



Corroboree Dancing, c.1971-1974

1991.0021.001

Charlie Egalie Tjapaltjarri

Warlpri/ Luritja language group

Synthetic polymer on Masonite

Written by Evelyn Hall

Charlie Egalie Tjapaltjarri painted *Corroboree Dancing* on a large rectangular piece of masonite. Atop a dark red background, Charlie Egalie painted three swirling black figure-eight-like designs. The design on the far left is made of a single thin and irregular line, with seven “loops” that become smaller as they approach the top of the piece. The middle design is the largest one, with only three “loops.” It is roughly double the width of the designs on either side, and is comprised of multiple parallel lines, between three and seven. The design on the right has five full “loops” and one half “loop.” Most of the “loops” contain a black concentric circle. Surrounding these circles are U-shapes in differing numbers: one, two or three. Surrounding these three designs are small white dots which reach almost to the edge of the masonite. An uneven border of red background is visible on the top and bottom.

Charlie Egalie Tjapaltjarri painted this work at Papunya. It was first purchased by Geoffrey Bardon from the artist sometime between 1971 and 1974. Bardon then sold this painting to Margaret Carnegie, a well-known art collector, for her collection around 1985. Museum Art International and Maurice Tuchman facilitated the sale of this painting to John W. Kluge in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1991. This work was part of Kluge’s initial gift of artwork to the University of Virginia (UVA) in 1997, which formed the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of UVA.

There are several conflicting ideas of what this painting represents. The explanation documented in *Myriad of Dreamings*, which was corroborated by anthropologist Fred Myers, is that it depicts a men’s ceremony. The swirling designs are the patterns made by the mens’ feet while dancing. The other interpretation is that these swirling designs are the paths of ancestors traveling, or possibly large ground paintings. In any interpretation, the concentric circles in the “loops” are campfires, and the U-shapes surrounding them are men sitting on the ground. These symbols are used by various artists from this movement. It’s likely that the artist chose red as the background the sand in the artist’s country is red. Additionally, when men cover their bodies in paint for ceremonies, they use red as the base layer. They then sometimes add colors on top of this layer, such as black and white. This may explain the other two colors in the painting.

Born in Pikilyi around 1940, Charlie Egalie Tjapaltjarri was educated at Yuendumu as a boy and then worked as a stockman for the majority of his early life. He worked at Haasts Bluff for seven years and then at Narwietooma Station for another seven years. In the early 1970s, Charlie Egalie moved to Papunya and began to paint in 1972. During his time in Papunya, he produced many paintings about Wallaby, Budgerigar, and Water Dreamings. His painting *Budgerigar Dreaming* was used in Nadine Amadio’s *Wildbird Dreaming* as the front cover. Charlie Egalie married Nora Nakamarra, whom he taught to paint. They had two sons and two daughters, one of them being Natalie Corby. Like her mother, she was taught by Egalie and later became a prominent artist at Papunya Tula Artists Ltd. In 1991, Egalie left Papunya and settled near Mount Leibig, an area west of Papunya, where he spent the rest of his life. He died in 2002.

The word “corroboree” is not an appropriate term. This hints at the fact that this painting was likely titled by someone other than the artist. To make the title of this painting more relevant, a possible name for it could be Men’s Ceremony or Ceremony Dancing.

Egalie’s contribution to the Papunya Tula Art Movement is amplified through the teaching he provided to his wife and daughter. Egalie’s brother, David Corby, is also a talented artist and has painted for Papunya Tula Artists Ltd. His artistic legacy is significant not only because of his own painting as a pioneering early artist of this movement, but also as a result of his influence on his brother, his wife and his daughter, who became one of the first prominent female painters in Papunya.

Bibliography

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Location: Storage 3/Flat File Cab. 1/Drawer 1

ARTIST: Charlie Egalie Tjapaltjarri

Title: Corroboree Dancing

Accession Number: 1991.0021.001

Creation Date: 1971-1974

30.24"H x 14.75"W

Other number on back of frame: MCC 001

MAIN QUESTION: Our documentation from MAI states that the linear forms in this work are dancing patterns for a ceremony. Margo remarked that she had mostly see lines like this in paintings about womens' ceremonies, and that we couldn't necessarily rely on that and that they could be travelling lines of ancestors. What do you think?

These kinds of figure eight forms/enclosures are not uncommon in paintings. There are men's ceremonies in which two men sit facing each other with some sort of ceremonial pole between them and they sit inside a ground painting. This could be that, or it could be a men's ceremonial ground (centered on the central circle) with different locations of men sitting. It looks rather conventionalized, as if it somehow is drawn from another medium (shield painting?).... But the semicircles at the circles would usually be people seated at a camp, or a fire. So this might reflect a large ceremonial gathering with groups of men preparing and dancing.