

DESERT PAINTER

Art born of the bush

DOROTHY NAPANGARDI

Artist

Born: Mina Mina, Northern Territory, 1948-56
Died: Near Alice Springs, aged mid-60s

Dorothy Napangardi, who died in a car crash on the Tanami Road 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-feted artist after winning the 1991 National Aboriginal Art Award for best painting in Western Media.

Over the next two decades, she would become the darling of Australia's contemporary art scene, exhibiting in many private 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, fashioning one of her admired sandhill paintings into a 2000sqm carpet for permanent display in the Plaza Gallery in Brisbane's Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Sought-after and collectable, her work was acquired by, among others, The National Gallery of Australia and all major Australian State galleries, the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, the Vroom Collection in the Netherlands, the Kaplan-Levi Collection in Seattle and the Kerry Stokes Collection and Holmes a Court Collection in Perth.

Despite the cosmopolitan appeal of her work, her greatest pleasures were simple: spending time with family, and hunting.

The daughter of Jeannie Lewis Napurrurla and Paddy Lewis Japangangka, she was born "out bush" near Mina Mina, remote Warlpiri country to the far north-west of Alice Springs, bordering Pintupi land.

Her mother had a daughter from a previous marriage. As with her half-sister, and siblings from her mother's second marriage, Dorothy Napangardi's birth was not "legally" registered because it took place beyond the "settled" areas.

In 2000, reminiscing about her childhood in and around Mina Mina, Napangardi recalled unconditional happiness and the sense of unqualified freedom she experienced when travelling on foot around the vast expanse of the familial estate, at night sleeping beside family members, with the stars their only canopy.

Arranged in orderly rows, their heads to the east, feet extending west, sometimes the extended family group was protected by rdupa (or yunta), minimal bough shade windbreaks (local flora permitting).

During those formative years Napangardi mastered the art and science of hunting small game and gathering bush tucker, which would remain a lifelong passion.

Abundant bush foods populated her homeland. Dismissed as barren and inhospitable by most of the (relatively few) non-indigenous people who have visited it, Mina Mina to Napangardi was a Land of Plenty.

Napangardi estimated she was about seven or eight when her family first encountered a white person, a patrol officer, who pressed them to abandon their ancestral country. In the mid-50s — or as late as 1957 — Napangardi and her family were forcibly relocated to the



Beloved home: Sandhills of Mina Mina 2000, synthetic polymer paint on canvas.
Picture: National Gallery of Australia. © Dorothy Napangardi

comparatively new Warlpiri settlement of Yuendumu, hundreds of kilometres south-east of Mina Mina. There, the family's whitefella names were imposed on them.

Moreover, the local health clinic ascribed arbitrary dates of birth to all family members.

The family was deeply unhappy at Yuendumu. Not long after their arrival, Napangardi's father led the younger members of the extended family on a trek back to Mina Mina, but the authorities soon returned, taking them back again. Their way of life was no longer tenable.

Napangardi, having been promised when young to an old man, Jampijinpa, eventually left him to live in Alice Springs, after giving birth to four daughters, Julie, Sabrina, Maria and Dolores. After remarriage in the late 80s, she gave birth to her youngest daughter, Annette.

While living in Mina Mina, Napangardi had begun receiving instruction from her grandfather on the Karnta-kurlangu/Kanakurlangu Jukurrpa (Women's or Digging Sticks Dreaming). This was as a matter of inheritance, though as a small child Napangardi was not permitted to recreate its visual imagery.

These Jukurrpa would later become the principal subject matter of her most celebrated artworks.

In 1987, she met Roslyn Premont at a centre for Aboriginal artists in Alice Springs, where she had begun painting on boards. The women forged a long-term working relationship after Premont opened Gallery Gondwana in Alice Springs in 1990.

Their business collaboration ended last year when Premont closed the gallery after injury.

Napangardi's extraordinary spatial ability enabled her to deal effectively with huge canvases.

Older, tradition-grounded Centralian Aboriginals' exceptional orientation skills and visual-spatial ability translate into the ability to construct "mental maps". This encapsulates their ability to hold in 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 four walls.

This is an enduring feature of her artwork.

In recent years, while Napangardi 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 Napangardi 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 to mid-60s.

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

Christine Nicholls
The author is a senior lecturer at Flinders University.

Deaths

CRADDOCK (Len): Founder of Hampton Park Scout Group. A great scout who has gone home. Sympathy to Doreen, Leon and all Len's family and friends. From the Fellowship Section of Hampton Park Scout Group.



DAVIES Clive McKennay (Ken): Get you home Kenny Mack, your parents and siblings who went before await you. Love Graeme and Ann Davies and family.

DICK (Dorothy): A very loved sister to Fred and sister-in-law to Elaine. Aunty to Carolyn, Great Aunt to Fleur and Great Great Aunt to Isabelle. We will miss her so much.

DICK (Dorothy): We are devastated to say farewell to our touring veteran, best mate, life member, leader of our club song. Your charisma during your touring years commanded the respect of everyone who had the pleasure to tour with you. We are blessed with the memories. Deepest sympathy to your family, friends and work colleagues. (Everywhere we go...)

DICK Dorothy (nee Brown): Loved cousin of Ann, Brett and Bron. Jeff and Kaye and families. Lots of happy memories over many years. Love and sympathy to Tony, Kerry, Graeme, Siobhan and families and Fred and Elaine. A full life well lived.

DICK (Dorothy Nadine): Deepest sympathy and prayers to Dorothy's family on her recent passing. Dorothy's never ending support and sincere loyal service to the Parish of Midland, in particular Swan View Uniting Church is remembered with grateful appreciation. Dorothy will be forever remembered and missed at our church. Swan View Uniting Church Congregation

DICK (Dorothy): Sympathy to Tony, Graeme and families. Memories of the many Monday night scrabble games. Olive, Alison and Barb

ELLIS (Charles Victor): Our deepest sympathy to Anne, Brian and Didi. From Uncle Bill, Rae and family.

ELLIS (Thomas Lewis): Passed away peacefully at Beddingford Lodge Pinjarra 26.7.2013 aged 89 years. Loving husband of Val, father to Tom and Sandy, Wendy and Brian and Graeme. Grandfather to Leigh, Nathan, Craig and Michelle and families. Sweet memories

ELLIS (Tom): Sympathy to Valma and family. Brother-in-law to Joan and Eric (dec). Uncle of Jan, Nola and Neil (dec).

FAIRMAN (Celine): My deep condolences to Chris, Roy and families on the loss of your sister, a true lady. From Nick Del Popolo.

FEAST (Anna): Special cousin of Jim, Beryl and families. Sympathy to the girls and families. Remembering good times in Wagerup.

FOSBERRY (Richard): Deepest sympathy to Tina on the loss of your husband and Josh and Maddison on the loss of your loving father. The memories can never be taken. May he RIP. Penny, Tony Chapman and Family

FOSBERRY (Richard): Our deepest sympathy to Tina and Jean and all the family for the sad loss of Richard. Always in our hearts. You will be sadly missed. From your Aunty Gwen and Aunty Frouta, Vic, Taki and family.

FRANCES (Celia): Loved niece of Joy and Joe Woodley and loved cousin of Simon, Anne, Timothy, Paul, Kate and Jane.

GARBUTT (Mavis Estelle): Passed away after a short illness. Will be sorely missed by Shirley, Phil, Roy and Shari.

GASKELL (Anthony): Cruiser you were an amazing friend and a member of our family. Words cannot express our sadness and you will be forever in our hearts. R.I.P. Mate Kayla and Harro

GASKELL (Anthony): Our heartfelt condolences to Judith, Dean and family. Cruise, words cannot describe the sadness we feel in our hearts. You left us with some amazing memories that will make us smile forever. Your loyalty, courage, determination and especially that sense of humour will never be forgotten. We love you. Boner, Chickee Babe and Molly.

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GASKELL (Anthony): A fine young man who has had a great impact on many. Cruiser, you will be truly missed. The next 'big one' I catch will be in your honour. Deepest sympathy to your family, Geoff and Raymie Hulm and families.

GASKELL (Anthony): Cruiser, such a fun and passionate person. You meant so much to everyone in your life. You will be sorely missed. My deepest sympathies to your family and those closest to you. All my love Louise Pitts x

GASKELL (Anthony): The "Cruz", a cracker of a bloke, who was always the life of the party. Fond memories of the "Osterich", such a loss to this world. Our thoughts are with his family. R I P mate. JT and Leigh xx

GASKELL (Anthony): Cruiser, you were one of a kind. You put a smile on every face and lit up every room. We have lost too soon a good bloke, a great character and a true protector of our community. You will be missed by many. Deepest sympathy to all your family. Love Steve and Marie Cloughley.

GASKELL (Anthony): Our deepest sympathy and love to Judith, Dean, Brenton, Sharon, Janine and family. Cruise, a wonderful man, a fantastic friend, a huge loss to us all. The stars will shine a little brighter now. Until we share another Andrew Garrett. Love always, Kylie, Pryce, Jordan and Daniel.

GASKELL (Anthony): RIP Cruiser. A truly unique man. A life too short but packed with fun, adventure and achievements. We are proud and honored you were part of our family. Deepest sympathy to Judith, Dean and family. With us always at Rottnest. Mr T and Mrs T.

GASKELL (Anthony): Our deepest sympathy goes out to our beautiful friends, Judith and Dean, Brenton and Janine and extended family on the passing of their son, brother and uncle. Anthony was much loved by everybody. Taken way too soon. Susie and Jeff.

GASKELL (Anthony): To a work colleague and a friend Cruise. Thank you for giving us so many great memories that we can now fall back on to help us through this very sad time. You will be deeply missed by so many people but never forgotten. Ian and ClareThompson.

GASKELL (Anthony): Cruiser, I have countless memories of great times together. A strong, loyal, loving man who will be missed by so many. Has been such a privilege to call you a mate. Rest easy champ. Buts, Sam, Madison and Lachlan.



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GASKELL (Tony): Cruise, the laughter you brought to Rotto on your annual visits will live with us always. One of life's true champions, sadly missed. Mick and Karen Wear

GASKELL (Anthony): Fond memories of our days at Mt Hawthorn. A bloke who loved the thrill of the chase. Rest in Peace mate. Andrew Dillon

GASKELL (Anthony): Cruise, so many great memories. Bundy will never taste the same again. 2Bob, Eng, Ned, Jake and Tess.

GAUNT (Sidney Derrick): Passed away peacefully on Saturday 7th July. Devoted Husband of the late Jean and Connie, loving Father to his Children, Grandchildren and their families. Special thanks to The Pines at Ellenbrook for their support and care. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him and loved him. Funeral Arrangements to be announced at a later date.

GENTELLI (Edna): Deepest sympathy to Carmel, Eddie and family on the sad loss of Edna. A wonderful lady and friend to all. From Mary-Ann, Richard, Zac and Nick.

GENTELLI (Edna): Lifetime special memories of my Claremont days spent with the Gentelli family. Rest in peace dear Edna. Noreen Young.

GENTILE (Giovanna Joan): Deepest condolences to Tom and Artemiza, Lucie, Bradley, Pierina, Allan, Bruno, Steven and families for the loss of your loved one. Giovanna you will be sadly missed forever. Basilio Polinelli

GREEN (Kathy): Deepest sympathy to Aunty Val, Shane and families. RIP Kathy. Love Shane, Debbie and family.

GREEN (Katherine): Deepest sympathy to the Wedlocks and Greens. From Simon and Vic

GROCOTT (Audrey): Sincere sympathy to the family on the sad passing of Audrey. Chas and Audrey were pioneers of Thorne and families. I was shipmates. Douglas Corker and family

GROUCUTT (Pamela Lynnette): 2.3.1922 - 26.7.2013 Passed away peacefully surrounded by her family. Loving wife of Michael (dec), beloved mother and mother-in-law of Susie and Andy, David and Sally, Tony and Julie. Cherished grandmother of Ben, Will, Jamie, Kate and Emma.

GROVE (Frances): Farewell to aunty Peggy, a wonderful caring lady. Sympathy to Pam, Claude, Dennis and families. Thinking of you. Your loving sister Felicia (dec), aunty of Phil, Dot, Graham, Melinda and family.

GUY (Tom): From Ron Wundowie and Caversham. Sincere sympathy to Joyce and family. Tom and Sheila

HALLEEN (James): Much loved nephew of Elizabeth cousin to Ian and Wendy. James will be sadly missed. Our love and prayers go out to Mary, Andrew, Scott and families.

HAMERSLEY (Judy): In loving memory of our dear Aunty Judy. Fond memories of our childhood holidays at Muresk. Love to Uncle Colin and all the family, from Harvey, Sue and Lock.

HEAD (John): Deepest sympathy to Gloria and family. A respected life member for many years of Kwinana Westrail Social Golf Club.

HEALY (Joe): Passed away Sunday 28 July following a short illness. Loved and respected husband, father and father-in-law of Molly, Mary-Anne, Gerard, Patrick, Michael and Franca and grandfather of seven. Ar dheis dé go raibh a anam dílis.

HOCKING (William Ernest): Passed away peacefully, 24th July, 2013. Loved husband, father and granddad. Rest in peace

HUBBARD (Pearl): Mum, we will miss your happy smiling face and little quips. Thank-you for everything, we will always love you and sorely miss you. Say Hi to Dad, All our love forever. Your loving son Frank and Karen. Thankyou to the nursing staff Ward 9 South Fremantle Hospital for all the attention and support.

HUBBARD (Pearl): My dear Mum together with Dad at last. I'll miss our happy times together. My love goes with you as always. Trish xx.

HUBBARD (Pearl): To Nan, Hoping you fly with the angels. With love Cameron and Fiona.

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