SPINIFEX
ARTS PROJECT

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

ART GALLERY
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SPINIFEX ARTS PROJECT

Byron Brooks, Veronica Brown, Kunmanara (Linda) Coleman, Lorraine Davies, Kanta Donnegan, Fred Grant, Ned Grant, Debbie Hansen, Kunmanara (Anne) Hogan, Estelle Inyika Hogan, Simon Hogan, Betty Kennedy, Lawrence Pennington, Lois Pennington, Myrtle Pennington, Patju Presley, Ian Rictor, Winmati Roberts, Ngalpingka Simms, Kunmanara Thomas, Roy Underwood, Lennard Walker, Carlene West, Tjaruwa Woods

Pitjantjatjara people, Tjuntjunjtara, Western Australia

PAINTING STORIES TOGETHER

The Spinifex Arts Project was established in the 1990s as part of the **Native Title** process. The first paintings documented the traditional ownership of Spinifex Country in the Great Victoria Desert in Western Australia, adjacent to the border with South Australia and north of the Nullarbor Plain. Following the recognition of their Native Title claim, the **Spinifex** people have continued to record their stories and knowledge through paintings on canvas.

They are maps not simply of land, but of who Spinifex people understand themselves to be: in relation to the land and in relation to each other.
John Carty

Some of the Spinifex paintings are **collaborations**: the men work together and the women work together to record a shared story of their connection to country. Each artist has their own style and contributes their individual history to the collective canvas. A way of painting that began as a form of evidence has developed as a unique contemporary expression of identity and place.

Spinifex collaborations capture and express these dynamics of artists towards the canvas and each other. It's a song they share, but each man paints with his own voice.
John Carty

DOCUMENTING THE ARTISTS

Photographer Stephen Oxenbury spent a week with the Spinifex artists as they painted their collaborative works. This took place in the centre of the Spinifex Native Title claim, at Ilkurlka, a nearby rockhole and major site in the Kalaya (Emu) story. Oxenbury's portrait photographs show the Spinifex people on their country. The Spinifex paintings and photographs present portraits of people and place together and demonstrate a connection to country that has always been and is still strong today.

Spinifex Arts Project artists (left to right) Simon Hogan, Lennard Walker, Lawrence Pennington and Patju Presley working on *Ilkurlka*, at Ilkurlka, Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, 2015. Photo: Stephen Oxenbury

RESPONDING

The Spinifex paintings include collaborations, yet each artist tells their own story within the whole. Can you see the different styles of the individual artists? How do the different voices within the collaborative painting contribute to an understanding of the work?

Both the Spinifex paintings and photographs have been described as *portraits*. What do these portraits tell you about the people and their country? Research or write your own definition of a portrait.

What do you find special and unique about the Spinifex paintings? Compare the representation of country in this work with other paintings about country in TARNANTHI or at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

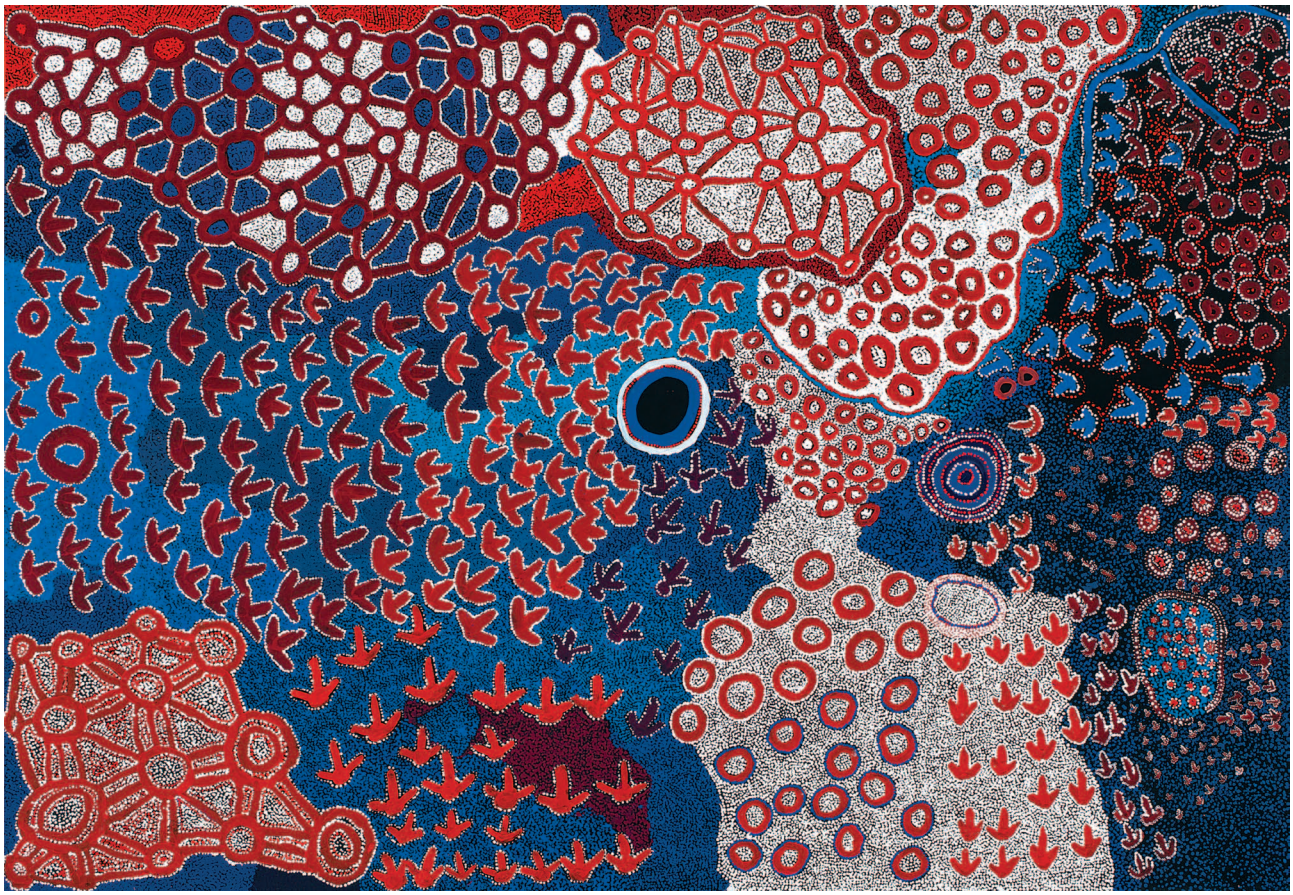
Find out about the Native Title claim for Spinifex country.

MAKING

Choose someone you know as the subject of a photographic portrait. Plan to take their photograph in a place that is important to them. Decide on the best time of day to take the photograph. Record your thoughts about the process, especially what you have learnt about lighting and **composition**.

Research the geography and plant life of the Great Victoria Desert. Make a work of art to demonstrate your understanding.

Spinifex Arts Project artists standing with completed men's collaborative *Ilkurlka*, Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, 2015. Photo: Stephen Oxenbury



Patju Presley, Lawrence Pennington, Simon Hogan, Ian Rictor, Roy Underwood, Fred Grant, Byron Brooks and Lennard Walker, Pitjantjatjara people, Western Australia, *Ilkurlka* 2015 Ilkurlka, Western Australia, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 200.0 x 290.0 cm, Courtesy the artists and Spinifex Arts Project. Photo: Saul Steed

Spinifex Arts Project artist Ngalpingka Simms, Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, 2015. Photo: Stephen Oxenbury

GLOSSARY

collaboration: in the visual arts collaboration refers to working with another or others on a joint project

composition: the placement or arrangement of elements or parts in a work of art

Native Title: *is a property right which reflects a relationship to land which is the very foundation of Indigenous religion, culture and well-being* (Australian Human Rights Commission)

spinifex (*Triodia* species): a tough, spiky tussock grass found in the red sandy desert country of Central Australia

RELATED WORKS IN THE COLLECTION

TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS, *Tjanpi punu (trees)* 2012, near Amata, South Australia, Tjanpi, acacia branches, chicken wire, acrylic wool, unspun sheep's wool, wipia (emu feathers), raffia, paper raffia, plastic flowers and leaves, gumnuts, pillow stuffing, mulga stumps, wire, synthetic polymer paint, second hand clothing (dimensions variable). http://bit.ly/1M7SeZI

TJANPI DESERT WEAVERS, *Paarpakani (Take flight)* 2011, near Amata, South Australia, raffia, minnarri grass, buffel grass, wire, wood, poly-raffia, string, emu feathers, twigs, wool, fake flowers, bush turkey feathers, alpaca wool, second hand fabric, plastic rake, felted wool, branches (dimensions variable). http://bit.ly/1LZTSkB

John OLSEN, Australia, 1928, *Meandering Murray and wattles* 1982, Clarendon, South Australia, oil on canvas, 184.0 x 306.0 cm. http://bit.ly/1jF5wX8

Hossein VALAMANESH, Australia, 1949, *Fallen branch* 2005, Adelaide, bronze, 152.0 x 156.0 x 7.0 cm. http://bit.ly/1ONNmio

Estelle Hogan, Myrtle Pennington, Betty Kennedy, Ngalpingka Simms, Lois Pennington, Lorraine Davies, Veronica Brown, Kunmanara Thomas, Kanta Donnegan and Tjaruwa Woods, Pitjantjatjara people, Western Australia, *Kuru ala* 2015, Ilkurlka, Western Australia, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 200.0 x 290.0 cm, Courtesy the artists and Spinifex Arts Project. Photo: Saul Steed

Spinifex Arts Project artists (clockwise from far left) Lorraine Davies, Veronica Brown, Kunmanara Thomas, Kanta Donnegan, Tjaruwa Woods, Estelle Hogan, Myrtle Pennington, Ngalpingka Simms and Lois Pennington working on a women's collaborative, Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, 2015. Photo: Stephen Oxenbury

SPINIFEX ARTS PROJECT

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TARNANTHI | Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art
8 October 2015 – 10 January 2016

Open daily 10am – 5pm, FREE ENTRY

Spinifex Arts Project artist Tjaruwa Woods, Spinifex country, Great Victoria Desert, 2015. Photo: Stephen Oxenbury

Cover image: Tjaruwa Woods, born c.1954, Warutjara, Western Australia, Pitjantjatjara people, Western Australia, *Purpurnya,* 2015, Tjuntjuntjara, Western Australia, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 200.0 x 230.0 cm Courtesy the artist and Spinifex Arts Project. Photo: Saul Steed

Information and quotes have been derived from the accompanying *TARNANTHI* exhibition catalogue. Information and hyperlinks correct at time of print.
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Editor: Penelope Curtin
Design: Sandra Elms Design
Art Gallery of South Australia staff Mimi Crowe, Nici Cumpston, Tracey Dall, Elle Freak, Laura Masters, Ryan Sims and Lisa Slade, and DECD Education Manager Mark Fischer, assisted in the development of this resource.

Warning: Members of Aboriginal communities are respectfully advised that some of the people mentioned in writing or depicted in photographs within this resource have passed away. All such mentions and photographs in this resource are with permission.

Note to the reader: Unless otherwise noted, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words mentioned in this resource are spelled as advised by the relevant cultural authority. Approval for use of 'Tarnanthi' has been granted by Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi.

RESOURCES

Cumpston, Nici 2015, *TARNANTHI* exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. http://bit.ly/1iKlcrd

Cumpston, Nici (with Barry Patton) 2010, *Desert Country*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. http://bit.ly/1iKlcrd
Desert Country Education Resource. http://bit.ly/1FJGKi8

Cane, Scott 2002, *Pila Ngurui: The Spinifex People*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia. http://bit.ly/1GlFJNB

National Gallery of Australia, Tradition and Transformation – Indigenous Art in the NGV Collection, 'Spinifex Artists'. http://bit.ly/1PaLT52

Aboriginal Art Online, 'Spinifex People and Spinifex Country'. http://bit.ly/1KRtLdu

Alice Springs Desert Park, 'Nature Notes – Spinifex'. http://bit.ly/1WCXiwS

Stephen Oxenbury – Photographer http://bit.ly/1Vw44lo

Australian Human Rights Commission, Native Title. http://bit.ly/1NV0HDE

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BHP Billiton is proud to be the Principal Partner of TARNANTHI | Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, presented by the Art Gallery of South Australia and supported by the Government of South Australia. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.