



# KEEPING THE DREAMTIME ALIVE

By Erin Kennedy





"These artists want people to know who they are and what their culture is about, and what they can do through their painting." – Julie Harvey

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
"Kungarrangkalpa" by Tjunkaya Tapaya. Acrylic on canvas. 48"x60". Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects  
ABOVE: Spinifex artist Roy Underwood painting at Tjunjutjara Community in Western Australia. Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects

Harvey Art Projects, which focuses exclusively on Australian indigenous art, is the only gallery of its kind in Sun Valley. In fact, Harvey Art Projects is the only gallery of its kind in the United States. "We're the only international gallery in the U.S. that works directly with Australia's leading indigenous art centers and artists," notes gallery founder and director, Julie Harvey. The gallery introduces contemporary Australian indigenous art to new audiences, locals and visitors alike, and works to broaden the dialogue about this unique art form.

This month, Harvey Art Projects celebrates its fifth anniversary with a special exhibition, *Survey: Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art 2010-2015*, on view through September 30, 2015. Showcasing 24 paintings and sculptures from a dozen regional artistic centers in Australia, the exhibition presents an overview of Australian indigenous art, transporting viewers directly into another world. The artworks are extremely varied and diverse, ranging from brightly-colored acrylic paintings on canvas to hollowed eucalyptus

logs and bark painted with natural pigments. Photographs of the artists accompany the exhibition, along with a map of Australia showing the geographic locations where the artworks were produced. According to Harvey, the exhibition "is like a museum here in Ketchum, where people can experience Australian indigenous art as a whole."

This begs the question: why Sun Valley, of all places, to open a gallery of Australian indigenous art? While admitting that it may seem out of place at first, Harvey explains, "There is an unexpected synergy between the Australian indigenous work and the Wood River Valley. People come to Ketchum to be in nature and understand how the landscape speaks to them and informs their lives. The artwork is speaking the same language. It is about the land."

This connection to the land is central to contemporary Australian indigenous art. Among indigenous Australians, the Dreamtime, or "Tjurrkupa," refers to the time of creation, when the ancestors traveled across the land and fashioned





the rocks and mountains, hills and rivers, and sacred spaces. The Dreamtime embodies the cumulative knowledge of the ancestors, an ongoing narrative that grows as it is inherited by generation after generation. Each artist inherits a specific Dreamtime story based on the region or landscape in Australia, usually where the artist was born. Painting, both traditional and contemporary, keeps the Dreamtime alive, and helps maintain the people's deep relationship to the land. "The paintings hold a sacred energy," says Harvey. "Sometimes if you spend enough time with the work you can almost hear the hum of the land."

The artworks also resonate with local audiences on a visual level. "These are modern, contemporary artworks," Harvey states. "People walk into the gallery and immediately respond to the strong visual aesthetic in the

artworks. Only afterwards do they discover what the artwork means." For example, Tjunkaya Tapaya's acrylic painting on canvas, "Kungarrangkalpa," is an arresting display of intricate, organic shapes and patterns in vivid shades of red, gold, and lavender. The dramatic hues and large size of the painting create a sense of awe that is almost overwhelming. But the artwork is more than just a splash of color. "Kungarrangkalpa" means the Seven Sisters, which is an extensive creation story relating to the Pleiades constellation. In the story, the seven sisters are swimming near a flat-topped mountain when a man sneaks up and nearly catches them. Quickly, the sisters dive under the water and swim underground.

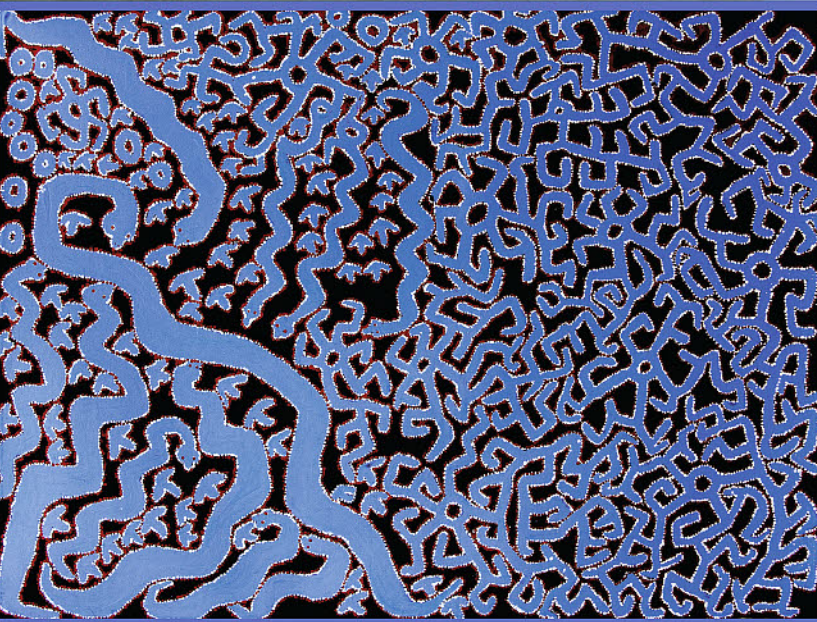
Roy Underwood's artwork, "Mulaya," is also a visual tour-de-force. Over six feet in width and five feet in height, the acrylic painting on canvas

is a maze of deep, sky-blue paths, ringed with red and white dots, against a black background. The painting is incredibly detailed and, looking closely, one can discern shapes that appear to be tracks made by animals such as birds and snakes. In fact, the painting depicts the Scorpion Story of the Spinifex, or Pila Nguru people, whose lands are situated in the Great Victoria Desert region of Western Australia. The painting shows the tracks and holes of the scorpion in the landscape. As with most Dreamtime narratives, the story is sacred and only those who have inherited this Dreamtime may paint it.

In many cases, the artwork's connection to the land is literal as well as symbolic. "Contemporary indigenous art came about through a terrible time in Australian history when indigenous people were rounded up

TOP: Artist Tjunkaya Tapaya. Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects  
RIGHT: Harvey Art Projects exhibition, "SURVEY"  
"Mulaya" by Roy Underwood. Acrylic on canvas. 78"x68". Courtesy of Harvey Art Projects  
Harvey Art Projects exhibition, "SURVEY"2





and put into white settlements,” explains Harvey. “Through the act of painting, they exercised the right to self-determination and moved back to their traditional lands.” This is nowhere more apparent than among the Spinifex people. Moved off their land in the 1950s to make way for nuclear weapons testing, the Spinifex were the first indigenous group in Australia to make an office Native Title claim to a large expanse of land. Spinifex artists began working to document the country within the claim area, and ultimately created two large paintings depicting the entire Spinifex area as a way to visually express land ownership. The paintings were included in the preamble to the Native Title agreement, which was granted to the Spinifex people in 2000.

Nearly every indigenous community in Australia now has an art center, where people can paint and coordinate the sale of their artworks. The income generated by selling a work of art may support as many as 50 members of an extended family. “Creating and selling art, and having a market for art, really came at a time when indigenous people needed something to maintain not only their independence and cultural identity, but also to survive and earn an income,” notes Harvey. But first and foremost, the art is about sharing culture and bringing indigenous Australian stories to the wider world.

“Every artwork tells a story,” says Harvey, “and every story told through a work of art keeps the Dreamtime alive.”

**Harvey Art Projects**  
 390 1st Ave N | Ketchum  
 208.309.8676  
[www.harveyartprojects.com](http://www.harveyartprojects.com)

