



Wild Potato Dreaming, circa 1971-1972
2008.0003.014
Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula
Luritja language group
Synthetic polymer on composition board

This painting is full of many varying maroon lines. Horizontal and vertical lines divide this painting into many unique geometric sections. The sections are painted black and filled with a multitude of white dots, which also vary in size and consistency. The center of the painting uses thin maroon lines to create small, stripe-like sections of black, while the outer edges are divided into larger, more regular, more geometric sections. Certain vertical lines in the painting are outlined with white dots, making them more prominent.

Wild Potato Dreaming was purchased from Stuart Art Centre in Alice Springs with the registered number 5051. We do not know how it came to be in Margaret Carnegie's private collection, possibly via Peter Fannin. John W. and Maria T. Kluge purchased it from Margaret Carnegie, either directly or at an auction house, and proceeded to donate it to the Kluge-Ruhe Collection in 2008, more than a decade after John's initial gift.

Documentation for this painting indicates it depicts the growth of wild potato roots beneath the ground. This theme is fairly common in Western desert paintings.

After studying this painting some more, we began to think it showed multiple perspectives. Areas of the painting seem to be divided into clear sections by heavy lines that could represent mountain ranges. While we know the center of the painting represents the root growth of wild potatoes, we theorized the outer edges, which are much less detailed and more orderly, might show nearby mountain ranges where the potatoes can be found. Another question we had is whether this painting refers to a certain site, specifically Kalipinya, since many of Johnny's paintings focus on that region.

However, after emailing scholar Luke Scholes, we no longer believe his painting shows multiple perspectives. He agreed that this painting most likely depicts Kalipinya, but since Kalipinya is not characterized by mountains, it would not be logical for Johnny to paint a mountain range.

Initially it was believed that Johnny painted this between 1971 and 1974. It is very difficult to give this painting a more exact date, but we believe it was likely made in 1971 or 1972. Stylistically, it is similar to other works of Johnny's from this time. *Old Man's Medicine Dreaming* (painted in 1971) uses the same black, maroon and white dots as *Wild Potato Dreaming*. The patterning of dots is also similar, and the paint used is very opaque and solid. Luke Scholes helped reaffirm our theory about the dates. He finds the composition to be similar to other paintings done in 1971 or 1972, and also pointed out that determining the type of paint used could help narrow down the date. Unfortunately, we are not able to say for certain which type of paint was used because the painting is currently at a conservator in Richmond, so perhaps this could be further investigated. The painting was also in an exhibit in 1973, so it must have been completed before then.

Bibliography:

Bardon, Geoffrey. *Papunya Tula: Art of the Western Desert*: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.

Bardon, Geoffrey, et al. *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*. Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2000. Print.

Benjamin, Roger, et al. *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya*: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2009. Print.

Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon. *Papunya: A place Made After the Story*: Miegunyah Press, 2004. Print.

Gilchrist, Stephen, et al. *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*: Harvard Art Museums, 2016. Print.

Johnson, Vivien. *Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert*: Craftsman House, 1994. Print.

Judith Ryan and Philip Batty. *Origins of Western Desert Art*: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2011. Print.

Correspondence:

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Dear Laura and Gauri,

Thank you for your email and your very interesting questions. First of all I should apologise for the length of a couple of my responses, too much information I know, but hopefully gives you plenty to consider. Please note that I have delved into some speculation below, but hopefully if you can respond to some of the questions I have asked, some of this speculation might make some sense.

I hope this assists you with the work you are doing. I look forward to responding any further questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Luke

Shorty Lungkarta Tjungarrayi: *Big Corroboree Dreaming*, from either 1975 or 1978.

Do you think the artist attribution is correct?

- a. While Kluge-Ruhe's documentation clearly attributes this painting to Shorty Lungkarta Tjungarray, the book *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story* by Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, attributes it to Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungarrayi with the title *Men and Women Ceremony*. However, we know that this book is not completely reliable, so we are not certain. Our