

YIWARRA KUJU THE CANNING STOCK ROUTE

form.
building a state of creativity

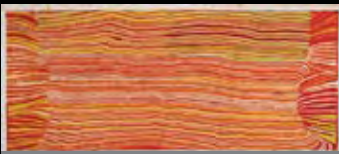
Education
at the
**NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF
AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA**

*Tuju: Telling our stories
through painting, song & dance*



The white man history has been told and it's today in the book. But our history is not there properly. We've got to tell 'em through our paintings.

Clifford Brooks, 2007



1 **Kaninjaku**, 2008, by Kumpaya Girgaba, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia



2 **Kinyu**, 2007, by Eubena Nampitjin, Warlayirti Artists, National Museum of Australia



3 **Tapu Country**, 2008, by Jukuna Mona Chuguna, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia



4 **Kumpupirntily**, 2007, by Jakayu Biljabu and Dadda Samson, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

Telling our stories through painting, song and dance

Western Desert art is constantly evolving. It has its foundations in long-held traditions of groups from diverse communities and has also incorporated influences from recent history. The art of those groups whose Country has been transected by the Canning Stock Route, or who have been impacted by the changes wrought by the route, reflects the rapid pace of change and the dislocation this has caused, while at the same time retaining connections to Country, family and belief.

How is painting related to Country?

Maps tell us about the perspective and values of the people who make them. Alfred Canning made a map which detailed in great beauty his route through the desert but which tells nothing of the Aboriginal world it cut through. On either side of the narrow corridor he surveyed the land is seemingly empty, without value. For Aboriginal people this was a rich landscape that held thousands of years of history and proscribed the meaning of their life.

- 1 In the painting, *Kaninjaku* [Canning Stock Route] by Kumpaya Girgaba the road is almost invisible and the canvas is dominated by undulating sandhills or *tali*. Here the artist absorbs the road into her vision of her Country.
- 2 Eubena (Yupinya) Nampitjin grew up around Jarntu and Nyirla after the death of her mother. With her first husband and three daughters she travelled north, with drovers, along the Canning Stock Route to Balgo mission. Like many sites in this country, Jarntu (Kinyu) is simultaneously an ancestral being, a story and a place.

Of this painting Eubena says:

That waterhole I paint is my own Country. Kinyu is the one that grew me up.

This reflects the intimacy with which Aboriginal people relate both to Country and to the ancestral beings that give these places their power.

- 3 Jukuna Mona Chuguna was born at Kurntumangujarti. As a young girl she fell in love with Kurrapa Peter Skipper and travelled north with him away from her home. However, she retains strong ties to her Country.

My feeling for my Country comes from the stories. I paint my mother's Country and father's. It's sad too because my father is buried there. I think about my Country all of the time. I like to paint the desert. It makes me think about my parents.

Jukuna Mona Chuguna, 2007

How are sacred stories told through painting, song and dance?

Country and Jukurrpa (Dreaming) are inextricably tied. This is shown in many paintings which are like maps of country and which are also important Jukurrpa stories.

- 4 Jakayu Biljabu and Dadda Samson's painting *Kumpupirntily* is both a map and a story of creation ancestors.

The Ngayurnangalku [ancestral cannibal beings] started around Mundawindi side. They went on their knees and wailed and crawled all the way to Lake Disappointment. Ngayurnangalku travelled all the way to Savory Creek from east to west. They stopped at Jilakurru and near Puntawarri. They travelled from long way, and finally stopped at Kumpupirntily [Lake Disappointment].

Jakayu Biljabu, 2008

- 5 Wirnpa was one of the most powerful of the creation ancestors, the *jila* men. He was the last to travel the desert before entering the *jila* (spring) that bears his name.

Wirnpa and another man were travelling from the west. When he landed at Wikirri, he spread all the food, mitutu, nyunjin and yukiri seeds ... At Yinyaru, they saw flashing lights and the man found an enormous hailstone pulsating with light. He flew with Wirnpa, holding the hailstone against his belly. He dropped it when it became too heavy, and they picked it up and kept going.

Jakayu Bilabu, 2008

- 6 Nora Wompi was born at Pingakurangu rockhole near Kunawarrtiji. As a young girl she travelled north with drovers to Billiluna and Balgo.

(front image) Young men dancing at the Ngumpun workshop, near Fitzroy Crossing, photo by Tim Acker, 2008



5 **Wirnpa**, 2004, Harry Bullen, Yulparija Artists, Laverty Collection

Song and Dance

I was a little baby here at the rockholes of Kunawarritji and Nyarruri. I painted all the little hills around that area. In the Jukurrpa, they were all squeezed out of the soft earth. People made them.

Kunawarritji (Well 33) and Nyarruri (Well 32)

This is a rockhole that was made in the Jukurrpa. These Kanapurta (ancestral beings) are the stars in the sky. The Seven Sisters are standing up as a group of trees between Nyipil and Kunawarritji.

Nora Wompi, 2008

The Minyipuru (Seven Sisters) are Jukurrpa women who flew across the desert, visiting and creating waterholes as they travelled.

Song and dance are also ways of telling stories. Many of the Jukurrpa stories which are painted are also told in songs.

'Kurtal wanyjurla wanyjurla?' (Kurtal, where are you?)

This excerpt from the 'Kurtal wanyjurla wanyjurla' song recounts Kurtal's journey from the saltwater Country to Kaningarra:

In the north-west I saw leaping fish sparkling in the sunlight.
Carrying the sacred object I wade through the water. The waves carry me down to the depths.

In the north-west I saw a seagull. The seagull was speaking.

I saw lightning flickering in the north; I was the rain cloud.

I am Kurtal. I bring the game and make the Country fruitful.

The wind is wild, the lightning flickers above.

Up there Kaningarra is crying, the wind roars.

I am Kaningarra, the great rock. Look to the south, that level ground is sloping now.

Who is that coming after me? I am a *maparn* [magic man] but I'm losing my powers.

Look to the west. See his headdress.

Kaningarra song

This song bring up big rain.

Jukuja Dolly Snell, 2009

The song for Kaningarra comes from a very old form of Walmajarri, a language no longer spoken:

I am Kaningarra. Standing in my Country, I look to the south.

What is this thing chasing me? I'm a *maparn* [magic man] but these devil dogs are frightening me. I hit them with my powers.

Streaks of lightning are flashing in the distance. A storm is gathering all around.

Lightning is flashing on top of the hills like fire, I hide underground. A waterhole forms in the earth.

A storm cloud is raining in the distance but it is coming closer. Lightning strikes on the hill. Another waterhole is formed from the sky.

The storm is approaching from the north-west, sprinkling lightly like mist. It rains a little bit.

In the north, a Jangala man looks out, standing on one leg near the sea. He is painted up, carrying a spear and a boomerang. He drinks the rainwater and dances back and forth, bringing the song from the north.

Dances from the *jila* Country

Many important dances are performed by the people of the *jila* Country. Some represent Jukurrpa stories, like those of the *jila* men Kurtal and Kaningarra and women's ancestral totemic stories like Mangamanga, while others represent historical stories and events.

Majarrka *juju* (song and dance) describes the true story of Wurtuwaya (Yanpiyarti Ned Cox's grandfather) and Wirrali (Mayam Julia Lawford's grandfather). While travelling near Paruku, they had discovered a group of men performing a ceremony with their stolen Majarrka totem. When the ceremony ended, Wurtuwaya and Wirrali crept in unobserved and retrieved the sacred totem.

How can painting reveal recent history?

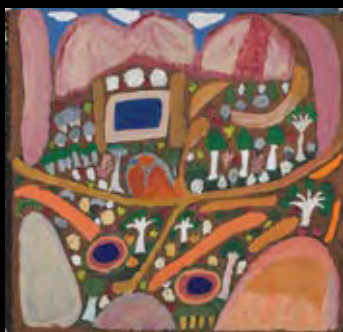
The Canning Stock Route was surveyed and wells constructed between 1906 and 1910. From 1911 to 1931 only eight mobs of cattle were driven from stations such as Billiluna and Sturt Creek to Wiluna. By 1917 half of the wells had been damaged or destroyed. In 1929 a project commenced to rebuild the wells. The years 1932 to 1959 saw a new era of droving along the stock route. Many artists painting today were growing up in the desert during this period.



6 **Kunawarritji**, 2007, by Nora Wompi, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia



7 **Kulyayi**, 2007, by Jewess James, Ngurra Artists, National Museum of Australia



8 **Tiwa**, 2008, by Lily Long, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia

- 7 At Kulyayi, which became Well 42, history and the Jukurrpa collided. During the excavation of the well, either by Canning's original party or by one of the reconditioning teams, the great rainbow serpent Kulyayi was killed.

[Kartiya] were looking for water ... They dug down and found that snake ... They killed him and ate him just like ordinary meat.

Milkujung Jewess James, 2007

People felt empty when he was gone ... They moved away. Animals moved away. People, animals, they're connected. When they took that snake out, they made that place out of balance.

Lloyd Kwilla, 2009

Jukurrpa and history meet in other paintings

- 8 *This is the Canning Stock Route. This is the big hill where a long time ago, my mother, father, my sister Amy and my brother used to live. We would sometimes climb up on that hill and see drovers. They put the government Well [26] next to Tiwa jurnu [soak] when they were building the stock route.*

Jartarr Lily Long, 2008

The hills in this painting relate to a Jukurrpa story of an old woman who tried to poison two men, but there are echoes of stock route history as well.

This used to happen to Aboriginal people on the Canning Stock Route too. My auntie's husband was poisoned by white people. They used to leave bullock leg with poison for people to eat.

Jartarr Lily Long, 2008

What are some other forms of art made in the Western Desert?

9 **Engraving**

In the desert, both men and women used *jakuli* or pearl shells, for ritual and decorative purposes. *Jakuli* were used in rainmaking ceremonies.

10 **Weaving**

Kumpaya Girgaba grew up in the desert around the Canning Stock Route and she moved to Jigalong mission, but she has family in Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing and Patjarr. She first learnt to make baskets through her relatives.

When I was in Kurungal [Wangkatjunga community] I was learning to make baskets. I learned how to make baskets before I started making painting. It's like weaving manguri [head pads].

Kumpaya Girgaba, 2008

We didn't know how to make baskets until Kumpaya brought the idea back.

Jakayu Biljabu, 2008

11 **Headdresses**

Headdresses made from paperbark are worn by dancers performing the Majarrka *juju*. The headdresses are secured with *tungkul* (hair string).

12 **Sandals**

Yakapiri (woven bark sandals) are unique to the peoples of the Western Desert. They are made from the tough inner bark of the *yakapiri* or 'bird plant'.

Questions and activities to share with your students

1. Why does Clifford Brooks think it is important for Aboriginal people to tell their stories through their paintings? Do you agree with him? Explain your answer.
2. Have students think about where they live. Ask them to design some symbols that reflect their landscape, for example ▲ or ▲ could represent houses, and ≡ or ≡ could represent roads. Have students draw or paint a map of their locality using the symbols they have devised.
3. Have students conduct an internet search for paintings that depict events from history. Have each student choose one painting and describe the way the painting depicts the event.
4. Either copy the words of the two songs or read them to your students. Have students use clap sticks to make up a rhythm for one of the songs. Ask groups of students to create a large painting of how they would interpret these words. Using the rhythm and painting have students dance the story of their painting.



9 Engraved *jakuli*, about 1930, collected by Alfred Canning's party, South Australian Museum



10 Basket, 2009, by Kumpaya Girgaba, Martumili Artists, National Museum of Australia



11 *Pukurti* (tall Majarrka headdress), 2007, by Ned Cox, Ngurra Artists, National Museum of Australia



12 *Yakapiri* (bark sandals), 2008, by Penny K-Lyons, Mangkaja Arts, National Museum of Australia