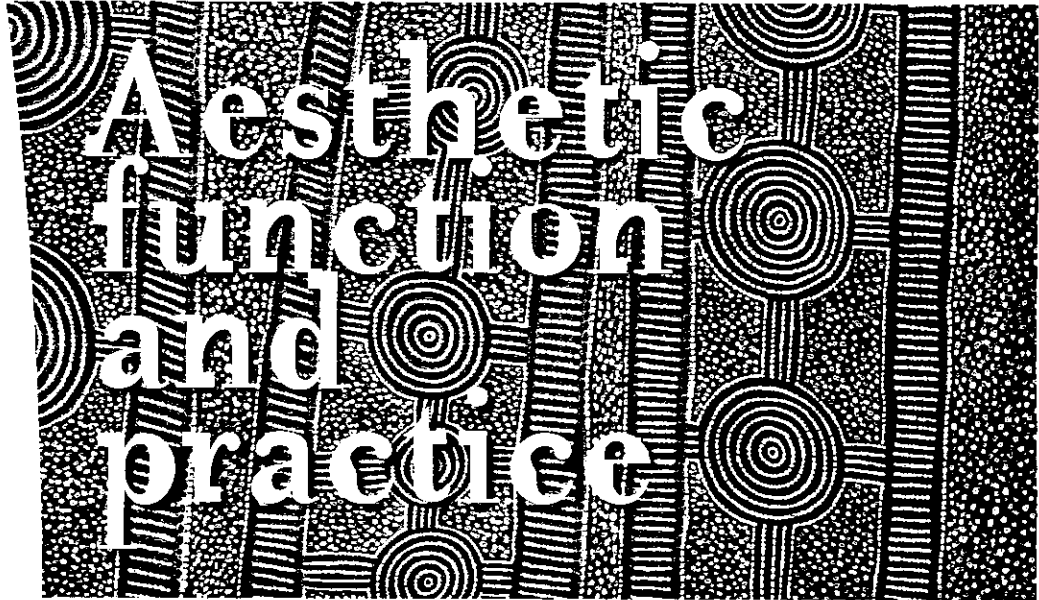


In H. Morphy and M. Prokeš, eds.
Art from the Land. University of
 Virginia Press 1999



Detail from 8.24

A local art history of Pintupi painting

Introduction

This essay is an exploration of an intersection I perceive between ethnographic knowledge and what is sometimes known as 'connoisseurship' of western desert acrylic painting.¹ I attempt a particular kind of history of Pintupi painting, one that emphasises a comprehensive and detailed study of the development of the Papunya-based painters Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra and Wuta Wuta Tjangala.

I do so to demonstrate the existence of what I will call, following Roman Jakobson (1960), an aesthetic orientation in the paintings of these men and to characterise the particularities of this aesthetic function. The common emphasis on the relationship of acrylic paintings to earlier traditions of image-making in ritual should be replaced by more specific, local histories of painting as a practice, considering (for example) the relative autonomy and distinctive trajectories of western desert painting in distinct communities such as those represented in

I do not propose to enter into a discussion of the ultimate sources of all esthetic judgements. It is sufficient...to recognize that regularity of form and evenness of surface are essential elements of decorative effect, and that these are intimately associated with the feeling of mastery over difficulties; with the pleasure felt by the virtuoso on account of his own powers.

I can give at least a few examples which illustrate that the artist has not in mind the visual effect of his work, but that he is stimulated by the pleasure of making a complex form (Boas 1927: 25).

¹ I want to thank Faye Ginsburg and Terry Smith for reading a draft of this paper and Lila Abu-Lughod for her stimulating question a few years ago. I am particularly indebted to Howard Morphy and Frances Morphy for their extensive comments and editorial suggestions and to Nancy Munn for her careful criticism.

this volume: Papunya, Balgo, and Yuendumu. A local art history that places paintings in the context of an artist's practice over time, I shall argue, is both anthropologically informing and provides insights into qualitative aspects of Pintupi painting which, while not necessarily equivalent to Western valuations, may demonstrate a synergy with them. To approach such questions, one needs more local histories of painting as a practice.

It might seem obvious to those reading a catalogue essay or attending a symposium on 'Aboriginal art' that the western desert paintings have 'aesthetic value' (emphasising the 'value'), or that the interpretation of such visual languages is itself a worthwhile enterprise for a history of art. Anthropologically, however, it is not obvious (see Myers 1989, 1994). How do we come to have such a recognition? How do such understandings circulate in the wider world?

I have a mildly personal reason for asking such questions, stemming from an offhand remark I made in a talk a few years ago about a slide showing inexpensive 'dot paintings' in a newsagent's shop in Alice Springs. I had shown a series of slides to illustrate the range of production in western desert painting. These, I indicated casually, with a sweep of my hand, were obviously 'tourist art'. My remark rang an alarm bell with a colleague. She noted my own insistence that Pintupi emphasise that the value of their paintings lies in their 'truth'—their origins in the Dreaming—rather than in their 'beauty'. Poorly executed or brilliantly done, such paintings are valued as 'from the Dreaming', as almost every art adviser in Central Australia could report, and frequently they are claimed to deserve a similar price, because, as Pintupi say, 'this is a very important Dreaming.'

Are we entitled, then, to make claims for differences in the production of Pintupi painters—to regard some as 'better' and others as 'mere tourist art'—when

these categories of evaluation are not discursively established among the painters or within their cultural traditions? Was I departing from a rigorous application of indigenous categories, which do not appear to recognise paintings for their 'aesthetic value'? In this essay, I will focus on the emergence of painting as a practice, and argue that its relationship to discursive categories must be studied in detail to be understood, rather than being inferred from such categories. I wish to show that some painters, at least, evince a serious engagement with painting as a practice that differentiates their works from 'tourist art'.²

Pintupi acrylic painting hardly lacks for commentators. Some of these are deeply concerned with the kind of local differences and stylistic analysis that might allow us to specify the particular artistry of Pintupi painters. For example, Caruana's articulation of the 'Pintupi propensity for austere composition' (1993: 114) clearly resonates with Ryan's (1990) discussion of the Pintupi style as 'linear and cerebral'. Ryan views the increasing emphasis on Tingarri cycle paintings as the development of a tightly restricted visual language.³

Like cadences in a solemn Gregorian chant, a limited number of colours and motifs are ritually repeated. The universe of signs and symbols is an impenetrable and ordered construct which provides a window on to the secret world of the men. (1990: 29)

Caruana (1993: 130) sees the Warlpiri, contrastingly, as more ordered, ornamental and structured in their attention to the abundance of the land.

While these interventions are extremely helpful in articulating some general periods in the development of western desert painting, there is more yet to be gained from the local histories I have in mind. The kind of detailed knowledge of the sequences of production that exist for Western artists is often lacking for indigenous art. Few careful and detailed

² Paintings of the tourist type may very well continue to reveal sacred knowledge, as the painters insist they do, and in this sense they are not 'unauthentic'.

³ The word *Tingarri* refers to mythological travelling groups of men and ceremonial novices. Pintupi often describe it as 'all the men'. Three major geographical lines of named places are described as Tingarri: they were visited and created in the Dreaming by three groups of travelling people made up of novices who had already undergone the first stages of initiation and who travelled under the guidance and discipline of powerful, authoritative 'bosses'. Secluded from women and the uninitiated, such groups performed and witnessed ceremonies and hunted, argued and fought, just as present-day Aboriginal people do.

studies of the development of particular painters have been undertaken (Johnson's work (1994, 1997) is an exception), and fewer still of these look at actual series of paintings, rather than at some 'type' pieces thought to represent different moments of development. Moreover, collections—even those as impressive as the Kluge–Ruhe Collection—do not allow us to engage with the paintings at the level where iconographies and changing painterly practices might be conceived. Objects are sold and dispersed widely through private collections and museums, with assumptions being made about their essential nature so that the process of practice is lost. Thus, evaluations of these paintings tends to be rather superficially aesthetic, and based on principles that may have little to do with the painters' own concerns and practices.

I had an unusual opportunity to record the production of Pintupi art at a crucial point in the 1970s when the paintings were beginning to gain a market. The practice of painting was beginning to change as a result both of the pleasure of practice and in response to external stimuli such as the need to maintain secrecy of restricted forms in response to criticism by other Aboriginal groups (see Caruana 1993; Kimber 1995; Ryan 1990).

Truth or beauty (or both)?

There is clearly a difference between Pintupi and Western evaluations of Pintupi images. The Pintupi are inclined to stress that the images 'come from the Dreaming', and to deny that these paintings are 'made up' by human beings 'just for fun'; they may state simply that 'it is my Dreaming', emphasising that the right to display this Dreaming is part of their identity.

Ostensibly, then, Pintupi do not regard one painting as more valuable than another on account of its 'qualitative' properties. Such facts might imply that

it is inappropriate to apply Western notions of art to these cultural objects. There has been considerable discussion of late about the applicability of the category of 'aesthetics'—as well as 'art'—cross-culturally, or even in the translation of non-Western practices. Some anthropologists have insisted that the category 'aesthetics' assumes modernist notions of an object detached from context, submitted to the senses of the observer for detached contemplation purely for its formal qualities. 'It characterizes,' Overing writes, 'a specific consciousness of art...[F]ar from having universal appeal, the meaning of aesthetics is intrinsically historical' (1996: 260).

I was initially sympathetic to this viewpoint. Indeed, I should admit that the initial appropriation of western desert painting as available to Western aesthetic judgments filled me with dismay. In my first two years of fieldwork with Pintupi people at Yayayi, Northern Territory, it was clear that Pintupi did not emphasise culturally the aesthetic qualities of the paintings.⁴ They have, as far as I can understand, very little in the way of a vocabulary in which the impact of form can be discussed.⁵

Nevertheless, how are we to understand the differences among painters in the attention they give to their activity, in the interest they take in painting, and in the range of invention their work displays? The practices of Pintupi painting are not 'contained' within the authorising discourses, although they may be subordinated to them. A concept of 'art' or of 'aesthetics' is not necessary for acts of communication to acquire an emphasis, as Jakobson (1960) put it, 'on the message for its own sake'—to acquire, in other words, an aesthetic function. What is important about Jakobson's conception—however inherently modernist it might be—is that it imagines the aesthetic function as potentially present in every situation of communication, although it might not be the dominant one. A communicative act is not identified with a single

⁴ The outstation community of Yayayi, 26 miles west of Papunya, was formed in early 1973. Under the terms of the Labor government's policy of 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people, 300 Pintupi speakers sought autonomy in moving to Yayayi from the larger, mixed-language settlement at Papunya, although they continued to participate in the cooperative Papunya Tula Artists. The National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies funded my fieldwork at Yayayi.

⁵ One concern, quality of execution, seems to have been an introduction by various art advisers (Marshall-Stoneking 1988), in appreciation of Western consumers' ideas about what makes 'good art'. At the same time, as Ian Green (1988) has noted, the Papunya painters *do* discuss qualitative effects in some ways—for example, in the notion of 'flash' there is an emphasis on an effect that is discerned as the affective value of 'brilliance' elsewhere (Morphy 1989).

function. A poetic (or aesthetic) component of communication may be present without constituting an autonomous, detached aesthetic object.

The aesthetic function and signifying practices

This brings me, then, to the substantive issues: Pintupi culture valorises some dimensions of paintings—a painting's 'truth' in relation to the Dreaming, the right of expression as part of one's identity—but gives no particular discursive support to others, such as the aesthetic function. Paintings are not compared on aesthetic grounds, are not evaluated explicitly in terms of their quality. The absence of indigenous discourse, however, need not mean that the paintings lack an aesthetic component, or that a concern with the 'palpability of the signs' (Jakobson 1960: 93) is insignificant to some of the actors. My impression is quite otherwise. What Boas (1927) understood as 'virtuosity'—the pleasures of the practice, so to speak, in basket making, pottery making, or Northwest Coast wood carving—seems clearly present as a feature of production.

I do not want to claim that the Pintupi painters I have known think of themselves as 'artists', with all the cultural baggage that might imply. Yet, their practices and products manifest an engagement with the aesthetic function, and this engagement varies from painter to painter. Pintupi painting reveals the pleasure of practice, the elaboration of virtuosity. Using the cases of Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra and Wuta Wuta Tjangala, I can show something of the substance of this aesthetic engagement and discuss some of the properties of the distinctive visual languages that emerged in the course of the development of their painting traditions.

Pintupi painting: The periods

Papunya Tula—and Pintupi—art acquired a particular form in response to criticisms from other Yarnangu (Aboriginal people) that it violated strictures of religious secrecy for shared traditions.⁶ The effect of this criticism—an occasion of 'trouble' in Aboriginal English—was, perhaps, a central historical moment in its stylistic development away from naturalistic representation especially of ritual forms and towards increasing 'abstraction'.⁷ Judith Ryan, for example, sees the increasing deployment of 'dots' after 1972 as a 'masking' of secret referents:

A fundamental change was occurring as the artists themselves...assessed the content of their paintings. Other Aboriginal people had seen the paintings for sale to outsiders, and were angered by what seemed to be a blatant display of certain aspects of the secret-sacred men's world. In response to this, all detailed depictions of human figures, fully decorated tjurunga, and ceremonial paraphernalia were removed or modified (1990: 27–8).

Ryan describes this transformation in Papunya Tula images, in which emphasis shifted to infilling the background, as a form of 'camouflage'.

Wally Caruana also describes a transition occurring at this time, set in train by the realisation that imagery of a sacred and secret nature was being broadcast to a public who did not possess rights to its deeper significance:

By 1974 the naturalistic elements in paintings became less frequent and the narrative was expressed through conventional symbols which, given their multi-referential range of meanings,

⁶ Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd is the name of the artists' cooperative formed initially in the Aboriginal community of Papunya, Northern Territory. Named after the local Dreaming site, it was incorporated in 1972, with 11 original Aboriginal shareholders; by 1974 it had 40 producers. It is a community-based enterprise, owned by the Aboriginal shareholders, with emphasis on group decision-making.

⁷ Concerns over the problems of secrecy and restricted knowledge in western desert painting were articulated as early as 1972 by various outsiders. The best and most comprehensive discussion of this history is Kimber (1995).

allowed the artists to describe their work without reference to secret information. Thus the public story could be separated from the more esoteric meanings (1993: 110).

Most writers consider that the increase from 1973 onwards in dotting and in the dominance of the concentric circle motif in Pintupi painting—with the concomitant focus on related aesthetic and formal effects—reflects these considerations.⁸

While the politics of secrecy may have been a factor in the process of change, it was not a dominant theme of discussions I had with Pintupi artists. My closest and most constant engagement with painters was in 1973–75, a period in which I documented all the (270 or so) paintings produced at Yayayi by Pintupi producers for Papunya Tula. The documentation of these early paintings has always intrigued me, but never satisfied my curiosity. What do these shapes mean? What are the painters communicating? What is involved in the transition from these forms to those found in subsequent periods of painting? Despite the shifts in overt form, the painters were intensely interested—in their discussions with me—in a range of deep meanings and referents they understood to be in their paintings.

Such questions require a more intricate examination of the whole corpus of painters' work. I propose, then, to look at the bodies of work by individual producers, beginning with their works as I recorded them in the period 1973–75. I will do this in two sections. The first considers the series of works produced by Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra as evidence of his interest in form, pattern, and design. The second reviews a large set of paintings of the 'same story', predominantly by a single painter—Wuta Wuta Tjangala—but also by others. I first provide a general discussion of the practice of painting among Pintupi in the early 1970s.

The central and significant precursor of acrylic painting at Papunya was ritual. The fabrication of symbolic forms in ceremonies involves cooperation or consultation in production with others who have subsidiary or equivalent rights to the Dreaming story (see Myers 1986a). This seems to have continued significantly at Yuendumu (see Dussart, this volume), but at Papunya and Yayayi in the early 1970s production for sale outside the system was organised around works by individual artists, giving little recognition to the *shared* rights to Dreamings.⁹

This emphasis on individuals may owe something to the ways in which acrylic painting emerged as a marketable form, in contrast (for example) to the emphasis on commissioned work at Yuendumu. By mid-1973, the painters at Papunya and Yayayi were individually being given specific canvas boards to paint, with the expectation that the finished works would be purchased by the art adviser when he or she returned in the next month. Individual authorship was recognised in the practice of exchange. The art adviser paid each individual whose painting was bought, recording the 'artist's' name as the author of the painting. No payments would be made to other 'owners' of the same Dreaming, for example, and this was generally accepted, although I heard occasional comments from 'owners' that they thought some of the money should have been theirs (see also Kimber 1995: 135).

The evolution of individual, distinctive styles is evident from looking at the work of any of the painters through time, but the temperamental differences between Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra and Wuta Wuta Tjangala are particularly powerful in showing the extent to which the paintings are a medium of individual expression and an exploration of form itself.

⁸ Kimber has shown that 'extensive dotting had become virtually universal by 1974' (1995: 133).

⁹ In Pat Hogan's (1985) notes for the earliest consignments of acrylic paintings, the works are always listed in attribution to particular individuals.

¹⁰ In Pintupi and other languages of the western desert, the locative suffix *-nya* (or *-nga* after certain sounds) is a very common optional final element of place names. Such place-names refer to Dreaming beings or to events or activities involving them. The use of the locative therefore denotes place, in the sense of 'the place identified with y', or 'the place at which x occurred'.

¹¹ How these rights and identities came to be constituted for Yanyatjarri would require a more extensive discussion and paper, drawing on his life history, travels, and genealogy—of which they are an expression.



Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra: The play of templates

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra, also known as 'Anitjarri no. 3', who died in 1992, was a man with a great talent for painting [8.1]. One of the original members of the Papunya Tula Artists cooperative, his home country was in the southern area of the Gibson Desert that links Pintupi speakers with those who regard their (very similar) language as Ngaatjatjara. He identified with both groups and was one of the last of the Gibson Desert people to leave their home countries in the late 1960s.

In the period 1973–75 Yanyatjarri was very active in painting, with an output that may have been stimulated by a long expedition in June of 1974 to visit his main sacred site, the Tingarri centre of Yawalyurrunya, as well as the intense performance of Tingarri initiations at Yayayi.¹⁰ The main 'stories' that Yanyatjarri painted, the Dreamings over which he exercised the rights of representation, were the

8.1

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra,
1975
Photo: Fred Myers

Tingarri cycle, especially that from the area of Kurlkurtanya to Kaakurutintjinya (Lake MacDonald), the *kuniya kutjarra* (two carpet snakes), *wati kutjarra* (two men), the *wayurta* (possum) Dreaming that crossed the Tingarri path, and *kutungu* (an old woman, who was a snake).¹¹

The chart entitled *Time series* [8.2] presents all of Yanyatjarri's paintings in order of their production (or recording). It shows something of the overall development of his work and his use of certain figures across stories of differing content and ritual form. It is also possible to see what occurs in different paintings of the same place, or of the same story, and what iconographies are deployed. I use the term 'feature' to refer to numbered distinctive graphic signs in the paintings for which I recorded information from the painter.

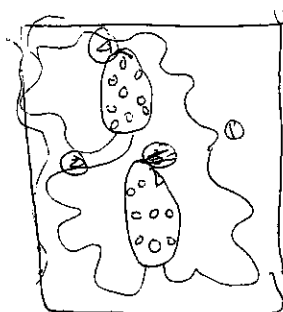
The discussion of Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra's work is divided into three main parts. While I try to keep within the framework of historical sequence in his painting, it is useful to recognise overall frameworks of what might be extravagantly referred to as 'experimentation' or more modestly as 'exploration'. The first part of my discussion will focus on the strategies of representation embodied mainly in a series of paintings of the Tingarri tradition, following the development of the five-circle grid template in his paintings. The second part of the analysis involves Tjakamarra's deployment of rectilinear images, a practice that is not entirely temporally separate from the five-circle grid development. Finally, I will turn to the effects of painting on larger canvases.

8.2

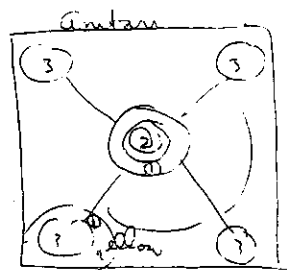
*Time series:**Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra*

This chart (read top left to bottom right) shows my field sketches of every painting produced by the artist over a two-year period (1973–75), in date order. In each painting certain graphic signs emerged as significant in my discussions with the artist, and these were numbered at the time. I use the term 'feature' to refer to them in this essay. Since the main discussion of the sketches occurs within the text, the captions contain minimal information: the reference number from my field notebooks, the place and Dreaming to which the painting refers, and the date on which the sketch was made. Many of the sketches are reproduced and discussed individually later in the essay: where this is the case the individual figure number is placed beside the number of the sketch.

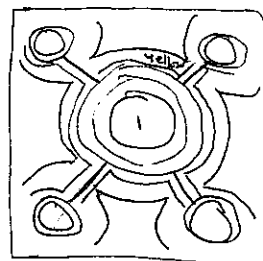
8.2 continues overleaf...



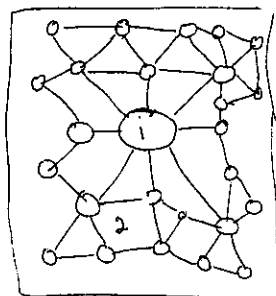
Painting 4
Nyilinya, carpet snakes
19 September 1973



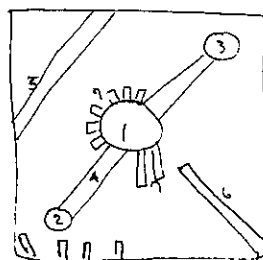
Painting 68 (8.3)
Kurukurtanya, Tingarri
19 September 1973



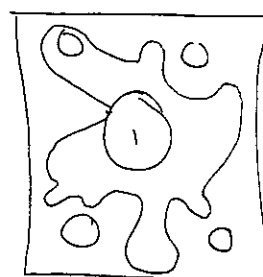
Painting 70 (8.4)
Kantawarranya, Tingarri
5 March 1974



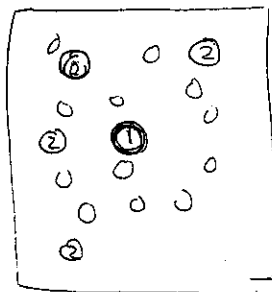
Painting 85 (8.14)
Tjukulapirinya, Tingarri
19 March 1974



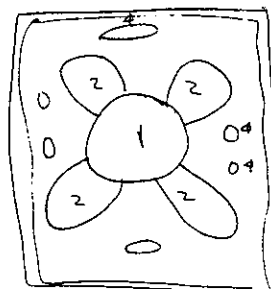
Painting 93 (8.5)
Mulutjitinya, Tingarri
25 March 1974



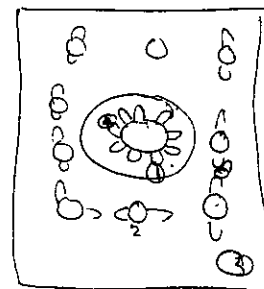
Painting 98 (8.13)
Tjuntinya, two carpet snakes
4 April 1974



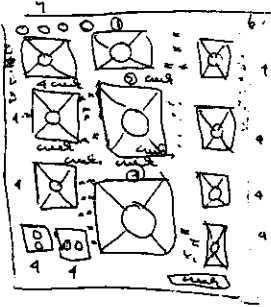
Painting 99 (8.15)
Kirritjinya, Tingarri
4 April 1974



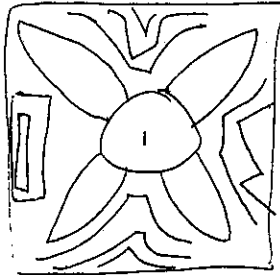
Painting 104
Tjilingannga, two carpet snakes
11 April 1974



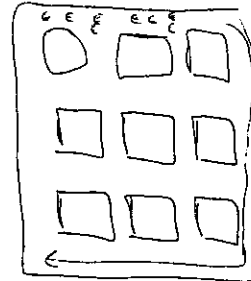
Painting 107
Wakulanya, Yula
16 April 1974



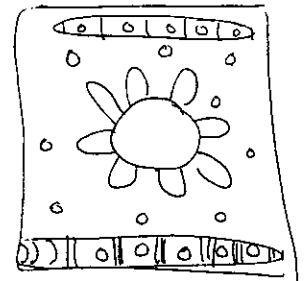
Painting 113 (8.18)
Rilynga, Tingarri
4 June 1974



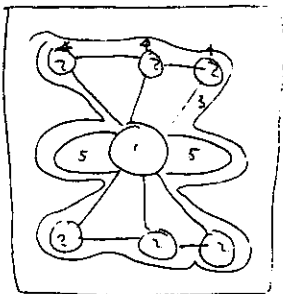
Painting 118 (8.6)
Tjimanya, Tingarri
4 June 1974



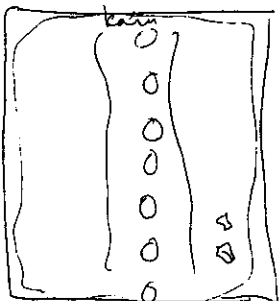
Painting 153 (8.19)
Yiitjurunya, Tingarri
6 August 1974



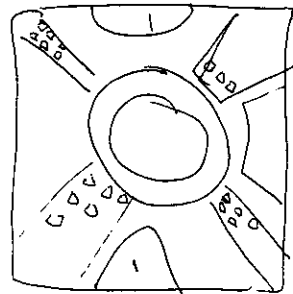
Painting 154
Larlitanya, *wati kutjarra*
6 August 1974



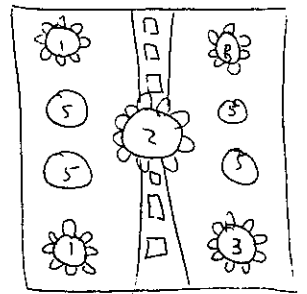
Painting 188
Yalkarnintja, Tingarri
12 September 1974



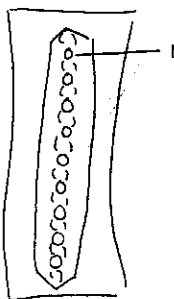
Painting 219 (8.25)
Mingarritalnga, Tingarri
25 September 1974



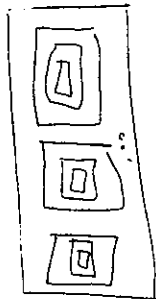
Painting 222 (8.9)
Pakaranganya, *wati kutjarra*
3 October 1974



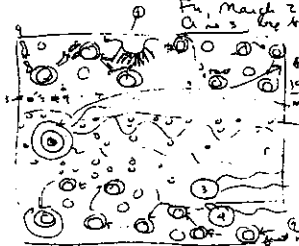
Painting 230 (8.26)
Lungkartanya, *monitor lizard*
15 October 1974



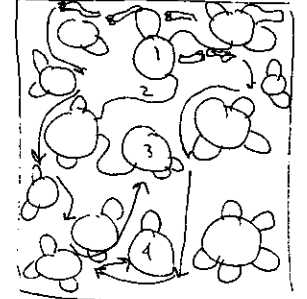
Painting 257 (8.22)
Ngaminya, Tingarri/women
20 December 1974



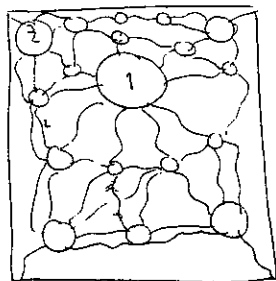
Painting 258 (8.23)
Wangukaratjanya (from
Kurlkurtanya), Tingarri
20 December 1974



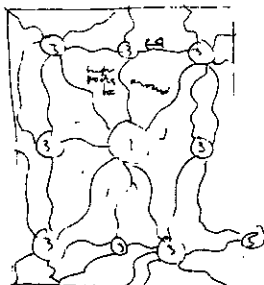
Painting 259 (8.28)
Big map of country (Tjuntinya,
etc.), two carpet snakes,
kutungu, native cat (Tingarri)
21 March 1975



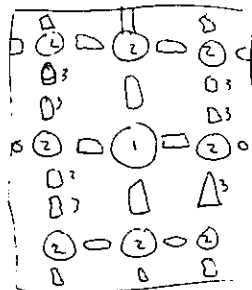
Painting 260 (8.16)
Kiritjinya (2), Tingarri
21 March 1975



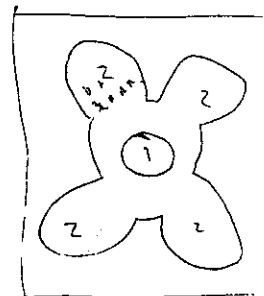
Painting 169
Ngumulynga, two boys
26 August 1974



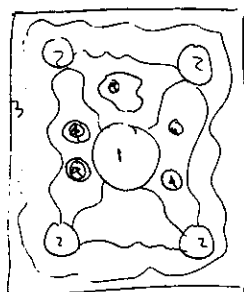
Painting 176
Palykarpungkunya,
two carpet snakes
31 August 1974



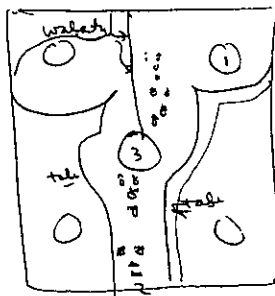
Painting 178 (8.32)
Maraputanya, wati kutjarra
3 September 1974



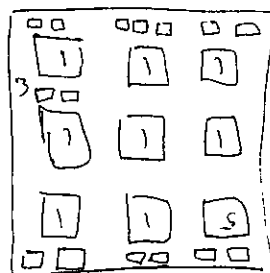
Painting 179 (8.7)
Karrkunya, initiation
3 September 1974



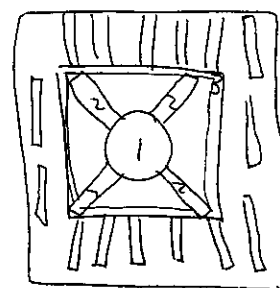
Painting 239 (8.30)
Piritjtjinya, two carpet snakes
7 November 1974



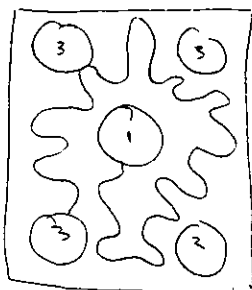
Painting 241 (8.27)
Yiitjurunya, Tingarri
20 November 1974



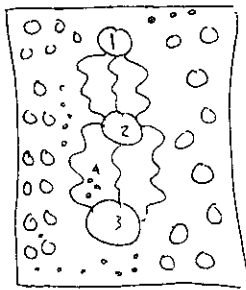
Painting 243 (8.20)
Mirraturanya (near Tjimanya),
Tingarri
21 November 1974



Painting 248 (8.21)
Kuntarrinytjanya, Tingarri
27 November 1974



Painting 264 (8.11)
Yiilytjinya, two carpet snakes
10 April 1975



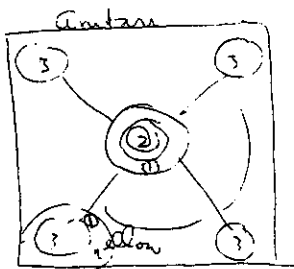
Painting 265
Tjilingannga, two carpet snakes
10 April 1975

8.2 (continued)

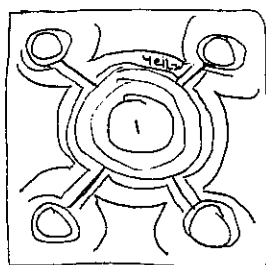
Time series:

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra

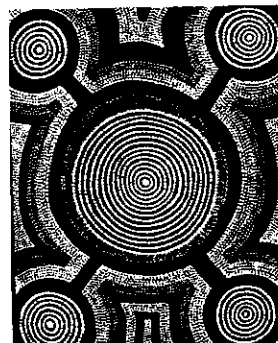
Field sketches of every painting produced by the artist over a two-year period (1973-75) in date order (read top left to bottom right).



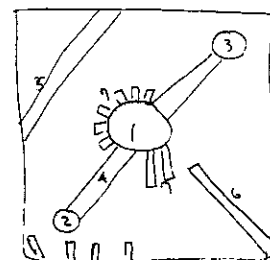
8.3
Painting 68
Kurkurtanya



8.4
Painting 70
Kantawarranya



8.4a
Painting 70



8.5
Painting 93
Mulutjitinya

Five-circle grids and body designs

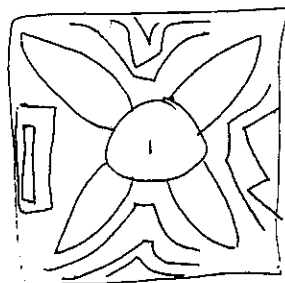
I can best begin with two early paintings I recorded. These images involve two sites of the Tingarri, quite conventionally represented in the five-roundel configuration, painted in acrylics on 60 x 90 cm canvas boards. Painting 68 [8.3] is of *Kurkurtanya* (a waterhole represented by a circle: feature 1). The image refers to the set of hills where the Tingarri men—a group of young men initiates under the control of *kuninka* (native cat)—came after leaving *Yawalyurrunya* soakage. The painting includes a number of other named places. At the centre of the image is a cave (feature 2) which is near *Yawalyurrunya*. In the hills nearby is the cave known as *Kantawarranya* (Yellow-ochre-place), from which people regularly collect the ochre for ceremonies. The circles on the periphery (feature 3) represent this cave. Pintupi understand the deposits of yellow ochre there as a transformation from the 'original' ochre designs (called *walka*) placed on the backs and stomachs of the Tingarri initiates who visited there in the Dreaming.

The second image, painting 70 [8.4], which was said to be *Kantawarranya* itself, is a five-circle grid that simply intensifies the focus on the central roundel. Both of these images project onto the dimensions of the canvas board the ochre body-design of circles

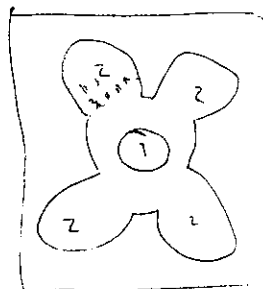
connected by lines worn by Tingarri initiates. Yarnangu say that these hills are the place where a large number of Tingarri men stopped to rest on their way towards Lake MacDonald. The hills include among them other distinguishable named places, of which Yanyatjarri also painted images from time to time—*Rilynga* (a rockhole) and *Pilintjinya*.

Modifying the five-circle grid

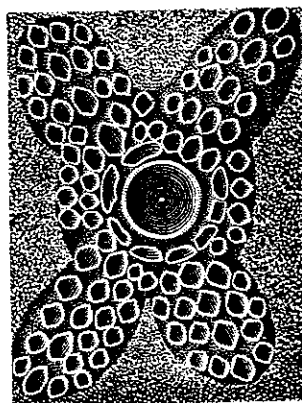
It is worth tracing the ways in which Yanyatjarri modifies the five-circle grid, using it again and again. Painting 93 [8.5] is again of the Tingarri, still on the path to Lake MacDonald, at *Mulutjitinya*. While Yanyatjarri here combines roundels and rectilinear shapes in an unusual way, the underlying template—providing an expectation that the painter modifies—is the five-circle grid. The central circle (feature 1) is a waterhole, a *walartu* (lake), and the organisation of the circles occupies the diagonal. At the central circle (which is probably also a ceremonial ground) one of the men swung a sacred object that flew off and landed at the place marked by feature 3, making a larger water here where it penetrated the ground. Feature 4 (connecting the circles) is a creek, while the rectilinear shapes 5 and 6 represent sandhills abutting on the site. Feature 2 is a high hill



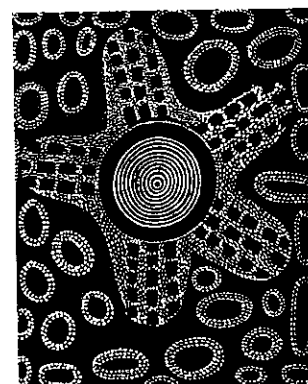
8.6
Painting 118
Tjimanya



8.7
Painting 179
Karrkunya



8.7a Painting 179



8.8
see overleaf

Extending the five-circle grid

while the rectilinear shapes spinning off from the centre are small creeks. The image does seem to create a sense of centrifugal force, as with a sacred object flying off from its hair string, connecting the features of the landscape through ancestral activity.

It is also possible for the painter to put other twists on the grid. Painting 118 [8.6] is of another Tingarri story, at Tjimanya, but it represents a different group of initiatory ancestors travelling on a more southern route. In this painting, the central roundel represents a soakage. The emphasis of the image is on a waterhole right in the middle of sandhills (the pointed semicircles), without any hills or rocks, created as a *karnala* (cleared ceremonial ground). The native cat sang out from a nearby hill, Mirraturanya, and herded the novices towards Tjimanya where they lay in a hole, in the fire, as novices do in the cleared ceremonial ground.¹² This placing of novices 'into the fire' is a central part of the preparation of Tingarri, and while the pointed semicircles are said to be sandhills, they also might represent the flickering flames of the fire, with the central position of the feature reflecting the fire's centrality to Tingarri initiatory practice. While not overtly representing the five-circle grid the whole image formally manipulates the same space as the grid.

The basic spatial structures of the five-circle grid can be modified by Yanyatjarri to quite different effects. For example, painting 179 [8.7] is of an important site known as Karrkunya (Red-ochre-place).¹³ It consists of a roundel in the centre partially surrounded by a larger circle and four semicircular shapes. These four semicircles actually represent the ends of two *kurtitji* (shields), where young men secluded for ceremony are supposed to throw a ceremonial offering of grass. At this place, an initiatory operation on a young man went wrong and he died. From his blood, one now finds red ochre at the place. The central roundel is now a *yapu* (rock). This image—recorded on 3 September 1974—is strikingly similar to an untitled painting in the Kluge collection [8.8] painted by Yanyatjarri when he was living at Tjukurla in 1973.

Painting 222 [8.9] returns to the *wati kutjarra* (two men) theme, at a place called Pakarangaranya (Get-up-and-stand-place). The image is built around a central roundel anchoring a more rectilinear set of diagonal structures. This roundel (feature 2) is said to be the waterhole at Pakarangaranya, 'their camp'. The two men were frightened of an attack by *mamu* (demons) and so they stood up from their camp in the centre, facing in opposite directions. They turned

¹² See also painting 243 (8.20), constructed in a rectilinear form.

¹³ Readers should note that this western desert site is not the same place as the Warlpiri site of Karrku, far to the north and east, referred to in Françoise Dussart's paper in this volume. The use of such a name for more than one place is quite common, especially when it refers to a distinctive feature such as red ochre.

8.8

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra

Untitled

1973

Private collection

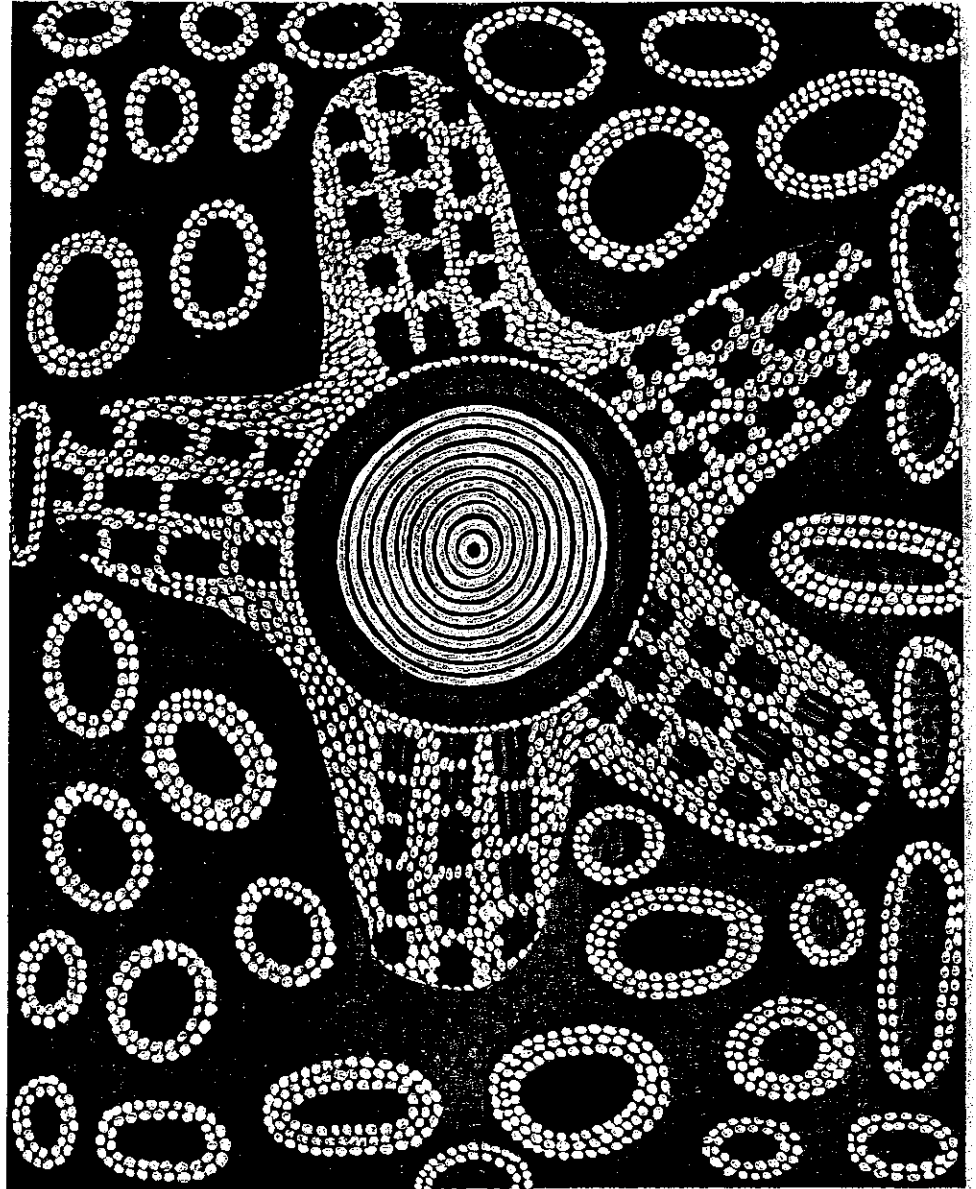
of John W. Kluge

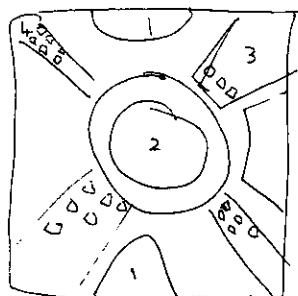
1993.0006.008

Acrylic on masonite

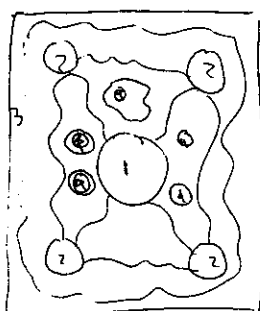
75.5 x 71 cm

This painting bears a marked resemblance to *Karrkunya*, by the same artist, recorded as painting 179 in my fieldnotes (see 8.7). The use of purple and red, the organisation of the spatial field, and the representation of forms that look like the stone flakes of *Karrkunya* suggest that it too represents the site of *Karrkunya*.

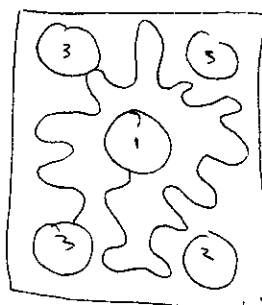




8.9
Painting 222
Pakarangaranya



8.10
Painting 239
Piritjitjinya



8.11
Painting 264
Yilytjinya

to stone there. They are represented by the slightly triangular semicircles (feature 1), which indicate a seated person facing outward. The diagonal fields (feature 3) sweeping up to the corners represent gravelly areas of small rocks, and feature 4 indicates a gap in the hill made by the men getting up and standing around. In this image Yanyatjarri continues a pattern: he superimposes fields of small objects (stones in this case) on more fundamental geographical entities.

The five-circle grid also underlies a series of snake paintings that Yanyatjarri did during this period and subsequently. In painting 239 [8.10] Yanyatjarri takes up the story of the two carpet snakes who were being led around by *nyuuna* (death adder). The story is located at Piritjitjinya, where the snakes are resting. This is said to be a dangerous place where the snakes almost stayed permanently. The organisation of the image uses a five-circle structure and the meandering lines that Yanyatjarri almost invariably uses for the snakes. The central circle (feature 1) represents a cave, and the circles marked (2) represent openings out from the cave at the top of the hill. The two snakes wandered around this area, smelling the places, and leaving their mark. The circles and rough shapes marked (4) inside the image represent rockholes in the area. The meandering surround line represents the path of the death adder, enclosing the area of the two carpet snakes he is said to 'look after'. In this image, the five-circle structure represents a set of interconnected caves and openings to the outside as a two-dimensional, unified form.

It should be apparent that many of the two carpet snake paintings are yet another modification of the five-circle grid. Painting 264 [8.11], of the two carpet snakes at Yilytjinya (south of Paranya), is very similar in form to other paintings of Yanyatjarri's, such as one in the Kluge–Ruhe Collection [8.12], painted at Papunya between 1972 and 1974, that is simply titled *Snake Dreaming*. Feature 1 (in 8.11) is the main camp, on a creek made by the meandering path of the carpet snake. Feature 3 represents eggs that the snake laid and left behind. These are now large round stones outside the creek, on the plain. From here the snakes went eventually to Nyilinya (see 8.2, painting 4) where *kutungu* (old woman) hit one of them on the head and killed, cooked and ate it on her way to Kiwurnga. The other carpet snake was killed, Yanyatjarri said, by 'clever men'—not in the Dreaming. Yilytjinya is a place that men used to go to 'make' the carpet snakes increase. Here one can see the different way in which Yanyatjarri has arranged the story elements to fit the board's shape.

These images are structurally very similar to another painting of the two snakes. In painting 98 [8.13] the painter takes up the story of the two carpet snakes at Tjuntinya—*tjunti* usually refers to a cave. The five-roundel configuration centres on the *piti* (hole) of the death adder who led the two snakes around. This hole is a waterhole, and the meandering line that holds the painting together represents the movements of the death adder around this site, among some hills (represented by the outer circles) covered with a vegetation of spinifex and *wangunu* (woolly butt grass).

8.12

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra

Snake Dreaming

c. 1972–1974

Private collection

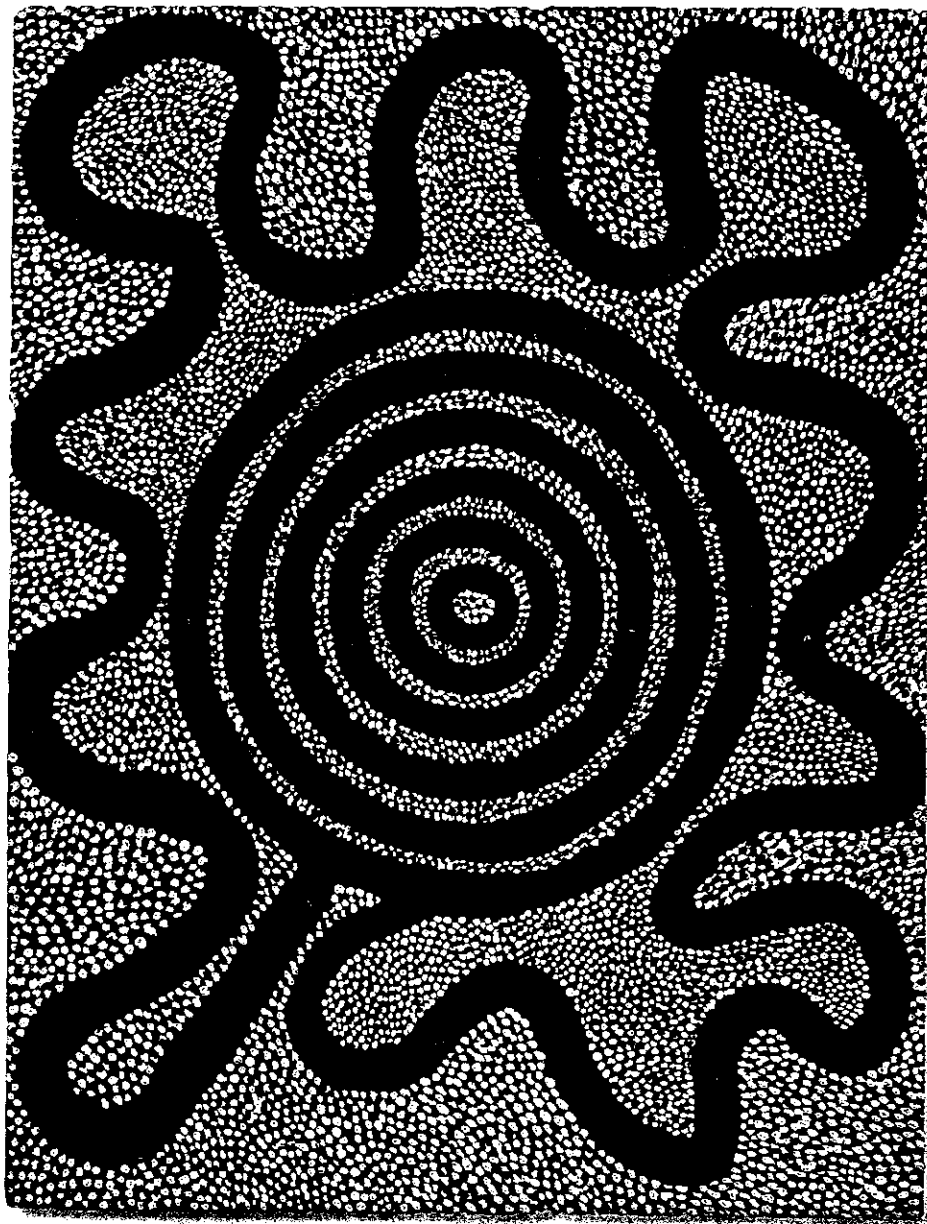
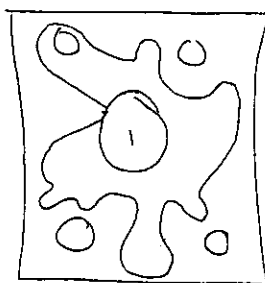
of John W. Kluge

1993.0006.007

Acrylic on masonite

57 x 43 cm

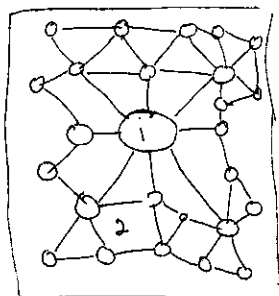
This painting is very similar in form to Yanyatjarri's two carpet snake paintings which are based on the five-circle grid. In this case the grid is not overtly present, but its status as a template for the painting can nevertheless be inferred through comparison with paintings such as the ones illustrated in (8.11) and (8.13).



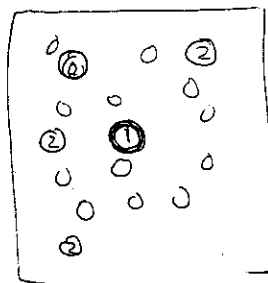
8.13

Painting 98

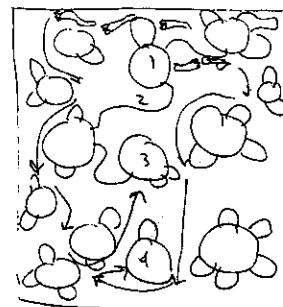
Tjuntinya



8.14
Painting 85
Tjukulapirninnya



8.15
Painting 99
Kirritjinya 1



8.16
Painting 260
Kirritjinya 2

Multiplicity as potency

The five-circle grid contains within it the potential for extension. Links may be established through circles and lines to other places. These in turn become the focal points for other grids, so that eventually a wider network of relationships is created. We will see later how this process is reflected in the form of the larger canvasses that were subsequently produced by Pintupi artists. At this stage, however, I want to draw attention to the symbolic aspects of multiplicity represented in some of the earlier paintings.

Painting 85 [8.14] is again of the Tingarri, the group of men now travelling further on their way towards Lake MacDonald. At Tjukulapirninnya (Many-rockholes-place) the multiplicity and magnitude of their aggregation is conveyed through the large number of small circles, arrayed around a large central circle. Representing what was said to be 'a big water', this circle was also a ceremonial ground (typically a cleared area, scraped free of vegetation) in the Dreaming; here the novices gathered around an upright pole in its centre. Before 1973 some painters might have painted such a ceremonial pole directly, but by the time I recorded this example such visual information was usually being withheld. Instead, another dimension of the place's potency is

featured—the size, or sheer number, of the aggregation. The numerous smaller rockholes come from (are transformations of) the novices sitting around the rocks. In a sense, the rocks are their bodies, *purlirringu* (turned into stone).

For a subsequent image, painting 99 [8.15], I have only a poor annotation, unfortunately. I include it because it helps understanding of the formal means through which multiplicity is presented. Kirritjinya is a Tingarri place *en route* from Yawalyurru to Lake MacDonald where a large number of the Tingarri men came, under the direction of *kuninka* (native cat). Where they sat, small rockholes abound. At the centre, in what looks like a modification of a seven-circle configuration with others added, is the large waterhole. Yanyatjarri produced a different representation of this same story much later (painting 260). This later painting [8.16] emphasises a particular feature of the story left out of the first image—the Tingarri men's hunting, killing, and cooking of an old man from that site who was hiding underground. Footprints indicate the old man's movements at the site, and his use of a noisy sacred object is alluded to in the curving lines that are said to stand for a *wila* (ceremonial necklace) worn by initiates. Yet there is probably some standard

8.17

John Tjakamarra

*Tingarri men travelling
from Kirij (Kirritjinya) to
Tjukala*

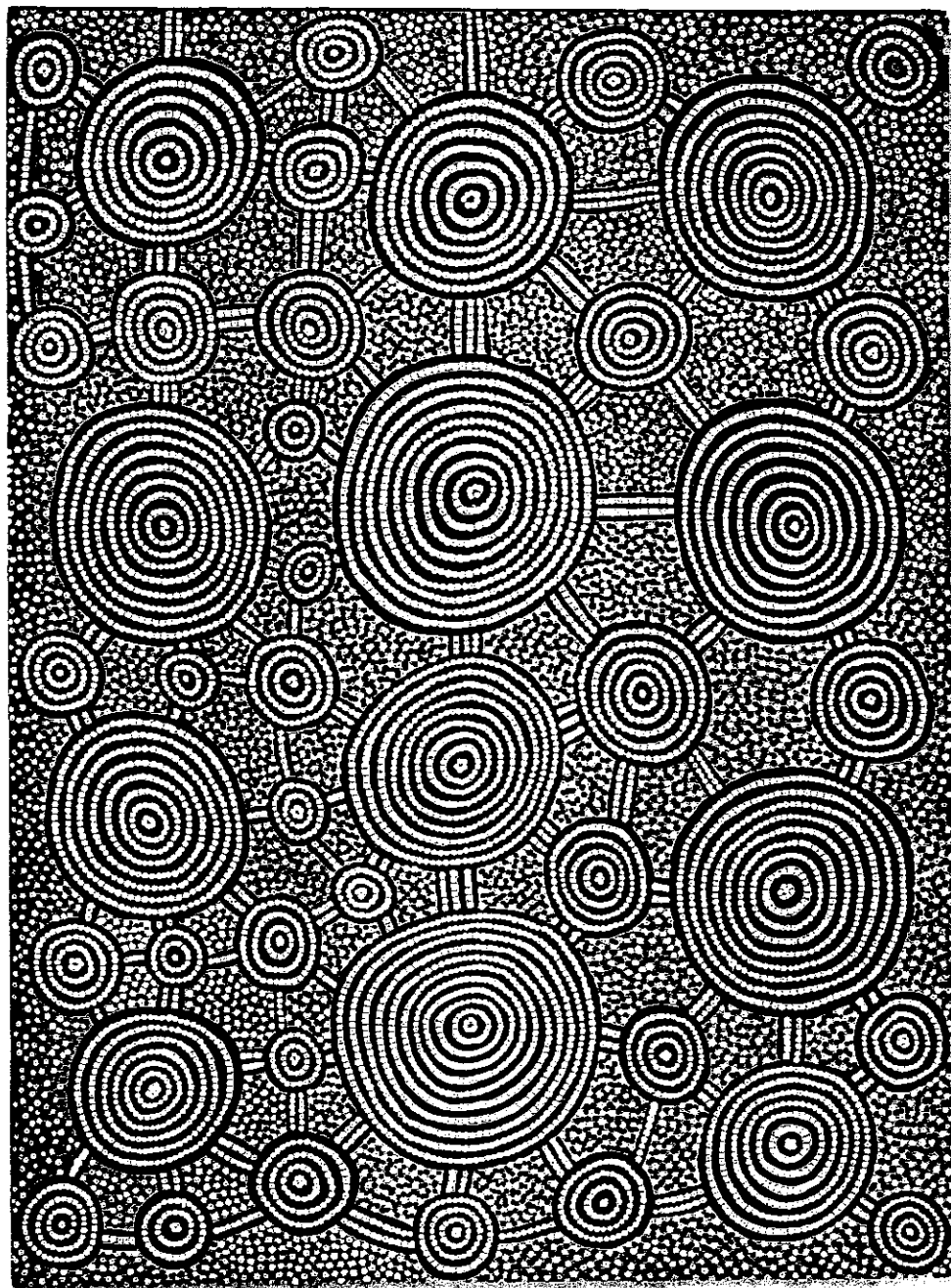
1991

1991.0036.010

Acrylic on canvas

120.5 x 88 cm

This painting, by Yanyatjarri's close kinsman and countryman John Tjakamarra, bears comparison with the earlier two paintings by Yanyatjarri, recorded in my field notes as paintings 99 and 260. It clearly emphasises, with its large number of abstracted circles, the concern with multiplicity.



represented by the choice in the first painting (8.15), as we can see from the Kluge–Ruhe Collection's painting from 1991 of Kirritjinya by Yanyatjarri's classificatory brother, John Tjakamarra [8.17]. He too emphasises the multiplicity of rockholes and thereby the multiplicity of Tingarri men.

Rectangles and paths

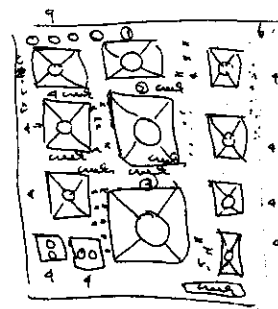
In mid-1974 a major period of Tingarri initiation took place in the Pintupi community at Yayayi. It corresponds—perhaps only coincidentally—with two developments in Yanyatjarri's paintings: an increased recourse to rectilinear forms and the appearance of a 'path' motif. One can see a sensibility at play here, in exploring the potential of distinctive forms.

Painting 113 [8.18] returns to the Tingarri story in the hills around Kurlkurtanya, and is focused on the place known as Rilynga. Resorting in a striking fashion to a rectilinear imagery, this painting emphasises some of the relationships among the places created in the Tingarri movements as the native cat brought the Tingarri men towards Lake MacDonald. This narrative emphasis is a common strategy for painters who wish to indicate the *coinvolvement* of geographically distinguishable features in a larger story. It also amounts to another version of places that are sometimes painted separately. Such a painting reveals the significance of the Dreaming, its truth. At the top, feature 1 is Rilynga, a large rockhole, and feature 2 is Pilintjinya (another waterhole), while feature 3 is Kurlkurtanya (see [8.3] for comparison). These waterholes occupy the central space of the image, representing the spatial logic of residing in the area, with camps drawing on all three water sources. The other rectilinear features, organised with the whole as part of a three-column arrangement, represent the hills and rocks which are the Tingarri men in their numbers. Around the outside, dotting represents the mulga scrub around the hills. The native cat's tracks

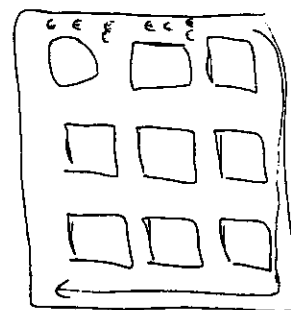
are found within the image along the spaces that the painter identified as 'creeks' in the hills.

The next image, painting 153 [8.19], is of a place where the native cat, *en route* to round up the Tingarri men at Yawalyurrunya, encounters the *wayurta* (possum) people at the series of *maluri* (claypans) and a soakage known as Yitjurunya (where the painter's mother's father died). It was painted in acrylics with brush on laminated board. The image emphasises rectilinear form, once again in a three-column grid, with a path of *wayurta* (possum) tracks circling around three sides. The possums, who were from this place, were sitting in their cleared ceremonial grounds (now a claypan), which are represented by the rectilinear forms typically incised by western desert people on sacred boards. While the possums were gathered here at night, singing, the powerful *kuninka* (native cat) man came into view. He stopped to decorate himself with vegetable down in the design associated with him, and a large bloodwood tree marks the spot at the site. It is unrepresented in this painting, but is represented as the central circle in painting 241 (see 8.27). The possums saw the awe-inspiring large sacred object he carried and, terrified, said nothing to him. As he ran, the native cat used the dramatic and ritualised high stepping motion typical of ceremonial and anger-display contexts and this is said to have resulted in more claypans. The centre square represents a reliable soakage, with smaller ones around, but the rectilinear form presumably alludes to designs on the sacred object he carried—embodying his power.

Painting 243 [8.20] represents another Tingarri site, Mirraturanya, which is a series of swampy claypans where the Tingarri men, women, and novices came together. The men are said to be on the top right area in the image, and the women on the lower left. The novices were 'put in the fire' and subsequently 'revealed' (brought out of all-male seclusion) at what is now the soakage of Tjimanya.

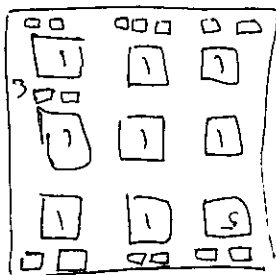


8.18
Painting 113
Rilynga

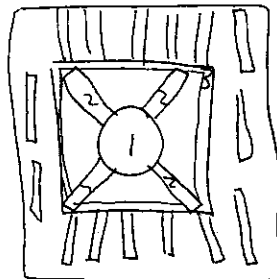


8.19
Painting 153
Yitjurunya 1

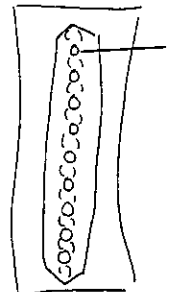
Sketch from notebook
and painting



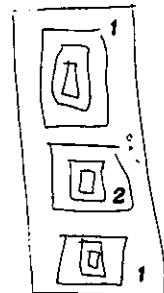
8.20
Painting 243
Mirraturanya



8.21
Painting 248
Kuntarrinytjanya



8.22
Painting 257
Ngaminya



8.23
Painting 258
Wangukaratjanya

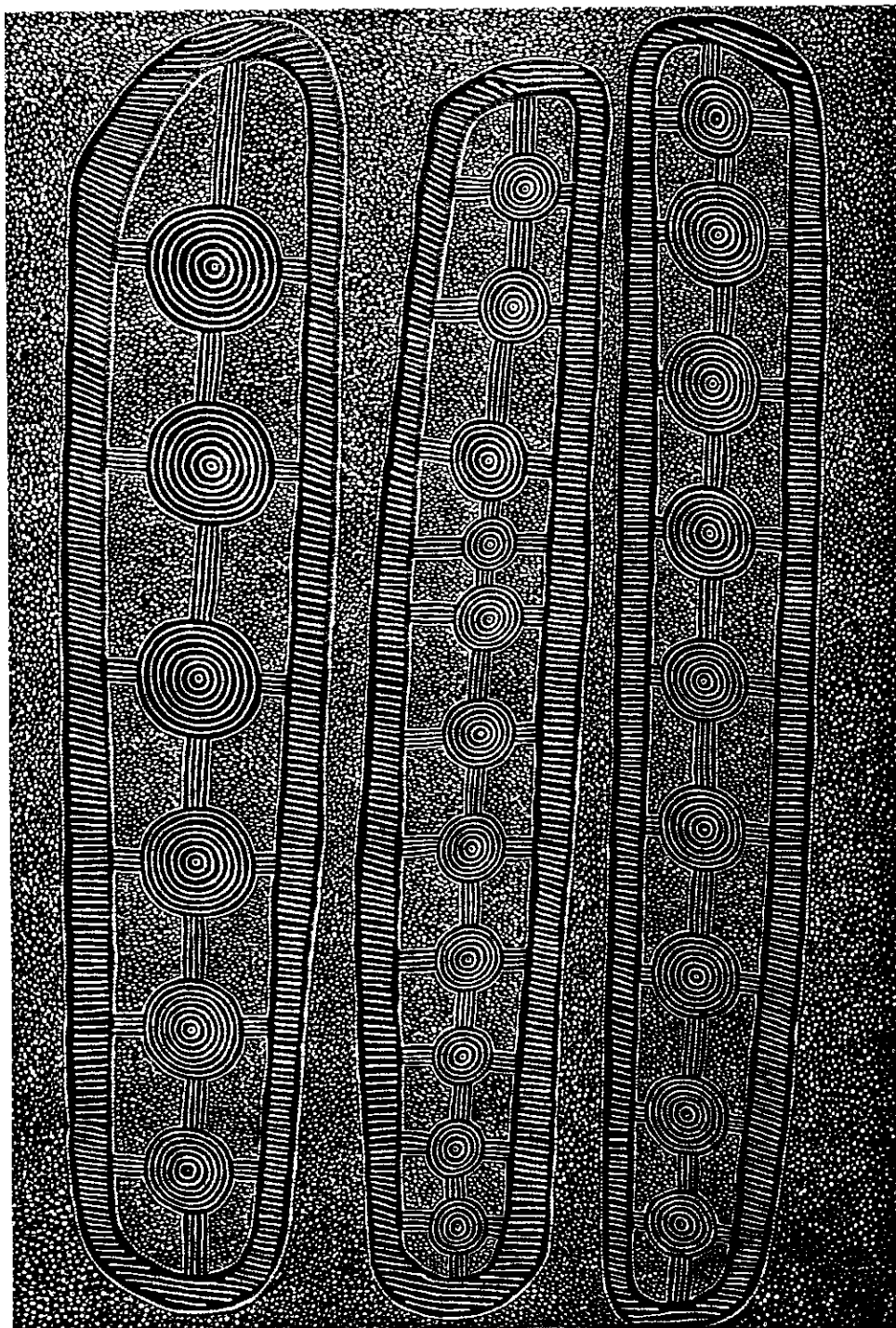
In contrast to the image of Tjimanya (8.6) that emphasised the fire, the six-feature grid uses rectilinear shapes rather than circles, and all but one of these larger squares were said to be 'the swamp', a very big one. The smaller squares at the top periphery are said to be some kutinpa (stony rises), the places where the older men directing the proceedings 'sang out' to begin the ceremony. Feature 3 (the small squares on the left, below the first row) represents a stony rise where the area for the novices' fire pit was dug out—where they came to stand while being revealed—and where water can now be found in the swampy area. Feature 5 (the large lower right square) is Tjimanya.

Painting 248 [8.21] is more unusual in deploying a combination of circular and rectilinear shapes. The painting represents another point on the path of the Tingarri story from Yawalyurru, at a place called Kuntarrinytjanya (Becoming-ashamed-place). This place is on the Tingarri travels beyond Kurlkurtanya, and it is the conception place of Yanyatjarri's youngest brother. The central circle is the rockhole, surrounded by diagonal rectilinear shapes that are identified as sacred objects that the Tingarri men were decorating on their way to this place from Rilynga. The native cat stole these sacred boards, but when he came to this place, he felt *kuntarringu*

(ashamed), giving the place its name. The square feature surrounding the sacred objects and the waterhole is the hill, and beyond it, the rectilinear shapes indicate the sandhills around the hill.

Rectilinear forms represent a minority of the images Yanyatjarri painted, but they are far more common in his work than in that of other painters. Painting 257 [8.22] is unusual for this period, being small and very narrow and painted on fibre board rather than canvas board. I had asked Yanyatjarri to paint a board for me, and when he discovered there were none of the usual size available, he chose to do two paintings on small pieces of fibre board, a practice that had become less frequent after 1972. The choice of design form may owe much to the nature of the paintable surface, which is quite similar to the shape of ritual objects themselves. The painting belongs to the *kungka* (women) Dreaming.

The particular design is associated with events relating to Marapintinya, where the women had pierced their nasal septums. The central image is said to be a sacred object, not belonging to men but to women. Women carried these objects as they accompanied the Tingarri men near the Pollock Hills north of Marapintinya. A separate group of travelling Tingarri men was sitting south of them in the Pollock



8.24

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra
Women's Dreaming,
 near Kiwirrkura

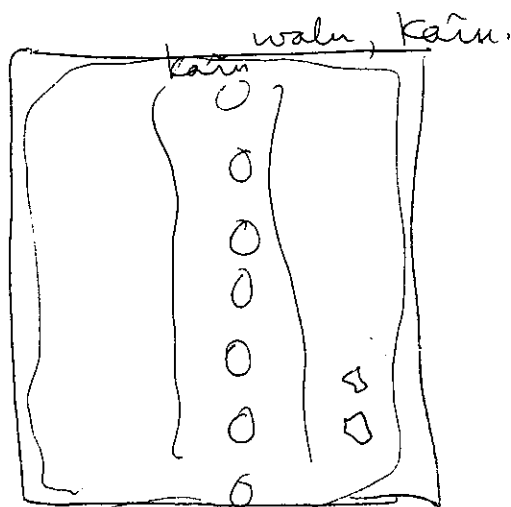
1989

1990.7024.001

Acrylic on canvas

151 x 101.5 cm

This painting appears to be an elaboration of the design found in Yanyatjarri's earlier small painting of 1974, recorded in my field notes as painting 257 (see 8.22). Therefore it quite possibly refers more specifically to the same site (Ngaminya).



8.25
Painting 219
Mingarritalinga

Hills, while the women were north in the sandhills at Ngaminya. Their food, *walpuru*, lies in a line along the sandhill. These women were cooking this food, a kind of bush vegetable that is cooked in hot ashes like a yam and of which only the protruding *pina* ('ears') are eaten. In this painting the circles represent the firm breasts and nipples of a maturing girl and the half circles represent the edible top part of the *walpuru*. When cooked, *walpuru* makes a loud cracking or exploding noise. The song verse associated with the design was given as follows:

ma punta palarni
taarrtarma
ma punta palarni
kinkinma punta

The song refers to the cracking sound—*taarrtarma*—which frightened the women, so that they ran away. This painting should be compared with one Yanyatjarri painted on canvas in 1989, *Women's Dreaming, near Kiwirrkura* [8.24], now in the Kluge–Ruhe Collection, which seems to represent an elaboration of the design.

The next painting [8.24], which is numbered 258 in my notes, was made at the same time as painting 257. It was done with acrylics and brush, also on fibre board. The design is from one of the 'men Tingarri' travel paths. Yanyatjarri said the other (257) was *kungka* (woman) and this was *wati* (man).

The rectilinear design reflects the rectilinear incised patterns typically found on sacred boards of western

desert people. It should be considered simply as a painting of such a board. This story is about the Tingarri men who were sent by the native cat from Yawalyurrunya in the west toward Kaakurutintjinya (Lake MacDonald), where they were all killed. This image represents the events and their geographical imprint at a place called Wangukaratjanya. The design was glossed as a schematic map: the two outer features (1) are *pinangu* (small waterholes) that hold water just after rainfall, and (2) is a large rockhole where the native cat laid down his sacred boards and cooked his meat (using the boards to shift it in the fire). The dots around the designs represent *yurilpa* (flat clear land).

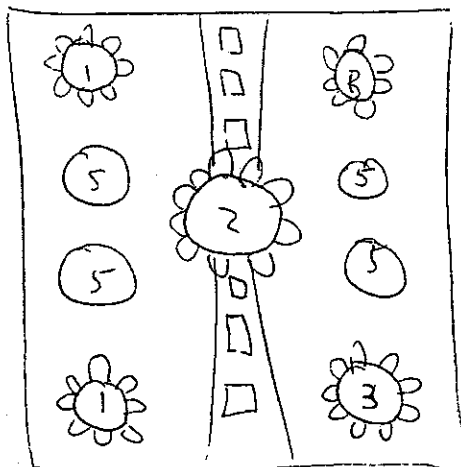
Imaging the 'path'

During this period of experimentation Yanyatjarri also developed some other components of visual language. Painting 219 [8.25] departs from the circle-grid composition, and offers an emphasis on a path or a channel of action. It also seems to sustain an interest in more rectilinear forms. This image of the Tingarri story at Mingarritalinga (near Pilintjinya, and part of the Yawalyurru and Kurlikurta cycle) represents the many small rockholes along the creek there. The line around the periphery of the image indicates the hill, and beyond it the painter identified a sandhill. Around the central creek (*karru*) and its rockholes (*walu*) he has included some irregular small shapes he identified as rocks and stones (*puli*), probably a gravelly area, made from the flowing blood of the Tingarri novices—a substance representing their life-force and strength. This life force is flowing down the creek bed, imaged as a broad path through the centre of the painting.

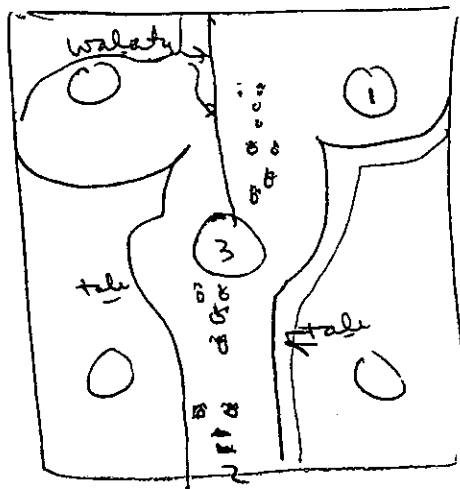
In the next two months Yanyatjarri painted two more images emphasising the path motif and also showing his mastery over the five-circle grid. Painting 230 [8.26], interestingly, repeats the figure of a central path to indicate a creek or watercourse. The place is identified as Lungkartanya (Blue-

tongued-monitor-lizard-place), and is said to be associated with a kind of sorcery known as *yinirarri*. The circle in the centre is 'the hole' where the blue tongued lizards were sitting. The 'daisy' shapes in the four corners mark rockholes. The use of a vertical central rectilinear for a creek echoes painting 219 (8.25) done only two weeks previously, although the mythologies are distinct.

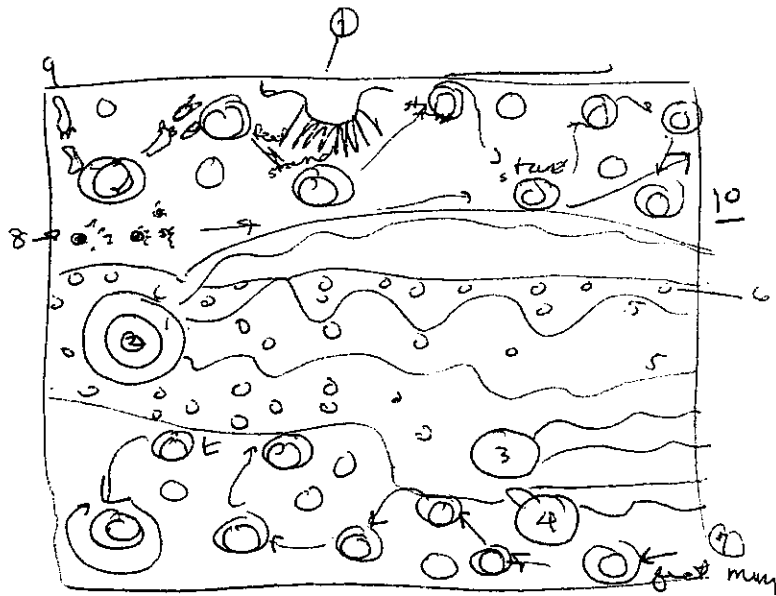
Painting 241 [8.27] is another representation of events at Yitjurunya where *kuninka* (native cat) encountered the possum people at a place known for its series of swampy claypans. This painting should be compared with the rectilinear form of (8.19), done three months earlier. The ceremonial grounds cleared by the possums, where they sat singing their ceremonies, are indicated by the two circles at the top (feature 1). The image has a 5-circle structure, broken up by the fields of colour. At the bottom of the painting, the native cat is putting on the vegetable down for ceremonial designs. The central circle (feature 3) is a very large bloodwood tree—a transformation of the native cat putting on his designs. Around the outskirts of the main area the painter has indicated the presence of a sandhill. It is difficult not to see this painting as building on the use of the vertical rectilinear to construct a main path for the native cat through the possum people's encampment, perhaps emphasising his movement and dancing more than in the earlier image.



8.26
Painting 230
Lungkartanya



8.27
Painting 241
Yitjurunya 2



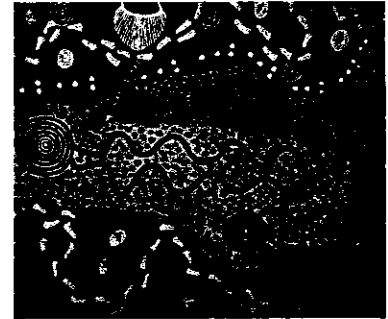
8.28
Painting 259
Big map of country

Sketch from field notebooks and painting. Yanyatjarri's first large canvas painting, with the main Dreaming tracks of his country.

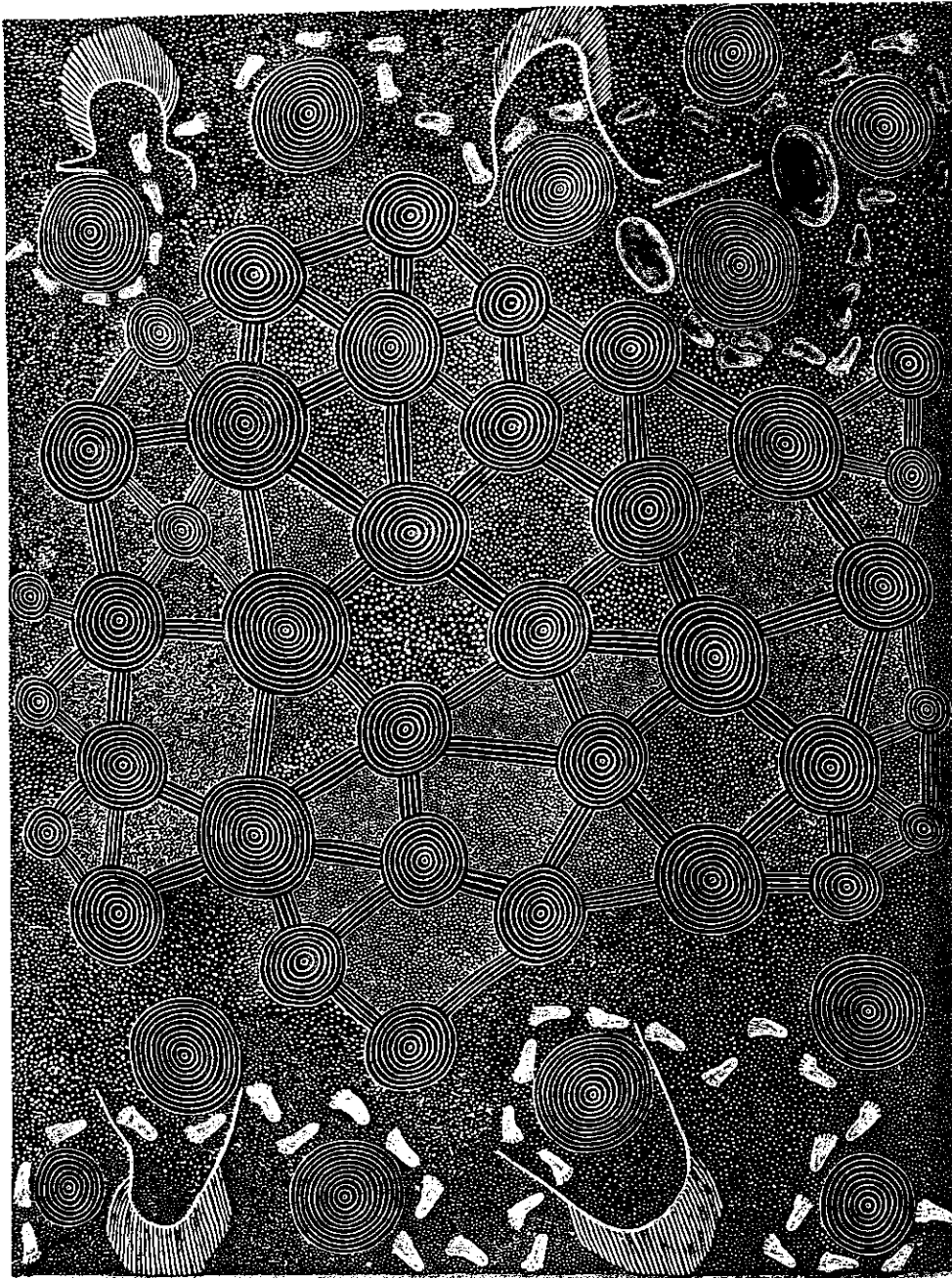
The effects of space: Complex images

One of the main developments that occurred shortly after my main period of fieldwork was the production of large canvases. Working on large canvases involved the development of a number of principles of design already evident in the earlier series of paintings: the replication of motifs, the use of grids to extend links to other sites and the combination of Dreamings from different places. One outcome was the 'complex map', which incorporated a number of a painter's Dreamings in one representation.

It was only in 1975 that Yanyatjarri began to do larger paintings on canvas. Painting 259 [8.28], the first of these, became a land rights poster. It involves most of the painter's major Dreaming stories. The bottom story concerns *kutungu*, the snake-woman who travelled eastward towards Muruntji. Her path across the country is shown. She saw the two carpet snakes of the second Dreaming, represented by Tjuntinya, one of their waterholes (the roundel



marked as feature 2), from which they are said to have 'risen'. Feature 3 represents the hole that the death adder opened for the two carpet snakes from another place, a cave called Kakalyalyanya (feature 4). This last place has poisonous, yellowish water which humans cannot drink. Feature 5, the meandering lines, represents the tracks or paths of the two carpet snakes, while the small circles (feature 6) indicate the meat of the two snakes (probably through reference to the holes made by the snakes in pursuit of their prey). At the bottom of the image, the circle marked as feature 7 indicates the place where the snake-woman saw the two carpet snakes digging holes in pursuit of game. At feature 8 the painter has indicated by means of track marks the path of the native cat, angrily pursuing the Tingarri men on his way from Lake MacDonald to Yawalyurru. Feature 9 represents another snake-woman figure heading westward from Pangkupirri rockhole towards a big waterhole south of Narurrinya, known as Kiwurnga. At the top, feature 1 represents a woman's possum-tail necklace, the *mawulyarri*, first spun by this ancestral figure. The circles at the top of the painting are *pura*, a vegetable food. The woman is said to be hunting, digging for a small animal called *tatjalpa*. At feature 10, the snake-woman 'went inside' at Kiwurnga. She saw a carpet snake and speared it where a bloodwood tree now stands. The carpet snake bit her stick and pulled her in, under the ground. The ceremony of the two carpet snakes, involving designs in vegetable down and sorcery spells, was 'given' to



8.29

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra

Muruntji story

1988

1989.7018.007

Acrylic on canvas

270 x 200 cm

This painting of Muruntji emphasises the relationship between *kutungu* (the snake-woman), represented by her footprints and the *mawulyarri* (possum-tail necklace), and the two carpet snakes. It replicates part of the large painting recorded by me as painting 259 in 1975 (see 8.28).

8.30

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra

Artist's country near

Kurlikurta

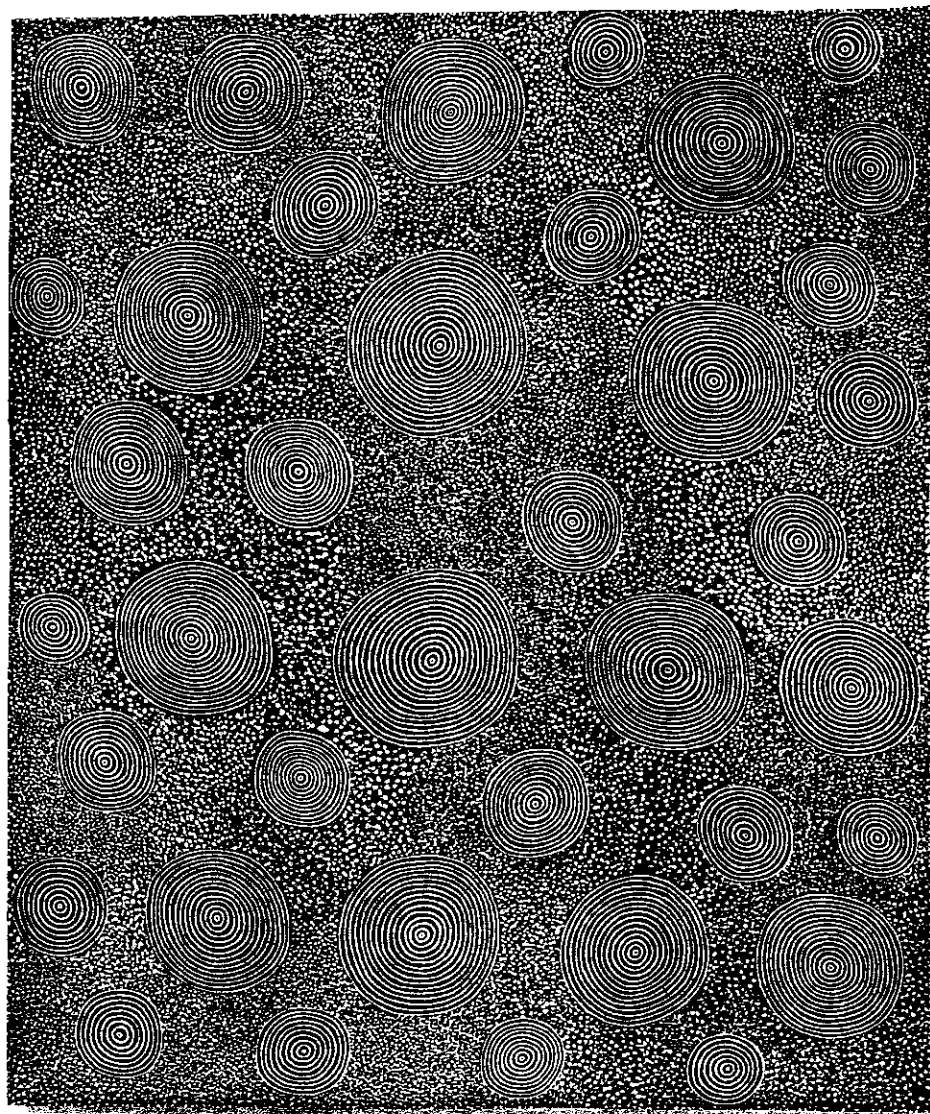
1988

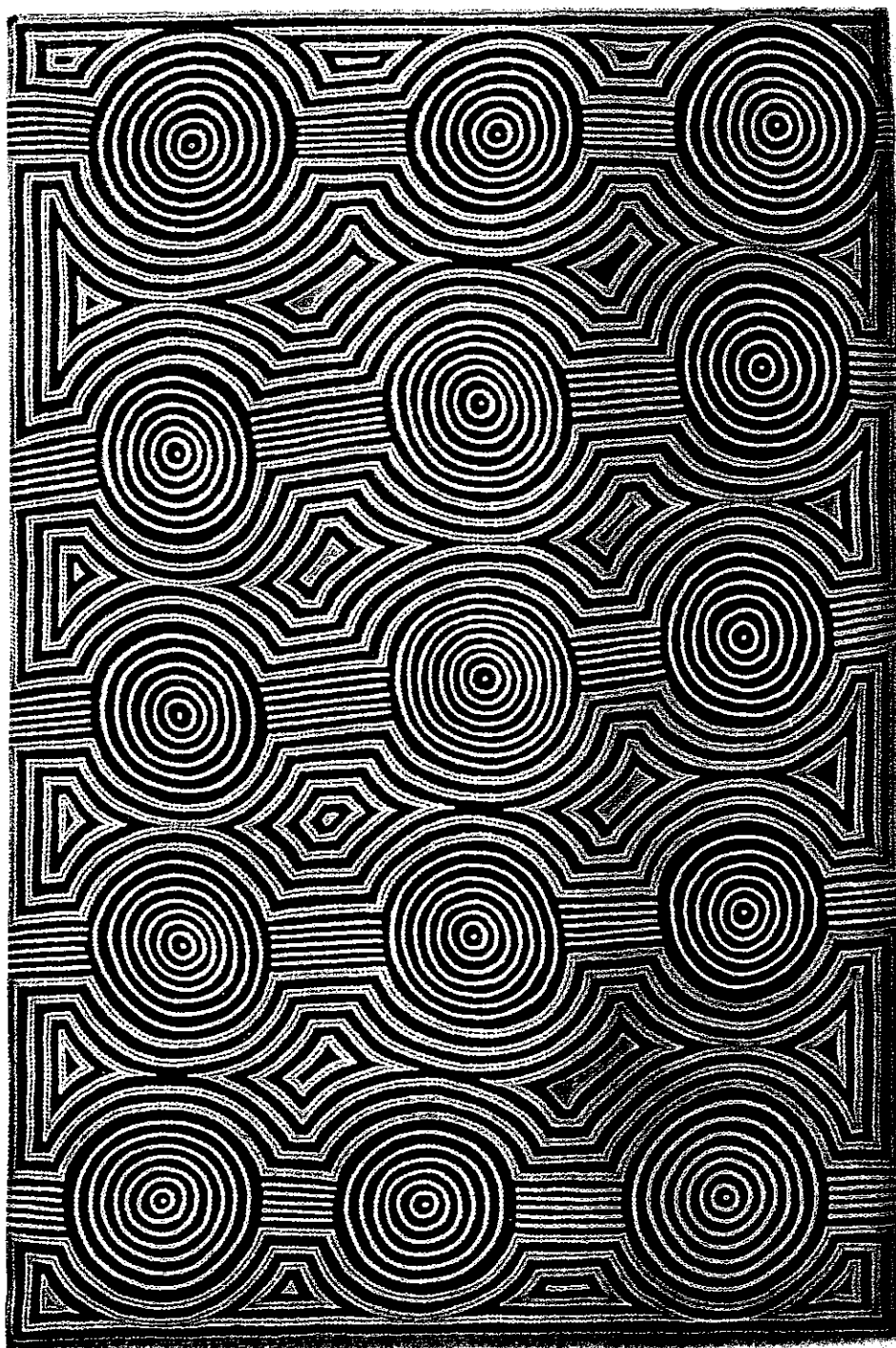
1989.7004.016

Acrylic on canvas

183 x 152.5 cm

In this large painting the series of concentric circles emphasises the large size of the group of Tingarri men gathered at Kurlikurtanya. In this respect it contrasts with the earlier, smaller, images of this place (8.3, 8.18) by the same artist. At the same time it displays the growing preference for greater abstraction which is evident in the later paintings.





8.31

Simon Tjakamarra

Pilintjinya

1988

1989.7004.014

Acrylic on canvas

180 x 120 cm

This painting by Yanyatjarri's younger brother Simon should be compared with Yanyatjarri's own paintings of the Kurlkurta complex, especially the one shown in (8.18), where the waterhole of Pilintjinya is represented by feature 2.

Yanyatjarri when he was a young man, and in return he gave large ceremonial gifts of meat. This grand painting of Yanyatjarri's is partially replicated by one in the Kluge–Ruhe Collection, labelled as *Muruntji story* [8.29].

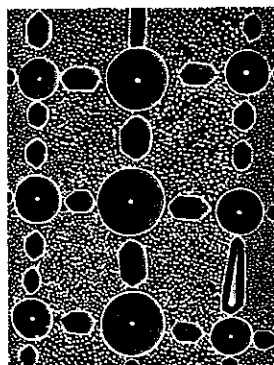
We can actually see the effects of the new image size, not only in the comparison of the five-circle-grid carpet snake paintings (4, 98, 264: see 8.2) with the Muruntji maps (8.28, 8.29), but also in the case of the multiple representations of Kurlkurtanya. Yanyatjarri's *Artist's country near Kurlkurta* [8.30] is a gracefully arranged series of concentric circles on a dotted background, emphasising *multiplicity* (the large number of Tingarri men). The earlier images from 1973 (8.3) and also 1974 (8.18), however, emphasise the specificity of the place and allude to the connected circles and lines used in painting on the bodies of the young men. Yanyatjarri's brother Simon's painting of the related site of Pilintjinya and part of the Kurlkurta complex [8.31] (cf Yanyatjarri's painting 8.18), has the distinctive trademark of his personal style—merging dots—but also uses the available size to emphasise multiplicity.

Composition and symmetry are not just significant properties of Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra's work: they constitute major components of the visual organisation of western desert painting generally. Indeed, Sutton's study of western desert acrylics—based on a sample of 300 paintings dating from 1971 to 1987—outlines some of the central constituents of what he calls the 'morphological meaning' of this art, 'its visual logic and the way forms come together to create the look of the art' (1988b: 59). These constituents are: that ceremony is the key locus of Aboriginal classic art; that the renewed recombination of a limited number of elements lies behind the austere economy and the consistency of the art; and that a tension between symmetry and asymmetry is a central force in its aesthetics. More particularly, however, Sutton develops a series of

broad generalisations about the composition of paintings and the role of symmetry within it. These suggest the existence of underlying templates much like those described by Morphy for Yolngu bark painting as 'generative and organizational components of the artistic system' (1992: 150; see also Watson (1996) on Balgo art).

Of course, as Morphy has argued for Arnhem Land, the locus of a dynamic in Yanyatjarri's work requires something other than the reduction of his corpus to the generative rules of a morphology. But it is in the *recombination* of a limited number of formal elements that he succeeds, especially in bringing rectilinear and circular iconographies into communication—and in this activity one can discern his virtuosity, engaging so many possibilities. There is a 'feeling for form developing with technical activities', as Boas suggested (1927: 11). One can observe the borrowing and relocation of sets of forms from one painting to the next, in which subtle repositionings begin to become very interesting to the accustomed viewer. Moreover their place in a series makes a good case for a consideration of them as evidence for an emerging practice—one that does not require an ideological formulation of a category 'art' or even of 'aesthetics'.

Such analysis can only provide the beginning for understanding the 'choices' or actual arrangements deployed by a particular painter—the impact of these arrangements may depend on a viewer or producer knowing what range of choices there might be. While the choices of how to represent an object, a place, or a story may rely on a range of conventional (rather than invented) signs—icons and indices—this selection seems based on a recognition of the material quality of the sign vehicle itself (eg size, shape, location, colour) in relation to other materialised signs. This is, precisely, the 'palpability of signs' that Jakobson found central to 'poetics' or 'aesthetics' (1960: 153). We can turn from the delineation of morphology, which Sutton

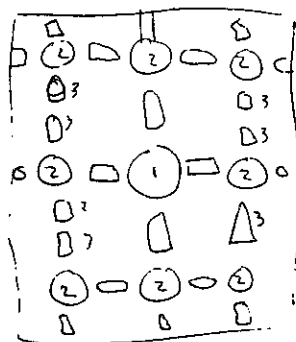


8.32

Painting 178

Maraputanya

Painting and sketch from
field notebook



emphasised, to a recognition of Yanyatjarri's 'virtuosity' in controlling these possibilities for his own expression.

Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra's paintings, taken over this period of time, show a burst of production around the time of our several trips to visit his country out west. This 'burst of production' is not simply an enthusiasm of quantity. The paintings show, I believe, an exploration of form and colour that is notable for its variety, for example in the use of rectilinear and roundel forms, as well as their combination. His paintings are rarely the rote application of a template (five- or seven-circle grids), but usually show some further consideration: he builds on a clear set of templates, repeatedly modifying them. The painting of Karrkunya (8.7), using the same colour combinations that are part of *Maraputanya* [8.32], makes the 'template' of the five-circle grid work with quite different shapes. The development of the 'creek'—the central vertical rectilinear—through the plane of the painting also seems to be a discovery he makes. Taken as a whole, and even ignoring the use of colour, Yanyatjarri's work is virtuosic in its interest in form.

8.33

Wuta Wuta stands
decorated and
ready for 'sorry
business' at Yayayi,
1974.

Photo: Fred Myers



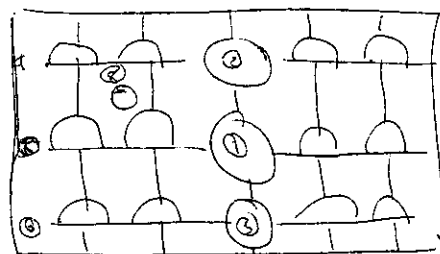
Wuta Wuta (Uta Uta) Tjangala: The Yumari paintings

In Wuta Wuta's paintings, the engagement with form is mediated (more than in Yanyatjarri's case) through a concern with an expression of his personal identity, an expression that, I believe, attempts to communicate his experience of ritual. Generally, the annotations produced for Wuta Wuta's paintings by most recorders are problematic. He spoke almost no English and was, moreover, rather an excitable sort of man, wildly expressive and playful. The series of paintings he produced in 1973–75 surprised me in review. He is known best for his masterful paintings of his own Dreaming at Ngurrapalangu and Yumari, but few of these appear in his rich output for nearly a year. Indeed, it seems that these places and their stories begin to appear more commonly after we made trips to the region and even more so with the growing prospect of returning to live on his country. This emphasis was also visible in his concern to have his sons gain knowledge of that country.

8.34

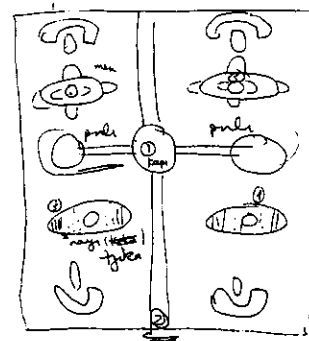
**Partial time series:
Wuta Wuta Tjangala**

This chart shows my field sketches of the first six paintings produced by the artist in the period 1973–75. The sketches are in date order, and include the first of his Wilkinkarra paintings (see 8.36).

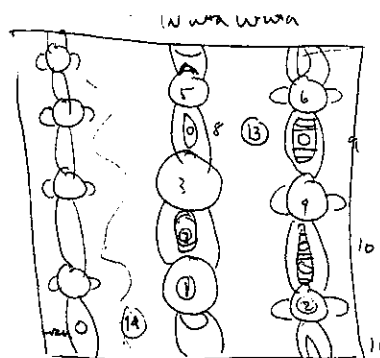


iyari (dengeru)

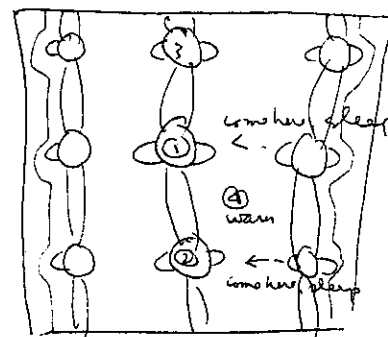
Painting 2
Tarkurrnga
12 September 1973



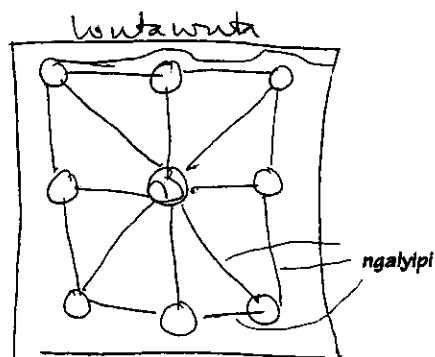
Painting 5
Walinngi
5 October 1973



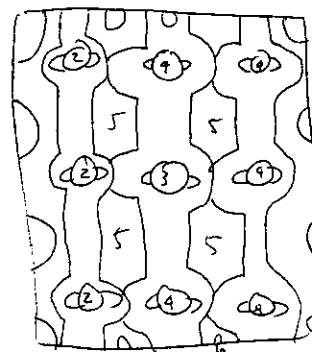
Painting 11
Tjapangartiwarnu
5 October 1973



Painting 16
Yawarrankunya
22 October 1973



Painting 20
Wilkinkarra
22 October 1973



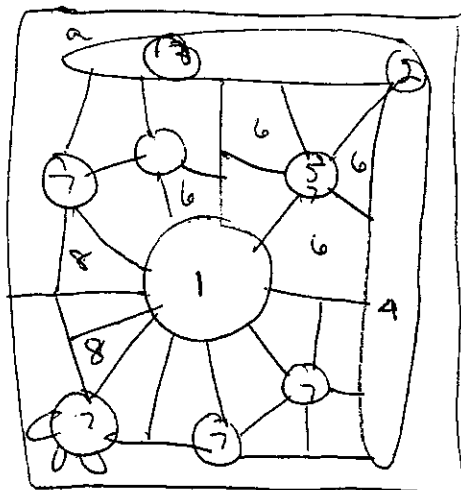
Painting 28
Malkanya
2 November 1973

The Pintupi living at Yayayi in 1973 had insecure tenure. They had moved from Papunya, a place dominated by other groups, to this nearby outstation, but at Yayayi they were still residing on land of which they were not the primary custodians. The paintings, by contrast and with significance, denote their *own* country.

Wilkinson

Major emphases of Wuta Wuta's early paintings are the *kungka kutjarra* (two women), who traverse his country on the way to Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay) and Wilkinkarra itself. Many painters produced images of Wilkinkarra, of course, but these are especially frequent in his work, and may reflect the performance of Tingarri ceremonies in 1973 in which reenactments of Wilkinkarra mythological sequences were significant. These were replaced, subsequently, with an intensified emphasis on the Yina (old man) Dreaming. At the same time his very close friend and brother-in-law Charley Tjarurru painted a coherent series of the old man's travels towards the area that Wuta Wuta emphasises.

Wuta Wuta's paintings show the development of an extraordinary facility with form, especially in the ways in which he breaks up and organises the plane of the picture itself, as in paintings 2, 5, 11, 16, 20, and 28 [8.34]. The three-line structure is used quite variously in 2, 11, 16, and 28 and contrasts with the more cross-shaped designs of 5 and 20. The initial paintings focus heavily on the three-vertical-line grids as a structuring device, while later paintings organise the space in a far more complex way, as in painting 151 [8.35]. He draws inspiration from the varied details of story and place to produce varying emphases in his images. This is evident, for example, in the range of ways he represents Wilkinkarra [8.36], with its story of a different old man and the Kanaputa women, whose fire made the salt lake area there. Sometimes the focus is on the straight line-emphasised path (paintings 48 and



8.35

Painting 151
*Wintalynga (and
Ngurrapalangu)*
29 July 1974

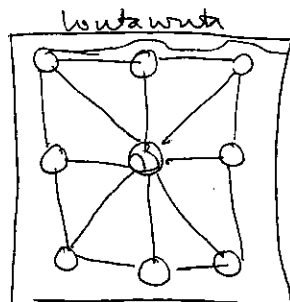
62) of the Kanaputa women coming from Ngurrapalangu, organised with a seven-circle shape. The 'arms' of the latter form (also in painting 115), are the arms of a ceremonial object which surrounds a circle representing the cave into which the Tingarri initiates went from the fire. Sometimes the emphasis is more on the ceremonial ground of the Tingarri performance at Wilkinkarra (painting 115), sometimes it is the dancing women and their *ngalyipi* (fibre rope) as in painting 20, and sometimes it is the iconography of the fire which two men lit there (the concentric circles and crescents in painting 163). Each of these 'narrative' choices has different aesthetic effects: the signs that represent the features have different properties.

The series of paintings done by Charley Tjarurru in this same period, and my discussions with him (he was often more narratively oriented than his friend), indicate that the central features of the old man Yina—who possessed great sorcery power—were his penis and his testicles. In each painting, and when we visited sites, the painters always pointed out to me the stories of the old man (which they found hilarious), whose penis left its mark at Tjintaranya and was bitten by ants at Namanya, whose penis

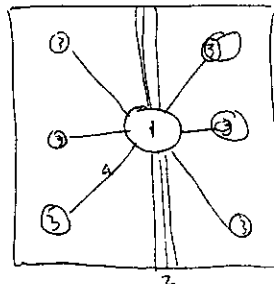
8.36

**Wilkinkarra series: Wuta
Wuta Tjangala**

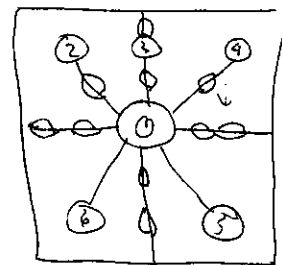
This chart shows my field sketches of some of the paintings relating to Wilkinkarra produced by the artist over a two-year period (1973–75).



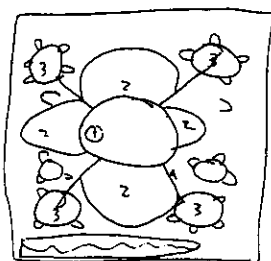
Painting 20
Wilkinkarra
22 October 1973



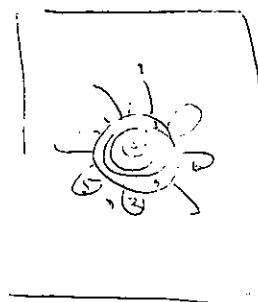
Painting 48
Wilkinkarra
26 November 1973



Painting 62
Kanaputa
30 December 1973



Painting 115
Yukurpanya
4 June 1974



Painting 163
Wilkinkarra
15 August 1974

¹⁴ Space precludes the publication of my drawings of Charley Tjarurru's paintings of the old man at the first four places.

and testicles rested separately at Wili rockhole (as the rockhole and the sandhills), whose testicles were stepped on by a dog at Nginananya, and whose penis was erect and swinging in the air as he walked at Tjurrpungkunyjtjany, a rocky rise east of Sandy Blight Junction where the old man defecated and tried to hide it by lighting a fire.¹⁴ The painting in the Kluge–Ruhe collection mistakenly entitled *Untitled Dreaming at Yawaiaogra* and dated to 1971 [8.37] is almost certainly Tjarurru's painting of Tjurrpungkunyjtjany, recorded as painting 212 in my field notebooks [8.38]. The iconography of this painting represents his penis as an oblong form and his testicles as circles.



8.37

Charley Tjarurru

Tjurrpungkunytjanya

1974

Private collection

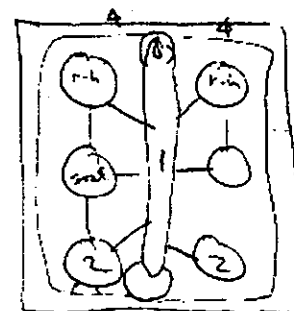
of John W. Kluge

1996.0002.008

Acrylic on plywood

128 x 26.5 cm

In the Kluge-Ruhe documentation this painting is entitled *Untitled Dreaming at Yawaiangra*, 1971, but this is almost certainly incorrect. It bears a strong resemblance to (and is probably the same as) the painting that I recorded as painting 212. This depicts Tjurrpungkunytjanya, a rocky rise where Yina defecated, and tried to hide the fact by lighting a fire. His penis and testicles are depicted by an oblong form and circles.

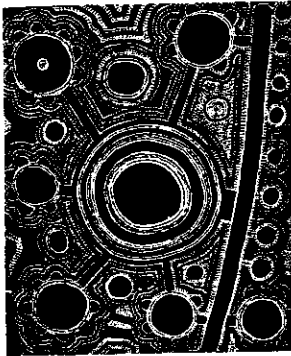


8.38

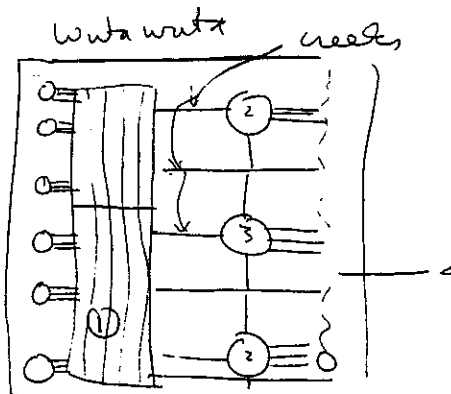
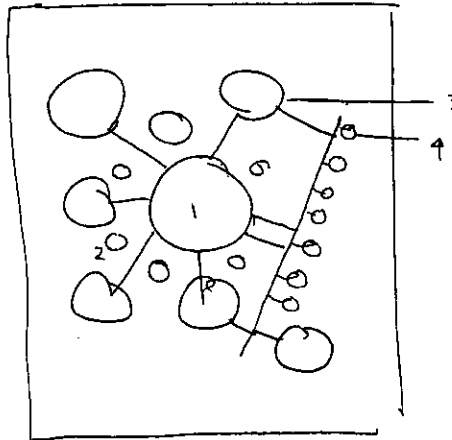
Painting 212

Tjurrpungkunytjanya

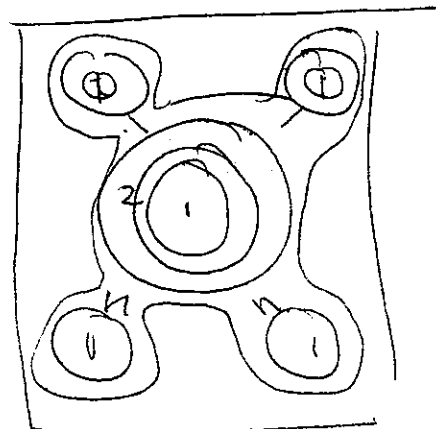
19th September 1974



8.39
Painting 131
Ngurrapalangunya
(and *Wintalynga*)
11 June 1974



8.40
Painting 44
Ngurrapalangunya
23 November 1973



8.41
Painting 235
Wintalynga
15 October 1974

Ngurrapalangunya

Wuta Wuta undertook many representations of the hills and stories at Ngurrapalangunya, a hill and claypan site that was his own conception place. Here, the *kungka kutjarra* (two women) brought a being called Tjuntamurtu (Short-legs). The women were frightened by the approach of the old man, and they fled towards Lake Mackay, while Tjuntamurtu ran and crawled inside a cave, frantically tossing out the sacred objects stored there to make room for himself. These sacred objects became the hill called Wintalynga (feature 4) shown in painting 131 [8.39], which lies south of the several large claypans (feature 3) of Ngurrapalangu, itself represented as the cave (feature 1). The hill of Wintalynga is perpendicular to the hill in which the cave is located, where the two travelling women (represented more clearly in painting 151 [8.35]) had originally left Tjuntamurtu behind. They set him down while they danced a woman's dance (*nyanpi*); in dancing, they created the claypans. After rainfall these claypans are the source of a seed-bearing plant known as *mungilpa* whose seeds are ground into cakes and eaten. The cakes are represented as feature 2. The painter's mother ate these seedcakes, he said, and thus he was conceived. Therefore, his conception Dreaming is said to be Tjuntamurtu, connected both to the old man story and to the two women Dreaming.

Three paintings particularly draw attention to the representation of the hill of Wintalynga as a sacred object. Each includes a rectilinear shape with small circles along the side: these represent the shaved wooden inserts on the ritual headdress that became the hill. The paintings are 44 [8.40], 131 [8.39] and the well known, frequently reproduced *Tjangala and two women at Ngurrapalangu*, painted in 1982 (see Sutton 1988a: Fig. 177). Painting 151 [8.35], which emphasised Wintalynga, has great resemblances to these. It shows both hills and Wuta's conception site as bullroarer-shaped forms partially



8.42

Wuta Wuta Tjangala, 1981
Photo: Fred Myers

¹⁵ His father was from the south originally, from the Yawalyurru area that had been Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra's home.

¹⁶ Wuta Wuta also claimed links to the south, through his father, at Yawalyurru. These links were recognised by his relatives there because he had been able to maintain his ties. He activated these ties by marrying a woman from the southern area and moving there for a while.

enclosing a centrifugal and radiating seven-circle grid, a template that he subordinates to the needs of the overall design and the memory of the place. The final painting of Wintalynga that I have (painting 235) is built around the five-circle grid and emphasises the two women making a *murli* (shelter) on the far side of the hill, after fleeing the old man [8.41]. This painting uses a standard sort of form (concentric circles) to abstract a representation of a somewhat conical shelter seen from above.

Yumari: The painting of place

Now I would like to turn to the Yumari images, two of which have become key examples of the quality of western desert acrylic painting (see Smith 1990). Any discussion of Wuta Wuta Tjangala's paintings requires understanding that for Yarnangu painting one's country or one's Dreamings is also—or simply is—painting one's identity. While I have written extensively on this topic elsewhere (see Myers 1986a, 1988), we might summarise Pintupi understandings of place or 'country' by seeing these material formations as embodiments or objectifications of the identities of close relatives. These come to be associated with the identities of living persons, whose relationships are objectified in them and expressed by them. Yumarinya (Mother-in-law-place) was a place where Wuta Wuta Tjangala used to live, filled with his memories of experiences and life-historical events, and it was very important to him [8.42].

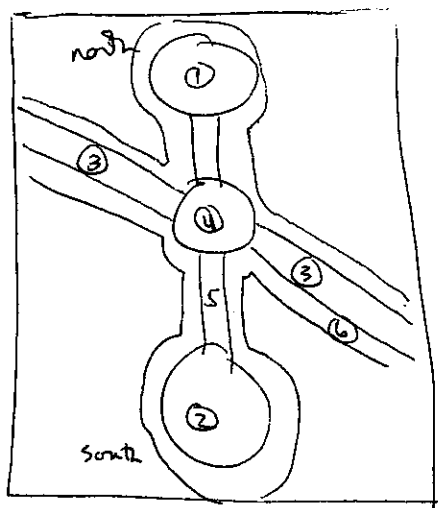
So, how did he come to be identified with this place? Yumari was part of Wuta Wuta's mother's *ngurra* (country). Her Dreaming conception was near to Yumarinya. His father had moved there when he married her, and he lived for a while in the

north near Yumarinya with his wife's people, as is common for that time of life.¹⁵ His father subsequently died at Kalturanya, nearby, and is known by that place of his burial.

Wuta Wuta's own conception Dreaming at Ngurrapalangunya is linked to Yumari through the activities of Yina (the old man). He was on his way to Yumari when he scared the two women at Ngurrapalangunya. Both Wuta Wuta and his elder brother thus claimed Yumarinya through their (shared) mother and her father (Wuta Wuta Tjapanangka) and through their own father, who is buried in the area, as well as through conception.¹⁶ Wuta Wuta can paint the Yumari designs, and 'hold' that country in ceremony, because these rights of identification were given to him by his 'one-countrymen', recognising in this manner their relationship to him. Their shared identity is thus objectified in their mutual identification with the place.

This is an active process. In ritual exchange, and in controlling their sons for initiation and daughters for marriage, Wuta Wuta and others acted as a group, performing ceremonies as 'brothers'. The place was a vehicle of the shared identity of the younger generation, as 'sons' of the group of fathers. At the same time, his identification with Yumarinya (and other places) and his right to produce and deploy its stories and images provides Wuta Wuta with something he can exchange with other men. In this sense it undergirds his identity as an autonomous, equal man.

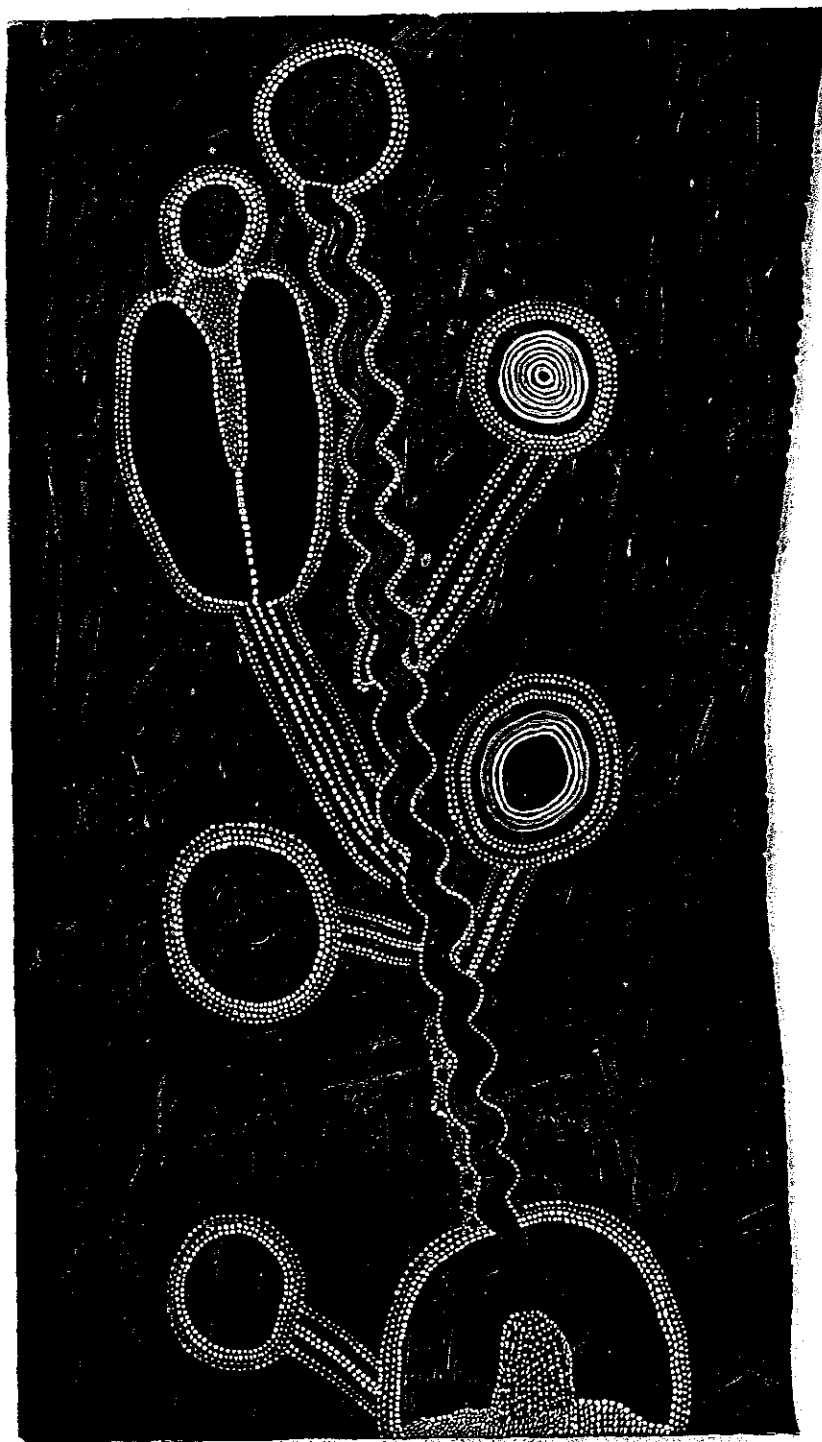
Yumari as a site is perhaps best delineated through Wuta Wuta's painting of it in 1979, on a small canvas board [8.43]. His description of this painting is that the old man went to Yumari, now an x-shaped rockhole on a broad rock platform among the sandhills. The painting represents the rockhole, said to have been created by the body of the old man when he lay down. Feature 4 represents the man's navel; feature 2 is his head. Feature 1, another circle,



8.43
Wuta Wuta Tjangala
Yumarinya
1979

8.44
Wuta Wuta Tjangala
*Old man Dreaming
at Yumari*
c. 1973
Private Collection
of John W. Kluge
1995.0002.006
Acrylic on masonite
74 x 43 cm

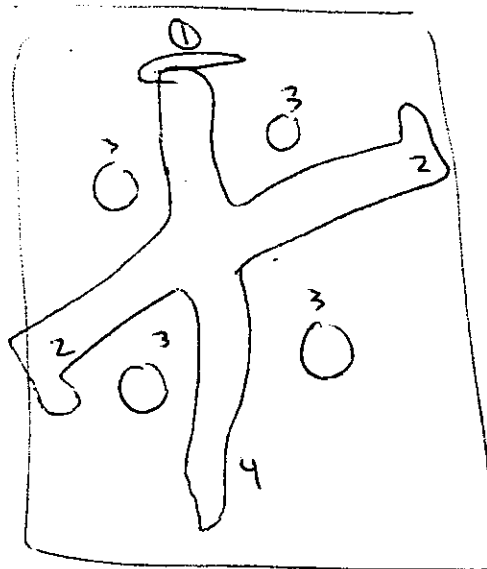
This painting from the Kluge-Ruhe Collection shows many resemblances to the painting of Yumari that I recorded in 1979 (8.43). The upper left-hand crescent is probably the old man's pubic tassel.



is his crotch covered by a pubic tassel. The upper left-hand crescent in *Old man Dreaming at Yumari* in the Kluge-Ruhe Collection [8.44], dated c.1973 and also clearly of Yumari rockhole, most probably also represents this tassel.

The line to the top left of the 1979 version (8.43), feature 3, represents his legs, and feature 5 (another line) represents the man's hair string belt which left a mark—a line of colour—inside the rockhole. Feature 6 signifies his spear, and also designs he wore on the sides of his body that are used to represent him in ceremonial activity. From the spot of the rockhole itself (which is indeed strangely like the body of a person lying down) the old man arose in the night to copulate illicitly with his mother-in-law (hence the name of the place). Various features at the site are indices of this activity, although they were not noted to be in the painting.

Yumari was the subject of several paintings by Wuta Wuta. The paintings of Yumari dating from July 1981 were made at Papunya two months after Andrew Crocker (the art adviser at the time) and I made a trip out to Yumari with a group of men, led by Wuta Wuta. We were living in Papunya, for the moment, and the Pintupi were engaged in a controversy that was about to crystallise into their separation from the rest of the 'Papunya Aboriginal community' and their movement back west to their own country in the Kintore Range (see Myers 1986b). The controversy involved rights over motor vehicles as well as conflict over claims to ownership and residence in the Mt Liebig area; a conflict set in motion by the possibility of oil and mineral exploration there. As he painted the image of Yumari, I recorded in my notebook (on Friday 3 July 1981) that Wuta Wuta talked to me and one of his cousins about getting control of their country out west, of taking his sons to live at Yumari (so they wouldn't become alcoholics and die), and of moving to their own country because of the growing 'jealousy' about their residence near Papunya. The questions of who



8.45
Wuta Wuta Tjangala
Yumari
July 1981

had rights to Mt Liebig, where some Pintupi were living, and to Papunya, were much in the air—these were political questions concerning indigenous formulations of identity. Should they return to their own country, such 'trouble' would be resolved.

The iconography of the first Yumari painting of July 1981 [8.45] differs slightly from some of his earlier ones and, as he explained it, Wuta Wuta spoke of where the bones of his dead relatives (his father, his mother's brother) were buried in this area. He intended to go and live near these bones. The emphasis on the penis (feature 4) of the old man remains, and the x-shape of the rockhole remains central to its representation, articulating a physical landscape form and an ancestral body, bringing the Dreaming close to almost ritual re-presentation. The feature marked as the head (1), is almost certainly a ritual headdress, and the small rockholes indicated as feature 3 probably include one small rockhole on the platform that is the vulva of the mother-in-law. The iconography is deployed to fill the rectangular space, and many features of the area are ignored. The emphasis on the shape is quite different from the

8.46

Wuta Wuta Tjangala

Yumari

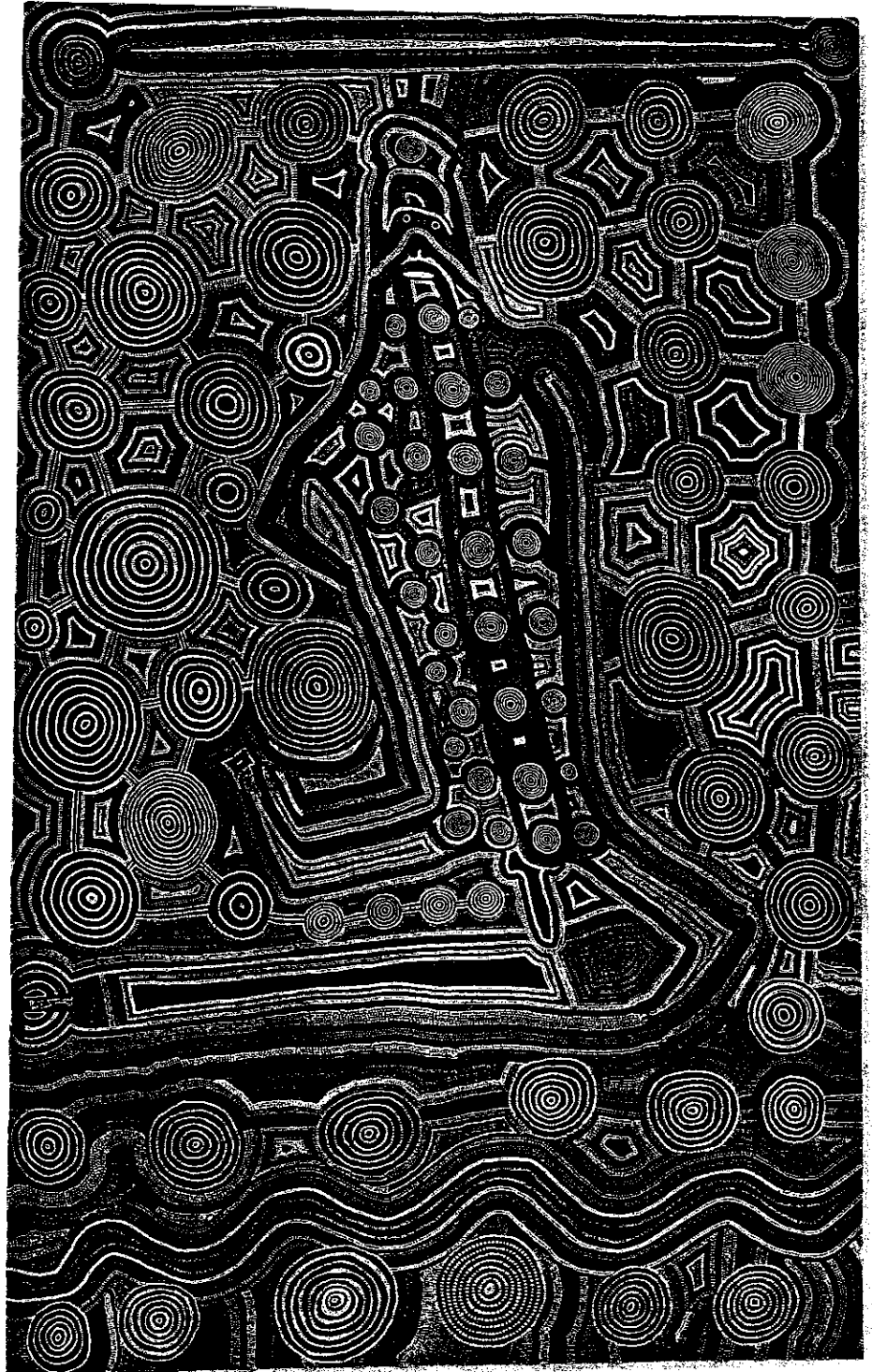
1981

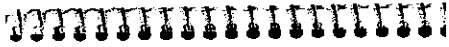
Acrylic on canvas

366 x 244 cm

Collection of the National
Museum of Australia

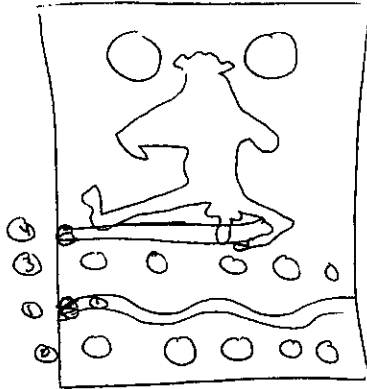
The generally accepted title for this painting is *Yumari* (see Sutton 1988, Fig. 179) but it is perhaps more appropriately entitled *Tjuntamurtu*. The central representation that dominates the painting is a depiction of this Dreaming figure, who is closely identified with the artist's conception site at Ngurrapalangunya. The painting contains references to several other major Dreamings, including the old man Yina whose body formed the rockhole at Yumari, but its major focus is the artist himself, represented by Tjuntamurtu, surveying the country to which he hopes soon to return.





8.47

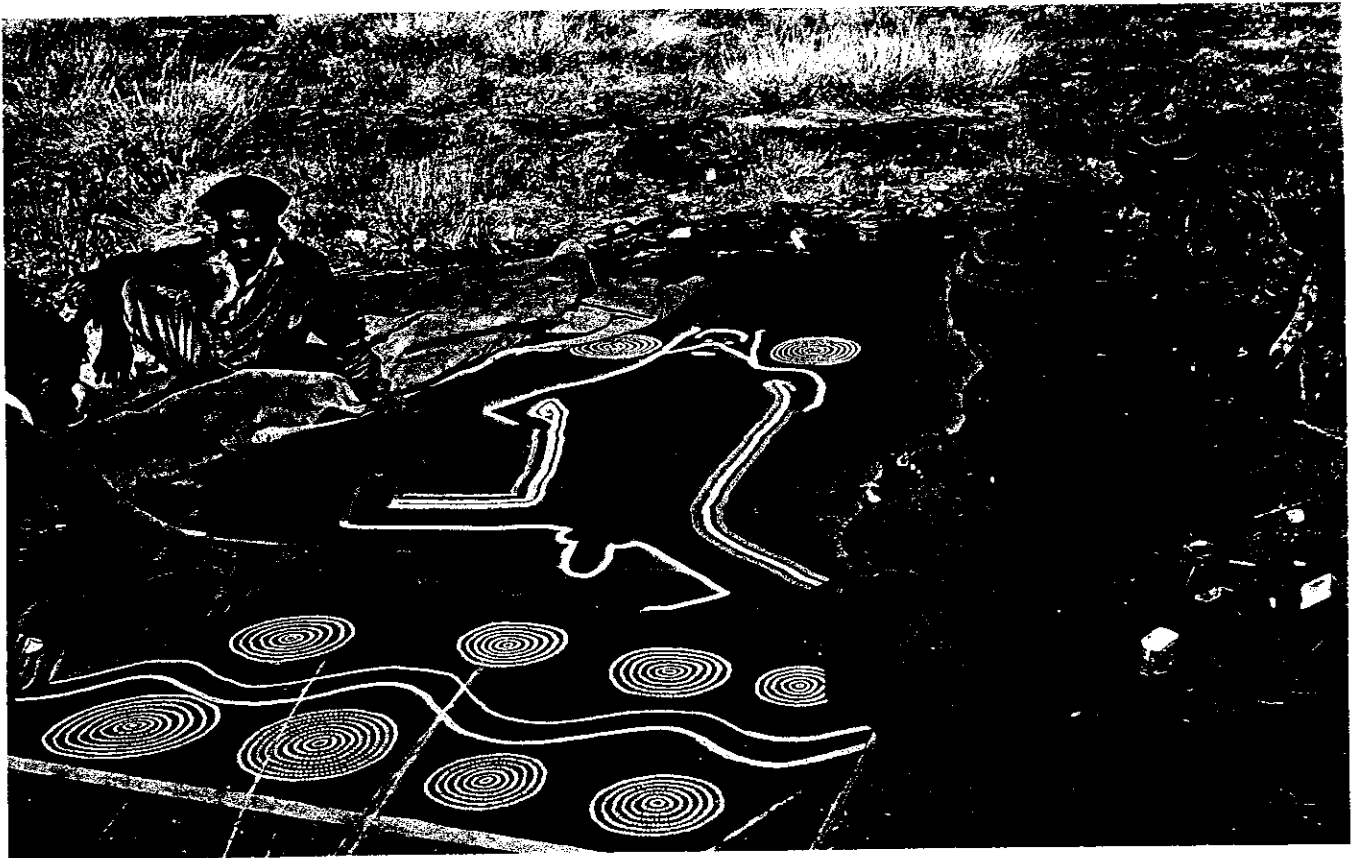
Sketch of *Yumari* (8.46)
made while the painting
was being produced, in
1981.



8.48

Wuta Wuta Tjangala
working on *Yumari*
(8.46) assisted by
Tim Payungku,
Yumpurlurru Tjungurrayi,
and Yala Yala Gibbs.

Photo: Fred Myers



Yumari painting of the same year included in the *Mr Sandman* catalogue (Crocker 1981). But I think something else is also happening in the use of the forms, with the old man becoming more and more of a presence. And that may signify Wuta Wuta's increasingly strong expression of his identity (in the context of his aging), but also of the growth of Pintupi autonomy.

Only a few weeks later, while tense meetings were taking place between the Pintupi and other residents of Papunya, Wuta Wuta was completing what many regard as his masterpiece of Yumari [8.46] and [8.47]—a painting stylistically quite distinct from the previous one. Commissioned for someone—I never knew for whom—it is painted on one of the giant canvases used by Papunya Tula for its most significant commissions and measures 244 x 366 cm. Such an expanse invited a complex image, which Wuta Wuta provided. While the younger and somewhat more secular men engaged in their meeting, Wuta Wuta was preoccupied with his canvas. When the Pintupi met separately with representatives from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, to make their case for leaving Papunya and moving west, they did so at this painting place.

I knew this painting was something special, especially in its distinctly different iconography for the figures and in its combination of the two related stories he most often painted—Yina (the old man) and Tjuntamurtu. I photographed it as it was being made, with Wuta Wuta's son-in-law and his brother-in-law helping [8.48]. Years later, I saw it again, reproduced in the catalogue for the *Dreamings* exhibition.

It had become common for artists to combine several Dreamings in the large paintings. This painting included Tjuntamurtu—the large figure—and more coded representations of the *Jirru* (king brown snake) Dreaming (8.47, feature 1) that crossed from Central Mount Wedge through Lake Mackay (Wilkinkarra), where it saw the Kanaputa women on its way west.

Yina is embodied as his penis (the somewhat rectilinear extension, feature 4), presumably also travelling west, and the circles (feature 3) represent the Kanaputa women. The central figure—the somewhat naturalistic representation—is, therefore, Wuta Wuta himself in his incarnation as Tjuntamurtu, surveying and dominating his country. A clearer expression of a painter's identity is difficult to imagine. Pointing to this figure, Wuta Wuta told me, 'here, indeed, I am trying to get a bore.' The circles all around the figure represent the rocks around the cave which Tjuntamurtu entered, at the site represented in paintings of Ngurrpalangu and Wintalynga. In representing his identity in the land the artist crosses back and forth between the landscape, the figures who created it and which it manifests, and the human incarnations of it, including himself. The central figure is not, as some interpretations have suggested, the old man Yina—and the penis is not Tjuntamurtu's. If there is a headdress on the head, it is very likely that which is visible in the paintings of Ngurrpalangu and Wintalynga—the sacred object tossed out of the cave and which became the hill of Wintalynga.

Conclusion

The capacity of almost every Pintupi man, at one time or another, to take up painting and produce interesting images requires explanation. The answer lies, I believe, in what Boas called 'technical experience' combined with an emerging social context that provides economic, social and political value for paintings of the Dreaming. Everyday life offered the Pintupi painters I knew many opportunities to practice design and form—in toolmaking, ritual designs, carving ceremonial boards, and so on. But not every painter has a painterly vocation. Some do, however, and this is my point.

There is no *indigenous* discourse, at the moment, to capture a sense of people who have a special

capacity and interest in form—and certainly not one to valorise it. The painters insist that the paintings are valuable for their reference to the Dreaming. If this situation initially appears to lend weight to claims such as those made by Overing (1996) against a universalisation of aesthetics, that 'Among the Piaroa, there do not exist the "artist", the "art object", and "the aesthetically astute subject"', this is only true at the level of explicit discursive elaboration. An aesthetic sensibility is evident, instead, *in practice*: in the range of paintings, the variety, the inventiveness displayed in the bulk of an individual's production. Some painters manage a few paintings, a few styles, and either quit painting or simply maintain a fairly common stock of images. Others are notable for their invention and experimentation. This capacity—or these interests—had less opportunity for objectification in the pre-contact social world, but it was not absent. I am led to imagine, therefore, an aesthetic that is deployed in the absence of a specific discourse that valorises it particularly. In other words, reliance on the discursive apparatus of participants themselves is, in the end, not sufficient to grasp the totalities of their practice.

I have drawn on—and modified—Jakobson's (1960) understanding of the 'poetic' (or 'aesthetic') function to argue that any communicative act might have the potential to focus on the 'message' for its own sake, to treat the signs not as transparent to the message but as material forms in their own right. Kupka's (1965) consideration of Arnhem Land bark painters interrogating, as it were, their materials in executing an abstraction or reduction from their cultural world, and Boas' (1927) reflections on technical skill as the basis for virtuosity both emphasise an aesthetic function that is not discursively elaborated and not necessarily aimed at communicating to a viewer or addressee. Vivien Johnson, in her analysis of the work of the Anmatyerre artist Clifford Possum (1994), draws attention to his use of varying techniques to

communicate his culture's view of the Dreaming. Her study of him as an *intentional* 'artist'—a condition I do not argue for his Pintupi counterparts—suggests a sort of formal self-consciousness. Indeed, the development of a secularised acrylic painting language, in her account, emerged from the application of self-censorship regarding sacred images. In contrast, she suggests that the Pintupi painters, perhaps less sophisticated in their knowledge of the outside world (see also Kimber 1995), had a greater difficulty in resolving the problem of deploying images that were regarded as 'sacred'. I wonder if what she rejects for the Anmatyerre may be more true for the Pintupi: namely, that the 'creative tension' in the work of these painters derives from 'flirting with taboo subjects' (1994: 39). The vitality of Pintupi painting seems associated with the rendering of the complex of ritual knowledge and experience onto a two-dimensional plane. In the initial periods, for example, one finds the greatest *range* of paintings, and one finds this range in the work of those men most dedicated to ritual, such as Wuta Wuta, Shorty Lungkarta (whom I do not discuss here), and Yanyatjarri Tjakamarra.

This is the stuff of a local art history, suggesting that there is much to be done in trying to understand what actually has been taking place in the practices of painting. At some level, serious students of the visual have implicitly known how to acquire relevant knowledge—they speak of 'training their eye'—even if they have not at the same time come to terms theoretically with what their knowledge implies about the practitioners. A generalised 'Aboriginality' no longer comprises the value of the paintings in the art market. As I have noted elsewhere, the growing Aboriginal art market has seen a trend towards increasing discrimination and connoisseurship, towards the valuation of some paintings as 'better art' or more valuable than others (see Myers *nd*).

It appears that connoisseurship in the art market has begun to grapple with some of the complex organisations of colour, space, and form in western desert paintings. Christopher Hodge, who represents Papunya Tula in Sydney's Utopia Gallery, granted me an illuminating interview about the changing place of 'Aboriginal fine art'. An artist himself, Hodge's central concern is the dealer's responsibility for the development of 'connoisseurship' or knowledge as a basis for appreciation of artistic value, as a way to discriminate 'quality' in paintings. I had asked him whether he thought it took a lot of work, through exposure and the training of people's 'eye', to start to recognise where invention is for Aboriginal painters. Hodge replied as follows:

Yeah, because if you examine any number of Aboriginal artists' works, and you look at them cold, without any kind of research, it's very difficult to tell who has done what. But if you looked at twenty painters from the Renaissance, that had painted The Last Supper say...to the person that hasn't researched that area, there is still the trouble of picking who did what. But to the person who puts the proper amount of study in, that scholarship is rewarded. Like, you and I could easily look at any of the Pintupi painters, and the ones that stand out, you can pick them no problem at all, because you are picking a personal style which supplants itself on top of the form...The ten per cent you can't pick are the artists who haven't got great personal strength.

(Christopher Hodge, interview with the author, Sydney, June 1991)

Hodge was very clear that what he expected to sell was 'painting,' rather than 'Aboriginality'. The expensive paintings, he told me, were sold on the basis of knowledge, moving buyers ever further towards 'stronger' art:

There's a mixed thing there. Some of the best people that come to the gallery, some of our best collectors, aren't interested at all in the stories, they look at the work. And once they started building their confidence to the point where they trusted their judgment, just in the same way they trust their judgment of European paintings, they bought strong works, and they bought stronger and stronger works. And the decorative end of the aboriginal art market, the collectors tend to work away from that into tougher and tougher pitches as their confidence goes up.

(Christopher Hodge, interview with the author, Sydney, June 1991)

Hodge also suggested that detailed knowledge is essential in order to understand what I would call the particular practice of painting and the problems involved in it. Unquestionably, the conditions for producing such knowledge may lie in the social formation we know as collecting, and the conditions for producing a genre of activity like 'painting' may require a market. That is, however, not the concern of this essay. I am not trying to understand the social and cultural conditions in which 'aesthetics' may emerge as a form of value. At this point, through attending to the synergy between Hodge's aesthetic theory and Pintupi practice, I focus on the manifestation of a concern with aesthetics evident in the paintings themselves.

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