



**Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula**

(Australian, 1918 - 2001)

**Water and Tucker**

Synthetic polymer paint on composition board  
76 x 91 cm / 29.9 x 35.8 inch

**PROVENANCE**

Painted at Papunya in 1972;  
Consignment number 17, Painting number 37, Stuart Art Centre, Alice Springs?;  
Private collection;  
Sotheby's, Aboriginal Art, Melbourne, 25 July 2005, lot 158;  
The Austcorp Group Limited Art Collection;  
Private collection, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**EXHIBITED**

9 October 2012 - 20 January 2013, Musée du quai Branly, Tjukkurtjanu; Origins of Western Desert Art, Paris, France  
30 September 2011 - 12 February 2012, National Gallery of Victoria, Tjukkurtjanu; Origins of Western Desert Art, Melbourne, Australia

**LITERATURE**

Geoffrey Bardon, and James Bardon, Papunya, *A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2004, p.429, painting 394

Benjamin, R. et al, *Icons of The Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings From Papunya*, New York: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 2009, p.21, illustrated in the background of a photograph of the Men's Painting Room at Papunya taken in 1972

**ABOUT**

In the first three years of the Papunya art movement, Johnny Warangkula produced a series of paintings of the desert landscape covered in native food plants and nourished by rain and rivers of freshwater. In mid-1972, at the time this work was created, a major topic of discussion amongst the artists in the Painting Room at Papunya was the idea of painting 'my country', that for most of the artists was quite distant from the township. These works are characterized by fields of intricate brushwork, where every section of the composition is meticulously detailed in layers of dotted and stippled paint.

Among the artist's finest works, these paintings capture the essence of the physical richness and variety of vegetation and topographical features in the landscape at a dramatic time in the seasonal cycle. Moreover, through the visually mesmerizing application of layers of colour, the artist conveys the notion of the ancestral forces vivifying the landscape.

This composition is an elaboration on the conventional desert iconography for Rain or Water Dreamings: two sets of concentric circles, representing fresh waterholes, joined by a series of meandering lines to represent flowing water. The footprints of the Water Ancestor appear in the lower left quadrant while the black area in the lower right represents a clay pan.

**BIOGRAPHY**

(Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula)



Johnny Warangkula was born in Mintjilpirri, south of Lake Mackay around 1918. Johnny first encountered white civilization in 1930 when he hid in a tree upon seeing a plane, which he understood to be a devil. In 1932 he met an Adelaide University expedition at Mt. Liebig and afterwards, his family moved to Hermannsburg, where Johnny worked as a labourer constructing the airstrip. He continued working in construction, moving around different parts of the desert. In 1954, Johnny was chosen, along with Nosepeg Tjupurrula, as an Aboriginal representative to meet Queen Elizabeth II. Johnny was serving on the Papunya Council when Geoffrey Bardon arrived at the settlement in 1971 and when painting started. Johnny acquired painting material and soon developed his own personal style. He was the first to use the dotting technique to describe vegetation, often applying several layers of overdotting. Johnny remained an important force in the painting movement until the mid 1980s, when his failing eyesight reduced his artistic output. His work often depicted Water Dreaming stories, as well as Yam, Fire, Dingo, Wallaby and Egret. In 1996-97, Johnny took up painting again, executing rough expressionist works inspired by his main Dreamings.

#### EXHIBITIONS

Selected exhibitions:

- 2015: Signs and Traces - Contemporary Aboriginal Art. Cultural institute Zamek. Poznan, Poland
- 2011: 'Origins of Western Desert Art: Tjukurtjanu', The Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 2001: 'Icons of Australian Aboriginal Art,' Singapore.
- 1999: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco , USA
- 1999: 'Tjinytjilpa', Embassy of Australia, Washington, USA;
- 1999: Flinders Art Museum Flinders University, Adelaide
- 1993: Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
- 1991: Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, USA;
- 1989: Australian National Gallery, Canberra
- 1989: Westpac Gallery, Melbourne
- 1989: 'Mythsapes', National Gallery of Victoria Melbourne
- 1988: Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery
- 1982: London, England
- 1982: Brisbane Festival
- 1982: Georges Gallery, Melbourne
- 1981: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

#### COLLECTIONS

- Holmes a Court Queensland Art Gallery
- National Gallery of Victoria
- Art Gallery of South Australia
- National Museum of Australia Canberra
- Orange Regional
- Gallery Alice Springs Law Courts
- Museum Art Gallery of the Northern Territory Darwin
- Flinders University Art Museum
- South Australian Museum
- Art Gallery of NSW