

Kathleen Petyarre



Date of Birth: c. 1940

Region: Utopia, Northern Territory / Adelaide, South Australia

Language: Anmatyerre / Alyawarre

An Anmatyerre speaker, born in c.1940, Kathleen Petyarre's traditional country is Atnangkere, an important soakage on the western boundary of Utopia station which, on account of the abundance of food it provided, was keenly sought out by neighbouring Eastern Arrente groups.

Kathleen's father had three wives, and several daughters, who in recent times have managed to hold on to the area as a group establishing a camp at Atneltyeye Boundry Bore. Kathleen's Dreamings include Women Hunting Emu with Dingo and Mountain Devil Lizard. Like most of the Utopia artists, she took up painting in 1988-9 as a part of CAAMA's Summer Project after previously working in batik. Kathleen is a talented batik artist. The Museum and Art Galleries of NT holds one her batik works. This is a large piece being 6x3 metres. Kathleen is currently producing some beautiful works of art using body paint designs.

Kathleen is a talented and focused artist who takes pride in her work and makes every effort to ensure that all of her work presented is of the highest quality. Her art is minimalist, done in a layering technique with very intricate dotting.

One definitive highlight and specialty of her present work rests in her ability to contour and form her dreaming paintings attuning this to her symbolism and ceremony. Kathleen has the innate capacity to meld together the earthy and timeless perceptions associated with her culture. This interaction is seen and felt through the rigorous high quality standard of work she sets for herself. The end result to this mastery is a transmutation of visual feeling onto her paintings.

Christine Nicholls writes "...In her works, Petyarre creates an optical flow that evokes a sense of motion. This she achieves by simulating the criss-crossing patternings of small Mountain Devil Lizard tracks. There is an architectural sensibility in Petyarre's works, conveyed by her representations of the quasi-geometric variations and intersections of the tracks and trails that these tiny reptiles leave in the desert sands. Elucidating on her dynamic, reticulate imagery, Kathleen Petyarre says that "Mountain Devils, they walk around in family groups, between 3 and 10 of them, they all walk around the country together in [a] family group". Interweaving and re-tracing each other's tracks, the journeying of these little lizards become encoded, as ephemera, in

the delicate sand designs and tracings that they leave in their collective wake. In turn, the lines and markings left by these diminutive lizards are transformed into the magnificent artworks that we see...”

(Christine Nicholls, Ripples on the Water - Lines in the Sand New Works by Joanne Currie Nalingu and Kathleen Petyarre, Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery)

Her work is exhibited widely across Australia and overseas. She is an artist in high demand. Private collectors from all around the world constantly seek after her work. In 2001 she featured in a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney where she was hailed as one of Australia’s most talented female artists.



Genius of Place: The Work of Kathleen Petyarre

Kiersten Fishburn - review

9 May - 22 July 2001, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

It is both a rare and delightful experience to enter a gallery of contemporary art and immediately be transported into a space of contemplation. *Genius of Place*: The work of Kathleen Petyarre has that power. It is not without cause that Petyarre has been compared to Turner or Rothko; there is the same complexity through restraint and reduction, an extraordinary understanding of colour, a real lyricism to her painting and the sense of capturing the almost visionary. But Petyarre also speaks to us of her unique experience as an indigenous Australian woman, exploring her heritage and her land. The vision that Petyarre gives us is not a universal one, but it resonates in a way that almost seems to embrace the viewer into her dense patterning. So this is a generous art as well, allowing us to turn our contemplation inward as well as out; we are transfigured not just into the ethereal, but also, and firmly, into a distinctive experience of land.

Kathleen Petyarre explores her Dreaming narrative of Arnkerrth, the Thorny Devil Lizard or Old Woman Mountain Devil. The Arnkerrth Dreaming is the dreaming of the Atnangker country and in her painting Petyarre shows us how the Dreaming, Arnkerrth, and the land, Atnangker, are intimately, inseparably, connected. Through the movements of Arnkerrth, movements expressed both spatially and temporally, the land is shaped and defined. As a custodian of the Arnkerrth Dreaming, Petyarre has permission to represent her dreaming ancestor and through her art she creates a sense of timelessness; Arnkerrth walks still, endlessly mapping, marking and indeed delineating the landscape.

There are many possible ways to reproduce a landscape - as map, photograph, impression. There are even more ways of remembering or seeing a space; it shifts in time, through experience, through the filter of memory. It may be felt more than seen; densely populated with occurrence, ritual and rhythm. It is this type of landscape - heavy with collective and individual memory - that Petyarre alludes to. As her paintings shift in focus, from detail to whole, and through time, as seasons shift, after hailstorms or sandstorms, so we are gifted with a fullness of experience marked and shaped by the movements of the Mountain Devil Lizard and Petyarre's careful use of rhythm and repetition. It is as though the deliberate layering of paint that is Petyarre's technique (done with, in a lovely multicultural touch, satay sticks) also echoes and nods at the layering of meaning and the temporal in her land.

It may seem to us at first that meaning, the shape of these works, is elusive. Are we looking at a map, a representation, a story, a memory? Yes, and more. Petyarre's paintings have something of the imprint about them. As she imprints on canvas, so her paintings seem almost like an after-image, an imprint, when we close our eyes and remember a space so well known that we can no longer represent it without a multiplicity of experiences and meanings pressing and layering on the image as well. In some ways when thinking about Petyarre's art it seems easier to construct a set of binaries. Simple, yet also complex and full of depth; subtle yet vibrant, her art employs the traditional yet is simultaneously absolutely contemporary; representational and abstract, repetitive yet also richly diverse. It is in the slippage between these binaries that Petyarre's work and her skills are located.

This is highlighted by the thoughtful hang in the upper gallery of the MCA. It allows us to see a chronological development of her work from early batiks to her current, breathtaking, paintings, and the on-going exploration of her Dreaming heritage. We can view the exhibition as a whole, take in the connections between her works, watch the landscape ebb and flow from close-up to distance. We can follow the tracks of Arnkerrth or the fall of bush seeds. Or we can focus on a single work with its commanding presence on the wall and journey through the layers of meaning that it contains.

Genius of Place is both an intelligent and beautiful exhibition, and while the idea of beauty might be somewhat out of currency in the contemporary arts, there is simply no word more apt. The opportunity to see Petyarre become more assured in her style as it is refined and strengthened and to be absorbed into the many dimensions of Atnangker country, is to witness one of our foremost artists: a woman in absolute command of her skills and vision.

Solo Exhibitions include:

- 2009 Work by Kathleen Petyarre was included in an art exhibition coordinated by charity Shalom Gamarada for the Storylines cultural festival at Saint Ignatius College in Sydney
- 2003 Ilyenty, Mosquito Bore, Recent Paintings, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2001 Genius of Place - The work of Kathleen Petyarre, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW
- 2000 Kathleen Petyarre, Retrospective Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW
Landscape: Truth and Beauty, Recent Paintings by Kathleen Petyarre, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
"Strong Spirit, New Directions in Contemporary Aboriginal Painting, Songlines Gallery, San Francisco, USA
- 1999 Recent Paintings by Kathleen Petyarre, Coe-ee Gallery, Mary Place, Sydney, NSW
- 1998 Arnkerthe - My Dreaming, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Vic, Australia
- 1997 Museum Puri Lukisan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, June, Solo Exhibitions
- Artist in Residence - Art Gallery of South Australia, Desert Artists-in-Residence, January, Adelaide, South Australia
- 1996 Kathleen Petyarre - Storm in Aknangkerre Country, Alcaston House Gallery, Melbourne, Vic

Group Exhibitions include:

- 2006 Prism, Contemporary Australian Art at the Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
Recent Paintings, Kathleen Petyarre & Abie Loy, Framed Gallery, Darwin, NT
Dreaming Their Way: Australian Aboriginal Women Painters, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC., USA
Kathleen Petyarre & Abie Loy Kemarre, Bush Leaf & Other Dreaming's, Gadfly Gallery, Dalkeith, WA
Abie Loy & Kathleen Petyarre, New Paintings, Maunsell Wickes Gallery, Paddington, NSW
- 2005 Aboriginal Vision in Contemporary Australian Art, Levi - Kaplan Collection, The Wright Exhibition Centre, Seattle, WA, USA
Utopia Women, Maunsell Wicks, Paddington, NSW
New Paintings Kathleen Petyarre & Abie Loy, Utopia, Gadfly Gallery, Dalkeith WA.
l'Art Aborigene d'Australie, Australian Embassy, Paris, France
- 2004 Spirit & Vision - Aboriginal Art, Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg, Austria
Arnkerthe - New Paintings, Coe-ee Gallery, Sydney
- 2003 Kathleen Petyarre & Abie Loy, Recent Paintings, Fire-works Gallery, Brisbane
All About Art, Alcaston Gallery, Sydney
Big Country: Masters Exhibition, Gallery Gondwana
- 2002 Sisters/Yakkananna, Kahui Mareikura Exhibition, Tandanya, Adelaide
SALA Festival, Gallerie Australis, Adelaide
All About Art, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
- 2001 Chapman Gallery, Canberra
All and About Art, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
- 2000 Beyond The Pale, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
The Collection, Gallerie Australis, Adelaide
Utopia, Framed Gallery, Darwin, NT
The Return of Beauty, Object Galleries, Sydney
SALA Week, Gallerie Australis, Adelaide
Chemistry, Art in South Australia 1990 - 2000, The Faulding Exhibition, Adelaide
Two Women Dreaming: The Emergence of International Style Indigenous Painting (Kathleen Petyarre & Gloria Petyarre), Songlines Gallery, San Francisco, USA
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
All About Art, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
Spirituality and Australian Aboriginal Art, Madrid and internal regional Galleries, Spain
- 1999 15th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Gold Coast City Gallery, Surfers Paradise, QLD
Tandanya, Adelaide, SA
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
Raiki Wara: Long Cloth from Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
North by North East, Landscape & Ceremonial Paintings from Utopia, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
SALA Week, Gallerie Australis, Adelaide
Utopia: Ancient Cultures/New Forms, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Utopian Visions: Emily Kngwarreye and the Women of Utopia, Songlines Gallery, San Francisco, USA
Odyssey: A Journey into World Art, Bicentennial Exhibition, Peabody - Essex Anthropology and Ethnology Museum, Harvard University, Salem, MASS., USA
- 1998 "Recent Acquisitions", National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
John McCaughey Memorial Art Prize, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Our Country - Then & Now, Gallerie Australis, SA
Chapman Gallery, Canberra, ACT
Expanse, Art Museum, University of South Australia, Adelaide
Raiki Wara: Long Cloth from Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
15th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin, NT
The Rodney Gooch Utopia Collection, Riddock Regional Art Gallery, Mount Gambier, SA
"Belonging to Mother Earth" - Indigenous Wisdom and Healing Conference, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA
The Seppelts Contemporary Art Award Group Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Utopia Dreamings, Japingka Gallery, Perth

- 1997 14th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Surfers Paradise, QLD
 14th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, ACT
 Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide
 14th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Campbell town Gallery, NSW
 14th NATSIAA Touring Exhibition, Westpac Gallery, Melbourne
 Schilderijen uit Utopia, Songlines Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands
 Utopia Exhibition Adjunct to Documenta, Kasel, Germany
 Group Exhibition, Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane
 Dreampower, Art of Contemporary Aboriginal Australia, Museum Puri Lukisan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
 Galeri Ardiyanto, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
 Dreamings from the Home of the Mountain Devil Lizard, Coo-ee Gallery, Sydney
 Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming, Japingka Gallery, Perth, WA
- 1994 Utopia Mixed Exhibition - Festival of Arts, Gallerie Australis, Adelaide
 "The Evolving Dreamtime: Contemporary Art by Indigenous Australians from the Kelton Foundation Collection", Pacific Asia Art Museum in Pasadena, California, USA
- 1990 The Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland, Limerick City, Gallery of Art, Ireland
 "Contemporary Aboriginal Art from The Robert Holmes a Court Collection", Carpenter Centre for the Visual Arts
 Harvard University, Boston, MA, USA
- James Ford Bell Museum, University of Minnesota, USA
 Lakewood Centre for the Arts, Lake Oswego, USA
 "CAMMA / Utopia Artist's in Residence Project". The Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth, WA
 "Utopia - A Picture Story, 88 Silk Batiks from the Robert Holmes a Court Collection". The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, Ireland
- 1989 "Utopia Women's Paintings: The First Works on Canvas, A Summer Project". S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney Orange
 Regional Gallery, Orange, NSW
 "Utopia Women", Coventry Gallery, Paddington, Sydney
 Utopia - A Picture Story, 88 Silk Batiks from the Robert Holmes a Court Collection, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, SA

Collections include:

Paintings Collection of H. M. Queen Elizabeth II
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT, Australia
 The Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth, WA, Australia
 The Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin, NT, Australia
 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia
 Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide, SA, Australia
 The Kluge-Rhue Collection, University of West Virginia, Virginia, USA
 The Kelton Foundation, Los Angeles, California, USA
 The Levi-Kaplan Collection, Seattle, Washington, USA
 A.T.S.I.C. Collection, Adelaide, SA, Australia
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic, Australia
 Museum Puri Lukisan, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
 University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide, SA, Australia
 Riddoch Regional Art Gallery, Mount Gambier, SA, Australia
 Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA, Australia
 Collection de Musee des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris, France
 Peabody - Essex Anthropology and Ethnology Museum, Harvard University, Salem, Massachusetts, USA

Batik:

Museums and Galleries of NT, Darwin, NT, Australia
 The Robert Holmes a Court Collection, WA, Australia
 National Gallery of Victoria, Vic, Australia