



KUDDITJI KNGWARREYE

Kudditji Kngwarreye (pronounced Kubbitji) was born about 1928 at Alhalkere at Utopia Station, located about 270 kms north east of Alice Springs. After a traditional upbringing and initiation, Kudditji quickly adapted to the western civilization by forging a career as a highly regarded Stockman. He also spent some time working in mineral and gold mines that were then operating in the region before adopting painting as his career.

A custodian for ceremonial sites located in his country at Utopia Station, many of his paintings refer to sites at Boundary Bore, where men's initiation ceremonies are performed. He began painting his precisely dotted Emu Dreaming paintings, featuring ranks of coloured roundels and other 'hieroglyphs' on a chequered or dotted background, in 1986. He was one of the first established male artists in Utopia.

Kudditji is the brother of the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye. An Anmatyerre Elder and custodian of many important Dreaming stories, Kudditji Kngwarreye has a deserved reputation as an innovator and as a consummate colourist. He has been actively painting since 1986 which is around the same time as his renowned older sister who transformed the Indigenous Fine Art Movement.

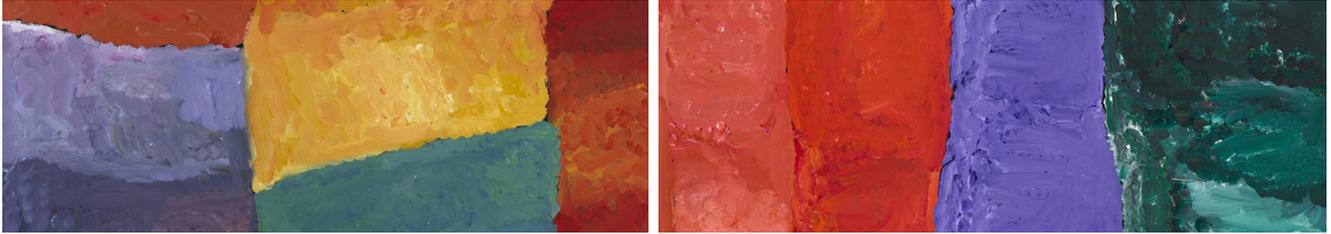
Kudditji's style developed over the years of his creative practise. His sophisticated dot work that he employed in his early career transformed into a preference for a much looser brushstroke in large blocks of colour in later years. He produced bold and confident paintings, with stark or subtle contrasts depending on his choice of shades, executed in a painterly manner. Kudditji's paintings reflect a style he has worked on since 2003 when he began to explore a technique known as the dump dump, or dump dot, that was made famous by his sister Emily. Though the similarities between brother and sister are there, Kudditji's beautiful, soft and mesmerising landscapes of his country are unmistakably his own and have found wide acceptance and acclaim via very successful solo exhibitions, particularly in Australia and London. His paintings are romantic images of his country, accentuating the colour and form of the earth and landscape, the depth of the sky and the shimmering summer heat, expressing his extensive knowledge and love of his country. Kudditji most frequently depicted his inherited ancestral totem, the Emu. The concentric circles represent water holes where the Emu goes to drink. Several of these are situated around the Boundary Bore region.

He painted only sparingly until his sister's death in 1996 after which he experimented with a number of gestural styles involving looser brushstrokes and schematic composition. However the demand for his earlier, male iconographic style saw Kudditji to return to it, and it was not until 2003 that he began to exhibit the saturated patchwork colour paintings with which he is principally associated today. His current renown rests almost exclusively upon colour field works that are invariably entitled *My Country*. In these, fields of colourful textured stippling are structured into a geometric architecture of squares and oblongs.

Confronted by the sheer power of his works, many people immediately make the comparison that Kudditji Kngwarreye's paintings echo the colour-field artworks of the abstract expressionist, Rothko. Scholars have discussed the 'deconstruction' that many trained western artists arrive at in a period of their career that breaks down the years of training by the traditions of the establishment. Poles apart in both geography and training, 86yr old Aboriginal elder Kudditji Kngwarreye has a fascinating and ancient history which is reflected in his art. Imbedded in his iconography is a connection with his dreaming that simply will never be taught in any art school. When Kudditji's work appeared for auction at the Deutcher-Hackett 2007 sale this comparison was employed by one commentator to note the record setting sale for a post WWII work of Rothko's-White Center, Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose, at Sotheby's in New York - (SMH May 19 2007).

Though parallels between the abstract expressionists and Indigenous artists like Kudditji, may seem to labour the point of the latter's contemporary credibility, the underlying sentiment is valid. It does demand equal respect. Yet there are far more intimate parallels to be drawn between his style and that of Emily. Certainly both were masters of colour. However, the geometric composition of Kudditji's work has a more formal feel, than either the energetic linear, or 'dump dump' bush strokes of his sister. In this regard Kudditji rarely strays from a strictly Aboriginal male aesthetic in to the wild abandon of female gestural work. There is a clear 'intention' as he lays down the quilted structures, no matter how loose and haptic the grid may be.

These works still resonate strongly with his earliest ones. They still fall within the distinctive Anmatyerre male convention of depicting men's ceremonial sites and, in Kudditji's case, Emu Dreamings. While his earlier works were far more conventional they were well received and Kudditji made his living as an artist, after haven given up life as a stockman. A move away from this style at first proved unprofitable, which prompted a return to his tried and trusted style. However, in time, the successful outcome of years of experimentation saw him gain national attention and, later, international renown.



Emily, Kudditji and other Utopia painters like Gloria Petyarre, Minnie Pwerle, Barbara Weir and others, who paint quickly with gestural or stippled brushwork, have one important thing in common. They need to paint a lot of work over an extended period in order to develop a truly unique and successful style. This is interesting, in the current context where 'art centre provenanced' works are considered by many to have supreme provenance. Artists such as these could never have emerged from official art centres with their financial restraints and requirement to cater to the needs of large numbers of individuals. It has only been through unfettered freedom of expression, and profligate creativity, that their careers have flourished to the point where they are amongst the most successful of all Aboriginal artists.

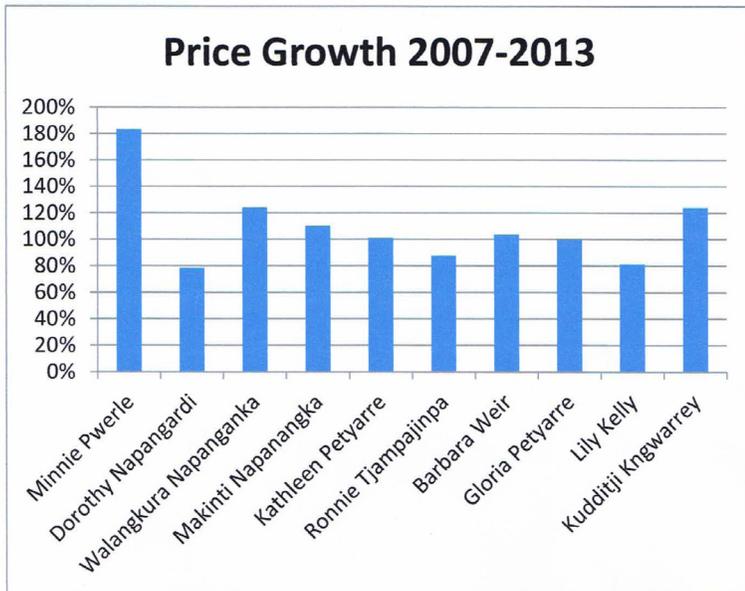
In Kudditji Kngwarreye's case his works have been included in countless group shows and no less than 10 solo exhibitions since 2000. Far from diminishing his career, the fact that hardly a retailer in the country would not be able to find a canvas or two somewhere in the stockroom to show a prospective client, has only served to enhance his reputation and standing.

In January 2007, Kudditji was included in the list of Australia's 50 most collectible artists and he was declared one of the top 10 most collectible Aboriginal artists, based on future price growth potential.
Source: Australian Art Collector magazine, Nicholas Forrest, art market analyst.

Profile References

Top End Arts Marketing. 2006. Togart Contemporary Art Exhibition. Darwin. Top End Arts Marketing.
Japingka Gallery. 2004. Kudditji Kngwarreye - My Country. Fremantle WA. Japingka Gallery.

Below is a price comparison amongst a few of the leading Indigenous artists for your interest:



KUDDITJI KNGWARREYE

Solo Exhibitions

- 2011 Kudditji Kngwarreye, Kate Owen Gallery, Sydney
- 2010 Kudditji Kngwarreye, Kate Owen Gallery, Sydney
- 2009 Kudditji Kngwarreye: Pastels, Kate Owen Gallery, Sydney
- 2008 30 Emu Dreamings, Kate Owen Gallery, Sydney
- 2008 My Country, Japingka Gallery, Perth
- 2006 Masterwork, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
- 2006 My Country, Japingka Gallery, Perth
- 2005 Waterhole Aboriginal Art, Danks Street, Sydney
- 2005 New Paintings, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
- 2005 Colours in Country, Art Mob, Hobart, Tasmania
- 2004 My Country, New Paintings, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
- 2004 My Country, Japingka Gallery, Perth
- 2004 Waterhole Aboriginal Art, Sofitel Wentworth Hotel Exhibition, Sydney
- 2003 New Paintings, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 New Paintings, Chapel off Chapel, Melbourne

Group Exhibitions

- 2008 Black & White: Inspired by Landscape, Kate Owen Gallery, Sydney
- 2005 Big Country, Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs
- 2005 Fresh from the Central Desert, Canberra Grammar School, Canberra
- 2004 Two Senior Men, Art Mob Gallery, Tasmania
- 2004 Australian Exhibition Centre, Chicago
- 2004 Spirit of Colour, Depot Gallery, Sydney
- 2002 The Contemporaries, Contemporary Artspace, Brisbane
- 1992 Tjukurrpa, Museum fur Volkerkunde, Basel, Switzerland
- 1991 Central Australian Aboriginal Art & Craft Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 1990 Art Dock, Contemporary Art from Australia, Noumea, New Caledonia

Major Collections

- Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs
- Hank Ebes Collection, Melbourne
- Macquarie University, NSW
- R. M. Barokh Antiques, Los Angeles, California

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