

Warlimpirrnga (Warlimpirri)
Tjapaltjarri

Area: Kiwirrkura
Date of Birth: C.1959
Language Group: Pintupi
Date of Painting: 2018



Artist Information:

Born on a hillside east of Kiwikurra in the late 1950s, Warlimpirrnga was one of a small party of Pintupi people whose arrival in Kiwirrkura in 1984 made national headlines.

Until this point, at the age of about twenty-five, Warlimpirrnga had never encountered Europeans or lived in a settlement. The group had been following their traditional nomadic lifestyle in the area west of Lake Mackay. After three years at the settlement in Kiwikurra, Warlimpirrnga (*As Recorded by The Sydney Morning Herald*) approached Daphne Williams of Papunya Tula Artists with the request that he be allowed to paint. The other artists instructed him in the use of paint and canvas, and he completed his first painting for the company in April 1987. His first 11 paintings were exhibited in Melbourne at the Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in 1988, the entire group being purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria.

Warlimpirrnga is married with a son and paints Tingari stories for his country, around the sites of Marua and Kanapilya. He is the brother of Walala Tjapaltjarri and Thomas Tjapaltjarri, also artists and his wife is well known painter Yalti Napangati.

In 2000 he was one of four men who traveled to Sydney for the opening of the Papunya Tula, *Genesis and Genius* Exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW) where he participated in the making of designs in sand prior to the opening of the exhibition. In 2012 his work featured in *DOCUMENTA*, an exhibition in Kassel in Germany. In 2015 he was taken to New York and several other cities in the US for the opening of a solo exhibition of his work at Studio 94 and in September 2016 a record price of \$297000 was achieved at a Sotheby's





Warlimpirnga Tjapaltjarri with two of his untitled paintings at Salon 94.



Warlimpirnga's painting that sold for 167 000 GBP at a Sotheby's auction in London in September 2016.

New York Times
An Aboriginal Artist's Dizzying New York Moment
September 18, 2015
Randy Kennedy

For at least the last century, it has always been a momentous occasion: An artist from the hinterlands arrives in New York for the first time, hoping for what the writer Willie Morris called “the tender security of fulfillment.” But for the painter Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri, things were a little different.

First, Mr. Tjapaltjarri, who is believed to be in his late 50s, has had an international following for several years, and currently has pieces in a show traveling the United States. Second, Mr. Tjapaltjarri's hinterlands are a lot more hinter than most. Until he was in his 20s, he and his family, part of the Pintupi Aboriginal group, lived in a part of the Western Australia desert so remote that even after other Pintupi were forcibly relocated into settlements in the 1950s and 1960s, his family remained out of view, hunting lizards and wearing no clothes except for human-hair belts, as its ancestors had for tens of thousands of years. When they were encountered by chance in 1984 and persuaded to move to a Pintupi community, they instantly became famous, known in newspaper accounts as the Pintupi Nine and described as the last “lost tribe.”

Since that time, Mr. Tjapaltjarri has taken up painting on canvas with two brothers, adapting ceremonial designs that Pintupi men used on rocks, spears and their bodies. While he has traveled several times within Australia, he took his first trip to another country last week, arriving in New York for the first solo exhibition of his work in the United States. The show runs through Oct. 24 at the Salon 94 gallery on the Bowery, near the New Museum.

Dressed in jeans, a checked shirt, Everlast tennis shoes and a black cowboy hat that would have been right at home at Gilley's nightclub in Houston in the '70s, Mr. Tjapaltjarri said through an interpreter that he was enjoying the attention his paintings were receiving but that the city itself was a little intimidating. He liked the subway, but the Top of the Rock at Rockefeller Center not so much. He laughed and patted his considerable paunch to show where the butterflies were.

It's not a customary feeling for Mr. Tjapaltjarri (his full name is pronounced war-lehm-peer-ing-ah jah-pal-jah-ree), who was the eldest male in his family in the desert and, as a healer and keeper of ancestral stories at the heart of the Pintupi people, is still a commanding presence in Kiwirrkurra, the community where he lives in the Gibson Desert. The paintings that have made him a sought-after figure in the Desert Painting movement, which arose in the 1970s and sowed international interest in Aboriginal art, are in one sense transcriptions of the stories. They seem abstract, made from thousands of dots — a signature of much Desert Painting. The dots form tight parallel lines that, when viewed close up, oscillate like those of a Bridget Riley Op Art painting, except more so, a visual equivalent of standing near a speaker that drowns out all the sound around it.

The lines and switchbacks, painted on linen canvas while it is flat on the ground, correspond to mythical stories about the Pintupi and the formation of the desert world in which they live. Some of the stories, which are told in song, can be painted for public consumption, but others are too sacred or powerful to be revealed to outsiders. “My land, my country,” said Mr. Tjapaltjarri, the only English words he uttered during an interview, pointing at a painting with a circle made out of dots. He said it represented a group of ancestral women who appear only at night in the desert around Lake Mackay, a vast saltwater flat that is the primary focus of his paintings.

The way that the lines and curves tell the stories remains mostly a mystery. “I've been asking that question for 40 years, and I've never really gotten the same answer twice — it's very inside knowledge,” said Fred R. Myers, an anthropologist at New York University who has studied the Pintupi and their art since the early 1970s and as a doctoral student helped bring attention to the Papunya Tula Artists cooperative, which is owned and directed by Aboriginal people from the Western Desert. “The paintings operate more like mnemonic devices than like representations of a narrative.”

Mr. Myers was translating for Mr. Tjapaltjarri one recent afternoon in the gallery along with the artist's nephew, Matthew West, who had accompanied his uncle from Australia. The professor said that while Mr. Tjapaltjarri was proud of his reception in the wider art world, “he is highly respected in his homeland for his knowledge and experience, and his paintings of his stories are really very much tied to that respect.”

Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, who owns Salon 94, said she first saw Mr. Tjapaltjarri's work in the prestigious Documenta exhibition in Kassel, Germany, in 2012, and that while she had seen works of Desert Painting before, she was particularly struck by his. “I also loved the fact that this abstraction had another kind of abstraction behind it — at least abstraction to us, because we'll never be able to understand these stories in the way they do,” she said. “And I thought that they looked so contemporary at a time when abstraction is being practiced by so many New York artists.” (His works are selling at the gallery for \$25,000 to \$80,000.)

Mr. Tjapaltjarri was stifling yawns by the end of the interview, not because he was bored but because four days in New York had put him through the wringer. And he was getting on a plane in the morning for the next stop on his American tour, the Pérez Art Museum Miami, where several of his works went on display on Thursday in a traveling exhibition of abstract Aboriginal painting. “I'm not homesick yet,” he said, smiling from behind his long gray beard and asking to have his picture taken with a reporter before everyone parted ways. “I'm having fun.”

GANNON HOUSE GALLERY

COLLECTIONS:

National Gallery of Victoria,
National Musee Des Arts Africains et Oceaniens, Paris,
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Art Gallery of NSW
Artbank, Sydney

EXHIBITIONS INCLUDE:

1990 'Friendly Country Friendly People' Touring Exhibition
1992 Naidoc Week Exhibition
1999 Papunya Tula, *Genesis and Genius*, Art Gallery of N.S.W, Sydney
2001 'Pintupi' Alice Springs
2012 Documenta, Kassel, Germany
2015 Salon 94, New York

PUBLICATIONS:

Papunya Tula, Genesis and Genius, AGNSW.
Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert, A Biographical Dictionary, Vivien Johnson, Craftsman House
Aboriginal Artists Dictionary of Biographies, Kreecmanski, Janusz B & Birnberg, Margo JB Books
ISBN 1876622474

COLLECTIONS, PUBLICATIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

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EASE THEM IN: HOLDING

A small family group of Western desert Aborigines has made what is believed to be its first contact with modern society.

The nine Aborigines were brought into a remote Central Australian outstation on Saturday.

The bush nomads were reunited with Pintubi relatives they had not seen in more than 25 years.

They made the trip into the 20th century in four-wheel drives from the Pintubi outstation.

The Pintubi Aborigines had given up the nomads for dead after they lost contact with the main tribe in the late 1950s. They became separated when they were overlooked by a Government drive to bring the scattered community together into major reserves in the late 1950s.

Most of the Pintubis went to the Papunya settlement, west of Alice Springs, but the group was left behind.

Since then, the group has been living in Pintubi country, trekking between

Canberra moves to halt media

water holes only the Pintubis know of and surviving on goannas, feral cats, kangeroos and emus.

They hunt with traditional tools — spears, boomerangs, woomeras and nulla nullas.

There are two men, two boys in their teens, two elder women, one woman in her 20s and two teenage girls.

They are: Wallimpi Tjapangardi, the oldest of the men; Pirti Tjapaljari, the other man; Narnoena Nangala and Papalanya Nangala, the two elderly women; Thomas Tjapangardi and his brother Yatajarri Tjapangardi; Takarria Napaljari, the woman in her 20s;

and the two teenage girls, Yalti Napanardi and Yurkulti Napanardi.

They have fine features with delicate limbs and tough, leathery hands and feet.

They are wary of white people.

The European clothes they have been given are believed to be the first they have had.

Two of the nomads, who have been walking naked through the sandhills of the Pintubi country for most of their lives, were sighted by two members of a Pintubi outstation community on Monday, last week.

The Aboriginal Affairs Department has

• From Page 1.

been monitoring the situation since the group was first sighted and will try to prevent media groups and anthropologists from pouring into the area.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Mr Clyde Holding, said the department was taking appropriate steps to ensure the group's contact was made in such a way as to ease the culture shock and minimise health risks.

Mr Holding said it was possible a common cold or any modern virus could prove fatal to members of the group because they were unlikely to have developed immunities to these diseases.

"We want to make sure that this group's

introduction to modern Australia is better than the introduction of Aborigines generally to white Australians since 1788," he said.

Mr Holding may visit the area soon.

The Central Land Council will prosecute anyone in the area without permits and is angry over the release of the information.

The location of the community is being kept secret for the group's protection.



• Contd Page 3.