



Untitled, c.1972

1991.0021.005

Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi, Pintupi

Pintupi Language group, Kintore Ranges

Synthetic Polymer on Composition Board (Masonite)

Written by Virginia Peng

This painting by Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi was painted on a masonite board that was likely painted black before the application of white paint. The pattern consists of three concentric circles, which are spaced evenly and vertically in the middle. Each circle has three rings, and white dots placed in between the rings. On each side of the board, three semicircles face out towards the edges and are also evenly spaced. Similar to the concentric circles, these semicircles are comprised of three rings with dots in between the spaces. The artist painted three slightly curved pathways from one side to the other to connect the semicircles, depicted with two lines enclosing a track of white dots. Likewise, shorter pathways also extend out from the center circles, linking the semicircles on the sides. At the top, two groupings of six short, white parallel lines are symmetrically spaced. Similar sets of lines appear near the bottom on the sides. Furthermore, in contrast with the rest of the painting, an area near the bottom is filled in with white dots, while the rest of the negative space in the painting is left black.

This painting was first purchased around 1985 by Margaret Carnegie. The painting is presumably part of a sixty-one painting collection of Aboriginal art that she and her son had purchased from Bardon. Between 1985 and 1991, Museum Art International acquired the painting, which was then sold to John W. Kluge on July 18, 1991. Kluge donated a large part of his collection to the University of Virginia in 1997, including this painting. This work is not currently on display, partially due to its fragility. In fact, the painting is required to be stored and carried flat to preserve the paint that has begun to tent and deteriorate. Fluctuating temperature and humidity could have caused the pigments to exfoliate more easily; other conjectures question the quality of the paint.

Due to the fact that this painting is untitled, it is very difficult to determine its meaning. Compared to other paintings by the artist, it is very likely that the work is related to the *Frog Dreaming* story. As can be seen in *Frog Dreaming* (1971) by Charlie Tjaruru, similar sets of short strokes represent the Frog's movements on sand, also known as travelling lines, according to Geoffery Bardon. Bardon also states that the *Frog Dreaming* could be part of the *Ice Dreaming stories*, which are both related to Tjitururrnga, Charlie Tjaruru's birthplace. Many of the motifs in this untitled painting are found in Charlie Tjaruru's *Frog Dreaming* from 1973. In this work, the dots likely represent hail or frost and the semicircles can be interpreted as caves. Because of the visual similarities, this interpretation could be extended to the work in question which is untitled. The concentric circles are usually stopping points in the journeys of ancestral

beings. Bardon suggested the groups of parallel lines could be a number of things, but anthropologist Fred Myers suggested they are most likely spears or boomerangs.

This work has been attributed to Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi (1925-99), whose name is also commonly spelled as Taruru, Tarawa, Wadama and Watuma. Charlie Tjaruru was born at Tjitururrnga, near Kintore in the Northern Territory, to parents Nuulyngu Tjapaltjarri and Karntintjungulnyu Nakamarra. His family was among some of the first people to move to the Haasts Bluff area, an area that housed a prominent Lutheran ration station run by missionaries. Charlie Tjaruru was given the name “Charlie” by Dr. Charles Duguid in 1936. After his father’s death, Charlie Tjaruru was raised by Tjurti Tjapaltjarri, whose daughter Pantjiya Nungurrayi began painting for Papunya Tula Artists in the mid 1990s. Charlie Tjaruru worked as a builder and dingo hunter while also continuing to take rations to people still living “out bush” in the desert. He also claimed the position of spokesmen for young Pintupi men who had migrated to Haasts Bluff after 1960. He later met Uta Uta Tjangala, a fellow artist and brother of Charlie Tjaruru’s future wife, Tatali Nangala. Charlie Tjaruru worked with a small group of Aboriginal men to found Papunya Tula Artists Ltd in 1971. Charlie Tjaruru was close with Geoffrey Bardon and Andrew Crocker, both of whom assisted greatly in the exhibition and advertisement of Aboriginal works and conservation in the early years of the movement.

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Location: Storage 3/Flat File Cab. 2/Drawer 1

ARTIST: Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi

Accession Number: 1991.0021.005

Title: Untitled

Creation Date: circa 1971

20"H x 9 7/8"W

Other number on back of frame: MCC-007

MAIN QUESTION: We have no title for this work. Do you have any idea what story it could be representing, or anything we should pursue? So far, based on another painting by this artist and documentation of it by Bardon, it seems like the bands of parallel lines could be clapping sticks, rain, or body paint designs (or all three at once), but even that is fairly vague!

It is very difficult to know what story this might be without some documentation. I am quite sure that the parallel lines are not clapping sticks. I never saw him paint anything like that, nor did I see him paint Rain Dreaming stories. He very often painted the sites around Tjitururrnga, which has several stories, one of which is "Ice Dreaming," which really refers to "frost." The word for that is nyiinnga. I looked in Bardon and Bardon, and found 3 paintings of Charley Tjaruru on what Bardon recorded as Frog Ceremony Dreaming, or Spirit Man Frog Dreaming.... The first of these (p. 230 top) has

semicircles on the sides and short parallel lines. Bardon identified these first as spears, and then seems to correct to “travelling lines.” I don’t know this story but Bardon records him saying the Frog Dreaming is part of the Ice Dreaming, so it’s presumably an element of the story at Tjitururrnga. I would imagine, since he refers in the third iteration to men in caves, that the semicircles might be caves or perhaps the dotted bottom portion is a cave with the frost as the dots.