

Spinifex Artists Group

Language: Pitjantjatjara

**Byron Brookes Fred Grant Ned Grant Simon Hogan
Ian Rictor Roy Underwood Lennard Walker**

The Spinifex People began painting on canvas in 1996 as part of their land title claim. Initially two large collaborative canvases were produced, one painted by men and the other by women. Byron Brookes, Fred Grant, Ned Grant, Simon Hogan, Ian Rictor, Roy Underwood and Lennard Walker are all senior men who were involved in the original men's land title painting. Hogan precipitated the title claim when he was a member of the local ATSIC regional council.

Because Aboriginal identity is embedded in complex, subtle and dynamic relations with others, contemporary aesthetic expressions of this identity often take a collaborative format. Collaborative paintings became a feature of various Aboriginal land title claims that followed the Mabo decision in 1992. Like the original Spinifex People title-claim paintings, the collaborative paintings submitted for the awards are Tjukurrpa (Dreaming) stories associated with the artists' personal and shared connections with country and its histories. They are part of an ongoing "arts project" that involves bush trips with paintings done in situ, with the aim of documenting ownership of various sites. While the artists have now been painting for a decade, their art retains the raw expressiveness typical of new desert art centres.

The Spinifex People who speak a number of Pitjantjatjara dialects are from the southern parts of the Western Desert, near the Western Australian / South Australian border. They have remained in their country throughout the post-contact period, even though many have travelled widely and lived in other desert locations. Hence they have enjoyed considerable continuity with traditional times. Unlike most other Aboriginal groups, they managed to avoid anthropological classification into a particular speech community though Norman Tindale, whose work is the basis of such classification, called them the Ngalea. Today they are, as they always have been, the Anangu (Aboriginal people from the Western Desert cultural bloc) tjuta (many) pila (spinifex) nguru (from), or more simply the Spinifex People.

(Author: Ian McLean)