

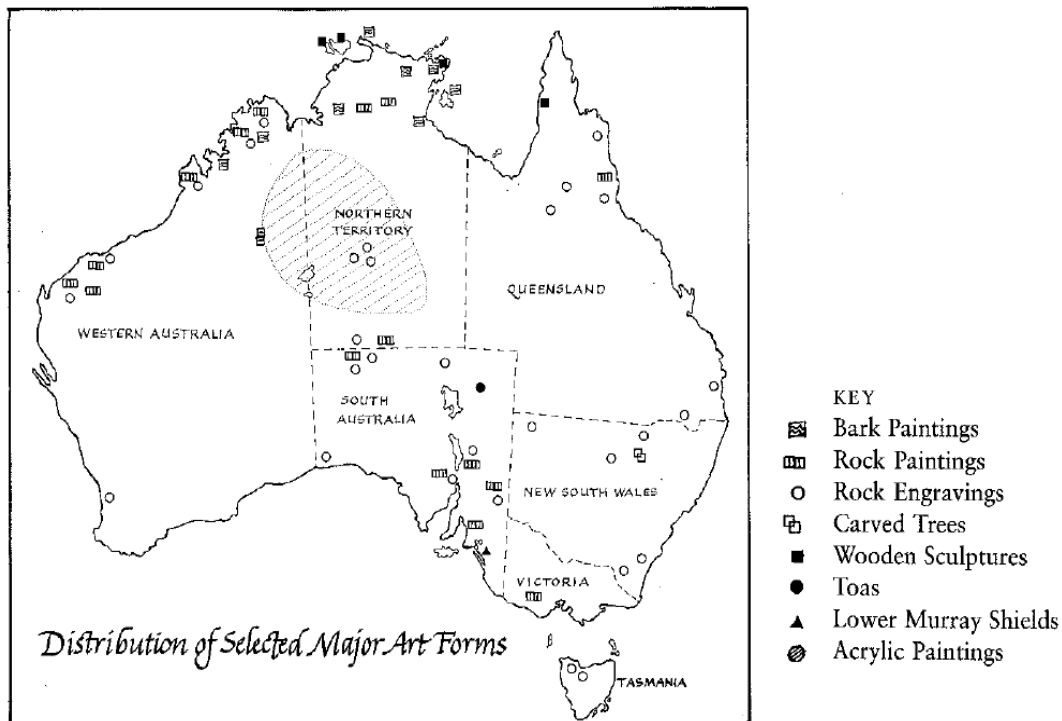
Landscape as Cultural and Political Process in Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Art: Mapping
Land, Body, History and Society in the Art of Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley

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Art production is key to Aboriginal social, religious and political expression, and this has been true for millennia. Aboriginal populations have inhabited the continent for an estimated 60,000 years, and evidence of an established visual culture in early Aboriginal communities is seen in the surviving rock paintings in the Kimberley region of northern Australia, dating to 6,000 years before the present. A range of visual forms have continuously played key roles in formalizing and maintaining indigenous cosmologies; they are inseparable from Aboriginal ritual and daily life. Since the arrival of European explorers and subsequent colonial settlers in the late 18th century, Aboriginal visual cultures adapted to new materials and ideas while surviving violent attempts to remove indigenous physical and cultural presence from the land. From the 1970s, with renewed efforts to reclaim land rights and gain equal citizenship in the Australian nation, Aboriginal art has become a central form of political expression within a white-dominated society. As visual forms circulating in Western art markets and institutions, contemporary Aboriginal art plays an important role in asserting indigenous political and cultural autonomy to non-Aboriginal viewers. Communicating with non-indigenous audiences is a crucial strategic feature of Aboriginal contemporary art, and has come to shape the way white Australians and global audiences view Aborigines and their position in the contemporary landscape.

Among the most internationally visible forms of indigenous visual art production are the acrylic paintings made by artists living in Australia's rural outstations, especially those in the Western Desert region (see map below). Achieving great success in international art exhibitions and markets in Europe, the United States, and Asia, “dreamings” paintings, or “dot” paintings (see fig. 3) that are firmly rooted in customary visual motifs, subjects, and styles have been hailed as hallmarks of 'primitive' modern art. Receiving similar international attention are the art works made by formally-trained indigenous artists working in the major metropolitan centers such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in the southeastern coastal regions of Australia.

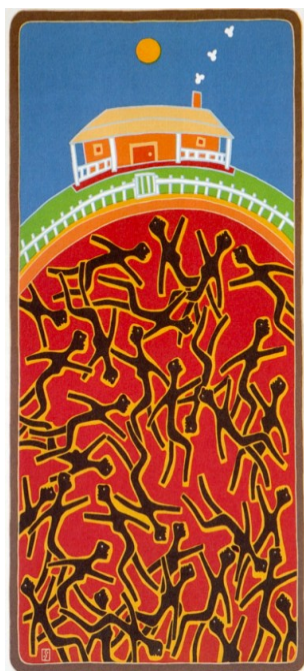


Map from Peter Sutton, ed. *Dreamings: the Art of Aboriginal Australia* (New York: G. Braziller, 1988), xiii

Urban artists have a related, but significantly different, colonial experience compared to rural Aboriginal painters. While the latter were able, to some degree, to maintain their ties and cultural connection to traditional homelands, urban indigenous communities are founded on a history of forced relocation and displacement from their ancestral lands. In her discussion about corporate identities within urban Aboriginal communities, Lynette Russell explains identity construction as “a paradigm that allows for the inclusion of subtle and overt changes that have resulted from European colonisation.”¹ These changes include direct, critical engagements with the colonial process and responses to subsequent social and political inequalities. Wally Caruana describes how urban art “provides rare Aboriginal commentaries on nineteenth century life in the rapidly changing Australia.”² He discusses major themes, such as colonial dispossession, Australian racism and negative stereotypes of indigenous peoples (e.g. fig. 1).

1 Lynette Russell, “Koori Modernity and Corporate Identity,” in *Savage Imaginings: Historical and Contemporary Constructions of Australian Aboriginalities* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2001), 81

2 Wally Caruana, “Artists in the Town and City,” in *Aboriginal Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 196



(fig. 1) Sally Morgan, *Another Story*, 1988, stencil, color screen print on woven paper, 23.75 x 12 7.9 in, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

While the art production of urban and rural communities appear quite distinct, one can look at the two practices as diverse responses to a similar colonial history. Many scholars discuss how this comparison may be problematic, for example Diane Bell says this “dichotomy is a dangerous juxtaposition and one that obscures the complex realities of the emergence of Indigenous art in both regions.”³ It is useful to examine the two simultaneously in order to explore different experiences within similar colonial contexts. Through this examination, it is clear that art remains key to Aboriginal expression, just as it was in 6,000 b.p. Visual culture and art production navigates through Aboriginal experiences while constructing identities that engage with Australia's colonial history.

This discussion focuses specifically on the experiences of Aboriginal women because the female condition within Australia's colonial context has largely been ignored by history, scholars and the art market. Anthropologists have historically categorized women in the domestic sector of Aboriginal society while labeling their art as utilitarian and less important than men's art. While the

³ Diane Bell, “Person and Place: Making Meaning of the Art of Australian Indigenous Women,” in *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 102

literature on Aboriginal art and culture has progressively brought women back into the folds of society and ritual, female experiences in colonialism still need recognition and exploration. Aboriginal women have experienced brutalities of colonialism such as rape, exploitation, and forced surrender of their children to government institutions. This discrimination occurred in the art world as well because female artists were rarely exhibited or recognized even though their art is key to cultural expression. Women possess an extensive visual language with a particular view of these colonial experiences and their art demonstrates an engagement with this history. When looking at their artwork, a specifically female experience reveals itself in both urban and rural communities.

In the following discussion, two artists demonstrate these different experiences and show the continuing social and political relevance of Aboriginal culture in Australia today. Emily Kame Kngwarreye, who became widely successful in the Western art world in the 1980s and 90s, shows a rural experience through her art. A senior woman in the Anmatyerre community, Kngwarreye's paintings provide an innovative and refreshing take on Aboriginal visual culture. Her career started when she began painting in Utopia, an outstation in the Western Desert. Though she only painted for six years until her death in 1996, her work made a global impact on the art market as well as on the understanding of Aboriginal women's perceptions of the world.

Fiona Foley (b. 1964) is an artist who exemplifies the urban Aboriginal experience, and her work is quite different from Kngwarreye's. Foley began working in the late 1980s and has continued working into the present. She works in a number of mediums from pastel paintings to public installations and film. Departing from subjects and motifs that draw from 'traditional' visual and religious culture, Foley creates art that comments on the colonial experience and resulting social, political and cultural inequalities. Although her work is different from rural Aboriginal art such as paintings by Kngwarreye, it acts in the same ideological spaces because it reinforces an Aboriginality shaped by colonialism. These spaces can be understood as landscapes through which both rural and

urban art navigate.

Landscape is an effective way to explore Aboriginal art because it considers a painting's relationship to the physical, cultural and political geographies which it shapes and in which it circulates. Franca Tamisari (1998) describes how, in the Aboriginal worldview, the physical landscape is created through a bodily experience, a “being-in-the-world.”⁴ She contrasts an indigenous Australian “corporeal” connection between the body and the land with non-Aboriginal perceptions of space which define it as a static entity outside of oneself that is objectified rather than experienced. Through colonial contact, these contrasting worldviews collided and a new expanse was created in which Aborigines try to define their cultural, social and political conditions. I use the idea of 'landscape' to refer to spaces of contact, conflict and negotiation. When considering Aboriginal and Western definitions of landscape together, interrelated concepts emerge that are relevant to my analysis: physical geography, bodily experience and production of space, point of view and possession, and relationships to place. Landscapes are not static ideas, but are dynamic sites of cultural practice. As contemporary Aboriginal identities have grown more and more complex and spatially expansive due to an increasingly globalized world, one can use various landscapes to understand how Aboriginal art works to map out indigenous presence in changing topographies.

These various landscapes are the same for multiple artists whose experiences as Aboriginal Australians differ. For example, Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley both produce works of art that navigate the same terrains, although their separate conditions as rural and urban Aborigines cause them to work within each of these topographies differently. Both artists are deeply connected with the physical geography of the land and for this reason the land itself is one of the ideological spaces through which we can better understand their art. Another terrain is the landscape of the female body, a space determined both by the Aboriginal belief system as well as by personal experiences of Aboriginal

4 Franca Tamisari, “Body, Vision and Movement: in the Footprints of the Ancestors,” in *Oceania*. Vol. 68, No. 4 (June 1998): 250

women. These experiences are greatly defined by Australia's colonial history, in which the Aboriginal body was controlled, exploited and exterminated. The colonial landscape is a third way one can navigate through Kngwarreye's and Foley's practice because it is a space that profoundly shapes the artists' identities and their work. Finally, there are two ideological spaces made up of human geographies and I discuss these as the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal social landscapes. Aboriginal art communicates with a world outside its own culture while constructing Aboriginal identities in a more cosmopolitan domain. By exploring Aboriginal visual culture through these landscapes, one begins to see the multivocality of Aboriginal art as it maps an indigenous Australian experience. These terrains are not mutually exclusive, but inform one another in an intertextual way. This paper similarly marks paths through the art of Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley.

I. Physical Landscapes

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, landscape present in Aboriginal art is the land itself. In order to understand the importance of geographical space in Kngwarreye's art, we must understand how Aboriginal visual culture produces meaning through what it represents. According to Aboriginal cosmology, ancestors journeyed across the natural terrain (“dreamings”) at the beginning of time (“dreamtime”), creating a landscape through their physical interactions with it. Thus, specific geographical features seen today are the products of the ancestors' experience during 'Dreamtime.'⁵ Through their journey, ancestors bestowed onto Aborigines the Law, which dictates how they must live and care for the land. The Law declares that life can only be sustained through human movement and bodily experience through space. Aboriginal visual culture is directly tied to this belief system because, just as ancestors transcribed their experiences into the land, Aborigines must re-enact that experience through visual culture, maintaining the generative power of the ancestors in order to care for the

⁵ The terms 'dreaming' and 'Dreamtime' are English translations of “djugurba,” the spatiotemporal nexus in which the ancestors journeyed.

present time and space. In Franca Tamisari's words, "the maintenance of the Law...is conceived as an act of following, literally in the footsteps of the ancestors."⁶ This 'following' occurs when Aborigines make visible Ancestral dreamings. In these depictions, created during various rituals, the Australian landscape is both the visual subject matter and the existential effect of the art.

Nancy Munn, in her influential book *Walbri Iconography* (1986), describes the designs that make up this subject matter for the Walbri people, a group in the Northern Territory west of Utopia, where Emily Kngwarreye lived. Dreamings are depicted in various mediums – sand drawings, body painting, ceremonies – and in this visual culture, the land is central to the subject matter because it is the site where ancestors emerge and through which they and their human descendants move. In these Dreamings, two key motifs, the circle and the line, appear:

...from one point of view the circles constitute a single element (the site circle), from another, they comprise a figure of the enclosure type: the central area is conceptualized as a hole (or water hole) from which the ancestor emerged or into which he or his progeny went during his travels. The surrounding lines are the campsite itself, sometimes thought of as the paths the ancestor made in walking around. The circles therefore synthesize the notion of a place where the ancestor slept (made camp), and walked around, with concepts of emergence (coming out), procreation (progeny go into the ground), and death (ancestor goes into the ground). Elements of the ancestor's life cycle are thus connoted by the circle-line figure, so that these are fused with the notion of his track in the country.⁷

The representation of Aboriginal cosmology through circle and line motifs are also applied to other mediums that do not originate in Aboriginal visual culture. These new mediums were introduced to Aboriginal communities when anthropologists and the Institute for Aboriginal Development started a movement in 1976 to teach Aborigines Western skills such as literacy and arithmetic.⁸ This movement also brought art teachers to the desert settlements, such as Jenny Green who first introduced various art

6 Tamisari, "Body, Vision and Movement," 262

7 Nancy Munn, *Walbri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 138

8 Jenny Green, "Singing the Silk: Utopia Batik," in *Raiki Wara – Long Cloth from Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait*, ed. Judith Ryan and Robyn Healy (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998), 39

forms including tie-dye. This soon developed into a batik program for women in Utopia, led by Suzy Bryce and Nyangkula Brown in 1977. While these new art forms brought recreational means of cultural expression in the outstations, the program soon aimed toward economic independence for women.⁹ This was successful because many were able to sell their batiks and there was even an exhibit in 1980 at a gallery in Alice Springs, near Utopia. A number of batik exhibitions followed, and Emily Kngwarreye was one artist in the 1990 exhibit *Utopia – A Picture Story*.



(fig. 2) Emily Kngwarreye, *Emu Dreaming*, 1988, batik on silk, 92.9 x 46.3 in, The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury

In one of her batiks from this exhibit, *Emu Dreaming* (1988, fig. 2), a brown background is layered with pictorial representations of the desert landscape in shades of yellow: Kngwarreye shows plants such as the woollybutt grass, fruits and seeds as well as animals such as lizards, turkeys and goannas.¹⁰ In this work, as well as other batiks from this movement, art production remains key to Aboriginal expression. The physical landscape still serves as the subject matter and is deeply connected to the root of Aboriginal iconography and visual culture.

⁹ Green, "Singing the Silk," 40

¹⁰ Margo Neale, ed. *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kngwarreye* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2008), 50

Today Kngwarreye is known for her acrylic paintings on canvas, a medium to which she was introduced in Utopia. As with batik production, the role of physical geography as subject matter did not change when Aboriginal artists took up the mediums of acrylic paint. The first wave of critically acclaimed Aboriginal paintings came in 1972 from the Papunya Tula Art Collective, an organization of male Aborigines primarily from Luritja/Pintupi language groups who depicted dreamings using the same motifs used in rituals. The artists in this group translate the designs in their visual culture, much like the motifs Munn discusses, onto the canvas. One example is Michael Nelson Tjakamarra's *Warlujarrayi* (c.1981, fig. 3), which resembles the sand drawings created for male rituals. The orange, ochre and brown tones resemble the ground on which men depict their dreamings, and the designs in Tjakamarra's painting signify specific ancestors and their journeys through footprints, campsites and pathways in space. The motifs show a continuity with Aboriginal visual culture in the new medium of acrylic.



(fig. 3) Nelson Tjakamarra, *Warlujarrayi*, c. 1981, acrylic on linen, 35.8 x 24 in

Although the critical acclaim of Papunya Tula men did not reach female artists at this time, the visual similarity between religious visual culture and acrylic painting can be seen in the art of women

such as Emily Kngwarreye. Through her work, one sees the extensive visual culture among Aboriginal women. In Kngwarreye's batiks and acrylics, she uses the same “circle-line figure” in Munn's description to depict the plant and animal life in Dreamings for which she, as a senior woman in her community, is responsible.



(fig. 4) Fiona Foley, *Emu All Over*, 1990, synthetic polymer on canvas, 59.4 x 47.2 in, The Holt Collection, Northern Territory

Kngwarreye's 1990 painting, *Emu All Over* (fig. 4), is an example of how her work is rooted in the Australian landscape. The canvas is covered with reddish-orange, beige and green dots, overlapping each other with no apparent pattern. In various places of the composition where the layer of dots is thinner, we see an underlying pattern of lines. Robert Hollingworth, in his article “Looking at (Not Seeing): Reconsidering the Work of Emily Kngwarreye” (1998), interprets these dots as the immaterial substance of experiencing the land. He compares this to a similar visual signifier in the Western world: “A dotted line in a drafter plan is used to indicate something in the diagram that cannot be literally

observed.”¹¹ The underlying pattern of lines, however, is a more literal representation of one's experience through land because it depicts the emu ancestor's journey through the Australian terrain.

For rural Aboriginal artists, the landscape is not only the subject matter but it is also the site and material of the work itself. In the ritual processes of re-enacting Dreamings by drawing on the ground, the patch of sand that represents the site is cleared of sticks and sandy lumps before the ground is transcribed with motifs that represent the ancestor's experience. As seen in the works discussed above, artists have adapted religious and cultural motifs to newer forms such as acrylic paintings in order to maintain spacial relationships.

These motifs, however, disappear in much of the art produced by urban Aboriginal artists. Urban artists, like Fiona Foley, who were displaced through the colonial process and forced to resettle on missions and government stations, are not privileged to the sacred details of these Dreamings and the ancestors' experiences. Foley bears witness to the displacement of Aborigines through colonization, and her sense of place rests in memories of where her relatives lived and what has happened to the Aboriginal community after colonial settlements transformed their way of life. Foley is a descendent of the Badtjala people of Fraser Island, which lies on the southern coast of Queensland. This island's relationship with colonialism began with the shipwreck in 1836 of Captain James Fraser and his crew, including his wife Eliza Fraser, who was the only survivor. Upon her rescue, she spread terrible stories about the 'savages' who she claimed kept her captive on the island.

This began a series of attacks by white colonists to drive Aborigines off Fraser Island. The Badtjala community was removed from the island and placed into settlement camps run by Christian missions. Olu Oguibe (1995) describes the period between the 1930s and 1940s as the “whitification” of Aborigines: “the often brutal and unrelenting imposition of European culture and values.”¹² This

11 Robert Hollingworth, “Looking at (Not Seeing): Reconsidering the work of Emily Kame Kngwarreye,” in *Art Monthly Australia*. Vol. 115 (Nov. 1998): 16

12 Olu Oguibe, “Medium and Memory in the art of Fiona Foley,” in *Third Text*. Vol. 33 (Winter 1995-96): 52

process disrupted Badtjala culture and drove out much of their knowledge passed down through kinship groups. The following generations found themselves without a link to their homeland and without knowledge of their culture. Fiona Foley is part of this generation, but her relationship to her mother and grandmother, who she mentions as influencing her trips back to Fraser Island, maintains her connection to her Aboriginal heritage. Her mother was an active figure in the fight for Aboriginal custodianship of the island. Foley remembers how this affected her when she was a child: “When you witness someone with that passion and vision for the future, a vision for her children and the next generation after that, who had a sense of the importance of securing land on Fraser Island for Badtjala people, it was the underpinning for me while I was growing up.”¹³ The physical landscape plays an important role in Fiona Foley's connection to her Aboriginal history. Even if urban Aborigines do not know the specific stories and rituals for the Dreamings, they understand how the land is the “physical and ancestral substance of [Aboriginal] people.”¹⁴ For this reason, the Australian landscape is the manifestation of Aboriginal identity.



(fig. 5) Fiona Foley, *Dingo Skull B*, 1994, pastel, oxide, charcoal on paper, 51 x 50 in, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Fiona Foley refers to the natural environment in her artwork as a way to directly reference her

¹³ Foley quoted in *Fiona Foley: Forbidden*, cur. Michele Helmrich, Christine Morrow and Rachel Kent (Sydney; Brisbane: Museum of Contemporary Art; The University of Queensland Art Museum, 2010), 15

¹⁴ Tamisari, “Body, Vision and Movement,” 255

Aboriginal identity. For example, in her 1994 painting *Dingo Skull B* (fig. 5), Foley presents a simple but powerful landscape in Fraser Island. The ochre pastel overwhelms the background, interrupted only by the thick brown line of the desert's horizon. The skull of a dingo jumps out at the viewer from the landscape, staring at us through the cavities where its eyes used to be. In the right side of the painting lies an adze, an ax-like tool used by indigenous Australians. The catalogue for a traveling exhibit *Invisible Voices* (2000) explains that Foley picked up this adze on one of her trips to Fraser Island.¹⁵ In this composition, the adze materializes Foley's experience moving through her ancestral homeland. She has done a number of similar paintings that present one or two objects in a vast landscape of color. While these works emphasize a human absence in the empty space, Foley evokes the memory of her ancestors and makes their absence visible by inserting artifacts such as the adze. Similarly, the dingo skull evokes a presence of indigenous life in this empty landscape. Although it is a life that is past, hence a skull rather than the head of a live dingo, this presence persists in the dingo's enduring bodily remains. Foley imbues the land with Aboriginal history independent of white culture (the artifact) and the effects of European settlement (the emptiness). In Olu Oguibe's words, "the dingo is the silent figure that calls history to account."¹⁶

II. Bodily Landscapes

While *Dingo Skull B* uses artifacts rather than the Aboriginal body to call Australia's colonial history into account, other works by Foley and Kngwarreye use the physical presence of the Aboriginal body to evoke their identities as indigenous Australians. The body, therefore, is another ideological space, or landscape, through which we can think about Aboriginal art. As discussed above, the Aboriginal belief system is centered around Ancestral movement through the landscape; this experience causes the land to take shape and therefore the physical terrain is a manifestation of the ancestral bodily

¹⁵ Joan G. Winter, cur. *Fiona Foley: Invisible Voices* (Bundaberg: The Bundaberg Arts Centre, 2000), 16

¹⁶ Oguibe, "Medium and Memory," 52

experience. Thus, bodily experience is central to Aboriginal cosmology. When Aborigines re-enact ancestral experiences through visual culture, they not only re-inscribe the ground with the ancestor's presence but they also inscribe themselves into the land, and the land itself becomes part of the human experience. As anthropologist Jennifer Biddle says, “‘skin’ is literally, materially, the same ‘substance’ as country in that it is equally a medium in which Ancestral traces reside.”¹⁷ Thus, the body plays a key role in Aboriginal visual culture because it is a site of rejuvenation and location in the physical landscape.



(fig. 6) Nelly Napanangka Fencer during Awelye preparation, photo by Jennifer Biddle, 1989

For Kngwarreye and Foley, the *female* body is a particularly rich terrain. In rural Aboriginal communities, women practice a specifically female ritual – called Awelye in Kngwarreye's Anmatyerre community – in which the women decorate their breasts with specific motifs that signify ancestors and their Dreamings (see fig. 6). The body is treated as a sacred site during this ritual: like a patch of sand on which Dreamings are re-enacted, the body is also cleared of marks and inconsistencies before it is painted. This is similar to the way Aboriginal acrylic painters coat their canvases with a layer of paint: for example, Emily Kngwarreye begins all her paintings with a monochromatic layer onto which she applies her more colorful brushstrokes. In her work, we begin to see similarities between the bodily

¹⁷ Jennifer Biddle, “Inscribing Identity,” in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 180

experience and its manifestation on canvas. By treating their skin like a canvas or like the ground during other rituals, Aboriginal women embody the ancestral experience and reinforce their spiritual and physical connection to the land. In her essay about the Aboriginal body, Biddle describes how “the breast is figured as a writing instrument...which makes marks that are as felt as they are seen.”¹⁸ These marks are similar to the lines in acrylic paintings, such as *Emu All Over*. Hollingworth suggests the yellow lines covering the dark background of this painting “demonstrate a graphic recording which may be equivalent to body/world experience itself.”¹⁹



(fig. 7) Emily Kngwarreye, *Emu Woman*, 1988-89, synthetic polymer on canvas, 36.2 x 24 in, The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury

When new materials were introduced by colonists, the connection between the body and the sacred was not entirely disrupted; Aboriginal women began to decorate new forms in addition to their

18 Jennifer Biddle, *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2007), 99

19 Hollingworth, “Looking at (not seeing),” 16

bodies. The patterns used in Awelye rituals appear in Kngwarreye's early batiks, including *Emu Dreaming* discussed above. Among the various plants and animals she depicts in this batik, there is the occasional representation of the designs women paint on their bodies during Awelye ceremonies. The continuing relevance of female body decorations can also be seen in Kngwarreye's early work *Emu Woman* (1988-89, fig. 7). A combination of red, black and white dots fill the painting, often overlapping one another in the same way as *Emu All Over*. The dots fall on top of white, yellow and black lines which form the representational motifs of the painting. Near the center of the canvas, one finds the same motifs that decorate breasts in Awelye rituals as seen in *Emu Dreaming*. By representing female ceremonial motifs on canvas, Kngwarreye is fulfilling her duties as a senior Anmatyerre woman. She transcribes her Aboriginal experience onto the canvas as she continues to transcribe it onto her body. Instead of being 'inauthentic' due to the introduced medium of acrylic, Kngwarreye's paintings are new manifestations of the ancestral power on which her community depends. In these depictions, ancestral power is evoked through female visual culture, asserting the continuing importance of women's ritual.

Fiona Foley's work also addresses the landscape of the female body, although it comes from a different experience than Kngwarreye's. Foley does not have access to the same sacred information about the Dreamtime, nor has she participated in Awelye body painting. Foley uses her experience, instead, to explore the black female body in the context of colonial Australia. Rather than signifying ancestral experiences, Foley's depiction of the black female body exposes its exploitation and mistreatment. This parallels other works in which Foley explores Australia's physical landscape in the context of colonialism, such as *Dingo Skull B*. For Foley, the body is connected to the land because it too has been colonized.



(fig. 8) Fiona Foley, *Badtjala Woman*, 1994, series of 3 black and white photographs (one image not included here), 17.7 x 13.8 in each, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

The female body as a landscape is particularly relevant for Foley's 1994 photographic project, *Badtjala Woman* (fig. 8). This series consists of three photographs in which the artist is shown from the waist up, bare chested and adorned with two necklaces. In one of the portraits, she is also wearing a basket that hangs down her back from the forehead, a tool used by rural Aboriginal women. In these photos, Foley does not meet the viewer's gaze but instead looks beyond the frame and in one photograph she pensively looks at the ground. This series resulted from research Foley conducted at the State Library of Queensland where she found anthropological photographs of Aborigines in the library's archive. In these photographs, the Aboriginal body is an object of scientific study, not a person with a history and experience of her own. Like the physical landscape, the indigenous body is objectified and turned into a scientific specimen. Foley's criticism of representations of Others responds to a long history of anthropological photography during the nineteenth century. Christopher Pinney explores this issue in his essay "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography" (1992).²⁰

²⁰ Christopher Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography," in *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), 74-95

Pinney begins his argument by explaining that both photography and anthropology have two histories: the first was when both the medium and discourse were believed to show an essential truth of their subjects, and the second history is when the objectivity of photography and anthropological studies came into question. Foley's portrait and the photograph she refers to each reflect these two histories within anthropological photography.

The original photograph to which Foley responds exemplifies the first history Pinney identifies, in which the camera ostensibly captures the essence of the ethnographic Other in an objective, scientific way. He relates this first history of photography to the early years of anthropology because the fieldworker's experience collecting data is analogous to the camera's recording of a moment in real life.²¹ In Pinney's words, "the recurrent anthropological quest for Otherness coincides exactly with the trick that photography enacts in pursuit of its 'reality effect'."²² The photograph then becomes an index of the subject's existence and of his or her way of life. This indexical quality allowed anthropologists to juxtapose a foreign culture with their own, and thereby provide an 'objective' study of the inferiority of Others, which aided the colonial project. In her own photographs Foley turns this tradition on its head because she, the non-white subject, is also the photographer and she captures *herself* in a way that questions the impersonal, colonial gaze.

Foley's appropriation of this original photograph reflects a shift to the second history of photography in which "the indexical becomes the iconic and symbolic, and photography becomes nothing more and nothing less than a kind of painting."²³ Foley's self-portrait is no longer indexical because the photograph of the Aboriginal woman does not refer to the reality of an indigenous figure collecting goods in 'the wild.' It is now symbolic because we know the figure in the portrait is Foley herself, whose experience is as much tied to a white, settler colonial Australia as it is to the indigenous

21 Pinney, "The Parallel Histories," 82

22 Pinney, "The Parallel Histories," 76

23 Pinney, "The Parallel Histories," 84

community.²⁴ The *Badtjala Woman* series demonstrates the intertextuality of various landscapes because it comments on the colonization of the female body, critiquing the colonial gaze of photography.

III. Colonial Landscapes

The colonial landscape is an important terrain that Aboriginal art inhabits. It is impossible to isolate the art of Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley from its connection to Australia's colonial history and its effect on the Aboriginal experience. The topography of this history was created when colonialism came into contact with the space Aborigines inhabited. In this colonial landscape, Aborigines have a new relationship with the land due to the clash between European and Aboriginal conceptions of the space one inhabits. The former “approaches land as space rather than a series of experienced places.”²⁵ As opposed to the Aboriginal worldview in which the human experience and the environment are constructed by moving through the land and one's actions within that space, European settlers, and this is perhaps still the case in Western thought today, consider 'place' to be a static entity outside of oneself, independent from the body and therefore something that can be obtained, controlled and possessed. This is evident from the first occupation of Australian land, in which settlers declared the Australian continent to be uninhabited upon their arrival, calling the landscape a “terra nullius,” or “land without owners.”²⁶ They justified this by saying the Aborigines “had no readily identifiable hierarchy or political order which the British Government could recognise or negotiate with.”²⁷ Having justified their ownership of the land, colonists continued to displace indigenous communities throughout the coast and desert, making them dependent on white settlers for survival. Because their

²⁴ This discussion comes from another paper I wrote on the same photograph by Fiona Foley in a HAVC class taught by Jennifer Gonzalez in Winter 2012.

²⁵ Tamisari, “Body, Vision and Movement,” 250

²⁶ “Terra Nullius and Sovereignty,” Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, accessed March 19, 2012, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/docrec/policy/brief/terran.htm>.

²⁷ Ibid.

concepts of 'experienced place' clashed with white concepts of land ownership, Aborigines were distanced from their connections to history and identity; their “corporeal” connection to the physical landscape was weakened.

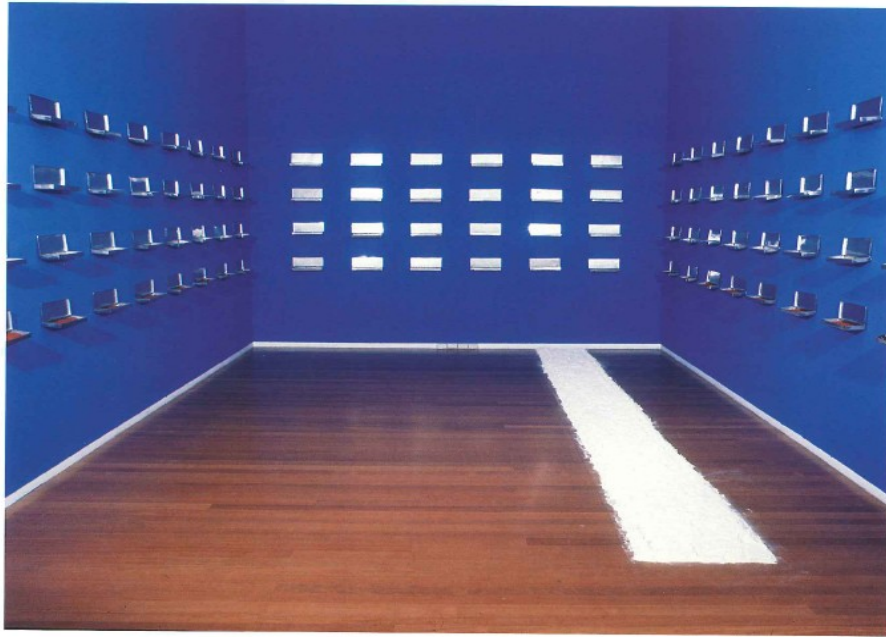
This connection has proved resilient, however, because Aborigines still demonstrate the importance of their relationship to a homeland. This is most relevant in the land claim hearings that occurred in the 1970s when Aboriginal men and women testified their rights to own the land which they have always inhabited. Their case was made possible by Aboriginal visual culture, which bears witness to Aboriginal knowledge and maintenance of territory. Terry Smith (1998) explains that Aboriginal paintings are seen as documentation, or proof, that the artist has fulfilled a duty to care for the land by representing Dreamings.²⁸ This was accomplished by Kngwarreye when, in the first land claim that resulted from the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in 1976, she and other women from Utopia performed an Awelye ceremony in front of the Aboriginal Land Commissioner as a testimony to their right and responsibility to the land. In the court, Utopia women painted ceremonial designs on each other's bodies then sang and danced as per Awelye customs. Again, we see the intertextuality of the various landscapes through which Emily Kngwarreye's art travels because the Awelye ceremony responds to the colonial landscape by using bodily and physical topographies discussed above. In this way, women's designs not only have cultural significance that has been historically under-appreciated, but they now have political importance by asserting Aboriginal land rights. Female Aboriginal art remains key to understanding this political expression.

28 In Donald Holt, ed. *Emily Kngwarreye: Paintings* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1998), 26



(fig. 9) Fiona Foley, *Annihilation of the Blacks*, 1986, wood, synthetic polymer paint, feathers, string, 109.4 x 118.1 x 23.6 in, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Urban Aboriginal artists such as Fiona Foley engage with Australia's colonial landscape differently than many rural artists, often producing works that are more explicit about their critique of the country's history. For example, Foley's sculptural piece from 1986, *Annihilation of the Blacks* (fig. 9), forces white Australia to acknowledge its violent history towards indigenous Australians. Nine wooden figures painted black hang by their necks from a wooden gallows-like structure while a tenth figure, painted white, stands in front. Turned slightly toward the viewer, the figure avoids the unpleasant sight of this 'annihilation' and suggests the invisibility of genocide in white Australian memory. The viewer is supposed to identify with the white figure, who represents Australia's colonial history. Foley wants her audience to both witness that violence and witness how white Australia ignores that history and must come to terms with the violent founding of their country. In this work, Foley criticizes how Aborigines are invisible in Australia's history but she does it differently than in works such as *Dingo Skull B*, in which an Aboriginal presence is invisible yet evoked by the adze. In *Annihilation*, Foley makes the black body menacingly present, insisting the viewer confront the scene.



(fig. 10) Fiona Foley, *Velvet Waters – Laced Flour*, 1996, tin, honey, rock salt, hair, fish bone, oxide, white flour, dimensions variable, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

While this work is obvious in its criticism of Australia's colonial history, Foley's later works are more subtle, yet still potent critiques of the colonial experience. She uses her work to expose events from Australia's past which have been suppressed in the national memory, what Wally Caruana calls “the secret history of Australia.”²⁹ For example, *Velvet Waters – Laced Flour* (1996, fig. 10) is an installation piece in which tin boxes are arranged in rows on the walls of a gallery space. The boxes are open, allowing us to see contents that range from honey and fish bones to rock salt and hair. These, like the adze in *Dingo Skull B*, are metonyms for Aboriginality because they are objects from the landscape which we now understand as a manifestation of the Aboriginal experience. This work not only evokes Aboriginal, but also colonial, presence with a rectangle drawn in flour on the floor. The title, *Velvet Waters - Laced Flour*, helps us read what the flour signifies: Foley refers to the widely unacknowledged nineteenth century practice of giving Aborigines flour that was laced with arsenic. This was part of the genocide that occurred during colonialism, when white settlers moved Aborigines to camps in order to clear the landscape, and often that was accomplished with murder.

²⁹ Caruana, “Artists in the Town and City,” 198

In *Velvet Waters*, the introduced material of flour visually disrupts the Aboriginal experience and evokes the white settler's violent entry into Aboriginal space. Foley's title suggests that the flour can also be associated with a river running through the desert, one that sustains life and adorns the natural landscape. This shares the original function of material goods, such as flour, that were introduced by Europeans: they helped to sustain Aboriginal life that was now dependent on Europeans for survival. However, these materials, like Foley's river of flour, were also tools to control and kill indigenous communities. Foley is exposing her viewers to this history, speaking mainly to non-Aborigines. By speaking to an outside audience, she spatially and historically maps her identity as an Aboriginal woman who has experienced this colonial history. In Russell's words, "Public signification of identity requires a world view which, although originating inside a culture, is designed and intended for an audience outside of it."³⁰

IV. Social Landscapes

This audience forms another landscape that is different than the physical, bodily and colonial spaces that constitute the subject matter and function of Kngwarreye's and Foley's art. The last two landscapes are intimately connected to the physical and historical terrains discussed above. The first social landscape is the non-Aboriginal space to which Aboriginal art is directed and by which it is evaluated. This human geography influences the subject matter and also affects how art is received by an audience outside Aboriginal communities. Within this space, two audiences affect Aboriginal art production: the global audience, such as international art markets and exhibitions, and the national audience in which Australians are encouraged to see their country through an Aboriginal perspective.

Foley directs much of her work toward a national audience because she is critically engaged with Australia's colonial landscape. This is evident in *Annihilation of the Blacks*, in which Foley forces

30 Russell, "Koori Modernity and Corporate Identity," 74

her viewers to acknowledge a history that has been kept in the shadows, and in *Badtjala Woman*, in which Foley uses anthropological photography from Australia's archives to explore representations of Aborigines. These works are meant to re-write and re-present Australia's historical narrative through a female perspective in order to provoke awareness and ultimately change the condition of Aboriginality within Australia. In an interview with curator and writer Alison Kubler (2010), Foley explains that she considers herself more as an educator than an artist.³¹ Like an educator, she conducts research before starting a piece, as we saw in *Badtjala Woman*. This process also informs her 1995 installation piece *Land Deal* (fig. 11). Like *Velvet Waters- Laced Flour*, this installation uses the wall and floor space of the gallery. Rows of axes, knives, mirrors and scissors adorn the wall, while the floor is decorated with a spiral of flour. These materials were given to Aborigines by the colonist John Batman in exchange for land ownership. This seemingly equal exchange was not honored when white settlers used the notion of *Terra Nullius* to occupy the land and essentially call it their own.³² By exposing this historical narrative through art, Foley hopes that Australians will gain a more accurate understanding of the Aboriginal experience, resulting in a more equal environment in which to live.



(fig. 11) Fiona Foley, *Land Deal*, 1995, mixed media, flour, found objects, dimensions variable, shown in Savode Gallery, Brisbane, Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

31 Helmrich et. al., *Forbidden*, 16

32 Helmrich et. al., *Forbidden*, 69

Although her work is often directed toward a national audience, Foley has created other works that speak to the global space of non-Aborigines, commenting on experiences of other indigenous groups. In her photographic series, *Wild Times Call* (2001, fig. 12), Foley dresses as an indigenous American of the Seminole community. She photographs herself in the American landscape, expanding the geography of indigeneity by exploring common colonial experiences. Her costume and the natural landscape in which she photographs herself visualizes stereotypical notions of indigeneity as trapped in nature and isolated from the modern urban world. However, it also associates her own experience as an indigenous female with the global condition of indigenous citizens. As curator Michele Helmrich says, “while some may argue the ethical rationale of this move, such a radical endeavor enabled Foley to step outside the expectations of how Australia's Indigenous people might represent themselves.”³³ In this way, Foley addresses both national and international human geographies because she acknowledges the global dynamic of inequalities in black and white power relations.



(fig. 12) Fiona Foley, *Wild Times Call* 7 (part of series of 10), 2001, type C photograph, 29.9 x 44 in

While Helmrich points out that some critics see *Wild Times Call* as problematic, Foley's work is

33 Helmrich et. al., *Forbidden*, 37

often greeted with positive criticism because of her innovative and pointed references to Australia's colonial history. Her art engages with an outside audience, and it is this audience, in addition to the artwork, that shapes this social landscape. This is most obvious in Foley's installation pieces, in which the art occupies a three-dimensional space. While she works with other mediums, Foley has created many pieces for public spaces because she includes her audience as part of the subject matter of the piece; it is this outside group that shapes how her works connect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social landscapes. This critical engagement with human geographies requires that Foley negotiates with her audience and its sensitivities. One example of how Fiona Foley has to negotiate with this social landscape is her public installation *Witnessing to Silence* (fig. 13).



(fig. 13) Fiona Foley, *Witnessing to Silence*, 2004, lotus stems: cast bronze, etched pavers, water feature: stainless steel, laminated glass, Brisbane magistrates Court, Brisbane

This work, completed in 2004, was commissioned by the Brisbane Magistrates Court. Foley claims this commission was particularly important for her because, in her words, “you don't get an opportunity to produce public art works for law courts very often.”³⁴ Foley decided to create a work that commemorated the massacre of Aborigines in what is now Queensland. This work, like many of her other installations and sculptures, confronts a period in Australia's history that has been ignored by the dominant white population. The installation depicts many different sculptural elements of the landscape. There is a circle of bronze lotus stems, surrounded by a circle of white granite, from which mist shoots out every fifteen minutes, watering the bronze flowers. Leading away from the circle of lilies are pavestones with historical place names. For example, one pavestone lists Waterview Run, Mapoon, Mongaree Station, Bones Knob and Gunpowder Creek. These site names lead to another sculptural circle made up of five stainless steel columns. Each column has one side made of glass that is laminated with ash, and the circle is also surrounded by another circle of white granite.

After the installation was permanently installed at the court, Foley released a statement explaining the true significance of the materials she used and the place names decorating the pavement. Foley's strategy had been to remain silent about the installation's true meaning because she knew the Magistrate Court would censor her work.³⁵ Foley originally explained the water at the lotus circle and the ash in the steel columns represented natural disasters that afflicted the places named on the pavestones. After the installation was complete, Foley revealed the place names are actually the sites of massacres inflicted on Aborigines by white Australians. She explained the ash and water are two materials used to clear bodies away from the massacre sites, erasing signs of the violence and also erasing any memories of Aboriginal presence. Foley inserts that presence back into the Australian

³⁴ Foley quoted in Helmrich et. al., *Forbidden*, 17

³⁵ Helmrich et. al., *Forbidden*, 17

consciousness by highlighting the devices of genocide. *Witnessing to Silence* demonstrates how Foley negotiates with a non-Aboriginal audience that would otherwise choose to continue suppressing this history.

Kngwarreye's work has for the most part addressed a global audience. While she was producing acrylic paintings, she understood her work circulated within a space occupied by viewers who knew nothing of her culture. Her work, like that of all Western Desert acrylic painters, deploys Aboriginal visual language for the purpose of communicating with an outside audience. Whether they made art in order to become financially independent, or whether artists were motivated to teach European Australians their culture, non-Aborigines have been the intended audience for acrylic paintings. This reflects a long tradition of Aboriginal interaction with non-Aboriginal groups that often exchanged goods and knowledge. Anthropologist Howard Morphy explains how the ability of Aborigines to communicate with outside groups has always been present in their recorded history. For example, the Yolngu, who live in Arnhem Land in Northern Australia, used art to establish a relationship with the Maccassan group of Indonesia. Between 1600 and 1900, Aborigines engaged in trade with the Maccassans; imported textiles and other goods influenced objects of Yolngu material culture such as the canoe and the metal ax as well as Yolngu visual culture.³⁶ Their relationship with the Maccassans was so strong that Aborigines incorporated them into the 'Dreamtime.' Morphy argues the “incorporation of the Maccassans into the Dreamtime creation, far from signaling a conservative ideology that took no account of change, was a means of adjusting to changing circumstances while at the same time ensuring that new information about the world was incorporated within traditional frameworks of knowledge.”³⁷

There was potential for the same engagement with outsiders when white settlers came into contact with Aborigines in the late eighteenth century. The indigenous groups engaged in a similar

³⁶ Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 222

³⁷ Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, 224

trade relationship with settlers by exchanging local materials for foreign goods. This relationship did not result in the same incorporation of new “frameworks of knowledge,” however, because, as Morphy points out unlike the Maccassans, colonists were more interested in appropriating Aboriginal land than in developing a relationship with the land's inhabitants.³⁸ Nevertheless, art appeared in this, albeit unequal, dialogue with European settlers as a material for trade, allowing Aborigines to receive necessary goods. In this way, material and visual culture reveals a history of Aboriginal engagement with Others.

The art movements at settlements such as Utopia, however, caused a shift in the dialogue between Aborigines and outsiders. In the 1970s, art production was not only an object to trade with Europeans, but it became a tool that Aborigines used to educate white Europeans about their culture in the hope of creating a more equal relationship.³⁹ Emily Kngwarreye's art exemplifies this shift because she directs her acrylics toward national and international viewers, teaching her culture through painting. One project commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1993 exemplifies how Kngwarreye responds to the demands of the art world. The work, *Alhalkere Suite* (fig. 14), is made up of twenty-two canvases and depicts an Anmatyerre song cycle through which Emily unfolds the natural cycle of her country, Alhalkere.



(fig. 14) Emily Kngwarreye, *Alhalkere Suite*, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on twenty-two canvases, 35.4 x 47.2 in

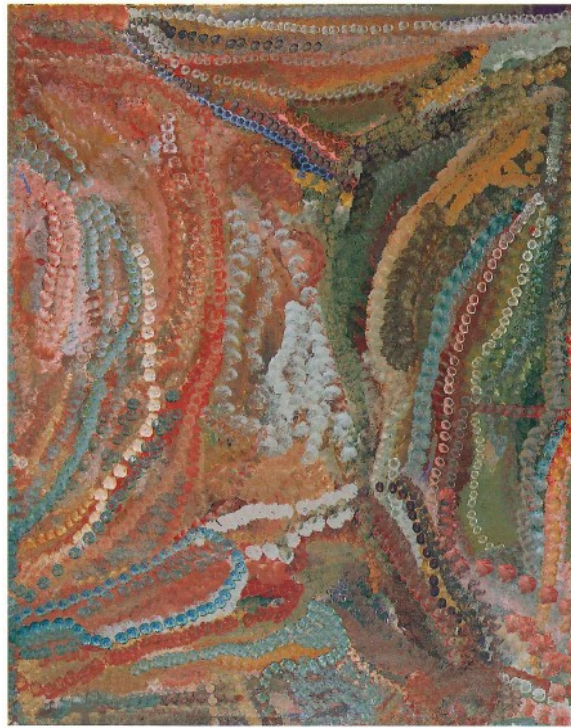
38 Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, 221

39 Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, 242

each, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

In this painting, the dots covering her representational lines in *Emu All Over* have now become the lines themselves, depicting pathways and formations as well as plants and animals. The suite encompasses many of the formal techniques Kngwarreye employs in other canvases, and the diverse color palette she uses over the years appears simultaneously in this one piece. The catalogue for an exhibit in 2008, *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, explains that *Alhalkere Suite* was the first work produced by Kngwarreye that consisted of multiple canvases; previously she produced single paintings for each commission. It seems she chose to make this monumental work because she knew it would be shown in its entirety at the National Gallery of Victoria. As opposed to the individual buyers of her work, who privately display a limited number of her paintings, Kngwarreye recognized an opportunity to present her work in a public, national space. Acknowledging Australians who were to see *Alhalkere Suite*, Kngwarreye chose to paint an extensive song cycle with seasonal variations because it allowed her to depict numerous elements of her visual culture in one unified gallery space. It differs from other paintings in which she depicts Alhalkere because she does not usually show the landscape in various times of the year. *Utopia: The Genius* describes how the various canvases show aerial scenes of the landscape, blossoms of flora after a rain flood, dry deserts after draughts and the geological features of her country.⁴⁰ In this painting, we get a comprehensive view of the land as it is experienced through time, and thus we get a view of Kngwarreye's experience living in this changing terrain.

40 Margo Neale, ed. *Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*. (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2008), 122



(fig. 15) Emily Kngwarreye, *Merne Everything VI*, 1994, synthetic polymer on canvas, 59.4 x 47.2 in, The Holt Collection, Northern Territory

Emily Kngwarreye's motivation to show her country and culture in one project in order to teach as much as possible to one set of viewers also appears in her paintings titled *Merne*, which roughly translates as 'everything.' One example from a series of paintings with this title is *Merne Everything VI* (1994, fig. 15). The lines in this painting resemble those in *Alhalkere Suite* because they are made by a series of dots rather than a continuous stroke with the paintbrush. The lines are made of many different colors, from cooler blues and greens to warm pinks, reds and oranges. The lines run parallel to each side of the canvas, framing a central mass of light blue dots that merge into one another so the line motif disappears. The various colors could serve the same function as those in *Alhalkere Suite* by signifying certain parts of the season and the colors of the land at that time. The lines are similar to those in *Emu All Over* and other paintings in which Kngwarreye traces the movement of ancestors as they create the physical geography. This subject matter appears in her other paintings titled *Merne*, although the style varies between explicit lines and a hazy color palette. In these paintings, Kngwarreye

accomplishes what she sets out to depict in *Alhalkere Suite*. She reveals the complex and diverse nature of her country in order to assert her connection to the land and her community's historical presence in Australia's social landscape on a national as well as physical level.

Many art critics have explored Kngwarreye's innovative use of lines and dots, questioning why she would obscure her dreamings with a chaotic but visually appealing layer of dots. Jennifer Isaacs suggests the reason Kngwarreye covers her representations with dots is a response to the demand by non-Aboriginal audiences for a specific narrative. Due to restrictions on sacred knowledge based on age, gender and kinship, Aboriginal paintings never tell a complete story; images that signify this knowledge are protected by the Law, which allocates certain Dreamings to certain kinship groups. Kngwarreye does not allow the viewer to see any but the smallest hint to an Ancestral reference, while at the same time indicating its complexity and vastness in ideological and physical spaces. According to Isaacs, Kngwarreye's minimalist narratives are the result of continuous demands by art dealers to depict a clear, explainable story: “Whenever we went too far, wanted more information or did not accept the work as it was she drew back, ultimately answering every question about the meaning of her paintings with, 'You know, merne, everything.’”⁴¹

While Kngwarreye painted with an international audience in mind, she had little control over how it was received in the art market. Fred Myers discusses various critiques of her work, grappling with tensions between what the acrylics signify for Kngwarreye and what they signify in a world dominated by modernist criteria. In his literature review of various critics, Myers exposes diverse opinions about Aboriginal art. Some scholars declare that an essential 'Aboriginality' has been overcome by European culture in Australia, such as Robert Hughes who describes a “spiritual wholeness lost, variously, to 'Western art'.”⁴² Other critics demand that a new discourse be created in

41 Jennifer Isaacs, “Anmatyerre Artist,” in *Emily Kngwarreye: Paintings*, 21

42 Fred Myers, “Representing Culture: The Production of Discourse(s) for Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings,” in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (February 1991): 38

order to discuss this new art form, such as art dealer John Weber's assertion that "a new vision demands a new system of critical thought."⁴³ There are debates over whether the paintings are 'true' art or if they have been turned into a commodity that feeds the Western fascination with the Other, and this is the topic of many articles such as Anne-Marie Willis and Tony Fry's "Art as Ethnocide: The Case of Australia."⁴⁴

By the end of Myers' essay, there is the sentiment that perhaps we can understand Aboriginal acrylic paintings as both high art and as a colonial commodity, as simultaneously 'authentic' and influenced by European culture. We can understand Emily Kngwarreye's intention in this pluralist way. Kngwarreye paints what is 'authentic' for her, and it reflects her community's culture. At the same time, however, her art speaks to a non-Aboriginal audience that defines and assigns value by Western standards. Kngwarreye acknowledges this social landscape in the subjects she chooses to paint, as we saw in *Alhalkere Suite*. Myers concludes that it is hard for the Western art world to see Kngwarreye's work from this pluralist perspective "because of its own preoccupation with the global processes that suffocate [it]."⁴⁵ Looking at Kngwarreye's art, as well as the work by other Aboriginal Australians, through multiple landscapes is one way we can avoid defining her work solely by modernist criteria, confining it to a single ideological space.

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After half a century of witnessing Aboriginal art inhabiting and shaping a range of physical and human topographies, what, can we say, is Aboriginal? The second social landscape through which we can explore Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley is the Aboriginal community itself. We can understand contemporary Aboriginal identities in this exploration of how Kngwarreye and Foley move through, and therefore create, social landscapes. One begins to see that questions of an 'authentic Aboriginality'

43 Weber quoted in Myers, "Representing Culture," 41

44 In *Third Text*, No. 5 (Winter 1988-89):3-20

45 Myers, "Representing Culture," 50

are useless because Aboriginal cultures are as much a part of an increasingly globalized world as they are a part of Australia's history.

In his essay "Cosmopolitan Patriots," Kwame Appiah argues for a world in which citizens may experience various places, live in them, participate in their politics, adapt to them, while remaining rooted in their original sense of place. If we consider the Aboriginal experience in this context, then it is not a question of 'authenticity,' but a question of what Aborigines are doing with their freedom as cosmopolitan Australians. Appiah argues that a cosmopolitan world gives individuals the freedom to choose their lifestyle and therefore their identity using the social tools one has or chooses to develop. Even if the place one chooses to inhabit is far from one's roots, the cosmopolitan person continues to "nurture the culture and the politics of their homes."⁴⁶ Kngwarreye and Foley fulfill this task by continuing the tradition of art-making that Aborigines have been following for millennia. Emily Kngwarreye following the Law and continues to re-enact the ancestral experience even though she finds herself in a landscape that has devalued her indigenous rights and distanced her from her cultural roots. Fiona Foley uses art to critique the relationships on which the Australian nation was founded and opens discussions about the presence of Aboriginal culture in a world that has historically refused to see it.

In this cosmopolitan space, Aborigines are free to construct identities that fit their experiences. This is not unfamiliar to their culture, as the body and the geographical space it inhabits is determined by a person's experience in the world. It seems fitting, then, that Australian Aborigines today can construct urban identities that thirty or forty years ago would have seemed 'inauthentic.' Appiah's explanation of how a cosmopolitan citizen constructs this new identity is not inauthentic at all, in fact it is dependent upon the 'original' (for lack of a better word) identity:

46 Kwame Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring, 1997): 619

Our social lives endow us with the full richness of resources available for self-creation: for even when we are constructing new and counternormative identities, it is the old and the normative that provide the language and the background. A new identity is always post-some-old-identity (in the now familiar sense of *post* in which *postmodernism* is enabled by the very modernism it challenges).⁴⁷

In this sense, can we begin to see contemporary Aboriginal art as the representation of a post-Aboriginal identity? This is not to say that a cosmopolitan Aborigine is no longer 'Aboriginal' nor does their identity come *after* the Aboriginal experience in the chronology of human identities. Instead, contemporary Aboriginal identities are dependent on a past Aboriginality before colonialism as well as a new identity that results from engagements with other cultures.

When we consider a social landscape made up of Aboriginal identities constructed through a cosmopolitan condition, we can understand how Fiona Foley's art is part of the artist's growing awareness of her identity within the changing landscape of Australian politics and social structure. In her work, Australia's physical, cultural and ideological geographies become the site of cultural resistance because it exposes the country's history and reinforces the connection between the Australian landscape and Aboriginal identity. Emily Kngwarreye also uses her art as a form of cultural resistance because of its role in land claims and sustaining indigenous cultural practices. Her paintings document the path she takes to construct her identity as an Aboriginal woman who is very much a part of her community, one that must exist simultaneously with European Australian communities. These two Aboriginal artists map out and navigate through various ideological spaces in which Aboriginal art serves an activist function within a white-dominated society.

When we look at Kngwarreye's art in this context, we can look back at paintings previously discussed and examine how these works show an increasing awareness and freedom of the artist's new post-Aboriginal identity. Appiah explains how the "old and normative" aspects of one's culture "provide the language and the background" for one's new cosmopolitan identity. Similarly,

47 Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 625, original emphasis

Kngwarreye's visual culture provides a language through which she can communicate and with which she creates new spaces for Aboriginal culture to move through. In her work *Emu All Over*, for example, she uses the emu ancestor's journey to display her culture to outsiders, and she uses her own culture to construct a new way of life for her and her community. In this cosmopolitan context, we can see how she remains an Aborigine but one that has developed a new sense of self in the presence of Others.

Fiona Foley develops a similarly new identity through her work because she shows how colonial history is central to her cosmopolitan identity. By exposing a suppressed narrative, Foley creates a post-Aboriginality that builds on the exploitation of black female bodies. Her work *Wild Times Call*, for example, demonstrates Foley's identity as a cosmopolitan Aborigine connected to a global condition of indigeneity. The formally-different but historically-linked art of Emily Kngwarreye and Fiona Foley demonstrates that visual culture remains a vital mode of cultural expression for both urban and rural Aboriginal communities, allowing a continuous mapping of identities and spaces in a variety of inter-dependent landscapes.

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