

ANCESTRAL MODERN: AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART FROM THE KAPLAN & LEVI COLLECTION

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a resource for educators visiting the exhibition *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection* or the Australian and Oceanic Art Permanent Collection Galleries on a guided or self-guided visit. Educators are encouraged to develop open-ended discussions that ask for a wide range of opinions and expressions from students. The projects in this guide connect to core curriculum subject areas and can be adapted for a variety of grade levels to meet Washington State Standards of Learning. Related images for each project are included at the end of this guide. If you would like additional assistance modifying these projects to fit your classroom, please email SAM's Wyckoff Teacher Resource Center (TRC) at trc@seattleartmuseum.org.

Additional exhibition information can be found at seattleartmuseum.org/ancestralmodern. For more information about bringing a group to SAM please visit seattleartmuseum.org/educators or email schooltours@seattleartmuseum.org.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

An enduring visual language that speaks to the **culture, ceremony** and history of the Australian Aboriginal is communicated in this exhibition. This language is comprised of a complex set of lines and dots that represent elements such as the intricate root system of a yam which is made up of sinuous interconnected lines. These visual elements are also used to represent the **flora, fauna**, landscape, sea and sky. Featuring over 100 artworks created within the last 40 years, using a variety of media; canvas, natural pigments on bark, carved wood sculptures, intricate woven fiber works along with detailed bronze castings, *Ancestral Modern* expresses an innate art making activity that conveys stories of food, laws, life and people. Generations of Aboriginal artists have contributed to the visual language witnessed in these works that stem from a continuous life conversation that remains an active, integrated part of their evolving traditions and histories.

Aboriginal Art is a general term used in this guide, but it must be noted that the work in this exhibition is comprised of several distinct visual languages within that term that are assembled from images made in desert lands such as **Arnhem land, Kimberly** and **Utopia**. To be more specific, this distinction is pushed further by the artists that live there such as Ricky Maynard, Wanyubi Marika and Tjumbo Tjapanangka, to name a few. Each artist represents a unique style, story and history that have been passed down through the millennia.

EXHIBITION THEMES & GUIDING QUESTIONS

Documenting Cultural History:

- How do cultures preserve or document history? How do Aboriginal artists document their **cultural history**?
- How do artists use **symbols** to tell stories or communicate?
- How can paintings of cultural history change over time as they move through generations of story tellers?

Honoring the Australian Landscape:

- How can artists be inspired by their natural environment?
- How can the contemporary world interact with landscape? How have our manufactured and natural landscapes evolved?
- How do Aboriginal artists honor their landscape through works of art?

Contemporary Visions From the Ancient World:

- How can modes of artistic expression change over time as societies grow and technology changes? In what ways do they remain the same?
- How can people who are not in direct influence or contact with each other make work that is visually similar? What factors might influence this connection?
- How do other cultures use artistic expression in their daily lives?

PROJECT UNITS

CEREMONY: HONORING THE LAND AND WATER'S BOUNTY THROUGH PAINTING

Australian Aboriginal artists have begun, in the last forty years, to transfer their ceremonial and historical images to canvas. However, painting on canvas has not replaced traditional forms of art making done in the sand or on the body for ceremonial and storytelling purposes and not all information from these practices appears on the canvas. This is done in part to protect their cultural meanings and traditions.

Aboriginal artists draw from a variety of environmental, experience based influences and history to create their work. Ceremonial body painting images of land and water provide artistic inspiration for many Aboriginal artists. Receiving a bounty of sustenance from water and land in a multitude of ways such as; fishing, nourishment, growing and gathering food and shelter, Aboriginal artists reflect and record these experiences in their work. There is also a spiritual aspect that **transcends** the physical form and the benefits that water and land provide. As mentioned in the introduction, each culture, region and local environment, helps determine a distinct style for each work of art. In this example of art inspired by history and its connection to the process of ceremony, Regina Pilawuk Wilson records a multitude of colored vine fibers on canvas. This stylistic patterning is drawn from the experience of gathering bush vines as a child to weave into fishing nets. She conveys within her work an elevated sense of respect for the materials found in the environment that combine to create **utilitarian**, decorative and ceremonial items. An accomplished fiber artist, Wilson's line work references her weaving skills in the piece *Message Sticks*¹ that utilizes perpendicular lines to yield a vibrating surface representing the sticks. Message sticks were marked sticks used to communicate upcoming events or ceremonies of importance before newer communication technologies were introduced.² It is an amazing illustration of how experiences of land, water, tradition and history combine to create a unique visual language and image. How do other global **cultures** honor their land and the bounty that it yields? After a thorough discussion of the work with the class, proceed to the activity that follows.

Step 1: Explore the concept of ceremony with your class. What does ceremony mean to them? Can they think of ceremonies or celebrations associated with food in their culture? Describe some of them and discuss as a class.

Step 2: Individually, have each student research and describe in writing multiple events associated with the celebration of a particular food that occurs locally or nationally. Support this research with images.

Step 3: Using the information and images found in their research, have each student participate in the growing of a class plant. If resources are available, have each student grow a plant.

Step 4: While the plant is growing, students can document the progress by taking daily or weekly photographs along with recording the observed growth information as a **data set**.

¹ All of the images referenced in the resource guide will be found at the end of the document.

² Pamela McClusky, Wally Caruana, Lisa Graziose Corrin, Stephen Gilchrist, *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan and Levi Collection* (Yale University Press, 2012), 138.

Step 5: Create drawings documenting the plant's growth over time. Again, this can be done weekly, monthly or at the end of the process.

Step 6: Have the students share their research, data and images as a class comparing observations for consistency of data and documentation methods.

Step 7: Finally, create a class display of the drawings and information.

(Learning Standards: Arts 1.2, Arts 3.1, Arts 4.4, Communication 1.2, Social Studies 3.2, Science 5.2, Writing 2.2).

ORIGINS: COMMON THREADS THAT BIND THROUGH STORIES

In the work *Mountain Devil Lizard Dreaming*, Kathleen Petyarr visually describes the twisting path taken by an ancestor that is represented in lizard form. Dots **proliferate** across the image to create **undulating** patterns representing a seed, skin and sand simultaneously that summon ancestral powers from within the earth. The central X shape takes visual prominence in the center of the painting, marking the area where women participate in ceremonies that speak to their reliance on traditional leaders.³

Many cultures have stories that describe journeys connected to the origins of their people, land or traditions. After a thorough discussion with the class about this work of art, prompt the students to recount their own family origin story. Where did their family come from and how did they get here? What mode of transportation did they use? Did they arrive by boat, on foot, the air, car or train? In addition, have the students write about their personal story asking how the journey influenced and changed them as individuals.

Step 1: As a class, discuss different origin stories from either the student's own culture, cultures you have studied together or their immediate family experience. Compare their stories, what is similar and what is different?

Step 2: Have the students write a short paragraph about what steps would need to be taken to travel to their family's place of origin whether they refer to a recent move across town or if they have the ability to reach into the distant past of their family tree.

Step 3: Using the research methods of science and the data crunching of math, have the students supply practical logistical information on a graph. Here are some examples:

- a) What mode of transportation would you use?
- b) Using this mode of transportation, calculate and record how long would it take to reach your destination? Are there other modes that are faster? Create a chart showing the different modes of transportation that could be used and compare the amount of time, fuel used and cost of each.
- c) Which mode would be the most cost effective and create the least impact on the environment?

Step 4: Next, have the students add this information to their original paragraph with each student presenting what they have written and found to the class.

(Learning Standards: Arts 3.2, Arts 3.1, Arts 1.2, Communication 2.1, Science 3.2, Social Studies 4.1, Reading 1.3, Writing 2.2, Math 2.3, Math 3.1),

LIFE LESSONS: HISTORIES AND STORIES THROUGH NARRATIVE

In many instances, stories teach about life's lessons through a historical reference. It is helpful to be reminded of these life lessons in order to inform decisions when navigating the personal world. The Spinifex Men's Collaborative, comprised of 17 men working together on this one painting, combine stories of the past and recent past events to create collaborative works of art. The parallel tracks of the

³ *Ibid*, 116.

two snakes winding through the multicolored composition titled *Wati Kutjara (Two Men Story)* represent trucks that transported the Spinifex people away from their homeland during episodes of Atomic Testing. In addition, the work also tells the story of two snakes, a father (Wandirii) and son (Wintjirdii) that are traveling through the land to complete the boy's initiation ceremonies and instruction. Ridiculed and driven away by the people from one of the villages on their travels, the son plotted revenge. Setting a trap, baited with a sweet honey that drips from the leaves of the eucalyptus, he waits in the trees until the people arrive to collect the sweet nectar. Once they arrive, he devours them. Having been asleep, his father awoke to discover the aftermath of what his son had done. An argument and fight between the two commences. Displeased and at the request of the people, Wandirii takes his son away to continue his instruction. To this day, Aboriginal people make sure to appease any snake that might be near a water source.⁴

Step 1: Begin by looking at the image of the Spinifex Men's Collaborative's painting, asking the students to imagine what life lesson or history it might be depicting. Spend time reviewing what a **collaborative** is and what it means to collaborate in a group setting.

Step 2: After discussion, reveal the background information of the painting to the students.

Step 3: Next, have the students form small groups to write their own stories based on a life lesson or a recent shared personal, observed or recorded history. After the groups have finished their stories, have them create a collaborative illustration similar in style to the work of the Spinifex Men's Collaborative based on their writing.

Step 4: To conclude, have student groups share and discuss their stories and illustrations.

(Learning Standards: Arts 4.4, Arts 3.2, Communication 1.1, Social Studies 4.4, Reading 3.1)

LAW: WHEN TWO WORLDS MEET

Communities create **laws** to **socialize** behavior and establish **governing systems** ranging in levels of complexity, development and origin. Over many millennia, Aboriginal Australians have developed **customary laws** to meet their society's needs that are independent of contemporary Australian **civil law**. Since 1967, they have fought to have their customary laws recognized by Australian civil law. Over the years, they have had a number of successes pertaining to Land Rights and **copyright laws** for their indigenous art. Laws are also depicted in the paintings called **Dreamings**, which are visual stories and histories passed down through the generations. Each family's Dreaming is also copyright protected through established customary Aboriginal law. In the Balgo Women's work *Wirrimanu*, we see the countryside represented in bold yellow, red, blue and black lines that move throughout the canvas. It is a vision of how their country was shaped by Luurnpa (the Kingfisher). Molding the land into his vision, he is the keeper of their laws. Looking at customary and civil law throughout the world, are there similar interactions concerning the intersection of these forms of laws in other areas of the world? After a thorough discussion of the work with the class, proceed to the activity that follows. See the resources section at the end of this guide for more information concerning customary laws.

Step 1: Discuss the differences between customary and civil law as a class.

Step 2: Have each student research different cultures' customary laws in other areas of the world.

Step 3: Drawing from their own experiences, have students cite examples in their own lives where these intersections occur. What are some customary laws that are observed in their classroom? How are they enforced? Who enforces them? Do they clash with current school or classroom laws?

Step 4: From the discussion of customary and civil laws in other cultures, their school and their classroom, have the students write a set of customary and civil laws for their classroom.

(Learning Standards: Communication 1.1, Reading 2.3, Social Studies 5.1)

⁴ *Ibid*, 120.

RESOURCES

More information can be found in SAM's online collection at seattleartmuseum.org/emuseum. Unless noted otherwise, resources listed below are available for loan from the Ann P. Wyckoff Teacher Resource Center (TRC) at the Seattle Asian Art Museum.

Exhibition information, including a map, landscape photographs and image previews, can be found at seattleartmuseum.org/ancestralmodern.

Books for Students:

Aboriginal Art Of Australia: Exploring Cultural Traditions by Finley, Carol. Minneapolis: Learner Publications, 1999. Describes Aboriginal art, including rock painting and engraving, as well as sand and bark painting. ND 1101 F565

Aboriginal Peoples of Australia by Bartlett, Anne. Minneapolis: Learner Publications, 2002. Learn about Aboriginal cultures, including traditional legends, food and family life. GN 666 B37

Art, Land, Story by Nicholls, Christine. Kingswood, SA: Working Title Press, 2009. Looks the traditions this art has come from and emphasizes the continuous links between Indigenous art, place and "The Dreaming—the central core of Indigenous law and religion. N 7401 N5

In the Deep Red Desert by Lionetto-Civa, Angie and Booth, Christina. Kew East, VIC: Windy Hollow Books, 2010. Explores the Australian desert through the eyes of a dingo. PZ 7 L56

Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizard and Other Stories Told by the Kukatja by Greene, Gracie, et. al. Broome, WA: Magabala Books, 2003. Told in Kukatja and English, this tale is a traditional Dreaming story of the Kukatja people of Western Australia. GR 366 K84 G74

Resources for Educators:

Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art: Kaplan and Levi Collection by McClusky, Pamela, et. al. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012. Catalogue for the exhibition. N 7401 M33 A73

Aboriginal Art by Caruana, Wally. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003. A comprehensive survey of Australia's indigenous artists. N 7401 C37

Australian Dreamings. Tucson, AZ; CRIZMAC, 1996. Educator guide exploring Aboriginal art. Includes DVD and prints. CURR GD N 7400 C74

Country Culture Community: An Education Kit for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection by Jones, Jonathan, et. al. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2009. Developed to help students understand and appreciate the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island art. CURR GD N 7401 J76

How to Talk to Children about World Art by Glorieux-Desouche, Isabelle and Dunn, Phoebe. London: Frances Lincoln, 2010. Questions and answers about thirty world art objects. N 5311 G56

The Little Red, Yellow, Black Book: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia by Pascoe, Bruce. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008. Ideal tool for cross-cultural training and education. DU 124 S63 P3

Ways of Seeing: Australian and Oceanic Art Outreach Suitcase. Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2012. Focusing on the cultural traditions of Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and Polynesia, this collection of images and objects will open students' eyes to the diverse ways cultures view their worlds through map making, nature activities and shared histories. SUITCASE AUSTRALIAN/OCEANIC

Online Resources:

Aboriginal Art for Children by Australia Native Art and Aboriginal Paintings. Activity suggestions and stories from an aboriginal cultural assistant in Australian primary schools. www.australianativeart.com/aboriginal-art-card-series/aboriginal-art-for-children/

art + soul by ABC TV (Australia). Website for TV special sharing Aboriginal art from the homes and studios of artists. www.abc.net.au/arts/artandsoul

Australian Indigenous Cultural Heritage by the Australian Government. Introduction to the cultures of Australia's indigenous peoples, with links to additional information.

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage>

The Yirrkala Art Centre and the Mulka Project by the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre. Created by the Yolngu people in northern Australia, the site Includes artist information, images and a collection of audio clips and videos. www.mulka.org

Online Resources on Customary Laws:

The Common Law and Civil Law Traditions by the Robbins Collection, School of Law, University of California at Berkeley. www.law.berkeley.edu/library/robbins/CommonLawCivilLawTraditions.html

How Somalia's Aged Tribal Justice System Keeps the Peace in a Country Known for Chaos by Louisa Lombard, Legal Affairs. www.legalaffairs.org/printerfriendly.msp?id=891

Indigenous Justice Systems and Tribal Law by Ada Pecos Melton, American Indian Development Associates. www.aidainc.net/Publications/ij_systems.htm

Proof of Aboriginal Customary Laws: The Australian Experience by the Australian Law Reform Commission, Australian Government. www.alrc.gov.au/publications/24.%20The%20Proof%20of%20Aboriginal%20Customary%20Laws/p roof-aboriginal-customary-laws-australian-e

Aboriginal Courts in Canada by Karen Whonnock, The Scow Institute. www.scowinstitute.ca/library/documents/Aboriginal_Courts_Fact_Sheet.pdf

GLOSSARY

Ancestors: A person from whom one is descended through birth.

Arnhem Land: A region located in the Northern Territory of Australia which has been occupied by indigenous people for over 35,000 years.

Ceremony: A formal event performed on a special occasion.

Civil law: Seeks to resolve non-criminal disputes such as contracts, property ownership along with damages for personal and property damage. Its purpose is to provide a legal, organized and written remedy to solve problems in society.

Collaborative: A group of people that create and work on one piece of artwork together.

Copyright laws: A protection given to the owner and creator of a work that is typically related to literary, artistic, musical or written work as a protection against unauthorized use or profiting.

Cultural history: A history of selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems and behaviors of the members of a group of people.

Culture(s): That which defines a group of people based on learned behavior, languages, values, customs, technologies and art; the sum of attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from another.

Customary laws: Based on a pattern of behavior established and agreed upon within a community over time. According to a statement from an Aboriginal respondent in a 2006 Law Reform Commission of Western Australia report concerning Aboriginal customary law, they stated it is comprised of *“connected people in a web of relationships with a diverse group of people; and with our ancestral spirits, the land, the sea and the universe; and our responsibility to the maintenance of this order.”*

Data Set: A collection of information organized and grouped of observed events representing different variables.

Dreaming: The term commonly used to describe Aboriginal cosmology, encompassing the ancestral beings, the laws of religious and social behavior, the spiritual forces that sustain life and the chronicles that describe these.⁵

Ephemeral: Lasting a very short time.

Flora: Plants specific to a region.

Fauna: Animals specific to a region.

Kimberly: It is a region located in the Northern part of Western Australia and is known as one of the earliest places to be settled in Australia by people from what is now Indonesia over 40,000 years ago.

Moral: Behaviors based on right and wrong determined by society.

Symbols: Something that stands for something else.

Principle: A basic truth, law or assumption.

Proliferate: A rapid increase in number.

⁵ McClusky, *Ancestral Modern*.

Transcend: To exceed or pass beyond original expectations.

Undulating: A wavy form or surface that can or appears to move in a side to side motion.

Utilitarian: An object that is prized more for its usefulness rather than its beauty.

Utopia: An area located approximately 230 kilometers northeast of Alice Springs in Australia. Utopia, whose name comes from early twentieth century European settlers, is a grouping of five places or “countries,” named after the ancestors who formed them. Utopia’s indigenous place names are Alhalpere, Rreltye, Thelye, Atarrkete and Ingutanka. There are about 120 working artists in the community.⁶

⁶ “Utopia.” National Museum Australia.
www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia_the_genius_of_emily_kame_kngwarreye/utopia.



Image from Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection
Message Sticks, 2004. Regina Pilawuk Wilson, Australian Aboriginal, Marathiel people, Peppimenarti, Daly River Region, Northern Territory, born ca. 1948. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 78 3/4 x 78 3/4in. (200 x 200cm), Promised gift of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan.



Image from Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection
Mountain Devil Lizard Dreami, 1996. Kathleen Petyarr, Australian Aboriginal, Anmatyerr people, Utopia, Central Desert, Northern Territory, born ca. 1940. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 48 1/16 x 48 1/16in. (122 x 122cm). Promised gift of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan.

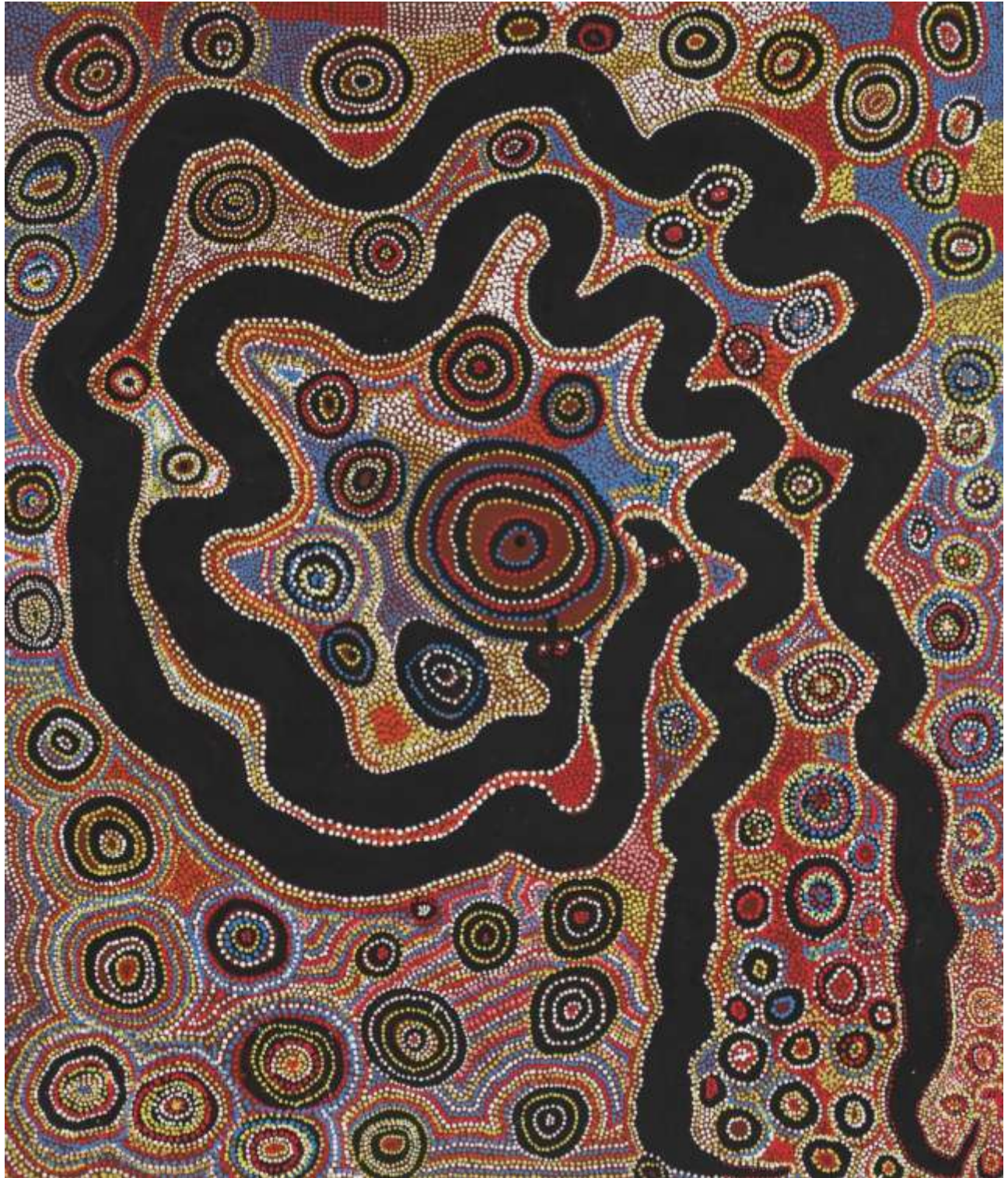


Image from Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection
Wati Kutjara (Two Men Story), 2003. Spinifex Men's Collaborative, Australian Aboriginal, Pitjantjatjara People, Tjuntjuntjara, Southwestern Deserts, Western Australia. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 82 11/16 x 74 13/16in. (210 x 190cm), Promised gift of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum.

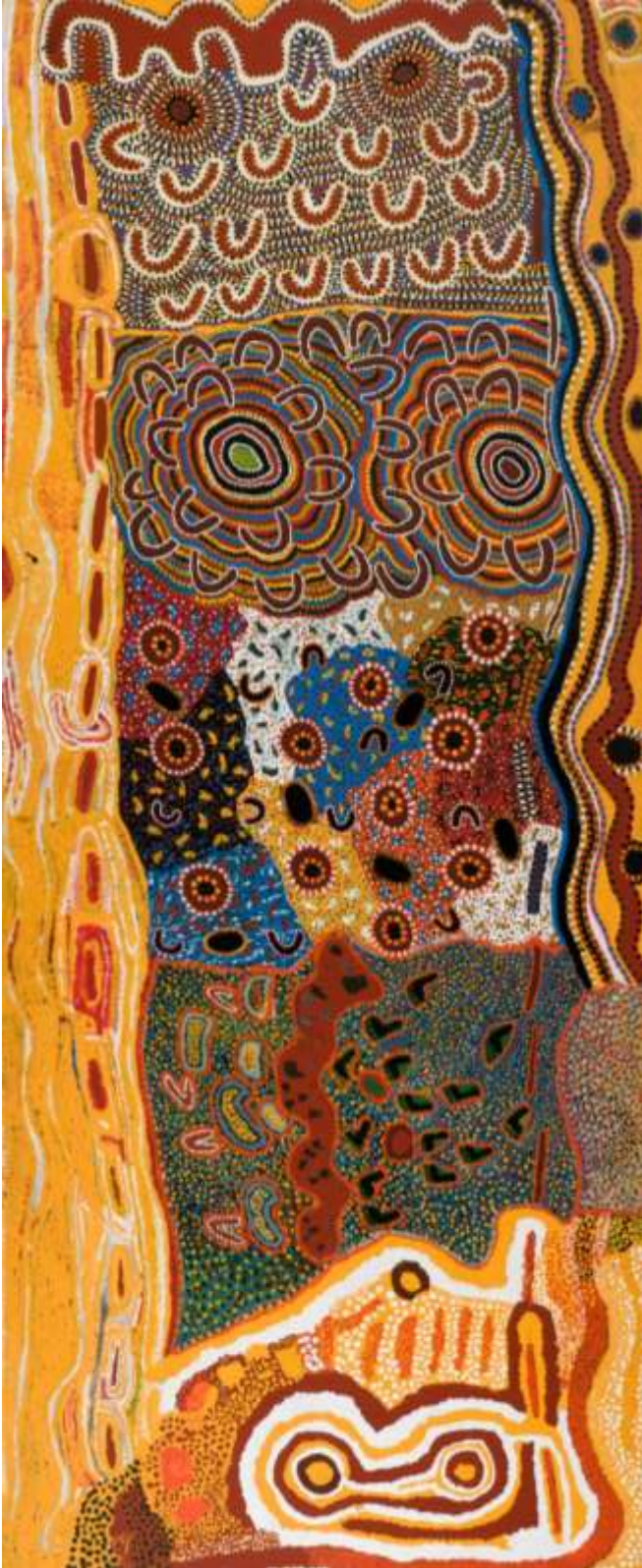


Image from Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection

Wirrimanu (Balgo), 1999. Balgo Women (Tjemma Freda Napanganaka, ca. 1930-2004; Margaret Anjulle, born 1946; Patricia Lee Napangarti, born 1960; Mati Muddgiddell, ca. 1935-2002; Lucy Yukenbarri, 1934-2003; Eubena Nampitjin, born ca. 1920), Australian Aboriginal, Kukatja, Wangkajunga, and Walpiri peoples, Balgo (Wirrimanu), Kimberley/Western Desert, Western Australia. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 47 5/8 x 116 1/8 in. (121 x 295cm). Promised gift of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan.