

# GAGOSIAN

---



## DESERT PAINTERS OF AUSTRALIA

### Two Generations

Opening reception: Thursday, September 24, 5–8pm  
September 24–November 7, 2020  
7/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Anooralya-My Story*, 1991, synthetic polymer on linen, 48 × 84 inches (121.5 × 213 cm) © Emily Kame Kngwarreye/Copyright Agency. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2020

---

September 11, 2020

*Whole lot, that's the whole lot. Awelye (my Dreaming), Arlatyeye (pencil yam), Arkerrthe (mountain devil lizard), Ntange (grass seed), Tingu (a Dream-time pup), Ankerre (emu), Intekwe (a favorite food of emus), Atwerle (green bean), and Kame (yam seed). That's what I paint: whole lot. . . .*

—Emily Kame Kngwarreye

Gagosian is pleased to announce the first major exhibition in Hong Kong dedicated to work by contemporary Indigenous Australian artists. It is the third in a series of critically acclaimed exhibitions presented by the gallery, following New York and Los Angeles in 2019. *Desert Painters of Australia: Two Generations* is organized in collaboration with D'Lan Davidson, a leading Melbourne-based consultant in the Indigenous Australian art market.

Indigenous Australians constitute the longest surviving civilization in human history for more than 60,000 years. While affinities may be perceived between remote Indigenous Australian art and other modern art forms, the individual practices that are developed in relative isolation stem from the oldest continuous art traditions in the world.

This exhibition is designed to introduce the local audience for the first time to rare works by some of Australia's most renowned Indigenous artists from remote regions of the continent. The intergenerational selection includes the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Makinti Napanangka, and Bill

“Whiskey” Tjapaltjarri, and living artists such as Yukultji Napangati, George Tjungurrayi, and Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri.

After the forced displacement of the Pintupi, Luritja, Warlpiri, and Anmatyerr people to the Papunya settlement in the Northern Territory from the 1950s, tribal members began collaborating on site-specific paintings. Deriving from ancient rituals of body decoration, sand drawing, wood carving, and ceremony, these collective expressions eventually evolved into autonomous works on canvas by individual artists. To protect the rituals of their culture from disruptive forces, the artists veiled their sacred iconography and knowledge in dynamic abstract patterns, decipherable only by initiates. Their intense focus and rhythmic mark making produced compelling works of great optical complexity—pointillist constellations, free-flowing linear formations, concentric swells, topological geometric fields, and hypnotic ripples—representing the Dreaming, a worldview that provides Indigenous Australians with an ordered sense of reality, a framework for understanding and interpreting the world and the place of humans in that world. This priceless knowledge of human life includes survival strategies, ancestral histories, and narratives of the earth and the cosmos.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye, affectionately known as “Emily,” was a revered elder of the Utopia region and one of the most celebrated artists in Australian history. Throughout the brief ten-year span before her death, she painted freely and prolifically, moving confidently through an astonishing range of style and expression. *Anooralya—My Story* (1991) is a key example of Emily’s early “fish-eye” pointillist technique, where she engaged her entire body in making countless individual marks on canvas. In this painting, rarely seen in the last thirty years, these delicate dots coalesce into grainy pools and sinuous streams, recalling at once the macrocosmic systems of the galaxy and the microcosmic root structures of the wild yam, a symbol of fertility and Emily’s Dreaming. When asked to describe her inspirations, Emily’s response was consistent: “It’s everything.” In other words, each painting represents her entire culture, encapsulating her intimate relationship with “Country,” the physical land and the spirits that inhabit it, as well as the people and their traditions.

Makinti Napanangka’s paintings commemorate Pintupi women’s performative and ritual traditions. The flowing stripes of paint in amber and violet recall the *nyimparra* (hand-spun string skirts made from human hair) and the rich natural ochres with which the women adorn their bodies during tribal dance ceremonies. Makinti’s pulsating compositions draw from Pintupi epics, especially the travels of *Kungka Kutjarra* (two women ancestors) who created the landforms at Lupulnga. In the featured works, expressive lines of color evoke the energetic movements of the hair-string skirt dances and the fleeting desert mirages that glaze the hot earth where they are performed.

For generations, the land and the many stories it contains have inspired the creativity of the Desert Painters as seen in the dizzying labyrinths and energetic fields by George Tjungurrayi and Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri. Transmuting into paint on canvas the customary mark-making techniques with which they decorated their tools and their bodies with ceremonial designs, these Pintupi men trace sinuous lines into charged and tensile optical compositions. While Tjungurrayi’s paintings are generally flame-colored to evoke sun and earth, Tjapaltjarri uses restrained gray pigments to evoke the sensations of cool desert nights from Tingarri epics. Many of Tjapaltjarri’s paintings evoke Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay), a vast saltwater flat visited after dark by ancestral women to perform sacred celestial rituals. Yukultji Napangati, sister to Warlimpirrnga, was also born near Wilkinkarra at a water hole called Murruwa. In her highly refined paintings, she layers thousands of tone-on-tone vertical strokes to generate oscillating fields of dark and light sensation that recall the shimmering grasslands, the fractal patterns of sand dunes, and the textures of animal pelts from her Country.

Bill “Whiskey” Tjapaltjarri, a Pitjantjatjara artist from the Western Desert, used a unique cartographic approach to paint works of sweeping scale that are reminiscent of drawings his elders once made with crayon on butcher’s paper to map the vast lands of their Country for white anthropological interlocutors. Two of Whiskey’s largest paintings, both titled *Country and Rockholes near the Olgas* (2006) depict the areas around Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (Mount Olga). The subtle palette of these works, which ranges from deep aqueous blues to vivid corals, and their complex contouring, reimagine the striking hues and topography of the geological phenomena that surrounded Whiskey throughout his life.

#### **THE ARTISTS:**

**Emily Kame Kngwarreye** (c. 1910–1996), an elder of the Anmatyerr tribe and arguably the most famous Indigenous Australian artist, began painting at a late age in the Alyawarra community of

Utopia. She is celebrated for her rapid and systematic exploration of different styles and formal inventions, largely identified with women's ritual activities. Her early dot paintings drew on her experience with traditional batik fabric production; over time, her paintings became more and more gestural, reduced in their detail and liberated in their formal qualities. Emily has been the subject of major museum surveys in Australia and Japan, and her work featured prominently in the 56th Biennale di Venezia in 2015.

**Makinti Napanangka** (c. 1930–2011) was born at Mangarri, near the Kintore community, on the border of the Northern Territory and Western Australia. She lived in the Haasts Bluff community before moving to Papunya, where she began her prolific painting career. In 1999, Napanangka underwent a cataract operation, which led to the evolution of the thick expressive lines and more vivid hues that characterize her mature painting style.

**Yukultji Napangati** (born 1975) left her traditional hunting-and-gathering life in 1984 as a member of the "Pintupi Nine," one of the last Indigenous groups to move into contact with modern Australian society. Drawing on ancestral narratives or Dreamings passed down to her through generations, her distinctive style involves intense and refined mark making on large canvases to produce astonishing optical sensations related to natural phenomena.

**George Tjungurrayi** (born c. 1947), a member of Papunya Tula, is deeply invested in his Pintupi heritage, particularly the stories of the Tingarri cycle from his Country. Tjungurrayi has developed an abstract language that sublimates the details of his relationship to these sacred places and their information into dynamic linear compositions painted in simple and precise lines, rather than fused dots. He has been represented in solo exhibitions in Australia and the Sydney Biennale, where a suite of his paintings was exhibited both on the ground and on the wall.

**Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri** (born c. 1958) is a member of the "Pintupi Nine." He started painting in acrylics in 1987, after observing his relatives painting in the remote community of Kiwirrkura in Western Australia, where the cooperative of Papunya Tula artists had become well established. Tjapaltjarri's earliest paintings were purchased and donated to the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Since that time he has also participated in such major exhibitions as documenta 13, in Kassel, Germany.

**Bill "Whiskey" Tjapaltjarri** (c. 1920–2008) was a renowned *ngankari* (healer), nicknamed for his abundant whiskers. He was born at Pirupa Akla, near the Olgas, and lived in the Haasts Bluff community near Mount Liebig in the Northern Territory. He began painting at eighty-five and continued until his death four years later. His paintings have been exhibited throughout Australia as well as in Europe and Asia.

#### **ABOUT D'LAN DAVIDSON:**

Working as a private dealer and an auction house expert for fifteen years before opening his solo enterprise in Melbourne five years ago, **D'LAN Davidson** has produced exhibitions and catalogues of exceptional remote Indigenous Australian art in Australia and the United States. D'LAN Contemporary operates under a strict ethical policy, exhibiting all works with a clear line of community art center provenance and assisting economic growth for Indigenous Australian communities with the establishment of his Voluntary Resale Royalty initiative, which invites sellers to contribute 2.5 percent of their resale proceeds back to the respective artist or estate and then matches their contributions.

#DesertPainters

---

#### **Press**

##### **Sutton**

Carol Lo | carol@suttoncomms.com | +852 2528 0792

##### **Gagosian**

presshk@gagosian.com | +852 2151 0555