

For Immediate Release

## **NYU's Grey Art Museum Presents First U.S. Survey of Australia's Most Iconic Aboriginal Art Movement**

**Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu: Contemporary Aboriginal Painting from the Australian Desert**  
January 22–April 11, 2026

Exhibition reflects on the fifty-year history of Papunya Tula Artists, Australia's oldest  
Aboriginal-owned arts organization

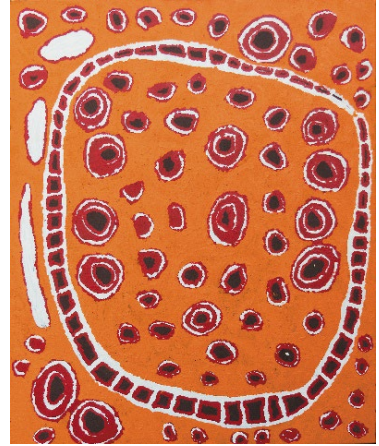


Michael Jagamara Nelson, *Five Stories*, 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 71 5/8 in. (121.9 x 182 cm). Courtesy the Parker Foundation © Estate of the artist. Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd. Photo: Tom Cogill

(NEW YORK, NY, December 5, 2025)—NYU's Grey Art Museum will host the landmark traveling exhibition *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu: Contemporary Aboriginal Painting from the Australian Desert*, the first U.S. survey of Australia's most globally recognized Aboriginal art movement. For the past five decades, Papunya Tula Artists—the oldest Aboriginal-owned arts organization in Australia—has stood at the forefront of contemporary Aboriginal art, producing some of the most iconic art and artists in the nation's history. Inspired by the sweeping ancestral landscape of the Australian desert, the exhibition celebrates one of the world's greatest stories of resilience, self-determination, and the power of art.

On view from January 22 through April 11, 2026, at 18 Cooper Square, the exhibition features over 80 artists and some 120 works produced since 1971, including masterworks by leading

artists such as Mantua Nangala, Makinti Napanangka, Yukultji Napangati, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Warlimpirnga Tjapaltjarri, and Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula. Rather than reflecting a chronological sequence, works in the exhibition are arranged based on geographic and social ties. By juxtaposing multiple representations of the same (or related) subjects across multiple generations of artists, the exhibition surfaces key insights on the development of style, motif, and aesthetics across the past half-century and the life of the arts organization. The project significantly expands on the art historical terrain charted in the exhibition *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya*, which was organized by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University and presented at the Grey Art Museum in fall 2009, and which featured some 50 paintings made in Papunya in the early 1970s. Both *Icons of the Desert* and *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu* have benefited from the critical contributions of Dr. Fred Myers, NYU Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and a renowned cultural anthropologist who has studied the practices of Papunya artists since the beginning of the region's painting revolution.



Inyuwa Nampitjinpa, *Travels of Kutungu from Papunnga to Muruntji*, 1999. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 60 x 48 in. (152.4 x 121.9 cm). Collection of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter © Estate of the artist. Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd.

Organized by the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia in conjunction with Papunya Tula Artists, *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu*—a Pintupi phrase meaning “past and present together”—is the result of a thirty-year association between the two organizations. Reflecting on the exhibition’s impact, Henry F. Skerritt, Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Virginia and Curator of Research at Kluge-Ruhe, says, “The international success of Aboriginal art has been the single most effective tool in making mainstream Australians aware of the unbreakable ties between Aboriginal people and their land, along with the ancestral connections, or ‘Dreamings,’ that underpin this worldview.”

“The Grey Art Museum and NYU have an abiding history with this foundational movement—16 years ago, we presented *Icons of the Desert* in collaboration with Fred Myers, a longtime advisor to and friend of the Grey,” adds Michèle Wong, Interim Director. “This new, expansive survey allows us to showcase the remarkable evolution of Papunya Tula Artists, including the crucial contributions of its women artists, to a New York audience.”

A highlight of the exhibition is *The Papunya Tula Fiftieth Anniversary Suite*, featuring 50 works by 50 leading contemporary artists from the organization. The relatively small, nearly square canvases that compose this historic commission create an epic picture of collective knowledge and the power of community. *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu* also includes two well-known artworks exclusive to the Grey’s presentation: Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula’s *Water Dreaming at Kalipinyapa* (1972) and Michael Jagamara Nelson’s *Five Stories* (1984). Michael Nelson’s *Five Stories* is one of the most reproduced Aboriginal artworks in existence, and has not been shown in New York since Asia Society’s 1988 exhibition *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*. Although now iconic, at the time of its production, the work contained several pictorial innovations, including the use of yellow dotting to outline graphic elements—as opposed to the usual white dots—and a wide array of highly original infill techniques. These techniques bring



Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, *Water Dreaming at Kalipinyapa*, 1972. Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 31 3/4 x 29 3/4 in. (80.6 x 75.6 cm)  
Collection of John and Barbara Wilkerson © Estate of the artist.  
Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd. Photo: Neil Greentree

together into a single, coherent image, five different ancestral narratives that intersect on the artist's homelands. Johnny Warangkula's *Water Dreaming at Kalipinyapa* is part of the artist's well-known series, *Water Dreamings*, inspired by the heavy rains in Papunya at the time. Using sinuous strokes and shimmering dotting, Johnny Warangkula captured the presence of abundant plant life following desert rains, cementing the dot as a defining feature of Aboriginal art more than any other artist. The painting's historical significance is underscored by the fact that it twice made Australian national headlines when it sold for world-record auction prices in the 1990s and 2000s.

### **About Papunya Tula Artists**

The remote township of Papunya was established by the Australian government in 1959 as a settlement for Aboriginal people who were being relocated from their desert homelands. In 1971 a small group of men began painting their ancestral designs, using acrylic paint on scraps of cardboard, Masonite, and linoleum. Residents of Papunya, people of diverse backgrounds and languages living together in cramped conditions, used painting as a way of explaining who they were and where they came from. Using ancient iconographies rarely seen by outsiders, these artists defiantly asserted themselves against the uncertainty of colonial displacement, and initiated an artistic renaissance. In 1973 the group founded their own company, Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd—the first Aboriginal-owned cooperative in Australia. Today, artists from Papunya Tula travel the world, and their artworks have been included in exhibitions such as Documenta and collected by institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum.

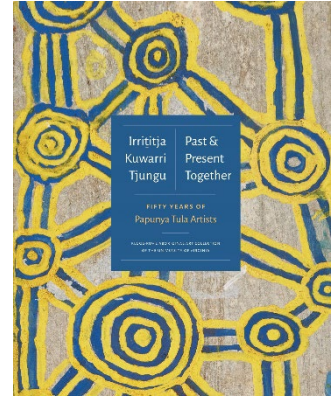
The impact of this movement is best captured by the artists themselves. "These old men had a picture in their mind from Country and ceremony, and they were starting to think about how they were going to do that new form of painting. They started the style of painting that we are now doing. From there, it blew up like a balloon. They started small, and from small they blew up. From Australia to the United States, overseas, like a balloon," says Punata Stockman Nungurrayi, artist and daughter of founding artist Bill Stockman Tjapaltjarri.

### **Tour**

*Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu: Contemporary Aboriginal Painting from the Australian Desert* was on view at Brigham Young University Museum of Art in Provo, Utah, from July 18 through December 6, 2025. After its presentation at NYU's Grey Art Museum, it will open at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, on September 26, 2026, and remain on view through April 2027.

## **Publication**

An illustrated publication, *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu (Past and Present Together): Fifty Years of Papunya Tula Artists* accompanies the exhibition. Published by University of Virginia Press and edited by Fred Myers and Henry Skerritt, it celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Papunya Tula Artists, from the first experiments on scraps of cardboard, linoleum, and Masonite through to the epic abstract paintings that are showcased internationally today. The catalogue includes essays and contributions by John Kean, Steve Martin, Elizabeth Marks Nakamarra, Narlie Nelson Nakamarra, Eileen Napaltjarri, Charlotte Phillipis Napurrula, Punata Stockman Nungurrayi, Rachel Paltridge, Hetti Perkins, Cara Pinchbeck, Margo Smith, Marina Stocchi, Paul Sweeney, Morris Jackson Tjampitjinpa, Joseph Jurra Tjapaltjarri, Bobby West Tjupurrula, and Jodie Napurrula Ward.



Cover of *Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu (Past and Present Together): Fifty Years of Papunya Tula Artists*. Courtesy University of Virginia Press

## **Sponsorship**

*Irrititja Kuwarri Tjungu: Contemporary Aboriginal Painting from the Australian Desert* is organized by the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia in partnership with Papunya Tula Artists.

The presentation at the Grey Art Museum is made possible in part by generous support from the Charina Endowment Fund; the Parker Foundation; John and Barbara Wilkerson; D'Lan Galleries, New York; Salon 94; Ellen and Bill Taubman on behalf of the A. Alfred Taubman Foundation; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.



## **About the Grey Art Museum**

The Grey Art Museum is New York University's fine arts museum, dedicated to advancing knowledge of different cultures, contexts, and histories across time. Over the last five decades, the Grey has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts—including painting, sculpture, photography, film, and performance—often traveling to venues in the United States and abroad. As a university museum, the Grey shares NYU's fundamental commitment as a global research university by producing scholarly exhibitions and publications, hosting interdisciplinary public programs, and stewarding the NYU Art Collection and the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Middle Eastern and Asian Art.

## **General Information**

Grey Art Museum, New York University  
18 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003

(Mailing address: 20 Cooper Square, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003)

Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024

E-mail: [greyartmuseum@nyu.edu](mailto:greyartmuseum@nyu.edu) Website: [greyartmuseum.nyu.edu](http://greyartmuseum.nyu.edu)

**Hours**

Tuesday: 11 am–6 pm

Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Thursday: 11 am–6 pm

Friday: 11 am–6 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

**Admission**

Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff

**Press Contact**

Sofeia Eddy | [sofeia.eddy@nyu.edu](mailto:sofeia.eddy@nyu.edu) | 212-998-6782