

Milpa

Stop-motion animation by Spinifex Artists

Next to the internationally renowned and bustling Spinifex Arts Project in Tjuntjuntjara—a small, remote town located 800 miles east of Perth in the Great Victoria Desert, Western Australia—is an intergenerational, multimedia arts space for creating film, photography, and digital shorts.

Named after the Anangu practice of sand drawing, Milpa (est. 2018) is a small, creative studio operated by Spinifex Arts Project for the local community to learn new disciplines, including film, animation, model making, and digital arts. Anangu means “people” in the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages. It is also the term used to refer to people from the Western Desert region where Milpa is located.

The art center has historically engaged many senior artists in painting practices, whereas Milpa provides other creative services to encourage younger generations to engage in the arts. Here, the only prerequisite to participate is a desire to create and collaborate, with each participant bringing their unique ideas, humor, and creative skills to the table.

In this selection of stop-motion animations, some recall cultural narratives; some share glimpses of everyday life and stories of the past; and others tell cautionary tales. Some projects aim to educate and drive social change through creative outputs, while others narrate local happenings in and around Tjuntjuntjara. Significantly, they are narrated almost exclusively in a dialect of Pitjantjatjara, a prominent and thriving language spoken in the region. In Australia there are around 800 dialects of the 250+ Indigenous languages and, according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), 90% are considered to be endangered.

Younger artists have experimented and produced significant artworks through digital media that capture and express their ideas, cultural values, and humor under the cultural guidance of senior artists and community members. These shorts, created by and for this community, are an important creative and contemporary record of what it means to be a Spinifex artist living and working in one of the most remote communities in Australia.

On display December 13, 2024 - March 2, 2025

***Walawuru Iti Katitja: An Eagle Story* (2019)**

4:26 min.

Walawuru Iti Katitja is a true story shared by senior ceremonial leader and renowned artist Fred Grant. This story is well known throughout the community and captures the challenges faced by families back in early days.

***Seatbelt Tjura: Put on Your Seatbelt* (2018)**

5:29 min.

The artists started working together in May 2018 motivated by a very serious issue affecting many Indigenous communities across Australia: the high fatality rate of vehicle collisions in remote areas. The film shares educational driver resources in Pitjantjatjara, which is many people's first and main language. The aim is to curb preventable issues, such as the over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples, that arise partly from the lack of translated materials.

On display March 4, 2025 - June 1, 2025

***Putikutu Ananyi: Bush Trip* (2021)**

5:41 min.

Putikutu Ananyi is a story about families going out, collecting mai (plant foods), being on Country, and learning from old people. This story was conceived by Kendrea Hogan and contributed to and fabricated by a production crew of over 10 young artists. Those in their 20s to 40s make movies like this to show children the value of spending time with their Elders.

***Milpa Movie* (2018)**

2:00 min.

Artist Patju Presley is the voice and storyteller of this small Anangu Wati (Spinifex man) puppet who is out and about on Spinifex Country hunting kipaṛa and kaḷaya (bush turkey and emu).

This short, stop-motion animation spoken in Pitjantjatjara was created by Milpa's founders Kumanara (Anne) Stevens, Sophia Brown, and Timo Hogan with project facilitator Ange Leech. The soundtrack was composed by Derek Coleman.

The Tjuntjuntjara_Nya Cooking Show

***Mai Wiru Palanya: Making Beautiful Food* (2023)**

3:07 min.

Set in a miniature replica of the Tjuntjuntjara Women's Centre kitchen, hand-crafted puppets voiced by Kendrea and Pamela Hogan cook butter chicken, a popular Indian-inspired healthy and home-cooked alternative to processed foods, which are more readily available in many remote communities due to the high price of fresh produce.

Working from real photos, the artists have modeled puppets, props, and a movie set created with recycled materials and polymer clay.

See more films by Milpa here:

