



Kudditji Kngwarreye
(Indigenous Australian (Anmatyerre), ca. 1928 - 2017)

Biography

Kudditji Kngwarreye was born around 1928 at Utopia Station, a community in the Eastern Desert about 230 km north east of Alice Springs and currently consisting of 16 camps. Kudditji was also family through kinship of the renowned Indigenous artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye. He was one of the elders of the Anmatyerre language group and an important custodian of many Dreamings, which are the significant sacred stories of the Australian First Nations peoples. These stories are infused into Kudditji's art, as he would ultimately paint for over twenty five years.

Kudditji was one of the first established male artists from Utopia and is known for his large dynamic paintings, saturated with colour and paint. His paintings represent his traditional country around Boundary Bore, of which he was a custodian. Boundary Bore is located just off the Ooratippra Creek in the southeast of the Northern Territory, with a distance of about 1200 km south-southeast from Darwin.

As a traditional custodian of his country and of the lores and stories of the Emu, Kudditji Kngwarreye was responsible for the initiations of the younger men of his tribe. Although not much detail is given about aspects of this initiation, it is generally understood that this involves the practical teaching of hunting the Emu as well as the spiritual story of the Emu ancestors. Kudditji considered it his obligation to continue these traditions in combination with an intimate physical and spiritual knowledge of the Anmatyerre country. This country is what he transferred onto the canvas. While painting, the artist could be heard singing—a way of infusing his works with stories of his land, of the ancestors, hunts, travels, sacred Dreaming sites, and the food and water of Anmatyerre country.

As a painter, Kudditji mixed his colours directly onto the canvas, layering his paint into a patchwork formation. When he first started painting, he painted his Emu Dreamings in a precise 'dot painting' style. Over time, Kudditji began to experiment with acrylic paint, going beyond the traditional pointillist style that he had used before 2003. He switched to the more abstract style of his *My Country* paintings, where he portrayed color fields consisting of coarse blocks with saturated colors in different tones on a black background. Interestingly, these paintings appear from a distance to consist of uniform gradating, coloured blocks, whereas up close a wide range of vibrant colors are revealed. The intensity of Kudditji's works often changes throughout the day as different light sources draw out and conceal distinct, shifting colours and elements. His paintings do not offer a traditional perspective of the land, such as viewed from a plane. Rather, they are without a fixed perspective.

Taking a heavily laden paint brush and sweeping it broadly across the canvas in stages, he began to evoke lyrical images of country. Kudditji's paintings are visual interpretations of his birthplace, where the land and sky change throughout each day and season, conveyed through various shapes and colors. He accentuated the color and form of the landscape, the depth of the sky in the rainy season and the reds and oranges of the shimmering summer heat.

Kudditji's ground-breaking paintings express his intimate knowledge and love of his country in a richly textured and highly innovative way and are reminiscent of the last body of work of his famous kinswoman Emily Kame Kngwarreye. It is not sure who first started painting in this style.

Kudditji Kngwarreye's play with the effects of light, across the various snapshots of his country, in combination with his almost scientific approach to the nuances and temporality of colour, has resulted in commentators likening his work to Claude Monet. Equally, the monumental, spiritual, and even transcendental experience of his magnificent epochs of colour might suggest associations with Mark Rothko. It's not implausible to think of Philip Guston's 1950s and 1960s abstract paintings, where bold and assured brushstrokes articulate the experience of colour. These associations make sense from a Western art historical point of view, but they counteract the authenticity of the works by Kudditji and the age-old traditional stories of his culture signified by them.

Due to his deteriorating health and illness, Kudditji was forced to stay and paint in one place in Alice Springs from the late 2000s onwards. From 2015, in the last few years of his life, he hardly created new works.

Ever since Kudditji Kngwarreye began to exhibit his artworks in 2003, his fame has steadily risen in the international art world, which has continued after his passing in 2017. His work is represented in major national and international collections and Kudditji has gained worldwide recognition for the powerful interpretations of his ancestral Dreamings.

Selected Collections

Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, Australia
Hank Ebes Collection, Melbourne, Australia
Artbank, Sydney, Australia
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
R.M. Barokh Antiques, Los Angeles, USA
Sarrita King Collection, Australia
Pat Corrigan Collection, Sydney, Australia
Luciano Benetton Collection, Venice, Italy
Guilleman and Sordello Collection, France
Jacqui McPhee Collection, Perth, Australia
Mbantua Gallery Permanent Collection, Alice Springs, Australia
Gillian & Watson McAllister Collection, Sydney, Australia
Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, La Grange, Motiers, Switzerland
Dalrymple Community Cultural Centre Trust Collection, Charters Towers QLD, Australia

Selected Exhibitions

2025

Interwoven Worlds, SmithDavidson Gallery X Wolterinck Laren, Laren, The Netherlands

2024

Colorful Landscapes I Kudditji Kngwarray & Zhuang Hong Yi, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Utopia in Colours, Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Motiers, Switzerland

2023

Utopia in Colours, Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Motiers, Switzerland

2022

Connection I Songlines from Australia's First Peoples in a spectacular immersive experience, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia

2021

Desert Colours 2021, Incinerator Art Space, Sydney, Australia

Voyage across Aboriginal Australia - Founders' Favourites, Fondation Burkhardt Felder Arts et Culture, Moitiers, Switzerland

2020

Origins: Australian Aboriginal Art from the SmithDavidson Collection,
SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2019

Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art: A Curated Selection, SmithDavidson
Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2018

East meets West, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2016

Utopia: Abstract Expressionism from the Desert, SmithDavidson Gallery,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2015

Signs and Traces, Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Zamek Culture Centre, Pozan,
Poland

2013

Sky and Desert, Foundation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Switzerland

2009

Reves Aborigines, Musee Arts et Histoire de Bormes-Les-Mimosas,
Bormes-Les-Mimosas, France

2008

Solo: My Country, Kudditji Kngwarreye, Central Art, Alice Springs, Australia

2006

Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, Denmark
Solo: Masterwork, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

2005

Solo: Waterhole Aboriginal Art, Danks Street, Sydney, Australia
Fresh from the Central Desert, Canberra Grammar School, Canberra, Australia
New Paintings, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

2004

Australian Exhibition Centre, Chicago, USA
Heartbeat - Living Country, Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, Australia
Solo: Waterhole Aboriginal Art, Sofitel Wentworth Hotel Exhibition, Sydney,
Australia
Spirit of Colour, Depot Gallery, Sydney, Australia

2003

New Paintings, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

2002

The Contemporaries, Contemporary Artspace, Brisbane, Australia

1999

Solo: New Paintings, Melbourne, Australia
Chapel Off, Chapel Gallery, Melbourne

1992

Solo: Tjukurrpa, Museum fur Volkerkunde, Basel, Switzerland

1991

Solo: Central Australian Aboriginal Art & Craft Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice
Springs, Australia

1990

Art Dock, Contemporary Art from Australia, Noumea, Australia

Selected Art Fairs

EXPO Chicago, Chicago, USA
The Armory Show, New York, USA
KunstRAI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Art Cologne, Cologne, Germany
PAN Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
TEFAF Maastricht, The Netherlands
Treasure House Fair, London, United Kingdom