

WARLUKURLANGU

WARLUKURLANGU ARTISTS ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATION, established in 1985, is renowned as one of the most significant and successful art centres in the Northern Territory. It is based in YUENDUMU, which lies 300 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs, and is home of about 1000 people. The name 'Warlukurlangu' derives from an important Jukurrpa (Dreaming) and means 'place of fire'. It was chosen by a number of older men and woman who saw the need for an organisation that represented their interests as artists but also recognized the importance of the cultural laws which are inseparable from the stories depicted in paint. Warlukurlangu is an Aboriginal owned and governed association with almost 200 Warlpiri and Anmatyerre-speaking members.

From its inception, the art centre has sought to encourage a better understanding of Warlpiri and Anmatyerre culture. The driving force behind its establishment was the desire to maintain control of the paintings within the community through independent associations of local artists. As a result the Warlukurlangu was officially incorporated in 1985, with the directive that the interests of the community took precedence over everything else. Membership was drawn from the whole community and was open to all Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people from Yuendumu, and priority was given to group shows.

Paddy Japaljarri Stewart was a key figure in these events. In the early 1970s he had been involved in the painting of the now famous mural on the Papunya school wall and in 1983 he was instrumental in yet another community based project, the painting of the Yuendumu school doors. Altogether thirty doors were painted with the major Jukurrpa of the region: twenty were installed on to school buildings and six were placed in teachers' houses around the community. Paddy Japaljarri Stewart painted twenty of the doors himself and the others were painted by Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Larry Jungarrayi Spencer, Paddy Jupurrula Nelson and Roy Jupurrula Curtis. The artists stated that their aim was to ensure that children were brought up with appropriate knowledge of the Jukurrpa. In Paddy Japaljarri Sims' words they were trying to 'make a memory of these stories' for their children. In 1987, with the assistance of the AIAS (now AIATSIS), Warlukurlangu Artists published a book, Yuendumu Doors: Kurruwarri, which included color photographs of the doors and accompanying stories in Warlpiri and English.

The doors have since undergone extensive restoration and have toured Australia in an exhibition entitled 'Unhinged' (SAM 1999-2000).



Warlukurlangu artists in studio



Warlukurlangu outside studio

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The work produced at Warlukurlangu is characterised by its flamboyant use of color and strong design elements. Kurruwarri (ritual design) forms the template for all the paintings and traditional rules are strictly adhered to. Individual creativity and artistry can nevertheless be seen in the handling of paint, arrangement of the kurruwarri and the execution of the dots. Warlukurlangu is famous for the large canvases, which have been commissioned by public galleries in Australia, Europe and the USA. They have formed the focus of major exhibitions around the world and have also been purchased by private collectors. Measuring up to three by seven metres, these gigantic works of art give the artists room to fully express the sheer size and scope of Jukurrpa narratives and the country associated with them. These projects provide the artists with the opportunity to work together in a manner, which reflects Warlpiri social practices and resembles traditional ceremonies. Many younger painters are given their first opportunity to gain experience in the process of painting and express their knowledge of Jukurrpa. There is a marked willingness to work together and a shared sense of obligation to represent the Jukurrpa as accurately and comprehensively as possible.

Warlukurlangu Artists has proven over the years that community control of an organisation can ensure artists' rights are recognized, and that the culture of Warlpiri and Anmaatyerre people can be appropriately represented in the public arena.

Susan Congrave, Contributor for: *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*. Oxford University Press, Australia 2000. p733-734



An artist painting at Warlukurlangu



Warlukurlangu artists in studio