

JUDY WATSON

Waanyi • Lawn Hill Gorge, Northwest Queensland

"I listen and hear those words a hundred years away
That is my Grandmother's Mother's Country
it seeps down through blood and memory and soaks
into the ground."



Photo: Palani Mohan/John Fairfax

XLVII ESPOSIZIONE INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 1997

FLUENT

Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie, Judy Watson
47th Venice Biennale
15 June–9 November 1997

Touring Australia from January 1998
The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Drill Hall Gallery—Australian National University
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute
Art Gallery of Western Australia

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Managed by The Art Gallery of New South Wales



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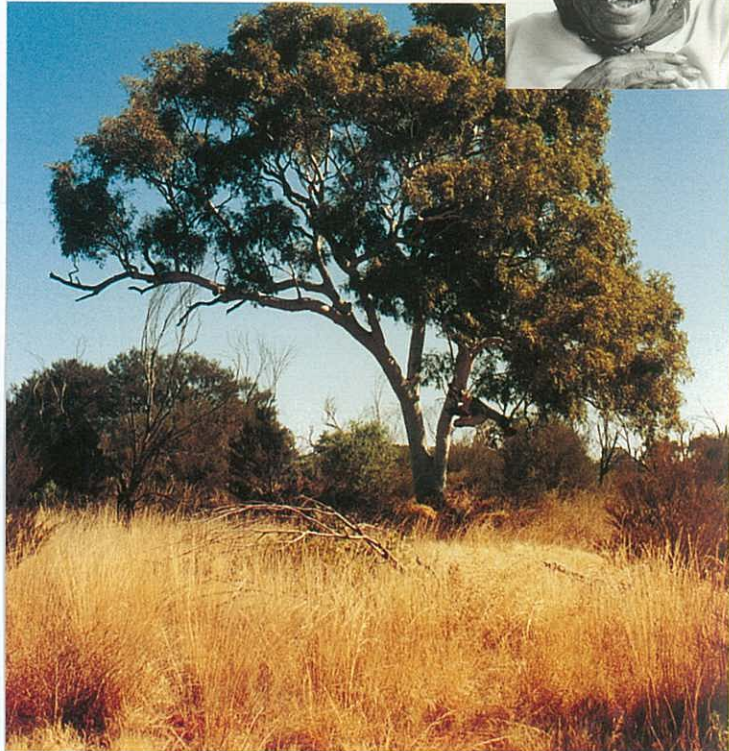
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Cover: Emily Kame Kngwarreye
Untitled (Awelye) 1994 (detail)
Private Collection

EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE

Anmatyerre • Utopia, Central Australia

"This is my country. This is me."



AUSTRALIA
FLUENT

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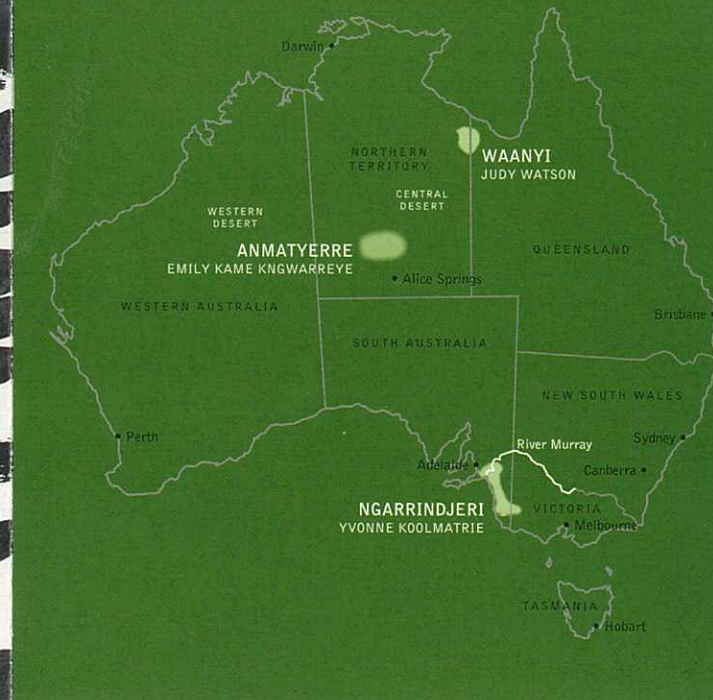
Relatives of the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye are advised that a photograph of the artist is reproduced within this brochure.



YVONNE KOOLMATRIE

Ngarrindjeri • River Murray, South Australia

"I can sense something that is there, I don't know if it is
where Aboriginal people used to walk many years ago.
Every time I come back from
the river I create something new."



FLUENT

Like the many canals that weave through Venice, *fluent* explores the subtle connections between the works of **Emily Kame Kngwarreye**, **Yvonne Koolmatrrie** and **Judy Watson**.

In the same sense that one might be fluent in a spoken language, these artists share a fluency of visual expression. In *fluent* this fluidity is expressed by the motif of the stripe, as it appears in Kngwarreye's work. The stripe is mobile; moving forward and backward, up and down, spontaneous, forceful and gestural. It is a mark that is globally occurring, like a word in a language we can all understand.

Kngwarreye, Koolmatrrie and Watson draw on a continuous cultural heritage while expressing their individuality within this

tradition. Their works articulate the fluent relationship between country, kin and the individual—the relationship between seen and unseen worlds.

One cannot be thought about without the other, like night and day, like a language and a word, like an island in the sea. fluent.

Victoria Lynn

fluent suggests a continuous ebb and flow between modernity and tradition, art and craft, painting and sculpture, abstraction and narrative. It is the weaving together of different stories and journeys—from the past to the present—that creates the fabric of contemporary Indigenous Australia.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye is one of the most significant of Australia's contemporary artists. Born in the bush at Utopia, Central Australia early this century, Kngwarreye lived a traditional lifestyle. She was a senior Anmatyerre law woman in her community, and the leader of a number of song cycles. She passed away in 1996 and was believed to be in her eighties. In accordance with Aboriginal custom, Kngwarreye's full name is not spoken out of respect for her and her family. The substitute Kwementyai (meaning 'no name') and the artist's skin name, Kngwarreye, is used.

In her lifetime Kngwarreye witnessed phenomenal change as the colonial frontier expanded into the remote areas of the Australian outback. Kngwarreye was only introduced to non-traditional practices in her late sixties. Initially working with batik, it was not until over a decade later that Kngwarreye found the medium she came to master, painting on canvas. Her paintings are now represented in major public and private collections in Australia and overseas. Kngwarreye's paintings are highly individual and energetic interpretations of an ancient tradition. *fluent* focuses on the 'stripe' paintings which suddenly appeared in late 1993, displacing the painted fields of shimmering dots for which she was renowned. In her recent works, analogy is made between the stripes of the paintings and the traditional body paint of Kngwarreye's *awelye*, yam dreaming cycles. These bold stripes capture the immediacy and rhythm of 'painting up' (on the body) for a ceremonial performance.

Yvonne Koolmatrrie is a leading practitioner of a rare form of Ngarrindjeri weaving traditional to the Riverland country of South Australia. She is partly responsible for the renaissance of this form of weaving which was gravely endangered by the impact of colonisation. Today, Koolmatrrie passes on the method to students and her work may be found in contemporary collections across Australia.

Originally intended to exist in the world of water, Yvonne Koolmatrrie's seemingly weightless weavings are at once elegant and enigmatic. Made of sedge grass reeds from the River Murray—chosen for their strength, colour and fragrance—Koolmatrrie's weavings are distinctive for their inherent gracefulness and balance. The artist describes their process

of creation as intuitive, drawing inspiration from the life of the River Murray and the unseen presence of her ancestors before her.

I look at different things. I might be along the River and I see different shapes and think that's a good way to weave. I don't sketch it, I just get my rushes and start to weave.

In Koolmatrrie's woven objects the sculptural potential of traditional Ngarrindjeri weaving is realised. These spirited forms act as a channel between the works of Kngwarreye and Watson, expressing the convergence of art and craft practice, and contemporary and Indigenous art.

Judy Watson is one of Australia's most highly regarded young contemporary artists. She has travelled and exhibited abroad extensively and held international residencies in Canada, India, Italy, Norway and New Zealand. Watson's journeys have led her to discover that 'being outside of my own country and culture accentuates commonalities and differences with other countries and their cultures and enforces a greater understanding of my own'.

Watson draws on her impressions of her country and experiences abroad to create metaphysical landscapes of intense sensuality. As a Waanyi artist, Watson has said her work is about 'memories washing over me'. She regularly travels to her country in Northwest Queensland (Waanyi

country) to draw inspiration from her rich personal and communal histories.

Watson's abstract narratives expose the hidden stories of the Australian colonial experience and explore affinities with Indigenous people of other nations.

In Watson's paintings the ability of Aboriginal art to have a relevance and resonance outside its immediate cultural context is revealed. Her floating, unstretched canvasses merge the past with the present, the familiar with the foreign—'about always being in a constant state of flux'.



Emily Kame Kngwarreye
Untitled (Awelye) 1994 (detail)
Private Collection



Yvonne Koolmatrrie
Eel trap 1997 (detail)
Courtesy of the artist



Judy Watson
blood vessel 1997 (detail)
Courtesy of the artist