



### **Minnie Pwerle**

(Australian Indigenous (Alyawerre/ Anmatyerre), 1920 - 2006)

### **Biography**

Minnie Pwerle was a celebrated Australian First Nations artist from Utopia in the Northern Territory. A proud custodian of the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre language groups, her cultural identity deeply informed her art and life. She was born near the Utopia cattle station, a remote region now renowned for its flourishing community of Australian First Nations artists. As a teenager, Minnie gave birth to her daughter, Barbara Weir, who later became a prominent artist herself. Minnie later married 'Motorcar' Jim, with whom she had six children. Family, culture, and community were at the heart of her life, and her responsibilities as a cultural custodian shaped her artistic practice.

Minnie's artistic journey began in the late 1970s when she participated in a community batik project initiated in Utopia. This project, which involved applying wax-resist dyeing techniques to fabric, empowered local women and encouraged the development of their distinctive artistic voices. The success of the batik project laid the foundation for the community's later transition to painting on canvas. Although Minnie began painting on canvas in the 1980s, her career as a painter truly took off in 1999 remarkably, when she was around 80 years old. Presented with canvas, Minnie began translating her ceremonial body painting knowledge into vivid, expressive works. Her paintings featured bold linear patterns, vibrant color palettes, and spontaneous compositions that conveyed a dynamic sense of energy.

Her unique style quickly garnered attention from collectors and galleries. Distinct from the intricate dot-painting styles typical of Western Desert art, Minnie's fluid and abstract forms offered a fresh and contemporary interpretation of First Nations art. Her innovative approach, alongside artists like her friend Emily Kam Kngwarray, helped transform global perceptions of Australian First Nations Art. Minnie's work was deeply rooted in ancient cultural traditions, including body painting, sand drawing, and rock art, yet her expression on canvas brought these timeless practices into a modern framework. Her paintings embody the powerful link between art, land, and Dreamings, the ancestral stories central to Australian Indigenous culture. Through her use of movement, shape, and color, Minnie's works became visual celebrations of her heritage.

Her impact on the Australian art scene was profound. Minnie's paintings are now held in major public and private collections around the world, including institutions such as the National Gallery of Australia. Her vibrant, emotionally charged canvases continue to inspire audiences and artists alike. Minnie Pwerle painted prolifically until her passing in March 2006. She left behind a powerful legacy not only through her own work but also through the ongoing creativity of her daughter, Barbara Weir, and the artists of Utopia. Minnie's art remains a compelling testament to her enduring connection to country, culture, and the stories of her ancestors.

### Selected Collections

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia  
Queensland National Gallery, Queensland, Australia  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia  
La Trobe University Collection, Sydney, Australia  
Kelton Foundation, California, USA  
Thomas Vroom Collection, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Corrigan Collection, London, United Kingdom  
Kreglinger Collection, Antwerp, Belgium  
AMP Art Collection, Sydney, Australia  
Hank Ebes Collection, Melbourne, Australia  
Fred Torres Collection, Australia  
Pat Corrigan Art Collection, Australia  
Gillian & Watson McAllister Collection, Sydney, Australia  
Mbantua Collection, Alice Springs, Australia  
The Luzco Family Collection, USA  
Jacqui McPhee Collection, Perth, Australia  
Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo, Australia  
Dalrymple Community Cultural Centre Trust Collection, Charters Towers, Australia  
Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Motiers, Switzerland  
John McBride Collection, USA

### Selected Exhibitions

2025  
*Dreaming in Color: Works by Australian First Nations Artists*, online exhibition, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2024  
*Utopia in Colours*, Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Motiers, Switzerland

2023  
*Emily & Others | Geniuses from Utopia*, Art Mob, Hobart, Australia  
*Utopia in Colours*, Musee de l'art aborigene australien, Fondation Burkhardt-Felder Arts et Culture, Motiers, Switzerland  
*Celebrating Country: Women Artists of Art Mob*, Art Mob, Hobart, Australia

2022  
*Connection*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra  
*Ngawiya Ngubadi*, The Sidney Nolan Trust, The Rodd, Herefordshire, United Kingdom  
Art Mob's 20th Birthday Exhibition, Art Mob, Hobart, Australia

2021  
*Desert Colours 2021*, Incinerator Art Space, Sydney, Australia  
*We Choose to Challenge*, Coe Fine Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
*Solo: Remembering Minnie | 15 years on*, Artmob, Hobart, Australia

2019  
*Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art*, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
*Desert Colours: Central Australian painting from the Collection*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia

2018  
*Mercedes Me x Pwerle Gallery Art Exhibition*, Mercedes Me, Melbourne, Australia  
*Utopia exhibition of four generations*, Pwerle Gallery, Adelaide, Australia

2017  
*Of Country and Culture: The Lam Collection of Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art*, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, USA

2016  
*Utopia; Abstract Expressionism from the Desert*, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2014  
*Dreaming Art Centre of Utopia*, DACOU Dreaming, Adelaide, Australia

2012  
*Art & Interior – Modern Aboriginal Art at Wolterinck Laren*, Laren, The Netherlands

2010  
*Utopia*, DACOU Melbourne, Middle Park, Australia  
*The Pwerle Sisters*, DACOU Australia; DACOU Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Middle Park, Australia

2009  
*Indigenous Australian Painting*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA  
*Utopia - Colours of the Desert*, Gongpyeong Art Space in conjunction with DACOU, Australian Embassy in Korea and Crossbay Gallery, Seoul, Korea





2010

*Utopia*, DACOU Melbourne, Middle Park, Australia

*The Pwerle Sisters*, DACOU Australia, Middle Park; DACOU Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Australia

2008

*EWB Elements*, travelling group exhibition, DACOU in conjunction with Dreamtime Art, all major cities of Australia

Solo: *Minnie Pwerle – Body Paint*, DACOU Melbourne, Middle Park, Australia

*Atnwengerrp: Land of Dreaming*, Minnie Pwerle carpet launch, Designer Rugs Showroom, Edgecliffe, Australia

*Emily and Her Legacy*, Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, with Coe-ee Art Sydney in conjunction with the landmark retrospective exhibition *Utopia - the Genius of Emily Kngwarreye* at the National Art Centre, Tokyo

2007

*Treasures of the Spirit*, Tandanya Cultural Institute, Adelaide, Australia

*Standing on Ceremony*, Tandanya Cultural Institute, Adelaide, Australia  
Australian Embassy, Washington, USA

2005

Finalist in the 2005 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Australia

Named by Art Collector as "one of Australia's 50 most collectible artists".

2003

*Art from the Dreamtime*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, USA

2002

Selected entrant in the 2002 19th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Australia

Solo: *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, DACOU Gallery, Adelaide, Australia

*Mixed Utopia exhibition*, Knut Grothe Galeri, Charlottlenlund, Copenhagen, Denmark

Solo: *Minnie's Country*, DACOU Gallery, Adelaide, Australia

2001

*Women Artists of the Australian Desert*, Auckland, New Zealand

Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

*Desert Color - My Country*, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

San Anselmo, Marin County California, USA

*Out of Utopia*, Canberra, Australia