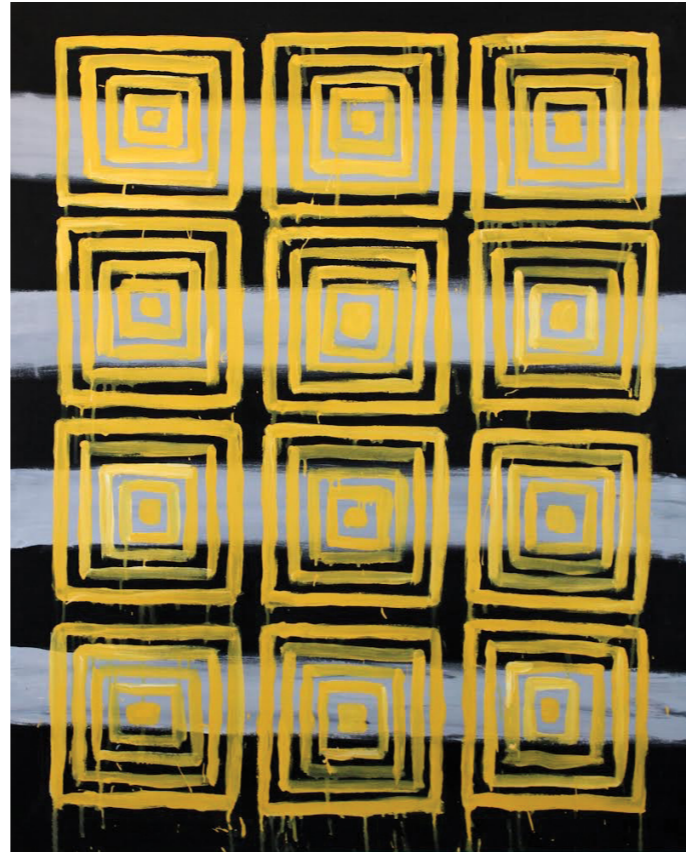


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Exhibition dates:
10th August–9th September, '23

Exhibition opening:
Thursday, 10th August, 5:00PM

KUNTARRINGANYI WANKATJAKU



Featuring work by:

Ashley Robertson, Dennis Nelson Tjakamarra, Denzel Nelson Tjakamarra, Herman Corby Tjapaltjarri, Isaiah Egan, Jayquin Nelson, Jerome Raggett, Justin Allen, Keanu Nelson Tjakamarra, Kieran Roger Tjupurrula, Leemyn Corby Tjapaltjarri, Martin Pollard, Nathan Brown Tjangala, Selwyn Nacambala, Wilfred Thomas Tjampitjinpa

- (01) Dennis Nelson Tjakamarra, Everyone Have Good Time, 2023, pen/pencil drawing, 57x38.5 cm
 (02) Leemyn Corby Tjapaltjarri, Fuck Off No Blanket, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 183x152 cm
 (03) Wilfred Thomas Tjampitjinpa, Tjanganpa Tjukurrpa, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 152x122 cm
 (04) Nathan Brown Tjangala, Wanampi, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 122x122 cm
 Cover: Justin Allen, Walpa kurrupa (2003) synthetic polymer on linen, 122 x 183 cm

Too Shy to Speak

Exhibition dates:
10th Aug–9th Sept, '23

At Coconut Studios:
8/18 Caryota Court, Coconut Grove, Larrakia Country, NT

The young men who make up the majority of exhibitors in this show may say they are Too Shy to Speak, but their works have a story to tell – yet another Papunya story, which for Papunya and its artist generations is as significant as those their community is famous for. To begin with though, we should not misunderstand what they are saying with this evocative title. 'Shy' in Central Australian Aboriginal English doesn't only mean embarrassed or timid or self-effacing. In young people especially, it carries another meaning: respectfulness and reluctance to be involved out of fear of making a wrong move. This second sense perfectly encapsulates the apprehensiveness of these young men about the weighty cultural responsibilities they are taking on in joining with their fathers and grandfathers as the next generation of painters of their Dreaming, Papunya's Dreaming.

Take Kieran Roger Tjupurrula, grandson of the late Charlie Marshall Tjampitjnpa, one of the first Papunya Tula artists to be collected by the National Gallery of Australia. Kieran's first ever painting, included in this exhibition, features the words 'Pilamilani Ngayuku Tjamungku Tjukurrpa Kanyini'. In Luritja this means "I can feel my grandfather holding this country for me". Alongside these words is Kieran's rendering of his grandfather's design. The same stark design forms the basis of his other works in the exhibition, their minimalism reflecting the young man's awareness of what this represents in his society: his mature identity as a painter of the Tjukurrpa, with all the deadly serious spiritual responsibilities that go with it.

These young men are not just "emerging artists" as the Art world might think of them. From the perspective of their own community, they are more akin to "novices". Their induction as painters was not just into the practice of painting but also into the meanings behind it under Aboriginal law. Their teachers were Kumantjayi Dixon Tjupurrula, Watson Corby Tjungarrayi, and Dennis Nelson Tjakamarra, sons of founding Papunya Tula artists Mick Wallankarri Tjakamarra, David Corby Tjapaltjarri and Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula. Half a century ago, as young boys, they watched from the playground as their fathers and other senior lawmen of the Papunya community painted the Warumpi Honey Ant Tjukurrpa design on a prominent wall of the Papunya School. The so-called 'early Papunya boards' created soon afterwards in the rush of painterly activity of the original Papunya Men's Painting Shed are recognised nationally and internationally as the founding works of Australia's most significant Art movement. Those children who watched their elders from the schoolyard, now themselves the senior law men and women of their community, saw fit to mark the anniversary by both celebrating this illustrious history – and ensuring that it continues. For after fifty years, the men of Papunya once more have a dedicated space in which to make art together. This exhibition celebrates the artistic conflagration sparked by this historic return.

Papunya's women painters, whose significant early contribution to the Papunya Tula art movement had long been overlooked, were the ones whose wonderful works put Papunya Tjupi's name on the map of Australian art. It was never intended to exclude men from this 21st century re-invention of Papunya painting, but in practice they were, by the lack of a culturally appropriate space. The revival of men's art was prompted by the commitment of these strong women artists and directors of Papunya Tjupi to share their success with the men. The revitalisation began with a series of bush camps where senior men of the community passed on their stories to their sons and grandsons "so they can keep looking after those stories and look after themselves by painting" [Kumantjayi Dixon]. The first body of work created across the three camps was exhibited at Papunya Tjupi's onsite gallery as Nganampa arts, tjungurrinytjaku kutju ('Our Art, Coming Together As One'). A year later a second body of work was exhibited as Tjupi Puli, meaning 'Honey Ant Mountain' – a reference to the ancestral Dreaming site that rests beside Papunya, in the shelter of which the works, a mix of paintings and sculptures, had been created. This second exhibition also celebrated the opening of the new men's painting space. Artist and director Isobel Gorey summed up the general feeling across Papunya as she welcomed guests to the art gallery: "This is a special time because we remember our Tjamu (Grandfathers) painting in the old days. We are celebrating now because it's happening again".

Highlight of Tjupi Puli was a broken-down Ford Falcon abandoned beside Warumpi Hill in the '70s that the men painted with a medley of motifs honouring the early famous painters of Papunya. Watson Corby coordinated the project and also directed a short film in which Kumantjayi Dixon explained the designs featured on the car, including its centrepiece, a recreation of the Tjupi Tjukurrpa story painted on the Papunya School in 1971. The project was inspired by Watson's experience talking proudly in Luritja at the 2019 Desert Mob symposium before hundreds of strangers about Papunya's history, his grandfather's country and the journey of the young men. He hit on the idea of the painted car as a way of communicating this journey, the excitement of a new beginning, and the young men's deep consciousness of their roots. As Kumantjayi Dixon puts it in the video: "Ngatja family tree kunyu. Palya nyakuntjaku. Ulata tjukurrpa ngatja. Yuwa nganampa tjukurrpa kanyintjaku" ("This is like a family tree. It's good for us to see this. There is a whole lot of Dreaming here. Our Dreaming. Here so that we can hold onto it".)

Dennis Kulata Nelson is resident elder of the Papunya Men's Shed and a mentor to its young men. He can be found there most days, working on his latest exquisite canvas – true as always to his father's teachings, or another of his quirky drawings – or reading, cleaning up, or showing visitors over the new premises and explaining the designs on the 'Art Car' that now sits alongside the Men's Painting Shed. Dennis's inimitable graphics evolved during the 1980s when he

worked as an illustrator with the Papunya Literature Production Centre on over one hundred titles. Recently resumed by popular demand, they also feature in the animated short film accompanying this exhibition. As Leemyn Corby's graffiti painting shows, he is attracting followers amongst the young men who prefer to forge their own path, with sculptures like the extraordinary array of heads by Leemyn, Selwyn Nacambala and Keanu Nelson. Justin Allen also cut his artistic teeth in the Literature Production Centre as a young man, a legacy now drawn upon in his eerily personified wind spirits.

I vividly remember first meeting Dennis Nelson on the Papunya Road in the 1990s with his friend Two Bob Tjungarrayi's son and their respective paintings for Warumpi Arts. You could tell how proud they were of them, though like these young men they said little beyond who their fathers were. They were part of their generation of Papunya's wild young men, the survivors of which, like the generations before and now after them, ultimately take their place as senior lawmen. Whitefella art history is linear: everything goes back to the originating moment of the 1971 Honey Ant Mural, but for Papunya's artists all history is circular, repeating endlessly. The old men paint the same design for the young men that their elders painted for them – and so law and culture are continued down the generations. "All these young fellas have become like their grandfathers, following their footsteps." as Kumantjayi Dixon says, "That's the way the law is for us. Teaching the young fellas to follow this law, story, culture."

Vivien Johnson, June 2023

Coconut Studios is located on Larrakia land. We pay our respects to Larrakia ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging and extend this respect to Luritja ancestors and Elders. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

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