

Wyndham Art Gallery

SHIFTING ELEMENTS AND CAMP DOGS

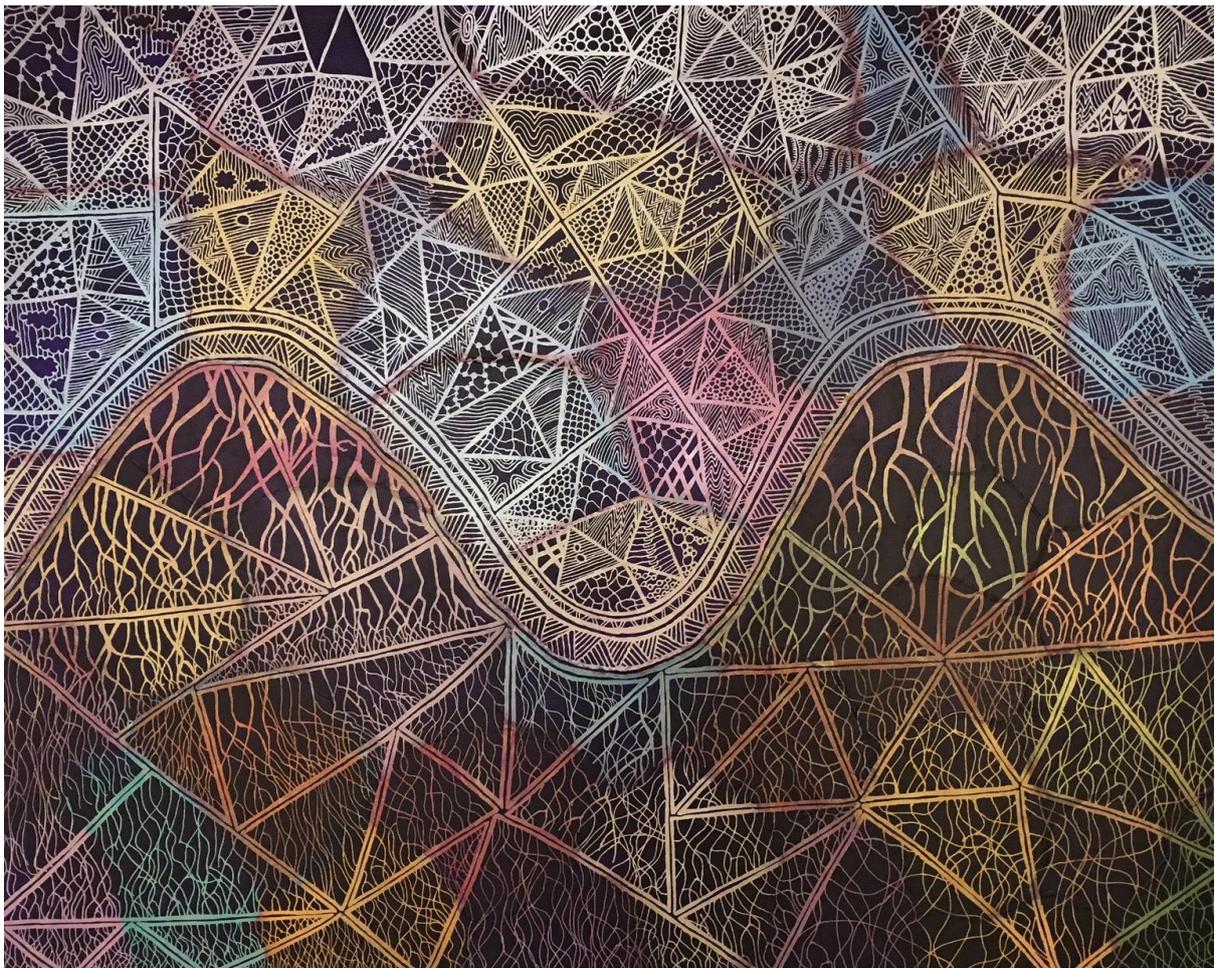
By Kamahi Djordon King



Ghost by Kamahi Djordon King

19 January to 18 March 2018

Kamaha Djordon King brings a taste of the top end of Australia to Wyndham. Many people have not had the opportunity to travel up north to see the northern regions of our continent. If they do, it is often in a tour bus that gives an overview of the amazing cultural heritage that lies mostly unacknowledged at the foundation of our country, but not a deeply personal account. Or they are traveling by themselves with no introduction to Aboriginal people who can open up a whole new way to see the landscape. The complexity of race relations in this country make it difficult to make a connection unless introduced, as people are wary of 'white men bearing gifts' as a result of the violent history that is this countries legacy. Because of that people are sometimes left unaware of the deeper meaning behind Aboriginal artworks and tend to see them in a European context.



Kamaha Djordon King – Of Earth and Sky (unrealised Dreams)

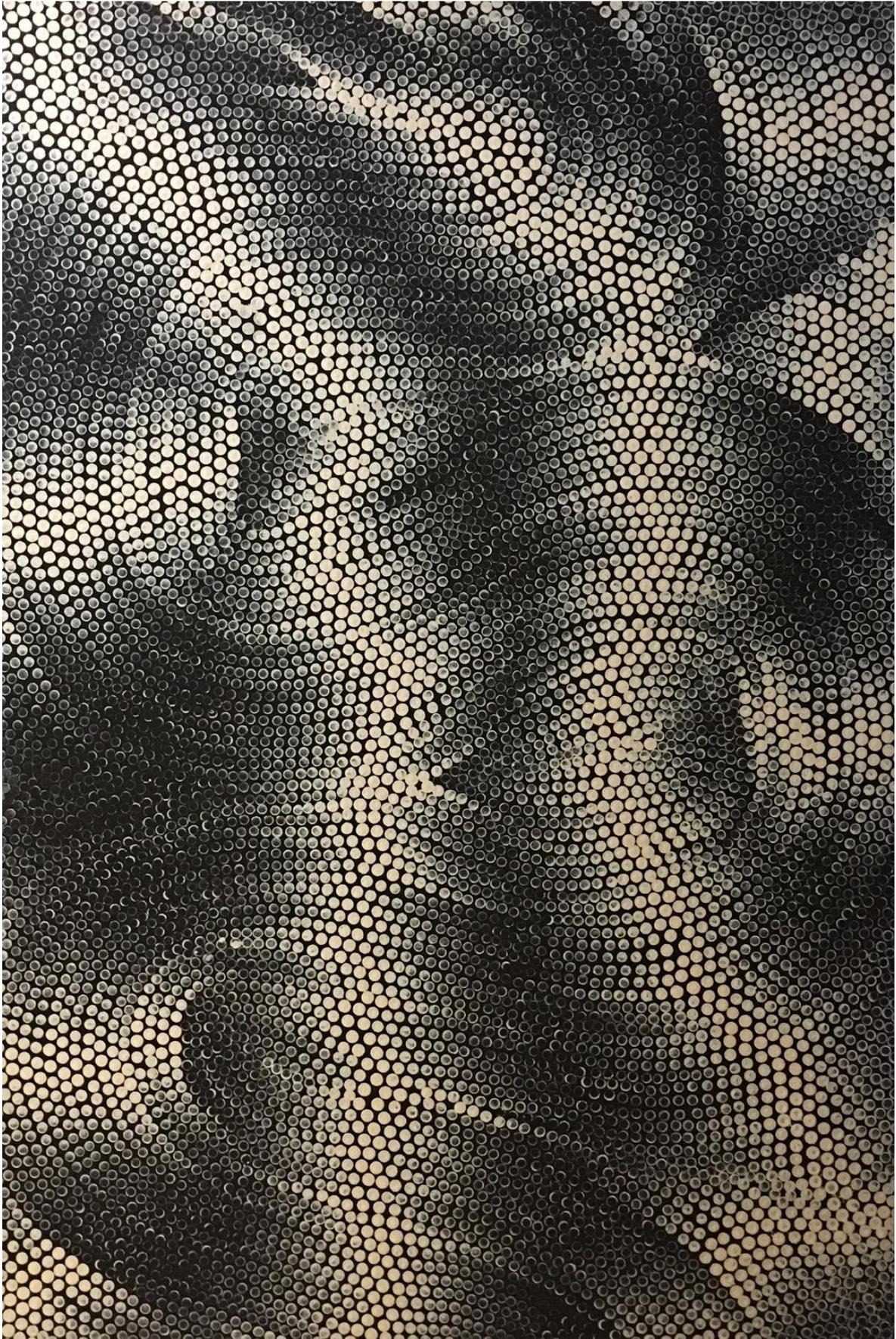
Kamahi is interested in his work being accessible which generously opens up the landscape to people not from his country. Kamahi is Gurindji and originally comes from Katherine a remote town in Northern Territory. It is situated on the Katherine River below the "Top End", 320 kilometres southeast of Darwin. It is the fourth largest settlement in the territory and is known as the place where "The outback meets the tropics".



Kamahi Djordon King – Dry Season

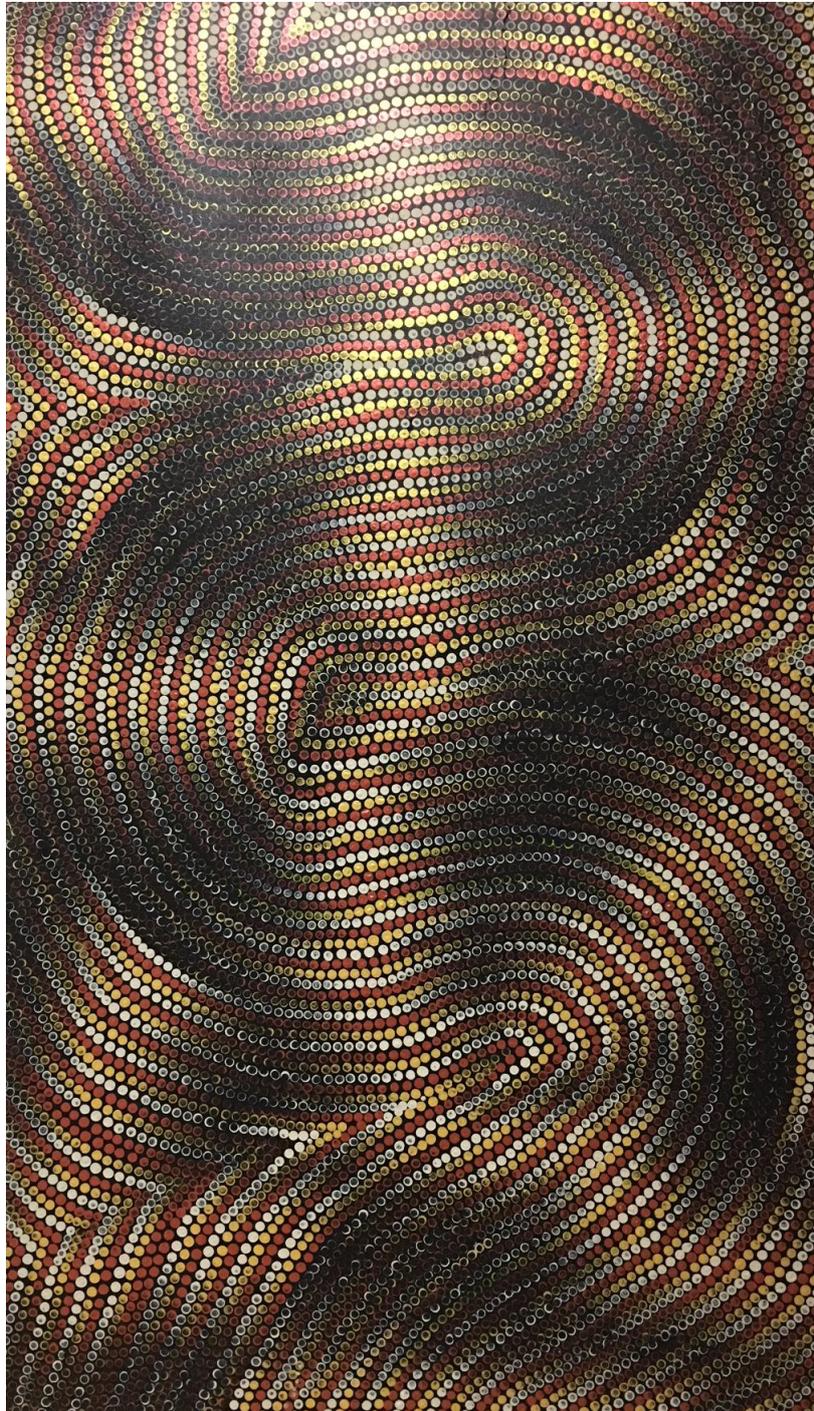
The landscape informs Kamahi's work and is where he draws his inspiration from. The rich colours of the desert can be seen replicated in his paintings, often seen from above which is generally an Indigenous view, as opposed to the traditional European way of seeing the landscape that usually involves a horizon. A European perspective is traditionally seen from one point of view looking out, however an Indigenous perspective is more related to mapping and allows for an inclusive or universal point of view.

Fauna and Flora are also an inspiration for Kamahi as can be seen in his paintings such as *King Brown*, showing the light on the snake skins as they slither across the ground to get out of

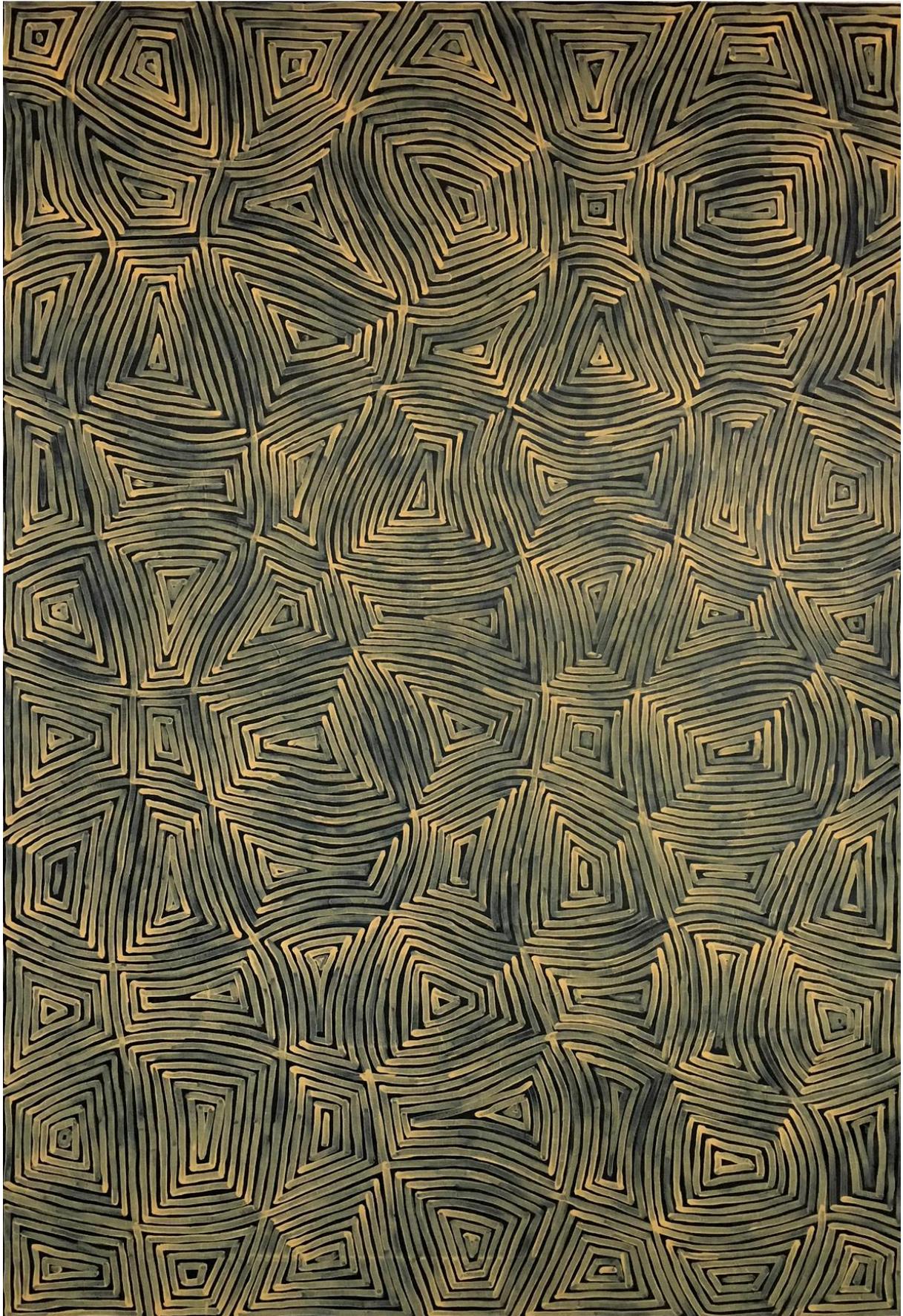


Kamahi Djordon King – File snake

the heat. In these two paintings he uses reflective paints that glow, creating the illusion of movement when seen from afar. *Alligator* depicts the underbelly of the crocodile in a beautiful patterning.



Kamahi Djordon King – King Brown



Kamahi Djordon King – Alligator

Kamaha is related to the people who were made famous in the non-Aboriginal world by their stand against Lord Vesty in the Wave Hill walk off.

From wage rights to land rights

In August 1966, Aboriginal pastoral workers walked off the job on the vast Vestey's cattle station at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory. At first they expressed their unhappiness with their poor working conditions and disrespectful treatment.

Conversations between stockmen who had worked for Vestey's and Dexter Daniels, the North Australian Workers' Union Aboriginal organiser, led to the initial walk off.

The next year the group moved to Wattie Creek, a place of significance to the Gurindji people. They asked Frank Hardy to 'make a sign' which included the word 'Gurindji', their own name for themselves. Their disaffection was deeper than wages and working conditions.

Although these stockmen and their families could not read, they understood the power of the white man's signs. Now their name for themselves, written on a sign, asserted a claim to Gurindji lands.

'I bin thinkin' this bin Gurindji country. We bin here longa time before them Vestey mob. Vincent Lingjari.'

[1]

In 1967 after hearing Minister for the Interior Peter Nixon's plan to dismiss the Gurindji claim to their land, Ted Egan wrote 'Gurindji Blues'. A singer/songwriter who had a long association with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, Egan listened to the Gurindji people and recorded their views about land in the song.

'Gurindji Blues' was recorded by RCA records in 1971 with a young Yolngu spokesman, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, accompanying Egan. [2]

1. Frank Hardy, *The Unlucky Australians*, One Day Hill, Melbourne, 1968; this edition London, 1981, p. 131.
2. http://indigenousrights.net.au/land_rights/wave_hill_walk_off,_1966-75

This tradition of protest underlies most Indigenous art and when it informs any reading of the work the viewer is included in a new perspective on the history of our country, not taught in our schools until relatively recently.



Kamahi Djordon King - Following the Songlines

Songlines cross the continent in a complex web of knowledge. Difficult for the uninitiated and non-Aboriginal people to understand, they are like an extensive encyclopedia that records information on Lore (Aboriginal Law), landscapes, cultures, people, animals and all the necessary information that was needed for the First People of this land to live sustainably for over 2000 generations.

Following the Songlines is a painting that depicts a gathering on sacred land, a merging of neighboring tribes following the songlines. The circles represent people, the motif in the circles,

their skin names. The lines underneath are the songlines of Kamahi's Grandmothers Kantri. Indigenous people lived in every part of the continent of Australia pre colonization. They were the undisputed sovereign owners of the country and that sovereignty has never been ceded.

There were over 300 languages and different tribal groups across the continent and much like Europe they had their own laws and cultural practices.

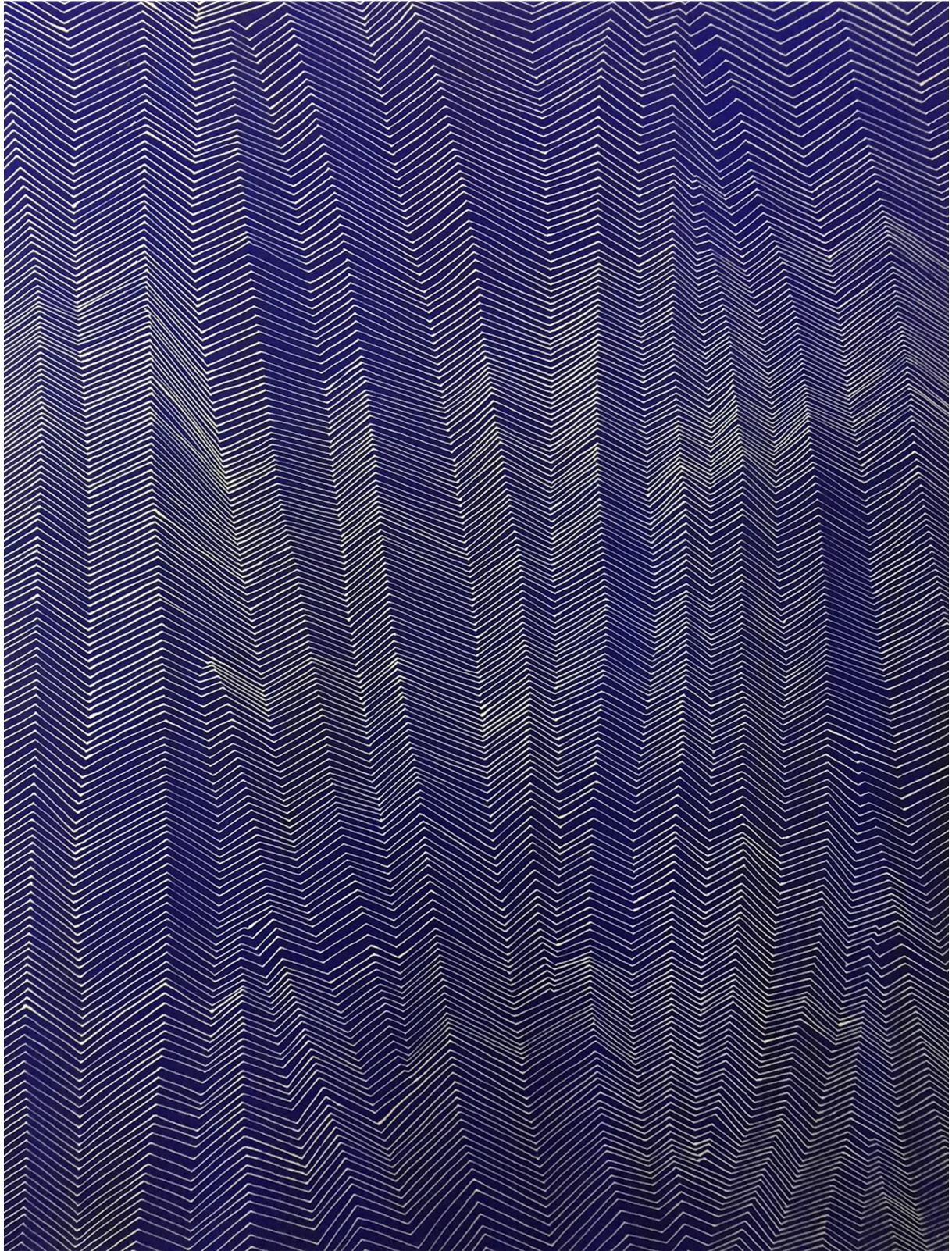
Their highly sophisticated cultures and ways of living enabled them to survive and live well in a huge variety of climates from the cold in what we now call Tasmania to the tropical far north and central deserts. What we now know as Melbourne is also known to Aboriginal people as Narm.



Kamahi Djordon King - Following the Songlines - detail



Kamahi Djordon King – Gurindji Sandhills



Kamahi Djordon King – Gurindji Sandhills

Kamahi Djordon King has created video artworks that capture the painting of his *Gurindji Sandhills* paintings in time lapse. What is a time consuming and delicate task of precision is shown over a short period of time which belies the slow process of painting that often happens on the ground in the Northern Territory with more than one person participating. However Kamahi's work is an example of the variety of ways that Aboriginal people make art which allays often formed stereotypes that create misunderstandings in the non-Aboriginal community.

Kamahi's paintings are influenced by his grandfather whose knowledge of the land and culture was passed on to his grandson who started sketching at a young age. The combination of knowledge and 'Dreamings' are captured in the works in this exhibition.

The playful sculptures that accompany the paintings, are a new body of work designed as a tribute to his dog the late Tanah who he called his fur baby. Camp dogs refers to the group of dogs that typically hang around the camp fires in the NT but they also play with the word 'camp' that has another meaning in the GLBTIQ world.



Kamahi Djordon King – Ghost

Kamahi has an alter ego called Constantina Bush who regularly performs across Australia at different events. Most recently she was a guest performer with Yothu Yindi, the famous Australian band in their Australia wide tour. Constantina is a character much in the way Barry Humphries used his character Edna Everidge to make social commentary about issues too difficult to confront head on. Kamahi employs her character to address issues such as racism and prejudice using humor, allowing people to laugh at themselves. Constantina has also appeared in gallery exhibitions as well.



Jacky Jacky in a box – Bunjilaka, Museum Victoria

She is performing at this year's Park Lounge – Pride Without Prejudice event.

WYNDHAM ART GALLERY 2018 PROGRAM

WYNDHAM ART PRIZE – Opening 29 March
Exhibition Dates - 30 March – 11 June

WEAVE – Opening 21 June
Exhibition Dates – 22 June – 20 August

LOCAL – Opening 30 August
Exhibition Dates – 31 August – 29 October

OVERWINTERING

Opening 7 November
Exhibition Dates – 8 November – 31st December



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