

## EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE

(c1910–1996)

Anmatyerre language group

*My Anooralya Story* 1992

synthetic polymer paint on linen

120.0 x 91.0 cm

bears inscription verso: 92I016/ 92I016/ Emily Kngwarreye

accompanied by a certificate of authenticity from Utopia Fine Art Gallery, Northern Territory

### PROVENANCE

Utopia Fine Art Gallery, Northern Territory (stock no.92I016)

Private collection, Oregon

\$50,000 - \$70,000

Emily Kame Kngwarreye's oeuvre is a collective expression of the interconnectedness of her physical self and Country – her home *Alalgura (Alhalkere)*, situated near Soakage Bore, Utopia, northeast of Alice Springs – as well as the metaphysical associations of *awelye* (women's law ceremonies) and attendant custodial responsibilities. Her genius stems from individuations in her painted expressions of this nexus. In Kngwarreye's visual language, paintings are glorious manifestations of Country, *awelye*, and self – 'the whole lot' – a concept that was ever present in her work, across all styles and periods.

In 1992, Kngwarreye was awarded a laudatory and coveted career acknowledgment, the Australian Artists Creative Fellowship. *My Anooralya Story* was painted the same year on Utopia Station, where her art career first flourished, and belongs to a group of works described by Janet Holt as the artist's 'famous early period', in which Kngwarreye's paintings become 'looser and executed with aplomb and assurance'.<sup>1</sup> This period produced an extraordinary body of celebrated work in which Kngwarreye expanded her painterly vision in conjuring the fertile energy of her country's life cycles, in particular the seasonal maturation of the *anooralya* (finger yam), whose flowers produce *Kame (Kamee)*, the seed after which she was named.

*My Anooralya Story*, painted in spring, is a potent example of the Kngwarreye's compositional 'fluidity as structure',<sup>2</sup> wherein her characteristic 'organic uninhibitedness'<sup>3</sup> is apparent through the most important iconographic trait of this period: peripatetic trailing lines of multi-coloured dot-work tracing the burgeoning yam across Country in seasonal change. Kngwarreye's development and use of colour at this time is pinpointed by art historian Terry Smith as key to her innovation.<sup>4</sup> Within this painterly paradigm, Kngwarreye's tireless explorations of the possibilities of colour to enunciate personal narratives is astonishing, both in terms of vision and virtuosity.

In Kngwarreye's painterly lexicon, colour relates to 'seasonal effects on the country, as well as anticipation of those effects'.<sup>5</sup> Blue, which is rare in the artist's early period, has been linked to water that feeds the *Alhalkere* soakage and surrounds, while trailings of different coloured dot work may indicate flora or seasonal rains; yellow is associated with the yam's 'daisy' flower, as well as various levels of plant maturity. Warm tones evoke 'dry time,' and the flush of new growth that appears across Country after rain was joyfully described by Kngwarreye as 'green time.'

Kngwarreye's energy and focus exploring the life force of the *Anooralya* yam – from her emergent batiks, early high coloured works with trailing dots through to late career black and white linear masterpieces – has resulted in a lauded body of work. Metaphorical language employed by critics demonstrates the emotive power with which these paintings radiate and engage the sublime. Margo Neale refers to a 'crescendo' in Kngwarreye's colourist phase, revealing the 'full symphonic range of nature's palette ... the way Emily may have experienced *Alhalkere* over a lifetime.'<sup>6</sup> *My Anooralya Story*, 1992, while gloriously celebratory and reverential, also carries the imprimatur of developmental significance.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Holt, J., 'Emily Kngwarreye at Delmore Downs 1989–1996,' in Isaacs, J. et al, *Emily Kngwarreye Paintings*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1998, p.153
2. Smith, T., 'Kngwarreye: Woman Abstract Painter', in Isaacs, J. et al, op. cit., p.31
3. For an in-depth essay on the development of this aspect of her oeuvre, see Neale, M., 'Two Worlds: One Vision', in *Emily Kngwarreye: Alhalkere Paintings from Utopia*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1998, pp.23–32
4. Smith, T., op. cit., pp.24–42
5. Holt, J., in Isaacs, J. et al, op. cit., p.153
6. Neale, M., 'Marks of Meaning', *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2008, p.232

### 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.

