



Iyawi Wikilyiri, *Ngura Ngarutjara*.
Acrylic on Belgian linen.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST

Iyawi Wikilyiri

Iyawi Wikilyiri's visual language is a stunning example of contemporary desert painting's ancient impulses and aesthetic brilliance. Her approach to composition design and colour is as bold as her paintings of ngura (place), and as assured as her knowledge of country.

Born near Ernabella, home to Australia's oldest art centre and where she worked for a time in the craft room, Wikilyiri is married to **Ginger Wikilyiri** with whom she has produced several collaborative works, including *Husband and Wife* stories about Pukara. "It's a dangerous place this one, but beautiful too. The snake is thinking, he's looking around and saying 'these are all my colours, everything in this country'."

Unlike her husband – described as having "a tender sensibility of hand" – and unlike many of the other artists at Tjungu Palya art centre, Wikilyiri's paintings appear to have been executed by a conductor wielding a baton. That's not to say they aren't carefully considered, but they are most definitely dynamic, with dense compositions anchored by iconographic climaxes – dramatic black shapes that include trees and wanampi (water serpents) from her main two subjects, Pukara and Ngura Ngarutara.

As with many other emergent senior artists, Wikilyiri's artistic crescendo has developed quickly. In the past three years she has made the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award finals twice and her works have been acquired by the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs, Canberra's National Gallery of Australia and Artbank.

Jane Raffan