



*Big Corroboree Dreaming*, 1975

1993.0008.010

Shorty Lungkarta Tjungarrayi (c. 1920 - 1987)

Pintupi language group

Synthetic polymer on board

This painting features a large roundel made up of white dots and maroon lines at the center. U shapes of varying size are connected to this center roundel. Four smaller concentric circles are attached to the large center circle by lines of white dots. All but one of these smaller circles feature an attached U shape, also made of white dots and maroon. Each of the corners has a partial circle made of rows of white dots, and large U shapes on every edge. The top of the

painting has two maroon squiggly lines with white dots on either side. These lines run from the top edge of the work to the large center circle. The painting appears to be damaged, as seen by the frayed top corner and a thin, semi-transparent layer of white spray paint covering the top quarter of the piece.

Peter Fannin, an influential figure in the birth of the Western Desert art movement, first acquired this painting at Papunya after it was made. It was then sold to Margaret Carnegie who then sold it to John W. Kluge in 1993. This work was donated by Kluge to the museum in his initial gift in 1997.

Prior to our research, the documentation for this painting stated that it was made by Shorty Lungkarta Tjungarrayi, but the documents were contradictory about when it was made. Most sources identify the creation date as 1975. The “object worksheet” associated with Kluge’s acquisition of the work claims in one place that it was made in 1975 and in another place that it was made in 1978. Because this artwork appears in the 1977 documentary *Mick and the Moon* made by Geoffrey Bardon, and because most sources agree on the 1975 date, we conclude that it was most likely made in 1975. Luke Scholes, however, believes the 1977 date might be more likely, so it is hard to know for sure.

Although “Big Corroboree Dreaming” is the listed title of the painting, we suggest that it should be changed when on view at the museum. “Corroboree” is a Western term developed by colonists to refer to Aboriginal ceremonies in general and isn’t used by the Pintupi people. As a result of our research below, we encourage the museum to use the title “Man and Woman’s Ceremony”.

The diagram that accompanied the work at the time of accession indicates that the large roundel in the middle of the work is a “large sand mosaic” with “performers” around it, who are represented by U shapes. “Performers” likely refers to male ceremonial participants who created or are creating the sand mosaic, or ground design. The smaller circles surrounding the central roundel represent “fire” - probably campfires. These are surrounded by U shapes representing more men. The partial circles in the corners represent cliffs, while the other half circles on the edges represent men with their backs to the ceremonial participants. The wavy lines near the top of the painting represent “running water.”

However, after emailing Fred Myers we believe that this explanation may not be accurate. He believes that the ceremony depicted is a Tingari (also spelled Tingarri) story. He described it as “a ceremony in which the young men are being decorated and taught the stories, with women sitting (U shapes represent humans sitting) at a separate area, away from the ceremonial ground.” He went on to say that the squiggly line most likely represents smoke “...because it emanates from the ceremonial ground and Tingarri initiates typically go and stand in the smoke.” It would be logical for the U shapes facing away from the center to represent women, because Tingari ceremonies are considered men’s ceremonies, and it would be culturally inappropriate for them to participate.

*Papunya: A Place Made After The Story* affirms Myers' theory; its title for this piece is *Men and Women Ceremony*, and claims that some of the U shapes may represent women. It also indicates that the squiggly lines at the top represent smoke and not running water.

In addition, our research led us to question the attribution of this painting. *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story* says this piece was made by Yala Yala Gibbs, although this book is known to have attribution flaws. Upon further research we have come to the conclusion that the painting was most likely created by Shorty Lungkarta Tjungarrayi. To reach this conclusion we compared the painting to others created by Shorty, and in addition we consulted experts who agreed that the attribution to Shorty was most accurate. Fred Myers indicated that the characteristic Tingari grid with four arms radiating from a central circle, with U shapes surrounding it, is common in Shorty's works.

Bibliography:

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

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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,