

# MARKING THE INFINITE

## Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia

### AUDIO GUIDE TRANSCRIPT

Three ways to use the audio guide: (1) Connect to free “phillips” Wi-Fi, go to [www.bit.ly/marking-tour](http://www.bit.ly/marking-tour) on your smartphone browser, select the stop number; (2) Dial 202.595.1839 and enter the stop number; or (3) Download the free **Phillips Collection app**.

#### **STOP 1:** Klaus Ottmann, Deputy Director for Curatorial and Academic Affairs, introduces *Marking the Infinite: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia*.

This is Klaus Ottmann, Deputy Director for Curatorial and Academic Affairs. *Welcome to Marking the Infinite: Contemporary Women Artists from Aboriginal Australia*, an exhibition of works by nine artists, all matriarchs in their communities, whose work is steeped in the ancient cultural traditions of their people. I hope you will enjoy this colorful and invigorating exhibition as much as I enjoyed installing it in our galleries.



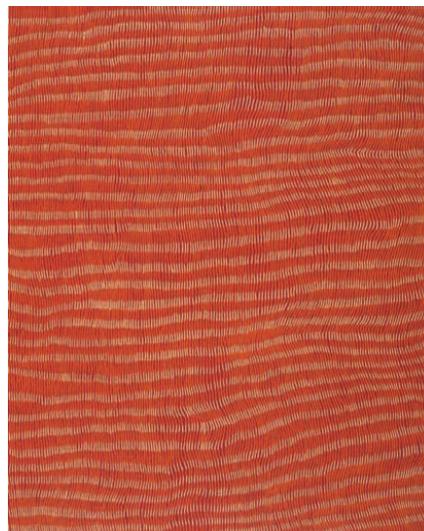
Showing Aboriginal art from Australia is a first for The Phillips Collection. It is part of our continuing efforts to foster a global conversation through the language of art, or as Duncan Phillips, the founder of our museum once said, “to place art and its universal language above and beyond the disputes of nations.”

We hope that seeing the paintings made by these incredibly imaginative women from Aboriginal Australia will make you discover new and different layers of meaning in the works in our own collection and provide fresh insights for your lives. Make sure to visit our courtyard where you can view our newest long-term mural painting made by the Australian Aboriginal artist Regina Pilawuk Wilson, who created this mural specifically for our museum in conjunction with the exhibition.

#### **STOP 2:** Collector and Philanthropist Dennis Scholl discusses the work of Yukultji Napangati

This is Dennis Scholl the collector of the art featured in *Marking the Infinite*.

The woman that’s taken the longest journey to get here is represented by the work in front of you. It is by Yukultji Napangati. Her story is amazing. She was born in the central desert of Australia and led a traditional, nomadic hunter-gatherer existence in her country, which was dominated by a large salt lake known as lake Makai, which she called Wilkinkarra. Her homeland and her people are



Yukultji Napangati, *Ancestral Women at Yunala, 2007*, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 60 1/4 x 48 in. Collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl © Yukultji Napangati, licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd., courtesy Papunya Tula Artists. Photo: Sid Hoeltzell

known as the Pintupi people. She lived off the land with her family of nine with no contact with the modern world. The rest of the Pintupi had been forced into government settlements, but somehow her family was able to live off the grid as their ancestors had for thousands of years. In 1984 when she was 14 years old, she and her family were discovered and brought to the settlement of Papunya. It is believed that they may have been the last Aboriginal Australians to come out of the desert. Across the world the headlines blared, “Lost Nomads: The Pintupi Nine Have Been Found.”

Now Yukultji found this quite annoying as clearly they had never been lost; simply living on the land her family had been on for many generations. When discovered she had never seen an automobile or a white person. As she transitioned to life in the community she watched the men paint. And then in 1996 she picked up a brush and began painting on her own.

The results are before you. She’s excited to bring her knowledge of her culture and country to her paintings. She comes from a family that is truly one of the great artistic families of Australia with most of her siblings having careers as painters. When she won a prestigious painting prize the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales described her work as “the shimmer and optical brilliance of Yukultji Napangati’s painting seduces us. It invites us into country, into a rich, complex, and multi-dimensional experience. This depth seems an apt metaphor for the richness of her culture.”

### **STOP 3: *Marking the Infinite* Curator Henry Skerritt discusses the work of Nonggirnga Marawili**

This is Henry Skerritt, the curator of *Marking the Infinite*.

Lightning crashes onto the rocks, the bay called Baraltja. The Yolngu say that lightning is the tongue of Mundukul, the lightening snake. I visited this bay on a very sunny day and I can imagine Mundukul raising his head, hissing sea spray on the rocks. The designs on this bark are uniquely Nonggirnga Marawili’s, they are part of a highly individual, visual language that she’s developed over the past decade. At the same time the diamonds that are formed by the lightening as it zigzags across the bark are highly reminiscent of the sacred designs of her Madarrpa people. These designs are traditionally controlled by men. Here, Nonggirnga shows both her knowledge of these designs but also her ability to work around them, fashioning a highly unique style that has made her one of the most significant contemporary Aboriginal artists working today.

Nonggirnga Marawili, *Lightning and the Rock*, 2014, 76 3/8 × 20 1/16 in., Earth pigments on bark Collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl © Nonggirnga Marawili, courtesy Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala. Photo: Sid Hoeltzell.



### **STOP 4: Art Historian Bernida Webb-Binder discusses the work of Angelina Pwerle**

Hello. I’m Dr. Bernida Webb-Binder and I am an art historian and a gallery educator here at The Phillips Collection.

Aboriginal art from Australia is unfamiliar to many Americans yet this exhibition demonstrates themes that concern us all as global citizens. What does it mean to live in a fast-paced world where we are all connected to each other yet

increasingly disconnected from the land and environment around us? In this painting, Angelina Pwerle abstractly illustrates the bush plum, a fruit of the sandalwood tree that is important for food and medicine in the Australian desert. The fruit is so significant that it features in the “Bush Plum Dreaming,” a women’s story that relates the journeys taken to gather the fruit. Rather than paint a figurative fruit, Angelina Pwerle individually paints a galaxy of dots to represent the land that is familiar to her. Yet, the sheer number of dots in the painting also suggests the infinity of the universe. In fact, she paints while the canvas lies flat on the ground.



Angelina Pwerle, *Bush Plum*, 2013, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 59 5/8 x 133 1/4 in. Collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl © Angelina Pwerle, courtesy Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. Photo: Sid Hoeltzell

As you look at her works and others in the exhibition, take the perspective of the explorer looking down from space. Angelina Pwerle’s *Bush Plum* is tied to her local geography yet speaks to the vast universe that we occupy together.

**STOP 5: Contemplation Audio Tour: Meditation and Yoga Teacher Elizabeth Kanter guides you through a contemplative encounter with an artwork that you’ve selected.**

This lasts about 10 minutes and concludes with a bell. For the best listening experience, headphone use is recommended. While viewing, please maintain a respectful distance from the artwork.

This contemplative experience guides you through an exploration of slow looking and sensing, and offers you the opportunity to deepen your relationship with this artwork—right here, right now.

Once you have chosen an artwork that feels particularly interesting or compelling in this moment, position yourself comfortably in relationship to it.

Acknowledge the presence of any people around you, and then return your awareness to your own body.

Sit or stand with ease. Feel rooted to the ground or your seat. Elongate your spine. You may want to close your eyes or gaze down softly at the ground.

Notice your breath, feel your body breathing.

Feel your breath enter your body through the tip of your nose, and feel your breath exit your body through the tip of your nose.

Let your breath flow easily.

Soften and release any tension or stress that you are holding in your face, your eyes, your jaw, your shoulders—anywhere in your body or mind.

Inhale smoothly and slowly, and on your exhale release any stress or tension that you’re holding—let it go.

Take another soft breath in and release another soft breath out.



Regina Pilawuk Wilson, *Sun Mat*, 2015, Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 98 7/16 x 137 7/8 in. Collection of Debra and Dennis Scholl © Regina Pilawuk Wilson, courtesy Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti. Photo: Sid Hoeltzell

As you're ready, open your eyes and begin to observe the artwork in front of you. Let your gaze settle naturally and become receptive to the art.

What do you first notice, what draws your attention?

Begin to explore the entire piece, absorbing the big picture. Take your time, look slowly.

If you notice any thoughts, just acknowledge with kindness, and return your attention to the artwork.

Feel into the space of this artwork—its fullness or openness, its expansion or intensity.

Notice how you feel. Notice your body, your breath.

Be effortless.

Now choose one part of this piece that you enjoy or that you are curious about right now. You could choose a color or shape... a place of light and shadow... an object... anything that calls to you.

Feel free to move around if you need to.

Focus on this area with a steady but soft concentration. Keep your breath soft as you observe.

Look closely at this area. What do you notice?

Continue to rest your awareness and attention on what feels interesting or appealing moment by moment.

Become receptive to light and shadows.

Explore lines, shapes, and textures.

Feel the energy of color, shades and hues—the energy of contrasts or subtle variations.

Notice where you feel places of change and transition, and places where you feel more steadiness and continuity.

Be aware of movement or stillness.

Tune into any other senses activated by this area or by this artwork right now—hearing...touch....smell...taste...

Feel where your awareness and attention are naturally drawn.

Simply notice.

How does this piece make you feel

Where do you feel its impact in your body? In your breath?

Observe any thoughts, emotions or sensations arising within you. Notice without judgment, and observing with neutral awareness how this piece makes you feel.

[15-20 second pause]

Become aware of the creativity and inspiration that shaped the artwork you are viewing.

If it feels comfortable, close your eyes. Be present with the impact of this artwork on you. Rest your awareness on how this creativity may be affecting you right now. Continue to let your breath flow gently and easily.

If your mind wanders, just acknowledge with kindness, and return your awareness to your breath.

[20-30 second pause]

As you're ready, release this practice and return to your awareness to the ground or the seat underneath you.

As you move through your day, notice how it feels to slow down and pay attention. Observe moments when something or someone inspires you or moves you in some way.

As you open your eyes, remember that you can explore and appreciate creativity all around you—in any place, and at any time.

[Meditation Bell]