

Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre



Introduction

Founded in 2004 in Mparntwe / Alice Springs, Australia

Artwork Title: *Homeless on my homeland*, 2018-19

Artwork Location: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Cockatoo Island, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and National Art School

Directed by descendants and kin relatives of Albert Namatjira, Iltja Ntjarra (Many Hands) Art Centre is proud to keep the Hermannsburg watercolour tradition strong for future generations.

At the peak of Albert Namatjira's career he moved from Ntaria (Hermannsburg) to a humpy in the Morris Soak camp in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), to be near painting teacher Rex Battarbee. At Mparntwe, Namatjira did not own or have a house to live in. His sons, daughters and grandchildren lived there with him near the creek bed. Today, Betty Wheeler, the granddaughter of Albert Namatjira, is living with her family in an outstation near Ntaria. She would like to live in Mparntwe, but housing is not available to her.

'Many of our family members living remotely need to be closer to Mparntwe, to use the services in town,' Betty says. 'There is a lack of housing and a very long waiting list ... Our families struggle with poor living conditions.'

Fourteen artists from Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre are being shown across multiple venues for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, tracing stories of Country as well as struggles with housing and displacement. Beautiful landscapes have been painted onto 'dollar shop' bags, a potent material symbol of life on the move. These works explore the enduring connection to Country, as well as continued cycles of dispossession, while powerfully asserting messages of self-determination.

'We want to introduce the beautiful landscape of the Northern Territory to people in urban environments. At the same time, we want to raise awareness about the issues we are facing. We feel that there is a lack of consultation with traditional owners. If the authorities listened to us then they would support us with housing issues rather than investing in mining on our Country, which we strongly object to.' – Mervyn Rubuntja, senior artist at Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre

Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre, *Homeless on my homeland*, 2018-19. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Art Gallery of New South Wales. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Fondation Opale. Participating artists: Kathleen France, Noreen Hudson, Clara Inkamala, Dellina Inkamala, Kathy Inkamala, Reinhold Inkamala, Vanessa Inkamala, Janie Karpa, Gloria Pannka, Hubert Pareroutja, Ivy Pareroutja, Mervyn Rubuntja, Hillary Wirri. Courtesy the artists and Iltja Ntjarra / Many Hands Art Centre, Alice Springs. Photograph: Zan Wimberley.

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Inquiry questions

- Look at the artwork. What do you notice first?
- Each work has a landscape painting on one side of the dollar bag and a written message from the artist on the other side. Why do you think the artists wanted to share these messages through their artworks?
- Dollar bags are used as a canvas. What would be difficult about painting on this type of material?
- What do you think the significance is of using a dollar bag as a canvas?

Creative learning activity

Choose an object from around your house that you can paint on to express what your home means to you.

Tip: try using an empty tissue box, an old t-shirt or garden pot.

Use watercolours to paint onto your makeshift canvas. If you don't have watercolours, try the NIRIN at home activity and make your own!

Reflection

- Think about your home. How do you feel about it and what it means to you?
- Why did you choose the item you did as your makeshift canvas?
- What difficulties did you find painting onto your makeshift canvas?

Extension

- Write a short poem about your home and community and what makes it special to you.
- Can art be a vehicle for political change?