



Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi
(Indigenous Australian (Pintupi), 1971 - 2019)

Biography

Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi was born in the bush near Jupiter Well in Western Australia. She is a celebrated Australian Indigenous artist whose work reflects her deep connection to the land and her cultural heritage. She belongs to the Pintupi language family through her mother's side, specifically from the country of Nynmi, near Kiwirrkurra in the Western Desert. Her father hailed from Alyarra, a region associated with the Ngaanyatjarra people.

Nyumi's early life was marked by both loss and resilience. As a young girl, she tragically lost her mother at Kanari soakwater near Jupiter Well. After this, Nyumi and her family led a nomadic existence, moving across the vast desert landscape. Eventually, they settled in the Wirrimanu community at Balgo, a pivotal moment in Nyumi's life as it marked the beginning of her journey as an artist.

In 1987, Nyumi began painting for the Warlayirti Artists cooperative in Balgo. This artistic endeavour allowed her to explore and express the rich cultural stories of her heritage, particularly the Dreamings associated with bush food from her childhood country.

Initially, Nyumi's work featured fluent lines in earthy tones, but over time, she developed a distinctive style characterized by thick impasto dotting. This technique created textured canvases where motifs of campsites, Coolamons, digging sticks, and bush tucker stood out, embodying the physical and spiritual connection to her land. Nyumi's role within her community extends beyond her artistic contributions. She is also a dancer and an enthusiastic teacher, dedicated to passing on traditional dances and songs to the younger generation. This commitment ensures that the cultural practices of her people remain vibrant and alive.

In her personal life, Nyumi married fellow artist Palmer Gordon. Together, they had four daughters, three of whom followed in their mother's artistic footsteps. Nyumi's encouragement and support were instrumental in their development as artists.

Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi's work gained widespread recognition in the late 1990s, culminating in her first solo exhibition, "Parwalla," at Raft Artspace in 2001. A painting from this series was later featured in the 2004 Biennale of Sydney, showcased at the Museum of Contemporary Art. In this series, Nyumi's connection to her childhood country is powerfully rendered, exemplifying her ability to translate the symbiotic relationship between artist and land into a visual language.

Nyumi's art is inherently feminine, depicting campsites, native flora and fauna, and women's food-gathering implements. Her delicate, jewel-like palette of pastel yellows, oranges, pinks, and creams sets her apart from the more vigorous styles of her contemporaries in Balgo. Her work is often compared to that of other notable desert women artists, such as Emily Kam Kngwarray, highlighting her significant role in the evolution of contemporary Indigenous art.

Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi remains a vital cultural figure, whose art not only preserves the stories of her people but also shares them with the world. Her paintings are more than just visual expressions; they are a testament to her enduring connection to her country and her commitment to keeping her culture alive.

Selected Collections

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia
Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, Australia
Artbank, Sydney, Australia
The Holmes à Court Collection, Perth, Australia
Morven Estate, USA
Helen Read Collection, Australia
Harland and Wolff Collection, Ireland
Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht (Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen), The Netherlands
The Collection of Colin and Elizabeth Laverty, Sydney, Australia

Selected Exhibitions

2013

Balgo Survey, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Alice Springs, Australia

2004

Solo: Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Solo: *Elizabeth Nyumi*, Raft Artspace, Darwin, Australia
29th Annual Shell Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle Arts Centre, Australia
21th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia

2003

20th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia
Elizabeth Nyumi, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia

2002

Elizabeth Nyumi, Aboriginal and Pacific Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia
30th Alive Prize, Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs, Australia
Desert Painters of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

2001

Aborigena Arte, Australiana Contemporanea, Palazzo Bricherasio, Italy
18th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia
Balgo Works, Städtische Gallery, Wolfsburg, Germany
Solo: *Parwalla*, Raft Artspace, Darwin, Australia

2000

17th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia
5th National Indigenous Heritage Art Award, Art of Place, Old, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia
Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

1999

16th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia

1998

15th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia

1997

14th Telstra NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia
Dreamings: Aboriginal kunst uit Australie, Eusebius, Arnhem, The Netherlands