



Artback NT

NGAYUUKU NGURA

Mrs T. Nampitjinpa Porter

Julieanne Farmer, Mrs Porter and Dr. Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis during filming at Pangkurpirri, 2022



Mrs Porter is my mother. She has lived her life in desert country, a world away from the cities of Australia. It's an arid land – a beautiful land – a network of water sources that are ours. The richness of her knowledge and skill comes from a life spanning immense societal change. Thanks to the power of her storytelling and her endless generosity, She continues to give not just to her families, but to the entire world.

- Dr Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis

This exhibition presents the most comprehensive collection of Mrs Porter's paintings and stories to date. Comprising of twelve works representing important sites selected by Mrs Porter, and a film bringing life to her paintings, her stories and her Tjukurrpa. For decades now, Mrs Porter has been recognised as a significant and successful artist whose firsthand knowledge of walking and living on country informs her practice. Mrs Porter's works evoke the movement and energy of desert landscapes, of Yawulyu (Women's songs) and the multilayered histories and Tjukurrpa that this Country holds. This project is a culmination of her desire to share her knowledge, her family's wish to preserve it, and an imperative to celebrate the life and mastery of an extraordinary woman.



Ngayuku Ngura My Country

Tjukurrpa is the foundation of Anangu life and society. Tjukurrpa refers to the creation period when ancestral beings, Tjukaritja, created the world as we know it, and from this the religion, law and moral systems. 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming' is often used to describe the way we and other Indigenous Australians see our origins. This translation suggests the beliefs are unreal. Tjukurrpa is no dream, and there is no such word as 'Dreamtime' in Anangu languages.

ABOUT ARTBACK NT

WHO WE ARE

Artback NT is the Northern Territory's leading arts development and touring organisation. For 30 years, we have connected people and place through the arts, supporting artists and communities across the Territory and beyond. We work across multiple art forms from visual arts, performing arts, music, to dance, to bring high-quality, culturally rich experiences to audiences in remote, regional, and urban locations.

WHAT WE DO

- **Touring:** We develop and deliver national and Territory-wide tours of exhibitions, performances, and workshops.
- **Artist support:** We collaborate with artists to create new work, offering professional development and production support.
- **Community engagement:** We prioritise meaningful engagement with communities, especially First Nations communities, ensuring cultural integrity and local relevance.
- **Partnerships:** We work with galleries, venues, and organisations across Australia to ensure successful delivery and audience reach.

OUR ROLE IN THIS EXHIBITION

Artback NT is proud to lead the national tour of this exhibition. Our team is responsible for:

- Coordinating logistics and scheduling with participating galleries
- Providing curatorial and technical support
- Managing freight, insurance, and installation
- Supporting marketing and audience development
- Ensuring artist and community engagement throughout the tour

This exhibition reflects our commitment to showcasing diverse voices and stories of the Northern Territory, and we are excited to bring it to audiences across the country.

NATIONAL TOURING NETWORK

Artback NT is the Northern Territory representative on the National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Australia group. This national network comprises representatives from six other states and territories, working collaboratively to deliver best-practice touring exhibitions of contemporary visual culture to remote and metropolitan communities throughout Australia. As part of NETS Australia, Artback NT contributes to a shared vision of cultural exchange, accessibility, and excellence in visual arts touring.

Michelle Bell, CEO

Roni Judge, Visual Arts Manager

www.artbacknt.com.au

ABOUT TJARLIRLI & KALTUKATJARA ART

Tjarlirli Art and Kaltukatjara Art are two community-owned art centers located on either side of the border between the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The Tjarlirli art centre is located in Tjukurla, a small community of around 50 people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Tjukurla was established here in the 1980s due to its proximity to extremely significant cultural sites and the ancestral homelands of community members. Nestled between sand dunes and the vast salt lake, Warlartu (Lake Hopkins).

Kaltukatjara art centre is just across the border in the NPY Lands of the Northern Territory. Kaltukatjara (Docker River) community was established as a settlement in the 1960s and is now home to around 300 people. It lies along stunning mountain ranges and river beds.



Mrs Porter, Tjukurla,
November 2022 by
Rosie Frecheville

Julieanne Farmer and Mrs Porter during filming at Pangkurripirri, 2002



MRS T. NAMPITJINPA PORTER

Mrs Porter was born at Wiruly-Wiruly just south of Kuruyurltu to father lilyi and mother Tjapukurla, in approximately 1931. Her skin name is Karrimarra/ Nampitjinpa. Mrs Porter lived her whole life on Country in the Western Desert. She lived a traditional nomadic lifestyle in her ancestral country before being moved to Warburton Mission. Her country surrounds where the communities of Tjukurla, Warakurna and Kaltukatjara now stand.

She first saw white people at Pulpa, when she was living with her family as a child. It wasn't until she was a young woman and had her children that she was taken off her Country. Along with her husband and children, she was taken by Native Patrol Officer McDougall to Warburton Mission with the other family members. Mrs Porter and her husband Nyalirrkurnu had 3 children, Charlie, Mal, and Fiona, all born at Pangkupirri in her ancestral home. While she was in Warburton she heard that her father had passed away at the Giles Weather Station.

After living in Warburton for some time, in the early 70s the family footwalked back to the newly established settlement of Docker River (Kaltukatjara). After living at Docker River for some time Mrs Porter and her family travelled to other places to visit families and to work. They went to Haast's Bluff, Papunya, Kakali Bore, Areyonga and Alice springs.

Again, in the mid 70's, Mrs Porter and her family moved back to Docker River. Here she met up with her sister Esther Nampitjinpa Giles. The last time she had seen her sister was in Warburton with two children and now Esther had six children. They were very happy to see each other again.

In the early 80s there was a death in the west camp at Docker River so everyone including Mrs Porter and family moved to Pulpa (Tjila well) which was an outstation of Docker River. This was the first settlement near Tjukurla Community. There were about 50 people living at Pulpa outstation. The families then established their own community in 1981 between Tjukurla rockhole and Pulpa rockhole and named it Tjukurla. It was at Tjukurla that Mrs Porter first took up the art of painting.

At the beginning, only men painted, then slowly women began to paint as well. Mrs Porter was part of this new group of women who began to paint at Tjukurla. She was also a skilled craftsperson and was well known for her skills as a traditional basket weaver and carver of punu before becoming a recognised for her paintings.

Throughout the 80s and 90s Mrs Porter lived with her families in Tjukurla. Later, she moved away to live elsewhere, but she returned to Tjukurla. In her old age, Mrs Porter continued to paint and travel between Tjukurla and Kaltukatjara (Docker River). She often painted side by side with her daughter, Fiona Young, and her granddaughter, Debrorah Young.

Written by Dr Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis, daughter of Mrs T. Porter. Edited sensitively following her passing.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Mrs T. Porter was one of the inaugural painters at Tjarlirli Art. Even in her nineties, she painted every day. She was central to the community and the art centre. Her remarkable life, cultural authority, and knowledge were widely respected by family and community. Yet, despite her artistic success, much of her personal story had not been shared publicly.

In early 2022, following discussions between Mrs Porter, her family, and Tjarlirli Art, the art centre applied to the Australia Council for funding for her to develop a collection of paintings accompanied by a film. Shortly after the application was submitted, Mrs Porter was

hospitalised and later moved permanently to the aged-care facility in Kaltukatjara (Docker River). This reinforced the importance of ensuring she had the opportunity to record and share her story. Remaining on Country and close to her home in Tjukurla supported her recovery, and she began painting again at the Tjarlirli studio in Kaltukatjara. The project was funded in May 2022.

Dr Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis – Mrs Porter's daughter, a skilled interpreter and author – joined as the project's key researcher and cultural lead. Having grown up with her mother's Tjukurrpa, she brought both cultural authority and experience working across Indigenous and Western



Mrs Porter and Dr. Elizabeth Marrkilyi Ellis mapping and documenting Country – Tjarlirli Art Centre, Tjukurla, 2022

knowledge systems. Filmmaker Matthew Woodham, who had worked with Tjarlirli artists for nearly a decade, brought a foundation of trust and respect. Together, they created a culturally safe and collaborative environment that enabled a deeply personal and in-depth film.

In a rare approach for desert art centres, Mrs Porter received artist fees for the creation of the works and film, rather than being paid only upon the sale of artworks. This ensured financial security, removed pressure to produce commercial work, and allowed full creative freedom.

The first development and filming period began in July 2022. Over the following nine months, Mrs Porter created the artworks, returned to significant places on her Country, recorded in the studio, and documented her stories with family. Her determination was extraordinary. She expressed her knowledge, painting, song, humour, magic, and unwavering desire to return to Country – climbing in and out of the LandCruiser at 90 years old to revisit her sacred places.

Initially planning to paint a small number of key sites, Mrs Porter continued to share more stories as the project evolved. She ultimately created twelve paintings depicting twelve significant places. The works hold deep meaning, and the accompanying film provides insight into these stories in a way not previously recorded or shared.

The collection premiered at RAFT Artspace in Mparntwe/Alice Springs, during a period in which the gallery was operating as a non-commercial project space. This allowed the focus to remain on cultural significance rather than sales. Mrs Porter and multiple generations of her family travelled in for the opening, reflecting that this project was first and foremost for her family, and secondly for a wider public.

In 2024, the collection had its second showing, in Melbourne, in collaboration with Agency Projects. Elizabeth, Fiona, and Mrs Porter's other daughter, Daisy Tjuparntarri Ward, opened the exhibition with song and spoke about the works in a panel facilitated by Dr Susan Lowish, Senior Lecturer in Australian Art History at the University of Melbourne, and Sophie Gerrard, Curator of Australian and First Nations Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. This marked an important step toward the institutional recognition the collection deserves.

The collection of works and the film are a remarkable legacy. Despite many challenges, a series of aligned efforts ensured that Mrs Porter was able to tell her story in her own way. Together, the paintings and the film form a powerful testament to the connection between Country, culture, and artistic practice. Through her characteristic generosity, she has left a profound gift of knowledge, story, and cultural strength for future generations.

Now, in partnership with ArtbackNT, the wider Australian public will have the opportunity to experience this powerful collection.

Adapted from an original text by Rosie Frecheville, Art Centre Manager (2020–2023). Edited sensitively following the passing of Mrs T. Porter.

Mrs T. Porter at Tjukurla



EXHIBITION DETAILS

Proposed national tour from
July 2027

EXHIBITION INCLUSIONS

- 12 paintings: acrylic on canvas - 91 x 122 cm
- 17-minute documentary film
- 14-minute slow tv film of Mrs Porter's painting
- 10-minute film footage of Mrs Porter's country
- 12 A4 pages of handwritten site names
- Wall map
- 12 detailed written stories for each painting

AUDIENCE & ENGAGEMENT

This exhibition is designed to engage a wide cross-section of Australian audiences, from regional communities to major metropolitan centres.

It offers rich opportunities for:

- First Nations engagement and community-led storytelling
- Education and curriculum alignment
- Public programming opportunities are pending consultations between Artback NT and the family of Mrs Porter
- Intergenerational learning and cultural exchange

COST

\$5k

CONTACT INFORMATION

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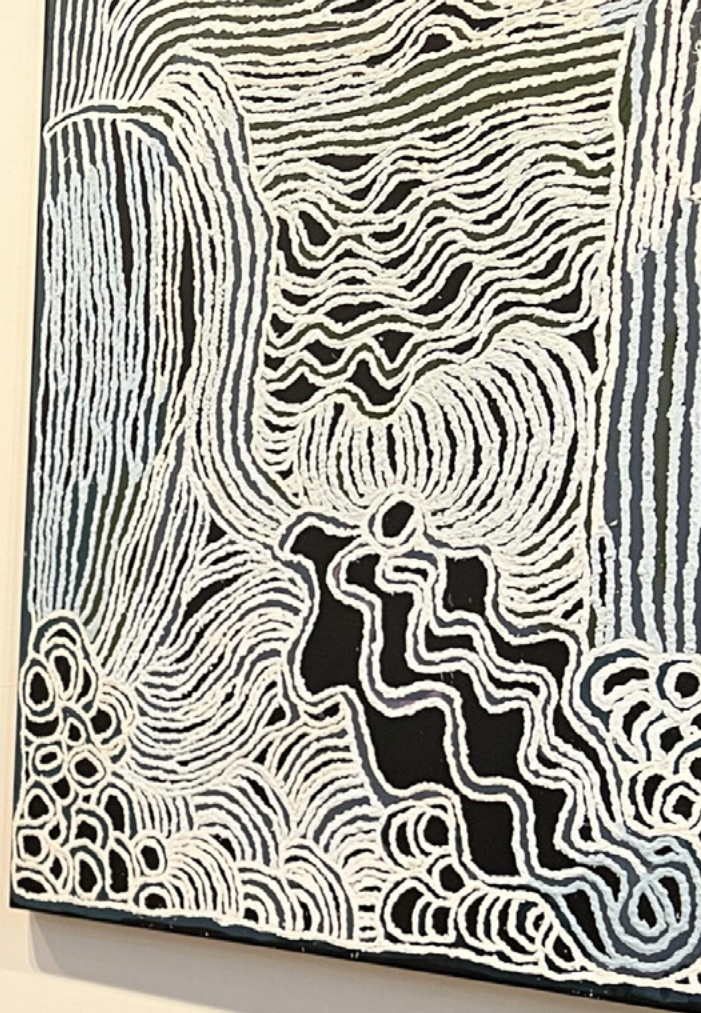
INSTALLATION

Installation images of the premiere
showcase of the collection and film at
Raft Artspace, Mparntwe, April 2023.

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Jariri



Mrs Porter at exhibition
preview, RAFT Artspace,
Mpartwe, Alice Springs, 2023



Painting collection
installation, RAFT
Artspace, Mpartwe,
Alice Springs, 2023



Film and map
installation, RAFT
Artspace, Mpartwe,
Alice Springs, 2023



Painting collection
installation, RAFT
Artspace, Mpartwe,
Alice Springs, 2023

