, the theft of representations of Aboriginal culture did occur. The position of what we now call Aboriginal art — meaning art as 'art' — in the non-Aboriginal world is largely due, though, to the primary role of the often eccentric, idiosyncratic and obsessive collector.

One of the first and best known collectors, Professor Baldwin Spencer, biologist and renowned ethnologist, almost single-handedly created bark painting as we know it and, at the same time, made an important start to having Aboriginal artistic representations placed in white cultural institutions.[4] It was the demand created by Spencer and other early collectors that stimulated Aboriginal people in the north to convert the images they had painted on to bark and rock surfaces into portable art on bark sheets. In this sense, bark paintings are equivalent to the contemporary acrylic works from Central Australia: an elaboration of existing forms and a creation representing the position of Aboriginal people in a large dominating culture and economy.

In the case of both bark and acrylic paintings, the art forms are not traditional and they are not *not* traditional. The dichotomy has no reality. They are statements *about* particular local Aboriginal cultures made to a non-Aboriginal audience, and far from being turned into commodities by a non-sympathetic, consumer-oriented, white market, they are created by Aboriginal people overtly and deliberately as commodities. People who argue otherwise have never spent any time living in an outback, art-producing Aboriginal community and have never talked at length about such issues with artists.

Given this situation, the collector is, from an Aboriginal point of view, the ideal target for the art. Collectors are often

1. G. Bardon, *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, 1979.
2. A. Crocker, *Charlie Tjaruru Tjungarrayi. A Retrospective 1970-1986*, Orange City Council, Orange, N.S.W.
3. A. Crocker (ed), *Papunya: Aboriginal Paintings from the Central Australian Desert*, Aboriginal Artists Agency and Papunya Tula Artists, Sydney, 1983; A. Brody, *The Face of the Centre: Papunya Tula Paintings, 1971-84*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1985.
4. P. Jones, 'Perceptions of Aboriginal art: A history' in Sutton, P. (ed), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, George Braziller, 1988, pp. 143-179.

enthusiasts about the Aboriginal worldview (even if they don't always understand it at other than a surface level); by definition they have the means to buy — and often can't resist buying new works; and they sometimes have the kind of individualised social relationships with particular artists that is so fundamental to Aboriginal ways of doing things.

Tim and Vivien Johnson have been collecting Western Desert art since the late 1970s. With some several hundred works, spanning the entire period of acrylic art from 1971 to the present, their collection is one of the largest and most important in private hands. It also rivals most Australian state gallery collections. Of the private collections, only those of the Carnegies, the Holmes à Courts and Richard Kelton approach the coverage and depth of the Johnson collection. Unlike these collectors, the Johnsons sometimes personally obtained works from artists. Their collection is particularly strong in its concentration on major figures from the Papunya Tula group: Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula, Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, Uta Uta Tjangala, Michael Jagamara Nelson, Kaapa Tjampitjinpa and Tim Payunka Tjapangati Tjapangardi. Their aim from the beginning was to collect good works from all main Papunya artists.

In addition, their collection contains significant works from the early days of the other major acrylic centre, Yuendumu, including paintings by Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson, Larry Spencer Jungarrayi and Paddy Sims Japaljarri. The paintings by Yuendumu women, such as Lucy Napaljarri, and those by the younger Papunya women artists such as Sonder Nampitjinpa, play a smaller but an important part.

The Johnsons have always seen the importance of documentation and have matched their collection of artworks with an impressive amount of information on specific paintings and on the movement in general. It is this material plus their work with artists such as Michael Jagamara Nelson that has provided the bases for their numerous published works. Unusually for collectors, the Johnsons' interest in Western Desert art has influenced their professional work: Vivien documenting and analysing the art as a sociological phenomenon and Tim absorbing aspects of the art into his own work as an artist.

Their collecting, especially their purchase of paintings at a time when few people were buying acrylic art, was important in assisting Western Desert painters in developing a market which could support the art. Their assistance with early exhibitions, their ready willingness to lend for shows, and their publications and interviews have all played a significant role in establishing the acrylic movement as we know it today. This is especially important given the spearheading role that acrylic paintings have played in bringing Aboriginal art in general to an international audience.

This exhibition includes some of the best of the Johnson Collection. It signals an important change in admitting a fact the art world often tries to avoid: that the dominant rationale or *raison d'être* behind a particular collection is frequently the collector himself or herself. This exhibition is a step towards understanding the position of the collector in the whole process of the move of Aboriginal art from the bush to the urban gallery.

Aboriginal artists are too often seen only as victims of a parternalistic and exploitative commodification process. A view of Aboriginal people as actively dealing with their social environment reveals Western Desert artists vigorously expressing both their culture and their position in Australian society. In this sense, collectors are useful and appropriate political and economic tools.

Christopher Anderson
Head, Division of Anthropology
South Australian Museum

the origins and development of western desert art

Our paintings have done nothing to damage our culture. We are proud of both.[1]

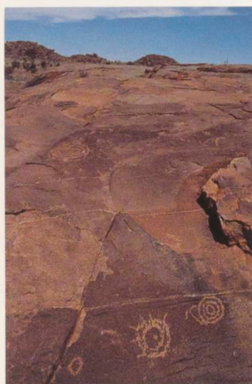
1. Letter to the *Sunday Territorian* written by a meeting of Papunya Tula Artists, June 1986.
2. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri interviewed by Vivien Johnson, Sydney, December 1989.

The Dreaming

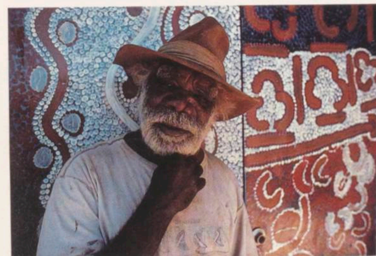
Whatever claims might ultimately be made for the historical significance of the contemporary Aboriginal painting movement which is the subject of this exhibition, it is important to understand from the outset that it isn't what some writers on indigenous cultures call a 'transitional' art form, an activity suspended somewhere in limbo between the indigenous and the imposing culture. When painting on canvas with brushes and acrylic pigments started up in 1971 at the remote settlement of Papunya, 250 km west into the desert from Alice Springs, it was a development *within* Aboriginal culture for its own historical purposes. And it remains so — notwithstanding the relentless media attention and the acceptance and acclaim of the international art world which the Papunya Tula artists have received in the past few years; none more so than Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, one of the most celebrated exponents of Western Desert art who, nevertheless, when questioned recently about how he became an artist, ignored his personal biography and simply reiterated the original social agenda of the painting enterprise:

> **Q:** Clifford, how did you get this idea to be an artist? To do the paintings and sell them to live, I mean. Can you remember when you had the idea to do this?
>
> **CP:** That Dreaming been all the time. From our early days, before the European people came up. That Dreaming carry on. Old people carry on this law, business, schooling for the young people. Grandfather and grandmother, uncle and aunty, mummy and father, all that — they been carry on this, teach 'em all the young boys and girls. They been using the dancing boards, spear, boomerang — all painted. And they been using them on the body different times.
>
> Kids, I see them all the time — painted. All the young fellas, they go hunting, and the old people there — they do sand painting. They put down all the story, same like I do on the canvas. All the young fellas, they bring 'em back kangaroo. Same all the ladies, they been get all the bush fruit — might be bush onion, bush plum, might be honey ants, might be yama — bush potato — all the kungkas [women] bring them back. Because everybody there, all ready — waiting. Everybody painted. They been using ochres — all the colours from the rock. People use them to paint up. I use paint and canvas — that's not from us, from European people. Business time, we don't use paint the way I use him — no, we use them from rock, teach 'em all the young fellas.[2]

As Clifford Possum observes, the activity of painting itself is integral to the ceremonial life of the peoples of the Western Desert. Restricted in European society to a specialised group, development of this skill is expected of every member of Western Desert society. Everyone receives a training in the technique and the ritual language of painting as part of their upbringing and education in the Dreaming. To that extent, everyone is potentially an artist in the style which pioneer artists like Clifford Possum, and many others whose work is represented



Petroglyphs on the road to Kintore, N.T.



Larry Spencer Jungarai, standing beside one of the school doors which he and other senior men at Yuendumu painted in 1985, helping to spark off the painting enterprise at the settlement.

in this exhibition, nurtured through the long night of '70s Australian culture and into the bright lights of the late '80s.

While those on the other side of the cultural divide earnestly debate whether to approach these paintings as art or ethnography, for the artists themselves there is no dilemma. The paintings are an expression, in another form, of the ancient cultural traditions of their people. They are a statement of their rights and obligations, as custodians of particular Dreamings, to sustain those traditions. For the people of the Western Desert, certain sites in the area where one's family has lived for countless generations bestow on each individual their spiritual and social identity. For example, each person is identified with the ancestral beings pertaining to the sites in the region of their birthplace and entrusted with the ritual re-enactment of the events which occurred there during the Dreaming. The focal points of these ceremonies are the elaborate sculpted mosaics also known as sand paintings, the traditional form on which the contemporary Western Desert artists base their renditions on canvas of the Dreaming stories.

The custodians of the Dreaming site prepare the ceremonial ground by burning off and then smoothing and clearing the area with the edges of boomerangs. When the surface is firm, they apply the ritual designs which encode the exploits of the ancestral beings, re-enacted in the ceremony. They use spinifex down dyed with the local pigments: charcoal, red and yellow ochres and white lime — or pipe clay brought from mines and beds sometimes hundreds of kilometres distant. Daisy petals and emu, blackbird and eagle fledgling feathers are other materials used to construct the sand painting. In rituals of intense emotional power, the symbolism of U-shapes, concentric circles and connecting lines which forms the dominant iconography of contemporary Western Desert canvases, is implanted in the memories of the participants in the ceremony as an image of the ancestral passage across the landscape.

The Dreaming is not some amazingly intricate piece of mumbo-jumbo, which the men and women of the Western Desert tribes could perhaps command our respect for remembering — if not for believing. In a way, its *least* surprising feature is that very thing: its memorability, not just to an individual within a tribe, but across tribes, and across millennia. For, in an extraordinarily elegant tailoring of a society's spirituality to its survival needs in the arid zone, the Dreaming is also a mnemonic. It equips the Western Desert tribesmen and women to survive in a land appearing totally barren and foodless to uninitiated eyes. A small food-gathering community with an intimate knowledge of the location of all vegetable foods, game and waters in its own territory could survive in these regions without hunger and thirst — provided they kept moving. As a navigational device, the Dreaming dispenses entirely with European maps in favour of a step-by-step intense visual memorisation of the actual terrain. Trees, rock formations, caves and monoliths pointed the way down trails marked out across the landscape by the ancestors. One of the distinctive features of Western Desert society is the relation of all its major sacred traditions to extensive journeys of the Dreamtime ancestors over vast distances, through the territories of many different tribal groups. By remembering the stories in their narrative sequence, the tribesmen and women remember the Aboriginal map of the country they are traversing — whose components receive lasting materialistation in these paintings.

> The sand paintings were always there — they are still here. They will be here forever. We are not 'turning our heritage into cash' — we want the whole world to know our culture. Other Aboriginal people have shown the world their culture, we want to do the same. Now our art is recognised worldwide for itself. We keep our 'sacred heritage' for ourselves, for our ceremonies and for our children. We Papunya artists have our culture and want to pass it on to our children. In the beginning, people didn't get paid money for their art. It was only to show the children the stories of our culture, of what our grandfathers taught us. The paintings show our stories but only non-sacred stories. The designs we use are the designs we always used. The dots are just as traditional as the circles and other designs, and we use them now to paint our country, the bush foods, different plants and flowers. The style has changed but not the message.[3]

This essay will trace the development of the painting movement from its emergence at Papunya in 1971, through what I described earlier as the 'long night of the '70s' and the beginnings of national and international recognition in the '80s. Some of the myths which have sprung up around the art of Papunya Tula in the course of its meteoric rise over the past five years to the status of High Art will be dispelled in the process, as the events are set in the context of the recent history of the Western Desert peoples. In this text, however, social and historical contextualisation will be combined with modes of presentation reserved until now for western art: the paintings in this exhibition are presented as the work of named individuals in an evolving history of artistic practice. To invite the viewer to form an understanding of these objects on the basis of an explanatory ethnography alone would be recreating the very effect of cultural distance which the paintings, with their Europeanised form, have the power to erase.

The Culture Conservationists

Long before anyone put paintbrush to canvas, Papunya was one of the most publicised Aboriginal settlements in Australia. Established in 1961, it was the last in a network of government settlements provided for the nomads of the Western Desert across Central Australia under the policy of assimilation. It was also one of that policy's most spectacular failures, made embarrassingly public by the settlement's proximity to Alice Springs, unlike other large Aboriginal settlements. This made it accessible to short-term visitors — in particular journalists, who had a field day reporting incidents like the 'riot' in which white staff and police reinforcements battled with tribespeople in one of the camps just six months after the official opening ceremony.

Papunya was always newsworthy because it was here that the remnants of the so-called 'lost tribe' of the Pintupi — presumed to be the last of the desert nomads still pursuing their traditional

3. Letter to the *Sunday Territorian* written by a meeting of Papunya Tula Artists, Papunya, June 1986

John TJAKAMARRA early '30s
Pintupi, north of Kiwirrkura
Ground Picture 1971
Acrylic on masonite, 52 x 60 cm (irreg.)

Artists from west camp — on the western side of Papunya — were generally of the Pintupi group which, like others at the settlement, made camp in the direction of their traditional country. John Tjakamarra's family was one of the first to establish themselves there, after walking into Papunya out of the desert in the early '60s. When painting started up at the settlement, he began working alongside his close countrymen Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi and Freddy West Tjakamarra. This work, one of the earliest in the collection, was still mounted on chipboard covered in hessian from the first interstate exhibition of Papunya paintings in Sydney in 1972 when it was purchased from a Melbourne dealer in Aboriginal art sometime during 1980.

Its extraordinarily detailed and delicate background dotting brings into doubt the view that this element entered the style several years into the movement, when secularisation and exhibition value had become part of the artists' concerns, marking the transition of the Papunya painters from Aboriginal ethnologists to artists producing for the European-Australian audience. Rather, the elaborate stippling reinforces the original artists' contemporary assertion that, 'The dots are just as traditional as the circles and the other designs we always used.' Generally, earth-coloured fields of shimmering dots remain one of the distinctive features of the work of Pintupi artists, as does the boldly iconic aspect of this painting.

It is a depiction of a ceremonial ground painting at some unspecified site, with the red and white infilling representing the pipe clay and ochre-dyed plant down used in the original. The central circle invokes a waterhole at the site, alongside which can be seen the forms left in the sand by ancestral beings, again unspecified, who lay down here to rest. The design work is also a reference to the body paint of the participants in the ceremony, and perhaps also to landforms at the site in question. The line coming out from the central roundel is the ancestors' line of travel through this place. The patches of red ochre dotting set into the background are not explained, but may also refer to features of the landscape.

lifestyle in the remote country around the Western Australian border — had been brought in by the Northern Territory Welfare Branch patrols from 1963 onwards. The romance of the Pintupi's 'first contact' experience still proves irresistible to the journalistic imagination. The story of Papunya Tula Artists is usually told in terms of the arrival of the 'new' Pintupi in the mid '60s and the unmediated application of the 'pre-contact' artistic tradition to modern European materials. Until a few years ago, the work of the Papunya artists was always referred to as 'Pintupi painting', though the painters belong to many different tribal groups. Like the important Dreamtime gathering at this site, which brought together the Honey Ant ancestors of all the Western Desert tribes, Papunya settlement brought together many different tribes — seven in all — from every point of the compass.

The settlement was originally designed to relocate four to five hundred tribespeople from the neighbouring settlement of Haasts Bluff, who were moved across *en masse* in 1960. Most were Luritja, with some Amnatjera, Warlpiri and Aranda people and a group of Pintupi who had settled in the region after the area was declared an Aboriginal reserve in 1948. However, they were soon joined by an influx of people from Alice Springs and surrounding stations and settlements. Then two hundred Pintupi people were brought in from the west. By 1964, the population of the settlement was well over 1000. Facilities, inadequate for half that number, were at breaking point. The kitchen was preparing 1500 meals a day to serve in a communal dining hall intended to seat three hundred. Sickness was rife. Matters came to a head late in 1964, when deaths equalled births at the settlement. Close to half those trucked in from the desert had died from various causes. Questions were being asked in the Australian Parliament about the 'high mortality rate of Aborigines at Papunya'.[4] In desperation, dispersal of the Pintupi to 'outstations' a few kilometres from Papunya, in the direction of their own country, began. Immediately death rates fell and birth rates rose, and without any official announcement of a change in policy or admission of guilt, the project of centralisation of desert dwellers was abandoned. These were the first steps in what was to become in the '80s a full-scale reoccupation of tribal lands right across the Western Desert.

By 1971, more than half Papunya's population of over a thousand was under sixteen years of age. As classroom numbers trebled, the crisis in the white education system began to appear in other aspects of settlement life. Delinquency became the pastime of the young: acts of vandalism, theft and car stealing, violence against Europeans. Papunya's police station, the first on an Aboriginal settlement in the Northern Territory, was opened in 1971. The enclosure within the station area of a sacred Honey Ant tree, part of the living Aboriginal significance of Papunya 'ground', indirectly provoked the most famous of the 'Papunya riots'. A crowd attending a rock concert drove police from the hall when they attempted to rearrest a youth who had escaped their custody on a drinking offence, and proceeded to stone their homes. Warning shots were fired at the youths in the belief that police 'women and children' were in danger. The situation was saved from disaster only by the intervention of some of the older Aboriginal men who quelled the mob with fighting sticks, boomerangs and spears in a rare public exertion of their authority.

The white education system was not the only one in crisis in Papunya. The elders blamed the delinquent younger generation on the breakdown of their own authority. The population numbers under sixteen years meant that the intensive educational practices of Aboriginal society could not be so effectively applied. Unlike the European teachers, who regularly resigned from their posts at the end of the school year, transfer was not available to the Aboriginal educators as a way out of their vocational crisis. Their situation called for a more constructive response, and the solution they devised was as sophisticated as it was radical. As head tribal educators, the Papunya artists perceived the didactic potential of the new art teacher's plans to paint a mural on the school wall and came forward, without anyone having asked them, to shape the project to their own ends. In one of the prime disculturation camps of the assimilationists, they instituted their own re-education program: in Aboriginality. They came up with a mass educational strategy enabling the transmission of the rudiments of the traditional belief system of the Western Desert peoples via its symbolic manifestations in the distinctly western medium of reproduction: they began to make images of their own culture. The design which they painted on an 11 metre wall under the school buildings was 'Honey Ant Dreaming': lesson one in the Aboriginal literacy program for Papunya.

Even as the painting movement was transforming Papunya into an education in the visual language of the Western Desert peoples, it was transforming itself. Again without being asked but of their own initiative, the old men began to paint representations of the rituals and beliefs of the old desert lifestyle. These were not 'general exhibition' versions like the school mural, but an accurate record of their own cultural traditions: precise layouts of ceremonial grounds and dancers' paths and detailed depictions of sacred objects forbidden to the sight of the uninitiated. They painted in groups away from the women and children in the camps, chanting the song cycles which told the story of the designs as they worked. The activity was a natural extension of the constant exchange of religious knowledge amongst senior men of the various tribes at Papunya, which was one of the positive effects of settlement life.

Though it is vital to understand the dire necessity which drove the artists to their invention, it is also important to resist the temptation to present Papunya Tula Artists as a phoenix-like apparition rising from the social disintegration of Aboriginal Central Australia. If we ask rather how conditions at Papunya could have been generative of so favourable an outcome, perhaps a partial answer may be found in the fact that in Aboriginal terms, Papunya was an unusually cosmospolitan setting. Most remote Aboriginal settlements in Central Australia are dominated by one language group. Many of the Aboriginal residents of Papunya had had prolonged contact with Europeans on other settlements and stations, where they would also have encountered members of other tribes. Their ritual knowledge had been fragmented, but also enlarged and broadened by their

4. Cited in *Papunya: History and Future Prospects:* A Report for the Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Education, July 1977.

experiences of the ceremonial practices and knowledge of other groups. Papunya's cultural diversity provided a special opportunity for this kind of religious interaction. Into this situation, the strength of the Pintupi newcomers' immediate, practical continuity of cultural experience may have brought the required concentration.

In a development of the school project, it was proposed that a museum be constructed at Papunya on the walls of which the artists of the newly formed Papunya Tula company would paint vast murals incorporating all thousand or more design motifs of the Western Desert tribes as a complete and permanent representation of their traditions. Peter Fannin, newly appointed secretary/art supervisor of the company, coined the term 'culture conservationists' to describe the painting enterprise in a submission to the Aboriginal Arts Board for funding of this 'magnificent temple to Aboriginal culture'. Neither this request, nor another for wages for the company's principal artists, was granted. But their existence confirms what the paintings from this time would show if they were not for the most part unsuitable for exhibition because of their secret-sacred contents: that Papunya Tula Artists was originally not a commercial venture directed at the European market at all.[5]

Impossible Dreamers

> Geoff Bardon is a man with an impossible dream — or so people keep telling him. Ever since February of last year, the tall, Sydney-born artist has been living at Papunya, a remote Aboriginal government reserve 150 miles [240 km] north of Alice Springs. Here where more than 1000 of the Territory's most primitive natives live with a handful of Europeans — mostly Welfare workers, district nurses and the constabulary — Geoff Bardon has started an art school. The young Sydney pioneer has done more than that. In recent weeks he has formed Papunya Tula Artists' Co-op — comprising twenty or so of the settlement's better painters and craftsmen, and designed to sell and promote their work interstate and overseas. Government officials told Geoff Bardon over and over again that he'd get nowhere with his dream of turning his handful of native painters into professional artists. But he has proved all the critics wrong.[6]

The image of maverick white leaders 'stirring up the natives' has been part of Australian folklore since the early days of European settlement, when an escaped convict called William Buckley gave his name to the national concept of a bad risk by taking his chances with the Aborigines. Geoff Bardon was this kind of anti-hero, or so the 'Woman's Angle' reporter from the Sydney *Sun* — and countless hurriedly researched media reports on Papunya Tula Artists — would have us believe. And maybe he was — at least such a perspective constitutes the painting movement as a confrontation with the European power structure and its ethnocentric culture. After all, Geoff Bardon's dream of 'his' 'painting men' becoming professional artists has become a reality. However, I suspect that Geoff Bardon and all those who have followed him in the arduous role of company secretary and art supervisor would more readily identify with a rather different perception of the influence of isolated Europeans on Aboriginal behaviour than the 'maverick' tradition: 'neither a powerful chief nor "the wild white Man of Badu", and only able to survive by being both useful and circumspect'.[7]

To understand the appearance of such sophisticated artistry as these early works display seemingly out of nowhere, it must be appreciated that the concept *and practice* of art in a western sense was well established in Aboriginal Central Australia long before Geoff Bardon's arrival in Papunya. His deep appreciation of the traditional sand paintings and their symbolism strengthened the artists' faith in their ability to evolve a form of expression responsive to their struggle for cultural survival in a new historical reality. But it was not a revelation — nor an impossible dream — to *them* that an Aboriginal person could make a good living as an artist in the Europeans' world. A man called Albert Namatjira dreamed that dream a generation before — and made it a reality.

Albert Namatjira's watercolours of the desert educated ordinary non-Aboriginal Australians in an appreciation of the Central Australian landscape which is now enshrined in the national ethos. Though dismissed by the art establishment of his day as a mediocre exponent of European-style representational landscape, he is still the only Aboriginal artist ever to become a household name in Australia — and one of the very few, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, to earn such recognition. It is now widely recognised that despite his adoption of western materials and techniques, Namatjira's art remained firmly grounded in Aboriginal values and concerns: his paintings are depictions of the sites in Aranda country for which he was tribal custodian. He died in tragic circumstances in 1959, leaving behind him the Hermannsburg or Aranda school of watercolourists, who continued to paint in the style he pioneered, providing a training ground for Aboriginal artists in the region, some of whom went on to work in more recently developed genres. As Clifford Possum explained:

> After that I start painting — them watercolour.
> I seen-im Namatjira 'e been livin in Glen Helen — that tourist mob, Glen Helen Gorge —
> I got it from them Namatjira's son 'e give me watercolour — I start painting boomerang . . .
> I been get good money for tourist people you know
> Yeah, I bin do-in watercolour with the boomerang
> Use-im them kangaroo, them emu, them tjampi [grass], them watia [trees][8]

It was Namatjira rather than Geoff Bardon who introduced the vocation of artist in a western sense to Aboriginal Central Australia. He planted the germ of the idea which is now spreading right across the Western Desert.

Aboriginal as a Second Language

As the paintings began to be sold outside the settlement, their potential audience changed to include not only the wider European community beyond Papunya, but also other Aboriginal communities, where apparently they were received with some disquiet. Sometime in 1974, a group of Aboriginals hurled stones and boomerangs at the building housing Alice Springs' first

5. The six paintings in this exhibition dating from the early '70s are all of the rarer type not containing the depictions of ceremonial and sacred objects which offended other Aboriginal people when the work of the Papunya painters was first shown outside the settlement.
6. Sydney *Sun*, 'Women's Angle', 29 August 1972.
7. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, James Cook University Press, Townsville, 1981, p. 111.
8. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, edited transcript of an interview conducted by John Kean in the mid '80s. The non-standard spellings are Kean's rendering of the artist's 'Aboriginal English'.

exhibition by the Papunya Tula artists. The protesters objected to the paintings' disclosure of sacred/secret designs. After the disturbance in Alice Springs, and generally the realisation that the paintings were destined for viewing and sale in the outside world, the symbolic language was desacralised and secularised. Pictorial motivations became more evident than in the earlier 'anthropological' paintings, one tangible sign of this being the general introduction of the distinctive dotted infilling which is now a hallmark of the Western Desert style — along with the 'Papunya palette' of yellow ochre, red ochre, black and white.

This phase of the art movement is barely represented in this exhibition, largely because during the period 1973-6 most of the paintings found their way to destinations of exemplary obscurity. The 1975 canvas by Billy Stockman Tjapaltjarri [5], which surfaced in an exhibition at the Collectors' Gallery in Sydney in 1978, must have been among the more resolved products from this time. Three other paintings from this era — vast canvases by Johnny Warangula and Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, and a board by Johnny Warangula whose colours rival the electric palette of many recently established schools of Western Desert painting, passed through this collection into three of the major public galleries in Australia. They were discovered lying forgotten in the back storeroom of Papunya Tula Artists in 1980, and 'rescued' for little more than the price of the materials. Viewed alongside the meticulous detail and delicacy of the earliest work, the 'roughness' and 'messiness' for which so much mid '70s production was consigned to oblivion as a degeneration of the style must be reinterpreted as deliberate experimentation with painting techniques and materials — including the move to canvas. However, it was not experimentation for experimentation's sake that the painters were engaged in, but the throes of technical and conceptual transformation arising in the development of a new painting language for their expanding encounter with western culture.

Their solutions were not purely aesthetic — though neither were they purely symbolic. Take the restricted palette. The painters devised combinations of the traditional palette to achieve effects spanning the colour range of the introduced acrylics: watery yellow on black for green, grey on red ochre for blue, red ochre on black for purple — and so on. Tonality was thus resolved with absolutely minimal means. The general dissemination of these colouration techniques throughout the painting community made possible a complete integration of the 'Aboriginal' colours, with their powerful political symbolism, into the functional role of primary pigments for the painting enterprise. Clifford Possum, whose *Possum Dreaming* 1979 and *Man's Love Story* 1981 [7,8] show the operations of a master colourist, recalled this moment of discovery:

> Not them white men colour no — them native colour — them red one them white one, black one. I start yulpa, karrku, nguntju nguntju, kantawarra — that's what I bin think-im idea — from four paint — red one and yellow, black one, white one — from four paint eh — I mix-im — 'nother four more — I mix-im from white 'nother four more — from my idea they all got-im.[9]

The basic Papunya painting techniques — the dots, the lines, the monochrome backgrounds, the effects of superimposition — are basic to modern western painting also, which is why the results might look like modernist abstracts. But the Aboriginals derived all these methods originally from their own ceremonial painting and the ancient rituals of the ground mosaic. All Western Desert paintings depict ambiguously actual geographical locations, the narrative line of the Dreamings associated with these places, and the contemporary ceremonials in which these connections are celebrated. These contents are fused into a coherent visual presentation using a code of abstract symbolism which makes western experiments with abstraction look naive. Modernism certainly has no equivalents for the complexity of mental space in the unprecedented paintings in which the phase of experimentation culminated in the late '70s.

As the artists acquired expertise in the new medium of paint and canvas and the symbolic codes they had devised for it, an amazing facility with scale, which had nothing to do with the current fashionability of the grandiose, but stemmed directly from the traditional sand paintings, began to display itself. Disregarding commercially suicidal overheads, art coordinators in the late '70s presented the painters with the challenge of larger and larger canvases on which to inscribe their visions. The artists responded to the epic dimensions with a lineal descendant of the Papunya 'temple' project — this time destined for the walls of a white cultural museum or art gallery. Like the proposed murals of the thousand designs of the Western Desert tribes, these huge paintings spelt out all the Dreamings over which the artists had collective custody. Artists executed a series of elaborate works almost encyclopedic in the range and complexity of their contents, in which their custodial responsibilities were laid out like a deed of title to their personal 'country'.

It was the inclusion of three of these vast compendiums of Western Desert culture in the 1981 *Australian Perspecta* in Sydney, (including the 8.3 metre *Ancestral Possum Spirit Dreaming* by Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri exhibited at Auckland City Art Gallery in 1988 as part of *Advance Australian Painting*) that ended the long denial of Aboriginal art by the Australian art establishment. In his catalogue note on the 1976 painting *Warlugulong* by Clifford Possum and his brother Tim Leura, Dick Kimber attributed the discovery of this topographical representation of the totemic landscape to these two artists:

> At the time of its execution (at Papunya near Alice Springs), no other painting in the six-year history of this adapted art had illustrated such a complex array of 'Dreaming trails'. Five years after its completion, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri remains the only 'Papunya school' artist to have conceived such elaborate depictions of country . . . In some respects the work can be viewed as a map of the artist's home country, the focal point of which is approximately 200 km north-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.[10]

9. Ibidem.
10. R.G. Kimber, *Australian Perspecta 1981: A biennial survey of contemporary Australian art,* Art Gallery of N.S.W., 1981, p. 136.

Uta Uta TJANGALA c.1910-90
Pintupi, Kintore Ranges
Old Man Lying at Yumari 1973
Acrylic on chipboard, 12.5 x 91.5 cm

Uta Uta Tjangala was one of the first Pintupi to make his desire for painting materials known to Geoff Bardon, and continued to be a major force in the painting movement throughout the '70s and '80s. Half a dozen large — 3.6 x 2.4 metre — canvases which he painted in the early '80s are among the most powerful paintings of the movement. Unlike the monumental works produced by the Amnatjera, Luritja and Warlpiri artists in the late '70s, which generally found their way to destinations of exemplary obscurity, several of Uta Uta's major works have been displayed in important and public places — the Supreme Court in Canberra, the Art Gallery of South Australia, and a third, still touring the world, belongs to the Aboriginal Arts Board. As this work shows, his paintings were never typical. Even at this early stage, it has the figurative aspect of representation of human or ancestor forms which also differentiates later work of Uta Uta's from that of most other Pintupi artists.

Yumari is a site near the Western Australian border for which Uta Uta is the senior custodian. It is also the Pintupi word for mother-in-law. The story of this place, most details of which are restricted, concerns an old Tjakamarra man who had intercourse with his mother-in-law, a Nangala, and his punishment for this offence against the laws of the tribe. The old man's trail runs from the northern Ehrenberg Ranges due west along the ridges of sand dunes to Yumari. The linked roundels may represent the campsites where events in the story occurred, the six rocks at the Yumari site, or the body of the old man whose lying down places can be seen as the arcs at the sides of the painting.

Old Mick TJAKAMARRA c.1905
Aranda/Luritja, Wiyanpiri
Honey Ant Dreaming 1973
Acrylic on chipboard, 43 x 57.5 cm

The Honey Ant Dreaming has become identifiable with the Papunya painting movement for a number of reasons. Papunya Tula is the name of one of the two small hills lying alongside the settlement which are the body of the Honey Ant ancestor itself metamorphosed into natural features. Papunya Tula Artists was chosen for the name of the painting company because this Honey Ant Dreaming site was shared by all the tribes in Papunya, in common with all traditional Aboriginal groups in the Western Desert region. Old Mick is one of the senior custodians of the Honey Ant Dreaming who gave the design for the school mural, sparking off the painting enterprise. This painting shows the care and precision of so much of the early '70s work. Old Mick was one of the pioneer artists of the movement and a leading figure because of his high ceremonial status. Until the early '80s, he was producing major paintings which reflected his depth of knowledge of the Dreaming. He helped establish conventions and techniques that influenced the next generation of artists, including his classificatory son Maxie Tjampitjinpa, whom he taught to paint in the early '80s. The meandering white stripe which gives this painting the look of a '50s European abstract, is the underground nest of the Honey Ant ancestors, where they live and work in a maze of tunnels. The oval shapes are the eggs of the ants, but also sacred boards or shields, perhaps as they would be placed on a ground painting for the ceremony. Some of these shapes are painted with less secret designs, similar to those used in paintings. Others are shown without markings where the artist has left off the design as a form of self-censorship. The background dots represent various kinds of bush tucker. This is one of a group of paintings originally in the Aboriginal Arts Board collection, but later sold through their marketing organisation.

However, as Tim Payunka Tjapangati's magnificent *Kangaroo and Shield People Dreaming at Lake Mackay* 1980 [27] — and hundreds of similarly large and complex canvases produced in the late '70s and more recent times show, in creating a work of this kind Tim Leura and Clifford Possum were spearheading a much more widespread phenomenon amongst the artists. The annotation supplied with the Tim Payunka by Papunya Tula Artists notes that the artist

> . . . is the custodian of a number of Dreamings, naturally, and stated recently that he will soon have done a representation of each of them. We can thus see that very real element of the paintings which is a declaration by the painters to outsiders. It is a declaration of their beliefs about the world, of their place in it and of what they see as rightly their heritage.[11]

Coming from Andrew Crocker, who ran the painting company for two years at the beginning of the '80s and repeatedly advocated that 'the paintings should be allowed to exercise their own aesthetic appeal and that explanations of content and symbolism should be kept to a minimum',[12] this is a somewhat surprising observation. Yet no one who has been closely involved with the artists who create these paintings can be unaware of the duality of Western Desert art which allows the coexistence of these Aboriginal imperatives with a visual and visceral impact finely attuned to the contemporary western aesthetic. For more than a decade, the pioneers of the contemporary painting movement laboured in obscurity in the remote deserts of Central Australia, perfecting the application of the traditional painting skills of the Western Desert peoples to the European medium of acrylic on canvas. By the start of the '80s, the Papunya Tula Artists were producing paintings so meticulous in their execution and so stunning in their impact, that they stood up to and surpassed anything the modernist tradition has to offer. Yet they also convey a vision of Aboriginal reality more telling in its intensity and emotional power than any external representation of it could ever be.

The Eighties

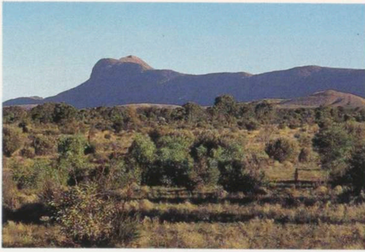
The '80s marked a turning point in the recent history of the Western Desert peoples. The resettlement of tribal homelands, which Europeans call the 'outstation movement', was gathering momentum. The Pintupi established Kintore in 1981 and by 1985 had pushed another 250 km further west across the Western Australian border to Kiwirrkura. The paintings had served a 'transitional' function for the inhabitants of Papunya during the decade of exile as a way of passing on the Dreaming while educating the rest of the world in the ancient traditions of the Western Desert peoples. With the resettlement of their country and re-establishment of the ceremonial links which the paintings had depicted, these 'anthropological' functions remained, but were supplemented by a more 'professional' approach to art-making. The production of representations of traditional knowledge for sale to white markets did not, as many feared it would, supplant ceremonial life. Rather, income derived from the paintings became vital to the viability of homelands communities requiring cashflow to sustain their modified traditional lifestyles. Art enterprises provide one of the few avenues to financial independence available to Aboriginal people living in these remote communities.

Many of the original group of artists are now in their seventies and with failing health or eyesight. In the traditions of Aboriginal education, they have been transferring their knowledge to a new generation of artists, imparting to them by instruction and example the techniques which they had devised for encoding their culture on canvas. A 'second generation' of Papunya painters, many of them young and many of them women, began to emerge working alongside the older group of artists in the mature Papunya style, producing highly sophisticated canvases for the western art market. The transformation of the ethnologists of Aboriginality into contemporary artists working in the subtle and highly sophisticated cultural tradition of which the Western Desert peoples are the bearers was complete.

In the world still dominated by colonialist assumptions about the art of non-western peoples, recognition of the Papunya painters' achievement was long hindered. Only ten years ago, Aboriginal art in Australia seemed firmly relegated to the museums and gift shops. If it found a place in the art galleries, it was somewhere in the vaults with the rest of the 'Primitive Art'. Some of the most extraordinary paintings to come out of the Western Desert were produced in the late '70s, but right through this period, the very qualities of Papunya painting which have since earned it international acclaim as the first art by a tribal people to bridge the gulf between the ethnographic and modern art contexts in western culture, caused it to languish in obscurity. The paintings were dismissed on all sides as too ethnographic for the art galleries and not ethnographic enough for the museums. Then suddenly, after a decade of rejecting them as an exotic part of the souvenir trade, leading public art galleries and museums in Australia began to collect Papunya paintings in the early '80s — and to hang them in displays of contemporary Australian art.

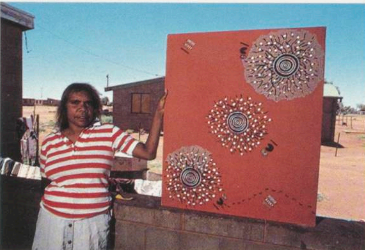
This approach was first adopted in 1980 by the Art Gallery of South Australia. It was a triumph of imaginative curating: the controversy aroused by the juxtaposition exposed the ethnocentrism which had hitherto allowed the art 'experts' to operate as though High Art and Aboriginal art were mutually exclusive categories. On Australia Day 1984, James Mollison, Director of the Australian National Gallery, appeared in a national daily beside an immense Johnny Warungula canvas purchased for the Gallery's opening celebrations, declaring that, 'It is apparent the achievements of Aboriginal artists are possibly the finest art achievements to date in Australia.'[13] Michael Jagamara Nelson's inclusion in the 1986 Sydney Biennale and the selection of his designs for the forecourt of the new Parliament House in Canberra cemented the art movement's national and international reputation. The stage was set for the amazing proliferation of painting communities across the length and breadth of the Western Desert which has occurred since the mid '80s, confirming the richness of cultural and human resources on which this extraordinary art movement can draw.

11. From the annotation provided with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists, written by Andrew Crocker.
12. Exhibition statement for Papunya Tula Artists, prepared by Andrew Crocker.
13. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1984.



Kintore, N.T.

Outside K-Mart Shopping Centre in Alice Springs.



Nora Nelson Napaljarri, Yuendumu, N.T.

Daisy Nelson Napanangka, with her painting of a Bush Banana Dreaming, Yuendumu, N.T.

From Yuendumu, Warlukurlangu Artists began exhibiting their works in Sydney in late 1985. Napperby and Mt Allan (Yuelamu Artists) soon followed, and by the end of the '80s dozens of painting communities were flourishing as far north as Lajamanu, west to Kiwirrkura and Balgo across the Western Australian border, across the South Australian border at Ernabella and Amata, and even east from Alice Springs in Ailyawara country around Utopia. Every general store in the Western Desert stocks paint and canvas to supply the artists of the community with materials. Every day new artists start painting. Andrew Pekarik, Director of The Asia Society Galleries, New York, and the man who conceived of the *Dreamings* exhibition which brought Western Desert art to the attention of the international art world, remarked two years ago that there were more artists per head of population in Aboriginal Central Australia than anywhere in the world outside the Latin Quarter of Paris. That is now an understatement: the potential is there in the ongoing life of the longest enduring cultural tradition in human history for every member of the Western Desert tribes to embrace the vocation of artist — and the way things have been going in Central Australia, they just might.

A vital element in the growth of the painting enterprise since the mid '80s has been the emergence of women artists. From the beginning, the occupation of artist was not confined to men among the Western Desert tribes. Specifically female iconographic and ritual traditions exist within Aboriginal society which necessitate the development of painting skills, such skills having been utilised since the Depression days when the trade in tourist artefacts was started by enterprising tribesmen and women along the bus route to Uluru. At Ernabella, a tiny mission settlement in Pitjanjatjara country beside the Musgrave Ranges in South Australia, Aboriginal craftswomen had been marketing their work in the southern states through Ernabella Arts Inc since the '40s. Winifred Hilliard, who established Ernabella Arts Inc, argued that they were artists who should be free like their western contemporaries to respond to influences for change, to experiment with new media, to invent new forms — not be 'pickled in their past'. For thirty years, she was a voice crying in the wilderness. But by the late '80s, western feminists' assault on the bastions of High Art was starting to change the rules.

Women's increasing participation as assistants on the dotted backgrounds of their husband's or father's canvases during the '70s reflects the increasingly secular orientation of the original group of Papunya artists towards the painting enterprise as the decade progressed. The first women at Papunya in the early '80s to begin painting as artists in their own right were these wives and daughters, who were already highly proficient in the contemporary Western Desert style. The Pintupi exodus came at the very time when the work of Papunya Tula Artists was beginning to be in demand in the art marketplace, and resources were available for the company to try out new artists. The women's emergence from their assistant roles was assured when their first works were immediately bought by the National Gallery, even though the work of most of the dozens of accomplished male artists who had laboured over the preceding decade to evolve the symbolic language and techniques of the mature Papunya style still went unrepresented in the collection.

The National Gallery — and the art market's — enthusiasm for the freshness which can be found in the work of all new artists to the painting movement — men and women — who have not yet developed a consistent personal style within the broad parameters of Western Desert art, has been an important factor in the proliferation of new painting enterprises. Dramatic changes in the non-Aboriginal community's appreciation of the importance of women as social and ceremonial agents in Aboriginal society also translated into pressure of art world demand for Papunya women's paintings. But it was the senior women at the neighbouring settlement of Yuendumu who first made the feminist-inspired dream of paintings drawing on distinctively female forms of cultural expression within Aboriginal society a reality. It was their large, flamboyantly coloured and painted canvases that flowed with pride in their cultural heritage, which so quickly drew the art world's attention in 1986 to Warlukurlangu Artists, first of the Western Desert art companies to be established following Papunya Tula's spectacular trajectory in the High Art stakes. Women still constitute a majority of the Warlukurlangu Artists, a pattern which has been repeated in most of the Western Desert painting enterprises established since the mid '80s.

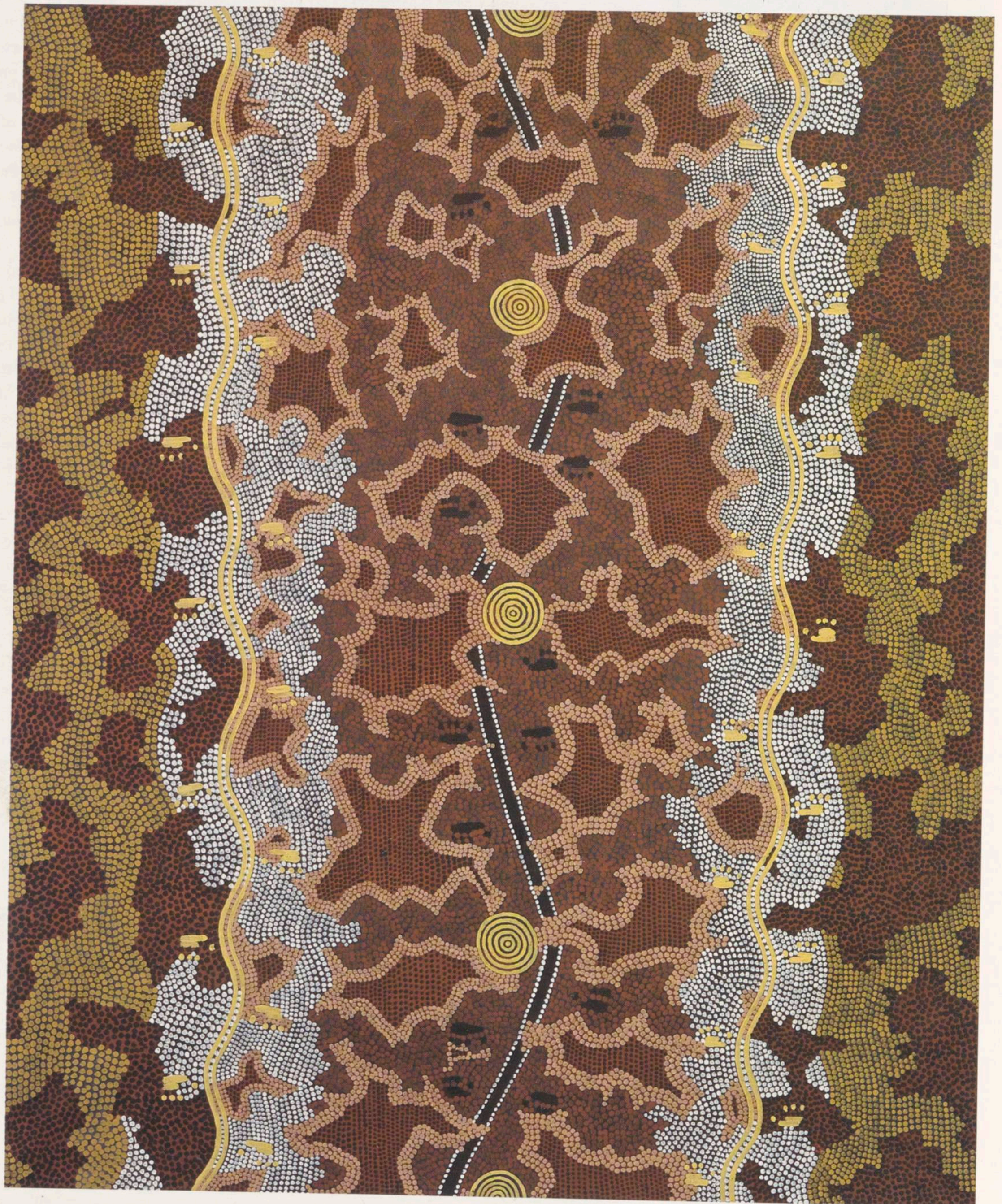
Conclusion

The mass circulation of Aboriginal imagery, much of it Western Desert derived, is fast becoming an identifying feature of Australian popular culture. The acceptance of Papunya paintings by the white art audience has spearheaded an unprecedented incursion of contemporary Aboriginal Art into the usually oblivious national consciousness. Crude stereotypes of the 'native artist' have been replaced by a perception of a multi-dimensional movement encompassing artists from the Pintupi homelands to the inner city ghettos, from the Papunya painters' 'deeds of title' to their sacred sites and ceremonies, to urban posters and murals. Under the old rubric of white benevolence and nostalgia no longer, but as artistic statements in their own right, they deliver the message of land rights and self-determination.

There are still those who mutter darkly about selling the Dreaming, but as Tim Leura Tjapalatjarri remarked inscrutably not long before his death, 'The money belongs to the Ancestors.' It is sheer hypocrisy for the western art world to pretend that High Art is not both a financial and a cultural status. The trick, as the Papunya painters have demonstrated, is to combine the two. Western Desert paintings are now acknowledged around the world as modern art produced by contemporary artists who are also bearers of one of most venerable cultural traditions in human history. Ultimately this unique intervention in modern western culture may rearrange the way the art of other indigenous peoples is approached and appreciated. As yet, the categories and concepts which analyse the achievement of these artists are only in the process of being invented, so far is our westernised intellectual reality behind their Dreamings.

Vivien Johnson

Clifford Possum TJAPALTJARRI c.1943
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Possum Dreaming 1979
Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm

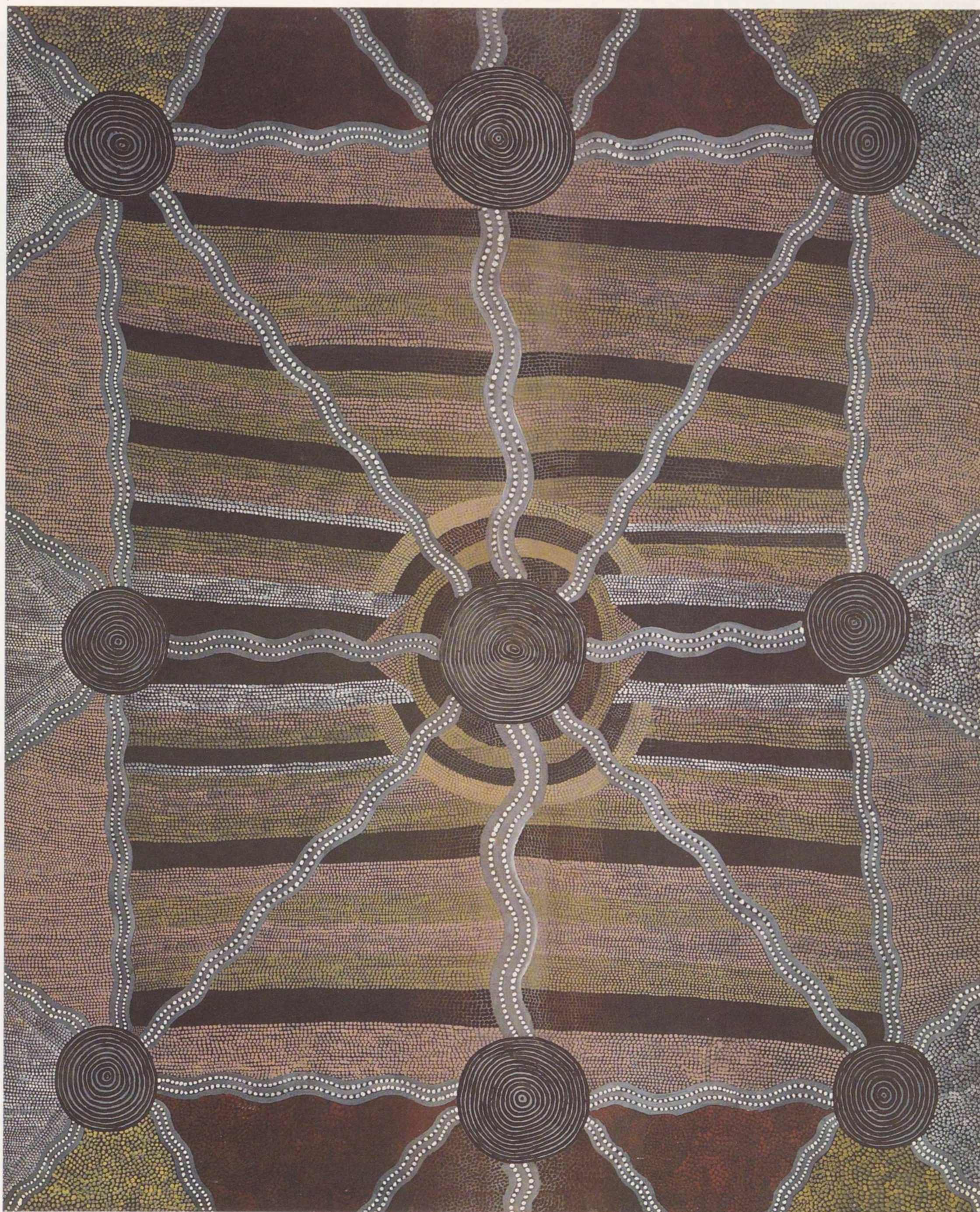


Depicted here are the travels of a Possum ancestor in and about the area known to the Aborigines as Tjuirri (on Napperby Station, approximately 250 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs).

Much of the area at Napperby Station is associated with the Tjukunypa or Possum ancestors, and there are many traditional trails of the possum people there. Some of the trails are of travelling ceremonial groups while others relate to the movements of families as they foraged. In the story shown here the ancestral hero stayed in a limited area around Tjuirri while his companions travelled to the south-west. The Tjukunypa ancestor is said to have travelled both on top of and beneath the surface of the ground. His underground path is therefore shown partially covered (central set of tracks). The trails on the surface are shown uninterrupted. The undulating lines are the track of the possums' tails and are flanked by the spoor. The background dots represent the contours and vegetation in the vicinity of Tjuirri. The sets of concentric circles are sites of special import in relation to the possum, including the spots where he emerged from and eventually re-entered the ground. *(From the annotation supplied with the painting, probably written by John Kean.)*

This painting dates from 1979, just after the artist had completed a number of very large, encyclopedic, topographical paintings, and just before widespread recognition of his work. It contains many of the elements that dominate all his work: it is symmetrical, very skilfully painted, and uses interlocking sets of shapes to illustrate the light and shade aspects of the landscape as well as the above- and below-ground path of the Possum ancestor. It employs a scaled-up version of a technique devised a few years earlier in which background shapes are painted in and then covered in dots — or, as in the central section, outlined first. The bigger dots were painted with a brush, rarely used for dotting in the '80s because of a return to the use of a stick. The brush method is faster while still allowing the precision shown in this painting. The use of cream, white and a charcoal grey demonstrate the artist's skill of mixing a range of colours for each painting that suits the story, while allowing him artistic freedom to explore colouration and tone.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1988.



Tim Leura TJAPALTJARRI c.1939-84
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Kooralia 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152.5 cm

This is a painting of the artist's birthplace. It is a spot in a creek on Napperby Station. The place is called Kooralia, which means the Seven Sisters constellation. The dunes in the dry creekbed and various other sites in the vicinity are shown in moonlight. It seems unusual in the context of this art that Tim would merely paint such a landscape and it is likely that stories and dances are associated with the place. Such is rather positively hinted at in other paintings of the site. Clearly the subject matter is too secret to divulge. *(From annotation supplied with the painting, written by Andrew Crocker.)*

Ceremonies are held at Kooralia to celebrate the story associated with the Seven Sisters constellation. The central roundel may be the sun which departed to give way to the stars at the beginning of the night and which will eventually reappear at the end of the ceremonies. A shaft of light in the background colour becomes moonlight, falling on the sand in the creekbed. It appears through the dots and establishes the mood and colouring of the painting. An early art supervisor's observation of Tim Leura that 'he more than any other artists among the Papunya Tula group creates paintings that are expressive in the European sense of the word', is equally applicable to *Kooralia* — more so, in that the painting seems to speak from a point beyond disaffiliation, with a melancholy which no longer dwells on the ways of the past but expresses itself in a pictorial formulation that transcends even the 'look' of Aboriginality.

Face of the Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, 1985; (Australian Information Service Calendar, 1986); *Papunya Tula Paintings*, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988.

Tim Payunka TJAPANGATI c.1942
Pintupi, Haasts Bluff
Kangaroo & Shield People Dreaming at Lake Mackay 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 186 x 155 cm

This powerful painting by Tim Payunka Tjapangati depicts two Dreamings and his own homeland along the western fringes of Lake Mackay in Western Australia. These two, which are celebrated in corroboree, are a Kangaroo Dreaming, utilised in the Tingari cycle, and the story of the travelling Kuditchi, or Shield People. The full details of the stories are secret and were not divulged. The artist did say that in the Kuditchi corroboree the men sing while the women dance. As far as the ideograms go, the cat's-cradle-like pattern around the edge of the painting represents rain travelling from hill to hill. The tracks of the kangaroo travelling from site to site are self-evident. The large pale area in the central part of the picture represents Lake Mackay (which is apparently two lakes). The roundels in that area are trees which grow in the lake. The golden-coloured patches are sandhills. The connected roundels and adjoining straight lines represent both soakages and campsites of the mythical Shield People in their travels.

The artist lives predominantly at Balgo, but comes and paints in Papunya. He is the custodian of a number of Dreamings, naturally, and stated recently that he will soon have done a representation of each of them. We can thus see that very real element of the paintings which is a declaration by the painters to outsiders of their beliefs about the world, of their place in it and of what they see as rightly their heritage. *(These notes were supplied by Papunya Tula Artists with the painting, and were written by Andrew Crocker, Art Supervisor and Secretary 1980-1.)*

Painted at Papunya before the Pintupi move back to Kintore, this work shows the detailed and confident approach to painting that has distinguished Tim Payunka's work since the early '70s. The roundels and adjoining lines show the travels of the mythical Shield People as a web of sites and journey lines mapping out the landscape. It is particularly finely painted with the green, gold and white colouring making it unusual. Within the context of the picture, the green symbolises the way water infuses the desert landscape, causing luxuriant growth after rain. This painting has appeared in several major exhibitions of Western Desert art, including the *Dreamings* show, and has recently become something of an icon of the movement through its appropriation by the Sydney artist Immants Tillers for use in several of his own works [cf. 35 for a more detailed account of Tingari Dreamings for Lake Mackay].

the hypnotist collector

An interview[1] with Tim Johnson in Sydney, December 1989, conducted by journalist Richard McMillan, a former editor of *Art Network*.

RMcM: How did you first become interested in Aboriginal art back in the '70s?

TJ: It was the Papunya paintings that got me interested in Aboriginal art. I was a painter who had returned to painting after three years as a conceptual artist, but I was still breaking away from the idea of the artwork as primarily an object. When I started painting again in about '73, I had a conceptual element in my work. There wasn't much painting around that I could relate to — that had idea content, and Papunya paintings did. I saw a show at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Sydney in '77 that included very large paintings by Clifford Possum, Tim Leura, Long Jack Phillipus and Anatjari — these were some of the first of the big canvases. I got obsessed with them straight away. It was an immediate recognition of something I'd been looking for, something I'd thought was possible but that no other artists I knew of were doing. The paintings worked as modernist art, but there was a cultural content with its own language — a sort of conceptual narrative. The fact that the paintings combined these things successfully was eye-opening for me, so I decided to find out how this had happened.

I started collecting them the following year. I used to buy as many as I could. They were cheap then — really cheap. For $50 or $100 you could get a really good small painting. They had quite a lot of stock at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery. There were paintings from the early '70s just stacked on top of each other in the storeroom. Also around that time Geoff Bardon's book *Art of the Western Desert* was published. I looked him up in the phone book, rang him up and went to visit him.

RMcM: How did it happen that you visited the Centre?

TJ: In 1978 we hired a car and drove to Ayers Rock and Alice Springs. We looked Papunya up on the map but found you needed a four-wheel-drive and a permit to go there — so we just looked at the paintings in the arts and crafts shops in Alice Springs and bought our first two paintings, one by Tim Leura and one by Johnny Warangula. What led me in 1980 to actually buy an airline ticket and fly to Alice Springs looking for the artists was a progressive disillusionment with life here in Sydney and a decision that it was time to learn more about the artists. I was sick for a couple of days and in a delirium during which I had a vivid dream where I went on a long journey. I was met at a bridge by an Aboriginal person, taken across a river and shown a new land. The next day, I booked an airline ticket.

When I got to Alice Springs, I caught the bus into town and went to the office of the Papunya Tula Artists company. It was just a little room at the back of the Arts and Crafts gallery in Alice Springs. When I walked up, there were groups of people sitting round under the trees opposite the door. They looked at me as I walked up and knocked on the door. There was no one there, so I went round to the gallery just as Andrew Crocker who ran the painting company walked in the door. He was just back from Papunya with a roll of canvases under his arm and covered in dust. We went round to the office then he took me over to meet some of the artists.

1. The title of the interview is taken from Bob Dylan's 'She's an Artist', *Bringing It All Back Home*, CBS, 1964.

RMcM: The guys sitting under the trees?

TJ: Yes — there was Tim Leura, Billy Stockman, Johnny Warangula, some of the older artists and so on. I had a really strong feeling that I knew them well as soon as I met them. There seemed to be a reason to be there. It felt as if my wanting to meet them was reciprocated. After I'd been introduced to Tim Leura, he asked me for paints and canvas. He sent me down to the shop to get canvas boards and paints because he wanted to do some paintings for me. He sat down and painted four paintings over the next two or three days, two for Geoff Bardon and two for me. He also took me round Alice Springs, introduced me to the other artists, and started to explain aspects of his culture to me.

Essentially, I was interested in painting, the thing I'd been doing for years — buying canvas, stretching it up, and painting for days on end. But here it was happening in another world, another era, and the paintings were like nothing I'd ever seen. The artists' approach to materials was totally devoted, in that every bit of paint was manipulated with love and care — and with awe. The approach to materials was perfect. Paintbrushes were treated like delicate objects, paints were used with a precision and delicacy I'd never seen before. This attitude the artists had to the materials leads to a really refined level of control.

I went back home after two or three days with a big roll of paintings I'd bought. I went right through the storeroom and bought $1000 worth of paintings. I just wrote out a cheque and covered it when I got home. The company was nearly broke and there were hundreds of paintings stacked in the storeroom. Some had been there for years. Some of them were so detailed, so carefully painted and with so many extraordinary symbols and images that there was no way of even classifying them in terms of what I already knew of as contemporary art. For ten years the artists had been doing these extraordinary paintings and no one in the art world had really taken any notice. They certainly weren't accepted by the art world then. It was a time when any support was really useful. The money I gave Andrew Crocker was used to buy the next roll of canvas and the next lot of paints, and to pay artists. Andrew told me I could help him too. He'd just started in the job and he was pretty committed to it. He was there to try and save the company, but he didn't know all that much about the art. So he was pretty glad when someone who knew the artists' work and could recognise and identify paintings for him turned up. I also offered the chance of a few contacts in the art world. He said to come back soon with Vivien, to come out to Papunya and meet everybody.

RMcM: When did you eventually visit Papunya?

TJ: That year. When we got to Alice Springs, Andrew told us to go down to the Oasis Motel and look at two paintings he'd hung there. We went down, and there was a grey Tim Leura and a green Tim Payunka, both 6' x 5' [180 x 150cm]. We raced back to the office and said we wanted to buy them. He was very pleased. Those two paintings have since gone round the world, one in the *Dreamings* exhibition and the other in various publications and so on. They were just waiting for someone to put them in the spotlight. Next we went out to Papunya with Andrew and met the artists.

The situation there was one of an incredible distance between us and them. We'd be there in the house and there'd be a timid knock at the door and then an old man would come shuffling in with a smile on his face, but hardly any words — communication was almost non-verbal. Andrew was dealing with these artists with some of that distance between him and them. Like him, I felt close to the people I met and made a lot of friends — that's why I kept coming back. But we had a lot to learn.

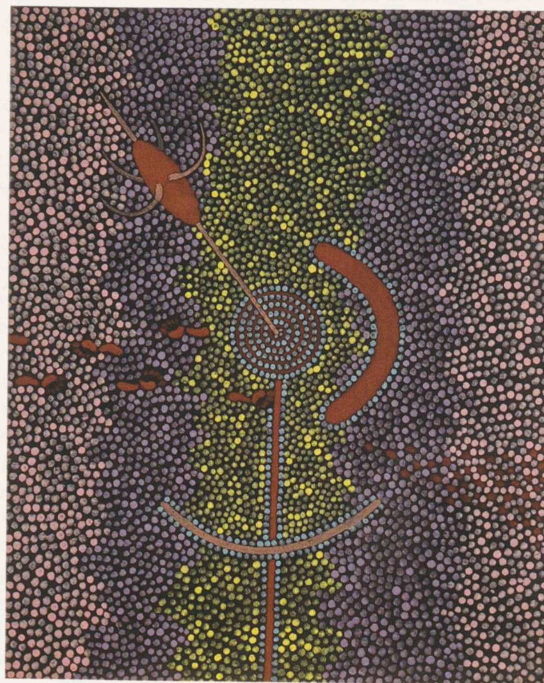
I could feel there was room for more to happen. The artists knew what they were doing, but the company was floundering on economic grounds. Another artist like me could have an input — there were ideas I could bring to bear on what Andrew was doing that were helpful to him. For example, the idea that paintings have to be good — I could say that artists can paint bad paintings and they could turn out to be the good ones. Because Papunya was a community of artists, I felt like I could take a curatorial role. It came out looking like a promotional role, but it wasn't intended to be. I didn't 'promote' Aboriginal art, because that puts it back in the tourist area, or ties it up with nationalism and paternalism. It was more a question of repairing an imbalance in our perception and struggling for their rights. They were doing better art than us, and it was being swept under the carpet. So we were at fault. I felt that as an artist, I had a role I could play in trying to get it accepted by the art world instead of leaving it in its own isolated category.

When I got back from that first trip to Papunya, I made a few phone calls. I rang up James Mollison,[2] Bernice Murphy,[3] Edmund Capon[4] and so on. I'd found half a dozen paintings out in the laundry, rolled up and stuck down behind the basin. They were soaking wet with mould on them and so on so Andrew Crocker gave them to me. Two or three of them are now in public galleries. I was really staggered that here I was getting these masterpieces so easily and there were more floating around in storerooms and shops, and yet they weren't getting into public galleries or serious private collections. I told James Mollison that they were very cheap, that you could go out there and commission them, or buy them from the company or any of their outlets.

I rang up Daniel Thomas[5] and tried to get him to buy the Clifford Possum *Possum Dreaming*.[6] Andrew Crocker had told me that if I could get the National Gallery to buy it, he'd buy me a case of Veuve Cliquot champagne. Unfortunately they didn't buy it but their Aboriginal Art curator from that time came to visit us and a little later Wally Caruana rang up to tell me that after seeing the Papunya paintings in the '81 *Perspecta*, James Mollison had decided that the National Gallery was going to embark on a systematic buying program.

The artists wanted me to organise a ground painting for them in Sydney. The project had been set in motion by the National Gallery and there'd been a grant of $400 to collect spinifex, ochres and things to make the ground painting, but no

2. At that time Director, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, and now Director, National Gallery of Victoria.
3. At that time Curator of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of N.S.W. and of *Perspecta 1981*.
4. Director, Art Gallery of N.S.W.
5. At that time Curator of Contemporary Australian Art, Australian National Gallery, Canberra; then Director, Art Gallery of South Australia.
6. cf catalogue [7].



Clifford Possum TJAPALTJARRI c.1943
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Man's Love Story 1981
Acrylic on linen, 52 x 41.5 cm

Tim Johnson commissioned this painting when he was acting art adviser for Papunya Tula in July 1981.

'I was only there for a month in the middle of '81. But I did a couple of things. Clifford hadn't painted for about a year, because of friction with the art adviser. I coaxed him back into painting. I kept making visits and giving him canvases — I gave him a big canvas first and he didn't do anything on that. I gave him a little one and when I went back he hadn't painted it. That was on the last day — I was on my way back to Sydney and he said ''Look, I'll paint it now.'' And he sat down and painted it. He did the Love Story with the spindle in it — a famous painting. It was in the *Dreamings* show, and a big one of the same story was in the 200 years of Australian Art exhibition. It took him nearly two hours, and it was the first painting he'd done for nearly a year, and he started off again.'

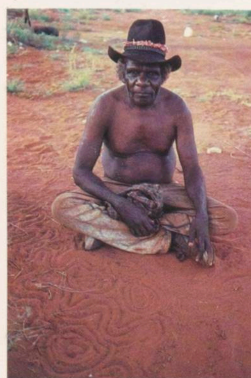
This painting shows the activities of a Tjungurrayi man at Ngarlu (the same man depicted in Lucy, Hilda and Ruth Napaljarri's *Sugarleaf Dreaming at Ngarlu* [43]. He fell in love with a Napangati woman he met who was collecting food. He travelled to the east (his footprints are shown) and came to this site, sat down (as shown by the brown U-shape) and proceeded to spin hairstring on a simple cross-spindle known as Wurrakurru. The spindle is shown leaning from the concentric circles that represent the site Ngarlu. As he spins, the man sings love songs to attract the woman to his campsite, 'talking with his thoughts on the wind'.

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, painting at Charles Creek, N.T.

arrangements had been made for the installation. It was supposed to be at the National Gallery but they'd been waiting a year or six months for word. It's a good example of how, at the administrative end, it didn't matter whether it went ahead or not — or when, but meanwhile these artists were out there in the desert waiting and waiting for the white people to give them the signal to do the ground painting — it was really important to *them*. When I turned up, they gave me the job of organising it.

We tried the N.S.W. Art Gallery, who agreed to put it in the middle of the forecourt during the Sydney Festival but when the date approached they made some excuse and dropped it. But the S.H. Erwin Gallery agreed to have it in their grounds. Two of the artists came down to Sydney for it. A lot of people came to see it and it got good press coverage. It was the first ground painting outside of the desert. Since then they've been done in Melbourne, Perth, New York and Paris. It's a very important statement for them. They have a meeting to decide what painting to do in terms of what they're trying to achieve, and it's usually accompanied by dancing and singing.

RMcM: As you helped with these projects, you became better known to the community and a focus for them in getting things done in the white world?



Willy Tjungurrayi with sand drawing, Kiwirrkura, W.A.

TJ: I think that's true for everybody who goes out into those remote communities. If you're accepted as a friend, there are so many things you can do — you end up making lists of what to do when you get back to the city. I helped wherever I could — stretching canvases, collecting stories, buying work myself, finding other buyers for it and acting as a point of contact for curators and writers in the art world. The next year Andrew asked me to come and work there for a month while he was in America for an exhibition of the work. That was a time when there was a neglect of Aboriginal art by Australians. He had the idea that it had to be shown to the rest of the world. I thought that it had to be protected from the rest of the world as well, some of the great paintings were being sold to overseas collectors and not getting into public galleries here. I had seen it happening. One of Clifford Possum's most detailed and complex pictures from 1979 was bought for $1400 by an American millionaire. This was happening in the late '70s and early '80s — there were avid collectors coming to Australia because they could buy whatever they wanted. National and state galleries were ignoring them.[7] It applied to Papunya painting more than anything.

RMcM: But — not to be chauvinistic about it, if the Museum of Modern Art is intelligent enough to buy pictures at a time when they're affordable, undervalued — they're doing what they did in the '20s and '30s, buying Cubist paintings.

TJ: I felt then that these paintings were so extraordinary they should remain with the people who were producing them, that the old people who paint all their non-secret designs onto canvas are recording their knowledge, as part of a process of passing it from generation to generation. The effects of white society on this culture at that time seemed to be very serious, and what was being recorded really belonged to the people that were recording it. But there's still no evidence that the communities themselves are interested in having the paintings on show as a permanent fixture. With more of an inflow of information about the culture coming back into the communities through various media, galleries might eventually be set up. That area of the culture is already occupied I think by more sacred things. This is especially true of some work done in the early '70s, because it's close to ceremonial painting. I see the early '80s now as the beginning of international interest in Aboriginal art: if you get one great painting over to America, maybe hundreds will follow, opening up the international art market. The paintings being produced now that are going overseas aren't ones that I would say should stay in Australia — especially since copyright of the imagery still remains with the artist.

Because we felt then that if they went overseas they'd be lost forever, it became a question of trying to get the art world to collect them here. They seemed to have no place in the art world then, and the painting company was supported by Aboriginal Arts Board funding. Sometimes paintings took three months to paint and the artists wanted immediate cash payment for them from the company. Then the company had to sell them. Getting a high enough price on the market for all the time and effort involved was very difficult.

Up to that point, there was a debate going on as to whether Aboriginal art should be in museums, or whether it should be regarded as contemporary art. I thought it was obvious that it was contemporary art. But the government was involved in marketing it and it was still aimed primarily at the tourist market. Their gallery was in the Rocks in Sydney for example — a tourist area. The paintings were also seen as a westernisation of traditional Aboriginal art, a commercialisation of it. But this ignored the artists' own choice in the matter. It seemed like a struggle for the right of artists to live off selling their art. That's something I believed in. They could survive the same way I was trying to — as artists selling their work. I thought their work should be bought by public galleries, and that once that happened it would be bought by collectors. This was how I thought the art movement could survive. Some people were against this kind of westernisation. The idea was that Aboriginal culture wasn't strong enough to survive the selling of its designs as commodities, i.e. as artworks. But this ignored the fact that the artists were quite capable of producing art that did sell, and of simultaneously preserving ceremonial art.

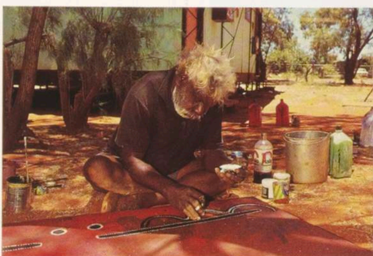
Art at ceremonies hasn't changed much if at all. To judge from early photos I've seen, it's the same as it was before the painting movement began. I've sat at a ceremony with a group of men around a ceremonial pole decorated with a wavy line and goanna tracks. The same people who painted the ceremonial pole do paintings, and the designs in the paintings are similar to those used in public ceremonies — allowing for aesthetic innovation related to the new materials, and for the ultimate destination of the work in the art world. The originators of the Papunya painting movement are usually regarded as Geoff

7. The Museum of the Northern Territory was the only exception at this time.

Bardon, Dick Kimber, Pat Hogan and so on, but it does go back further than that. All the way through, Aboriginal people have done paintings for white anthropologists, explorers, teachers, and so on. An Education Officer I met out there a few years ago told me he had bought paintings from Kaapa in the late '60s. But the work they did in the early '70s pioneered the organisation and production of paintings.

Concerning the question of whether this art damages the original culture, it helps it to survive. First, it's an opportunity to earn a living without leaving the settlements. Before that there was only work on properties — and part-time work at Papunya. Secondly, in the '80s the painting movement coincides with the outstation movement. Many of the artists were separated from their land and the Dreaming sites, and it was after about ten years of painting that it became more feasible for families to go back to their land. There is probably a connection: there was a lifting of morale and reassertion of culture through the paintings. Numerous groups went back to the land of their Dreamings where they used to live with their forefathers. A lot of people hadn't seen it for ten or twenty years, some people had never seen it. They were born in Papunya or Haasts Bluff and were shown their tribal land after they had grown up. Now some of the Gibson Desert has been resettled by people that lived on it thirty or forty years ago. This return to tribal lands has inspired paintings too. It's also important to remember that there's increased mobility and more frequent travel to and from communities and to Alice Springs, and more use of western ideas as well. In social terms it's like rising out of an imposed poverty.

Michael Jagamara Nelson, Papunya, N.T.



Paddy Sims Japaljarri, painting a Milky Way Dreaming, Yuendumu, N.T.

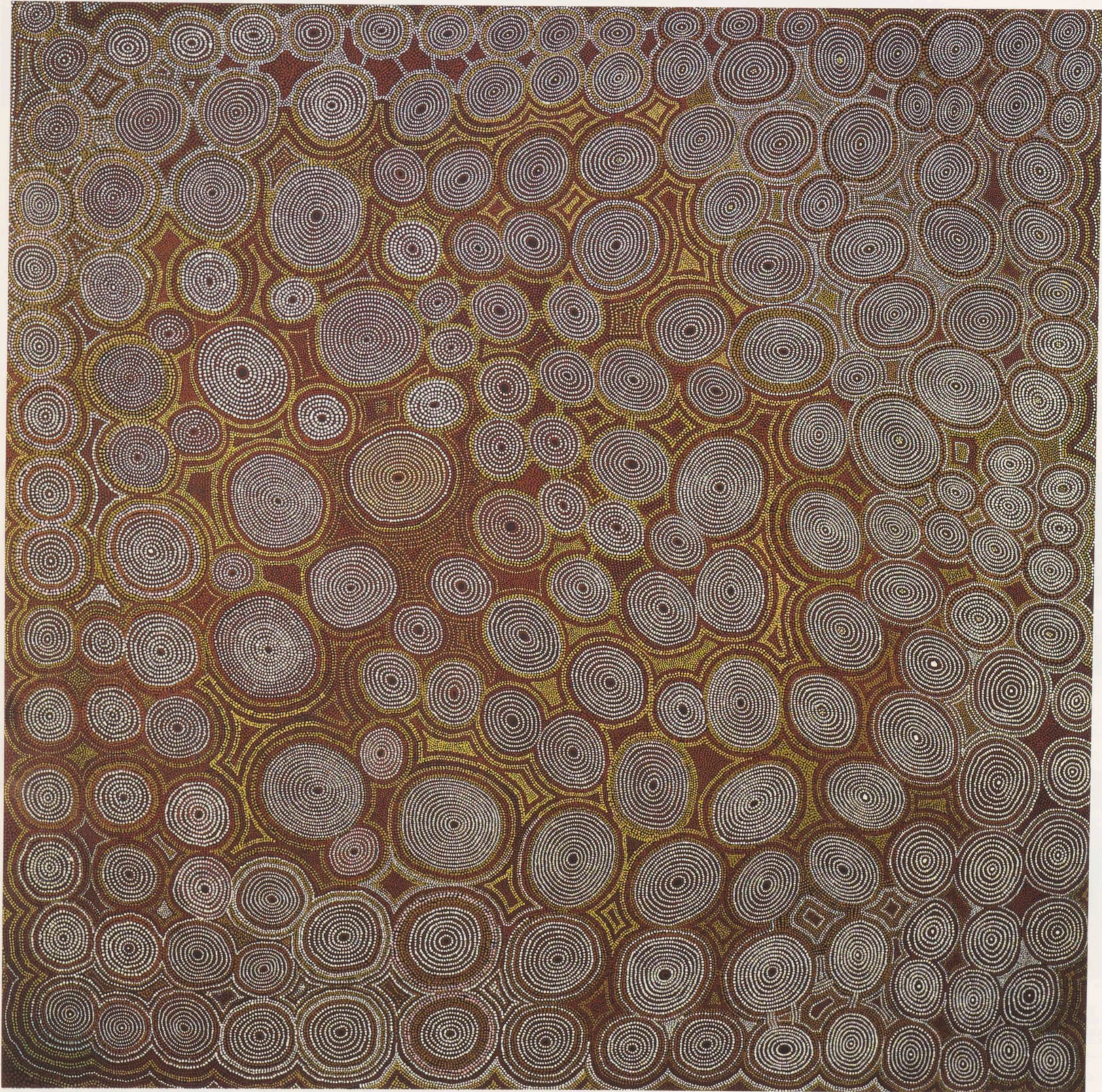
In June 1981 Andrew Crocker went to America and I spent about a month out at Papunya running the company. That was a really good chance to get to know everybody and to let people know that I thought what they were doing was very important and that there was a world out there that would really want to see it, that people would start collecting it, and that the idea of being artists was very feasible in spite of the isolation. So my attitude was to give everyone as much canvas as they needed. I didn't realise the intensity of their wish to paint and used up all the money in the bank account in about the first week. Then I had all these canvases out that I had to pay for and no money left. So I had to help sell the work. Back in Sydney after that, I became the Sydney agent for the company. The volume of work done in the three or four weeks was amazing — hundreds of paintings. Tim Leura was coming back every day for a new canvas, not even waiting to prime it. People were picking up bits of canvas that were lying around the floor and painting on them. The day I arrived, Uta Uta Tjangala came round asking for the big 8' x 12' [2.4 x 3.6 metres] canvas. He asked Daphne Williams who was working at Papunya then to hurry me up. So I stretched it up, primed it, and took it out to his camp on the top of the Toyota. He had a space cleared on the ground and a shelter built out of trees and branches. As I drove up, he stood here, paintbrush in hand. We got the canvas down and as soon as it was on the ground he began work. It took him months to paint and is one of the great paintings. He said he wanted me to buy it, but it was too good for a private collection and the Aboriginal Arts Board eventually bought it. It's been in various exhibitions and is featured in the *Dreamings* catalogue.[8]

Many interesting things happened. One artist, Pansy Napangati, brought in two dancing boards that had been used in a ceremony and asked to swap them for paints and canvas. I gave her canvas boards and paints and Kaapa who was there told me I'd be lucky because of the dancing boards. Generally women were not really encouraged to paint, either by the men except as helpers or by the arts advisers. When I was there I gave out canvases to women too. Pansy's paintings now sell for up to $20,000 — but she is an unusual artist, a strong person who launched herself through a series of steps and became a successful artist. She was marketing her work herself in the early '80s, and has learnt a lot from Clifford Possum to whom she's related.

While I was working there, I looked through the old stock books and the box of stories to find out more about the development of the movement. Andrew allowed this because he thought it should be studied and there was the possibility of my running the company in the future. I was actually offered the job when he resigned a year later but I had to turn it down. The idea I had of documenting the painting movement came from conceptual art — where the idea and not the object was emphasised. It was a way of expanding one's concept of what art was. Instead of art being located in the object, it could be located elsewhere. One could use any medium and anything could be nominated as art. One could record events one encountered in one's life. What the Papunya painters were doing was something I could approach with ideas from conceptual art, it fused art and life and included texts. I could document it — which was valuable, because so many of the best paintings were disappearing all over the world, and there was no way anyone could track them down. For example, the Australia Council used to provide groups of these early paintings from the '70s as official gifts to other Commonwealth countries — and they'd never be seen again. These are paintings that now sell for $20,000 and that should all be documented. So I documented the paintings I encountered, I photographed every painting I could find. I also photographed artists — which they approved of. 'That's your job,' was the reply from one of the senior men when I asked to photograph him. It actually turns out to be an area with applicable restrictions because there's a traditional law that says if someone dies you're not allowed to look at their photo. The photos I took are a fairly complete record of the artists at that time, but they can't all be shown now.

The documentation is something I fed back into the community. I always took the photographs of paintings out there and artists spent hours looking at them. Clifford Possum looked back over photos of his early work and I think it was very useful to him in terms of remembering designs and images that he'd done. Documentation of Aboriginal art is for art historical purposes now, and I gave up in about 1983. It got too controversial — people were very suspicious then, and they thought I was doing it to sell prints or something. I wouldn't, of course, but people are very protective of these paintings.

8. *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, ed. P. Sutton, Viking/Asia Society, 1988.

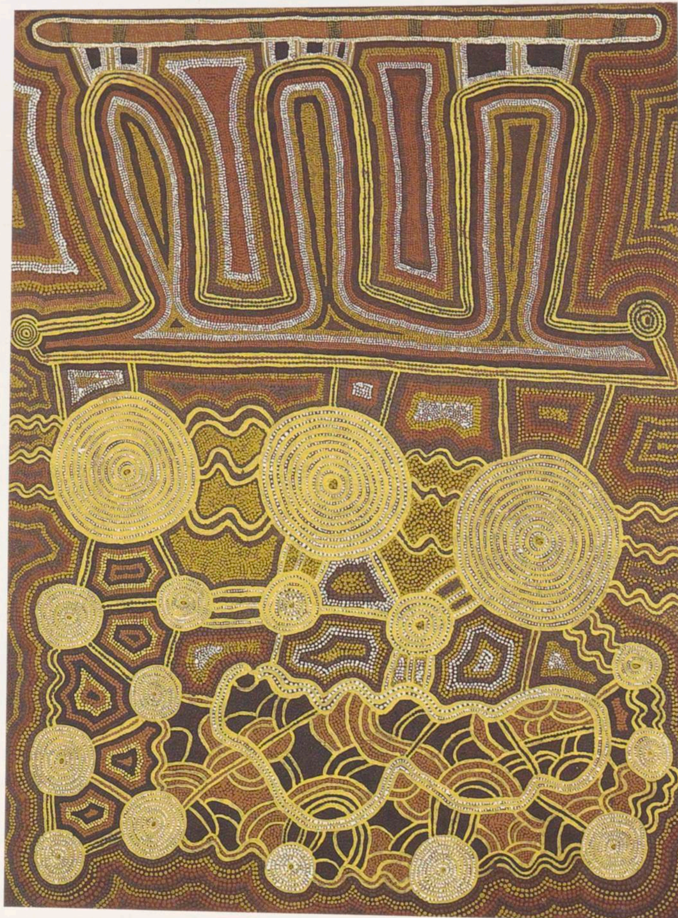


Anatjari TJAMPITJINPA late '20s
Pintupi, south of Jupiter Well
Ceremonial Ground at Kulkuta 1981
Acrylic on canvas, 182.5 x 182 cm

This painting depicts a ceremony at the site of Kulkuta, south-west of Sandy Blight Junction in Western Australia. It is a major water soakage and an important site for the Tingari ceremonies. Tingari is the ancient and secret knowledge transmitted to Aboriginal men in ceremony as a form of post-initiatory higher education. Much of the knowledge and activities of the Tingari lawmakers is reserved for the initiated and not to be considered part of the picture except as an absence. The entire painting represents the ceremonial ground with the participants sitting at their 'painting up' camps. The larger circles indicate older men of high ritual status. One of these larger circles is the headman but his identity in the painting was also kept secret. The elders are decorating the younger men (shown as smaller circles) with Tingari designs for the ceremony after a period of seclusion. They are all standing around the large circle of different colour from the rest around the centre of the painting. The background dots represent the lip of raised dirt around the cleaned-off campsites and, in the area around the ceremonial ground, water on the plain at Kulkuta.

During the '70s, an archetypal Pintupi painting developed, consisting basically of a group of connecting sites represented by concentric circles with lines joining them. The areas in between are filled with contour-like rows of dots bordering the design elements. During the '70s the grid of circles and lines was usually infused with U-shapes representing the performers of the story. In the '80s, these U-shapes became less common, and the spectacular paintings of the late '70s with their many circles surrounded by U-shapes began to give way to the interlocking fields of circles and lines which now typify the work of many Pintupi artists. Painted in 1981, *Kulkuta* represented something of a turning point in these developments, by dispensing entirely with U-shapes. Painstakingly dotted over a month with assistance from John Tjakamarra, this visually stunning work demonstrates the high degree of technical skill on a massive scale which the founding group of Pintupi artists had attained in the intervening decade.

Purchased directly from the artist by arrangement with Papunya Tula Artists, this painting has been included in important shows of Western Desert art including *The Face of the Centre* at the National Gallery of Victoria and *Dreamings.* Anatjari Tjampitjinpa still paints these same immaculate surfaces with their circles in motion, optical effects, and slightly sweetened earth colours.



Uta Uta TJANGALA c.1910-90
Pintupi, Kintore Ranges
Tjangala and Two Women at Ngurrapalangu
1982
Acrylic on canvas, 125 x 90 cm

This painting shows the site of Ngurrapalangu which is south-west from the Kintore Ranges just over the Western Australian border. The three hill-like shapes represent one man of the Tjangala kinship subsection and two women, one of the Nangala kinship subsection and the other a Napanangka. The roundels represent caves at the site, while the oblong shapes are hills. The background dots depict the vegetation of the area, the seeds of which are gathered, ground and made into a damper. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists.)*

This painting is typical of the artist's best work. Though smaller than the major canvases already mentioned [cf. 26], it dates from the period in which they were painted.

Curators and so on saw the value of it and now the company does it themselves.

I felt close to the artists. I could understand what they were doing and the subtleties of their image-making. For me, sitting down next to them on the ground and watching them paint was one of the most important experiences of my life as an artist. I learnt a new way of painting. Eric Michaels mentioned that everyone goes on about the issues surrounding Aboriginal art, and rarely gives full credit to the artists for the incredible achievement of creating a new style in contemporary art. That's the area in which I found myself working. As another artist, I could see that what they were doing was amazing. It takes incredible skill and patience to paint like that and they have something I will never have — Dreaming stories. I've watched Paddy Sims start a painting. First he told me to move back a bit and be quiet and then he started singing a song under his breath and looking off in a certain direction. Then he involved me by telling me that where he was looking was where the story applied. He went on singing for about five minutes and then picked up the paintbrush and started the design. He was getting permission to paint the design from the ancestors.

I couldn't document everything I was learning — just the paintings and information about artists and aspects of style and so on. What I'm commenting on is the archival aspect of it all, of trying to collect up any information to fill in the story of the painting movement — because of its importance in Australian art. It made me something of an image scavenger, but I saw myself more as a catalyst. I could suggest a better paintbrush for a certain job or I could show how to stretch a canvas a bit better, or I could argue the merits of a painting that wasn't within expectations. All the unusual paintings tended to be pushed aside and I was the person around collecting them up. We nearly always bought through the company — there was debate then about the rights and wrongs of even buying paintings but buying directly from artists was regarded as threatening the company's survival.

I started collecting as an extension of the idea of documenting the painting movement. The paintings were very inexpensive — I was even being given paintings, and artists were always offering to paint pictures for me. My own style of painting went through radical changes — I started doing dots myself. Then my paintings started to sell, so I started to use the money I was earning to buy more Papunya paintings and to make the idea of a collection something important. I talked to Dick Kimber about the idea of trying to have something by every artist, perhaps an early and a later work. I stumbled across paintings all over the place. Originally I went looking for them, but in the long run they came looking for me. Where once you'd have to go to Alice Springs to find a Clifford Possum and drive into the desert, now I just drive up the road and there's one for sale in a local gallery. I've experienced watching something that was distant and remote go through a whole lot of changes and suddenly begin to permeate my own culture, and proliferate. There are a whole lot of debates that go with these events — but it was what I felt should happen, that Aboriginal people in Central Australia had something really unique.

Originally, it was, 'Here, take *this*,' then it began to turn into an important collection. I'd see a good painting and see if I could buy it. I'd think of each new purchase as something that could take its place alongside the other paintings and that I'd be able to do things with them — exhibit them, give them back to the community, or send them off to the National Gallery one day. An overall picture of what's happening is valuable. I've shown them to people — hundreds of people — each artist's work one after the other. The collection was assembled according to where pictures were painted, when and by whom, what styles there were and so on. Curators from all round the world have seen them as well as local Aboriginal people, contemporary artists, and some of the artists themselves.

I think that many of the artists don't remember much of what they paint — they can be reminded of it pretty easily, but it's not kept as accessible information. They realised that I was collecting really good examples of their work. They'd go through the books commenting on the quality of the work. I showed a book of the collection to Wenton Rubuntja, an Aranda elder from Alice Springs who commented on the meaning of the collection. His comments were similar to those of another elder who said, 'You're a white law keeper for Aboriginal people.' This gives me another way of looking at the collection. What follows from having all the paintings is a difficult question. It could be seen as something I reached out for, but this ignores the way I acquired many of the pictures, and the fact that it's cultural property in the hands of someone who believes in Aboriginal rights.

Initially it wasn't done with an awareness of these issues, it was done because there was a necessity for it at the time. There were important paintings lying around that nobody wanted so I bought them. The artists were almost totally unrecognised. It was like a time when you could get Van Goghs for very little. I could go out and ask Clifford Possum to paint me a picture and hardly anyone else had done that then so he would. Often he'd be waiting there ready to paint. The meaning of it all in terms of a group of objects that has cultural value is something the artists themselves point out to me. I don't make claims other than that I've got a whole lot of paintings that I bought but I know what it means to Aboriginal people. The artists see it as a whole lot of accurate representations of important Dreamings and sites. Some of them are especially important Dreamings, and some are powerful and occasionally even dangerous apparently. For example, it was suggested that I look after one particularly detailed Pintupi painting by putting it away in a cupboard. More awareness of what it means to have the paintings comes from Aboriginal people than from white people. I'm also occasionally guided by dreams in these matters and on a number of occasions dreams have led to finding paintings.

These artworks have a different status in the communities from which they originate. The non-materialist nature of Aboriginal lifestyle means that the paintings are not treated as precious objects. Even with the Dreaming in them, they can be thrown out, or left lying around the artists' houses. They aren't ceremonial — they weren't made for that reason. They're

Sonder NAMPITJINPA late '50s
Warlpiri, near Yuendumu
Yalka Dreaming 1986
Acrylic on linen, 121 x 182 cm

This painting depicts designs associated with the Yalka or Bush Onion Dreaming ceremonies at the site of Amunturrngu (Mt Leibig). The roundel is the ceremonial area and it is shown with the traditional decorated nulla nulla standing upright in the centre. It is around this area that the women perform the ceremonies associated with this site. The U-shapes are the women, some of whom are sitting singing the songs while the others are performing the dances. The oblong shapes are the women's dancing boards. The arcs are shade shelters made from branches. The artist has also shown the wooden carrying bowls full of the Yalka.

Sonder Turner was awarded First Prize in the 1986 *Canberra Times* Art Award. *(Notes supplied by Papunya Tula Artists with the painting.)*

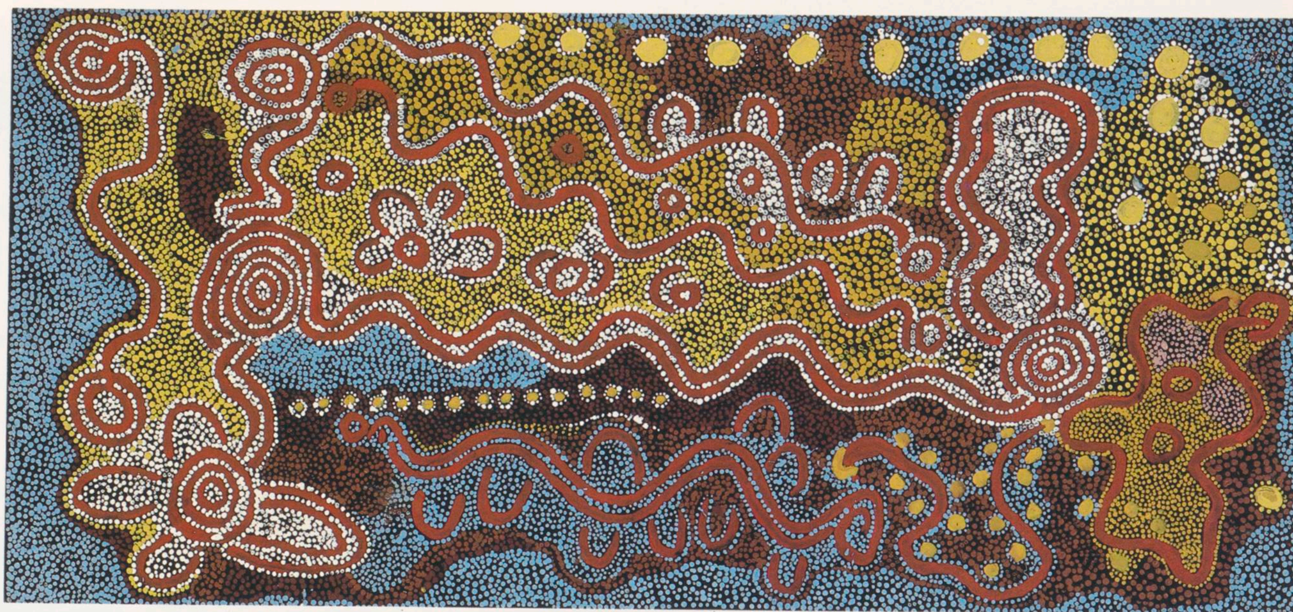
Strictly limited representations of women's stories are still quite common in men's paintings and those of older women artists like Daisy Leura and Gladys Warangula. Sonder and her sisters Sandra and Petra Nampitjinpa's early work departed from these conventions in depicting artefacts from the women's ceremonial life, like decorated ceremonial poles, and pubic belts worn on ritual occasions. This may have been in response to developments at neighbouring Yuendumu, where the senior women were painting monumental and detailed representations of women's law. Sonder paints the many important Dreamings in the Mt Leibig area for which her father Paddy Tjangala, who taught all his young daughters to paint in the mid '80s, is custodian. Paddy Tjangala's finely carved and painted carrying dishes have long contributed to Mt Leibig's reputation for quality artefacts.

a record, but occasionally they are used by Aboriginal people in a ceremonial way. They begin as a correct transcription of something that has been taught as part of the law. In ceremonies the designs had to be right, otherwise there might be some form of punishment. Women weren't generally allowed to see men's designs, and so on. There were very strict taboos relating to what designs could be used for. They have detailed information in them about complex mythological stories that explain many things, and create an attitude of reverence towards the landscape. Without this reverence, nature is dangerous, maybe not at the time, maybe years later. One cannot survive without understanding nature, being subservient to it.

The early paintings show the importance of detail. When figurative images were put in, they often showed frightened-looking figures. Other early paintings were too sacred to even be shown, and some showed designs regarded as dangerous. This feeling in the early work changed when restrictions were placed, and only secular designs used. This led to innovations within the pictorial language and the development of individual styles. As communities start moving back to outstations, or into Alice Springs, a new freedom was reflected and by the late '80s, the artists' own attitude to what they were doing was clear. They *want* to be remembered. They want to bring various strains together and follow things through. They want to do it with what's permissible in their own culture. They're proud of the innovations they've made in a technical sense, and of the care the work involves and of the opportunities that come from opening up communication channels with western society. Also there's the realisation that it's very frustrating trying to establish yourself as an artist. Advisors from the painting company might not turn up for a month or might not like your painting. Some artists have tried to go it alone and establish their own contacts. Many have been successful at this but others retreat from it, going back into the desert, taking a canvas with them and working in isolation. I think the artists' support systems that exist now reach out to those artists and the companies and individuals who work for them do numerous things for the communities besides giving out canvases and collecting paintings.

Years ago when they started painting, Aboriginal painters were light years away from being successful artists. They were totally isolated. But it was inevitable — their paintings were so extraordinary that it had to be acknowledged. It didn't seem as if the artists would be able to keep doing it then. It seemed like a cultural phenomenon produced by a range of conditions. After living in a settlement and being deprived of almost everything they eventually reached for a means of externalising what was being lost. The people who wanted to paint, and the people who kept painting — like Michael Nelson and Clifford Possum — were able to handle the idea that their paintings were in demand for exhibitions, in museums and galleries, and for collections and publications, and they were able to paint for that. They were able to paint for lone travellers passing through Alice Springs as well as in the context of postmodernism. But opportunities coming to Aboriginal artists are still limited. To establish yourself as someone with regular exhibitions is still very difficult. The idea of doing it from isolation is a good one — of keeping what you are and not allowing success to change it. They're totally isolated, but they're still at the centre and their art movement achieved international success.

edited by Vivien Johnson and Tim Johnson



Larry Spencer JUNGARRAYI 1919-90
Warlpiri, Yarripirlangu, south-west of Yuendumu
Milky Way Dreaming 1987
Acrylic on cotton duck, 80 x 174 cm

This Dreaming depicts the Milky Way and the Stars over the country of Jungarrayi and his father. The site of Yarripirlangu is associated with the Initiated Men (Ngarrka) or Vine (Ngalyipi) Dreaming. Paddy Spencer collaborated with Paddy Jupurrula on the *Munga Star Dreaming* painting of 1985, which was purchased by the Australian National Gallery from the first Warlukurlangu Artists exhibition at the Hogarth Gallery in Sydney in December of that year. His 1986 *Milky Way Dreaming* was also purchased by the National Gallery. This painting dates from around this time, possibly early 1987, and shows the Ngalyipi or Vine Dreaming design which is used in body-painting during women's ceremonies suggesting some ritual activity of women in this country.

Paddy Japaljarri Sims tells the story of the Milky Way: '. . . This story I am telling is about my fathers in the Dreamtime who made the stars travel across the sky. They were of the Japaljarri-Jungarrayi section. They came from their country in the north and lived in one place. Unchanging, these stars created by the Dreaming did not turn into other sections. They were not made randomly, but by the Japaljarri-Jungarrayi Dreaming who created the Milky Way and carried stars and witi poles as he travelled. The Dreamtime people travelled and made camp in one place for some time. They conducted male initiation ceremonies. They took leafy branches from trees and bound them together into witi poles, using vines and creepers. These they used when they initiated young men, as we do today. I am only telling of that part of the Dreaming story which came from the north. This same Dreaming belongs to others. We all join up — Yarripilangu and Yarrungkanyi. It is a big Dreamtime story about the millions of stars which shine above us as we sleep. It is also about the land which is sacred because it was created by the Dreaming. Special places were made by the Dreaming, which fell down as a shooting star to earth. Thus the Dreaming came to be for people. It is our father which stretches across the sky above us as the Milky Way.' (In *Kuruwarri — Yuendumu Doors*, Warlukurlangu Artists, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1987, p. 127.)

Lucy NAPALJARRI c.1926
Hilda NAPALJARRI c.1941
Ruth NAPALJARRI c.1940
Warlpiri/Anmatjera, Coniston Station and Mt Allan area
Sugarleaf Dreaming at Ngarlu 1986
Acrylic on canvas, 173 x 187.5 cm

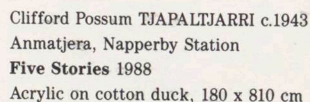
Ngarlu is near Mt Allan Station, east of Yuendumu. The primary Dreaming for the site is Yanyirlingi (Sugarleaf), a plant with sweet nectar that is eaten by Aboriginal people. The depiction of this Dreaming is complex and has several levels of meaning. Women are shown gathering Sugarleaf and performing a yawulyu, or women's ceremony, associated with the Dreaming. In addition, an actual event — the birth of two Jampitjinpa boys to two Nungarrayi sisters — at a camp near Ngarlu is shown. The Dreaming story concerns an illicit relationship between a man of the Jungurrayi subsection and his classificatory mother-in-law, a Napangardi. The man happened to pass by while the woman was urinating. He desired her and began to spin hairstring for a pubic tassel, singing love songs as he did so. This had the intended result of drawing her to his campsite at Ngarlu. Clifford Possum's *Man's Love Story* painting [8] shows the Jungarrayi man from the same Dreaming story spinning the hairstring on his spindle. *(Notes from* Dreamings *catalogue, based on those supplied with the painting by Warlukurlangu Artists.)*

With its vivid colouring and detailed design work spelling out the Dreaming stories at this site, this painting shows the power of the works produced collaboratively by the senior Yuendumu women. It was painted unstretched, with the canvas laid out across the women's knees, at a time in the evolution of the paintings enterprise at Yuendumu when the ritual act of invoking the Dreamings by representing them in the new materials took precedence over considerations like rectilinear surfaces for ease of stretching for later exhibition and sale.

Daisy Nelson NAPANANGKA 1924
Warlpiri, Yinjirimardi
Yuparli Jukurrpa (Bush Banana Dreaming)
1987
Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm

Yuparli *(Leichardtia australis)* is a fruit-bearing creeper that winds itself around trees. The painting illustrates the travels of two women (Napangardi and Napanangka) through country south and west of Yuendumu. The women were accompanied by Japangardi, who unbeknown to Napangardi, was Napanangka's wrong skin lover. At times as the trio travelled Japangardi would become an eagle and would travel behind them. Near Karinyarra (Mt Wedge) the women were assaulted by another man (Jungarrayi/Japaljarri moiety). Afterwards a huge wind pushed the women underground and they re-emerged at two soakages near Yinjirrimardi. Their journey ended at Pikilyi (Vaughan Springs) where they went underground. As the women travelled they collected yuparli fruit that resemble bananas and can be eaten raw or cooked.

Daisy Nelson is the wife of Michael Jagamara Nelson's stepfather, Paddy Jupurrula Nelson. She inherited *Bush Banana Dreaming* from her father.



Clifford Possum TJAPALTJARRI c.1943
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Five Stories 1988
Acrylic on cotton duck, 180 x 810 cm

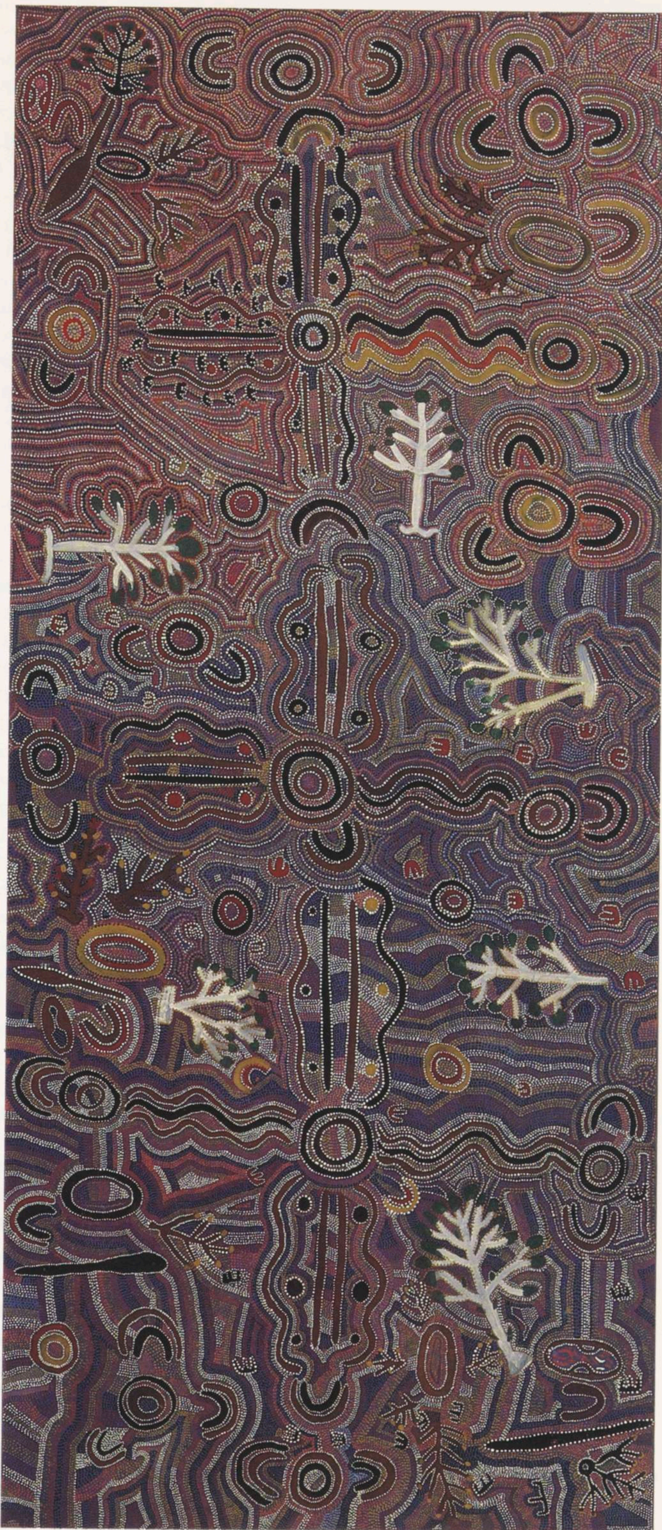
This painting depicts five stories from the artist's traditional country in the Anmatjera homelands. The central roundel is a Possum Dreaming site. The possum has a distinctive 'wobbly' walk which is shown by the footprints and sinuous markings on each side of the journey line. Four Possum ancestors are shown as four U-shapes. To the left is a nighttime Women's ceremony with seated women, digging sticks used in the dancing, fire sticks and ceremonial belts — the wavy lines with plumage at each end. To the left of this is shown a Bush Pineapple Dreaming showing six seated figures, boomerangs, spears and nulla nullas. The bush pineapples are the small light-coloured shapes attached to the meandering lines which represent the plant. On the right of the central design are shown two carpet snakes, baby snakes emerging from eggs and numerous ancestral figures represented by U-shapes. To the right of this a Worm Dreaming story is depicted showing worms — the short wavy lines, worm holes or tracks — the larger wavy lines emanating from the central roundel, four ancestors — the large U-shapes, and ceremonial belts with plumage at either end. The background shapes throughout the picture represent the surrounding landscape for the five stories, and the ochres used in ground paintings in which the designs are used. The painting was commissioned from the artist in 1988 and is the largest picture he has painted. It took the artist three months to complete with assistance from his family on the background dotting.

Michael JAGAMARA Nelson 1947
Warlpiri, Vaughan Springs
Five Stories 1986
Acrylic on linen, 183 x 122 cm

The artist has shown stories associated with six different Dreaming sites in this painting. The five central roundels depict trees in which the ancestor Witchetty Grub men lived. The small moon-like shapes to the side of the central line represent the ancestor Witchetty Grub men as they travelled north from Mt Singleton to Vaughan Springs. The roundels grouped in a triangular pattern show the site of Kunatjarrayi (Mt Wedge Range) but details of the associated ceremony are secret and no details were revealed [cf.17]. A young rainbow snake is shown hiding himself in the spring at Ilkirri (the roundel near the snake). That rainbow snake still lives in the spring. As he was hiding himself the snake scared a kangaroo who fled to Ilkirri. The kangaroo met another who was travelling north and the two journeyed together. In the bottom right of the painting, the site of Yarripalangu is represented by the roundel, and the moon-like shape next to it depicts the ancestor Goanna as he travels to Wanipi. The roundel with sinuous lines emanating from it, in the bottom left corner, depicts the Wild Potato Dreaming.

Michael Nelson is a young but well established artist. He won the National Aboriginal Art Award in 1984. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists.)*

Michael Jagamara Nelson began painting for Papunya Tula Artists in 1983. Over a period of about three years, his paintings developed into bold symmetrical designs with subtle infilling of multi-coloured dots and delicate brushwork. Some huge paintings (an 8.5 metre Possum Dreaming for the Sydney Opera House), inclusion in the 1986 Sydney Biennale, a major commission for the new Parliament House in Canberra, and a BMW which he painted, have taken his art into new contexts. This painting, like several other canvases from around this time, retains a topographically accurate mapping of the country of the artist's Dreamings. Nearly all the Papunya artists have been through a stage when they are preoccupied with painting out all the Dreamings they have custodianship of, before embarking on the evolution of a distinctive personal style based on recurrent visual features of their work.



Peggy NAPURRURLA Poulson, c.1935,
Maggie NAPURRURLA Poulson, c.1935,
Bessie NAKAMARRA Sims, c.1940
Warlpiri, near Warlpitarli
Janganpa Jukurrpa (Possum Dreaming) 1988
Acrylic on canvas, 210 x 91 cm

The country of this Dreaming is Jangankurlangu, meaning literally 'belonging to possum', an area of land within the Vaughan Springs station. The three concentric circles from which extend the main design represent three water sources in the area created by the Dreamtime possum ancestor. The central place is a rockhole, Lawanjajarra. To the north is Warrkaparli and to the south-east is Mawurrji, a soakage. Possums are nocturnal and nest in tall trees, especially Ngapiri (River Red Gum) and Wapurnungku (Ghost Gum). The straight lines show the path taken by the possums on their nightly hunting trips; the curves are the possums' tail tracks. Men are shown hunting possums with shields and spears. The Dreaming belongs to Napurrurla/Nakamarra moiety.

Featured in *Dreamings* video made to accompany the Asia Society exhibition.

the money belongs to the ancestors

An object in a museum case must suffer the denatured existence of an animal in the zoo. In any museum, the object dies — of suffocation and the public gaze — whereas private ownership confers on the owner the right and the need to touch. As a young child will reach out to handle the thing it names, so the passionate collector, his eye in harmony with his hand, restores to the object the life-giving touch of its maker. The collector's enemy is the museum curator. Ideally, museums should be looted every fifty years and their collections returned to circulation.[1]

The words of Utz, the protagonist in Bruce Chatwin's study of the obsessive collector, raise the question of the subjectivity which underwrites the amassing of cultural property. Utz collected porcelain, so the idea that the collector is driven by his or her own desire to touch and to handle, as well as the object's need to be handled, has specific reference to his personal obsession. Moreover, the idea behind the collection of these paintings was, as Tim has explained in the interview which precedes this essay, to rescue them from the obscurity to which the trade that then existed in Aboriginal art would have consigned them. Our dream was to see them one day hang in museums and art galleries and be appreciated for the great works of art they are, not to save them from such a fate.

However, there is an analogy with Utz's analysis in the idea that these paintings were meant to be touched. In Geoff Bardon's film *A Calendar of Dreamings*, about the early years of the painting movement at Papunya, there is a sequence where a group of the men are examining one of the paintings. They are crouching over it, singing its songs. They are pressing the surface with their hands, running them along the lines of the journey whose story is told in the painting and in the songs they sing. This and similar sights might have been what moved Geoff Bardon to attribute primacy to the 'haptic sensibility' amongst the peoples of the Western Desert.

In a different sense, it was the search for closer contact with the artists and their situation that drew me into collecting. Being an enthusiastic buyer opened doors that were much harder to open under the imprimatur of pure scholarship. In a practical sense too, it was a way of repaying the communities in general and the artists and their company in particular for the time and energy and the resources taken up by our presence amongst them. The warmth and hospitality they have always shown us soon transformed the means to pursue my quest for intellectual understanding of the art movement into an end in itself. Research agendas were overridden by the situational imperative of putting your money where your mouth was — and the pleasures of the gaze.

Those who frown upon the marketing of Western Desert art as a process of assimilation of Aboriginals into the cash economy, might learn something from the Aboriginal point of view on such exchanges.[2] Originally, the artists did not see receiving payment for their paintings as selling them, but as returning the ceremonial gift which the painter had bestowed by giving that representation of his Dreamings into the purchaser's keeping. In the intervening two decades, the artists have become adept at negotiating with European concepts of commerce, but to this day their art-making continues to be informed by the underlying notion of the painting enterprise as a cultural exchange with western society. For particular paintings, the principle of the ceremonial gift can still overpower any non-Aboriginal effects in determining their disposal. *Kooralia* [9], one of the major paintings in this exhibition, is a case in point.

We had asked Tim Leura to paint a version of the Sun, Moon and Morning Star painting which appears in Geoff Bardon's book, *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*. Returning to Alice Springs six months later, we asked Andrew Crocker if Tim Leura

1. Bruce Chatwin, *Utz*, Jonathan Cape, 1988, p. 20.
2. The title is taken from a personal communication with Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, Alice Springs, 1984.

had done such a painting and were disappointed to find he knew nothing of it. He did however, direct us down to the Oasis Motel to look at a couple of paintings he had put up on exhibition there, one of which was *Kooralia*. Though we didn't hear it from Tim Leura himself until much later, and the work bore no visual resemblance to the one in the book, I felt as soon as I saw it that this was the one he had painted for us. I knew that I had to buy it, no matter what the cost. I was to experience the same compulsion many times over the year with other paintings in the collection, though never with quite such force.

In 1989 I took a trip to Napperby Station, where Clifford Possum and his brother the late Tim Leura were born and worked as stockmen during their younger years. On the way back we crossed the broad sandy bed of Napperby Creek, Tim Leura's birthplace and site of *Kooralia* — which I guess makes the painting the Aboriginal equivalent of a self-portrait. I had stopped to take some photos of the scene, when my eye was caught by an immense flock of birds — cockatoos maybe — which had alighted in a dead tree on the bank. It brought to mind a story Andrew Crocker used to relate about driving out from Papunya under the direction of one of the artists, who had just brought in a painting of the white cockatoo Dreaming for which he was custodian. At one point his guide indicated out the window a flock of white cockatoos in a tree, just as he had depicted them in his painting. Andrew suddenly realised that they were following the path of the Dreaming track set down in the painting, and that somehow the events recounted in it were part of a visionary present of which the artist had just given him a glimpse. The birds rose and then subsided back onto the dead branches at the sound of the shutter and I put my western toy away with a slightly eerie but exhilarating sense of the artist's presence in that place and the operation of forces not contained in one's philosophy.

The ethnographic (and pseudo-ethnographic) contextualisations which almost invariably accompany exhibitions of Western Desert art have tended to invite the unwary to primitivistic appraisals. However, they are also a vital gesture in the relevant direction for understanding these paintings' capacity to transcend the frameworks of western criticism. Western artists with something to say in their art must engage in an oppressive, because hopeless, attempt to deny their art its status as ritual objects in some debased western religion of property. The Papunya Tula painters have no need to deny their work such a role, since it is an extension of their own scheme of things — in which the trade in such objects *is* the medium in which the culture's imaginative visions circulate.

Utz also observes that once established, the collection 'held him prisoner'.[3] In a different sense perhaps, that has also been our experience. When the recognition which we had so ardently advocated did finally come and Papunya Tula artists could command prices comparable to their non-Aboriginal counterparts in mainstream Australian art, the level of financial support we could collectively muster for the painting enterprise was insignificant in the rapidly expanding market for these works. We already had hundreds of paintings, more than we knew what to do with — literally, because public art galleries and museums all around Australia were now enthusiastically buying up the most recent Western Desert art through the artists' companies. This was an important development for a whole range of reasons, not the least of them its contribution to the legitimation of Western Desert art as 'high culture'. But it has forced us to rethink the destiny of the paintings we now have. The dream that they would one day hang in the National Gallery for all to see faltered early with the realisation that there was just no room to hang them, except in the storage vaults. Loans to major travelling shows such as the *Dreamings* exhibition gave wide exposure to some of the very finest works, which public institutions are generally unwilling to supply for such purposes from their own collections. But contemporary art world practice, requiring that the hand of the museum curator be visible in the selection of works for such survey exhibitions, militates against the paintings ever being shown as a comprehensive and representative collection spanning two decades of Western Desert art. As with the thousands of Papunya paintings before them whose obscure destinations had inspired our efforts at collecting in the first place, our custodianship of them began to devolve towards an Aboriginal model of the secret keeping place for sacred boards. For a long time we acquiesced in this development, finding the strain of maintaining a constant vigil over them less than the anxiety of separation. Ultimately however, such a fate was unacceptable.

It is said that a generation ago, when planes first appeared over the lands of the Western Desert tribes, a group of old men looked skywards and expressed the view that this would indeed be a fit means of transportation for the sacred boards they were carrying to a ceremony. This exhibition begins our exploration of new ways to discharge the obligation acquired with the paintings — by taking their message to the world.

> They want them as souvenirs to hang on their walls, but they don't realise that the paintings represent the country, all of this vast land.[4]

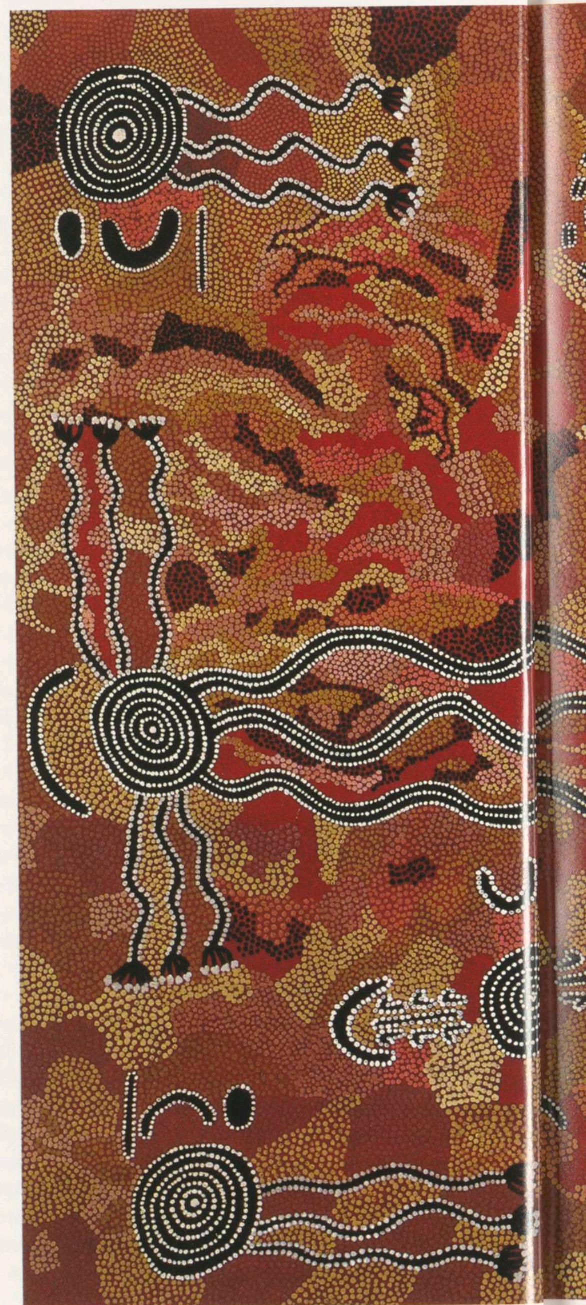
Vivien Johnson

3. Chatwin, op. cit., p. 90.
4. Michael Jagamara Nelson. Interviewed Sydney, 1986, for the film *State of the Art*, Illuminations, London, 1987.

Jack JAKAMARRA Ross, c.1925
Warlpiri, Warlpitarli
Yarl, Ngarlajiyi, Pamapardu & Marlu Jukurrpa (Bush Potato, Bush Carrot, Flying Ant & Kangaroo Dreamings) 1988
Acrylic on canvas, 125 x 183 cm

Jack has chosen to paint a number of his Dreamings in the one painting to represent their spatial relation to one another in the landscape. On the left is the Mt Singleton area — the central circular motif being Waputarli, the home of the Ngarlajiyi (Bush Carrot or *Vigna lanceolata*) plant; its roots and Dreaming paths extend towards Ngamirliri in one direction and Yintaramurru in another. An old man Jakamarra is shown travelling towards Mawurrji (now a soakage) to dig for Yarla (Bush Potato or *Ipomea costata*) in the centre of the painting. On the right is Yamaparnta, one of the sites of Yarla Dreaming belonging to Jakamarra/Jupurrula.

At the bottom right-hand corner of the painting are people digging for Yarla. Towards the centre bottom and centre top is Pamapardu — Flying Ant Dreaming from Yuwinji that goes underground at Mawurrji — emerging in the east. At the upper right-hand and lower left-of-centre areas of the painting the Marlu-Kangaroo Dreaming from Pujakiriki is shown. A Nakamarra kangaroo and her joey were sitting down — the son playfully climbing in and out of her pouch. *(Annotation supplied with the painting by Warlukurlangu Artists.)*



catalogue

Note: the language group/tribe of each artist (e.g. Pintupi) precedes place of birth (e.g. Haasts Bluff).
Where a work has previously been exhibited, the exhibition and venue is given after the annotation.

1

Old Walter Tulpulpa TJAMPITJINPA c.1910-81
Pintupi
Water Dreaming 1971
Acrylic on chipboard, 10 x 30 cm (irreg.)

Acquired in 1981 as a gift from Geoff Bardon, this very early work is by one of the elders who authorised the design work for the Papunya school mural. Mounted on cracked glass covered in hessian, it bears out Geoff Bardon's assertion that every conceivable painting surface in the settlement was put to use in this initial period: these were the only materials left for framing. Old Walter was a senior custodian of the Water Dreaming that runs through Kalipinypa, west of Papunya. Like most of his paintings, this is a depiction of a classic water iconograph, executed in the bright yellow and orange, as the artist tries out the range of introduced pigments.

2

Johnny Warangula TJUPURRULA c.1925
Luritja, Ilpilli
Water Dreaming 1972
Acrylic on board, 61 x 66 cm

The artist's birthplace lies in good water country around the Ehrenberg Ranges near the WA border, and his work often depicts Water Dreaming subjects. Produced at the beginning of the Papunya movement by one of its pioneer artists, this painting uses the techniques of overpainting of both the dots — with other dots — and aspects of the design with dots to create a 'floating world' effect which literally represents the rain and clouds and the regenerated landscape of the Water Dreaming cycle. Subtly coextensive with the overdotted surface are the wavy lines representing water. The bars at the top left are clouds, and the dots generally are background vegetation. In *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Geoff Bardon commented: 'Johnny's work best characterises the transition that has occurred in my time with the painting men. He was consciously visual and aimed at narrative simultaneity, where his special brilliance and enthusiasm make him unique. Drawing with a brush involves skill, and his early work shows clumsy method. However, he always showed great assurance in his direct approach and expansion of his stories. His calligraphic line and smearing brushwork is accompanied by dotted ornamentation. He gradually reduces these linear elements to achieve visual results using dots and overdotting. This becomes an intensely personal style of tremulous illusion, and his stories are narratives of great visual power.' The artist was a major and influential force in the painting movement till the mid '80s, and is still an active painter, often assisted nowadays by his wife Gladys Warangula Napanangka. A 3.7 metre Johnny Warangula canvas was the first major purchase by the Australian National Gallery of a Western Desert painting.

3

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4

Kaapa TJAMPITJINPA 1920-89
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Goanna Dreaming c.1972-74
Acrylic on cardboard, 41 x 54 cm

The story of this painting concerns two pairs of goannas who went hunting, their spears (the four bars of black and yellow ochre at each end of the painting) indicating they were 'men-goannas'. Each pair is represented in silhouette-plan form, whilst the four U-shapes around the central roundels indicate the involvement of four actors. The head colourings of the two lizards identify one as the common 'white' sand goanna and the other as the 'black' goanna (Ilkamaru). The latter are usually black all over, but the artist has focussed on the head (and tail markings) as distinguishing features. Each pair of goannas was successful in the hunt, and in celebration of this success and their travels about their country (the features of which were in part created by their activities), they decided to hold a corroboree. The smaller concentric circles on the painting show the corroboree camps where body paint was applied; the larger one in the centre of the painting locates the position of the ceremonial pole, focal point of the corroboree. The five-toed tracks on either side of the wavy line of the goanna's tailmark show the four goannas travelling towards the creekbed country of the Rain Dreaming. The wavy lines with the short bars down the sides of the painting may be lightning and clouds. The flower-like patterns of dots are spinifex, associated with the artist's goanna-favoured country. The symmetry of the painting is typical of Kaapa's work and remains a dominant aspect of the work of most of the

Anmatjera artists. *(With thanks to Dick Kimber for supplying this interpretation.)*

Kaapa Tjampitjinpa was involved with the painting movement from its inception: he was the artist chosen by the other men to paint the mural on the Papunya school wall because of his mastery of the brush method. In 1974 Kaapa won the Caltex Art Award, the first public recognition the Papunya artists had received, and when Papunya Tula Artists was established as a company, Kaapa was chosen as the first Chairman. He painted continuously through the '70s and '80s.

5

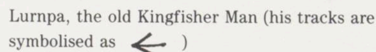
Billy Stockman TJAPALTJARRI c.1930
Anmatjera, Ilpitirri
Eagle Dreaming 1975
Acrylic on cotton duck, 48 x 163 cm

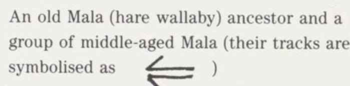
When this painting was purchased from the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Gallery in Sydney in 1978, it was said to be by Old Walter Tjampitjinpa, another of the senior men who gave the Honey Ant design for the school wall. Old Walter was blind when he died in 1981 and for some years before that commissioned other artists to paint his stories for him, including his wife Gladys Napanangka, Paddy Carroll — and Billy Stockman, whose large bold dotting is unmistakable in this canvas. Billy Stockman assisted Kaapa with the painting of the school mural, and by the mid '70s had developed a bold distinctive style within the traditional requirements. The muted brown colouring of this painting is unusual. It is a representation of a high blue hill near Yuendumu called Walkulpu and the Eagle Dreaming associated with this place, for which Old Walter was custodian, and after him Billy Stockman. It appears to be represented three times, perhaps at different episodes in the story, from an eagle's-eye view of the landscape. The eagle symbol shows the eagle totem ancestors, the artist's interpretation of the eagle approaching Walkulpu for a corroboree. The drama arising from this meeting would be enacted at the ceremony.

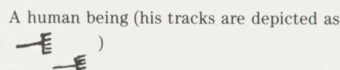
6

Long Jack Phillipus TJAKAMARRA c.1930
Warlpiri/Luritja, Kunatjarrayi
Tjikarri 1979
Acrylic on linen, 91 x 121 cm

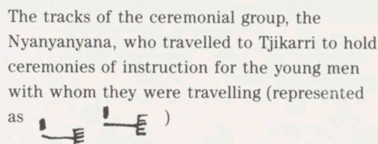
This is a complex and beautiful depiction of the mythological events that occurred in the vicinity of Tjikarri, a cave site far to the west of Alice Springs across the WA border. The main characters involved in the narrative are:

Lurnpa, the old Kingfisher Man (his tracks are symbolised as )

An old Mala (hare wallaby) ancestor and a group of middle-aged Mala (their tracks are symbolised as )

A human being (his tracks are depicted as )

Matinpilyangu, a giant dingo, the size of a horse (his tracks are symbolised as)

The tracks of the ceremonial group, the Nyanyanyana, who travelled to Tjikarri to hold ceremonies of instruction for the young men with whom they were travelling (represented as )

Lurnpa, the old Mala and Matinpilyangu are all ceremonial 'kings' and led the Tingari ceremonies that were conducted in the area. The Tingari is a vast song and ceremonial cycle common to many Western Desert groups. Mythological precedents are taught to the post-initiate young men as tribal 'law' in the course of the Tingari celebrations. Details are secret.

Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula [who also paints Tjikarri], suggested another mythological thread as represented in this painting. It tells of the adventures of Lurnpa, the old kingfisher, who was travelling with the group of Mala hare wallaby men in the vicinity of Tjikarri. The whole group was nearly perishing, for it was a dry time and they were carrying no water. Because Lurnpa had the advantage of flight, it was decided that he should go ahead to look for Minykulpa while the Mala herd waited in the shade of a tree. Minykulpa is a native chewing tobacco and is said to be very sustaining on long and tiring marches. However, Lurnpa betrayed the Mala and went to a rockhole where he drank the whole water supply.

The background dots symbolise the sandhill country in the vicinity of Tjikarri, while all other background dots indicate Wanki, Wirrkarrpa and Unguli, bush foods eaten by the mythological characters while in the vicinity of Tjikarri. *(From the annotation supplied with the painting, prepared by John Kean from Dick Kimber's notes.)*

Long Jack Phillipus assisted Kaapa and Billy Stockman in painting the school mural and has painted for Papunya Tula Artists for nearly two decades. In this painting, the artist has arranged the Dreamings associated with the site in a geographical relationship to one another to create an aerial map of the region and layout of the ceremonial ground. The all-white dots use a watery effect over red ochre to convey the pink of the sandhill country, while simultaneously referring to the composition of the ceremonial sandpainting. The bands down the sides of the painting are coded body paint designs and a stylised representation of a ceremonial pole. These details are perhaps puzzling almost a decade into the painting movement and the general secularisation of the painting language, but such casual reminders of higher levels of understanding of Aboriginal culture persist to this day.

7

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8

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9

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10

Tim Leura TJAPALTJARRI c.1939-84
Clifford Possum TJAPALTJARRI 1943
Anmatjera, Napperby Station
Two Dancing Men 1982
Acrylic on linen 91 x 101 cm

This is the last canvas Tim Leura painted for Papunya Tula Artists. He was taken to hospital before it was completed, and his brother Clifford Possum finished it for him. Their different styles — Tim Leura's delicate dots alongside Clifford Possum's bold neat ones — are clearly discernible.

The story of the painting concerns the two dancing figures in ceremonial dress at the

Paddy Sims JAPALJARRI 1916
Warlpiri, Kunajarrayi (Mt Nicker), south-west of Yuendumu
Ngaru Jukurrpa (Bush Plum Dreaming) 1986
Acrylic on cotton duck, 80 x 242 cm

The country of this Dreaming is Kunajarrayi (Mt Nicker) where two Dreamtime sisters (Napaljarris) were collecting ngaru (bush plum or *Solanum chippendalei*). The Napaljarris were digging in mulga country and made a rockhole called Katarra. Whilst standing in Kunajarrayi the elder sister made a lassoo from ngalyipi (snake vine) and tried to pull down Karrku (Mt Stanley) many kilometres away. She was unsuccessful but the younger sister tried and was able. It was in the very hot time of the year and they were a little crazed by the heat. The older sister carried her sibling home on her shoulders. *(Annotation supplied by Warlukurlangu Artists.)*

Beryl NAPANGARDI, c.1940,
Maggie NAPANGARDI, c.1920,
Margaret NAPANGARDI, c.1940
Warlpiri
Women's Ceremonies 1986
Acrylic on cotton duck, 170 x 190 cm

As one of the first group of large canvases painted by senior women of the Yuendumu community in early 1986 which announced the arrival of a new force in Western Desert art, this painting has a rich and important story to tell about women's ceremonial life in traditional Warlpiri society, details of which are not available at this time. Some indication of its contents may however be supplied.

The country of this Dreaming is Janyinki, west of Yuendumu, significant to Napangardi and Napanangka women who are the custodians of the Dreaming that created the area. The Dreaming story depicted in the painting describes the journey of a group of women of all ages who travelled east gathering food, collecting ngalyipi (*Tinosporo smilacina* or snake vine) and performing ceremonies as they travelled. The women began their journey at Minamina in the far west where digging sticks emerged from the ground. Taking these implements the women travelled east creating Janyinki and other sites. Their journey took them eventually beyond Warlpiri country. (*Notes supplied with the painting by Warlukurlangu Artists.)*

bottom left. They are father and son — one a Tjungarrayi and the other a Tjapaltjarri. Figures are rarely depicted in Papunya paintings generally, and in the work of these artists in particular. The full ceremonial dress of these figures is even rarer. Both men have ceremonial head-dresses with sacred boards bearing what appear to be Water Dreaming designs. They carry 'number seven' or 'killer' boomerangs as well as the more familiar returning boomerangs. Their bodies are painted with other designs and they are wearing pubic belts and leg decorations.

The concentric circles at the centre of the painting indicate the site of the ceremonies at Red Hill, some 16 kilometres south of Mt Allan. A number of objects used in the cermony are shown around the site: a hairstring pubic belt, two headbands, boomerangs, a spear, a spear thrower, a shield, and a stone axe.

Stories of Australian Art, Commonwealth Institute, London, 1988.

11

Paddy Carroll TJUNGURRAYI 1920s
Warlpiri, Yarrungkanyi
Flying Ant Dreaming 1981
Acrylic on linen, 180 x 120 cm

This painting celebrates the Flying Ant (Wantunuma) Dreaming associated with the site of Wantunumu, a waterhole in the sandhills west of Yuendumu. The concentric circles depict the holes in the earth where the Flying Ant ancestors enter and leave the ground. The oval shapes are their wings in the air — and also perhaps the shields which the Flying Ants carried.

Paddy Carroll Tjungurrayi began painting in 1979, learning by watching the other artists. In the intervening decade, he has established himself as one of the leading Papunya Tula artists, a consistent and meticulous painter. His extensive ceremonial knowledge is indicated by the range of Dreaming stories depicted in his paintings, including Witchetty Grub, Wallaby, Bush Potato, Possum, Goanna, Man, Woman, Sweet Potato, Bush Grapes, Carpet Snake, and Budgerigar. In 1980, he travelled to Sydney with Dinny Nolan Tjampitjinpa to make the first ground painting to be seen outside the Western Desert. He was one of five Papunya Tula artists selected to submit designs for the mosaic for the new Parliament House in Canberra. He painted the concentric circles included in the design of the $A10 note issued to commemorate the Bicentennial in 1988. His paintings are included in many major private and public collections including Parliament House, the Australian National Gallery, the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Holmes à Court collection and many others.

12

Dick Pantimus TJUPURRULA early '40s-1983
Mayatjarra/Luritja
Water and Wallaby Dreaming 1981
Acrylic on linen 182.5 x 182.5 cm

This major work depicts Water and Wallaby Dreamings related to the sites of Tjikarri [cf.6] and Kalipinya, near the Western Australia/Northern Territory border. The central design is the classic Water Dreaming iconograph of the water, shown as wavy lines, running from waterhole to waterhole — shown as concentric circles. The pink area inside the design represents sand dunes. The ancestral rainmaker sits at each end calling up the clouds and lightning that bring the rain. Kalipinya was the site of a great storm in the Dreamtime — the ancestor of all the storms that arise in the desert. The wavy line running the length of the painting is lightning and the short bars along it are clouds. The tracks of an aquatic bird, the egret, are shown feeding on the rain-stimulated vegetation including wangi, a type of flower, beside the waterholes and streams.

The designs on either side of the Water Dreaming pertain to the initiation ceremonies held at the site of Tjikarri in the Dreamtime. The concentric circles with two curved lines coming out from them on the lefthand side of the painting are symbols for the hare wallaby or mala, the protruding lines being the wallaby's whiskers. The tracks of wallaby in flight pass through the middle of this set of circles. The initiates are shown as concentric circles on the righthand side of the painting. Their tracks are shown moving all around a landscape dotted with claypans (the pink patches). The dead wallaby which they catch is depicted beside one of the camps. The footprints of the ancestral Dingo can also be seen coming in from the right.

Dick Pantimus was one of the coming new generation of Papunya artists, whose work demonstrates the complexity of the Papunya style in the early '80s. It contains the stylistic features of double dotting and submerged colour changes (the red and black of the background being over-dotted but still visible) which are also found in the work of older artists like Tim Leura and Johnny Warangula. In the manner of all Western Desert painting, it reconstructs the Central Australian landscape as a map of its Aboriginal significance. The artist was assisted with the background dotting by Charlie Egalie and his close friend the late Ray Inkamala. The entire painting was completed in about three days. In 1981 pink paintings were unheard of, and it was left in the storeroom at Papunya Tula Artists for two years, before being sold off at cost price. Since then, it has appeared in several major publications on Aboriginal Art including the *Dreamings* catalogue, been the subject of court action over its reproduction on a T-shirt, and made the front cover of *Vogue International*.

13

Charlie Egalie TJAPALTJARRI c.1940
Warlpiri/Luritja, NW of Mt Leibig
Budgerigar Dreaming 1983
Acrylic on linen 48 x 163 cm

This painting shows the Budgerigar Dreaming at the site of Partilirri to the north-west of the Treuer Range. The roundels are the camps of the birds and the tracks show their movement within the area as they fly about looking for food.

Rains which fall in the early winter are relatively rare, but when they occur they promote magnificent wildflower seasons and heavy seeding of grasses. Budgerigars, which are sometimes absent from the desert areas, breed prolifically, and form large flocks. When the hot weather arrives and the smaller waters dry up they are forced to focus on the major remaining water supplies. Immense wheeling flocks, brilliant in their green and gold, gather. In such gatherings, they are similar in their 'coming together' to the mythological ancestors. Here they are likened to the gatherings of big boys who are being drawn together for ceremonies associated with their initiation into manhood.

As the specific stories associated with this site are of a secret nature, no further detail was given. *(From* Wildbird Dreaming, *A. Amadio & R. Kimber, Greenhouse, Melbourne, 1988.)*

A painting of the same Dreaming, depicting the young men gathered at the campsites receiving instruction from the senior men, was used on the front cover of *Wildbird Dreaming*. Charlie Egalie has been painting for Papunya Tula Artists since 1972, when he began

working alongside Billy Stockman, Kaapa and Johnny Warangula. His country lies north-west of Papunya around Yuendumu. Paddy Sims Tjapaltjarri [cf.46], one of the leading Warlukurlangu artists, is a close relative.

14

Two Bob TJUNGARRAYI c.1940
Warlpiri, Haasts Bluff area
Goanna Dreaming 1983
Acrylic on linen, 183 x 152 cm

The mythological site celebrated in this depiction is Jurrulyitji located in the spinifex country to the north of Mt Wedge.

This painting celebrates the activities of a group of Kanawirri or Goanna ancestors in the vicinity of Jurrulyitji. The artist said that the goannas would emerge from their holes (homes) in the ground and search the bases of the clumps of spinifex grass for caterpillars. After having a good feed of caterpillars the goannas entered other holes at Yurrulyitji.

These designs are used as ground and body paint designs for ceremonies. The straight bars are the marks made by the tail of the goanna, the oblong shapes represent the goanna fat, and the wavy lines show the path of travel of the Goanna ancestor within the ceremonial area. *(Original notes supplied with the painting, written by Daphne Williams, Art Coordinator of Papunya Tula Artists since 1982.)*

Two Bob Tjungarrayi is one of a group of younger Warlpiri artists which also includes Don Tjungurrayi, Charlie Marshall Tjungarrayi, Maxie Tjampitjinpa and Michael Jagamara Nelson, who began to paint in Papunya in the early '80s. During this period, the Warlpiri artists developed a striped style of background dotting, which often appears in the work of Two Bob's stepbrother Paddy Carroll Tjungarrayi.

15

Don TJUNGURRAYI mid '40s
Warlpiri, Yuendumu
Witi Dreaming 1984
Acrylic on linen, 48 x 165 cm

Witi refers to the long ceremonial pole attached to the legs of ritual participants with nyalyippi-nyalyippi, a string made from the stems of a vine-like plant and used only by initiated men. A large group of men have carried the witi pole to Yantjilpirri, indicated by the central roundel, where the site has been prepared for the ceremony. The wavy lines are the marks they made on the sand pulling the witi along.

Don Tjungurrayi began painting for Papunya Tula Artists while staying at Three Mile Bore in the late '70s with Paddy Carroll, with whom he had shared a working life as a stockman and fencing contractor. In 1986 he won the Alice Springs Art Prize. This painting has a classical calm and severity of design, achieved by perfect pitching of story, design elements and technique.

16

William SANDY 1944
Pitjanjatjara, Ernabella
Dingo Dreaming 1983
Acrylic on linen, 182 x 152 cm

Wingkilina is a central place for both Dingo Dreaming and the mythology of the Two Travelling Sisters (Kungka Kutjarra). These women travelled over vast areas of the desert, performing ceremonies at night at important sites. You can see the footprints of the women and the dingo pups quite clearly in the painting. The background dots represent the country. *(Original annotation supplied by Papunya Tula Artists with painting.)*

William Sandy (apart from Thomas Stevens, who painted for the company only briefly) is the only Pitjanjatjara artist with Papunya Tula Artists, and until recently was the only Pitjanjatjara artist involved with the painting movement. He began painting regularly in the early '80s. This painting was one of several Papunya paintings commissioned from the company for the new Yulara tourist complex at Uluru, but was rejected by the management (perhaps because dingoes are a sensitive subject at the Rock since Azaria Chamberlain's disappearance), and was later purchased from the Aboriginal Artists' Agency storeroom in Sydney. William Sandy's work has recently been shown in New York at the John Weber Gallery and in a solo exhibition at the Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery in Melbourne.

17

Charlie Marshall TJUNGARRAYI late '40s
Warlpiri, Kunatjarrayi
Snake Dreaming 1985
Acrylic on canvas, 152 x 60 cm

The Dreaming story depicted in this painting belonged to the artist's grandfather. It concerns events at the site of Kunatjarrayi, west of Yuendumu, and deals with the men's side of the Witchetty Grub story, in which the witchetty grub turns into a snake. In the centre to the right of the painting are boomerangs and a spear. The background dotting represents the body paint of the participants in the ceremony, but also shows some of the topography of the site, including the greenish hill shape.

18

Maxie TJAMPITJINPA c.1949
Warlpiri, Haasts Bluff
Women's Dreaming 1986
Acrylic on linen, 183 x 121 cm

Maxie Tjampitjinpa has depicted in this painting secret women's ceremonies held at Karrinyarra (Mt Wedge), 40 kilometres north of Papunya. The site is associated with several Dreamings including a lovemaking ceremony. The name 'karrinyarra' means, literally, 'love song'.

On the top of Mt Wedge is a large natural stone platform. A man or woman sitting there, and chanting a particular song, will become irresistible to the one he/she is pursuing. Several Warlpiri men claim to have wooed their future wives by going to the top of Karrinyarra and chanting a love song.

The central roundel represents the dancing grounds of the women. A nulla nulla (a long wooden club or digging stick) is placed at the very centre of the circle, and the women dance around this. *(Original notes supplied with painting, prepared by Assistant Art Coordinator Annette Boyes.)*

This painting, and the preceding one by Charlie Marshall exemplify to perfection a quicker style of dotting, somewhat irreverently dubbed the 'phone booth' style after the graffiti-proof interiors of public telephone boxes in Australia (and kids at Papunya are inveterate graffitists), which has evolved since the mid '80s, mainly around Alice Springs.

Here it invokes the dust stirred up by the dancers' feet. The earliest example of background dotting that is just the fast imprint of the brush is the work of Musty Siddick, who used this technique in the late '70s. However, there are many examples of this type of brushwork in the paintings of the early '70s, to depict objects covered with down and spinifex and ochres, or simply using the brush with fluidity and skill. As with most of the innovations related to technique it can be traced back to its origins in the world that supports the painting enterprise — although, in Maxie Tjampitjinpa's case, experimentation arising out of an always prolific talent is also a significant factor. The reduction of the design to a single central circle is symptomatic of a 'post-narrative' phase of the painting movement during the mid '80s, in which artists exchanged the narrative complexity which was the dominant style of Papunya painting from the mid '70s into the '80s for a pictorial minimalism. Out of this came refinement of technique and often a return to earlier styles with new confidence.

Papunya Tula Artists, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988.

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20

Michael JAGAMARA Nelson 1947
Warlpiri, Vaughan Springs
Possum Love Story 1986
Acrylic on linen, 183 x 183 cm

This painting is a depiction of a very large ceremony performed by ancestor Possum Men at the site of Mowitji, near Vaughan Springs, west of Yuendumu Community. The central motif depicts Mowitji and the small roundels represent the main places of the ceremony. The sinuous lines and footprints show the tracks of the Possum Men as they performed the ceremony.

Part the mythology of this ceremony is the story of the Possum Man and Possum Woman of the Tjangala and Nakamarra kinship subsections who fell in love during the time of the ceremony. They were in the wrong kinship relationship to marry and prepared to run away towards Kiwikurra in the west. In the painting this story is shown by the two V-shaped arcs. The tracks travelling horizontally across the centre of the painting depict the two ancestor Kangaroo Men who passed through the area during the ceremony. *(Notes supplied by Papunga Tula Artists with the painting.)*

Possum Love Story is a very secret and important story. The iconography present here reveals none of this underlying content. It can perhaps be felt in the air-filled, energising impression the work gives off. The strong impact is as much due to the mandala-like structure of the design as to the artist's rendition of clouds hovering between the viewer and the land. The design too seems to be suspended above the ground yet part of it. The artist intentionally painted the impression of clouds viewed from the aeroplane while returning from the Sydney Biennale in 1986. The clouds are especially interesting, because they almost quote a *Man's Love Story* painting by Clifford Possum from 1974, which uses clouds in exactly the same way [cf. also 7]. This is just one aspect of Michael Nelson's style that has similarities to Clifford Possum's. Circles without dots, tracks without dots to highlight them, and little bits of figurative detail are all found in the work of both artists. However, both artists produce such a wide range of work in many styles that overlapping is to be expected.

Stories of Australian Art, Commonwealth Institute, London, 1988.

21

Thomas Stevens TJAKAMARRA late '40s
Pitjanjatjara
Possum and Kangaroo Story 1985
Acrylic on linen, 152.5 x 61 cm

The central roundel in this painting depicts Kilparinga (Lake Wilson), a small salt lake to the west of the Amata community in northern South Australia. A group of Aboriginal people were travelling and hunting in this area. They managed to spear and wound one of the kangaroos. The kangaroo took off leaving a trail of blood, and the hunters followed him. They tracked him round the edge of the lake, through blue-bush country. This is the blue section of the work. As they rounded the lake, they passed a group of Kuningka (Native Cat ancestors) who were painting and decorating a large ceremonial pole. The Kuningka took off in a fright and travelled south. The kangaroo entered a cave and travelled underground to avoid his pursuers. He placed a magic white stone on a tree outside the cave to frighten the hunters, but they disregarded this and followed him underground. The grey areas represent hills and the cream-coloured areas are clouds.

Thomas Stevens uses both European and Aboriginal styles in this painting, reflecting his versatility as an artist. For many years, he worked in the literature production centre in Papunya, producing illustrations for children's books written in the local dialect. For some, this style of painting is seen as a degenerate form of the art, falling as it does between European and Aboriginal styles. Perhaps it is the first example of 'Western Desert kitsch'. *(Catalogue notes for Wagga Wagga show by Billy Marshall.)*

To offset Billy Marshall-Stoneking's disparaging final comment on work that may now be seen as prophetic of developments in Western Desert art over the next decade, it is worth mentioning that the headmaster of Papunya School described Tommy Stevens as a 'genius' on the basis of his contacts with him in the Literature Production Centre. With its quotations from the work of older artists — overpainting of design elements, cloud shapes trailing across a curving picture plane which arches above the naturalistic figures in relief like a vast firmament — this painting sketches out directions which few artists inexperienced in the Western Desert style have dared to take.

Papunya Tula Artists, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988.

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23

Natalie Corby NUNGARRAYI 1967
Warlpiri, Papunya
Kunatjarrayi Women's Dreaming 1988
Acrylic on linen, 89 cm diameter

This painting depicts a Witchetty Grub story at the important women and men's site of Kunatjarrayi, west of Yuendumu. The central circle is a rainbow, the wave-motion-like form coming in from the top right is the light emanating from it. The long form edged with white coming in from the top left is a creek and the shapes coming out from the other side of the central circle are rushing water from the creek. The patched areas across the centre of the painting are bush tucker. Two women are represented at the base of the painting with digging sticks and coolamons, in which they are carrying witchetty grubs, with which the

site of Kunatjarrayi is associated. Another woman is shown at the top of the painting seated beside a coolamon also containing witchetty grubs. The small circles beside the women at the top and bottom of the painting are rocks.

This painting was intended by the artist to be submitted for the Moët and Chandon Award, but was not completed in time. The realistic figures (recalling those in the Tommy Stevens as well as the stylised European representations of Aboriginals which abound in the Alice Springs tourist shops), with their orientation on the central circle, comment on both the shape of the canvas and the horizonlessness of Western Desert landscape painting. Taught to paint by her father Charlie Egalie in the early '80s, Natalie Corby was one of the first women in Papunya to begin painting in her own right — and is still one of the youngest women doing so.

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25

Shorty Lungkata TJUNGURRAYI c.1920-87
Pintupi
Two Kangaroos Story 1972
Acrylic on masonite, 60 x 78 cm (irreg.)

Shorty Lungkata was one of the last men to join the original painting group, some time after the other Pintupi men had begun fulltime painting. His work from the beginning was bold, simple, and singularly intense. The use of trailing lines of watery yellow ochre dots in this painting shows an expressive hand and experimentation with colour effects at a very early stage in his handling of the new painting materials. Like the John Tjakamarra, the painting can be read as a ceremonial ground painting design, as body paint for the ceremony and as an abstract representation of the significant landforms at the site in question. The original annotation identified the curving arcs down the sides of the painting as lying down places for two old Kangaroo Men, and the parallel lines joining them as creeks. The white patches in the background dotting are salt.

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Old Tutuma TJAPANGATI c.1915-87
Pintupi/Pitjanjatjara, west of Lake McDonald
Kangaroo Dreaming 1981
Acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 152.5 cm

An important ceremonial leader for the Pintupi/Pitjanjatjara, Old Tutuma continued for over a decade to paint his Dreaming stories with the same loose but powerful style seen in this painting. In 1981, Old Tutuma travelled to Sydney with Old Mick Namarari and Nosepeg Tjupurrula for the first 'breakaway' exhibition of Papunya paintings at Sid's Gallery, organised by Billy Marshall-Stoneking, who was at the time a teacher at Papunya School. The show included this work and several other paintings by Tutuma, who was having difficulty obtaining canvases from the Papunya Tula art adviser on account of the very 'messiness' for which some more recently developed Western Desert painting communities have since attracted favourable attention. It was in Tutuma's case a combination of a boundless enthusiasm for the activity of painting, and the encroaching blindness which at the very end of his life ended a prolific output. His skin brother Andrew Bullen Tjapangati assisted Old Tutuma in painting up the design, which depicts the very secret/sacred Kangaroo ceremony, which stands at the centre of the men's ceremonial life. The tracks of the Kangaroo Men are clearly indicated through the centre of the painting, stopping to drink at waterholes and to eat the plentiful bush food after a period of good rain. The arc shapes around the edges of the painting, added to the design by Old Tutuma, are rainbows. The small circles represent the Tingari Men who carried the Kangaroo law throughout the country.

30

Freddy West TJAKAMARRA early '40s
Pintupi, Kiwirrkura
Tingari Story 1982
Acrylic on linen, 183 x 122 cm

This painting depicts the Tingari story at a site called Tjulurunya, a large soakage area in Western Australia far to the west of Sandy Blight Junction.

The mythology associated with this site concerns two young 'doctor men' who killed evil spirits that were a threat to people. To protect themselves while sleeping at night the two men stood up their ceremonial objects and drew their 'doctor men objects' from their stomachs and set them up around. One of the men was a Black Goanna ancestor. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists.)*

The opalescent surface of this painting and the angled lines of travel connecting up the circles have been distinguishing characteristics of Freddy West's work since the mid '70s. He joined the painting movement during Geoff Bardon's time, working with fellow countrymen Yala Yala Gibbs and John Tjakamarra in West Camp. After a break of some years in the late '70s, he resumed painting at the beginning of the '80s. Born in the desert around present-day Kiwirrkura, he was one of the moving forces behind establishment of a community there in the mid '80s.

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Limpi TJAPANGATI c.1930-85
Pintupi, Mereenie, near Haasts Bluff
Bush Onion Dreaming 1982/3
Acrylic on linen, 122 x 183 cm

Limpi Tjapangati was one of the original painting group at Papunya who developed a distinctive style, which remained constant over a long period of painting. One feature of this style was the use of alternating bands of brown and yellow in the background dotting, as seen in this painting. The striped style is also traceable through the work of Warlpiri artists like Paddy Carroll and Two Bob Tjungarrayi — and Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula, another Pintupi artist who for a time remained

like Limpi in the Papunya area after the establishment of Kintore. Until his dramatic death in 1985 — he collapsed while addressing a Land Council meeting — Limpi lived with his family at Haasts Bluff, a stunning outcrop of rock adjoining what is known as Round Hill, about 50 km east of Papunya, influencing other painters in the Haasts Bluff region with his style of broad stripes. Hearts and diamond shapes, explained by the artist as traditional symbols, made a startling appearance in his work in the early '80s. In this painting, the Bush Onion (yalka) plant is shown as it grows underground at a site near the Belt Range, Northern Territory. The white radiating lines are the tubers of the plant. The patterns running through the centre of the painting are probably coded information of ceremonial significance. They were not explained, though the artist did say that he was the sole owner of this design, and that it was a very important story.

33

George TJAPANANGKA
Pintupi
Two Women Dreaming 1986
Acrylic on linen, 152.5 x 152.5 cm

This painting depicts the two travelling sisters who roamed all over the central part of Australia in the Dreamtime. The footprints of the sisters are evident, and the roundels represent the numerous rockholes, etc., visited by the sisters during their journeying.

The painting is particularly striking because of its meticulousness. The tiny size of the dot work and the light effect created near the centre of the painting reflect individual style and interpretation. Most paintings are as recognisable to the initiated men as signatures, and a painter's work is often praised or appreciated in terms of his/her style of painting. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists.)*

George Tjapanangka is one of the newer Pintupi artists who began painting in the early '80s, but his style has all the delicacy and detail of the earliest paintings. This painting has more circles than most and a vast interlocking field of dots. Its yellow ochre colouring against the black background and intricate contouring creates the effect of a gold inlay.

Papunya Tula Paintings, Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, 1988.

34

Willy TJUNGURRAYI c.1930
Pintupi, Patjantja, south-west of Kintore
Tingari Story 1986
Acrylic on linen, 360 x 240 cm

No specific details of the story of this painting are at hand at this time. It depicts the travels of the Tingari, a group of mythical characters of the Dreaming, who travelled over vast stretches of the country, performing rituals and creating and shaping particular sites. The Tingari Men were usually accompanied by novices, and their travels and adventures are enshrined in a number of song cycles. These mythologies form part of the teachings of the post-initiate youths today as well as providing explanations for contemporary customs. The Tingari ceremonies are of a secret nature, and no further information was given by the artist.

This standardised account of the significance of the Tingari Men is supplied by Papunya Tula Artists with paintings depicting events in the Tingari cycle. Willy Tjungurrayi has included a vast array of sites in the painting, probably around his traditional country in the region of Lake McDonald, a short distance to the south-west of Kintore. In mythological times, a large group of Tingari Men made camp at Lake McDonald during their journeying from the Peterman Range towards Kintore.

Willy Tjungurrayi began painting for Papunya Tula Artists in 1976, and has since emerged as one of the senior Pintupi artists. He and his family joined the move back to the Pintupi homelands, settling at Kintore in the early '80s. This is one of his largest canvases. From a distance, the white dots in the centre of the concentric circles glow like a star map suspended above the muted browns and the blacks of the desert at night. The work took many months to complete, and shows the hands of fellow Pintupi artists John Tjakamarra and Simon Tjakamarra, in the background dotting.

35

Turkey Tolson TJUPURRULA c. 1942
Pintupi/Luritja, Haasts Bluff area
Tingari Ceremony at Wilkinkarra 1986
Acrylic on canvas, 305 x 198 cm

This painting celebrates the mythological events occurring at Wilkinkarra or Lake Mackay during the Dreaming. Lake Mackay is a huge, flat, mostly dry area far to the north-west of Alice Springs, just over the Northern Territory/Western Australian border. The size of the lake bed was conveyed by the artist, who retold stories of how in recent times Wilkinkarra could only be crossed if supplies of water and firewood for three days and four nights were carried by the small family bands on their march. The mythology related to this site tells of how large groups of Tingari men came from the bush in the areas surrounding Wilkinkarra and gathered at a cave near the lake bed.

The Tingari is a mytho-ritual complex or series of traditions of deep religious significance. They are widely distributed through the Western Desert and are basically secret-sacred. For this reason, details relating to the Tingari myths, songs and rituals may not be publicly revealed. Generally, the Tingari are a group of mythical characters of the Dreaming, who travelled over vast stretches of country, moving from waterhole to waterhole. Usually followed by a group of Tingari Women and accompanied by novices, Tingari Men instituted rituals and created and shaped particular sites, as well as providing explanations for contemporary custom. Their travels and adventures are enshrined in a number of song cycles, some with hundreds of verses.

While the Tingari complex is linked to other desert rituals, it has its own unique character. However, its content suggests that it is associated with the widespread fertility rituals found further north.

With the Tingari were a group of post-initiate novices. The novices or Maliki were gathered in a specially prepared area known as Kanala, and the ceremonies of instruction commenced. The Tingari Men were decorated with designs associated with the ceremonies and all had their hair tied back in a bundle at the nape of their necks, again in accordance with the related 'law'. Among the group of Tingari was one old man of the Tjakamarra subsection group who spun human hair into wool with a small cross-spindle.

A group of women who had come from the west heard the Tingari singing at their bush camps. The women called out softly to the men, 'Kutu kutu kutu kutu.' After a time the men and women separated, the women continuing their travels to the east, which are celebrated at many of the places where they stopped to hold ceremonies. The women's epic journey took them over the traditional areas of the Pintupi, Kukatja, Ngalia, Anmatjera and Alliawarra groups, their travels terminating at sites to the north-east of Alice Springs.

Two other mythological strands were mentioned in association with this site, but their relationship to the principal narrative

was not made clear. The Watikutjarra — literally 'men-two' — were said to have been at Wilkinkarra during the same period in the Dreaming. A huge mythological snake who came from Mt Wedge to the east was also said to have entered the ground at this site. The owners of this site belong to the Tjakamarra, Tjupurrula, Tjangala and Tjampitjinpa subsection groups.

Few specific details were given of the decorative elements of this painting as they belong to the secret-sacred world of the men. However, it was said that the sets of concentric circles represent the men's ceremonial areas at Wilkinkarra, while the adjoining lines indicate Ngalyipi, or bark rope supplied by the women, which was used as a key prop in the performance of the instruction ceremonies. *(From notes supplied by Papunya Tula Artists with a 1979 painting by the same artist of the same site, and of similar size and complexity; probably written by John Kean, then Art Coordinator of Papunya Tula Artists.)*

Turkey Tolson has been painting for Papunya Tula Artists since the beginning of the '70s. While some of his work is amongst the most innovative and figurative of the painting movement [cf.38], he also paints in a severely traditional and highly abstract style of circles and connecting lines, as in this painting. In his classical canvases, the areas of dotted infilling come forward visually, and the grid of circles and lines recedes — a striking and unusual effect which is also sometimes seen in the work of Anatjari Tjakamarra and Charlie Tjapangati. Turkey Tolson is currently Chairman of Papunya Tula Artists.

The contrast between the length and detail of the 1979 annotation and the brevity and generality of documentation now supplied with the paintings is striking — an index of the shift in emphasis from ethnology to aesthetics in the intervening decade.

36

Yala Yala Gibbs TJUNGURRAYI c.1920
Pintupi, Iltuturunga, west of the Kintore Ranges
Two Snakes Dreaming 1988
Acrylic on canvas, 121 x 212 cm

The snakes depicted in this painting travelled in the early morning from Mungawanni to the site of Patantja, a soakage west of Kintore in the Gibson Desert. The story associated with the painting belongs to the Tingari cycle, details of which are secret-sacred, so no further information could be given [cf.35].

Yala Yala has been painting since the beginning of the painting movement, and some exceptional work of his from the early '70s has been included in recent survey exhibitions such as *Face of the Centre* at the National Gallery of Victoria. Though some of the older Pintupi artists did change the way they painted in the mid to late '80s, Yala Yala was one of a number of other artists who kept rigorously to the original achievement of scaled down complex versions of ground paintings. This painting of Snake Dreaming contains all the elements of a classic Pintupi painting, with three different coloured snakes set against an unusual maroon colour occasionally produced by the red oxide paints that the artists usually use. The artist is a man of large stature, and in his work the sense of scale dominates, along with an often recognisable bend or joint in the works, like a number of movements within the picture meeting with some uncertainty.

37

Riley Major TJANGALA late '40s
Pintupi, south of Mt Leibig
Snake Dreaming 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 182 x 182 cm

This painting depicts events at the site of Watikutjarra (Two Men) around Lake McDonald. The right-hand snake is Tjampitjinpa; the one on the left Tjakamarra, who travelled from Lake McDonald across the sandhills. During the time of the rains, there was an argument involving bushfire and a fight, in which one man threw the other from the lake. The figure of a man in the centre of the painting is old Tala, who sat in the middle of the lake, and is there now as a hill.

One of a new generation of Pintupi artists who began painting for Papunya Tula Artists a year after the establishment of Kintore settlement in 1981, Riley Major was taught to paint on canvas by his older brother, the late George Tjangala, who had begun painting for the company in Papunya in the mid '70s and died in 1989.

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Narpula Scobie NAPURRURLA late '50s
Pintupi, Haasts Bluff region
Women's Dreaming 1989
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

This painting shows a Women's Dreaming at Walungurru (Kintore). The yellow ochre and white striped oval at the centre of the painting is a depiction of one of the women's painted dancing boards, and the wavy brown and yellow bands above and below it are the hair string belts they wear for the ceremonies. The lines of paired footprints indicate the paths of the dancers, and the double U-shapes show the women seated, again in formation for the ceremony. The short bar shapes are the digging sticks of the women sitting opposite each other in the dance.

Narpula Scobie is married to Johnny Scobie, also a painter, and is the younger sister of Turkey Tolson Tjupurrurla. She is one of the few Pintupi women to paint for Papunya Tula Artists, and was one of the first women to start painting for the company at Papunya in the early '80s.

40

Charlie Tarawa TJUNGURRAYI c.1921
Pintupi, Tjitururrnga, west of Kintore Ranges
Wati G'wala (Iceman) Dreaming 1989
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

This painting concerns the exploits of Wati G'wala, a man of the Ice-Cold time. The artist is custodian of a number of Ice Dreaming stories about the 'place where the ice made mountains'. According to Geoff Bardon, 'They are stories that date apparently from the last Ice Age over 30,000 years ago and foreshadow subsequent stories such as the Water Dreaming and the replenishing of life. The existence of such a geologically correct legend reinforces the validity of all the Aboriginal stories attributed to the Dreamtime ancestors.' (*Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, 1979.)

Charlie Tarawa was one of the first Pintupi to make sustained contact with Europeans. Because of his extensive experience, he became the spokesman for the younger Pintupi men in the early days of the painting movement at Papunya. A survey of his work and accompanying publication *Charlie Tjaruru*

[Tarawa] *Tjungurrayi: A Retrospective 1970-86* (Orange City Council, 1987), organised by Andrew Crocker, toured major galleries in N.S.W., Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

41

Joseph Jurra TJAPALTJARRI mid '50s
Pintupi, Kiwirrkura
Kiwirrkura 1988
Acrylic on canvas, 122 x 183 cm

The design elements in this painting depict the site of Kiwirrkura. The roundel is a soakage water place just to the west of where the Kiwirrkura Community now stands and the central section is a low sandhill which runs through the centre of the Community. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Papunya Tula Artists.)*

As a small boy, Joseph Jurra lived with his family in the Kiwirrkura area, following a traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle. He returned to Kiwirrkura when the settlement was established, commencing painting on canvas in 1986. Joseph Jurra had one of the first solo exhibitions of Papunya Tula Artists at the Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery in 1988 after little more than a year's experience of painting for the company. He is one of the younger generation of Pintupi artists who began painting after the move back to Kintore, whose work consists characteristically of severely traditional grids of circles and connecting lines. The earliest Pintupi paintings were equally iconic, but then the artists were engaged in inventing the elements of the code in which they then proceeded to paint. The minimalism of the late '80s is more like an abstraction from the narrative complexity which was the dominant style of Papunya painting from the late '70s into the '80s. This painting takes the 'post-narrative' style a step further in its depiction of a single site, the artist's birthplace, rather than a network of sites and the ancestral journey lines connecting them. The scale and directness of the designwork have some affinities with *Kooralia*, which is also of an artist's birthplace. Joseph Jurra's work is distinctive for its skill and the inventiveness of his compositions within the minimalist parameters of the modern Pintupi approach.

42

Darby JAMPITJINPA (& Jimija JUNGARRAYI)
c.1910
Warlpiri, Ngarliyikirlangu, north of Yuendumu
Yankiri Jukurrpa (Emu Dreaming) 1986
Acrylic on cotton duck, 92 x 173 cm

This dreaming comes from Ngarliyikirlangu, a country north of Yuendumu. Jampitjinpa and Jangala are kirda for this dreaming ('owners'), and Jungarrayi is kurdungurlu ('manager'). The painting depicts the part of the emu dreaming in which the emus had been poisoned by hunters, and are shown here lying down dying or dead. The meat is cut up so everyone gets ribs to eat; old women get thigh meat, and only the old men get meat from the stomach. Only old men can eat the meat from the leg bones, but everyone drinks the emu's blood. *(Notes supplied with the painting by Warlukurlangu Artists.)*

Acrylic painting started up at the predominantly Warlpiri community of Yuendumu, 200 km north-west of Papunya, in the early '80s, initiated by a group of senior women. In 1983, at the request of the principal, a group of senior men painted the doors of the Yuendumu school. In 1985 the Yuendumu painters established the Warlukurlangu Aboriginal Artists Association to manage the painting enterprise. Their first exhibition, held in Darwin that year, sold nothing, and sales from a second, held in Sydney later in the year, barely covered framing costs, though the purchase of the first large men's canvas by the Australian National Gallery and a smaller women's painting from the show was encouraging. Warlukurlangu Artists' third exhibition at the Editions Gallery in Fremantle in 1986 gave the Yuendumu artists their first major breakthrough; it sold out to rave reviews. This painting, which was reproduced on the invitation for this show, is radically different from the early work of the Papunya painters in its loose, exuberant paintwork and narrative complexity. Its subject matter, is however, comparably weighty and is represented here in the manner of ancient cave paintings from the Western Desert area.

Yuendumu Dreamings, Editions Gallery, Perth, 1986.

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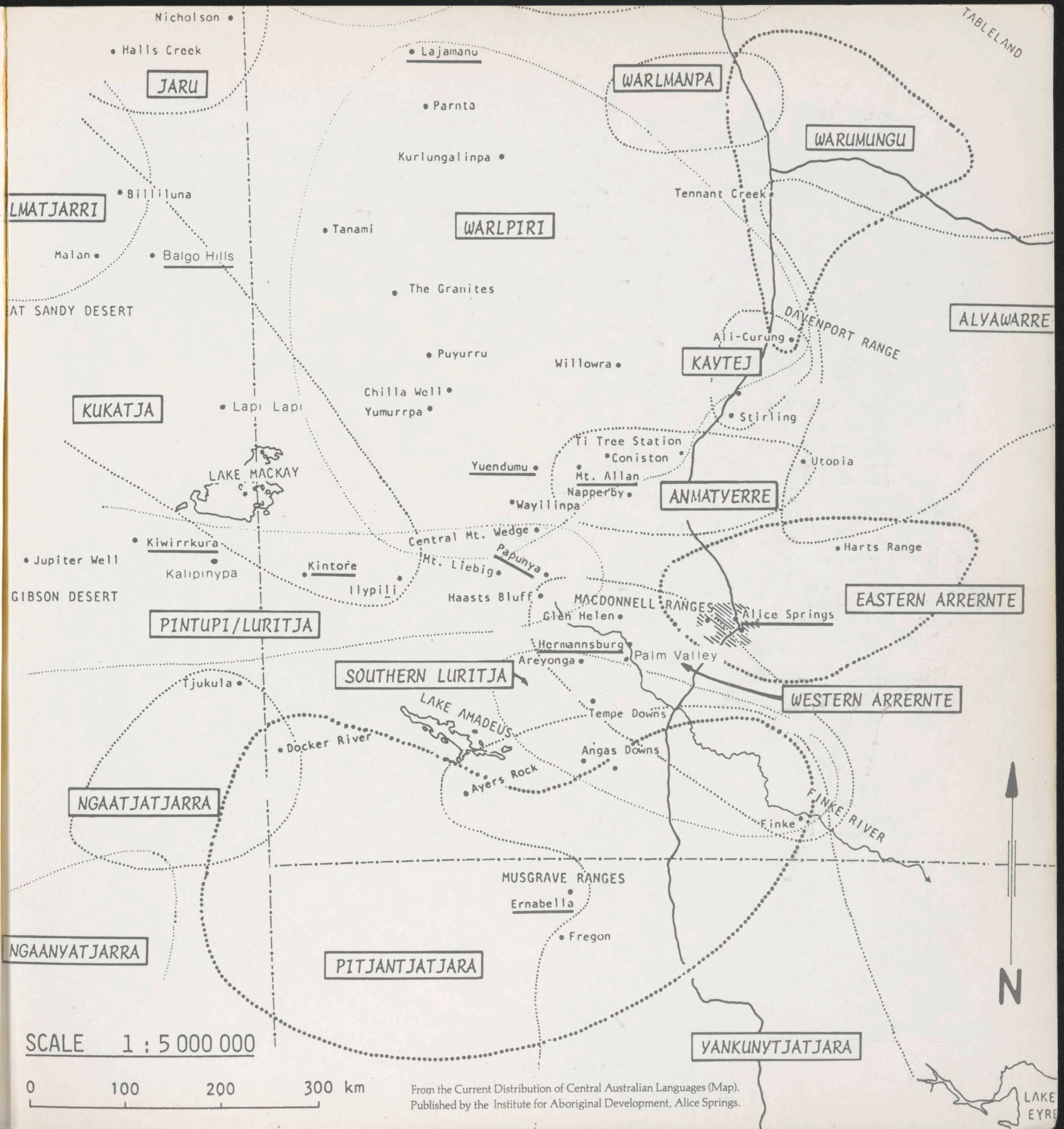

From the Current Distribution of Central Australian Languages (Map).
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Auckland City Art Gallery