BELIEVED DECEASED

DOROTHY NAPANGARDI

Dead: Mina Mina, Northern Territory, 1948-56

Dorothy Napangardi, who died in a car crash on the Southern Cross Highway near Alice Springs on June 1, was a titan of desert art. A reserved, softly spoken woman from Warlpiri country in the Northern Territory, Napangardi became a much-loved artist after winning the 1991 National Aboriginal Art Award for best painting in Western Media.

Over the next two decades, she would become the face of Australia’s contemporary art scene, exhibiting in private and public galleries. In 2002 she was honoured by a solo exhibition at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art, which later toured Asia. More recently she collaborated with the Italian luxury clothes firm Ermenegildo Zegna, manufacturing one of a kind a 200sqm carpet for permanent display in the Plaza Gallery to Brisbane’s Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Some sources and collectors, her work was acquired by numerous others. The National Gallery of Australia and all major Australian State galleries, the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, the Vossen Collection in the Netherlands, the Kaplan-Levi Collection in Scotland and the Kerry Stokes Collection and Holmes a Court Collection in Perth.

Despite the coalition appeal of her work, her greatest pleasures were family and hunting.

The daughter of Jeanie Lewis Napurrurla and Paddy Lewis Japangalka, she was born “out bush” at Mina Mina, remote Warlpiri country to the far north-west of Alice Springs, bordering the Papunya land.

Her mother had a daughter from a previous relationship with her father’s half-sister, and siblings from her mother’s second marriage, Dorothy Napangardi’s birth was not “legally” registered because it took place beyond the reach of the law.

In 2000, reminiscing about her childhood in and around Mina Mina, she spoke of unconditional happiness and the sense of freedom she experienced when travelling on foot around the vast expanse of the desolate, at night sleeping beside family members, with the starry sky overhead.

Arrived in central towns, their heads a dynamic view of huge tracts of land, cognitive maps that are continually updated as one moves through that landscape.

The ability to make these maps of expanses of country is an acquired process that in all probability can only be learnt by living in big, relatively uninterrupted vistas, rather than surrounded by tour walls.

This is an enduring feature of her artwork.

In recent years, while Napapangardi spent time in the Warlpiri settlements of Yuendumu and Nyirripi and would also visit family in Adelaide, the place she considered home was Alice Springs. With her family and a strong network of Warlpiri friends, she would go hunting each weekend on the town’s outskirts.

Perhaps some small consolation is to be found in the fact Napapangardi died surrounded by people she loved. She was hunting with extended family when, at dusk, their overloaded car rolled over. She was most likely in her early thirties.

Dorothy Napapangardi is survived by her sister Margaret Napapangardi, brother John Japangardi, five daughters and their partners, 11 grandchildren and many friends in Australia, Fiji and elsewhere.

Christine Nicholls

The author is a senior lecturer at Flinders University.

To place death notices in the classifieds advertisement columns, please call 13 22 80.

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ART OF DEATHS

DOROTHY NAPANGARDI

Art Born of the Bush

Beloved home: Sandhills of Mina Mina 2000, synthetic polymer paint on canvas.

Picture: National Gallery of Australia. © Dorothy Napapangardi

NAPANGARDI (Dorothy): Loving retired caretaker of the Aboriginal art of Yuendumu and Nyirripi who died suddenly and too soon. May he RIP. Penny, Deborah, Daniel, Nicholas, Arlu and family.

DICK (Dorothy): Suddenly and too soon, her lovely daughter, the loss of your sister, a beautiful and talented woman. Chris, Roy and families on behalf of Tim, Paul, Kate and Leigh, Nathan, Craig and all the family. From the Mack, your parents and friends. From the Anglican Church, support and sincere loyal prayers to Dorothy’s family and Ann Davies and family. Get you home Kenny, our friend. From the Anglican Church.

GASKELL (Anthony): From Nick Del Popolo.

NORRINGTON (Molly): My love goes with you as we go... sympathy to your family, especially to your children, your parents, your friends and your extended family. We go with you... sympathy to your wife Margaret, to your children, to your parents, to your siblings and to your friends. From your loving husband, Arthur.

STANLEY (Myron): You were an inspiration to many. Our thoughts are with you. With love and sympathy to your family, including your children. A great man... gone but never forgotten. From your dear friend, Myron.

POST (Mona): We are so sorry to hear of your passing, we will miss you... memories that will make us laugh... love and sincere sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Mona.

SHEPHERD (Barbara): Our thoughts go with you... love and sympathy to your family. We remember you fondly. From Pat and Barry.

HUNTER (Barbara): Your passing was unexpected... love and sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Barbara.

YOUNG (Bob): Your passing was unexpected... love and sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Bob.

NAPANGARDI (Michael): Your passing was unexpected... love and sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Michael.

YOUNG (Mary): Our thoughts go with you... love and sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Mary.

SHEPPARD (Bernard): In the passing of your sister, the many Monday night services and the attention and support. May we go with you in our thoughts and prayers... love and sympathy to your family, especially to your children. From the Anglican Church.

HUNTER (Barbara): Your passing was unexpected... love and sympathy to your family. From your dear friend, Barbara.

GASKELL (Anthony): From Nick Del Popolo.

STANLEY (Myron): You were an inspiration to many. Our thoughts are with you. With love and sympathy to your family, including your children. A great man... gone but never forgotten. From your dear friend, Myron.

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