



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARVEY ART PROJECTS

POWER, COLOR & STORY

AT HARVEY ART

by Martha McGuinness

ISOLATED, REMOVED, SECLUDED.

I freely admit that I am neophyte when it comes to contemporary Aboriginal art. Prior to writing this piece my appreciation did not extend much beyond the obvious surface beauty. The rich, vibrant colors that seemed to explode off the canvas, the dramatic patterns and bold, powerful markings of the paintings. I was drawn to the visual impact of the art. It emanated personality and life. Yet the cultural history behind these paintings was something I knew very little of. Lucky for me, writing this piece has afforded me the opportunity to learn about contemporary Aboriginal art and the more

Above: "Warmurrungu (Emu Story)" by Nyarapayi Giles. 89.5cmx119.5cm. Acrylic on Belgian linen. 2015.

I learned about the story, the colors, the motifs, The Dreamtime, the more I appreciated it. I am still impacted by the beauty that resonates from the painting but with a deeper understanding of the history and culture, even more of its beauty is revealed.

For those, like me, who know little of the artistic and cultural history of Aboriginal art, I will begin with a brief and diluted overview. Dating back over 40,000 years, Aboriginal art is the oldest documented artistic tradition known to man. The stories expressed in the ancestral art are the same stories featured today. In odd contrast, the contemporary Aboriginal art movement has been in existence for less than five decades. It can actually be pinpointed to 1971 when an art teacher named Geoffrey Bardon distributed paints and canvases to a group of Aboriginal men in Papunya. From this small community local “Art Centers” spread throughout the most remote regions of Australia. To fully understand Aboriginal art one must understand Tjurrkupa (The



Artist Nyarapayi Giles

Dreamtime). It is a narrative that explains everything in existence and is the basis of Aboriginal culture. These ancestral stories are passed from generation to generation and are always expressed through art. Although the stories are always the same, the artistic depictions can greatly differ. This creative element also adds to the prominence of artistic expression in Aboriginal society.

With this overview as a platform, it's pretty impressive that America's only gallery solely dedicated to contemporary Aboriginal art exists in Ketchum. Founded by Sun Valley resident and native Australian Julie Harvey, Harvey Art Projects (HAP) is dedicated to the mission of developing cultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the finest Aboriginal art in America. Harvey is an art curator and Aboriginal art specialist. Her gallery is located

at 391 First Avenue in Ketchum and features a rotating collection of works by artists from the Northern Territory and Western and South Australia. HAP is also the exclusive representative of Papunya Tula Artists in the United States where the contemporary Aboriginal art movement began.

This July HAP will unveil *Power, Color & Story*, an exhibition featuring artists from the Tjarlirli Art Center located in Western Australia. Unlike Western artists who often work as individuals, most contemporary Aboriginal art is created in local community Art Centers that operate like an artist collective. Their work is governed by a board of Aboriginal elders who ensure that the artists observe cultural protocol. For example, the popular dot motif often depicted in contemporary Aboriginal paintings evolved out of the need to protect sacred tribal symbols. Earlier artists had been painting symbols not meant to be seen outside of the community. Artists began to use dots to cover these symbols. Today more than 85 Aboriginal Art Centers exist throughout Australia and many of the centers are the only source of revenue for the residents of these secluded regions. The Tjarlirli Art Center, located in a community with a population of 40, has commanded international attention for an expressionistic style of desert narrative known for rich color, traditional bold marks, and resonating with the people's deep passion for their country and culture. HAP director Julie Harvey explains, “Tjarlirli Art is rooted in a timeless tradition that's carried through generations. Their passion for their country and culture is what inspires this wild and powerful art.”

The July exhibit features 17 works by celebrated artists Esther Giles, Nyarapayi Giles, Valmayi Nampitjinpa, and Karjarra Butler, four female elders of the village. Harvey explains, “We chose these women because they are on the cutting edge of Aboriginal art. They are in their mid to late 70s and doing terrific things. The work they produce out of this tiny center is highly expressive and unique. The way they interpret the story is unusual.” Harvey goes on, “Most of the artists from the Tjarlirli Arts Center are women. They have been drawing these stories all their lives, with their mothers, their sisters, their daughters, their family. Whether it be in the sand, on the body, or in paint, this is how they have always done it.” One of the artists featured in the exhibition is Nyarapayi Giles. Her paintings tell the story of the ceremonial ochre pits and emu spirit of her birthplace. Harvey explains, “Her new works explode with color and vitality as dots overlay each other moving as lines, circling, twirling, and radiating as does the work itself, the essence of her Tjukurrpa or Dreamtime story.”

Curating the show was no small task. Aside from traveling to the community, which takes three days on dirt roads from Alice Springs, considered the last point of civilization, Harvey worked with the Arts Center for two years before putting together a body of work that she felt created an exhibit. “What's impressive about



Above: "Kuruyultu-Esther" by Esther Giles. 149cmx179cm. Acrylic on Belgian linen. 2015. Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects.



Above: "Purrungu (Python Story)" by Esther Giles. 50x5cmx101.5cm. Acrylic on Belgian linen. 2015. Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects.



Artist Katjarra Butler

this exhibit is its sheer dynamism," Harvery explains. "It's awe-inspiring, and it's joyous—you get completely drawn in. They are works with a grandeur, they resonate." The exhibit of 17 pieces will go up on July 1 and will run through August 5 with an open-

"Australian Aboriginal art is the greatest art movement of the late 20th century. Many would extend that relevance to the present day. No other art movement offers us a direct connection to the beginnings of living human memory. It's a movement informed by over 40,000 years of continuous culture and the stories at the center of genuine works are complex, profound, and mysterious."

-Art Critic Robert Hughes

ing reception during the Ketchum Gallery Walk on Friday July 8, from 5 to 8pm. Paintings range in size from 36"x24" to 72"x60" and prices range from \$2,000 - \$15,000. For Harvey, bringing Aboriginal art to Sun Valley is natural. As she explains, "Many of the paintings reflect place, landscape, and natural environments. Sun Valley is such a beautiful place and this is something that the people here relate to and appreciate."

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