Yannima Tommy Watson known as Tommy Watson is an Indigenous Australian artist, of the Pitjantjatjara people from Australia’s central western desert. He has been described by one critic as “the greatest living painter of the Western Desert”.

Born: Yannima Pikarli, c. 1935
Region: Anamarapiti, Western Australia

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

2016  *From West of Here*, Piermarq, Sydney
2015  *Art Palm Beach*
2010  *Christmas Show*, Aranda Art, Armadale
2010  *Irrunytju Artists*, Agathon Galleries, Sydney
2009-2010 *Emerging Elders – honoring senior Indigenous artists*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
2009  *Kutu Wara (The Last One)*, Solo Exhibition, Agathon Galleries Sydney
2009  *New Works: South Western Desert Art of Australia*, Agathon Galleries 2009
2009  *Agathon Galleries Sydney, Melbourne*
2008  *Agathon Galleries Sydney, Melbourne*
2008  *Lismore Gallery*
2008  *Selected Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award*
2007  *Musee du Quai Branly, Paris (permanent exhibition)*
2007  *One Sun, One Moon*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, NSW
2007  *Tommy Watson*, Solo Exhibition, Agathon Galleries, NSW
2007  *Senior Irrunytju Artists*, Agathon Galleries, VIC
2007  *Irrunytju Fundraiser Exhibition*, Agathon Galleries, NSW
2006  *Tommy Watson*, Solo Exhibition, Agathon Galleries, VIC
2006  *Landmarks*, National Gallery of Victoria, VIC
2006  *Musée du Quai Branly Paris, France*
2005  *Mixed Show, Aranda Art*
2005  *Tommy Watson*, Agathon Solo Exhibition, Sydney NSW
2005  *Cairns Regional Art Gallery, QLD*
2005  *Wollongong City Art Gallery, NSW*
2005  *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) Gallery, VIC*
2005  *Ngayuku Ngura (My Country)*, Vivien Anderson Gallery, VIC
2005  *Senior Irrunytju Men, Aboriginal and Pacific Gallery, NSW*
2004  *Colour Power: Aboriginal Art post 1984*, National Gallery of Victoria, VIC
2004  *NATSIAA – Celebrating 20 Years*, National Archives of Australia, ACT
2004  *Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, SA*
2002  *Finalist Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards*
2002  *Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney*
AWARDS:
2008 25th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Darwin
2003 20th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Darwin
2002 19th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Darwin

RELATED BOOKS/READING:
Yannima Tommy Watson: MacMillan mini art series number 11
New Beginnings: Classic Paintings from the Corrigan Collection of 21st Century Aboriginal Art
Yannima Pikarli Tommy Watson, Marie Geissler, Ken McGregor, 2010 MacMillan

Time magazine, art critic - Robert Hughes, “Australian Aboriginal Art is the last great art movement of the 20th century.”

COLLECTIONS:
Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Western Australian Art Gallery, Perth
South Australian Art Gallery, Adelaide
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin
Musée du Quai Branly, Paris
Adam Knight Collection
Aranda Collection
Auscorp Collection
Elizabeth and Colin Laverty, Sydney
Harold Mitchell Collection
Patrick Corrigan, Collection
Kerry Stokes Collection
Kerry Stokes Collection
Luciano Benetton & family, Italy
Richard Branson Collection
TOMMY WATSON

Born at Anamarapiti, a homeland 44 kilometres west of the present-day community of Irrunytju, which is situated on the tri-state border of Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory. Tommy lived a nomadic lifestyle in the semi-arid country at the edge of the Gibson Desert. He travelled in the bush with his parents and learnt about hunting and gained respect for his country from his father.

In 2001 Tommy Watson and other senior Ngaatjatjarra and Pitjantjatjara men followed the example of the women at Irrunytju and began to paint on canvas. Watson said: "I want to paint these stories so that others can learn and understand about our culture and country". His country is marked by ancient ranges, dry creek beds, kapi (rockholes), maluri (claypans), tali (sand dunes) and flat sandy plains sparsely vegetated with spinifex, mulga scrub and desert oaks.

From his father he learnt how to craft spears, spear throwers, shields and boomerangs; make stone tools; hunt malu (kangaroo), putji (feral cat), kalaya (emu) and kipara (bush turkey). With these skills he set out on his own, living like his father taught him. Walking long distances through a land where water is scarce and traditional knowledge vital to survival, Tommy gained considerable understanding of the physical environment and the tjukurpa (Dreaming) connected with it.

Tommy’s artwork brings together contemporary painting techniques and media with traditional visual language and tjukurpa. Tommy uses layers of vibrant colours to symbolically represent the country of his parents and grandparents. Oranges, burgundy, reds, ivory, blue and pinks (and more recently, highlights of green) are used to create sumptuous, complex compositions. His shimmering dots surge across the canvas, suggesting the ripples and contours of the landscape. According to Judith Ryan, senior curator of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Watson produces work that is inward and liturgical which, in common with the early boards of the Pintupi men, exhibits 'incandescence'. Watson began painting in 2002 following the establishment of the community arts centre at Irrunytju in 2001 by the senior women of the community. Tommy burst into prominence at the 2002 Desert Mob show in Alice Springs with a magnificent painting, 'Walpa.'

With the assistance of the Harold Mitchell Foundation his work is now exhibited in the much anticipated Musee de Quai Branly, Paris, as one of six Indigenous Australian artists to be incorporated into the architectural structure of the museum. Watson's painting Wipu Rockhole will be on permanent display as a focal point of the Museum's design, embedded in its ceiling. In Australia, the confirmation of his extraordinary talent was achieved when his Waltitjata set an all time record for the work of a living aboriginal artist when it was sold for $240,000 at Lawson–Menzies auction in 2007.