Landmark survey of Australia's most iconic Aboriginal art movement embarks on US Tour

[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JUNE 4, 2025] ***Irriṯitja Kuwarri Tjungu (Past and Present Together): Contemporary Aboriginal Painting from the Australian Desert*** is the first US exhibition to survey Australia's most globally recognized Aboriginal art movement. For the past five decades, **Papunya Tula Artists**—the oldest Aboriginal-owned arts organization in Australia—has stood at the forefront of contemporary Aboriginal art, producing some of the most iconic art and artists in Australian history.

In 1971, at the remote township of Papunya, a small group of Aboriginal men began painting their ancestral designs with acrylic paint on scraps of cardboard, Masonite, and linoleum. From these humble beginnings, a multimillion-dollar industry would emerge, changing the face of contemporary art and creating a powerful voice for Indigenous artists that reverberates into the present. Inspired by the sweeping ancestral landscape of the Australian desert, it is one of the world's greatest stories of resilience, self-determination, and the power of art.

"These old men had a picture in their mind from Country and ceremony, and they were starting to think about how they were going to do that new form of painting. They started the style of painting that we are now doing. From there, it blew up like a balloon. They started small, and from small they blew up. From Australia to the United States, overseas, like a balloon."

– **PUNATA STOCKMAN NUNGURRAYI**
(Artist and daughter of founding artist Bill Stockman Tjapaltjarri)

The township of Papunya was founded in 1959 as a settlement for Aboriginal people who were relocated from their desert homelands. Living in cramped conditions, the community brought together people of diverse backgrounds and languages. Painting offered a way of asserting authority: of explaining who the townspeople were and where they came from amid this chaotic mélange of strangers. Using ancient iconographies rarely seen by outsiders, a new artistic renaissance sprung forth as artists defiantly asserted themselves against the uncertainty of colonial displacement. In 1973 the group founded their own company, Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd—the first Aboriginal-owned cooperative in Australia. Today, artists and artworks from Papunya Tula travel the world and the artworks have been included

in exhibitions such as *Documenta* and collected by institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Hood Museum of Art.

Irriṯitja Kuwarri Tjungu (Past and Present Together) features 127 works by over 80 artists produced between 1971-2021 and includes masterworks by leading artists such as Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri, Makinti Napanangka, and Yukultji Napangati. A highlight is *The Papunya Tula Fiftieth Anniversary Suite*, which features 50 works by 50 leading contemporary artists from Papunya Tula and presents an epic picture of the power of community.

"Each artwork is extraordinary. Gathered together, they are a profound expression of power, grace and beauty from members of the world's oldest continuous culture. I am glad they are here [in the USA] to be seen, appreciated, and loved."

– The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister of Australia

Organized by Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia in conjunction with Papunya Tula Artists, the exhibition is the result of a thirty-year association between the two organizations. Kluge-Ruhe is the only museum outside of Australia dedicated to the exhibition and study of Indigenous Australian art. Kluge-Ruhe recently organized the major touring exhibition *Madayin: Eight Decades of Aboriginal Australian Bark Painting from Yirrkala,* which culminated at the Asia Society New York in January 2025. *Irriṯitja Kuwarri Tjungu (Past and Present Together)* is accompanied by a major catalog edited by Fred Myers and Henry Skerritt.

EXHIBITION DATES: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, UT: July 18 - December 6, 2025; **The Grey Art Museum**, New York University, New York, NY: January 20 - April 11, 2026; **The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art**, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK: September 26, 2026 -April 2027

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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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