

= Minnie Pwerle =

Minnie Pwerle ( also Minnie Purla or Minnie Motorcar Apwerl ; born between 1910 and 1922 ? 18 March 2006 ) was an Australian Aboriginal artist . She came from Utopia , Northern Territory ( Unupurna in local language ) , a cattle station in the Sandover area of Central Australia 300 kilometres ( 190 mi ) northeast of Alice Springs .

Minnie began painting in 2000 at about the age of 80 , and her pictures soon became popular and sought @-@ after works of contemporary Indigenous Australian art . In the years after she took up painting on canvas , until she died in 2006 , Minnie 's works were exhibited around Australia and collected by major galleries , including the Art Gallery of New South Wales , the National Gallery of Victoria and the Queensland Art Gallery . With popularity came pressure from those keen to acquire her work . She was allegedly " kidnapped " by people who wanted her to paint for them , and there have been media reports of her work being forged . Minnie 's work is often compared with that of her sister @-@ in @-@ law Emily Kame Kngwarreye , who also came from the Sandover and took up acrylic painting late in life . Minnie 's daughter , Barbara Weir , is a respected artist in her own right .

= = Personal life = =

Minnie was born in the early 20th century near Utopia , Northern Territory , 300 kilometres ( 190 mi ) north @-@ east of Alice Springs , Northern Territory . Utopia was a cattle station that was returned to Indigenous ownership in the late 1970s . It is part of a broader region known as the Sandover , containing about 20 Indigenous outstations and centred on the Sandover River . Minnie was one of the traditional owners of Utopia station recognised in the 1980 Indigenous land claim made over the property ; her particular country was known as Atnwengerrp .

Pwerle ( in the Anmatyerre language ) or Apwerle ( in Alyawarr ) is a skin name , one of 16 used to denote the subsections or subgroups in the kinship system of central Australian Indigenous people . These names define kinship relationships that influence preferred marriage partners , and may be associated with particular totems . Although they may be used as terms of address , they are not surnames in the sense used by Europeans . Thus " Minnie " is the element of the artist 's name that is specifically hers .

Estimates of Minnie 's birthdate vary widely . The National Gallery of Victoria estimates around 1915 ; Birnberg 's biographical survey of Indigenous artists from central Australia gives a birth date of around 1920 ; The new McCulloch 's Encyclopedia of Australian Art suggests around 1922 ; Elizabeth Fortescue 's biographical essay in Art of Utopia offers a range between 1910 and 1920 . The uncertainty arises because Indigenous Australians often estimate dates of birth by comparison with other events , especially for those born before contact with European Australians . Minnie was one of six children , and had three sisters : Molly , born around 1920 , Emily , born around 1922 , and Galya , born in the 1930s . She was of the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre Aboriginal language groups .

In about 1945 , Minnie had an affair with a married man , Jack Weir , described by one source as a pastoral station owner , by a second as " an Irish Australian man who owned a cattle run called Bundy River Station " , and by another as an Irish " stockman " . A relationship such as that between Minnie and Weir was illegal , and the pair were jailed ; Weir died shortly after his release . Minnie had a child from their liaison , who was partly raised by Minnie 's sister @-@ in @-@ law , artist Emily Kngwarreye , and became prominent Indigenous artist Barbara Weir . Barbara Weir was one of the Stolen Generations . At about the age of nine , she was forcibly taken from her family , who believed she had then been killed . The family were reunited in the late 1960s , but Barbara did not form a close bond with Minnie . Barbara married Mervyn Torres , and as of 2000 had six children and thirteen grandchildren .

Minnie went on to have six further children with her husband " Motorcar " Jim Ngala , including Aileen , Betty , Raymond and Dora Mpetyane , and two others who by 2010 had died . Her grandchildren include Fred Torres , who founded private art gallery DACOU in 1993 , and artist Teresa Purla ( or Pwerle ) .

Minnie began painting in late 1999 or 2000 , when she was almost 80 . When asked why she had not begun earlier ( painting and batik works had been created at Utopia for over 20 years ) , her daughter Barbara Weir reported Minnie 's answer as being that " no @-@ one had asked her " . By the 2000s , she was reported as living at Alparra , the largest of Utopia 's communities , or at Urultja ( also Irrultja , again in the Sandover region ) . Sprightly and outgoing , even in her eighties she could outrun younger women chasing goannas for bushfood , and she continued to create art works until two days before her death on 18 March 2006 . She was outlived by all her sisters except Maggie Pwerle , mother of artists Gloria and Kathleen Petyarre ( or Pitjara ) .

= = Career = =

In the 1970s and 1980s Utopia became well known for the design and production of batiks . By 1981 there were 50 artists at Utopia creating batik works ; 88 artists participated in a major design project supported by the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association . Although several sources comment that artistic activity at Utopia began with batik and only later moved to painting , they do not state whether or not Minnie was a textile artist before she took up the brush . The National Gallery of Victoria 's brief biography suggests that she did not participate in the making of batik , but she was aware of it .

When Minnie decided to take up painting in 2000 while she waited for her daughter Barbara to complete a canvas in an Adelaide workshop , the reception was immediately positive : she had her first solo exhibition that same year at Melbourne 's Flinders Lane Gallery . She was first selected to exhibit in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2002 . One of her pieces , Awelye Atnwengerrp , was exhibited in the 2003 Award , in which her name was given as Minnie Motorcar Apwerl ( Pwerle ) . The artist 's asking price for the picture , A \$ 44 @,@ 000 , was the second @-@ highest in the exhibition and the highest for an artist from the central and western deserts . Her painting Awelye Atnwengerrp 2 was exhibited in the 2005 competition . She was named by Australian Art Collector as one of Australia 's 50 most collectible artists in 2004 .

There were many group and solo exhibitions of Minnie 's work at private galleries between 2000 and 2006 . These included exhibitions at Japinka Gallery in Western Australia in 2003 and 2005 , Adelaide 's Dacou Gallery in 2000 and 2002 , Sydney 's Gallery Savah between 2000 and 2002 as well as in 2006 , and Melbourne 's Flinders Lane Gallery in 2000 , 2004 and 2006 , the last of which was a joint exhibition conducted with her three sisters , all of whom are artists in their own right .

Desert art specialist Professor Vivien Johnson noted that Minnie was one of the Utopia artists whose style was " radically different from [ that of ] all the other painting communities in the Western Desert ? and stunningly successful in the market place " . Her most famous fellow artist was Emily Kngwarreye , whose painting Earth 's Creation in 2007 sold for over \$ 1 million , setting a record for the price paid for a painting by an Indigenous Australian artist . Unlike Minnie , Emily had been an active participant in the early batik movement at Utopia .

Minnie ( like Emily ) was often placed under considerable pressure to produce works . She was reportedly " kidnapped " by people " keen to go to often quite bizarre lengths to acquire " her work . Minnie 's experience reflected broader issues in the industry surrounding artists , who were often older , had limited education or English language ability , and faced serious poverty both themselves and amongst their families . In addition to being pressured to paint by others , there were media reports suggesting that some of the vast number of paintings traded under Minnie 's name were not created by her at all .

= = Style of painting = =

Minnie 's style was spontaneous , and typified by " bold " and " vibrant " colour executed with great freedom . Her works , such as Anunapa , Akali held by the National Gallery of Victoria , were executed in acrylic ( often referred to as synthetic polymer ) paint on canvas . As with other contemporary artists of the central and western deserts , her paintings included depictions of stories or features for which she had responsibility within her family or clan , such as the Awelye

Atnwegerrp dreaming ( or Women 's Dreaming ) . Indigenous art expert Jenny Green believes Minnie 's work continues the tradition of " gestural abstractionism " established by Emily Kngwarreye , which contrasted with the use of recognisable traditional motifs ? such as animal tracks ? in the works of Western Desert artists . Brisbane artist and gallerist Michael Eather has likened her work not only to that of Emily , but also to Australian abstract impressionist artist Tony Tuckson .

Minnie 's paintings include two main design themes . The first is free @-@ flowing and parallel lines in a pendulous outline , depicting the body painting designs used in women 's ceremonies , or awelye . The second theme involves circular shapes , used to symbolise bush tomato ( *Solanum chippendalei* ) , bush melon , and northern wild orange ( *Capparis umbonata* ) , among a number of forms of bushfood represented in her works . Together , the designs were characterised by one reviewer as " broad , luminescent flowing lines and circles " .

= = Legacy = =

Minnie 's art was quickly added to major public collections such as the Art Gallery of NSW , Art Gallery of South Australia , National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery . It was also included in a 2009 exhibition of Indigenous Australian painting at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art . Her works later formed the basis of a series of designer rugs , and , together with paintings by her sisters , illustrated the cover of art critic Benjamin Genocchio 's book , *Dollar Dreaming* . Described by art dealer Hank Ebes as the works of " a genius " , Minnie 's paintings were typically selling for \$ 5 @, @ 000 in 2005 ; the highest price fetched on the secondary market at that time was \$ 43 @, @ 000 .

Regarded as one of Australia 's leading contemporary women artists , Minnie ranks alongside other notable Indigenous female painters Dorothy Napangardi , Gloria Petyarre and Kathleen Petyarre . One of a number of women such as Emily Kngwarreye who dominated central and western desert painting in the first decade of the 21st century , Minnie is considered to be one of Australia 's best @-@ known Indigenous artists , whose work " the market couldn 't get enough [ of ] " .

= = Major collections = =

Art Gallery of NSW  
Art Gallery of South Australia  
Kelton Foundation  
Kreglinger Collection  
National Gallery of Victoria  
Queensland Art Gallery  
Thomas Vroom Collection  
Hank Ebes Collection  
AMP Collection