

## DESERT + COAST: Seven Elder Aboriginal Painters

Spanning Salon 94's landmark 3 East 89th Street building, *Desert + Coast: Seven Elder Aboriginal Painters* presents works by seven renowned senior women artists from Australia. From the deserts, Pitjantjatjara women Betty Muffler and Maringka Burton work from—and heal—the arid, sun-scorched Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankuntjatjarra (APY) Lands, while Pintupi artists Mantua Nangala and Yukultji Napangati paint stories belonging to women in the remote communities where they live and work. By contrast, the rich traditions and coastal landscapes of northern Arnhem Land are reflected in the colorful, expressive paintings of Yolŋu artists Dhambit Munungurr and Nonggirrŋa Marawili on eucalyptus bark and board, while Kaiadilt artist Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori feverishly painted her relationship to her traditional home of Bentinck Island in an unprecedented outburst of creative energy and aesthetic reconfiguration.

*Desert + Coast* celebrates the dynamic contemporary art practices that persist and advance from across the Australian continent. Indigenous women pioneered a new, co-created era of painting in Australia in the late twentieth century, and the works in this exhibition—each pushing the boundaries of scale and color, tradition and depiction—are rich examples of the vanguard of Aboriginal painting, memory, and narration.

Despite facing many adversities—assaults on land rights, cultural sovereignty, and self-determination—these artists' singular practices are united through their depiction of Country. More than the physical land and waterways—that which can be conventionally mapped—Country encapsulates the dynamic connection First Nations peoples have retained to their ancestral homelands, which in some locations in Australia have been continuously occupied for upwards of 65,000 years. Country also comprises an array of creation stories, ceremonial locations, and meeting places of utmost importance to these various Indigenous communities. Each of the seven women and their communities have been severely impacted by colonization; their globally recognized art practices reflect collective effort to retain and reiterate important cultural knowledges that have been passed down for thousands of years. Beyond their aesthetic innovations, these paintings tell stories—informing viewers about the physicality, history, and cultural importance of their respective desert or coastal Country.

The paintings of Muffler, Burton, Nangala, Napangati, Marawili, Munungurr, and Gabori are as forward-looking as they are informed by tradition and precedent. The question for viewers is less what do we know of these works, but what might we be willing to learn from them as we consider the range of Indigenous art across states and nations, the importance of culture and Country today, and the prevalence of diverse practices across Australia.

*Desert + Coast* is the largest gallery exhibition to date, internationally, to engage with a plethora of color, style, scale, and composition in the roughly fifty paintings included. While the pathways and years of practice vary significantly for each of the seven women, together their works generate a display of dynamic genius, centering female autonomy, culture, Country, and community.