

SEPTEMBER 14 - OCTOBER 7, 2023

Our Country: APY Lands

Kukika Adamson, Nyunmiti Burton,
Umoona Collaborative, Yaritji Heffernan,
Tuppy Goodwin, Sandra Pumani, and
Rhoda Tjitayi

OPENING: SEPTEMBER 14, 2023, 5-8 PM



Installation view of *Our Country: APY Lands* at GNYP Gallery Berlin in 2023



Yaritji Heffernan

152-22

2022

acrylic on linen

298 x 200 cm



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Ngura is a central concept for the Anangu people of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, a sparsely populated desert region in the north of the Australian state of South Australia. Ngura means 'earth, country, home' in the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages.

For Aboriginal women and men, their land and the stories connected to the land and their being are integral. As Nyurpaya Kaika Burton, one of the senior artists connected to the APY Art Centre Collective, states: "We were born into this story, into this country". The land is not separate from the people, who are the land's inherent and perpetual custodians.

The concept of ngura, home country, is the central subject in the bold, colourful compositions of the artists of the APY Art Centre Collective.

The APY Art Centre Collective, located in eight communities across the APY Lands, was founded in 2016 and became a catalyst for an extraordinary body of work to come out of this region. All the art centres that now form this collective know different stories and origins. Ernabella Arts, for instance, was established in 1948 and is the oldest art centre in Central Australia. The most recent art centre to be included is Umoona Art Centre, which was only established in 2020 (Coober Pedy).

Kukika Adamson, Nyunmiti Burton, Yaritji Heffernan, Tuppy Goodwin, Sandra Pumani, Sally Scales and Rhoda Tjitayi, the artists in this exhibition, represent

several generations. Each have their own unique and individual style.

The Umoona collaborative (Jeannie Minunga, Kay Finn and Myra Kumantjara) canvases reflect the fact that producing art, in the past and still today, is a communal effort, just as celebrating the land from which it emanates during ceremony.

Typically, concentric circles are used to depict sites of significance, while lines that connect these circle motifs often show the tracks of the ancestral beings in the elemental creation stories known as Tjukurpa (Dreamings).

The vibrantly colourful paintings of these artists not only are a continuation of an artistic tradition that goes back many thousands of years, but also give voice to an engagement in Aboriginal rights in regard to governance, sustainable land management, and the protection of sacred sites.

Artists of these remote communities travel around country and go into caves to see the artwork of their ancestors. Art is about country, knowledge of the land, and with it custodianship of that land. Several of the sites depicted, including Antara, a sacred place that is associated with Kungkarangkalpa, more widely known as the Seven Sisters story, are important women's sites. It are places that belong to women's law.

Georges Petitjean



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Kukika Adamson – APY Adelaide

Kukika Adamson (b. 1950, Pukatja) lives and works in Adelaide. She started her art practice, still as a child, at Ernabella Arts school with floor rugs and weaving before going into painting. Today, at the APY Adelaide Studio, she works beside Yaritji (Mutu Mutu) Heffernan and Wanatjura Lewis, two former school mates from Pukatja. As many Aboriginal artists, Adamson paints the myths that took place in the creation time referred to as the Dreaming. The artist focuses on one of the many foundational stories of the Anangu peoples: Wanampi Tjukurpa, the Rainbow Serpent Dreaming Story. She inherited this important Tjukurpa story, one of the creation narratives of the cultures of Aboriginal Australians, from her father, the well known artist Tiger Palatja.

Adamson's paintings have been exhibited since 2021.

Nyunmiti Burton – APY Adelaide

Nyunmiti Susan Burton's (b. 1960, Alice Springs) grew up in Pukatja to where she returned after completing the college years in Alice Springs. In 1980, Nyunmiti married and moved to Amata where she began a career as an Aboriginal Education Worker. She is the Vice Chairperson of NPY Women's Council and has many years of experience in community governance. Burton's work has been shown nationally and internationally, including the Bangkok Art Biennale in 2022, and entered public and private collections in Australia and Switzerland.

Burton paints the stories passed down to her by her father, mother, and grandfather. Those narratives tell of the connection between individuals and the country, and of the relationship to nature through food and travelling paths. Burton's paintings depict the Tjukurpa (that is, the creation story) of the constellations of Pleiades and Orion. In the Aboriginal cultures of Australia, these creation stories reveal routes across the lands and skies believed to be followed by the creator-beings in the period of the creation of the world, also called the Dreaming. These routes are seen as connections between individuals and ancestral lands and beings.

Rhoda Tjitayi – APY Adelaide

Rhoda Tjitayi (b. 1969, Pukatja) is based in Adelaide, where she began working at the APY Adelaide Studio in 2019. Tjitayi's grandmother has a great influence in the artist's education, since from a young age they would paint and sing together. The artist's grandmother was from the Country of Makiri, known as Tjala Minyma Ngura, the women's sacred place of the honey ant. Its ancestral creation narrative is Piltati Tjukurpa, the story Tjitayi has learned from her grandmother and is painting to preserve.

Tjitayi has been included in numerous exhibitions at APY Gallery and most recently has been featured in the 2022 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Free/State at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and was a finalist of 2022 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Sandra Pumani – APY Adelaide

Sandra Pumani (b. Alice Springs, 1974) was raised by her family in Mimili community, home to 300 Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara peoples. Pumani attended school in Mimili, and briefly visited a boarding school in Adelaide before returning to her community, to be with her husband and daughter. Pumani has held respected leadership positions in her community since 2004 and is known for championing education initiatives for Anangu children, being the Anangu Coordinator at Mimili School for over 10 years. Pumani was a finalist of 2023 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Pumani began to paint in 2022 at the APY Studio Adelaide, and is interested in the Tjukurpa stories, that is, Anangu foundational myths (also called songlines). In the Aboriginal cultures of Australia, songlines are routes across the lands and skies believed to be followed by the creator-beings in the period of the creation of the world, also called the Dreaming. These routes are seen as connections between individuals and ancestral lands and beings. Pumani's work centres on Inma Tjukurpa, the water, a subject that has been painted by all her family. At the core of Pumani's painting practice is the deep family connection, going back generations, to the land.

Tuppy Goodwin – Mimili Maku Arts

Tuppy Goodwin (b. 1952, Bumbali Creek) lives in Mimili community, home to 300 Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara peoples who have been living in the area for millennia in harmony with nature and acting as custodians of the land since 1975, when it was reinstated as an Aboriginal Community. Goodwin's work centres on the Tjukurpa stories, that is, Anangu foundational myths or songlines. In the Aboriginal cultures of Australia, songlines are routes across the lands and skies believed to be followed by the creator-beings in the period of the creation of the world, also called the Dreaming. These routes are seen as connections between individuals and ancestral lands and beings. Specially important to Goodwin is Maku Tjukurpa, the witchetty grub songline.

Goodwin's paintings have been exhibited nationally and internationally since 2010. Goodwin was first shortlisted for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards in 2018, and won the acclaimed Hadley's Art Prize for landscape painting in 2022. The artist has also been a pre-school teacher for 30 years sharing stories through inma (dance and song) and storytelling.

Umoona Collaborative – Umoona Community Arts Centre

The Umoona Collaborative consists of three women: the two sisters-in-law Jeannie Minunga (b. 1952) and Kay Finn (b. 1954), and Myra Kumantjara (b. 1981), Minunga's daughter. The three artists began to paint at the Umoona Arts Centre in 2021, and have focussed on individual as well as collaborative works. All three women work at the centre side by side with other family members, so that their practice is rooted in family relations. They paint the stories of their lands. Myra Kumantjara depicts her grandmother's country Kalpi, near Mimili on the APY Lands, considered an important women's place. Meanwhile Jeannie Minunga is interested in the Wanampi Tjukurpa (Water Serpent Story), and Kay Finn paints the Kapi Tjukula (waterholes) from the region of Oodnadatta.

With a collaborative work, the three artists are a finalist nominee in the 2022 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Yaritji Heffernan – APY Adelaide

Yaritji Heffernan (b. 1955, Pukatja) has been painting at APY Adelaide since its establishment, in 2019. She is an important leader and teacher in the centre, encouraging young artists in their emerging practice. She paints Kapi Tjukula (or waterholes), that were essential to the surviving of Anangu people in the dry season because of its use as storage of water. One only has access to the knowledge of these sites, and their location amid the creeks, through the strong connection that exists among Anangu families and between them, their land, and their ancestors.

Heffernan has been exhibiting her work since 2019, including in the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Academy of Fine Arts in Frosinone, in Italy. She was a finalist in the 2021 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Kukika Adamson

153-22

2022

acrylic on linen

199 x 298 cm





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This is a group exhibition of **APY Art Centre Collective** and **Mimili Maku Arts** artists in collaboration with **Arndt Art Agency**.

The **APY Art Centre Collective** is a social enterprise made up of 11 Indigenous-owned and governed arts and culture organisations from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. As a collective, these organisations work to increase income for Aboriginal artists and support the important work of art centres in APY communities.

The **Mimili Maku Arts** is a vibrant contemporary art studio owned and governed by a strong board of Anangu directors. The art centre supports artists across different disciplines such as painting, new media, sculpture and publishing. As founding member of the APY Art Centre Collective, Mimili Maku Arts continues to work alongside families and friends from other APY communities to develop regional large-scale artistic projects.

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