



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY
EVERYTHING



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Cover: EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY
Kame Colour 1995 (detail)

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EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY: EVERYTHING

An elderly Indigenous Australian woman who rarely left the boundaries of her ancestral Country in the arid Western Desert, Emily Kam Ngwarray and her work hold global significance. Although indifferent to Western art traditions and political or social issues, Emily is a cherished figure of Australian art and endures as an influential artist because of the emotional and visceral chord her paintings evoke in the viewer before any conscious or rational interpretations are imposed. In this affective experience of her works, we share directly the sensuous and sentient landscape of her Country. We sense, rather than know, Emily's reverence for ceremony, her profundity in old age, and her intimate relationship with the land.

Emily's brief and prolific career began very late in life. From her first painting on canvas in 1988, when she was in her late seventies, Emily bypassed any immature or 'emerging' phase of her work. Her masterful abstract visual language derived from a lifetime of reverential ceremonial bodily mark-making, and it soon gripped the wider art world. Her work on canvas moved through frequent stylistic shifts, expressing her depth of knowledge and continuing experience of awely – women's Dreaming ceremony. Anthropologist Jennifer Biddle has addressed this aspect of Central Desert Aboriginal paintings, specifically women's painting, as it originates from the sensuous location of mark-making on the body, unlike men's, which derives from topographical mapping on the ground. She states, 'If what we have learned from the great male painters of the Desert is about site-specificity and ownership, what we are learning from women is about the intimacy of the Dreaming as a profoundly embodied and lived experience.'¹ Hence Emily's work invites a bodily rather than an intellectual response from the viewer.

REVERENCE

Emily Kam Ngwarray was born around 1910 in Alhalker on the edge of Utopia cattle station in Anmatyerr Country, approximately 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs in Australia's Northern Territory. One of the last generations of Indigenous Elders born and raised before settler influence impinged, Emily grew up acutely attuned to the land's riches, its seasonality and her place within its cycles. By the time she started painting on canvas, Emily was a senior respected Anmatyerr Elder, keeper of significant ancestral knowledge and co-caretaker of several sacred sites in her Country, all of these aspects informing her life and her painting.

Alhalker, her physical and spiritual home, is an unwavering central theme in her practice. In Australian First Nation cultures, the physical systems of nature are maintained and balanced by the correct performance of ceremonies handed down through the ages by the ancestors. The fertility of the soil, growth of significant food sources, and prosperous seasons following good rains rely on the repeated and ritualised sets of practices of this Dreaming Law.

Awely involves painting multiple layers onto the body, accompanied by singing, which precedes performed dance cycles. Before 'painting up for ceremony', women would collect leaves, flowers and the bark of certain plants to make liquid cleansers to splash onto the body. After cleansing, animal fat is smeared over the skin, before the intricate ceremonial designs are reverently painted onto each woman's upper chest, breasts and arms using fingers or brushes dipped into rich desert ochres. This mark-making repeats the way ancestors made and marked the Country, the phenomenal nature of Emily's approach lying in both the multiple layers of her surfaces and the performativity of her painting. Her affinity with her subject is influenced by the ancestral narratives of Alhalker and the associated awely women's ceremony. The deep sense of touch which marks and makes Emily's canvases is impressed on our experience as viewers, for we can sense the purpose and potency of her hand.²

In 1977 Jenny Green, the founding coordinator of the batik group at Utopia, first introduced Emily to the technique of this portable medium, which requires artists to complete small sections at a time. The familiarity of batik also informed Emily's approach to painting the large-scale canvases later in her career, just as she would paint a woman's body for ceremony, earnestly finishing one area before moving on to another.³

Emily was not concerned with precision, neatness or regularity, and no matter how small or large the marks or the scale on which she worked, the canvas served as an extension of the ceremonial ground, connecting her to Alhalker.⁴ Emily engaged her whole body in her mark-making, as she did in dance, and she would often sing as she painted, embracing the cultural practice of singing Country. One can sense the rhythm of both song and dance in her work; for example, in *Untitled* 1993, the brush's bouncing or 'dragging' movement mimics the dancers' bodies as they propel forward, making short shuffling marks in the sand.⁵

It is often remarked that Emily produced a staggering 3000 works over eight years, a prolific output seen only in the creatively 'obsessed'. However, if we accept that in all aspects of life Emily was living the connection to her culture, we could view each of her paintings as a remnant of an unbroken performance in her responsibility to cultural continuation. The fact that Emily painted on her Country is also a crucial element in the power of her paintings. The rhythmic beating of the brush dots penetrating the ground underneath the canvas is a vital component in communicating the aliveness of Dreaming. As a keeper of ancestral knowledge, Emily had both a reverence for ceremony and a devotional touch that she attained and imparted throughout her life. This became integral to her painting practice, with the rituals and repetitions of her culture being imprinted on her canvases.

PROFUNDITY

The reverence present within Emily's mark-making is reinforced by her seniority as an artist, age being a mark of privilege in many cultures, and specifically in the Aboriginal context, conferring status as an Elder, as a senior lawholder or 'boss' for Country. For Emily, it granted freedom to transmit Altyerr – the Dreaming – with a singular approach that resonated with profound integrity. Emily's gift as an artist in old age lies in her complete ease with her materials and her command of their capacity to evoke the sensual connection to Alhalker. The vitality of her touch on the earth, skin and canvas and her profound understanding of what this meant culturally eternally resonate in her paintings. English art historian Kenneth Clark asks, 'The increased vitality of an aged hand is hard to explain. Does it mean that a long assimilation of life has so filled the painter with a sense of natural energy that it communicates itself involuntarily through (his) touch?'⁶ Emily's ability to embrace swift and fluid changes in technique and style throughout her meteoric painting career, capturing multiple truths of her singular subject, is only achievable when one has a profound lifelong understanding of that subject and is able to represent myriad aspects at will. As the dots started to merge and eventually retreat from the canvas, linework resurfaced, returning with sublime clarity to its genesis – the role of the totemic yam.

With the rapid shifts in style throughout 1995–1996 as Emily's painting series 'Yam' and 'Sacred Grasses' ended, the organic flow of the yam roots – for example, *Kame Colour* 1995 – eventually gave way to the rapidly scribbled markings of the sacred grasses, as seen in *Ceremony II – Yam Series* 1995. As Emily's approach to painting grew freer, the more urgent and vigorous were her gestures, with the later periods displaying an almost 'reckless freedom of expression spurred by the imminent feeling of departure'. As Clark writes, 'There is nothing more mysterious than the power of an aged artist to give life to a blot or a scribble.'⁷ The gestural marks Emily produced show a physical force and steadfast enthusiasm that belies the frailty of her late eighties, and evoke the marks of an Elder as she presses ochre hard into the skin of a young woman's body to teach her the significance of ceremony, land and culture. Long after the ochre is washed off, the ancestral lines and Dreaming stories are remembered within the body. Interestingly, her 'blots' and 'scribbles' at the very end of her career become soft and reflective. *My Country – Last Series* 1996 is one of twenty-four small paintings she produced over three days, only two weeks before she died, in which her sweeping, gathered gestures are captured in broad, conclusive brushstrokes.

INTIMACY

Emily's female perspective of Altyerr takes root in the visceral, palpable knowledge of Country she gained through hunting small mammals and gathering vegetable foods, as well as the custodial 'work' of singing and dancing ceremonies required for their replenishment. Emily was also sharply attuned to the seasons and weather, with her best work produced during the hot summer months of December, January and February. As the intense atmosphere would build, so did her increased productivity.⁸ This intimacy with Country is also present in her sense of self. Emily's middle name, Kam, means yam flower or yam seed, conveying her embodiment of the Altyerr for the yam and her authority as a holder of its Law. Whenever asked what story she painted, Emily would reply with different variations of the following definitive statement: *Whole lot, that's whole lot, Awely (my Dreaming), Anwelarr (pencil yam), Arkerrth (mountain devil lizard), Ntang (grass seed), Tingu (a Dream-time pup), Ankerr (emu), Intekw (a favourite food of the emu, a small plant), Atuwerl (green bean), and Kam (yam seed). That's what I paint: a whole lot...*⁹ With a wave of her hand over her finished canvas, Emily refers to its completeness, not as a finished visual representation of her Country, but in the present moment, during the act of painting where Emily Kam Ngwarray, Alhalker and Altyerr are synonymous.

Early paintings of 1989–1990 are specific in their explorations of the path of the anwelarr yam from Alhalker, the principal form of Emily's awely designs and the central, recurring theme across her entire body of work. The skeletal structure of lines, overlaid with waves of dots, is reminiscent of the yam's underground paths and its connection to the emu, which feeds on the yam flowers and seeds. *Alhalkere* 1990 and *Untitled* 1990 are archetypal works from this period, where the 'under-tracking' linear patterns are all but completely obscured by surges of refined and concentrated dotting.

Through instinctive mark-making, Emily expresses an intimacy with landscapes from her lived experience of ancestral and geographical contexts and histories of the single region of Utopia and Alhalker. The geographical landscape is layered with multiple and inseparable pasts and presents, from the Dreaming of the Deep Past to more recent social and cultural experiences. This intimacy with the land imbues each brushstroke on the canvas, each dot, with the same multiple temporalities. By sharing her connection to her Country and culture through the broad global reach of her paintings, Emily is extending an act of community beyond the boundaries of the Central Desert.

Emily Kam Ngwarray's work speaks to us today even louder than it has in the past. A second major retrospective of her work is set to open at the National Gallery of Australia in December. Her work headlines international exhibitions such as those recently held in Paris, New York and Singapore. Her popularity may reflect a simple



appreciation of the spiritual systems that guided who she was as a person and artist; however, for an elderly Anmatyerr woman belonging to a truly remote area of Australian desert country, her residing influence must tap into something more fundamental. If her work indeed does evoke an affective response, resonating with us emotionally and physically, it is through what her art does rather than what it means. Across her entire oeuvre, we are shown a way of being in a world where reverence for culture, the profundity that comes with age, and intimacy with the land matter deeply. Through a life spent learning about her Country and everything in it, Emily understood the world. When we view her work, we sense this.

VANESSA MERLINO

1. Jennifer Biddle, *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007, p. 29.
2. Jennifer Biddle, *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience*, p. 55.
3. Margo Neale (ed.), *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Ngwarraye*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2008, p. 58.
4. Margo Neale (ed.), 'Two worlds: one vision', in *Emily Kame Ngwarraye: Alhalkere: Paintings from Utopia*, Queensland Art Gallery and Macmillan Publishers Australia Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 21–32.
5. Anne Marie Brody, 'Emily Kame Ngwarraye: portrait for the outside', in Margo Neale (ed.), *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience*, p. 18.
6. Kenneth Clark, 'The artist grows old', in *Daedalus*, vol. 135, no. 1, On Aging, Winter, 2006, p. 85.
7. Kenneth Clark, 'The artist grows old', p. 86.
8. Janet Holt, personal communication to Vanessa Merlino, November 2019.
9. Emily's most definitive statement about her work, in Margo Neale (ed.), *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Ngwarraye*.



ALHALKERE 1990

EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

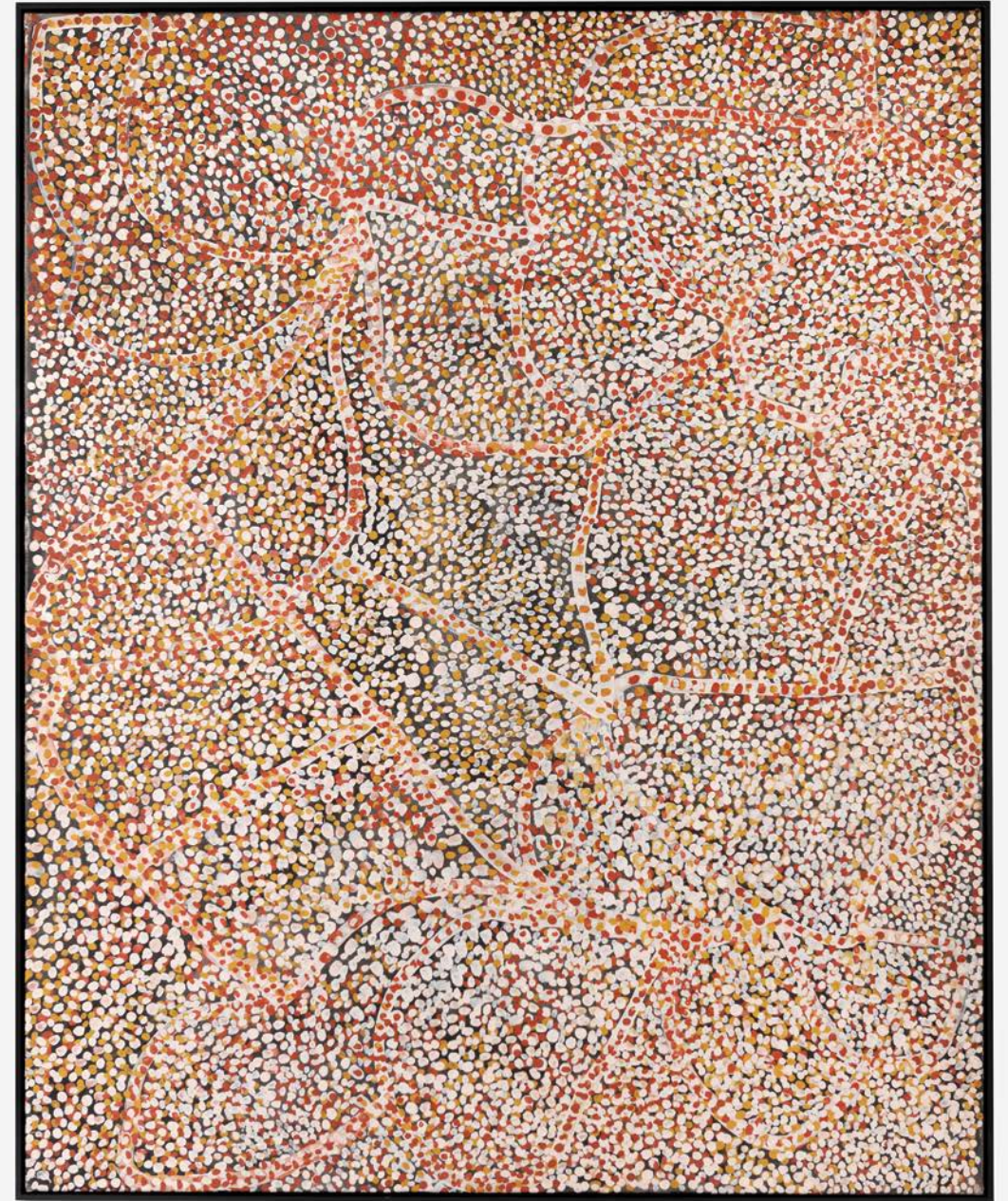
Alhalkere 1990
synthetic polymer paint on linen
149.5 × 121 cm

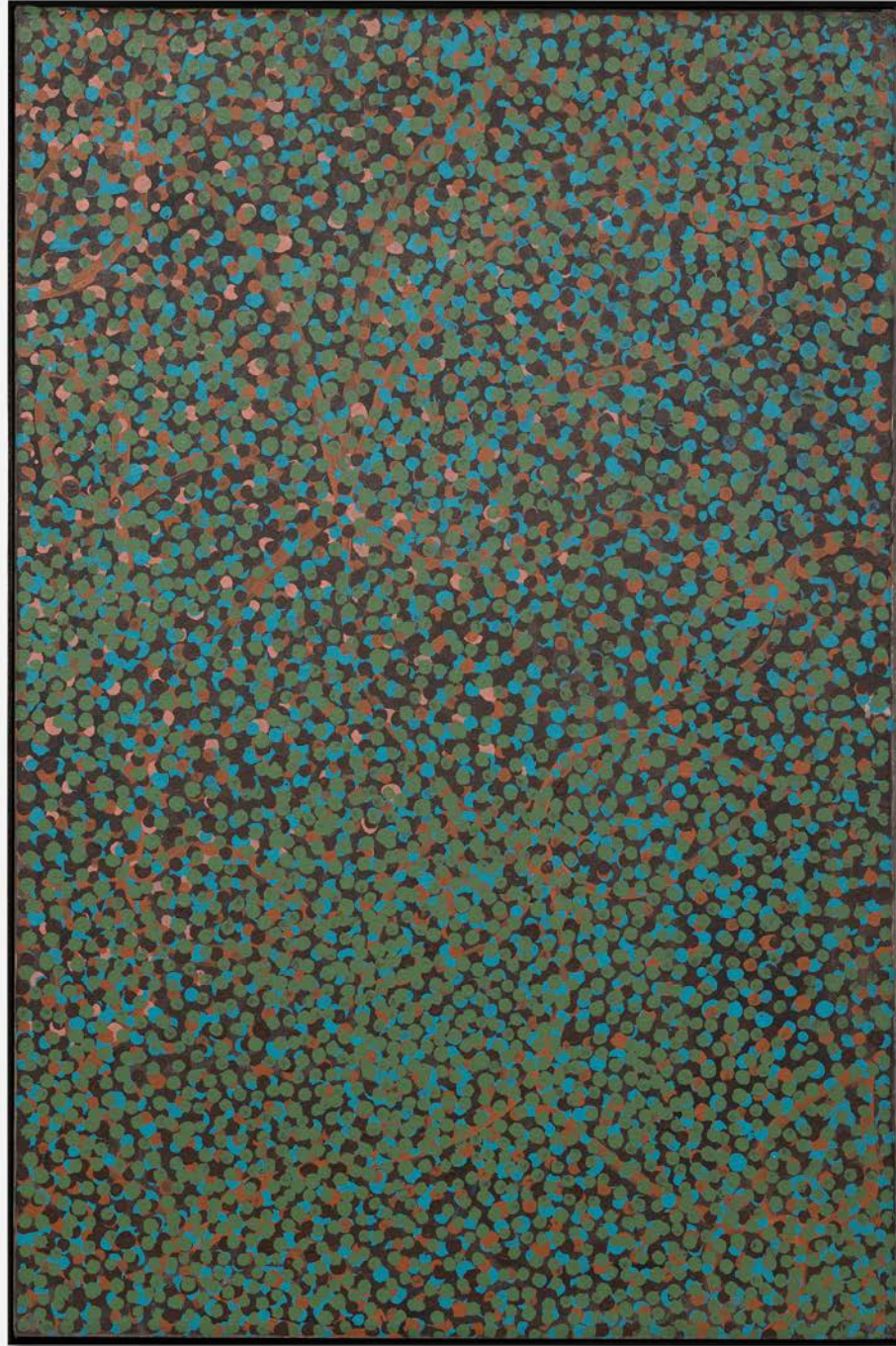
PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 0F31A
Coventry Gallery, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above in 1990
Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above in 1995
Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above in 2002
Private Collection

EXHIBITED

Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Coventry
Gallery, Sydney, in association
with Delmore Gallery, 1990



**EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY**

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Untitled 1990
synthetic polymer paint on linen
90 × 59.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Northern Territory, cat. no. 0L20
Dr Linda C. Fried, Aboriginal Arts, Inc., United States of America
Private Collection, Germany,
acquired from the above in 1996
Important Australian Art, Bonhams, Sydney, 11 May 2022, lot 22

1989–1992

Emily's early paintings express her batik designs' lightness and structural layered processes. Moving from silk to canvas, she maintained the same hastened pace of the trailing lines of hot wax flecked with fields of dots representing the above-ground and below-ground life of her totem anwelarr – pencil yam. In 1989–1992, Emily transformed these formative aspects of batik practice by harnessing the power and presence of the dot.

Once committing to this technique, Emily found the freedom to push its facility into glorious fields of colour and movement, achieving paintings

of rhythmic complexity over both large- and small-scale works. However, the principal motif of her ceremonial designs maintained its presence underneath paintings from this period. The skeletal structure of the sinuous lines of anwelarr forms the painting's foundation, recalling the yam's underground growth paths and, by association, the emu, which feeds on its flowers and seeds. The rhythmic thrust of Emily's precise dotting communicates the vitality of its Dreaming and invokes the underground life of the yam, although almost wholly obscuring its path.



MUNA - EVERYTHING 1991

EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Muna – Everything 1991
synthetic polymer paint on linen
121.5 × 214 cm

PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Northern
Territory, cat. no. IX50
Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
BP Collection, Melbourne,
acquired from the above
*The BP Collection of Australian
Contemporary Art*, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 8 September 2002, lot 17
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above via
Sotheby's private treaty in 2005



MUNA – EVERYTHING

If one can appreciate Emily's complete oeuvre as an expression of ceremonial reverberation, then *Muna – Everything* 1991 is the synergy of the body, environment and technical prowess in full flight. Painted at Delmore Downs in mid-winter of 1991, this is a significant work from the period between 1990–1992 in which the artist developed large-scale colour field paintings, regarded as among her most innovative and accomplished works. Unlike later images where the larger brush Emily adopted became almost an appendage to her ageing body, *Muna – Everything* is executed with measured focus. Her slender brush is dipped into multiple paint pots, shifting the colours to form rising and falling pink, red and orange plumes. There is a sense that Emily is hovering over the canvas as the dots fall in perfect spheres across the whole surface, evoking endlessness. The bands of colour that mark the edges of the stretcher are a hallmark of this period in which Emily treats the canvas as skin, marking it reverently in acknowledgment of its part in her practice of cultural maintenance.

WOMEN AT DELMORE

Muna – Everything 1991 is also evocative of the conditions in which it was painted. It is a painting of such resolve that it reflects the almost sanctuary-like environment of one of her most frequented studios, under the 'talking tree' at Delmore Downs. Much can be said about the significance of intercultural partnerships that mark contemporary Australian First Nations art history.

The best working relationships in the art studios of remote Australia have nurtured artists to achieve iconic status and success. No one is more celebrated in Australia's art history than Emily, and the relationship that grew between Emily and Janet Holt of Delmore Downs between 1989 and 1996 was one of care and respect, and set the tone for Emily's most significant and iconic paintings.

Janet met and married Donald Holt and moved to his family's property at Delmore Downs cattle station in Utopia, Northern Territory, in 1977. As the station sat on the overlapping Country of Alyawarr, eastern Anmatyerr and eastern Arrernte language groups, the Holt family had historical ties with the people living in this region of Utopia, particularly Emily and her family.

Emily's talents as an outstanding individual artist were recognised and nurtured by principal dealers Rodney Gooch, Christopher Hodges and Donald Holt, who were crucial to her success. However, the women that surrounded and supported Emily may take credit for creating the working atmosphere that would produce the masterpieces of her opus. Emily's adopted sister, Lily Kngwarreye, rarely left her side and was acutely attuned to her needs. However, Janet can be appreciated as the familial presence in which Emily also found equanimity. At Delmore, Emily and Janet were engaged in a symbiotic nurturing relationship. Janet would 'look after' Emily, attending to her health, comfort and studio needs, to allow Emily to attend to her family and nurture the spiritual and environmental facets of her cultural obligations.

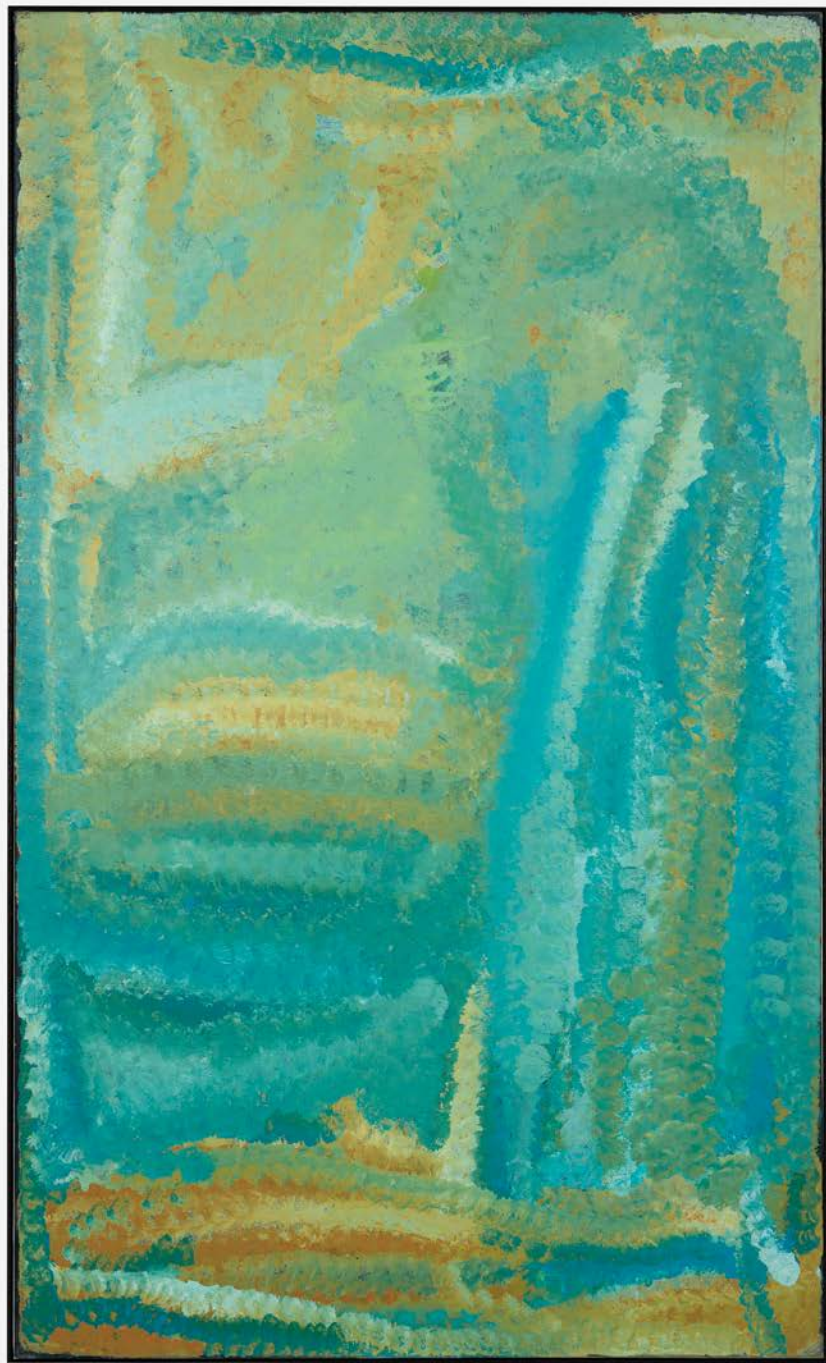


Emily's authority, her all-embracing and nurturing feeling for all things ceremonial, could be safely held at Delmore. On the property, Emily led the Utopia women to perform awely for Alhalker on three occasions. Although never a participant, Janet witnessed Emily's ultimate authority in these ceremonies. At dusk, she watched as Emily's body was cleansed in preparation, and as the paint was applied to her breasts and arms by firelight. Most significantly, Janet witnessed Emily's strength in ceremonial performance, bringing structure and order to nature and society.

As Emily's painting practice was sensual rather than narrative-driven, the proper environmental parameters were critical to her practice and are worth acknowledgment. The presence of those who were 'empathetic to her priorities of family' and the nurturing role of women was instrumental to Emily's success, not only as an immensely successful artist but also as a provider to many. The symbiotic relationships at Delmore sustained Emily and created a space where the importance and force of women were safeguarded and celebrated. For in the harsh Country that stretches throughout the region of Utopia, the well-being of women is a determining factor of survival.

VANESSA MERLINO

Reference: Janet Holt, 'Emily Kngwarreye at Delmore Downs 1989–1990' in *Emily Kngwarreye: Paintings*, Craftsman House: Arts International, Sydney, 1998, pp. 148–158. Janet Holt, in conversation with Vanessa Merlino, Melbourne, August 2021.



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Untitled 1993
synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 90 cm

PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 93H008
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

1993–1994

From 1993 to 1994, Emily entered what has been called her ‘high colourist phase’, which is characterised by the merging and blending of dots and the various configurations of their tracks across the canvas. The visual harmonies and rhythms mirror the physical and auditory mechanisms of ceremonial dance and song as her whole body engages in mark-making. Emily would also often sing as she painted, a method of remembering or recollecting ancestral narrative that stems from the cultural practice of singing Country.

The striking *Untitled* 1993 was painted at Delmore in August. Although a notoriously dry time, winter transforms the desert landscape. The biting cold nights melt by midday, and the light settles with clarity on the diverse textures and colours of the undergrowth, shrubs, bushes and soft sands. The vibrancy of works from this period shows Emily’s joy and sensitivity to the available colours. This painting is an assertive yet earnest declaration of her land’s subsistence, and it hums with the Country’s vitality, growth and rebirth in all cycles of the seasons.

UNTITLED – ALHALKERE 1993



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Untitled – Alhalkere 1993
synthetic polymer paint on linen
185 × 120 cm

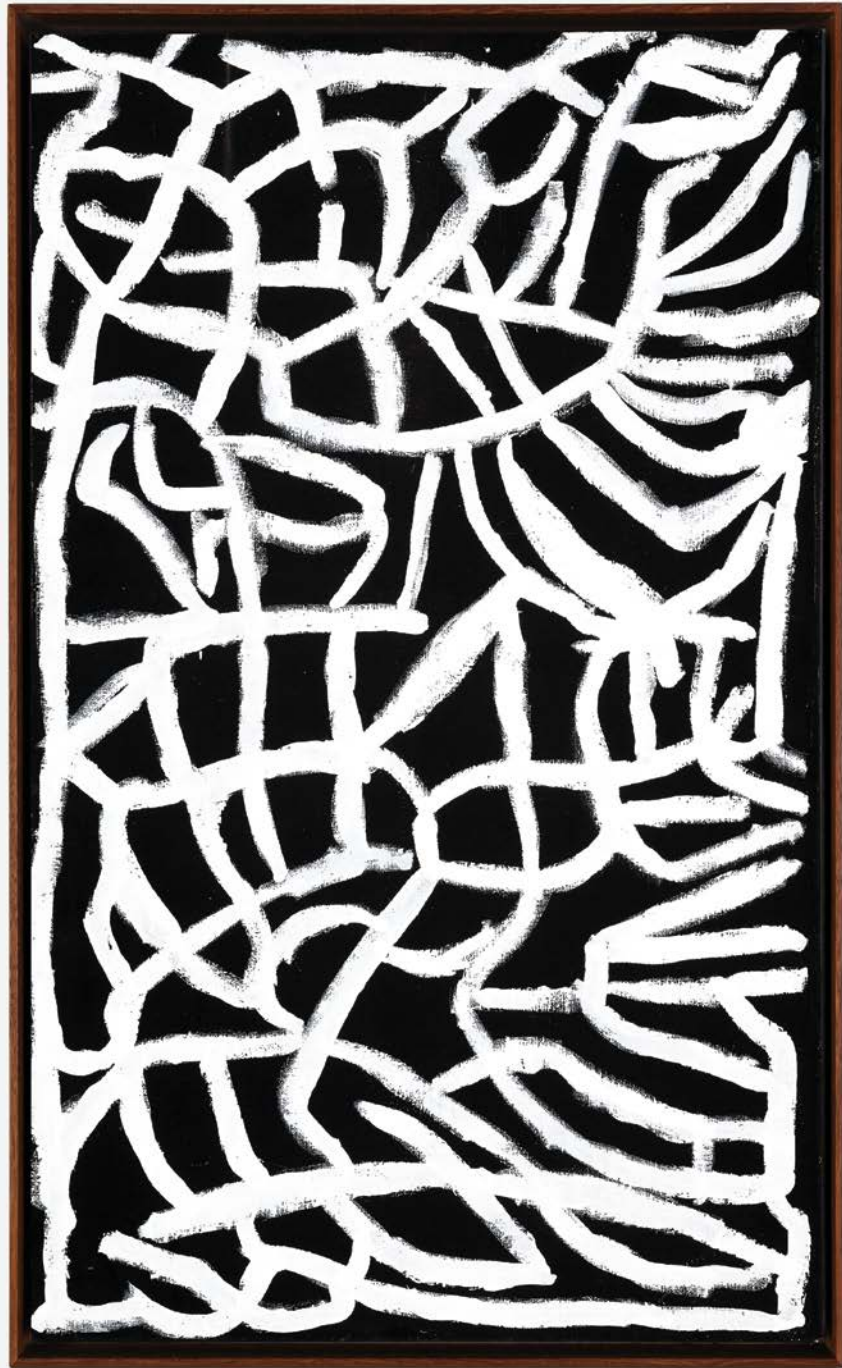
PROVENANCE

Commissioned by Rodney Gooch
(Mulga Bore Artists), Northern
Territory, cat. no. 7-1293
Utopia Art Sydney, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above
Utopia Art Sydney, Sydney
Private Collection, Sydney,
acquired from the above in 2022

EXHIBITED

Ten Years On, Utopia Art Sydney,
9 September – 7 October 2006
Emily Kame Kngwarreye:
STRONG – a tribute, Utopia Art
Sydney, Sydney, March 2020





EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Untitled – Yam Series 1995
synthetic polymer paint on linen
152 × 92 cm

PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Alice Springs
Private Collection, Northern
Territory, acquired from the above
Important Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's,
Melbourne, 24 June 2002, lot 96
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above
Important Aboriginal Art,
Deutscher and Hackett, Melbourne,
26 March 2014, lot 90
Private Collection, United States of
America, acquired from the above
Private Collection



KAME COLOUR 1995

EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Kame Colour 1995
synthetic polymer paint on linen
151 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE

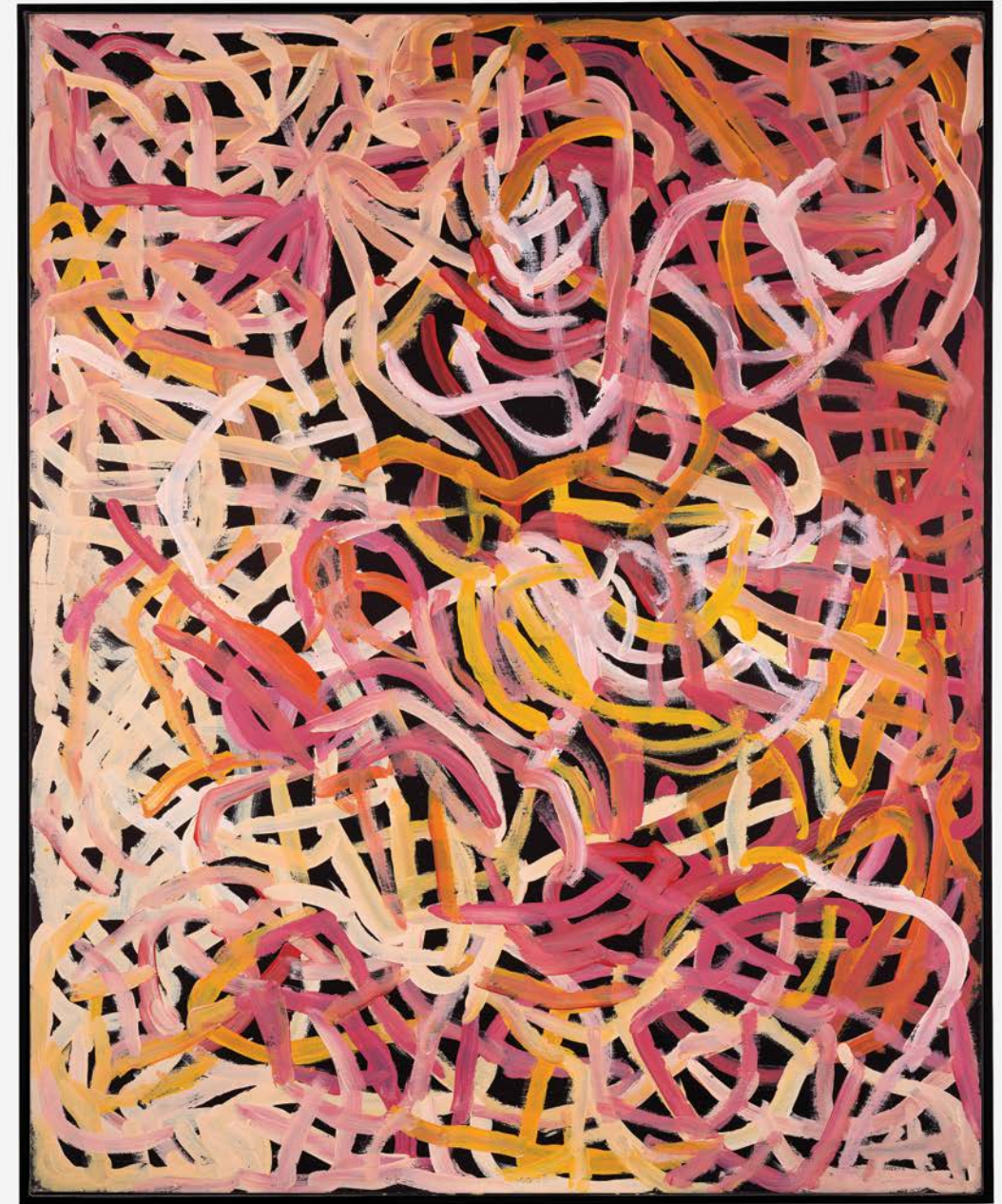
Delmore Gallery, Northern Territory, cat. no. 95H025
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne
The Applied Chemicals Collection, Melbourne, acquired from the above in 1995
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 26–27 July 2004, lot 215
Glenn Schaeffer, United States of America, acquired from the above
Aboriginal Art, Sotheby's, Melbourne, 20 July 2009, lot 82
Private Collection, acquired from the above

LITERATURE

Of My Country: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, The Applied Chemicals Collection, Bendigo Art Gallery, 1999 (in catalogue listing, unillustrated). This painting is sold with an accompanying copy of the Delmore Gallery certificate and the exhibition catalogue *Of My Country: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, The Applied Chemicals Collection*

EXHIBITED

Of My Country: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, The Applied Chemicals Collection, Bendigo Art Gallery, 1 May – 30 May 1999; Hamilton Art Gallery, 4 June – 10 July 1999; Swan Hill Regional Gallery, 16 July – 22 August 1999; Wagga Wagga Gallery, 27 August – 19 September 1999; Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, 28 December 1999 – 2 February 2000; George Adams Gallery, Victorian Arts Centre, 31 March – 30 April 2000





EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

Ceremony II – Yam Series 1995
synthetic polymer paint on linen
150 × 120 cm

PROVENANCE

Delmore Gallery, Northern
Territory, cat. no. 95L016
Songlines Aboriginal Art
Gallery, San Francisco
Private Collection, United
States of America, acquired
from the above in 2000

1995–1996

Emily's style evolved directly out of women's ceremonial body-painting rituals, where specific markings are applied to the upper bodies using fingers or brushes dipped in desert ochres. In 1994, after Emily began working on paper, the profuse dotting and linear patterns of earlier years ceded to bold, austere black stripes on white. These soon evolved into rapidly applied linear markings in a crescendo of colours that evoke nature and earth.

Towards the end of her eight-year career, Emily had swiftly moved through several stylistic transitions. The early measured and precise build-up of layers of intense dotting morphed and changed,

softening, flattening and merging until the dots disappeared altogether.

Before her last stylistic period of tangled painterly strokes, Emily had given in to her ageing body's protests against the physically demanding practice of repetitive dotting. She then revisited the economic qualities of the line. The under-tracking of the yam roots characteristic of her early paintings had returned as the singular focus. Emily's relationship with her medium and tools transformed at the end of her career and life. During this stylistic period, referred to as 'Sacred Grasses', the fist grips the brush tightly as it urgently pushes and pulls the paint.

MY COUNTRY – LAST SERIES 1996



EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

Anmatyerr language
circa 1910 – 1996

My Country – Last Series 1996
synthetic polymer paint on linen
55 × 76.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Dacou Gallery, Adelaide,
cat. no. SS1197163
Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne,
cat. no. FG010024.EK
Private Collection, Melbourne
Aboriginal and Oceanic Art,
Sotheby's, Melbourne, 26–27
July 2010, lot 130 (illus.)
Spinifex & Sand Collection, Tasmania
*Spinifex & Sand: The Tony Norton &
Jan Williams Collection of Aboriginal
Fine Art*, Mossgreen Auctions,
Melbourne, 4 April 2016, lot 29
Private Collection, acquired
from the above

LITERATURE

Margo Neale et al., *Emily Kame
Kngwarreye: Alhalkere: Paintings
from Utopia*, Macmillan, Melbourne,
1998, p. 62, cat. 89, (illus.)
Margo Neale (ed.), *Utopia: The
Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*,
National Museum of Australia,
Canberra, 2008, pp. 206–207 (illus.)

EXHIBITED

*Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere:
Paintings from Utopia*, Queensland
Art Gallery, Brisbane, 20 February
– 13 April 1998; Art Gallery of
New South Wales, Sydney,
15 May – 19 June 1998; National
Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
8 September – 22 November 1998
*Utopia: The Genius of Emily
Kame Kngwarreye*, National
Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan,
26 February – 13 April 2008;
National Art Centre, Tokyo, Japan,
28 May – 28 July 2008; National
Museum of Australia, Canberra,
22 August – 12 October 2008



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We are honoured to be included in Frieze Masters 2023. A significant step for our gallery, it is even more so for the Australian First Nations artists we represent. Firstly, I want to pay tribute to my friend, mentor and colleague Tim Klingender (1964–2023). Tim's pioneering contribution within this critically important sector paved the way for our international presence at Frieze Masters.

For such an important event, it is only appropriate to continue the work achieved for one of Australia's most acclaimed and embraced artists – Emily Kam Ngwarray.

The exceptional selection of works within this exhibition is the culmination of almost two years of procurement – resulting in one of the finest collections of Ngwarray's work on view today. Each and every work has been hand picked for its exceptional quality and to highlight each of the stylistic shifts throughout the artist's short yet prolific career.

We open with the well-resolved early painting *Albalkere* 1990 – a fabulous revelation of the artist's discovery of her new-found acrylic painting medium, possessing qualities of a lifelong practice in ceremonial bodily mark-making. Inherent in this work are technical elements that stem from Ngwarray's prior foundational work in batik.

Muna – Everything 1991 is an undisputable masterwork by the artist and the focal point of our exhibition. The painting signifies the apex of the artist's career, and we are truly honoured and grateful to be entrusted with this superb picture.

Also of particular note are the three elusive Yam Series paintings, which date from 1995–1996. The black and white pictures which Ngwarray began painting in early 1995 denote the beginning of this dramatic stylistic transformation in the artist's oeuvre. She then moved into a bold use of colour during the cooler months of July 1995. *Kame Colour* 1995 is a rare example from this most desired period. So too is *Ceremony II* 1995, which was created in December 1995 and is indicative of Emily's late period when she produced bright, action-filled expressions of her Country.

We end with *My Country* 1996, one of the twenty-four Last Series works that Ngwarray painted at the end of her life. This moving painting was one of only five works included in the National Museum of Australia's pioneering retrospective exhibition, which travelled to Japan in 2009.

Vanessa Merlino, Nicole Kenning and I welcome you to our booth, located at B10 at Frieze Masters 2023.

D'LAN DAVIDSON
DIRECTOR & FOUNDER, D'LAN CONTEMPORARY



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Emily Kam Kngwarray portrait p. 4,
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ABOUT

Formed in 2016, D'Lan Contemporary sources, exhibits and sells exceptional works of art by leading and emerging First Nations Australian artists in Australia and overseas.

ETHICS

Our mission is to create a transparent and sustainable marketplace for Australian Indigenous art and to respect and protect the integrity of the artist, the buyer, the seller – and the marketplace – from fraudulent sales or unethical procurement.

We maintain strict ethical practices and only exhibit and sell works of art with a clear line of provenance.

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS

The National Endowment for Indigenous Visual Arts is a charitable trust fund established to centralise and distribute proceeds from art sales back to Australian Indigenous artists and their working communities.

D'Lan Contemporary allocates 30% of annual net profits to the fund.

PROVENANCE

Every work of art exhibited and sold by D'Lan Contemporary has a clear line of provenance.

Documentation we draw upon to establish provenance includes:

- Community art centre certificate of provenance/authenticity
- Transfer of ownership documentation
- Purchase receipt or invoice
- Inclusion in academic/art historical publications
- Inclusion in exhibitions, and exhibition catalogues (private and/or public institution)
- Collection/exhibition inventory numbers (private and/or public institution)
- Inclusion in auction catalogues
- Documented appraisals

D'Lan Contemporary's guidance on best practice for buying Australian Indigenous art is:

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS ART (1980–PRESENT)

All contemporary Australian Indigenous works of art should be accompanied by documentation linking the artwork to the artist via their Community Art Centre or their primary gallery/representative.

Community Art Centres operate with an ethical focus and establish their own individual guidelines by which all artworks are sold.

Primary market artworks should only be bought from a Community Art Centre or an official artist gallery/representative.

Secondary market artworks should only be bought with a source of provenance from a Community Art Centre or an official artist gallery/representative.

MODERN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART (1950S–1980)

For artworks created prior to the establishment of Community Art Centres, such as bark paintings, Hermannsburg watercolours, Papunya boards and sculptural artworks made for sale, there is less necessity for Community Art Centre provenance.

However, artworks from this period with no traceable history are likely to have less market value than those that do – even when an artwork is clearly authentic.

Highly desirable provenance for artworks from this period includes Papunya Tula Artists, Stuart Art Centre and Maningrida Arts, or a clear link to a primary collector such as Geoffrey Bardon, Dorothy Bennett, Sandra Le Brun Holmes or Dr Scougal – who were all active in the 1950s–1970s.

ARTEFACTS AND OBJECTS (1880S–1950)

With artefacts, often much of the important collection history has been lost over time. Therefore, provenance can greatly impact value.

Before acquisition, research should be undertaken to ascertain the origin of the artefact or object, and how and when it left its country of origin.

Best practice in this segment is to obtain advice from a trusted industry expert before buying or selling.

PROTECTION OF MOVEABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT

The *Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1985* (PMCH Act) implements Australia's obligations under the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970 (1970 UNESCO Convention) to which Australia is a State Party.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention requires State Parties to ensure that no collecting institution accepts illegally exported items.

The Australian Government administers the PMCH Act through the Ministry for the Arts. The PMCH Act regulates the export of Australia's most significant cultural heritage objects by implementing export controls for objects defined as 'Australian Protected Objects'.

If you have any questions about acquiring or selling Australian Indigenous Art, please contact us at: enquiries@dlancontemporary.com.au



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