BALGO VISIONS | EUBENA

BALGO VISIONS | EUBENA

D'LAN CONTEMPORARY
40 Exhibition St,
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Wurundjeri Country
+61 3 9008 7212
enquiries@dlancontemporary.com.au
dlancontemporary.com.au

—

Cover: EUBENA NAMPITJIN
Millagudoo – in the Great Sandy Desert 1995 (detail)
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
180 × 120 cm

Previous: EUBENA NAMPITJIN
Kinyu 2011 (detail)
synthetic polymer paint on linen
100 × 100 cm

BALGO: VISIONS
Sydney Contemporary
8–11 September 2022

D'C Melbourne
15 September – 7 October 2022

EUBENA: INCLUDING SELECT WORKS FROM THE ESTATE OF EUBENA NAMPITJIN
D'C Melbourne
26 August – 7 October 2022

D·C

FOREWORD

D'Lan Contemporary is delighted to present this compelling exhibition of foundational Indigenous artworks celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of Warlayirti Artists.

Divided into two distinct collections but intended to flow as a complementary representation of one of Australia's leading artistic movements, this exhibition will both travel to Sydney Contemporary and feature across D'Lan Contemporary's two separate gallery spaces at 40 Exhibition Street, Melbourne.

Part 1 of the exhibition combines a collection of early canvases consigned to D'Lan Contemporary by a single vendor whose belief and passion for Balgo art was galvanised soon after the art centre opened.

Many paintings presented in the exhibition are fresh to the secondary market. They will inspire the curiosity and collector instinct of those who view the collection in person and online. Vanessa Merlino's accompanying essay provides context and clarity on the importance not only of Balgo as an independent art movement but also the importance of the artworks featured in this exhibition.

Part 2 focuses on one of Balgo's founding and most renowned artists, Eubena Nampitjin. We are proud to have been entrusted with a special consignment directly from Warlayirti Artists with the support and endorsement of Eubena's daughter Jane Gimme, who is also an artist and non-executive director of Warlayirti Artists.

Our collaboration with Warlayirti Artists represents over nine months of planning, conversations and cultural learnings for the D'Lan Contemporary team. Poppy Lever, Art Centre Manager at Warlayirti Artists, has been generous with her time and insights during Balgo's milestone year. Poppy's written piece 'Ngurra Kutjuwarra: On Country Together' is a powerful statement from the next generation of Warlayirti masters. The Balgo and Eubena project is one of several projects she has juggled alongside organising (and venturing out on) bush trips and the thirty-fifth birthday bash at Balgo, which will be celebrated at Wirrimanu at the end of August.

We also want to express our gratitude to Dr Erica Izett, who spent significant time with Eubena in the 1990s. She has extensively published on Eubena's practice and graciously shared personal reflections and critical context in the accompanying catalogue essay.

Finally, we welcome our clients and friends to attend our official opening at our Melbourne galleries on the afternoon of 17 September 2022 to help celebrate Balgo's thirty-fifth anniversary.

BEN CLARK
Managing Director, D'Lan Contemporary

BALGO
VISIONS

Sydney Contemporary | 8–11 September 2022
D'C Melbourne | 15 September – 7 October 2022

BALGO: VISIONS OF PLACE AND TIME

The art of the Balgo Hills region has a complex and layered history. Its creators live and paint on the edge of the Tanami and Great Sandy deserts in Western Australia, and the name 'Balgo' is synonymous with wild colours, unexpected forms and bold abstractions. As it emerged, it challenged the fledgling Western conception of the relatively conservative yet innovative Aboriginal art movement emanating from Australia's desert heart. In the thirty-five years since Warlayirti Artists' establishment, the art of Balgo has undergone a rising evolutionary progression. The story, which has been written and rewritten, frames the region as an artistic stronghold, and is a narrative that continues to unfold.

The most recent publication on the art of Balgo is Professor John Carty's seminal *Balgo: Creating Country* (2021). It is a robust synthesis of over twenty years of anthropological research in the region and offers a resolution of the pending questions in Balgo's art history. Beyond this, Carty's concept of 'Acrylic Country' contributes to a far greater understanding and appreciation of painting from remote deserts. He posits that what constitutes Country, for contemporary desert artists, is the same as the process of painting Country.

While Balgo artists may no longer make their daily lives on their ancestral Country, they continue to live through Country, to create the values and relations that constitute Country through painting it.[1]

So what exactly are we looking at when viewing Balgo art? Embracing Carty's concept of an acrylic country can influence how and what we see. The incredible diversity of styles that have flowered at Warlayirti Artists are indicators of more than aesthetic influences. They represent social, cultural and familial connectivity and ongoing maintenance of Country.

Underpinning Carty's notion of acrylic country is the profound understanding that paintings are not representations of Country; they *are* Country itself.[2] The painted ancestral, personal and communal narratives are informed by colonial history, the Christian mission, and economic and cultural motivations. What lies on the painted surface is

not merely a representation of a physical place but the social networks and relationships that have their origins in place. There is a much bigger picture than that created on the canvas, for what we are looking at when we view a painting from Balgo is a societal system, not just a physical art form.

For Sydney Contemporary 2022, D'Lan Contemporary is proud to present a selection of works from the most innovative and influential artists from Balgo. The twenty-two paintings presented encompass the first ten years of Warlayirti Artists. Together, these exceptional works capture a golden era of stylistic assertion and development. Individually, these works articulate the social nature of Balgo painting through stunning examples of its most distinctive elements: the evolution of colour and the family connections shared and transmitted through style.

The communal lands of the Western Desert are essential to an initial understanding of Balgo identity. The Catholic Pallotine Order established a mission in 1939, some kilometres from the present site of Balgo Hills. It offered refuge to several different Western Desert Language groups, collectively known as Kutjungka, meaning 'at one' or 'being of one culture'. Although 'at one', these groups also revealed their undeniable diversity in the first exhibition of Balgo Art, titled *Art from the Great Sandy Desert* and held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1986. Over a hundred artworks were shown in the inaugural exhibition, an eclectic amalgamation of subjects, media and styles such as figurative, landscape, iconographic, watercolours, paintings and drawings. Although eclectic, the exhibition was deemed to have 'great aesthetic significance',[3] which was the impetus for establishing the art centre the following year.

Tjumpo Tjapanangka's exceptional painting *Watikutjara* 1987 is one of the few recorded paintings from the first year of Warlayirti Artists. Two young brothers, the Goanna Men, are sleeping; the iconographic forms of their bodies are etched in deep red ochre lines, the work exhibiting the traditional colours characteristic of the paintings that were encouraged in the initial years of the art centre. First contact Elders, like Tjumpo, Donkeyman Lee Tjupurrula and Sunfly Tjampitjin, had the rights and the access to depict the ancestral narratives drawn from the desert landscape. Their cultural seniority was equivalent to having a direct line to the Tjukurrpa, and the confidence and authority of their paintings would drive them to become masters among the Balgo men.

Brown, black, white and yellow were adopted as immediately recognisable desert colours, but are also associated with the Dreaming (Tjukurrpa) and are particularly significant to Kutjungka culture.[4] Brandy Tjungurrayi's *Kunarri Waterhole* 1989 pushes the traditional colours, indicating his southern familial relations and the broader connectivity of people and families across the great swathes of the desert. The square forms are a recognisable symbol of his Country and became the stylistic currency his daughters would eventually inherit and incorporate in their paintings. The transmission of Balgo style is played out through lines of descent such as this – passing between parents and children and other close kin and countrymen.[5]

After the initial tentative steps taken during the first two years of the art centre, the Kutjungka principles of colour began to take possession of the Balgo identity. The desert began to be conceptualised through other colours such as green, purple, pink, mauve and blue. The women artists began softening the desert's reputation for harshness with colours connected to hunting and gathering, and those that reflect the landscape. *Kaliyangku* 1990 by Ena Gimme Nungurrayi reflects the abundance of food, with blushes of pink, red, orange and peach. The coloured fields of Milliga Napaltjarri's painting of her Country, Wakalpukka, are conjured through the soles of her feet on the desert floor. The blue of Susie Bootja Bootja's *Waterhole* sparkles with life-quenching water, with ever-growing vegetation branching from the site.

Although the Balgo style is transmitted between broader family relations, it has largely developed through innovation and collaborations between husbands and wives. These painting partnerships were central to the evolution of Warlayirti art and have led to the development of significant changes in individual styles. Some of the most dynamic pairs in Balgo history are represented here: Millie Skeen and Tommy Skeen, Muntja Nungurrayi and Johnny Mosquito, and the most famous, Eubena Nampitjin and Wimmitji Tjapangati. Each of these couples would, at some point, work on each other's canvases. Tommy painted women's stories associated with his Country, and Millie would paint some of her husband's Country in her canvases. However, Millie and Tommy Skeen's collaboration transcended conventional notions of men's and women's painting. Their painting techniques were a dance of flourishing exchange and compositional interlacing.[6]

Eubena and Wimmitji's famous collaborative partnership produced some of the most memorable paintings in Balgo's art history. Side by side, *Kurra* 1990 by Wimmitji and *Kinyu* 1990 by Eubena are in complete unison. Such was the affinity of their style that Eubena did not paint with the same technique or composition after Wimmitji stopped painting in 1998. Eubena's epic painting *Millagudoo* 1994 is a dominant statement of what was to come in her trajectory beyond her painting partnership. The Queen of the Desert,[7] from this point in time, was asserting her place as the most celebrated of the Balgo artists.

This group of early Balgo paintings from the first decade of Warlayirti Artists represents an exciting era of artistic development and growth. Those engaging with the Australian art world during this time were fortunate observers of the radical activity emanating from Balgo, seen as one of the glorious times in art from remote communities. Their bold uses of colour were a profound concept; husbands and wives were painting side by side and often together in public collaboration, and familial obligations to Country were being drafted, allocated and assigned in the contemporary medium of paint and canvas.

As the Warlayirti story unfolds, it is remarkable to consider what a canvas was for the pioneering artists, and what it continues to be. The works being presented at Sydney Contemporary 2022 offer the chance to 'look again', bringing these now closed artists' series into contemporary ways of seeing. They speak of familial relations, ownership and succession, and rights to Law and land. They are the synthesis of the ancient and contemporary, the sacred and physical world, the transcendent and the monetary. They may always be the product of the tension between transient living and the immobility of settlement. As established by the past masters, canvas as Country is being continued through the next generation of Balgo artists.

VANESSA MERLINO

—

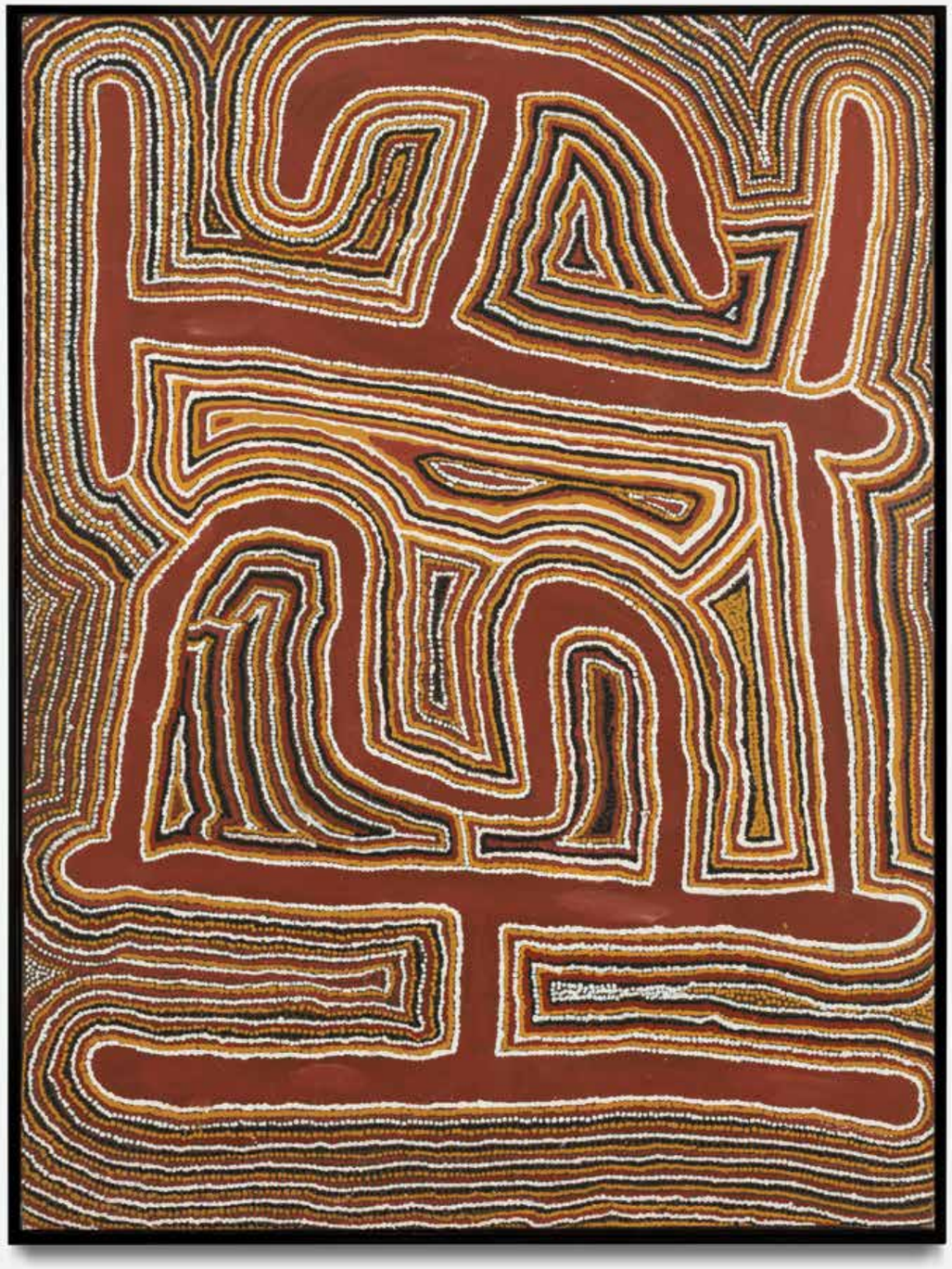
1. John Carty, *Balgo: Creating Country*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, Western Australia, 2021, p. 355.
2. ibid p. 339.
3. Ronald and Catherine Berndt in Colin Laverty 'Wirrimanu (Balgo)' in *Beyond Sacred* edition 2, p. 121.
4. Christine Watson, 'Whole lot, now: colour dynamics in Balgo art' in Judith Ryan (ed.) *Colour Power: Aboriginal Art Post 1984*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 119–122.
5. John Carty, *Balgo: Creating Country*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, Western Australia, 2021, p. 297.
6. ibid p. 315.
7. Erica Izett, 'Queen of the Desert: Eubena Nampitjin and the Balgo women' in Jacqueline Healy (ed.) et al., *Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2014.

TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA
circa 1929–2007
Watikutjara 1987

synthetic polymer paint on linen
115 × 86 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 812/87
Private Collection

AUD 26,000



BRANDY TJUNGURRAYI
circa 1930–2012
Kunarri Waterhole 1988

synthetic polymer paint on linen
125.2 × 91 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 054/88
Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne
Private Collection

EXHIBITED
Paintings from Kukatja Country: Balgo – Western Australia, Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne, 5–21 July 1990
Blue Chip XXII, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, 2020

AUD 14,000

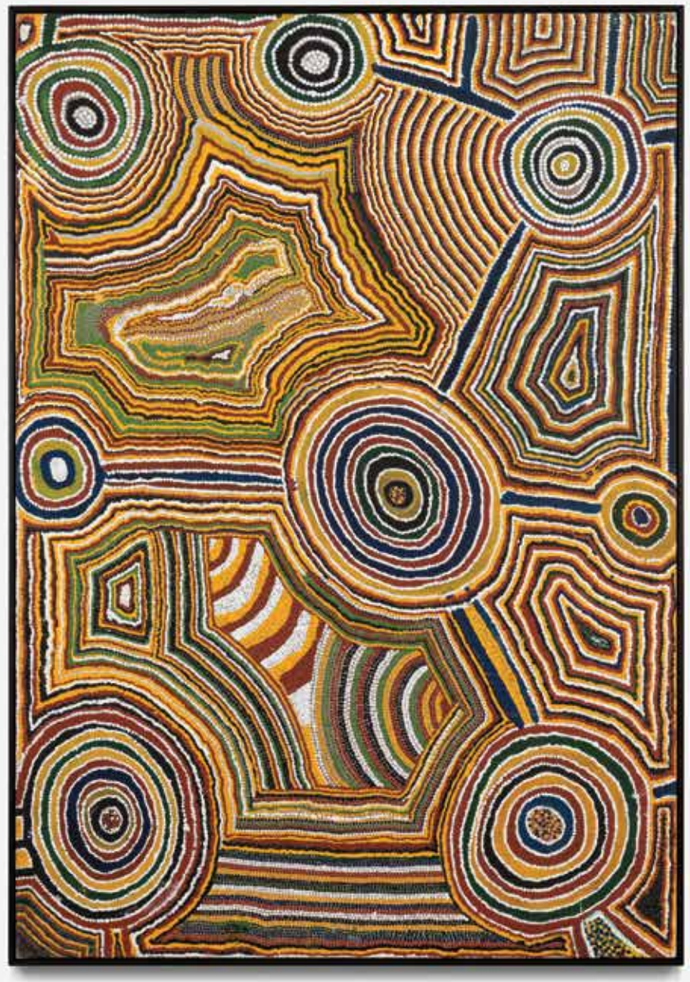
TJUMPO TJAPANANGKA
circa 1929–2007
Father's Country and Kangaroo Dreaming 1989

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120 × 85 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 328/89
Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne
Private Collection

EXHIBITED
Paintings from Kukatja Country: Balgo – Western Australia, Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne, 5–21 July 1990

AUD 22,000



SUNFLY TJAMPITJIN
circa 1919–1996
Travels of the Goanna Men 1990

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 556/90
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection

LITERATURE
T. Uchiyama (ed.), *Crossroads – Toward a New Reality: Aboriginal Art from Australia*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1992, p. 106 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
Innovation and Tradition: Exhibition of Recent Paintings by Warlayirti Artists from Balgo Hills WA, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, November 1990
Crossroads – Toward a New Reality: Aboriginal Art from Australia, The National Museum of Art, Kyoto, 22 September – 8 November 1992; The National Museum of Art, Tokyo, 17 November – 20 December 1992, cat. no. 74.

NFS

ENA GIMME NUNGURRAYI
circa 1953–1992
Kaliyangku 1990

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 455/90
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection

AUD 40,000

SUSIE BOOTJA BOOTJA NAPALTJARRI
circa 1932–2003
Waterhole in Artist's Country 1990

synthetic polymer paint on linen
113 × 82 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 328/90
Private Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 25 July 2005, lot 251
Private Collection, United Kingdom
Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 7 June 2011, lot 99
Private Collection

AUD 18,000

ALAN WINDEROO TJAKAMARRA
circa 1920–2003
Winderoo near Lappi Lappi 1990

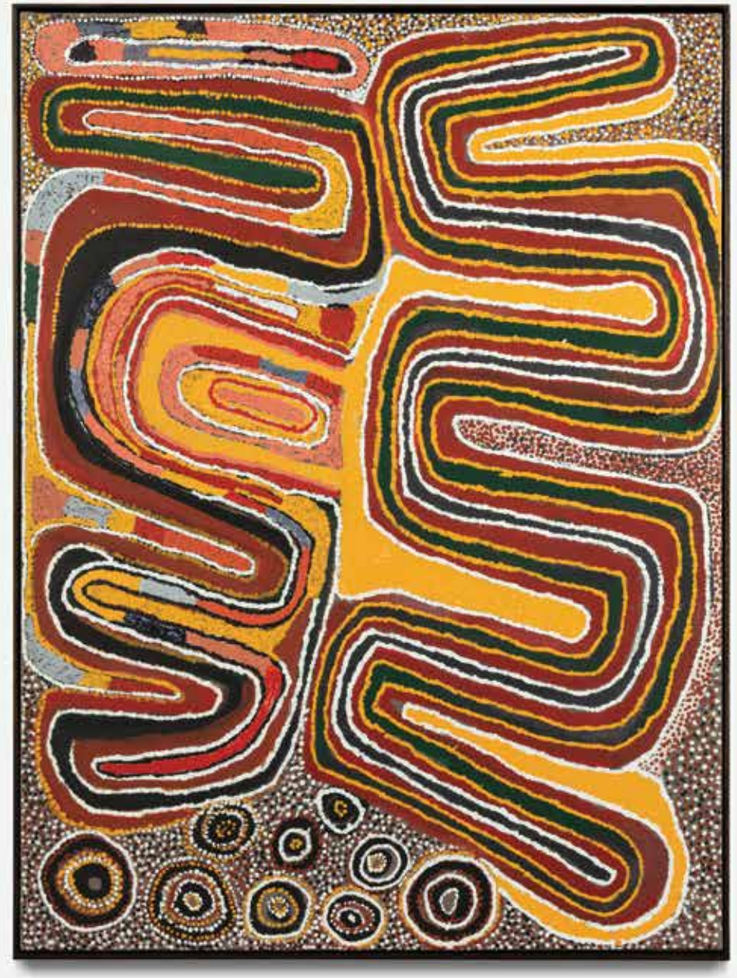
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
120 × 90 cm

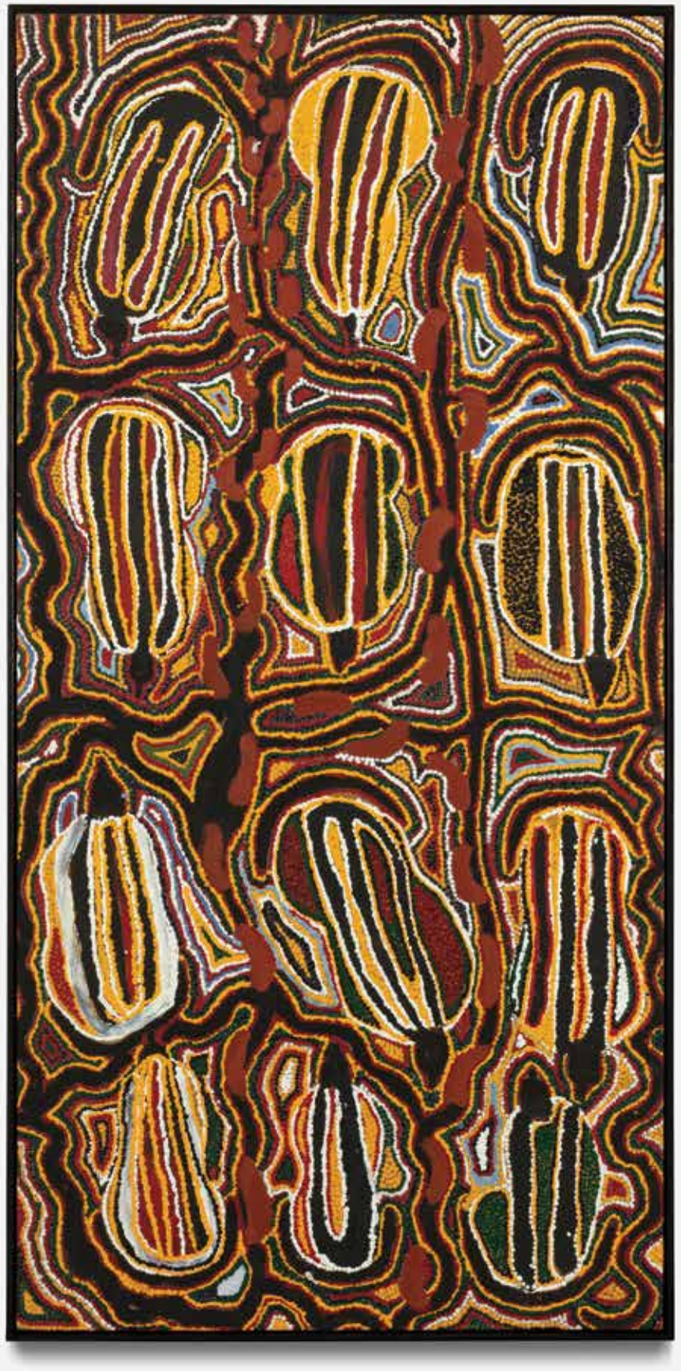
PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 201/90
Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne
Private Collection

LITERATURE
John Carty, *Balgo: Creating Country*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, Western Australia, p. 185 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
Paintings from Kukatja Country: Balgo – Western Australia, Deutscher Brunswick Street, Melbourne, 5–21 July 1990

NFS





NJAMME NAPANGARDI
born circa 1938
Parakurra, Pt Moody 1990

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artsits, Western Australia, cat. no. 4/90
The Collection of Mr Kelton, United States of America, acquired 1991
The Kelton Collection, Leonard Joel Auctions, Melbourne, 11 April 2022, lot 207
Private Collection

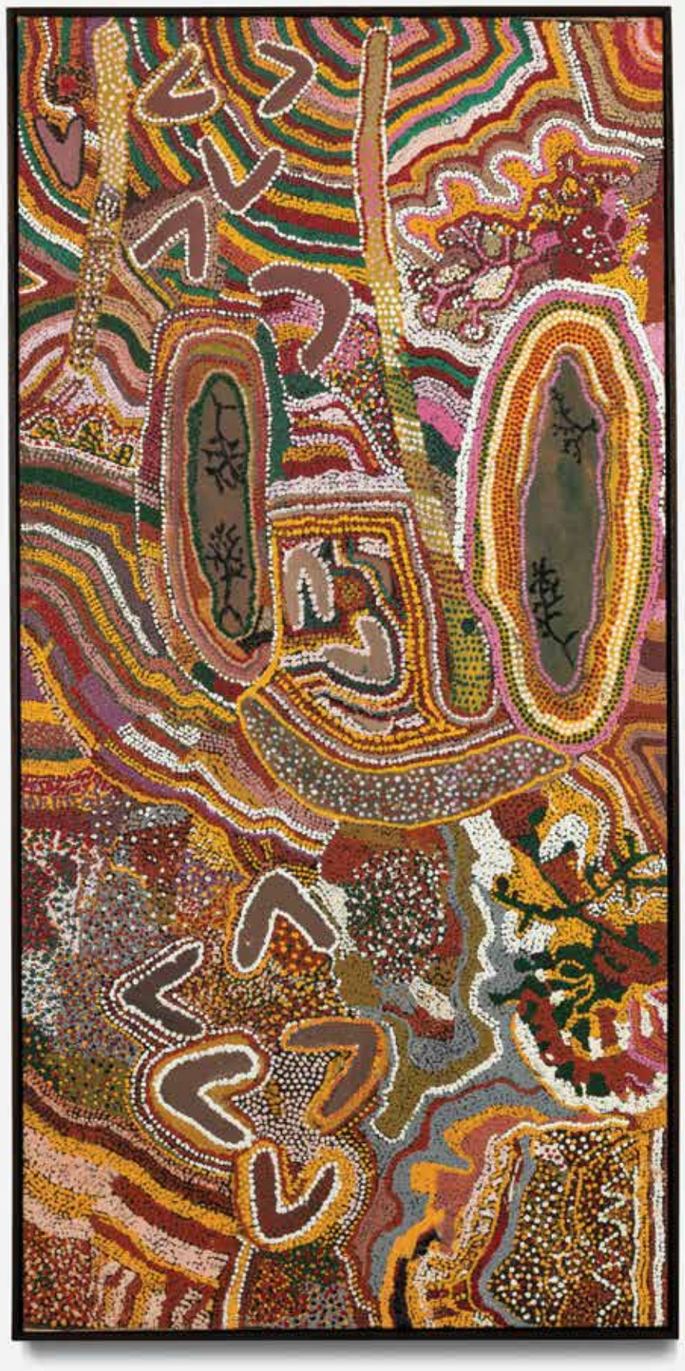
AUD 7,700

BRIDGET MUDJIDELL NAPANANGKA
circa 1935–2003
Yaiyarru 1990

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 33/90
The Collection of Mr Kelton, United States of America, acquired 1991
The Kelton Collection, Leonard Joel Auctions, Melbourne, 11 April 2022
Private Collection

AUD 8,800

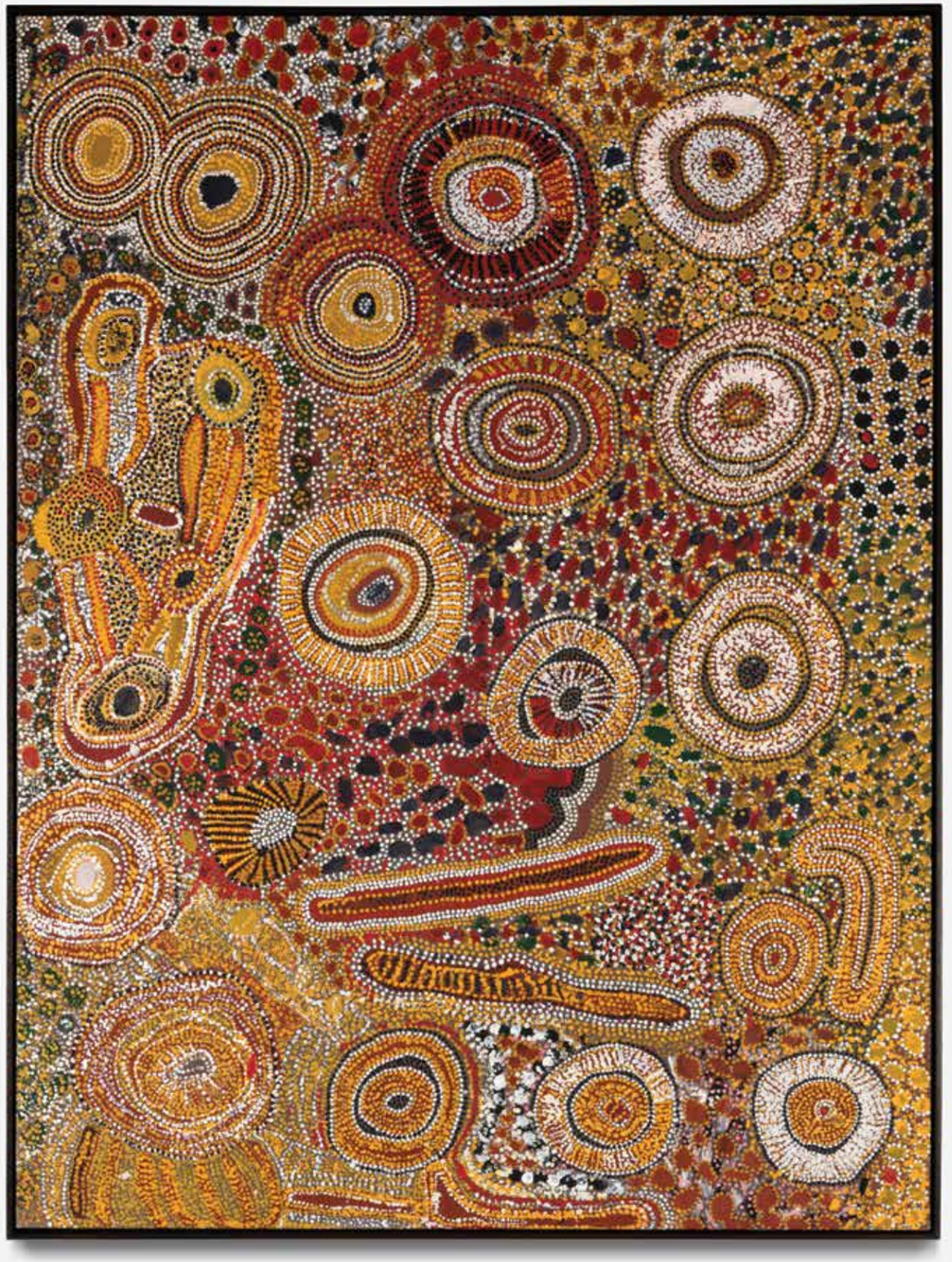


WIMMITJI TJAPANGATI
circa 1924–2000
Kurra 1990

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 90 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 249/90
Private Collection

NFS



EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1921–2013
Kinyu 1990

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
100 × 76 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 226/90
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Private Collection

AUD 30,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Tjarrayartil near Canning Stock Route 1991

synthetic polymer paint on linen
100 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 627/91
Arnaud Serval Collection, Switzerland

AUD 30,000

MILLIGA NAPALTJARRI
circa 1922–1994
Artist's Country – Wakalpukka 1992

synthetic polymer paint on linen
100 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 267/92
Cooee Aboriginal Art Gallery, Sydney
The Peter Elliott Collection, Sydney
Mossgreen Auctions, The Peter Elliott Collection, Day 2, Sydney, 31 August 2015, lot 200
Private Collection

AUD 28,000

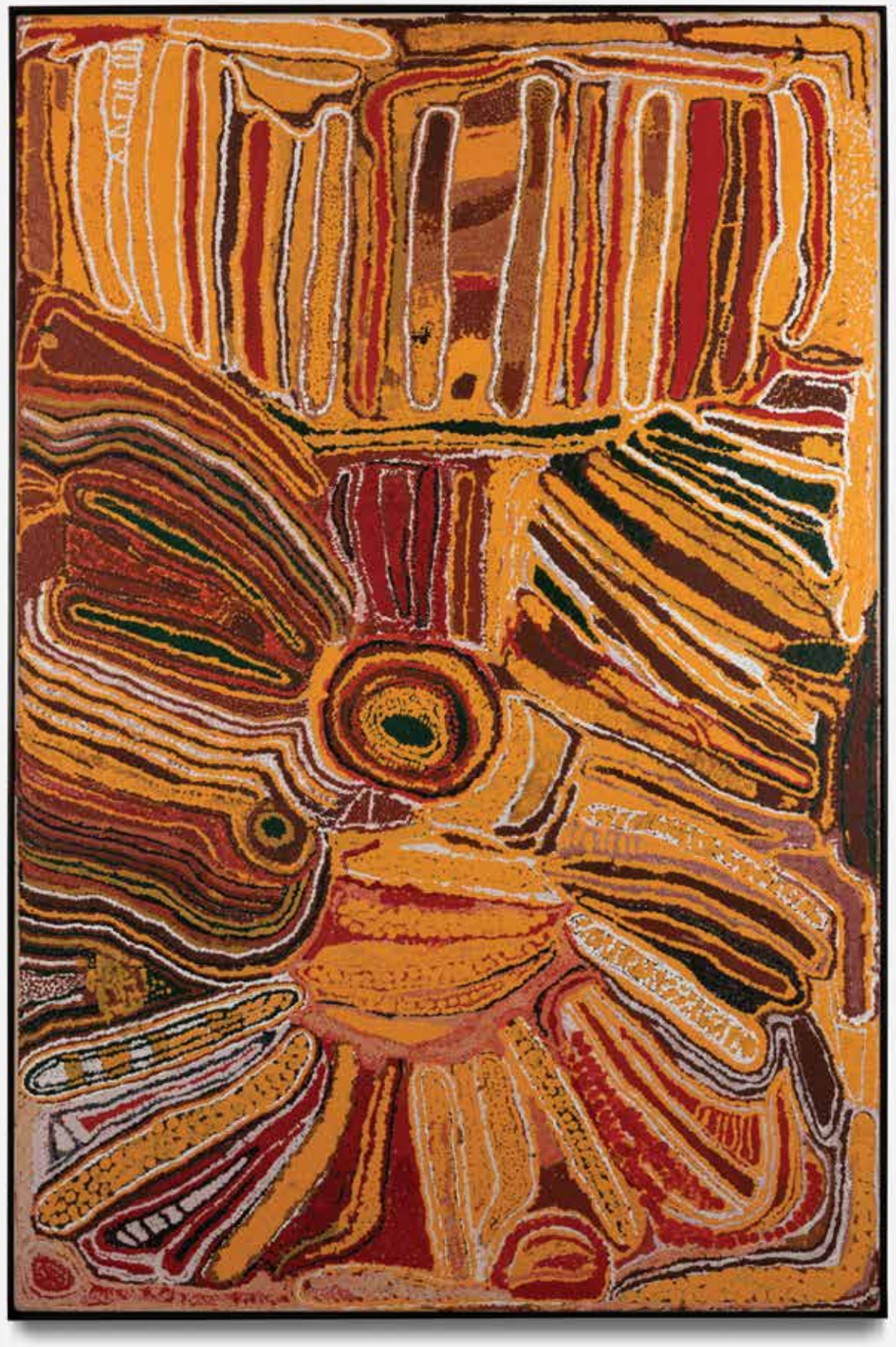
EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Millagudoo – in the Great Sandy Desert 1995

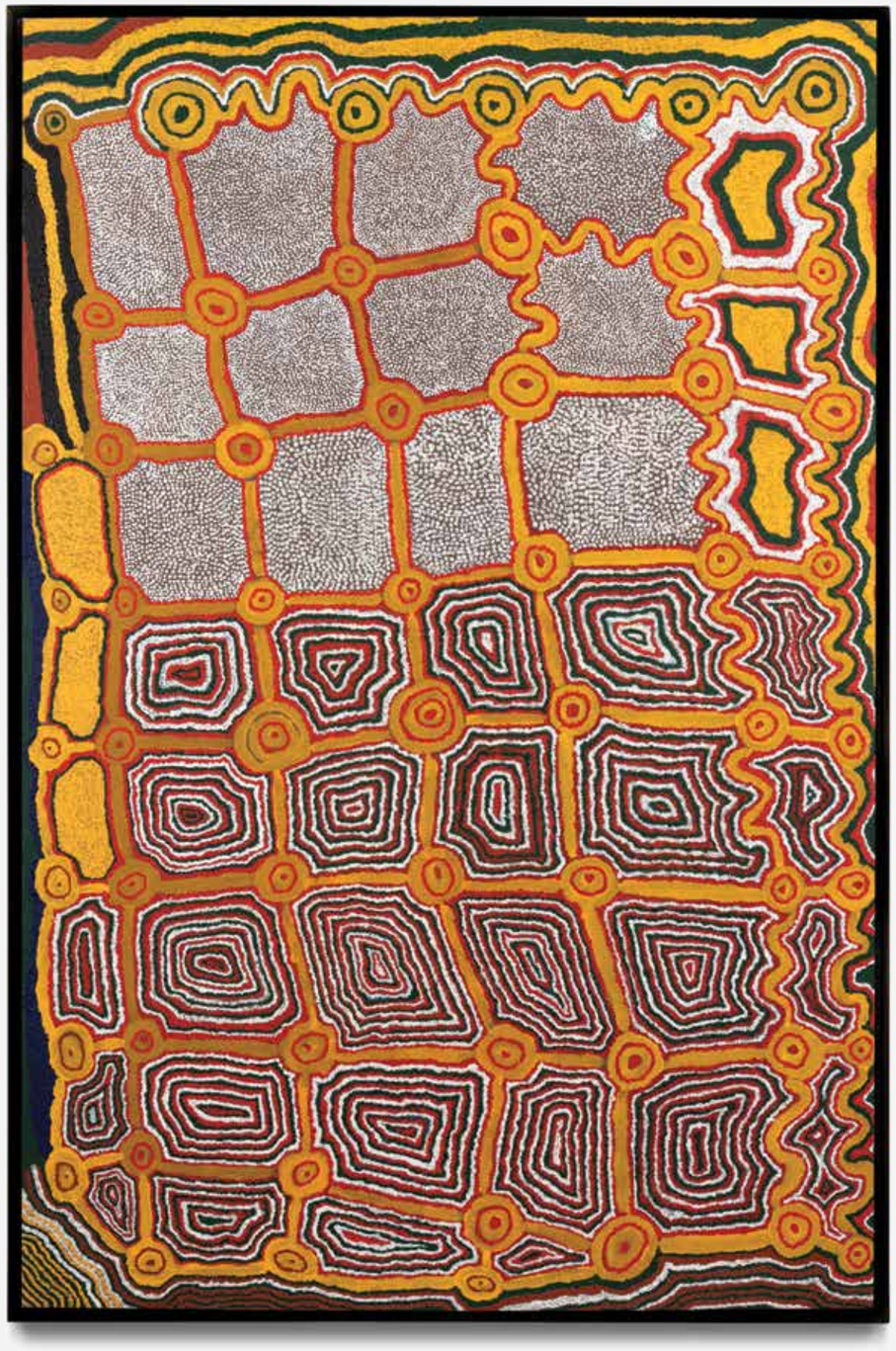
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
180 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 466/95
The Thompson Marecaux Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 20 July 2009, lot 49
Private Collection

LITERATURE
James Cowan, *Balgo: New Directions*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1999, pp. 38–39 (illus.)

AUD 85,000





DONKEYMAN LEE TJUPURRULA
circa 1920–1994
Wati Kutjarra at Wilkinpa 1991

synthetic polymer paint on linen
180 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 231/91
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
Hunter Collection, Sydney
Sotheby's, Melbourne, 26 June 2000, lot 126
Private Collection, Sydney
Aboriginal + Oceanic Art, Deutscher and Hackett, Melbourne, 14 October 2009, lot 15
Private Collection

LITERATURE
Gabrielle Pizzi, *Aboriginal Paintings from the Desert: Paintings by Australian Artists from Papunya, Balgo Hills and Utopia*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, 1991, p. 61 (illus.)

EXHIBITED
Aboriginal Paintings from the Desert: Paintings by Australian Artists from Papunya, Balgo Hills and Utopia, Union of Soviet Artists Gallery, Moscow, May – June 1991, and Museum of Ethnographic Art, St Petersburg, November 1991 – January 1992

AUD 36,000

LUCY YUKENBARRI NAPANANGKA
circa 1934–2003
Untitled 1995

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 569/95
Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection

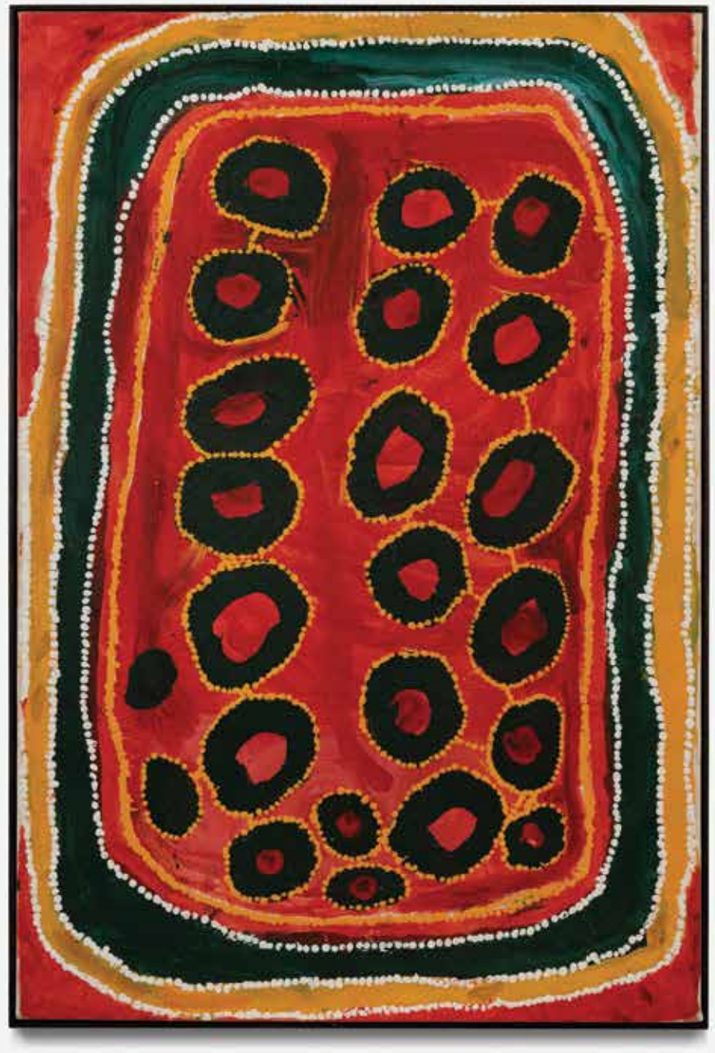
AUD 6,600

JOHNNY MOSQUITO TJAPANGATI
circa 1920–2004
Labu – South of Yagga Yagga 1995

synthetic polymer paint on linen
75 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 227/95
The Thompson Marecaux Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 20 July 2009, lot 141
Private Collection

AUD 8,000



TOMMY SKEEN TJAKAMARRA
circa 1930–2001
Barrakurra 1995

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
75 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 184/95
The Thompson Marecaux Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 20 July 2009, lot 50
Private Collection

LITERATURE
James Cowan, *Balgo: New Directions*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1999, pp. 36–37 (illus.)

AUD 15,000

MUNTJA NUNGURRAYI
circa 1930–1997
Punkabrinni on the Canning Stock Route 1995

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 285/95
The Thompson Marecaux Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 20 July 2009, lot 140
Private Collection

LITERATURE
John Carty, *Balgo: Creating Country*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, Western Australia, p. 184 (illus.)

AUD 15,000

TOMMY SKEEN TJAKAMARRA
circa 1930–2001
Walgalli – in the Great Sandy Desert 1996

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 652/96
Cooee Aboriginal Art Gallery, New South Wales
Private Collection, New South Wales
Aboriginal Fine Art, Lawson-Menzies, Sydney, 23 May 2007, lot 187
Private Collection

AUD 18,000

MILLIE SKEEN NAMPITJIN
circa 1932–1997
Untitled 1995

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 533/95
Mossgreen Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection

AUD 14,000

EUBENA

Including select works from

THE ESTATE OF EUBENA NAMPITJIN

D'C Melbourne | 24 August – 7 October 2022

EUBENA NAMPITJIN: PAINTING AS THRESHOLD

The threshold, the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely … for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles of passage from the one space to the other.[1]

[She] has gone through one crossroads after another
… has seen enough
to be able to separate
irrelevance from essence.
She has neither time nor energy
to waste on superficialities[2]

In the 1990s, as a young woman witnessing the Wirrimanu artists painting together, it seemed to me at times more like prayer than painting as they bowed over their canvases deep at work, and a sweet peace would descend and fill both room and heart. Intermittent conversing gave way to soft strains of recitation. Quiet percussion of touch – brush to canvas – created and shaped the visual rhythms pulsing out from their work.

There was still the regular hunting and gathering (further and further out from the outskirts of town with each decade), attending funerals, exhibitions, meetings and business, but the old artists were, by and large, sitting down. These first generation Balgo painters that rose to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s remembered the time before the 'white man' and the slow exodus north to the new 'shade' of priests and nuns in white habits. Then they would walk many kilometres in a day for food and water, trade, ceremonies or a marriage partner. And when, like Eubena, they joined the settler stockmen driving cattle up the Canning Stock Route, the vast treks across Country continued, for curiosity, droving, or travel between missions and station life. After World War II, as life became increasingly bound by and to the mission, with its wellspring of food and its new stone church, the caretaking of home Country many days or weeks walk away was impossible to sustain. The recitation of Dreaming cycles and ceremonies was challenged due to the scattering of the clan groups and incursions into their land. The non-Aboriginal contingent taking part in station and community life showed very limited respect or interest in Aboriginal culture and religious life. There were exceptions, as with the linguist Father Peile and a continuing lineage of well-educated and interested clergy, Father Brian being the mentor of my time. Here means were sought to share spiritual traditions and support a two-way course.

Stories and pictures of the high men gathering to paint and then parade the Easter banners in celebration of Father Peile's Silver Jubilee in 1981 are now well

documented, and this outburst of painting spilled over to Wirrimanu's adult education centre, spurred by stories told during earlier visits of relatives from Papunya, 700 kilometres south.

Like Papunya's phoenix myth – the resurrection of traditional motifs to pass on stories of place on the wall of the school – the Balgo banners and other variegated expressions of identity and story soon blazed forth as a contemporary art movement on canvas that Australia's national institutions embraced. In Papunya, the wives and other family often helped the men paint their canvases, but what distinguished Balgo was the early prominence that women gained as painters in their own right in the great painting duos of Sunfly and Bai Bai, Mosquito and Muntja, Tjumpo and Ningie, Mick Gill and Susie, Helicopter and Lucy, and Wimmitji and Eubena.

Their painting work and the economy that supported their sale gave the desert artists a platform not only to express but also empower their authority and culture. In the process, it became a national art movement, acknowledged now as the first truly Australian modern art movement. In this respect, the great Aboriginal art wave that spread out from the desert in the latter decades of the twentieth century can be compared to the post–World War I phenomenon of African-American jazz, which is considered the first great contribution of the USA to world culture. Jazz also had its roots in a transcultural cross-fertilisation – in that case, of African rhythms and European harmonies. Within the new sound echoed the turmoil of migration and subjugation but also freedom and resilience. The music seduced with its rich seam of deep emotion and its innovative improvisions, entrancing national and international music realms. Not only did it provide a political channel for African-American artists to transcend segregation and oppression, it created a new national identity and compact.

Drawing from her 'living breathing estate', Eubena's works were improvisations on songs of hunting and ceremonial grounds, hills, waterholes and stars, always reuniting with Kinyu (White Spirit Dingo Tjukurrpa[3]) and his site on the Canning Stock Route for which she was 'kirta' (owner).[4] Music and image are never far from the liminal. They are universal means of approaching and crossing thresholds, providing safe passage from one reality and being to another, which is integral to healing. The quiet but powerful percussion and rhythms emanating from the old people at work manifested in drama, mood, myth and sound on canvas as they sang their paintings into existence.

… verses of epic poetry, integral to the motion of life, well up when travelling, dancing, or painting and index the rhythms of [Eubena's] work. They lack any self-consciousness, doubt or hesitancy, as they are Tjukurrpa *(Law).*[5]

The joining of painting and song to open this passage to the ancestral realm is an age-old universal tradition, and few have made this movement of passage so palpable in their art as Eubena. The haptic[6] rhythm of pulsing currents or riding the liminal passage is the signature feeling of her art. From the lush and dextrous trackings of her brush – loaded with sweetness, and within an architecture of beat, curve and light – a dense rhapsody builds: smoke and feathered grasses, veils of rain sweeping across the face of marching dunes, the trailing light. It was as if she thought through the language of threshold and passage.

One of the features that I have always esteemed about Eubena as a person was her depth of character and indeed what seemed a certain quality of the absolute. Precious time with her gave me a glimpse first-hand of her chameleon-like sensitivity to the world, by which I mean her ability to blend or transmute herself in harmony with the properties of her environment.

At night her presence expanded like all great storytellers, though not always in vocal form. She would simply 'spread out', under vast jewelled skies, and let you settle in.[7]

She comprehended a matrix of interdependencies across species, time and seasons, vital to her high status and Maparn[8] abilities.

Eubena read country wind, sand, sky, or mood, alert to any change or clue. Though reticent to white eyes, the country came alive for you through her attention … [She] had a way of drawing things into focus, like a magnet, or a magnifier. Moments could suspend or swell in her touch, the arc of her finger, or the poise of her profile against the sky.[9]

Her command of communication, emanating through her complete being, always hit home, accentuated by her speaking no more than a few words of English. Her deportment, no doubt cultivated and utilised throughout her life as nomadic hunter, wife and mother, shone through in her bearing in later life as ceremonial leader, provider and healer.

Eubena's paintings are not that of a viewer and subject but a full merging in the song rhythms of life, utterly part of it. Transitioning from one phase of our lives to another is necessarily intense, requiring surrender to the passage, its rhythms 'without orientation until mystery burst through'.

Now her spirit runs with the white dingo.

—

POSTSCRIPT

Eubena's legacy continues in her daughters' practice and her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren within the wider community of Wirrimanu. In Eubena's obituary Christine Nicholls noted that as a 'materfamilias' she represented 'an unfailingly calm eye of the storm in post-colonial settlement life'.[10] Irrespective of who we are or what passages or painful thresholds we must pass, her paintings of passage, example of presence, and gracious acceptance of travails testify to the journey and maturing of human life. Long may she continue to inspire us to walk the path with as much dignity as we can muster.

[The elder] acts as a tuning fork
In an environment.
Because she is true
To her own feeling,
She rings a true tone[11]

DR ERICA IZETT

—

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1959, p. 25.
2. Marion Woodman, *Coming Home to Myself*, Conari Press US, 2000, p. 140.
3. Tjukurrpa translates loosely as the Law [of/expressed in] the Dreaming, or 'creation time', which is 'current, totemic and alive' – these narratives express and regulate the Aboriginal world view. They are repositories of knowledge about animals, plants, food, medicine and history. Their significance is largely practical rather than mystical, such as providing topographical descriptions that enable one to find water or travel across the desert. On another level the narratives show how life should be lived today so that the laws of nature laid down in the ancestral past are not violated. The idea of a deep continuity between the past and the present is a fundamental principle of the Dreaming.
4. The narratives told in song cycles concern the activities and journeys of ancestors across the Country, in which the geographical features, flora and fauna are as integral to the story as the actual ancestor. Indeed, each is a manifestation of the other, as are living persons and things today.
5. Erica Izett, 'Queen of the Desert: Eubena Nampitjin and the Balgo women' in Jacqueline Healy (ed.) et al., *Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2014, p. 62.
6. Senses of touch and motion.
7. Erica Izett, 'Queen of the Desert: Eubena Nampitjin and the Balgo women' in Jacqueline Healy (ed.) et al., *Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2014, p. 62.
8. Eubena was a Maparn 'clever women' or traditional healer. She was trained in aspects of medicine and traditional law by her mother, Mukaki, and was marked by the qualifying 'death' and rebirth experience.
   '… [her] power and prestige must stand out in the community. [She] is superior in knowledge, in experience, and in psychic power, and this must be reflected in [her] attitude and general bearing.' A.P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1977, p. 12.
9. ibid p. 60.
10. 'Unique Spirit's art gave nation pause', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 2013.
11. Marion Woodman, *Coming Home to Myself*, Conari Press US, 2000, p. 137.

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Yeewara 2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 75 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 490/04
Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
Private Collection, Melbourne
Australian Aboriginal Art including Works from the Maclean Collection, Deutscher and Hackett, Melbourne, 19 May 2020, lot 4
Private Collection, Western Australia
Private Collection

EXHIBITED
Eubena Nampitjin, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, 8 September – 2 October 2004 and Alcaston Gallery at Melbourne Art Fair, Melbourne, 29 September – 4 October (illus. plate 26)

AUD 22,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Yeewara 2005

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 478/05
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

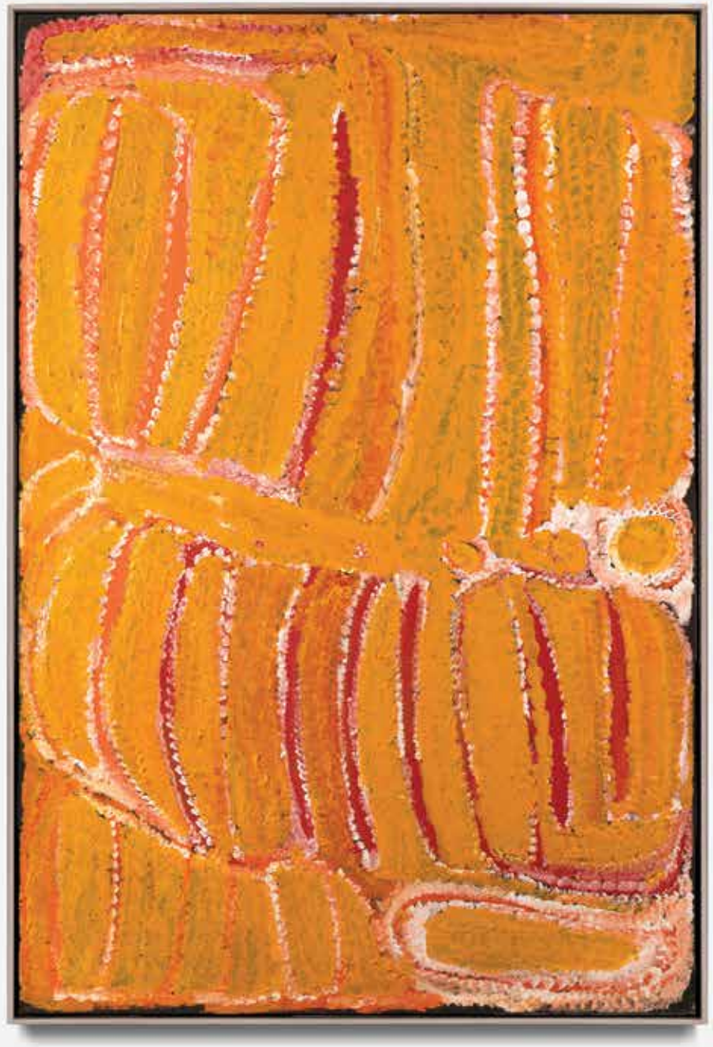
AUD 6,600

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kunawarritji 2006

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 80 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 703/06
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 15,000



EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Midjul 2007

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 1384/07
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

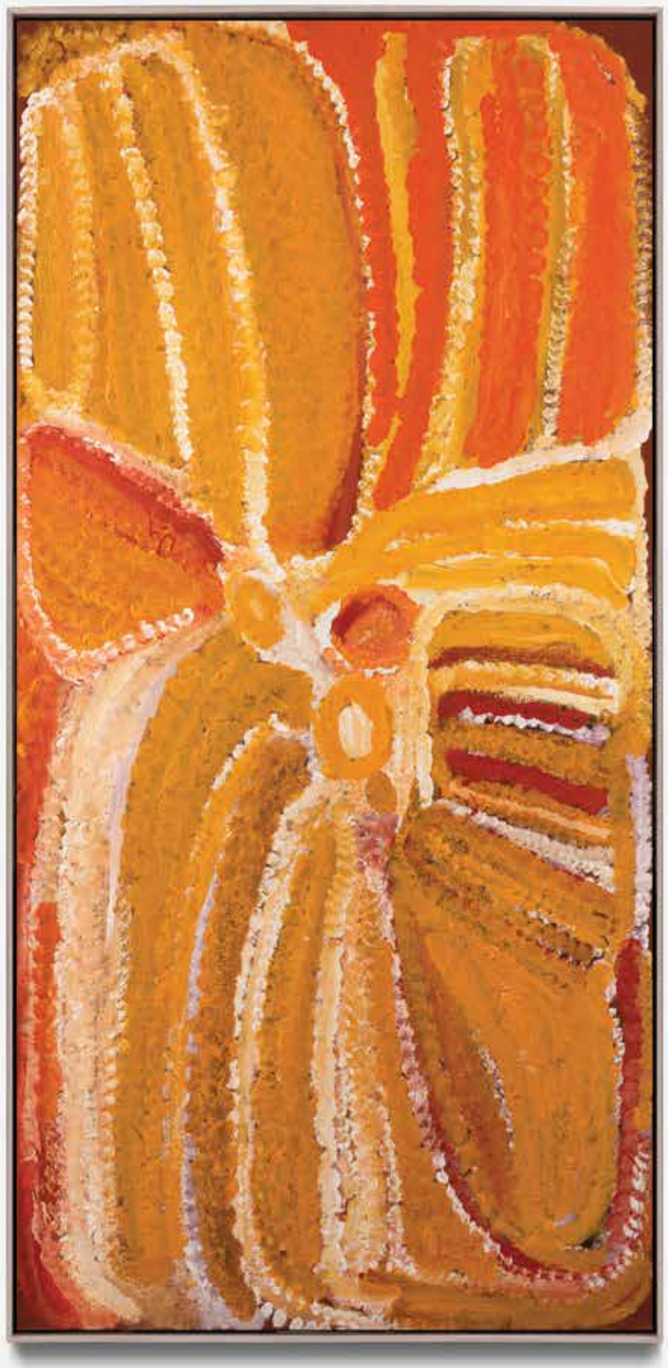
AUD 11,000

MILLIGA NAPALTJARRI
circa 1922–1994
Kinyu 2007

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 79/07
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 11,000



EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kunawarritji 2007

synthetic polymer paint on canvas
80 × 80 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 259/07
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 8,800

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
South of Balgo 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 1263/08
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

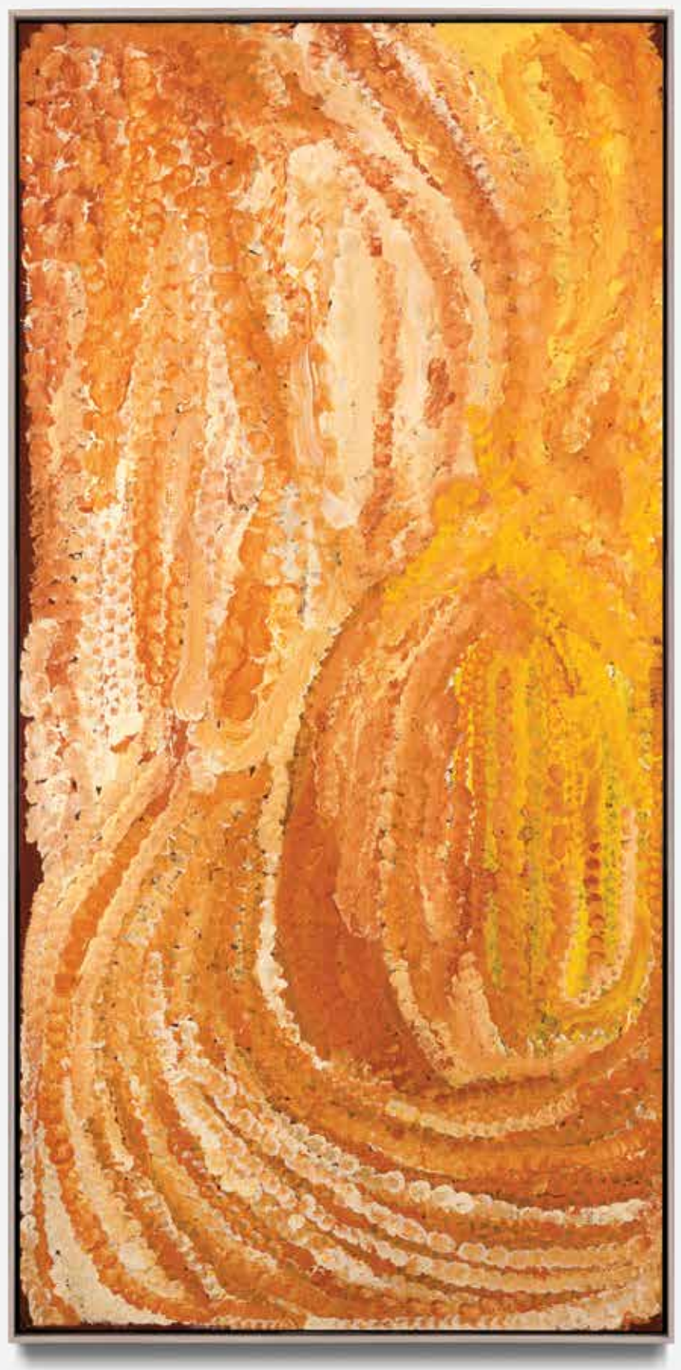
AUD 11,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 1145/08
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 11,000



EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2008

synthetic polymer paint on linen
180 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western
Australia, cat. no. 1117/08
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 58,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 295/09
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 6,600

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Well 33 2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 100 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 291/09
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 28,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western
Australia, cat. no. 317/10
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

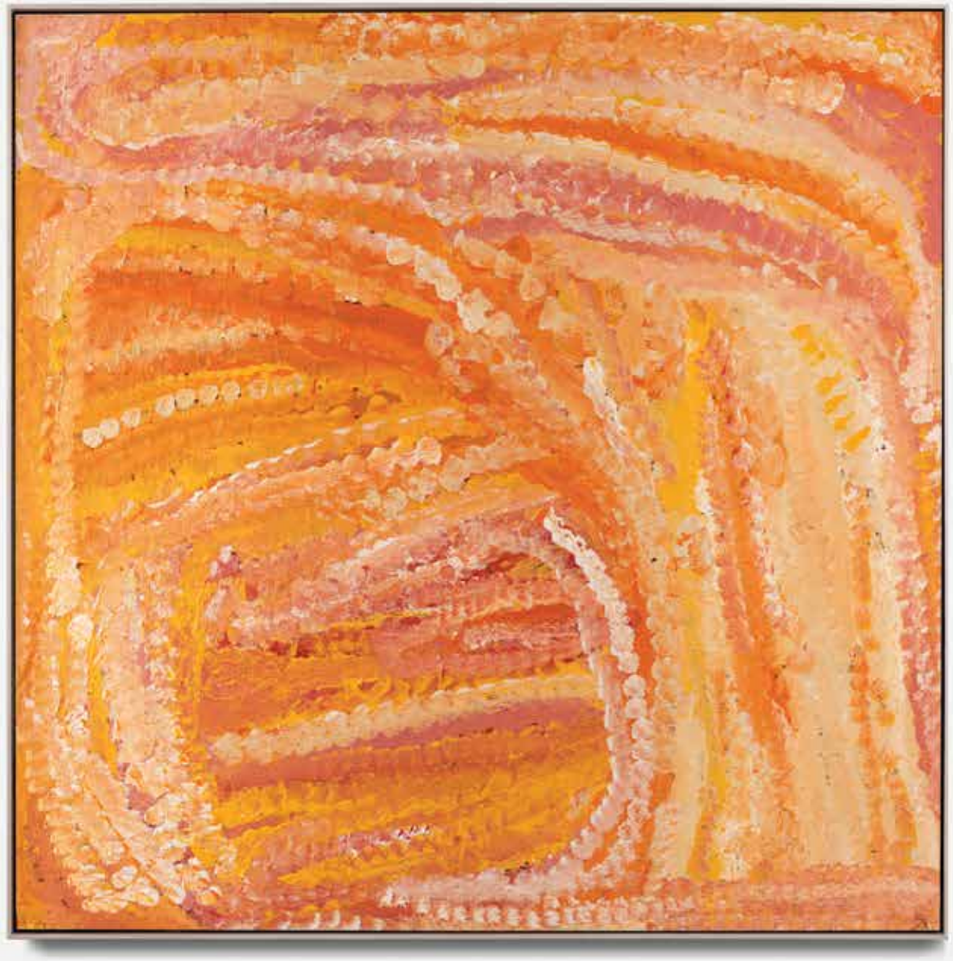
AUD 6,600

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen
80 × 80 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western
Australia, cat. no. 352/10
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 8,800



EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2009

synthetic polymer paint on linen
180 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 78/09
Redot Gallery, Singapore
Private Collection

AUD 58,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2010

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 105/10
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 11,000

—

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2011

synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 60 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 141/11
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 6,600

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2011

synthetic polymer paint on linen
100 × 100 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 392/11
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 18,000

EUBENA NAMPITJIN
circa 1924–2013
Kinyu 2012

synthetic polymer paint on linen
120 × 80 cm

PROVENANCE
Warlayirti Artists, Western Australia, cat. no. 80/12
The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin

AUD 14,000

NGURRA KUTJUWARRA: ON COUNTRY TOGETHER

The incorporation of Warlayirti Artists morphed painting into a form of cultural currency and economic vitality. A consequence, whether intended or incidental, is the essential need to have art centres for the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of First Nations people. The practice of painting, of communal prayer, connects people to their ancestral lands despite the hundreds of kilometres between Balgo, on the edge of the Kimberley, and the deep centre from which the Old People emerged.

The grand take-up of acrylic painting in the first decade of Warlayirti Artists marked a dramatic shift of events in post-mission futurity. The second decade saw key artists skyrocket to acclaim, and the Balgo brand solidified as a force of culture and of colour. The third decade saw another seismic shift: the passing of Old People and the subsequent restless, and often self-conscious, changes of authority.

Balgo is no longer a community of first-contact masters with an encyclopaedic knowledge of desert lore. Seniority is held by headstrong, gutsy mission women, and the rawhide of proud stockmen. They live graciously within the chaotic clash of two worlds, while never given full acknowledgment of their adeptness at white law. These folk have taken up the helm of painting, having learnt at the feet of masters, memorising the rhythmic dots of acrylic being sung to life.

At the midway point of Warlayirti Artists' fourth decade, communities were faced with unexpected COVID-closures, the first time remote Australia was effectively left alone – no tourists, skeleton services, no travel for footy or funerals.

So what to do? Where to go?

Inward, toward Country.

We started with a map: Country for Kukatja, Walmajarri, Jaru, Ngarti, Pintupi, Warlpiri, Wangkajunga, Manyjiljarra.

How would we see it all?

We began with one big trip, Ngurra Kutjuwarra: on Country together. We travelled 3000 kilometres across three deserts in seventeen days.

We traversed sand dunes as tall as skyscrapers, found rocky outcrops as grand as cathedrals, soak waters where great rivers churned below. We took to the skies: via helicopter, we found Nyilla, an important meeting place for many desert mob, unvisited for fifty years.

Drove for days to find a waterhole, dry and covered from long absences. Perhaps it has relics from colonial days, more often than not, grinding stones, spear heads, evidence of life. To the young people it says, 'My family was here, I am still here.'

Stories are recounted of hunting grounds and meeting spaces, of blackfellas being shot, kids hiding in spinifex – the only evidence of the skirmishes are graves of the white men who were speared.

Going on Country is an affirmation of existence for families and a truth-telling process for all. When we return to Balgo, spirits are full, families are jealous and keen to join next time, we are recharged and ready to go again!

With every decade comes an ever-expanding distance between the old masters who walked in from the desert, the current senior artists who were raised by nuns and, now, the young people with their encyclopaedic knowledge of TicToc dances, who get shame for doing the Milky Way dance.

Culture needs to be more than maintained; it needs to be strengthened, nurtured and reaffirmed. While cultural expression takes many forms, it emanates from a sense of belonging. Connection to Country cannot merely be maintained through hand, stick, paint and canvas – to keep connection between person and land, we must walk together on Country, learn stories from each other, pass them down, continue traditions.

Erica Izett so eloquently writes that she bore witness to a new form of prayer, to affirm faith and existence in an ever-changing world. Painting as prayer has not shifted in the thirty-five-year history of Warlayirti Artists. The development of familial style, the size of the boards and the final destinations of the artwork has adapted to the climate of the art market. A rhythm still pulsates through the centre, meditation descends once cuppa teas are made and large handfuls of biscuits have been snaffled. Once early bird humbug has waned, the new masters get to work, heads bowed in prayer – for Mama Kangarra (Father above), for the Tjukurrpa (creation Law), and for the young people who will one day take their place.

POPPY LEVER
Art Centre Manager, Warlayirti Artists

—
Since 2021 Warlayirti has embarked on seven Connection to Country camps with over 200 people from the Kutjungka region and collaborated with ranger groups and art centres to reconnect families from across the Western Desert.

OPPOSITE: Martu Country, near Natawalu (Well 40), Canning Stock Route, Western Australia. Image Credit: Warlayirti Artists
ABOVE: Jane Gimme on Ngurra Kutjuwarra trip, 2021. Image Credit: Lucinda White

Published in 2022 by
D'Lan Contemporary Pty Ltd
40 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

National Library of Australia
ISBN 978-0-6487750-7-2

CATALOGUING & RESEARCH
Vanessa Merlino

DESIGN
Liz Cox, www.studiomono.co

PHOTOGRAPHY
Leslie Haworth

PRINT
Ellikon Fine Printers

© Copyright D'Lan Contemporary Pty Ltd

COPYRIGHT

© Eubena Nampitjin/The Estate of Eubena Nampitjin 2022
© Milliga Napaltjarri
© Tjumpo Tjapanangka
© Susie Napaltjarri Bootja Bootja
© Brandy Tjungurrayi
© Sunfly Tjampitjin
© Ena Gimme Nungurrayi
© Alan Winderoo
© Njamme Napangardi
© Bridget Mudjidell
© Wimmitji Tjapangati
© Donkeyman Lee Tjupurrula
© Lucy Yukenbarri
© Johnny Mosquito
© Tommy Skeen
© Muntja Nungurrayi
© Millie Skeen Nampitjin

ABOUT

Formed in 2016, D'Lan Contemporary Pty Ltd offers specialist art advisory and management services.

We present the finest works of art to the market and take pride in sourcing and selling exceptional works of art by Australian Indigenous artists on behalf of clients both here in Australia and overseas.

ETHICS

Our mission is to create a transparent and sustainable marketplace for Australian Indigenous art and to respect and protect the integrity of the artist, the buyer, the seller – and the marketplace – from fraudulent sales or unethical procurement.

We maintain strict ethical practices and only exhibit and sell works of art with a clear line of provenance.

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS VISUAL ART (NEIVA)

The National Endowment for Indigenous Visual Arts (NEIVA) is an independent charitable trust fund established to centralise and distribute proceeds from art sales back to Australian Indigenous artists and their working communities.

D'Lan Contemporary allocates 30% of net profits to NEIVA. NEIVA is governed by an independent trustee company and funds are allocated through a grant application process managed by Agency Projects. Funded projects are selected by an advisory board of Indigenous leaders. For more information on NEIVA, visit www.neiva.org.au

COLLECTING AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS ART

Provenance is critically important when buying and selling Australian Indigenous art. A clear line of provenance helps to maintain a healthy and ethical marketplace, providing evidence that the artwork is authentic and assurance that the artist has been adequately recompensed.

Documentation that can establish provenance includes:

- Community Art Centre Certificate of Provenance/ Authenticity
- Transfer of Ownership Documentation
- Purchase Receipt or Invoice
- Inclusion in Auction Catalogues
- Inclusion in (private and/or institution) Exhibitions, and Exhibition Catalogues
- Collection/Exhibition Inventory Numbers (private and/or institution)
- Inclusion in Academic/Art Historical Publications
- Documented Appraisals

Best Practice for buying Indigenous Australian art is set out by the institutional standards below:

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART (1980–PRESENT)

All contemporary artworks should be accompanied by documentation linking the artwork to the artist via their Community Art Centre or their primary representative.

On the primary market, artworks should only be purchased from Community Art Centres or an official gallery/ representative. On the secondary market, the Community Art Centre should be the primary source of provenance for any reputable Indigenous Art Dealer or Auction House. This process aligns with the policy of all Australian institutions.

MODERN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART (1950s–1980)

For artworks created prior to the establishment of Community Art Centres, such as bark paintings, Hermannsburg watercolours, Papunya boards and sculptural artworks made for sale, there is less necessity for Community Art Centre provenance. However, a proven direct link to the artist will impact the value of the work; works from this period with no traceable history tend to have significantly less market value than those that do – even when an artwork is clearly authentic. Highly desirable provenance for modern Indigenous artworks includes Papunya Tula Artists, Stuart Art Centre and Maningrida Arts, or a clear line back to one of the primary collectors such as Geoffrey Bardon, Dorothy Bennett, Sandra Le Brun Holmes or Dr Scougal – who were all active in the 1950s–70s.

ARTEFACTS AND OBJECTS (1880s–1950)

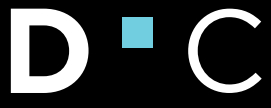
With artefacts, often much of the important collection history has been lost over time. Therefore, a proven provenance can greatly impact the value. Provenance and research should be undertaken to ascertain the origin of the artefact or object, and when and how it left its country of origin, before acquisition. Best practice in this segment is to obtain advice from a trusted expert in the field before buying or selling.

PROTECTION OF MOVEABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT

The *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1985* (PMCH Act) implements Australia's obligations under the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 (1970 UNESCO Convention), to which Australia is a State Party.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention requires State Parties to ensure that no collecting institution accepts illegally exported items.

The Australian Government administers the PMCH Act through the Ministry for the Arts. The PMCH Act regulates the export of Australia's most significant cultural heritage objects by implementing export controls for objects defined as 'Australian Protected Objects'.

If you have any questions about collecting Australian Indigenous art, please contact us at: enquiries@dlandavidson.com.au

DLANCONTEMPORARY.COM.AU