



The Pwerle Sisters
(Minnie, Emily, Galya and Molly Pwerle)

About the Pwerle Sisters

The Four Pwerle Sisters, Minnie, Galya, Emily, and Molly Pwerle, were First Nations artists from Australia, known for their collaborative approach to painting. They came from the Atnwengerrp community in the Utopia region of the Northern Territory and belonged to the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre language groups. Their artistic journey began, when Minnie started to paint in 1999, followed by her sisters in 2004 where they began to paint together, which was encouraged by Minnie's Daughter Barbara Weir.

Their work was deeply connected to their cultural traditions and Dreaming stories, which have been passed down through generations. Rather than painting individually, the sisters often worked together on the same canvas. They used a shared style that involved intricate dot patterns and bold lines, depicting important cultural symbols and stories. This collaborative process allowed them to combine their skills and knowledge, creating artworks that reflected their collective heritage. Each sister contributed to the paintings in a way that maintained harmony and balance in the composition.

They sat around the canvas, sometimes working simultaneously, other times taking turns. Each sister brought her own hand movements and techniques, yet their styles blended seamlessly. The paintings featured intricate dot patterns and flowing lines, representing Dreaming stories such as the bush tomato, Awelye (women's ceremony), and bush melon. Their work was not planned in detail beforehand but developed naturally as they painted, reflecting the organic way knowledge is passed down in their culture.

Their work gained recognition in the Australian art world, bringing attention to the rich artistic traditions of their community. Through their paintings, the Four Pwerle Sisters continued the storytelling practices of their ancestors while also engaging with the broader art market. Their collaborative method was both a creative and cultural expression, reinforcing their connection to each other and their heritage.



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



Gayla Pwerle

(Australian Indigenous (Anmatyerre/Alyawarre), born 1930)

Biography

Galya Pwerle, born around 1930 in the Utopia region of Central Australia, is a distinguished Australian First Nations Artist from the Anmatyerre language group. She is the youngest of the renowned Pwerle sisters and is also the aunt of acclaimed artist Barbara Weir. Like many First Nations artists from Utopia, Galya's work is deeply rooted in her cultural heritage, depicting the Dreaming stories and traditions passed down through generations.

In her early years, Galya worked as a nanny on Utopia Station, a cattle station that was home to many Anmatyerre and Alyawarr people. In the late 1970s, the station was sold to the government and returned to Australian Indigenous ownership, allowing the community to reclaim their land and continue practicing their traditional way of life. Today, Galya resides in Irrultja, a small community within the Utopia region, where she continues to paint and contribute to the rich artistic traditions of her people.

Galya's artistic journey began relatively late in life. In 2004, Barbara Weir organized a workshop at Irrultja outstation to encourage the Pwerle sisters to explore painting. This initiative provided Galya, along with her sisters Molly and Emily, an opportunity to develop their artistic skills under the guidance of their elder sister Minnie Pwerle, who was already an established and celebrated artist. The workshop led to the creation of numerous artworks that showcased their shared Dreaming, known as *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, which represents women's ceremonies and body paint designs. Galya's paintings often depict *Awelye* (women's ceremonies), *Bush Tomato* and *Wild Orange Dreamings*. Her works are characterized by their layered compositions, where the first layer represents traditional body paint designs used in ceremonies, while a second layer of fine dotting is overlaid to create depth and movement. This technique, common among Utopia artists, allows Galya to bring an element of storytelling and cultural preservation into her paintings. Her use of color is both vibrant and expressive, reflecting the landscapes and natural elements of her homeland.

Her talent has been widely recognized, and her artworks have been exhibited in multiple galleries across Australia and internationally. Galya was a finalist in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in both 2005 and 2008, a prestigious recognition in the Australian art scene. Her paintings are sought after by collectors and art enthusiasts who appreciate the deep cultural significance and artistic excellence embedded in her work.

She is still currently living within the Atnwengerrp community with her two sisters Molly and Emily Pwerle and many extended family members and still enjoying painting. Galya Pwerle remains an important figure in Australian First Nations Art. Through her paintings, she continues to share the traditions, stories, and spiritual beliefs of her ancestors, ensuring that her cultural heritage is preserved for future generations. Her dedication to her craft and her connection to the land make her a respected and influential artist within the Utopia community and beyond.

Selected Collections

Hank Ebes Collection, Melbourne, Australia
Mbantua Gallery Collection, Alice Springs, Australia



Molly Pwerle

(Australian Indigenous (Anmatyerre/Alyawarre), 1919 - 2023)

Biography

Molly Pwerle, born around 1919 in the Utopia region of Central Australia, is an esteemed Australian First Nations artist from the Anmatyerre and Alyawarr language groups. She is the younger sister of the celebrated artist Minnie Pwerle and the aunt of renowned artist Barbara Weir. Molly spent her early years working on MacDonald Downs Station and later on Utopia Station. In 1975, Utopia Station was returned to Australian Indigenous ownership, allowing the community to reconnect with their ancestral lands. Molly currently resides in Irrultja, a small outstation within the Utopia region, alongside her sisters Galya and Emily.

Molly's artistic journey began in 2004, when she was encouraged by her niece, Barbara Weir, to participate in painting workshops alongside her sisters. Despite her limited exposure to Western culture, Molly quickly embraced the medium, developing a unique and expressive style. Her paintings predominantly depict *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, which represents women's ceremonies and body paint designs associated with her country. Her artworks are characterized by a series of long, linear patterns that symbolize the body paint applied during ceremonial dances. These lines also represent the dancing tracks left in the sand by women during their performances. Molly's use of vibrant colors and dynamic compositions captures the energy and movement inherent in these ceremonies. Her paintings not only serve as visual representations of cultural practices but also as a means of preserving and sharing the stories passed down through generations.

Molly's work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, garnering attention for its cultural significance and artistic merit. Notable exhibitions include *Utopia – Colors of the Desert* in Seoul, Korea, 2009, *Treasures of the Spirit* at Tandanya Cultural Institute in Adelaide, 2007 and *Utopia in New York* at the Robert Steele Gallery, 2007. These exhibitions have contributed to a broader appreciation of Australian First Nations Art and have highlighted Molly's role in the continuation of her community's artistic traditions.

In addition to her exhibition history, Molly's artworks have been sought after in the art market. Auction results indicate a growing recognition of her work, with pieces such as *Awelye Atnwengerrp* fetching notable prices. This commercial success reflects the increasing value placed on Indigenous Australian art and the unique perspectives it offers. As a respected elder and "boss woman" in her community, Molly holds significant responsibilities, including overseeing women's ceremonies and cultural practices. Her dedication to her art serves as an extension of these roles, allowing her to share the rich cultural heritage of the Atnwengerrp people with a wider audience. Through her paintings, Molly continues to celebrate and preserve the traditions of her ancestors, ensuring their stories endure for future generations.

Molly Pwerle passed away in 2023.



Emily Pwerle

(Australian Indigenous (Anmatyerre/Alyawarre), born 1922)

Biography

Emily Pwerle, born around 1922 in the Utopia region of Central Australia, is a distinguished Australian First Nations artist associated with the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre language groups. Her homeland is Atnwengerrp, a significant area within Utopia. Emily is the younger sister of the renowned artist Minnie Pwerle and the aunt of acclaimed artist Barbara Weir. Throughout her life, Emily has maintained a traditional Indigenous lifestyle, residing primarily in her home community lands. Currently, she lives in Irrultja, a small settlement in Utopia, alongside her sister Galya.

Emily's exposure to Western culture was minimal during her early years. It wasn't until 2004, in her early 80s, that she began painting with acrylics on canvas. This initiation into contemporary art was encouraged by her niece, Barbara Weir, who organized a workshop at Irrultja Station for Emily and her sisters. This marked the beginning of an impressive body of work by the Pwerle sisters, Molly, Emily, Minnie, and Galya.

Emily's artwork predominantly depicts *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, which encompasses women's ceremonies and body paint designs associated with her country. Her paintings feature layered linear patterns that symbolize the body paint applied during ceremonial dances. These lines also represent the dancing tracks left in the sand by women during their performances. Emily's use of vibrant colors and dynamic compositions captures the energy and movement inherent in these ceremonies. In addition to *Awelye*, Emily paints other Dreamings such as *Anemangkerr* (Bush Tomato), *Akarley* (Wild Orange) and *Munyeroo* (a plant known in Alyawarre as Lyaw). These Dreamings are integral to her cultural heritage and are passed down through generations. Emily often combines several of her Dreamings into one painting, creating complex and richly layered artworks.

Emily's talent has been recognized through numerous exhibitions across Australia and internationally. Notable exhibitions include *Utopia: Colours in the Desert* in Seoul, Korea, 2009, *Utopia in New York* at the Robert Steele Gallery, 2007 and *Standing On Ceremony* at the Tandanya Cultural Institute in Adelaide, 2007. Her work has also been showcased in galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane and are held in several notable collections associated as well. These collections reflect the growing appreciation and value of her work within the art community.

As a respected elder and artist, Emily's dedication to her craft serves as a vital link in preserving and sharing the rich cultural heritage of the Atnwengerrp people. Her paintings not only offer visual representations of cultural practices but also act as a means of storytelling and cultural preservation, ensuring that the traditions and stories of her ancestors endure for future generations.

Selected Collections

Pat Corrigan Collection, Sydney, Australia
Hank Ebes Collection, Melbourne, Australia
Mbantua Gallery Collection, Alice Springs, Australia
DACOU Australia, Rosewater, Australia
Pat Corrigan Collection, Sydney, Australia
Artau Collection, Australia