

MINNIE PWERLE

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The extraordinarily powerful and prolific artist, Minnie Pwerle, was born in 1910 in Utopia; in bush country located about 350 kilometers North East of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory of Australia. She was to become, along with her contemporary, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, one of Australia's greatest female Aboriginal artists and upon her death in 2006, to be mourned by Aboriginal Art lovers all over the world. Minnie's Pwerle's paintings are now held in museums and exhibited in galleries worldwide, and they form an essential part of any serious Aboriginal Art collection.

Born: Utopia

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

- 2017 *Sharing Country*, Olsen Gruin Gallery, New York
- 2010 *Minnie Pwerle and Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, Kate Owen Gallery, Rozelle, NSW
- 2010 *The Australian Indigenous Art Market Top 100 Exhibition*, Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery, Bondi, NSW
- 2010 *Body Lines*, Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane, QLD
- 2008 *Emily and Her Legacy*, Hillside Gallery in Tokyo, with Coo-ee Art Sydney in conjunction with the landmark retrospective exhibition 'Utopia - the Genius of Emily Kngwarreye' at the National Art Centre, Tokyo, Japan
- 2008 *Atnwengerrp: Land of Dreaming*, Minnie Pwerle carpet launch, Designer Rugs Showroom, Edgecliffe, NSW
- 2008 *Colours of Utopia*, Gallery Savah, Sydney NSW
- 2008 *Utopia Revisited*, NG Art Gallery, Chippendale, NSW
- 2007 *New Works from Utopia*, Space Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
- 2007 Group exhibition, APS Bendi Lango Art Exhibition with Rio Tinto, Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane, QLD
- 2007 *Treasures of the Spirit*, Tandanya Cultural Institute, Adelaide, SA
- 2007 *Desert Diversity*, group exhibition, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2007 Group Exhibition, Australian Embassy, Washington, USA
- 2007 *Utopia in New York*, Robert Steele Gallery, New York, USA
- 2007 *Standing on Ceremony*, Tandanya Cultural Institute, Adelaide, SA
- 2006 APS Bendi Lango Art Exhibition, group exhibition, Rio Tinto Offices, Melbourne, VIC
- 2006 *The Pwerle Sisters*, group exhibition, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
- 2006 *Memorial Exhibition*, solo exhibition, Gallery Savah, Sydney, NSW
- 2005 *Small Wonders*, Mbantua Gallery, Alice Springs, NT
- 2005 Annual Group Exhibition 'Shalom', University of NSW, Shalom Department, Kensington, NSW
- 2005 *Utopia Revealed*, Japingka Gallery, Fremantle, WA
- 2004 *Divas of the Desert*, Gallery Gonwana, Alice Springs, NT
- 2003 *Art from the Dreamtime*, Portland Art Museum in conjunction with Mbantua Gallery, Oregon, USA
- 2003 Sydney Art Fair, solo exhibition, Gallery Savah, Sydney, NSW
- 2003 Contemporary Aboriginal Art Event, Mbantua Gallery, Umpqua Bank, Oregon, USA
- 2003 Group exhibition, Art & Soul Gallery in conjunction with Mbantua Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee, USA
- 2003 *Minnie Pwerle & Mitjili Napurrula*, Japingka Gallery, Fremantle, WA
- 2003 *My Grandmother and Me*, World Vision, Walkabout Gallery, Sydney, NSW
- 2002 *Mixed Utopia*, exhibition at Knut Grothe Galeri, Charlottlenlund, Copenhagen
- 2002 *Recent Paintings*, solo exhibition, Gallery Savah, Sydney, NSW
- 2002 *Paintings From Utopia*, combined exhibition at "Framed- The Darwin Gallery", Darwin, NT
- 2002 *Mixed Utopia*, exhibition at Galerie a Le Temps Du Reve, France
- 2002 *Contemporary Aboriginal Art From The Utopia Region*, combined Exhibition at BMGART, Adelaide, SA
- 2002 *Minnie's Country*, Dacou Gallery, Adelaide, SA
- 2002 *Generations Utopia*, combined exhibition, Japingka Gallery, Fremantle, Perth, WA
- 2002 Selected 2002, 19th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award

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2002 *A Collectable Aboriginal Art Event*, combined exhibition at Raintree Gallery, Darwin, NT
2002 *BIG COUNTRY small worlds*, solo exhibition, Fireworks Gallery, QLD
2002 *The Utopia Six*, Flinders Lane Gallery, VIC
2002 *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, solo exhibition, Dacou Gallery, Adelaide, SA
2002 Heart and Soul Gallery in conjunction with Mbantua Gallery, Nashville, TN, USA
2002 Urban Wineworks, with Mbantua Gallery, Portland, Oregon, USA
2002 *In the Cove*, Mbantua Gallery, Portland, Oregon, USA
2002 Chapman Gallery Group Exhibition, ACT
2002 *Mixed Utopia Exhibition*, Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, NT
2002 *Mixed Utopia Exhibition*, Gallery Savah, Sydney, NSW
2002 Gallery New York City, USA
2002 Knut Grothe Galeri, Charlotttenlund, Copenhagen, Denmark
2001 Mbantua Gallery, Alice Springs
2001 Chapman Gallery, Canberra
2001 San Anselmo, Marin Country, California, USA
2001 Japingka Gallery, Perth
2001 Tandanya, Adelaide
2001 Dreamtime Gallery, Santa Fe, USA
2001 Gallery 2021, Auckland, New Zealand
2000 AMP Building, Sydney

AWARDS:

Finalist, 18th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award

COLLECTIONS:

National Gallery of Victoria
Art Gallery of South Australia
La Trobe University Collection
AMP Collection
Art Gallery of NSW
Hank Ebes Collection
Kelton Foundation
Kreglinger Collection
Mbantua Collection
Corrigan Collection
Bond University
Queensland Art Gallery
Thomas Vroom Collection

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Henly, Susan Gough, "Powerful Growth of Aboriginal Art," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2005

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Brought up in a family of large families, Minnie had five siblings and went on to mother seven children herself. She grew up with the support of her blood family and her wider skin family in Atnwengerrp country, belonging to the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre tribe.

The source and great inspiration for her art, came from her involvement in traditional Aboriginal ceremonial practice and rituals where she was responsible for applying the all important body paint designs to participants in women's ceremonies.

She did not use acrylic paint, the medium she was to use in her rise to artistic stardom, but the traditional methods of the Aboriginal people: This was a paste made from the multi coloured earth found in traditional ochre pits, and ground with animal fats or oils into a 'paint'. The women's upper bodies (arms, chest, and back) were then prepared by smearing them with animal fats, and then the coloured paste applied in the form of intricate, patterns and symbols appropriate to the various ceremonies about to be performed. The symbols and patterns Minnie used were rooted in the ancient creation stories (Dreamings) of the Aboriginal People and were rich with history and meaning.

In the 1980's when Minnie was already in her 70's, she took another step towards her fame as an artist. A batik project had been introduced in Utopia and up to 80 Aboriginal women at a time participated in it. Minnie was one of them. It was her first involvement with creative activity outside her traditional role as mother, family member, gatherer of food and of course, traditional ceremony.

She was now just a step away from becoming a household name artist. Another artist, Lindsay Bird Mpetyane influenced the women in the batik project to try painting on canvas using acrylic paint. Minnie took to it straight away, drawing on her experience as a body painter in application of paint and design, and in creating the designs involving her traditional stories and iconography.

Minnie was now in her 80's, but at once, her work was strong, confident, painterly and immensely striking. Traditional iconography took on a new life under her brush, and the wild and joyful canvases that are her trademark began to catch the eye of the art market, not only in Australia but around the world. Minnie became a master of pattern, movement, colour and uncompromising brush strokes that all came together in an astounding and prolific outburst of creativity.

Those who diminished the value of her work in proportion to her output were to regret their point of view, for Minnie's work is iconic Australian Indigenous art, and although some of her descendants have adapted and passed on the tradition, Minnie was the original talent, and the original voice. Her work is powerful and unique, and it sets her apart from the rest.

Minnie's Pwerle's paintings are now held in museums and exhibited in galleries worldwide, and they form an essential part of any serious Aboriginal Art collection. She died in her 90's, still painting to the very end, and is truly one of the greatest of Australian Aboriginal artists.

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