

True Story

Of Life with Love from central Australia

Artback NT

Artback NT engages audiences to experience the diverse stories, compelling rhythms, and vibrant energy of regional and remote Northern Australia. We champion and support the diverse artists and communities of our region, fostering creativity, cultural expression, and connection to audiences.

Our Visual Arts Program collaborates with NT artists, curators, organisations, and communities to co-create and co-present touring exhibition to remote, regional, and metropolitan galleries, sharing quality visual arts experiences with diverse audiences across Australia.

Exhibition Description/ Curatorial Rationale

True Story is a vibrant body of figurative work selected by 6 prominent Indigenous art centres. The exhibition tells of the shared moments, memories, joys, and struggles of desert life through the lens of First Nations artists living across central Australia.

National audiences will be drawn by an ongoing fascination with the region - the iconic centre of Australia, a place both alluring and alienating in the popular imagination, yet pivotal to a collective sense of national identity. True Story invites viewers into the lived experience of life on Country, in town camps, and remote communities through the captivating storytelling style of the diverse communities of artists.

These stories convey the everyday experience of the artists and their families, childhood memories and dreams, as well as the realities of remote travel, caring for Country, and the ongoing fight for recognition and human rights.

Participating artists

Bindi Mwerre Anthurre

Charles Jangala Inkamala,
Adrian Jangala Robertson

Hermannsburg Potters

Rona Panangka Rubuntja,
Hayley Panangka Coulthard,
Andrew Kumarra Ebatarinja,
Abel Pareroultja, Beth Mbitjana Inkamala

Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre

Benita Clements, Dellina Inkamala,
Kathy Inkamala

Tangentyere Artists

Sally M Nangala Mulda, Doris Thomas,
Betty Conway, Marjorie Nunga Williams,
Nyinta Donald

Tjanpi Desert Weavers

Rosalind Yiparti, Sally Yiparti,
Mary Gibson, Sheryth Bronson,
Leonie Bennett, Cynthia Burke

Yarrenyty Altere Artists

Louise Robertson, Rhonda Sharpe,
Marlene Rubuntja

EXHIBITION OUTLINE

Synopsis

True Story shares the whimsical, political, and cultural interpretations of community life in central Australia.

The exhibition displays an array of interpretations in 2D, 3D and AV of tales told by those who live on Country.

True Story showcases an eclectic array of pieces including vessels, sculptures, animations, paintings and works on paper with a combination of floor and wall mounted works totalling approx. ~30 objects in all. A selection is detailed in this document.

Types of objects

2D, 3D and AV

Art Centres & Artwork

Bindi Mwerre Anthurre

Established in 2000, the Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists studio is the first in Australia to occupy the intersection between supported studios and Aboriginal Art Centres. The studio provides a means for Aboriginal artists living with a disability to develop and receive recognition for their artistic practices by providing supported studio spaces, and creative opportunities. The Mwerre Anthurre Artists hail from communities across central Australia – from Kaltukatjara/Docker River to the south, to Yuendumu to the north – yet most artists reside in Mparntwe.

BINDI MWERRE ANTHURRE

Title: Family in Yalpirakinu

Artist: Adrian Jangala Robertson

Size: 91 x 46 cm

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Year: 2023

Description:

Yalpirakinu is Adrian's mother's country. Adrian's mother is the late Eunice Napangardi, a well-known painter herself. His artworks consistently refer to the desert mountains, ridges and trees which are part of Yalpirakinu. Using a restricted colour palette, Adrian's brushwork is loaded with energy, drama, and memories. In this painting Adrian has drawn from his memory to portray his family in Yalpirakinu.





BINDI MWERRE ANTHURRE

Title: Ntaria (Hermannsburg)

Artist: Charles Jangala Inkamala

Size: 46 x 46 cm

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Year: 2023

Description:

Charles Jangala Inkamala was born in 1968. His mother's country is Papunya and his father's county; Ntaria (Hermannsburg). Charles lives in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and began painting with Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists in 2017. Charles meditates on his home country as he paints and imbues his work with strong knowledge of and connection to land.

Here Charles has painted his father's country Ntaria. His ability to recall the history and shaping of the land is evident in this work, as he paints from memory and engages bold colours, a unique perspective and intricate linework to capture the multitude directions of the rock layers.

Hermannsburg Potters

Hermannsburg Potters is based in Ntaria, a community 130 kilometres west of Mparntwe, on the banks of the world's oldest riverbed, Larapinta, the Finke River. Hermannsburg Potters developed from an initial six month training program in 1990 and has evolved into an internationally renowned pottery studio. The artists here bring the vibrant landscape and spirit of Central Australia to life with their hand-crafted terracotta and underglaze pots and figures. Taking inspiration from Country, culture, history, and day to day life activities the Potters depict stories of the river, birds, animals, bush foods, family, mission days, and current life in Ntaria.



HERMANNSBURG POTTERS

Title: Home to Lyiltjarra with my Five Dogs

Artist: Rona Rubuntja

Size: tbc

Medium: Terracotta & underglaze sculpture

Year: 2023

Description: *We were driving out home to Lyiltjarra Outstation. Me, my husband Freddy Peipei and all my 5 dogs in the back of the troopy. I got a lot of dogs! They were happy to be coming, jumping up on me, panting with their tongues out.*

Along the way we stopped to get firewood and my big mob of dogs seen a goanna walking around and chased it away. Kunya (poor thing). Freddy climbed up on top of the troopy and I threw all the wood up for him to pack there.

We kept driving to Outstation. When we got home my young nephew, Colin Malbunka, saw what a huge mob of wood we got and couldn't believe it! His mind was blown. We made big fire, warmed our hands on it.

We cooked up a feed on the fire, made a billy of tea. Freddy, Colin, and me sitting and talking, eating something, feeling happy. Those lucky dogs got a feed too! When we were all warmed up, we rolled out swags and slept outside with all my dogs, warm and happy. They were all laying there looking at me, smiling, until they all fell asleep.

Rona joined the Hermansburg Potters in 1998 and has since established herself as one of the most prominent senior artists of the group, participating in over twenty exhibitions in Australia and internationally.

Rubuntja's joyous style is distinctive, humorous, and imaginative, and her storytelling ability comes across most strongly in her figurative work. She remains inspired by contemporary life in Ntaria, and her work often includes depictions of cattle and brumbies roaming Country, heading out to the outstation in a Toyota, and collecting bush tucker with her extended family.

Rona's work was shortlisted for the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA's) in 2021 and she her work was also shortlisted in The Design Files Awards, 2021.

Rona Rubuntja's work was selected for the prestigious Shepparton Art Museum Indigenous Ceramic Art Award three times, winning second place in 2008 for her work *Palm Valley Muster*. Rona's first solo exhibition, *Down the Road from Ntaria*, opened at Sabbia Gallery in Sydney in November 2022. She is currently preparing to support Hayley Coulthard, Chair of Hermansburg Potters, to present and exhibit at the Indian Ceramics Triennale in January 2024.

HERMANNSBURG POTTERS

Title: (TBC)

Artist: Hayley Coulthard

Size: tbc

Medium: Terracotta & underglaze

Year: 2023

Description: *That's me when I was a young girl, playing on the swings here in Ntaria with my little friends.*

Hayley is an established artist and strong leader of the Hermannsburg Potters. She is the current Chair of Hermannsburg Potters and a Director of Desart. Hayley joined the Hermannsburg Potters in 2009, developing her raw natural talent under the mentorship of senior Potters Judith Inkamala, Kwementyaye Ungwanaka and her mother Anita Ratara. She is known for producing work of a high technical standard, rich in story and artistic merit. Hayley has participated in more than 50 group exhibitions in Australia and overseas. Hayley's work is held in many public and private collections. Hayley was a finalist in the Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of NSW in 2022 and 2023. She was a finalist in the 2022 Indigenous Ceramic Award at Shepparton Art Museum. Hayley is preparing to exhibit and present a new body of work at the Indian Ceramics Triennale, in January 2024.





HERMANSBURG POTTERS

Title: Hermansburg Races (tbc)

Artist: Andrew Ebatarinja

Size: tbc

Medium: Terracotta & underglaze

Year: 2023

Description: *We used to have horse races here in Hermansburg. Right there we used to race, down by the creek behind the pottery. People used to go round and catch wild horses. They'd break those brumbies in down in the stock yards, they're behind the school. Not long time ago, when I was a young fella.*

Andrew Ebatarinja started working with Hermansburg Potters in 2021 as part of the Men's Development Program. Andrew took to the medium immediately, using his skills as a painter to create dynamic works using both landscape painting and dot painting techniques, quickly developing his own unique style. Andrew is emerging as a strong leader in the Potters men's program, encouraging and teaching new artists. He has exhibited at Alcaston Gallery in Melbourne and Watch This Space in Alice Springs.

Iltja Ntjarra Artists

Iltja Ntjarra Artists is a not-for-profit Art Centre based in Mparntwe. Aboriginal owned and directed, the centre has a special focus on supporting the 'Hermannsburg School'-style watercolour artists who continue to paint in the tradition of their grandfather and relative, Albert Namatjira, arguably one of Australia's most famous artists of the 20th century. The Art Centre started operating in 2004 to provide a place for Western Aranda artists to come together to paint, share and learn new techniques and ideas. The artists work on national and international exhibitions. The centre is renowned for its scenic watercolour paintings on paper as well as its innovative projects, including textiles, and ceramics.

ILTJA NTJARRA

Iltja Ntjarra artists have contributed original works on paper reflecting on life in the desert intertwining their iconic landscapes with stories of the struggle for the environment, recognition, justice, and housing.

We want to introduce to people in urban environments the beautiful landscape of Central Australia. At the same time, we want to raise awareness about the issues we are facing. We feel that there is a lack of consultation with traditional owners. If the authorities would listen to us, they would support us with housing issues for example, rather than investing in mining on our Country, which we strongly object to. The works we present are to let people know about our Country and our lives.

Title: Homeless in Homeland

Artist: Kathy Inkamala

Size: 33 x 51cm

Medium: Watercolour
on paper

Year: 2022

Description: *The painting depicts a family gathering outside around the fire.*

This painting was inspired by a meeting with the Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) from Redfern, Sydney (supported by the Biennale of Sydney 2022).





ILTJA NTJARRA

Title: Palm Valley, NT

Artist: Benita Clements

Size: 33 x 50cm

Medium: Watercolour on paper

Year: 2019

Description:

Horse and cart were necessary for travel - back in the olden days. It took a long time to get anywhere. Nowadays tourists can visit special places quickly and easily as there are cars and buses. It's getting easier to see places that we couldn't visit before.

In my painting you can also see that my County has changed. Back in those days there was lots of sand, but over the years rocks have fallen from the mountains, so now there's lots of rocks around the water's edge.

ILTJA NTJARRA

Title: Fishing and Painting on Country

Artist: Benita Clements

Size: 36 x 54 cm

Medium: Watercolour on paper

Year: 2018

Description:

Fishing and painting with my family near Yaparlpa (Glen Helen), NT

Many of our family members that live remotely need to be closer to Mparntwe to use the services in town. However, there is a shortage of housing and a very long waiting list. Many of our families struggle with lack of housing and poor living conditions. For example, today, Betty Namatjira Wheeler, granddaughter of Namatjira, is living with her family in an outstation near Ntaria. She would like to live in Mparntwe, perhaps even at Morris Soak but housing is not available for her.

Our family member, Reinhold Inkamala says: *I live in Abbott's camp in Mparntwe. There is a big mob of family that stay there, many are drunk and there is constant noise and dirt inside and outside the house. We would like more privacy and the comfort of our own home, but we cannot get our own house. I have been waiting for a couple of years on a waiting list after I applied for a house, but I never got a place to live in for myself and my immediate family.*

ILTJA NTJARRA

Title: Homelessness

Artist: Dellina Inkamala

Size: 33 x 51cm

Medium: Watercolour on paper

Year: 2022

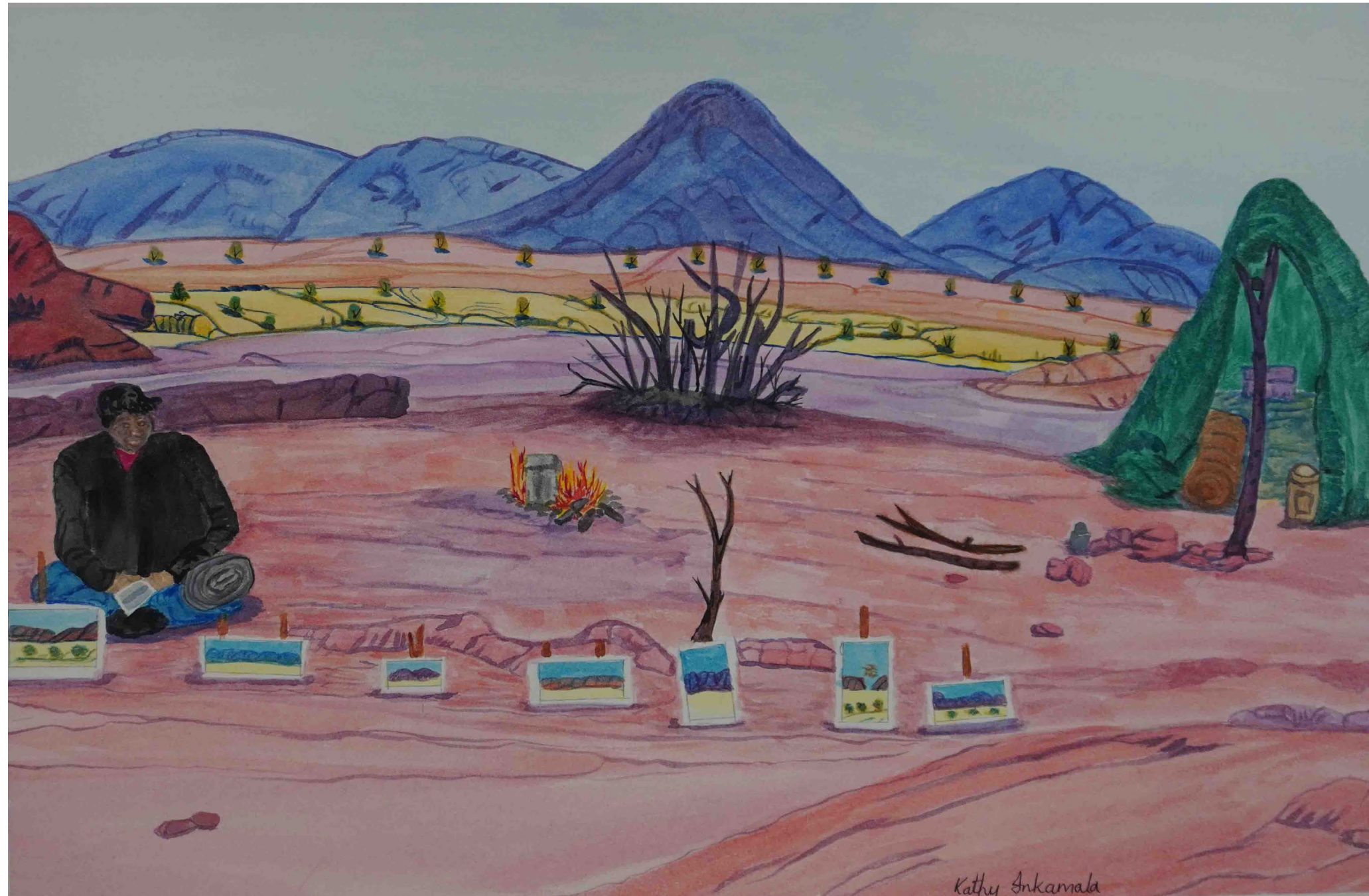
Description:

From left to right, bottom to top: Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Outstation, town camp, and the creek bed. Lost mob coming into town, outstations are full and there is a shortage of houses.

A family is on the creek bed camping when Alice Springs town council removes them from there. Then they go to town camps, but there are alcoholic family members, so they move on to the Alice Springs hostel, but it's closed because it's full. So, they go to the outstation but there are no rooms available. So, they continue back to the creek bed.

And so, the story goes on and on in a cycle...





ILTJA NTJARRA

Title: Namatjira Camp, Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Selling watercolour paintings on Country

Artist: Kathy Inkamala

Size: 49 x 31 cm

Medium: Watercolour on paper

Year: 2022

Description:

In the peak of Albert Namatjira's career, he moved from Ntaria (Hermannsburg) to a humpy in the Morris Soak camp in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) to be near Rex Battarbee and sell his paintings. Namatjira did not own a house or have a house to live in. His sons, daughters and grandchildren lived there with him near the creek bed. For a long while, the Namatjira family also camped near the iconic Ghost Twin Gums near Mparntwe. They lived in a windbreak and a humpy back in those days. One significant problem that the Namatjira family faced was humbug from other family members. There was constant pressure on them from family to give money, food, and grog. However, they did not have a house for protection and privacy.

Although Namatjira travelled to Canberra to receive his citizenship he still did not own a house. He requested the authorities to assist him with his and his family's housing situation at Morris Soak, but assistance did not come through. Namatjira eventually returned to the mission at Ntaria.

Tangentyere Artists

Established in 2005, Tangentyere Artists is a not-for-profit enterprise and a hub for art activities that supports around 400 artists across the 18 town camps of Mparntwe. Through art, Town Camp Artists communicate stories about family, identity, and everyday life experiences of Aboriginal people in central Australia. When sharing these stories, the artists place themselves in the national conversation, working towards understanding and reconciliation. Tangentyere is an Arrernte word meaning coming together, working together.



TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

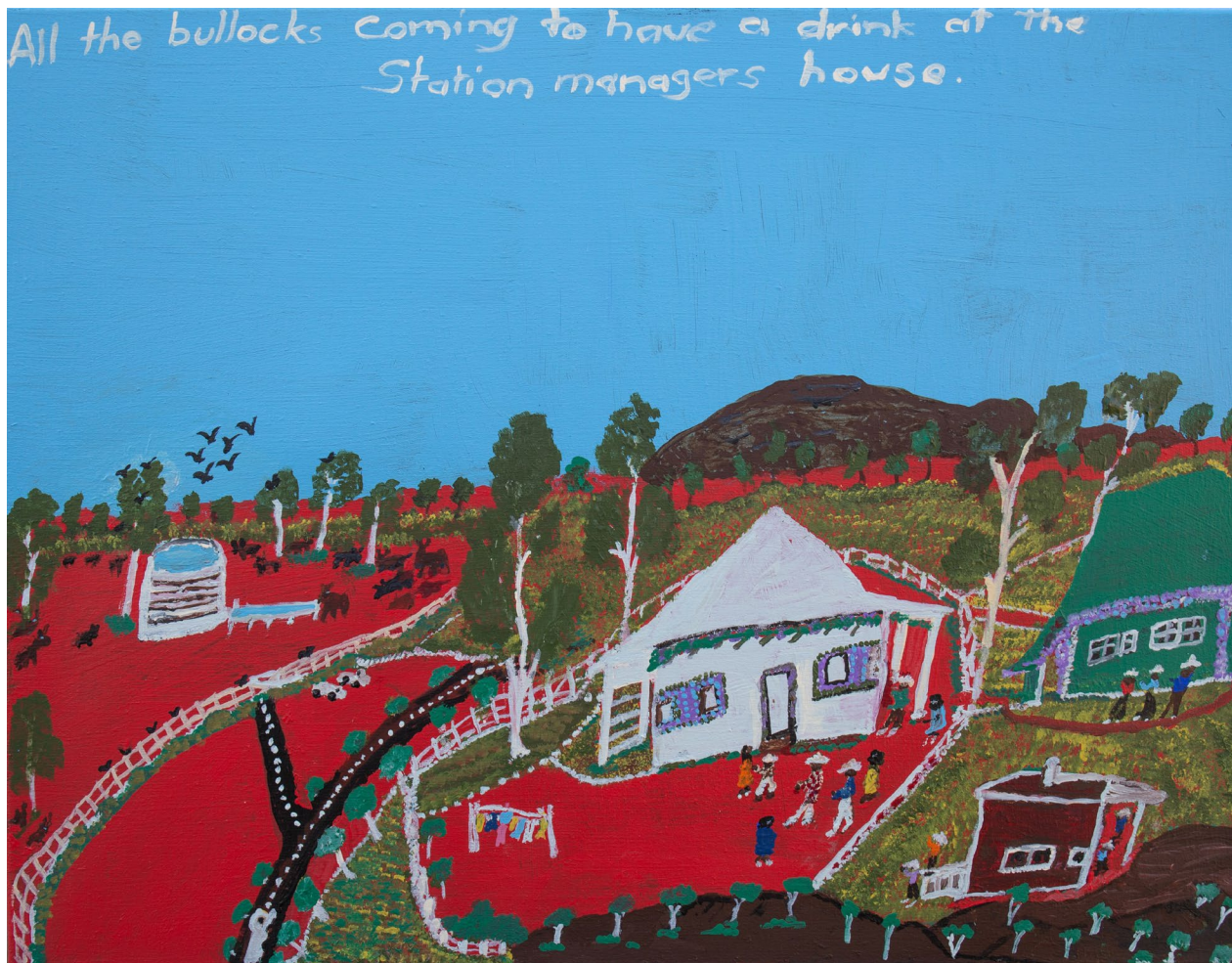
Title: Illari Creek, Tempe Downs

Artist: Betty Conway

Size: 660 x 1530 mm

Medium: acrylic on linen

Year: 2023



TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

Title: Pension Day in Wintertime, Titjikala
 Artist: Doris Thomas
 Size: 510 x 1220 mm
 Medium: acrylic on linen
 Year: 2023

TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

Title: Down the Creek
 Artist: Sally M Nangala Mulda
 Size: 660 x 1220 mm
 Medium: acrylic on linen
 Year: 2023

TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

Title: Finke Desert Race
 Artist: Marjorie Nunga Williams
 Size: 610 x 910 mm
 Medium: acrylic on linen
 Year: 2023

TANGENTYERE ARTISTS

Title: All the Bullocks
 Artist: Nyinta Donald
 Size: 510 x 665 mm
 Medium: acrylic on linen
 Year: 2023

Tjanpi Desert Weavers

Tjanpi Desert Weavers is a social enterprise of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPY Women's Council) that enables women living in the remote Central and Western Desert regions to earn an income from fibre art. Tjanpi represents over 400 Aboriginal women artists from 26 remote communities across Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory. Tjanpi artists use native grasses to make spectacular contemporary fibre art, weaving beautiful baskets and sculptures and displaying a seemingly endless creativity and inventiveness.

TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS

Title: Bush Bus (TBC)

Artist: Nellie Patterson

Size: 52 x 23 x 34cm

Medium: wire, raffia, minarri (greybeard grass)

Year: 2020

Tjanpi Desert Weavers in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands bring weaving to life with stories of the bush bus, an important figure in bush life.

For True Story, Kaltukatjara (Docker River) artists will tell the story of the beloved Centre Bush Bus and its historical connection to their community, having begun its service there in 1998. Through the fibre art medium, Tjanpi weavers want to celebrate the positive impacts the Bush Bus has on their community – the freedom to visit family scattered across the vast Lands, the benefit of accessing services in Mparntwe, and the ability to travel across remote regions with ease.

The bush bus, that's our bus. Docker River started that bus. Going to Alice Springs and back home. – Winsome Newberry



TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS

Title: Come on Toyota

Artist: Nellie Patterson

Size: 52 x 23 x 34cm

Medium: wire, raffia, minarri (greybeard grass)

Year: 2020



TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS

Title: Troopy

Artist: Margaret Smith

Size: 41 x 18 x 28cm

Medium: wire, raffia

Year: 2020

TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS

Title: Tjanpi Truckpa

Artist: Kunmanara (Niningka) Lewis

Size: 20 x 18.5 x 38 cm

Medium: wire, raffia, minarri (greybeard grass)

Year: 2007

TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS

Title: Minyma in a Blue Dress with Papa

Artist: Lynette Lewis

Size: 45 x 44 x 55cm and 36 x 15 x 28cm

Medium: wool, raffia, minarri (greybeard grass)

Year: 2019



Yarrenyty Artere Artists

Yarrenyty Artere Artists is a small, dynamic Art Centre located in the Yarrenyty Artere Town Camp of the Larrapinta Valley in Mparntwe, and part of Tangentyere Council, Aboriginal Corporation. Yarrenyty Arterre Artists are recognised for their delightful award-winning soft sculptures, made from bush dyed woollen blankets embellished and stitched with wool and cotton. The artists also work in textiles, works on paper, fashion and film making.

YARRENTY ALTERE

Title: A Strong Woman of the Country

Artist: Louise Robertson

Size: 76x60x13cm

Medium: Soft sculpture made from woollen blankets dyed with local Arrernte plants and rusty metal. Embellished with wool and cotton.

Year: 2022

Description:

This sculpture has my own story all over it from my sewing and my colours. It is all about me and my family and what keeps my mind relaxed. I love being around my family in Country. If you look on the head in my hair you can see some music and things for having a picnic out bush. These are the things that make me really happy. I love to entertain my family with music and picnics and go out bush. This sculpture is like a family photo with all the things that are good in the beautiful landscape. The landscape is showing how happy I feel when I am with my family swimming and laughing. The landscape in real life doesn't really look this bright and colourful but when I see it in my mind when I'm thinking about it for sewing, this is how I see it. So bright and lovely. I feel so proud to be an artist. To make art from my imagination and from my life. To show everyone the good times. And sometimes the hard hard times too.





YARRENYTY ALTERE

Title: I am not a tree, I am a woman

Artist: Rhona Sharpe

Size: 177x50x33cm

Medium: Soft sculpture made from woollen blankets dyed with local Arrernte plants and rusty metal. Embellished with wool and cotton.

Year: 2023

Description:

When I do my sewing, I think of new stories to tell. It is good to make people laugh and feel happy. This is my story today about this new sculpture, I really feel happy too when I look at her standing right here. This is my story today. I love to walk around in the bush, this is me walking in the bush. I love to look for bush tucker and be with family. One day I was walking in the bush and three birds jumped into my coolamon because they thought it was a nest and that I am a tree. But I'm not a tree. I am Woman! They think this is their new home. See my hand, that's me saying in sign language, Aboriginal way, "huh, what you doing up there"? I tried to shoo them away with my stick, but they just don't want to go. They like this new nest, this cooloman because it is beautiful with patterns and shiny cotton and so they sing "we love to stay with you in this shiny new nest"! Those birds were singing that song and they never flew away and so that day, I couldn't collect any bush food.

YARRENTY ALTERE

Title: My Father's Country

Artist: Marlene Rubuntja

Size: 44x57x34cm

Medium: Soft sculpture made from woollen blankets dyed with local Arrernte plants and rusty metal. Embellished with wool and cotton. Painted tin.

Year: 2019

Description:

My father and other families lived in the Todd River near Olive Pink for many years. My father worked so hard for everyone, to get them these Town Camps to get them homes. Do you know what he got, three tin sheds on his country. I feel so sad when I think he only got those tin sheds when he made homes for other people. He tried to live in those tin sheds, but it was too hard. You know I was talking about this story in the Art Room, telling it, and old Mrs.T Inkamala was listening, and she said when she heard me talking, she said, "I went there, and I saw those tin sheds, and you know what, there was only emus and kangaroos living in those tin sheds, true story." Now that's a true story, she really saw that, and she really said those true story words, true story! It might sound funny, and this sculpture might make you laugh but it makes me sad when I think about my father and those tin sheds. I just can't believe he worked so hard, and this was all he ever got. I've only been there

once, me and Milton. I want to go back, I want to take my children and grandchildren to that country, we need to go there, I can feel it so strong. I don't know if there will still be emus and kangaroos living in those tin sheds, it doesn't matter, it only matters that we get to see that place, my father's country."

See, we can tell a story that is sad really, but we can use all the bright colours and then you will stop and look and see that our sewing is telling you the truth. We can show you a story that you don't even know about us.

Marlene Rubuntja



PRODUCER/ PROJECT INFORMATION

History and credentials

This project is a collaborative effort between the producer, Artback NT, and the Art Centres representing the artists: Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists, Hermannsburg Potters, Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art centre, Tangentyere Artists, Tjanpi Desert Weavers, and Yarrenyty Altere Artists.

Significance

Desert life and stories of community and place.

Audience Relevance

This exhibition brings together approximately thirty art works. Comprising paintings and framed works on paper including screen prints and pigment prints, the exhibition combines wit and humour with astute commentary. The exhibition is highly accessible to a general audience while providing deeper insights into the cultural, social, and environmental influences on life. It will be of particular interest to those with a fascination for life in central Australia.

Although the exhibition reflects life in the desert, it has resonances throughout Australia as storytelling and politics know no borders.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Touring dates: 2025 - 2027

Exhibition specs:

3D

4 x Terracotta & underglaze pots with sculptural lids (within 50 x 50 x 50cm).

1 x Terracotta & underglaze sculpture car (within 50 x 50 x 50cm).

1 x sculpture of the Centre Bush Bus bus (approx. 90cm x 50 x 50cm)

3 x sculpture of smaller works (within 50 x 50 x 50cm).

3 – 5 x figurative sculpture approx. 90cm x 50 x 50cm

2D

15 x painting 33 x 50cm - 660 x 1530 mm

AV tbc

Running metres: 60

Approx. time needed to install exhibition:
1 day

Approx. time needed to bump out exhibition: 1 day

Exhibition inclusions:

e.g. Education material, bespoke furniture, AV equipment installation requires 1 projector.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Audience Engagement

The artists are available to engage in public activities including workshops, talks, performances, and community projects subject to funding and in development with specific venues.

Cost: \$5k + GST

CONTACT INFO

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