



Short St. Gallery



Helicopter Tjungurrayi

Born	1947
Language Group	Kukatja; Manyjilyjarra
Region	Balgo

Helicopter Joey Tjungurrayi is well recognised as one of Warlayirti Artists' leading artists and is a great ambassador for the Art Centre, painting with Warlayirti Artists since the early 'nineties. Born at Nynmi, west of Kwiirrkurra in Western Australia, Helicopter was brought up in a traditional nomadic lifestyle, learning from childhood the location of water sources and how to hunt for bush food. The time spent moving through country as a young boy has had a profound and lasting effect on Helicopter's artistic process and practice. As James Cowan writes in Balgo: New Directions 1999 of Balgo artists "...their work is grounded in a quintessential act of reverie." Helicopter's approach and dedication to the act of painting is evidence of the reverence which he holds for his country. My father got [my spirit] from [Nyakin], and my mother too... They were just taking me around them Countries, my mother and father. They took me everywhere. (Carty, J. Yiwarra Kuju, The Canning Stock Route, 2010). In 1957, the young Tjungurrayi became seriously ill while walking with his family on country: he was taken to the Old Balgo Mission for medical attention in a helicopter that had been doing mining exploration work in the area. The first helicopter that many of the people had seen, this important event is how he got his very memorable name. Helicopter worked at the mission in Balgo, drilling for water, cutting timber for fencing, fixing the windmill and travelled widely during these days to pick up supplies from the Kimberley ports. It was also at Balgo mission that Helicopter met and married Lucy Napanangka Yukenbarri. Together they had six children and grew up another two of Napanangka's children from her first husband. They were together until Napanangka died in 2003. Two of his daughters, Christine Yukenbarri and Imelda (Yukenbarri) Gugaman, have become successful artists in their own right. In the early 1990s Helicopter painted with Napanangka, not seeking any acknowledgement, and then in 1994 Helicopter started painting in his own distinctive linear style. Emanating from the central feature of a tjumu (soak water), Helicopter's works are predominantly created through a rhythmical and methodical application of thick paint, as the artist dots and drags the brush



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along the linen, creating extended lines, parallel lines that represent the tali (sand hills) that dominate his father and mother's country. Tjungurrayi can be found on most days sitting on the Art Centre veranda facing in the direction of his country. He gazes southward between brush strokes as if those distant tjurnu and tali were visible shimmering on the horizon. When asked about his painting, he will often motion fondly towards the Great Sandy Desert "good country, my country". In 1999 Helicopter started to gain recognition, he had his first solo exhibition, and was a finalist in the NATSIAA and Alice Prizes. In 2002 he was a NATSIAA finalist for the second time. Helicopter has had six solo exhibitions during his career, two of which were alongside his late wife, Lucy Yukenbarri. Helicopter has travelled interstate and overseas for exhibitions of his paintings, including London, Amsterdam, and a trip to Tokyo, Japan in 2010 where he lead a team of Warlayirti's artists to paint a brand new Audi as part of the Motika project. He continues to participate in a large number of group exhibition and his art features amongst some of the most significant collections of Aboriginal art across Australia and overseas. In recent years Helicopter developed cataracts on his right eye, which had a profound effect on his eyesight. His vision deteriorated but his dedication to recording culture and creating art remained steadfast: he walked each morning to the art centre escorted by his pack of dogs and felt his way into his chair. As he painted he instinctively pulled the brush across the linen as if singing the paint into tali and tjurnu, feeling the colours echo his memory of country. Towards the end of 2015 Helicopter travelled away from Balgo for eye surgery. It was successful in restoring a good part of his vision, and with his clearer vision returned, so did a more defined application of paint. Helicopter has regained his confidence, experimenting with contrasting colours and playful designs. Helicopter is a Maparn (traditional healer) and is an active Senior Lawman and Singer. In 2022 Helicopter was named a West Australian Cultural Living Treasure. In 2023, Helicopter had a large fall and broke his arm. Throughout his hospital stay and rehab, he still continued to produce artwork during this period. He's now back in Balgo, painting as good as ever.

Solo Exhibitions

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| 2022 | Spotlight on Helicopter – Short Street Gallery, Broome |
| 2019 | Helicopter: Joey Tjungurrayi, Raft Artspace, Alice Springs, NT |
| 2016 | Helicopter, Short St Gallery, Broome, WA |
| 2009 | Wangkurtu Dreaming, Whitford Fine Art, London |
| 2004 | Helicopter Tjaungurrayi, Alcaston Gallery @ Depot Gallery, Sydney. |
| 2003 | Always Together Painting, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Vic |
| 1999 | Tjurnu: Living Water, Alcaston Gallery , Melbourne, Vic |

Group Exhibitions

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| 2024 | We Are Wati: Desert Men - CIAF, Short Street Gallery, Cairns |
| 2024 | Parlukuluya ninti tjunin – Balgo Mob sharing knowledge - Yaama Ganu Gallery, Moree, NSW |



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2024	Desert Decedent's, Short St Gallery, Broome WA
2023	Desert Mob – Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs
2023	Balgo Survey Show – Aboriginal Contemporary, Sydney
2023	Art in the Park – Ord Vallery Muster, Kununurra
2023	Desert Cool – Short Street Gallery, Broome
2022	Balgo on the Stock Route – Art Mob, Hobart
2021	Earth is Touch: Recent Paintings from Balgo Hills – Calvin Morris Gallery, New York City
2021	Balgo Beginnings – South Australia Museum
2021	Desert Mob – Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs
2021	Revealed: new and Emerging WA Artists – Fremantle Art Centre, WA
2021	Ngurra Kutjuwarra: On Country, together – Kidogo Arthouse, Fremantle
2020	Palya: Art From The Desert – Purple Noon Gallery, NSW
2020	Tamanthi Art Fair (featured artist) – Lot Fourteen, Adelaide
2020	Desert Mob - Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs
2020	Kuwarritjanuluya Wakaminpa: A New Generation Are Doing It Now – Paul Johnstone Gallery, Darwin
2019.	Journey Through Culture, ReDot Fine Art Gallery, Adelaide, SA
2019.	Wirrimanu Balgo Artists, Japingka Aboriginal Art, Fremantle, WA
2019.	Desert Mob, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs
2019	Desert River Sea: Kimberley Art Then & Now - Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
2018	Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs
2018	Flying Colours - Talapi Gallery, Alice Springs
2018	WAU! Focus in Western Australia - Rovaniemi Museum, Finland
2017	Balgo - Jackman Gallery, Canberra
2017	Continuing Culture - Artitja Fine Art, Perth
2017	TARNANTHI FESTIVAL - Art Gallery of SA, Adelaide
2017	Flight: Aboriginal perspectives from the sky - FORM Art Gallery, Perth
2016	Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs
2016	Kings and Queens - Yaama Ganu Gallery, Moree, NS
2015	Warlayirti Artists, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Darwin
2015	Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
2015	Warlayirti 2015, Art Atrium Gallery, Sydney
2014-15	Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs
2014	Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
2014	Balgo 14, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
2014	Yaninpala Yirwarrawanna Kutjupa Ngurrarakutu – Walking the Path, Nomad Art, Darwin
2014	Balgo: Past & Present, Coeee Gallery, Sydney
2014	Summer Collectors Show, Susan McCulloch, Mornington Peninsula
2014	Warlayirti Artists, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Darwin



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- 2014 Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 2013-14 In Print 20/20, Celebrating 20 years of prints & printmaking, Charles Darwin University Art Collection & Northern Editions Printmaking Studio
- 2013 Convergence, Warlayirti Artists @ Short St Gallery, Broome
- 2013 Kuralka Tjanu Tjukurpa: Kuwarri Marr Ku (Old Stories: New Creations), Northern Editions, Charles Darwin University, Darwin Festival Exhibitions, Darwin
- 2013 Marrka Wangka- Warlayirti Artist, Yaama Ganu Gallery & Café Gali, Moree 2013 Re-generation, Susan McCulloch, Melbourne
- 2013 Seoul Open Arts Fair, Korea. (Group Exhibition via Desart, Alice Springs.) 2013 Sun Flying, Payla Art, Australian Embassy, Berlin, Germany
- 2013 Balgo Survey, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
- 2013 Fresh, McCulloch & McCulloch, Salt Contemporary Queenscliff, Vic
- 2013 Nora Wompi & Friends, Suzanne O'Connell, Brisbane, Qld
- 2012-13 Gestuelles – The Art of Transmission by Aboriginal Desert Women, IDAIA – International Development for Australian Indigenous Art, Alliances Francaises in Australia
- 2013 Warlayirti Artists, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Darwin
- 2013 Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 2013 Balgo Survey, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Victoria
- 2012 Convergence: Two Worlds, Void Gallery, Broome
- 2012 Watermark - the Signature of Life, IDAIA, Hong Kong
- 2012 Warlayirti Artists, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Darwin
- 2012 Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 2012 Wangkartu, Winpurpurla Soakwaters Continuing Through Time, Alcaston Gallery
- 2012 Warlayirti Artists, Artkelch Pro Community, Freiburg, Grassi Museum Leipzig, Fabrik Der Kunste, Hamburg and Galerie Gunzoburg Bodensee (Lake Constance), Germany
- 2011 Warlayirti Artists, Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Darwin
- 2011 Warlayirti Artists, Desert Mob Exhibition, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs
- 2010 Balgo Survey, Rheinfelden/Baden, Haus Salmegg, Coolamon Aboriginal Art Gallery Schopfheim, Germany
- 2010 Balgo Survey, ReDot Gallery, Singapore
- 2010 Ingalimpa Tjuntu - Singing Songs "We sing the country and that's how we find the way", ReDot Fine Art Galleries, Audi Forum Building, Tokyo
- 2010 Balgo Prints, Northern Editions, Darwin
- 2009 Lamparrta Tjanu Nyami , Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
- 2008 Balgo 2008, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
- 2008 Men's Exhibition, Woolloongabba, Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 2008 Mixed Show, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi , Melbourne
- 2007 Balgo Survey , Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne



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- 2007 New Balgo Prints & Glass, Northern Editions, Darwin
- 2007 Best of the Best, Framed Gallery, Darwin
- 2007 Valid Editions - They might be Giants, A La Trobe University Art Museum, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre
- 2007 My country: Abstract interpretations of Australian Landscape, LaTrobe University travelling exhibition. Ateneo Art Gallery, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines
- 2007 Survey, They Might be Giants, Woolloongabba Art gallery, Brisbane
- 2006 Helicopter Tjungurrayi, Christine Yukenbarri, Imelda (guguman) Yukenbarri, Carmel Yukenbarri, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
- 2005 Glass from the Sand Country, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne
- 2006 Survey, ShortstGallery, Broome, WA
- 2004 Balgo a go go, Grant Pirrie, Sydney
- 2003 Eight by Three, Scott Livesey Art Dealer, Melbourne, Vic
- 2003 Desert Mob, Araluen Centre for Arts, Alice Springs, NT
- 2003 Purtatjanirri Kamu Warmmala, Framed Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2003 Balgo Brilliance, Art Mob, Hobart, Tas
- 2003 Palya Minyirri, Thornquest Gallery, Gold Coast, QLD
- 2002 Balgo Hills, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Vic
- 2002 19th NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of NT, Darwin, NT
- 2002 Balgo Hills Artists 2002, Art Mob, Aboriginal Fine Art, Tas
- 2002 Art from Balgo, Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, NT
- 2002 Kutjunga, Passing it On: Works from Balgo Hills, Coomalie Cultural Centre, Batchelor, WA
- 2002 Big Colour My Country, Thornquest Gallery, Gold Coast, QLD
- 2002 Balgo Hills: an artist's survey, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, NSW
- 2001 Short on Size, Short st. Gallery, Broome, WA
- 2001 Balgo Men, Framed Gallery, Darwin, NT
- 2001 All About Art, Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
- 2001 Kutjunga, Bett Gallery, Hobart, Tas
- 2001 Balgo Works, Staedtische Gallery, Wolfsburg, Germany
- 2001 New paintings from Balgo, Cutliffe Gallery, Sydney, NSW
- 2001 Recent Works by Artists from Balgo Hills, Ochre Gallery, Collingwood, Vic
- 2001 Balgo Artists Return to Country, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
- 2001 Spirituality and Australian Aboriginal Art, Alcaston Gallery, Madrid, Spain
- 2001 Yvonnou Balgo Exhibition, AMG Gallery, Paris, France
- 2001 Past Modern: an exhibition of Kimberley Landscapes, Short st. Gallery @ Australia Square, Sydney, NSW
- 2000 The Westside: Images in Ochre and Colour, Coe-ee Exhibiting Gallery, Yuwayi Art Precinct, World Square, Sydney, NSW
- 2000 Olympic Exhibition, Coe-ee Exhibiting Gallery, Yuwayi Art Precinct, World Square, Sydney
- 2000 Past, Present and Future, Gallery East, Sydney, NSW



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- 2000 Balgo Hills, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Vic
2000 Marking the Paper: limited edition prints on paper, DesArt, Sydney, NSW
2000 Melbourne Artfair
2000 Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne, Vic
2000 Waltja-Family, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, NSW
2000 Hot Press: Recent Prints from Central Australia and the Kimberley, Beaver Galleries, Canberra, ACT
2000 Peintures des Aborigenes d'Australie, Palais des Congres et des Expositions, Paris, France
2000 Balgo Art, Gondwana Gallery, Alice Springs, NT
2000 Balgo Hills Aboriginal Paintings, Bett Gallery, Hobart, Tas
1999 Aboriginal Art, IHK, Wurzburg, Germany
1999 Dreaming in Colour: Australian Aboriginal Art from Balgo, University of Virginia, USA
1999 16th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, NT
1999 East Kimberley Art Awards, Kununurra Arts Council, Kununurra, WA
1999 Desert Mob '99, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs, NT
1999 30th Alice Prize, Araluen Centre, Alice Springs, NT
1999 Mularpa (True) Balgo, Framed, the Gallery, Darwin, NT
1999 Miliynyin, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, NSW
1999 Miliynyin, Japingka Gallery, Fremantle, WA
1998 Culture Store, Art Gallery, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
1998 Ngurrara: My Own Country, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, NSW
1998 Dreamings, Spazio Pitti Arte, Florence, Italy
1998 Balgo Men, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
1998 Hilton Hotel Art Gallery, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
1998 Dreamings, Vlaams-Europeesch Conferentiecentrum, Brussels, Belgium
1997 Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs, NT
1997 New Paintings from Balgo Artists, Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne, Vic
1997 Big Balgos: Recent Paintings by Warlayirti Artists, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, NSW
1997 Balgo Paintings, Seywald Gallery, Salzburg, Austria
1997 Dreamings, Arnhem, The Netherlands
1997 nnenseite: Projektgruppe Stoffwechsel, Kassel & Gottingen, Germany
1997 Desert Country, Matso's, Broome, WA
1996 Balgo Hills: Art of the Place, Derek Simpkins Gallery of Tribal Art, Vancouver, BC, Canada
1995 Two Men Dreaming: New Art from Balgo Hills, Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery, Sydney

Collections

Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands



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Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery of South Australia
Artbank Collection
Comuninad de Madrid (Department of Culture, Regional Government of Madrid)
Edith Cowan University
Gantner Myer Collection
Harland Collection
Kelton Collection, USA
Ken Thompson and Pierre Marecaux Collection
Kluge Ruhe Collection, USA
Lavery Collection
Musee de Quai Branly, Paris
Museum de Lyon, France
National Gallery of Australia
National Gallery of Victoria
Revue du Louvre, Paris
Solenne Ducos-Lamotte Collection
University of Notre Dam, WA

Awards

2024 Finalist, 41st NATSIAA, Museum and Art Gallery of NT, Darwin
2023 Finalist, The Jury Art Prize, Port Hedland
2022 West Australian Cultural Living Treasure
2004 Finalist, 29th Annual Fremantle Print Awards, Fremantle Art Centre, WA
2002 Finalist 19th NATSIAA, MAGNT, NT
2001 Tjumu painting translated into a mosaic that adorns the courtyard of the Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht, Netherlands
1999 Special Commendation, East Kimberley Art Awards, Kununurra Arts Council, Kununurra
1999. 16th NATSIAA, MGNT, NT
1999. Finalist Alice Prize, NT

Bibliography

2022 Mishra, Ankit. Helicopter Tjungurrayi short film:
<https://filmfreeway.com/HelicopterTjungurrayi>
2021 Carty, J. Balgo: Creating Country, UWA Publishing, Perth
2019 Lane, Carly, Emilia and Carboni, Desert River Sea: Portraits of the Kimberly, UWA Publishing



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- 2019 Browning, Dabiel, helicopter Story: the life and art oof Helicopter Tjungurayi, ABC Radio National
- 2014 Healy, Jacqueline (ed) 2014, catalogue Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo RMIT Gallery, Melbourne
- 2000 Australian Heritage Commission (Ed.), The Fifth National Indigenous Heritage Art Award. The Art of Place. Canberra
- 1999 Cowan, James, Balgo new directions. Craftsman House, Sydney
- 2000 Galerie B, Speyer, Kulturabteilung Bayer, Leverkusen, Bayer Australia, Sydney (Hrsg.), Das Verborgene im Sichtbaren. The Unseen in Scene. Aboriginal Art Speyer, Stockholm
- 1999 ISAACS, Jennifer, Spirit Country. Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art. Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne, Fine Arts & Museums of San Francisco
- 2000 Kleinert, S. und Neale, M. (Ed.). The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture. Oxford Univ. Press, Melbourne,
- 2000 Meeuwssen, Franca. Aboriginal Kunst, de verhalen vertellen, Zwolle,
- 2002 Murname, Gerald, Sista brevet till en brorsdotter. In: Artes. Tidskrift fLitteratur, Konst och Musik, Nr 4/2002, Arg. 28,
- 2001 Musée Olympic (Ed.), Art Aborigène, Jouvence millénaire,. Aboriginal Art, An Immemorial Fountain of Youth, Lausanne
- 2007 Outback discovering the people & culture of Australia's heartland, www.incword.com, pg 41, 42, 43, 59
- 2002 Winter, Joan G., (Ed), Native Title Business. Contemporary Indigenous Art. Keearia Press, Southport
- 2002 Murname, Gerald. Sista brevet till en brorsdotter, In Artes. Tidskrift fLitteratur, Konst och Musik, Nr 4/2002, Arg. 28,

Commissions

- 2010 Painted a car for Motika Project in Tokyo, Japan
- 2003 Tjumu painting translated into a mosaic that adorns the courtyard of the Aboriginal Musuem Utrecht, Netherlands