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## EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE

(c1910–1996)

Anmatyerre language group

*Earth Creation* 1995–96

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

197.5 x 286.5 cm

signed verso: Emilly

bears inscription verso: 1036 DACOU

### PROVENANCE

DACOU Gallery, Adelaide (stock no.1036)

Private collection, Adelaide

Gallery Savah, Sydney, 1999

Private collection, Sydney

\$100,000 - \$150,000

Emily Kame Kngwarreye's place within the top echelon of Australia's abstract painters is assured; acclaimed for making us see abstract art differently and, more importantly, the genius of her making us see the landscape differently.<sup>1</sup>

Kngwarreye's paintings – 'the whole lot' – are tangible representations of her interconnectedness with Country, *Alalgura (Alhalkere)*, situated near Soakage Bore, Utopia, northeast of Alice Springs. For Kngwarreye, paintings were glorious manifestations of a metaphysical trinity: Country, *awelye* (women's law ceremonies in *Anmatyerre*), and self – a fusion evident in her naming: *kame (kam)* being the seed of the wild pencil yam *atnulare (Vigna lanceolata)* found across *Alalgura (Alhalkere)*.

The genesis of Kngwarreye's oeuvre is tied to experiences and custodial obligations she shared with her countrywomen – one 'grows up' the land as one 'grows up' children.<sup>2</sup> Kngwarreye's oeuvre is an extraordinary cultural exegesis, wherein each work is executed with the potency of her country's fertility and life cycles, entwining ceremony, celebration and reverence.

The present work, *Earth Creation* 1995–96 is a commanding and beautifully balanced example from the late period in Kngwarreye's oeuvre in which she produced major multi-panelled masterpieces on the theme, including the magnificent *Earth's Creation I* triptych, which featured in both the artist's Australian and Japanese retrospectives.

Creation ceremony is part of a metaphysical *awelye* thread binding all of Kngwarreye's works, across all styles and periods, illuminating continuities of purpose, presence and place, of spirit and mind; a phenomenon described as 'mobilizing a realm of intelligibility that produced the Aboriginal world.'<sup>3</sup>

Margot Neale makes the connection between Kngwarreye's lifetime of ceremonial dancing, singing, and mark-making and the compositional rhythm of her paintings, which often exhibit a circularity akin to the way women's body-marking is applied, from breast to breast, arm to arm.<sup>4</sup>

The composition of *Earth Creation* reverberates strongly within a circular dynamic of passages in which Kngwarreye's embodiment of *awelye* life force is both palpable and generative – from the deep ground of blues, reds and pinks to the highlights of dotted trailing yam lines and bursts of light concentrations of 'clouds and clusters'.<sup>5</sup>

*Earth Creation* is synergistic display of creative prowess, where Kngwarreye's painterly animation of the celebratory and sacred synchronicity between yam and *awelye* coalesces and pulsates throughout the work's textural matrix.

Kngwarreye's significance was acknowledged early in her career with the prestigious Australian Artists Creative Fellowship Award (1992) followed by selection for the Venice Biennale (1997). Since then, her work has headlined international exhibitions of Australian art, and her exceptional talent lauded in three solo retrospective exhibitions, including the forthcoming eponymous exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, her work has also been showcased in a plethora of high-profile European and North American commercial exhibitions, where her 'making us see the landscape differently' is resonating anew with international critics.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Neale, M., 'Marks of Meaning: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye', in *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2008, p.247
2. Bell, D., 'Person and Place: Making Meaning of the Art of Australian Indigenous Women', *Feminist Studies*, vol.28, no.1, 2002, p.103
3. Ferrell, R., 'Dreaming', *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p.15
4. Neale, M., 'The Body' in 'Two Worlds: One Vision' in *Utopia*, op.cit., p.27
5. Smith, T., 'Kngwarreye Woman Abstract Painter', in Isaacs, J., Smith, T., Ryan, J., Holt, D., & Holt, J., *Emily Kngwarreye: Paintings*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1998, p.32
6. 'Exhibitions: Emily Kam Kngwarreye', National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [accessed October 2023]: <https://nga.gov.au/exhibitions/emily-kam-kngwarreye/>

### Jane Raffan

Jane Raffan is an accredited valuer under the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program. Her arts consultancy encompasses curatorial services, collection management, and a broad range of humanities-based research and writing.

