

Kluge-Ruhe opens an exhibition of dynamic paintings by internationally renowned Spinifex artists

[March 14, 2025] *In the Beginning: Paintings by Senior Artists of the Spinifex Arts Project* presents the bold, dynamic work of internationally renowned artists from the Spinifex Arts Project, a collective of Pitjantjatjara men and women in the remote community of Tjuntjuntjara in the Great Victoria Desert, Western Australia. The exhibition is on view from March 15, 2025 - March 8, 2026.

[Spinifex Arts Project](#) began in 1997 when the artists realized that painting would be an instrumental tool in lobbying the Western Australian government to recognize their ongoing connection to their sacred Country so they could return to their homelands. Senior Spinifex artists were displaced from their homelands when the British government was performing atomic bomb and rocket testing at Maralinga in the northwest of South Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. The artists created large-scale, collaborative paintings—powerfully citing their Tjukurpa (ancestral stories and beliefs) and enduring connections to their land—and used these paintings as evidence in what became the first successful Native Title claim in Western Australia, with the Federal Court awarding Native Title to the Spinifex people in 2000. Known for their collaborative canvases, Spinifex artists also developed innovative, individual artistic practices over the last twenty years.

Saturated with color and imbued with story, the paintings in the exhibition are drawn from a recent gift by Greg Castillo and Gary Brown, alongside a collaborative canvas on loan from the Fondation Opale in Lens, Switzerland. Castillo, who is a professor of architectural history at the University of California, Berkeley, began collecting work by Spinifex artists while teaching at the University of Sydney. The Castillo-Brown collection includes paintings by prominent Spinifex artists such as Lawrence Pennington, Tjaruwa Woods, Patju Presley, and Timo Hogan.

Katina Davidson (Kullilli/Yuggera) curated the exhibition in consultation with the artists and the art center due to the deeply sensitive cultural knowledge contained within the paintings. Davidson's six-month fellowship at Kluge-Ruhe over the 2024-25 academic year has been supported by the Australian Government through [Creative Australia](#) in partnership with the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

In the Beginning is accompanied by a series of public events, including an [Opening Reception](#) on Thursday, March 27 from 5-7 pm; a [Curatorial Tour](#) of the exhibition on Wednesday, March 22 at 1:30 pm; and a [Moderated Discussion](#) between Davidson and Greg Castillo on Friday, March 28 from 12-1pm.

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THE KLUGE-RUHE ABORIGINAL ART COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA IS THE ONLY MUSEUM OUTSIDE OF AUSTRALIA DEDICATED TO THE EXHIBITION AND STUDY OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART.



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