
On Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Spring Landscape* and *Untitled*: Success and Achievements of a Female Aboriginal Artist in Social Context

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Emily Kame Kngwarreye (c.1910–1996), an Indigenous Aboriginal artist of Australia's Central Desert region, began painting with acrylic on canvas in 1988 at the age of approximately 78, and subsequently produced more than 3,000 works during the eight years until her death in 1996. While her painting career was not long, her style underwent numerous changes during this time. Kngwarreye's highly abstract works transcended the conventional boundaries of Aboriginal art, and she rapidly became a central figure in the Australian contemporary art scene.

Looking back at the state of Aboriginal art at the time, this was an extraordinary turn of events, as the vast majority of Aboriginal artists were men. When contemporary Aboriginal art rose to prominence in the 1970s and late 1980s, the works' primary subject matter was Dreaming (the stories and beliefs behind creation of the world by the spirits of ancestors) and related iconographies which only men who had undergone initiation were allowed to depict. In other words, male artists with access to these subjects were the main practitioners of Aboriginal art, with women only on the periphery of the production process. However, despite these circumstances, in the 1990s female artists began to make their mark, and Kngwarreye is widely recognized as the first of them and one of the most successful.

Her success was due in large part to her exceptional creativity and talent, and indeed there has been a strong tendency to attribute her emergence in the art world and her uniqueness to "genius."¹ However, when Kngwarreye's success and achievements are examined in light of the society and environment of the time, it becomes clear that other factors also had an influence that was by no means insignificant. That is Aboriginal art, dominated at the time by male artists, mirrored the patriarchal nature of mainstream Australian society, whereas her home region of Utopia, by contrast, saw female artists play a trailblazing role.

This essay will examine the two points outlined above, and interpret Kngwarreye's success and achievements as a painter in light of the social circumstances and environment of the time. It will then review the development of Kngwarreye's career and place two works in the Ishibashi Foundation collection, *Spring Landscape* (fig. 1) and *Untitled* (fig. 2), in the context of that career. Finally, the essay will consider the new possibilities for Aboriginal art that Kngwarreye opened up.

Aboriginal Art and Male-Dominated Society

The late 1980s, when Kngwarreye began painting, was a pivotal period for the reception of Aboriginal art as contemporary art in society at large.² Notably, the Papunya Tula Artists Cooperative, established in 1972, also in the nation's Desert region, acted as a spark that ignited contemporary Aboriginal art, and by the late 1980s that Aboriginal art had gained worldwide popularity and recognition. At the time, all of the artists active in Papunya Tula were men, reflecting the male dominated social structure of the Aboriginal community at the time.

The anthropologist Diane Bell, who has studied Aboriginal communities in the Australian Desert region from a feminist perspective, notes that male-dominated Aboriginal communities were formed through contact with male-dominated mainstream society.³ Aboriginal society has traditionally been based on clear lines of demarcation between men and women, and this had the effect of giving rise to the male-dominated Aboriginal society that Bell describes. Aboriginal communities in Desert areas have long had clearly defined roles for men and women,⁴ and public interactions between men and women were considered as taboo. Therefore, when anthropologists or government officials from outside the community, i.e. from mainstream society, came and endeavored to make contact, they were met by and interacted with the men of the community because most of those seeking to make contact were male. In Bell's view, as a result of these male-to-male contacts and negotiations between mainstream and Aboriginal societies, the men of Aboriginal communities became the political and socio-cultural spokespersons, while women were reduced to a subsidiary role.⁵

In her book *Gender Studies on Aboriginal Society: Indigenous People, Women and Social Change*, the anthropologist Sachiko Kubota also discusses gender biases held by members of mainstream society that interacted with Aboriginal communities. Kubota writes of the misogynistic perspectives prevalent among anthropologists: "Anthropologists in the early 20th century took an evolutionist view of humanity, one aspect of which was that women were assumed to be vastly inferior to men. Aboriginal people, in particular, were seen as savages who treated the women of their group as slaves. Thus doubly subordinated, Aboriginal women were not considered an important source of knowledge and were not a primary focus of the study,"⁶ According to Kubota, it was not until the 1970s that a more gender-balanced perspective finally gained ground in Australian anthropology. Subsequently, the rise of

feminist anthropology, including Bell's, led to a reexamination of previous views of Aboriginal society, and in the 1980s this updated perspective was publicly acknowledged.⁷

Returning to contemporary Aboriginal art's rise to prominence, the Papunya Tula Artists Cooperative fit into the above-described framework in that it started when a white male teacher suggested that male elders of the community create a mural for an elementary school. Bell also describes Aboriginal art trends of the time in terms of a male-dominated social structure, criticizing male-dominated decisions about subject matter, style, price, and even new innovations in technique, and pointing out that much work produced by women was under-resourced and under-researched.⁸ She notes that at the same time, lack of attention at this stage paradoxically allowed women the freedom to make the work they wanted to make.⁹ In other words, female artists did not have to act as spokespersons for the community as male artists did, and did not have to produce work that represented the "Aboriginal culture" favored by society outside the community.

Kngwarreye's appearance on the scene was a departure from the male-dominated social context of Aboriginal art at the time. Judith Ryan, Senior Curator at the National Gallery of Victoria, describes Kngwarreye's emergence as breaking through the broadly accepted notion that Aboriginal art was the province of men, and describes her work's high degree of abstraction as having the power to change the nature of contemporary Australian art and transcend gender and racial categories.¹⁰

As Ryan points out, Kngwarreye's success and uniqueness were largely due to this high degree of abstraction: she rarely produced paintings incorporating iconography typical of Aboriginal art of the Desert region (designs and symbols representing human figures, plants and animals, vestiges left by spirits, bodies of water, the land) or featured restrained and uniformly distributed patterns of dots. Her signature techniques were endlessly expansive, free-spirited fields of dots and all-over abstraction, with no single point of visual focus on the canvas. These works break free from the conventional image of Aboriginal art.

However, no matter how abstract her work may appear, Kngwarreye's subject matter, like that of other Aboriginal art, is consistently figurative and specific. Although Kngwarreye did not speak much about her work, she did say the following:

Whole lot, that's whole lot, *Awelye* (my Dreaming), *Arlatyeye* (pencil yam), *Ankerthe* (mountain devil lizard), *Ntange* (grass seed), *Tingu* (Dreamtime pup), *Ankerre* (emu), *Intekwe* (favourite food of emus, a small plant), *Atnwerle* (green bean) and *Kame* (yam seed). That's what I paint, whole lot. (Translated by Kathleen Petyarre, 1990)¹¹

This passage is frequently if not always quoted in discussions of Kngwarreye. What Kngwarreye's words tell us is that no matter how abstract the representations in her works may be, what they depict are specific subjects, such as the form of a yam, the figure of an emu, and *Awelye*, a ceremonial tradition practiced by women that is connected to the Dreaming. The art historian Hetti Perkins describes the method of rendering figurative subjects abstract that characterizes Kngwarreye's paintings, saying that she stripped away the complex, culturally charged

iconography and symbols found in traditional Papunya and other paintings to reveal the core, or skeleton, of the subject matter, visually pursuing an aesthetic of simple lines and marks.¹²

Kngwarreye did not adhere to the conventional framework of Aboriginal art, but prioritized her own sensibilities. As discussed above, this may be due to her position as a woman in a male-dominated society at the time, which paradoxically enabled her to find a space for her own creativity to flourish apart from "social conventions" and "the responsibility to represent Aboriginal art to the outside world."

Thus far I have discussed factors behind Kngwarreye's success in terms of the social context of the time, which was that of a male-dominated society. The next section will focus on her home region of Utopia, which initially came to widespread attention due to the success of women artists. It will also offer an overview of Kngwarreye's artistic career, starting with batik (wax-resist dyeing), in which she was engaged before she began painting, and will examine her creative process.

Utopia and Kngwarreye's Country Alhalkere

Kngwarreye was born around 1910 in the Utopia region, located about 230 kilometers northeast of the city of Alice Springs in the Central Australian Desert. The name Utopia was given in the early 1920s by colonizers who established cattle ranches in the region.¹³ The area where Kngwarreye was born has been known for many generations as Alhalkere.¹⁴ Alhalkere was inherited from Kngwarreye's paternal ancestors, and this inheritance is traced all the way back to the Dreaming. The people of Alhalkere have become custodians of the land, protecting it and passing it on to the next generation through rituals, ceremonies, and community laws and codes.

Kngwarreye as an elder who had acquired wide-ranging knowledge, knew the codes of the community, and had various responsibilities and roles, became one of the custodians of her homeland (Country) Alhalkere. These included stewardship of Dreaming traditions inherited from her father, maintaining spiritual connections with her ancestors through rituals incorporating singing and dancing, and physically managing the land of Alhalkere, which embodies the Dreaming. For example, one important aspect of the Dreaming for Kngwarreye was an elongated yam known as *arlatyeye* (pencil yam). This edible yam has long, slender, heart-shaped leaves with small yellow flowers, and grows by sending roots spreading through the soil, making it an important food source for Aboriginal people. Kngwarreye was the custodian of the Dreaming of this yam as well as the custodian of the yam itself. The "Kame" that forms part of her name represents the seed of the yam.¹⁵ For Kngwarreye, Kame was not just a name, but a symbol that united her with Alhalkere.

The "whole lot" that she painted was all tied to the land of Alhalkere. This land was everything to Kngwarreye,¹⁶ the source of her creativity and the core that defined her art.

However, Aboriginal people who originally lived in the Utopia region, including Kngwarreye, were dispossessed of their homelands when the colonizers settled there. Many went to work for the colonizers, including Kngwarreye, who worked at a cattle ranch and a nearby mining operation for many years.

It was not until 1979 that she was able to return to Alhalkere.

Restoration of Land Rights in Utopia and the Women's Rituals of Awelye

After the colonization of Australia in 1788, Aboriginal lands were seized by the settlers. In 1976, almost 200 years later, the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act finally restored Aboriginal land rights. The Act gave Aboriginal communities in Utopia, among others, the opportunity to claim their traditional homelands as their own, and as a result, in 1979 regions including Kngwarreye's Country of Alhalkere were returned to them.¹⁷ In the process leading up to restoration of land rights in Utopia, a traditional ritual performed exclusively by women was submitted as evidence. The ritual, part of the tradition known as Awelye, was carried out at the land rights hearings.

Bell offers keen insight as to why the Awelye ritual was performed for an audience at these hearings. The restoration of land rights required that the community's genealogical lineage be clarified so as to legitimize their claim as landowners, and women were a crucial piece of this lineage. However, in keeping with the traditional prohibition on public interaction between men and women in Aboriginal communities, the women of the community refused to speak at the male-dominated hearings. Instead of testifying in front of the men at the hearing, they decided to perform the Awelye ritual. The songs, dances, and objects used in the ritual, patterns on the body, and the tradition of Awelye itself was intended to unite them with their ancestors, and were presented as evidence of the direct relationship with the land forged by their ancestors.¹⁸ The Awelye performance asserted the depth of the Aboriginal people's connection to the land of Utopia, and thus that they are the rightful owners of the land.¹⁹

This hearing in Utopia was the first case of women's rituals being directly linked to land rights restoration outcomes. The case is also important in the history of land rights restoration in that it shed light on the way procedures involved in land rights were conducted in the context of an externally and internally male-dominated society. Utopia's land rights restoration also differed from other cases in that batik (wax-resist dyeing) produced by Utopia women was submitted as evidence of their connection to the land.

Restoration of Land Rights in Utopia and Women's Batik

Batik production in Utopia began in 1977, two years before the restoration of land rights. Jennifer Green, who was assigned to Utopia as an instructor for a governmental adult education program, started a batik class as part of the program. The following year, Julia Murray was brought in as a batik specialist.²⁰ Kngwarreye took part in the production of batik from the beginning.

The patterns in batik pieces include plants and animals of Utopia, designs from women's ceremonial body painting, and diagrammatic maps of the land, which are important in the Dreaming traditions. In her batik work *No Title* (fig. 3), from 1981, we can see a distinctive iconography that seems to prefigure

her subsequent style of painting. Franchesca Cubillo, currently Executive Director for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts at the Australia Council and formerly longtime curator of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Australia, sees the loosely linked grid structure visible throughout the design as representing a network of yam roots.²¹ Networks of yam roots are among the most frequently appearing compositional devices in Kngwarreye's early paintings, and later in her career, networks themselves became the sole subjects of paintings (fig. 4). Cubillo also identifies the dotted lines filling the interstices of the linear structure as characteristic of Kngwarreye's work, and in her analysis, the parallel lines are consistent with designs on women's breasts that are part of Awelye.²²

In 1978, the Utopia Women's Batik Group was formed and began producing and selling batik on a more commercial basis. The following year, in 1979, batik pieces produced by the women of Utopia were officially submitted to the Land Rights Restoration Movement as proof of their connection to the land.²³ As with the Awelye women's ritual, Utopia was the first place where batiks produced by women were presented as evidence for land rights restoration.

Kngwarreye experienced women's assertion of their rights during this process of decolonization, and the presentation of art as evidence supporting that assertion. In stark contrast to the male-dominated Papunya Tula Artists Cooperative, which was located in the same Desert region and largely determined the direction of subsequent Aboriginal art, women played an important role in Utopia from the earliest days of its activities.

Kngwarreye's production of batik continued until 1988–89, when acrylic paint and canvas arrived in Utopia. The batik period is not assigned much value as part of her artistic practice. This is because batik in general tends to be regarded as craft, its artistic value not readily recognized, and Kngwarreye's output from the batik period is seen as a mere stepping stone to the explosive acclaim and popularity that awaited her later. However, the batik pieces produced by women of Utopia including Kngwarreye, along with the Awelye ritual, were presented to the government as evidence for the restoration of land rights, and these women had the experience of claiming and winning those rights. In this sense, the batik period was surely a meaningful one for Kngwarreye.

The consistency of themes in her work and the strong connection to her homeland, as described above, resonate strongly with her own life experiences. While mainstream Australian society at the time was male-dominated, and the Aboriginal communities that interacted with it were consequently male-dominated as well, Utopia was a rare example of women occupying an important position in the land rights restoration movement of the late 1970s. And Kngwarreye was at the center of it all.

Evolution: Acrylic on Canvas

Kngwarreye made her first paintings on canvas in 1988–89. Preferring the rapidity with which a painting on canvas could be completed to the complexity of the time-consuming batik production process, Kngwarreye never worked with batik again. *Emu Woman* (fig. 5), her first work on canvas, was exhibited at the S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, before being acquired by the then

Holmes à Court²⁴ Collection.²⁵ It is said that Kngwarreye's career as a painter began with this painting, and she went on to create over 3,000 works in about eight years, until her death in 1996 at the age of approximately 86.²⁶

During her short career Kngwarreye's style changed many times, never ceasing to incorporate new modes of expression, though her works can be broadly categorized into three main styles. The first is the so-called early style in which compositions are based on lines, as in *Emu Woman*, and the entire picture is covered with dots. The art historian Howard Morphy describes the linear structures in Kngwarreye's early works as representations of flora and fauna composed on the basis of geometric forms.²⁷ In his analysis, another key characteristic of the early works is that "the underlying figures became almost submerged beneath the surface pattern of dots."²⁸

In 1992–93 the dots began to overwhelm the linear structures, and the entire picture plane was composed entirely of dots. Fields of dots, an essential element of Kngwarreye's work, is derived from traditional designs of the Australian Desert region (ceremonial body painting and sand painting on the ground).²⁹ Her dot paintings of this period has also been described as "colorism"³⁰ because of the richness of color and boldness of this style compared to other periods.

From late 1993 onward, she began to employ minimalist color schemes (initially using only black) and vertical or horizontal stripes. Around this time she was in poor health, and the more simplified compositions lightened the burden of production while at the same time setting a new direction for her work.

Spring Landscape (1993) (fig. 1) and *Untitled* (1996) (fig. 2), both in the collection of the Ishibashi Foundation, can be stylistically classified as follows: the former is from the dot painting period, during which dots covered the entire picture plane and the palette was vivid and abundant, while the latter is in the striped style from the later period of her career, in which minimal colors were used. The Ishibashi Foundation's acquisition of the two works was an outgrowth of the exhibition *Prism: Contemporary Art in Australia* held at the Bridgestone Museum of Art, the predecessor of the Artizon Museum, in 2006. The exhibition was organized to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Australia and Japan. It set the stage for the museum's acquisition of contemporary Australian art,³¹ and in January 2008 four paintings including Kngwarreye's *Spring Landscape* and *Untitled*, were added to the collection.

Spring Landscape

Spring Landscape (fig. 1) was painted in 1993. This was an important year in the transition of Kngwarreye's style from dot-based to stripe-based, but this work still belongs to the dot painting era. The first thing that strikes the viewer is the color, with clashing, overlapping shades of purple, orange, yellow, and green applied with powerful brushstrokes brimming with energy. The word "spring" in the work's title evokes the invigorating stirrings of new life on the breeze. As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of Kngwarreye's dot painting style period is the richness of her palette, but this painting is relatively limited in terms of number of colors, and their

brilliance is moderate. Another tendency of works from this period is the changing size of the dots. Prior to this period the majority of dots were arrayed so as to fit within the lines of depicted figures, as in *Emu Woman*, or were concentric double dots, i.e. smaller dots within larger ones, as in *Untitled* (1989) (fig. 6). Gradually, however, the application of points was liberated from well-ordered regularity, and larger and bolder dots were applied to the surfaces.

The art historian Anne Marie Brody³² attributes this change in dots to the fact that Kngwarreye had begun using larger paintbrushes.³³ These allowed Kngwarreye to work more quickly (to meet the large volume of commissions that were coming in) and also reduced her own physical workload, and for this reason she worked in this mode frequently from this time onward. In many works Kngwarreye began to use a "dragging"³⁴ technique, in which large brushes are used to produce series of dots trailing off in a certain direction, creating flowing lines.

In *Spring Landscape*, the dragging technique is clearly evident. For example, the white-rimmed dots on the lower left edge of the picture appear to have been applied while progressively shifting their positions, little by little, from bottom to top (fig. 7). The orange dots extending from the center of the painting to the bottom are another example of a dragging effect (fig. 8).

Brody also takes note of Kngwarreye's physical movements while painting dots. Kngwarreye often gripped the ferrule of the paintbrush, the metal part adjacent to the bristles, and painted with her entire body in motion.³⁵ The artist was not able to write, and rather than moving her fingertips and wrists as one does when writing text, she moved the brush with the force from her shoulders, her arm and the brush working together as one to produce dots and lines. According to Brody, Kngwarreye's single-minded focus on making dots on canvas echoes movements of the body in the women's rituals of Awelye.³⁶ During Awelye, women line up in a row and gradually advance, jumping up and down to the rhythm of chanting. Margo Neale, Head of the National Museum of Australia's Indigenous Knowledges Curatorial Centre, points out that among Kngwarreye's works, no subject matter embodies the Dreaming, her connection to her physicality, spirit, and ancestors, more than landscapes.³⁷ Neale notes that Kngwarreye's physical movements and placement of dots while working, evoking the Awelye dance, and Awelye itself as a ceremonial tradition of direct linkage with ancestors, all of which Brody focuses on, connect to oneness with the land of Alhalkere, which is also the subject of this work.

Another characteristic of her dots is a technique which has been described as "floral,"³⁸ in which the brush is dipped in two or three colors of paint before application. In *Spring Landscape*, it can be seen in sequences of white dots that form arcs around the top and right sides of the purple cluster on the upper left side of the painting (fig. 9). Looking it closer, one sees that the center of the dots is a whitish hue, but as it spreads outward, it is tinged with purple; Kngwarreye sometimes cut the tips of her paintbrushes to create the pompom-like shapes seen throughout *Spring Landscape*, and to enhance visual effects.³⁹ Many of the dots, applied as if hammered home with all her might, appear to be blank in the middle and bordered on the outside by feathery brushstrokes.

Untitled

Late in 1993 the fields of dots, covering the entire canvas, gave way to more minimalist works consisting of only vertical or horizontal stripes. This dramatic change in style was facilitated by Christopher Hodges, the artist and art gallery director, who has worked with artists from Utopia, including Kngwarreye, since the early days. Hodges encouraged Kngwarreye, who was in poor health, to paint on paper, which was easier to handle, rather than on canvas.⁴⁰ He recalled that Kngwarreye made simple black lines on six sheets of white paper, saying “Awelye,” with a twinkle in her eye.⁴¹ In the Awelye ceremony, linear decorative patterns are applied to the shoulders, upper chest, arms, and breasts. An example of these patterns would be horizontal lines drawn from the shoulders to the upper chest, and vertical lines drawn on the chest to exaggerate the size and length of the woman’s breasts. In fact, this is not the first time decorative patterns used in Awelye were reflected in the work. The anthropologist Jennifer L. Biddle notes that many early works by artists from Utopia, including Kngwarreye, were inspired by Awelye ritual decorations.⁴² Since early on, Kngwarreye produced a number of works entitled *Awelye*. Some feature vertical lines on the four sides of a batik piece, as if framing it, while others depict the figure of a decorated body itself on canvas.

What distinguishes the stripe works from the end of 1993 from those associated with Awelye is their point of focus. *Untitled* (1996) (fig. 2) is a work exemplifying the artist’s late-career style. Here, breast-like shapes have disappeared and the focus is solely on linear decorative patterns like those used in Awelye. The lines are made as if stretched across the canvas, with the overall repetition of lines emphasized and no single area of focus. Many of the powerfully applied black lines on the canvas are interrupted, and rather than carefully adding to the broken lines to continue them, Kngwarreye either left the breaks as they were or painted red lines on top of them (fig. 10). Not a single line is straight, and they move freely over the surface like organic matter. Black, red, brown, and occasionally yellow lines intertwine, overlapping and colliding. The canvas is seemingly treated like a woman’s breasts before a ritual, and when viewing the work, we feel as if we are reliving Kngwarreye’s physical experience of “painting Awelye.” Hodges also notes that Awelye is a ceremonial tradition that encompasses “the act of painting”⁴³ as well as the decorative patterns on the body. The simplified stripes not only deliver a vicarious experience of Kngwarreye’s physicality through rough, bold brushstrokes, but also simultaneously evoke ritual song and dance and the narratives of the Dreaming. It also represents confidence in the spiritual connection with Alhalkere, of which Kngwarreye had the deepest understanding and knowledge.

In Closing

Thus far we have examined *Spring Landscape* and *Untitled* in detail, and what unites the two works is the total confidence in which Kngwarreye painted dots and lines. Her dots or lines were not meticulously placed with composition in mind, and her bold and confident compositions clearly set her apart from other Aboriginal artists active at the time. Concurrently active

male artists also played the role of spokespersons for their culture to the outside world by depicting the iconography of the Dreaming, and as mainstream society demanded “Aboriginal art representing the Dreaming,” it can be said that their works were produced under certain constraints.⁴⁴ As discussed earlier, this was largely due to the social context, in which male members of the Aboriginal community came to play the role of negotiators with mainstream society, which was male-dominated. The clear demarcation between men and women in Indigenous communities had traditionally been premised on men’s and women’s autonomy and equal bargaining power within the community, but contact with male-dominated mainstream society caused power imbalances within the community. It was in the midst of these times that Kngwarreye emerged as one of the few women who had the opportunity to claim and win rights from a female perspective, as discussed in the section on restoration of land rights in Utopia. In the process, she had the experience of confidently expressing her spiritual connection to her Country of Alhalkere. The boldness and lack of hesitation that pervades Kngwarreye’s work was no doubt underpinned in no small measure by her experience and position at this time.

Kngwarreye did not paint images of the Dreaming on canvas, as was the norm at the time, but instead stripped away accompanying meanings and symbolism to create more abstract works capable of standing on their own. She succeeded in creating a new context for Aboriginal art, between the traditions of her community and her own non-traditional sensibilities that lay outside it. *Spring Landscape* and *Untitled* are among the works that represent the spirit of Kngwarreye and the mode of abstraction she achieved.

I would like to close with a quote from Neale, which seems to point to new possibilities for Aboriginal art as seen in the work of Kngwarreye. Neale describes the role that Kngwarreye fulfilled as follows:

...one of her major achievements was not only to make us see abstract art differently but to see the land differently.⁴⁵

When we view Kngwarreye’s abstract representations and imagine her Country, we see more than a desolate Australian desert. Through her work we see the richness of the land, and the deep spiritual connection between the homeland and its inhabitants. Kngwarreye speaks to us, and to quote Neale again, “(hers) is not a view of the land, but rather its voice.”⁴⁶

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(Translated by Christopher Stephens)

Notes

1. The exhibition *Emily Kame Kngwarreye Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* at the National Museum of Art, Osaka and the National Art Center, Tokyo in 2008 had a Japanese subtitle including the word "genius." The exhibition's co-curator Margo Neale (now Head of the National Museum of Australia's Indigenous Knowledges Curatorial Centre) recalled that it was necessary to showcase Kngwarreye's genius and distinctive sensibilities in order to introduce her to international audiences. Gay McDonald and Laura Fisher, "Emily Kame Kngwarreye in Japan," *Artlink* Issue 35:2 (June 2015): pp. 50–53.
2. The history of the reception of Aboriginal art as contemporary art is discussed in my article: Ueda Anna, "Australian Aboriginal Art: Changes in Museums' Exhibition Approaches and Works' Reception," *Bulletin of the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation* no. 2 (2021), pp. 14–25.
3. Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002).
4. Roles were divided, but that does not necessarily mean that one gender was hierarchically superior to the other. The positions of men and women were autonomous and complementary.
5. Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, p. 46.
6. Kubota Sachiko, *Gender Studies on Aboriginal Society: Indigenous People, Women and Social Change* (Sekai Shiso-sha, 2005), p. 7.
7. Kubota, *ibid.*, pp. 7–12.
8. Diane Bell, "Person and Place: Making Meaning of the Art of Australian Indigenous Women," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (Spring 2002): pp. 97–98, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178496>
9. Bell, *ibid.*, pp. 97–98.
10. Judith Ryan, "In the beginning is my end': the Singular Art of Emily Kame Kngwarreye," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia*, exh. cat., (Brisbane; South Yarra: Queensland Art Gallery; Macmillan, 1998), p. 39.
11. Margo Neale, "Marks of Meaning: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, exh. cat., (Yomiuri Shimbun Tokyo Honsha, 2008), p. 20.
12. Hetti Perkins, "Nonggirra Marawili," *Defying Empire: 3rd Indigenous Art Triennial*, edited by Tina Baum, exh. cat., (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2017), p. 90.
13. Utopia consists of five Aboriginal communities (Countries): Alhalkere, Relyte, Thelye, Atarrkete, and Ingutanka. Colonizers who settled in the region in the early 1920s were so impressed by the abundant population of rabbits that they named the area "Utopia." Kelli Cole, "Emily Kame Kngwarreye" in *Know My Name*, exh. cat., (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2020), p. 214.; "Utopia," National Museum of Australia, accessed 4 August, 2022, <https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia/utopia-country>.
14. Kngwarreye was born around 1910 and white settlement in the area began in the early 1920s, meaning that Kngwarreye lived without contact with white people for about the first 10 years of her life.
15. "Biography by Margo Neale," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia*, exh. cat., (Brisbane; South Yarra: Queensland Art Gallery; Macmillan, 1998), pp. 218.
16. Neale wrote of Kngwarreye's work: "Her paintings are not about Alhalkere, they are Alhalkere." Neale, "Marks of Meaning," p. 18.
17. Anne Marie Brody, "Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Portrait from the Outside," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia*, exh. cat., (Brisbane; South Yarra: Queensland Art Gallery; Macmillan, 1998), p. 9. Community permission has been required to enter Utopia since Indigenous land rights were restored.
18. Bell, "Person and Place," p. 108.
19. "History of Utopia Art Movement: Early Days," utopia lane gallery, accessed 4 August, 2022, <https://www.utopialaneart.com.au/pages/history-of-utopia-art-movement>.
20. Brody, "Portrait from the Outside," p. 15.
21. "Emily Kame Kngwarreye," National Gallery of Australia, accessed 4 August, 2022, <https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object/106672?keyword=emily%20kame%20kngwarreye&searchIn=artistOrCulture&searchIn=title&searchIn=medium&uniqueId=106672>.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. The now Janet Holmes à Court Collection is built around a private collection begun in the 1960s by Robert Holmes à Court (1937–1990), who made a fortune in the cattle industry primarily in Western Australia. Aboriginal art forms a major part of the collection, and the Holmes à Court family purchased works from Utopia's batik-producing period onward. They were patrons of artists from Utopia, including Kngwarreye, since the early days of their activities, including purchases of the first paintings on canvas produced in Utopia. https://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/page/janet_holmes_court_collection.html
25. Brody, "Portrait from the Outside," p. 17.
26. In 1992, Kngwarreye became the first Indigenous artist in the country to receive the Federal Government's Australian Artists Creative Fellowship. In 1997, the year after her death, she was selected to represent Australia at the 47th Venice Biennale (in addition to Kngwarreye, Australia was represented by two other female Aboriginal artists: Yvonne Koolmatie and Judy Watson).
27. Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), pp. 309–312.
28. Morphy, *ibid.*, p. 309.
29. "Fields of Dots," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, exh. cat. (Yomiuri Shimbun Tokyo Honsha, 2008), p. 113.
30. Ryan, "In the beginning is my end,'" p. 43.; "Fields of Dots," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, exh. cat., p. 113.
31. *Nature Speaks D* (2005) and *Nature Speaks H* (2006) by Australian contemporary artist Imants Tillers (both shown in the *Prism* exhibition), and *Thorny Devil Lizard Dreaming* (2003) by Kathleen Petyarre, Utopia-born artist and niece of Kngwarreye, were initially acquired in 2007.
32. From 1987 to 1995 Brody was the curator and manager of the then Holmes à Court Collection, and Kngwarreye was among the artists she worked with.
33. Brody, "Portrait from the Outside," p. 18.
34. Brody, *ibid.*, p. 18. The term was used by Kngwarreye herself to describe this technique.
35. Neale, "Marks of Meaning," pp. 22–23.
36. Brody, "Portrait from the Outside," p. 18.
37. Margo Neale, "Two worlds: one vision," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia*, exh. cat., (Brisbane; South Yarra: Queensland Art Gallery; Macmillan, 1998), p. 24.
38. Neale, "Marks of Meaning," pp. 22–23.
39. Neale, *ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
40. Christopher Hodges, "Alhalkere," *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia*, exh. cat., (Brisbane; South Yarra: Queensland Art Gallery; Macmillan, 1998), pp. 36–37.
41. Hodges, *ibid.*, pp. 36–37.
42. Jennifer L. Biddle, "Breasts, Bodies, Art: Central Desert Women's Paintings and the Politics of the Aesthetic Encounter," *History, Power, Text*, ed. Timothy Neale, Crystal McKinnon, Eve Vincent (Sydney: UTS ePRESS, 2014), pp. 427–429. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1w36pd7.29>.
43. Hodges, *ibid.*, p. 33.
44. It should be noted that the male artists of Papunya Tula were also searching for new ways to express themselves in a constrained environment, and seeking innovation in works containing typical iconography. For more details, see: Ian McLean, "Aboriginal modernism? Two histories, one painter," *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, edited by Margo Neale, exh. cat., (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2008), pp. 23–29.
45. Neale, "Marks of Meaning," p. 30.
46. Neale, *ibid.* p. 31.

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