



**NGAYULU NGURAKU NINTI - THE COUNTRY I KNOW:  
BARBARA MOORE & SHARON ADAMSON**

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BY MARGO SMITH AM

Barbara Moore's paintings evoke the central Australian desert landscape in a distinctive and highly personal way. She admits, "I'm not like most artists out here. I have a different style." Instead of using dots, a common motif in desert art, Moore fills her large canvases with sweeping arcs and circles of bright colored acrylic paint. The exuberance of her painting matches her vibrant personality. Moore says, "I'm a brush artist who loves paint and color, and this is what you see when you look at my paintings. You see this joy and how the paint flies."

Each of Moore's paintings is titled *ngayuku ngura* (my country), referencing her connection to place. She explains, "What really underpins all of my work is the country that I know, and painting lets me think about my home and stay connected to the place I love." Although she lives in Amata, a small community in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia, Moore's country is farther north. She grew up at Amoonguna in the Northern Territory, about 10 miles southwest of Alice Springs. She attended Yirara College, a boarding school in Alice Springs, and later moved even farther north to her father's country at Ti Tree where she worked as a preschool teacher. Eventually, Moore relocated to Amata where her sister was living. There she married, had two children, and began working in the local clinic as a nurse's aide.

Moore describes her paintings as "a way for me to think about my country back up north." Although she has lived in Amata for a long time, she misses her home and painting helps her to feel connected to her country. Moore paints concentric circles and lines that refer in a general way to places she knows. Such symbols are shared widely among desert artists to depict features of the landscape. Moore explains, "They are the rock holes and landmarks of my country. We know our country. The places where the rock holes are. The tracks, the landmarks."





Barbara Mbitjana Moore, *Ngayuku ngura (My Country)*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 48 in,  
Collection of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter.



Barbara Mbitjana Moore, *Ngayuku ngura (My Country)*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 78 in,  
Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, Gift of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter, 2019.



Knowledge of country is both comprehensive and layered. It refers at once to the physical characteristics of a place, the resources it contains and its ancestral significance. Anangu (Aboriginal people) pass this detailed knowledge from one generation to the next. "When we go and take the children out, we know where to go and we show them. It's easy for us," Moore observes, "because we've been taught since we were babies. We're *ninti* (clever). We know the place."

However, unlike some desert artists, Moore doesn't refer to specific places and ancestral stories in her paintings. Her works are less like maps and more like an exploration of place through the senses. The bold gestures in these paintings resound with ancestral energy and the viewer can imagine herself transported to Moore's country, where knowledge is enacted in song and dance.

Moore distinguishes her paintings by selecting deep, jewel tone colors. Through her palette, Moore references the variety of plants and the changing quality of light throughout the day in the central desert. She says,

*The colors I choose are the colors I see when I'm in Amata, when I'm travelling across the APY Lands or travelling to my home in the Northern Territory. Some people might think that the desert is only dry and sandy, but our desert is full of colors and life. There's every color of green in the trees. Pinks, purples, yellows, white flowers of all different sizes. Red, white and grey sand and rocks. And every color that makes up the sunset. These are the colors I use.*

Despite her penchant for bright colors, Moore has experimented with grey tones to see if her bold style translates into a more subdued color range. These artworks reveal how paints of different consistency and thickness contribute to the depth and mood of her paintings. She enjoys pushing herself to try new things: "Different stories, bigger brushes, smaller brushes, thinner brushes. I like thicker paint, sometimes a little bit runny." Moore paints quickly, applying one layer of color on top of another. It isn't uncommon to find paint drips running down her canvases, but these contribute

to the overall effect that she loves. "Sometimes I like really block, solid paint, sometimes smooth paint - it all makes the painting sing."

Moore began painting in 2003 during her free time while she continued to work in the clinic at Amata. As her art career progressed, she devoted more time to painting. Part of what sustains her as an artist is the social life of working in the art center. She says,

*I come to the studio, like lots of artists here, every day. We have lots of oldies, young ones, and middle-aged artists. We all sit down and paint and talk, laugh and tell stories. It's really good for us to be here, working in the art center together. Doing all of this good work, sharing stories, laughing and talking.*

Like many Aboriginal art centers, Tjala is the heart of the community. During the past few years, Tjala artists have experienced exceptional success. Moore won the General Painting prize at the 29th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) in 2012. She has been a finalist at NATSIAA or in another prestigious art award every year since then. Moore's success has enabled her to travel and to share the fruits of her labor with her family.

*Seeing my paintings on the gallery wall, traveling, sometimes across the world, to see them makes me so proud. When I come back, the kids love it, chasing the Toyota and asking 'Where you've been? Anything for me?' I always remember them and I love showing them the catalogs and the books, showing them what their grandma's doing. Where she's been.*

Despite all of the accolades and awards, Moore says family is the primary reason she paints. "I'm not making money for me, I'm doing it because I love my children." She hopes that one day, when they are older, she can teach her granddaughters to paint and it will be their turn to take it over. She explains, "For us, the role of an artist is a respected position. It's one that our children and grandchildren look up too and that they aspire to be. I'm making a path for my children."





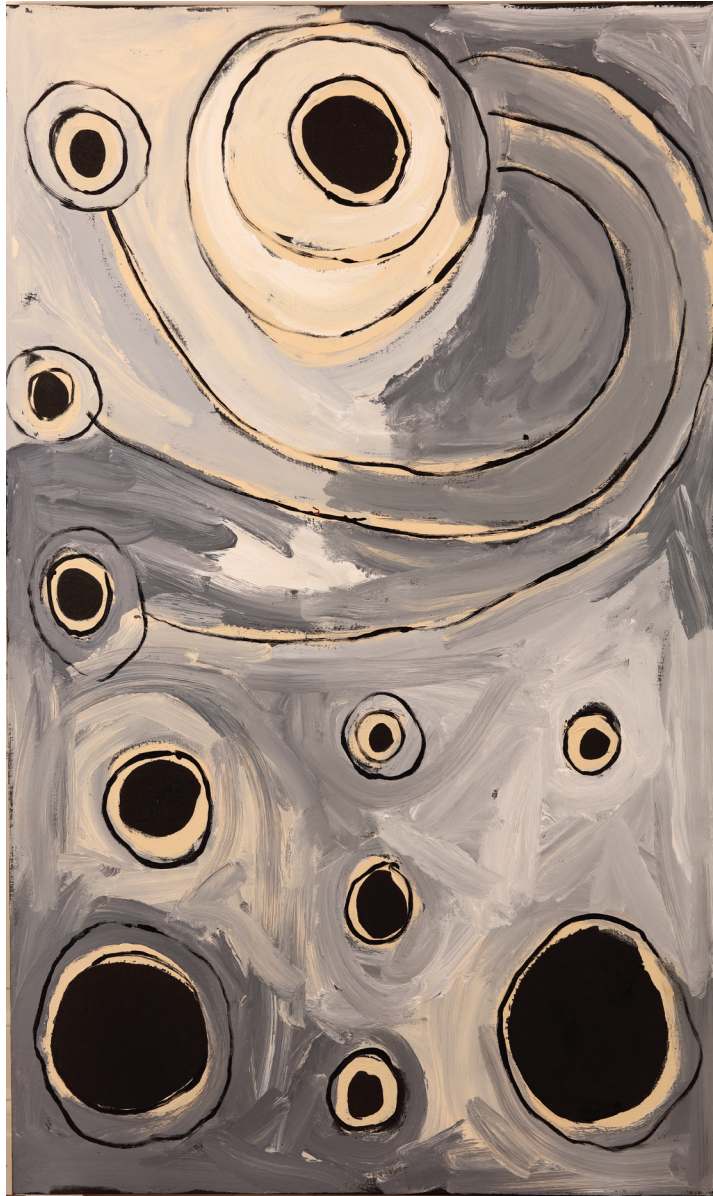
Barbara Mbitjana Moore, *Ngayuku ngura (My Country)*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 in, Collection of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter.



LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTER:  
Sharon Adamson, *Wanampi Tjukurpa*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 35.5 x 23.5 in, on loan from Tjala Arts.







Barbara Mbitjana Moore, *Ngayuku ngura (My Country)*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 40 in, Collection of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter.



Moore describes herself as “a strong, warm woman, who is head of her family. My paintings are big paintings. The gestures and movement in my canvases reflect the person that I am and how I carry myself.” She is proud of her accomplishments but even more, she is proud of her family. “That’s why I want to keep on painting,” she says, “showing them their home. But also supporting them along the way.”

*Ngayulu nguraku ninti (The Country I Know)* is Moore’s first exhibition in America apart from collective exhibitions of Tjala artists. Her residency at Kluge-Ruhe will be her first trip overseas.

Sharon Adamson, an early career artist and arts worker at Tjala, will accompany Moore to Kluge-Ruhe and work with her to paint a mural on one of the museum’s interior walls. Three of Adamson’s small works are included in the exhibition. Moore says, “I can hardly wait for this opportunity and sharing it with a young artist like Sharon is very special.”

Sharon Adamson works at Tjala Arts every day. She began painting at age 18, inspired by her great-grandfather, the renowned artist Tiger Palpatja (c. 1920-2012). Adamson paints his story, *Waṇampi Tjukurpa* (Water Snake Dreaming). She explains, “When we were little we used to visit him in the studio and ask him ‘tell us the *waṇampi* story!’ and he would show us and we would sit and listen.” Waṇampi is an ancestral being that brings rain and fills the waterholes. Adamson depicts the ancestral snake among the network of waterholes in a rocky landscape, indicated by bright colored circles.

Although she started painting when she was in high school, Adamson spent a great deal of her young life watching other artists and learning about drawing and painting from them. She describes an early memory of watching older women drawing in the sand. “They would be laughing and sharing stories about our country with family.” Sand drawing is one inspiration for acrylic painting and it is the stories shared by elders that frequently inform Adamson’s artworks.

Adamson's other interests include music and movies. She is quick to point out that she embraces new technologies:

*Even though life seems different from our ancestors and the elders, my country and culture will always be constant and strong. We make artwork with new ways today, with new materials and new techniques, but the stories are the same. They are a way for us to celebrate our culture and live it every day.*

Like Moore, Adamson enjoys working at the art center. Access to a variety of materials has enabled her to experiment with paper and ceramics in addition to painting, which remains her favorite. She describes her process saying, "I start off my work with my drawings, filling up the canvas and then add colors and layers. Sometimes parts are more open, sometimes they're all full up."

Adamson pushes herself to grow as an artist by changing each painting to make it different from the next. "I like having lots of different shades and mixing them so each is slightly different. And I like bright colors, my great grandfather loved that too." While she shares the love of color with Moore, Adamson remarks on the differences in their painting styles.

*You might think our paintings are similar but really it's pretty different. She likes the big brushstrokes, fat brushes and medium sizes ones. Her paintings are more open. But we both love the paint and how it sits up on the canvas.*

Their familiarity with one another's style of painting will be important as they work together to complete the Kluge-Ruhe mural. There is much value in an intergenerational exhibition and project such as this one. In many ways it articulates Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning that are such a large part of the success of Tjala artists. Sharon explains, "It's great watching (Barbara Moore) and the senior women, they are always helping and supporting us young ones and encourage us to keep going. We are always learning from them and sharing it with our children too."



Barbara Mbitjana Moore, *Ngayuku ngura (My Country)*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 40 in, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, Gift of Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter, 2019.





## ABOUT BARBARA MOORE

Barbara Moore (b. 1964) is an Anmatyerre woman from Amoonguna in the Northern Territory, although she has lived in Amata, South Australia for many years. She began painting at Tjala Arts in 2003 and was quickly recognized for her gestural, large-scale artworks. Moore was awarded the General Painting prize at the 2012 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA) at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin. She was since a finalist in the NATSIAA in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. Moore was also a finalist in the 2016 John Fries Award at the University of New South Wales and in the 2017 and 2019 Wynne Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. Moore's works are held in numerous public and private collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria and Artbank. Photo by Rohan Thomson.



## ABOUT SHARON ADAMSON

Sharon Adamson (b. 1995) is an early-career Pitjantjatjara artist from Amata, South Australia. The great-granddaughter of renowned artist Tiger Palpatja, Adamson began painting in 2013 and quickly garnered attention within the Indigenous art world. Adamson's paintings were included in the exhibition *Rising Stars* at Outstation Art in Darwin and in a joint exhibition with Barbara Moore at RAFT Artspace in Alice Springs in 2015. Her work was recently exhibited at Desert Mob in Alice Springs and Sydney Contemporary and is represented in the Artbank, Macquarie Group and Kerry Stokes collections. Photo by Tjala Arts.



## ABOUT TJALA ARTS

Tjala Arts is located in the community of Amata and is an Aboriginal owned and managed corporation founded in 1997. Tjala Arts boasts an exciting exhibition program supporting established, mid-career and emerging artists who embrace a variety of media including acrylic paint on linen, *punu* (wood sculpture), *tjanpi* (fiber weaving) and new media arts. The art center is renowned for innovative projects such as the Kulata Tjuta Project (Many Spears), which has now spread to seven art centers and is sharing the skills of spear-making across generations. The works of Tjala artists have been acquired by many private collectors internationally and are held in numerous public institutions including the National Gallery of Australia, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, The National Gallery of Victoria and The Art Gallery of South Australia. To purchase paintings by Barbara Moore or Sharon Adamson, please contact Tjala Arts at [info@tjalaarts.com.au](mailto:info@tjalaarts.com.au) or by calling +61 8 8956 2899.



## ABOUT RICHARD KLINGLER AND JANE SLATTER

Richard Klingler and Jane Slatter have studied and extensively collected Aboriginal art for more than twenty years. Their collection is weighted toward highly expressive paintings on canvas, especially by senior women artists, marked by bold and distinctive use of color and design. They hope to use their collection, through continued work with the Kluge-Ruhe community and others, to increase public understanding and appreciation of one of the world's great art movements and cultures. Jane and Richard moved from Australia to Washington D.C. in 2002.

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SEPTEMBER 19, 2019 - FEBRUARY 2, 2020

## OPENING RECEPTION AT NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Thursday, September 19, 5:00 - 9:00 pm, free for members, \$5 for non-members

## GALLERY TOUR WITH THE ARTISTS

Saturday, November 9, 10:30 am

## RECEPTION WITH THE ARTISTS

Thursday, November 14, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

## KLUGE-RUHE ABORIGINAL ART COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

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Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 10 am - 4 pm

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Free guided tour every Saturday at 10:30 am

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