

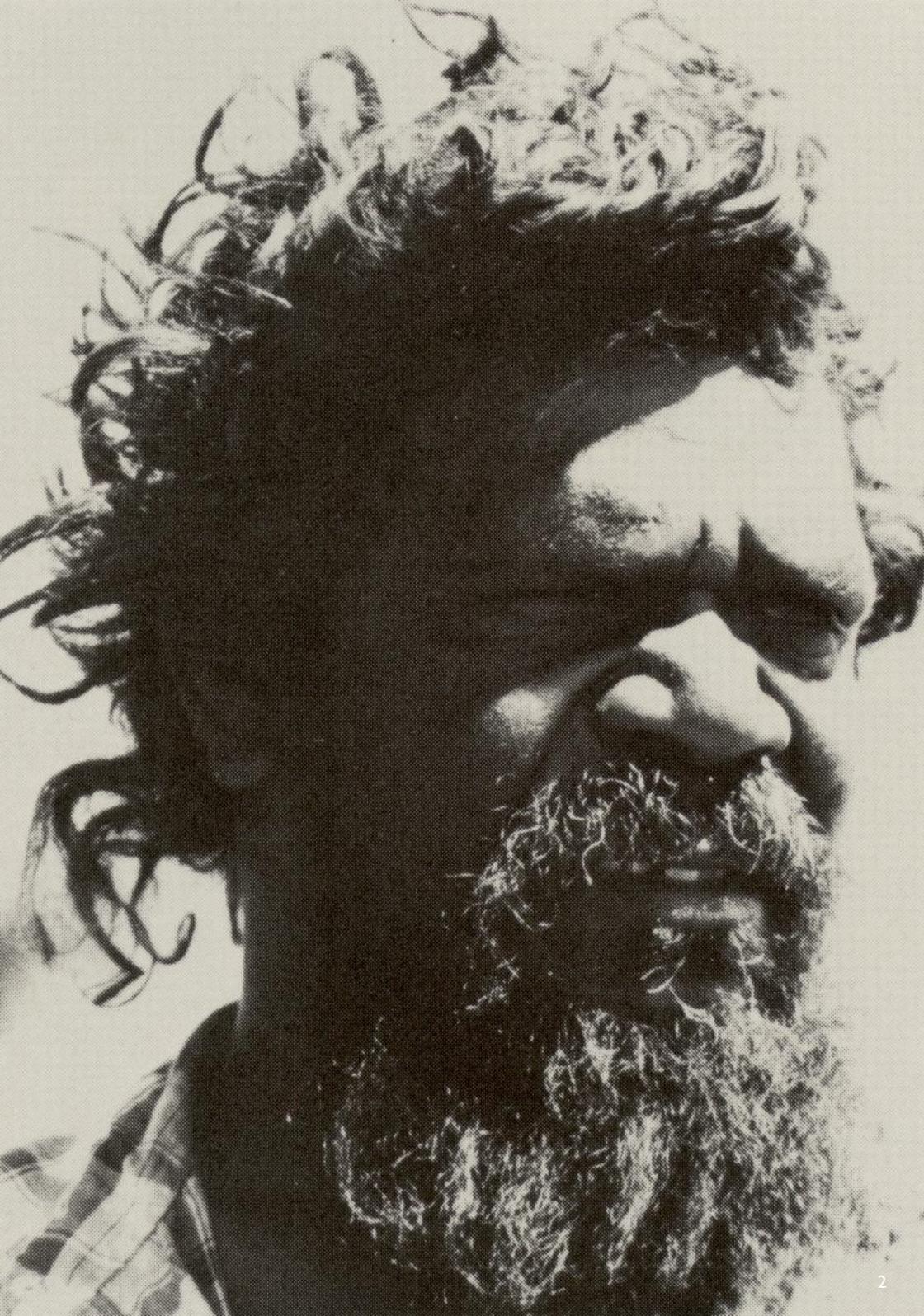


22.01 — 09.05

# Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri

*Master of the Western Desert*

**OLIVIER VARENNE**  
ART MODERNE & CONTEMPORAIN



## CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932–2002)

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (1932–2002) was one of Australia's most celebrated Aboriginal artists and a pioneering figure of the Western Desert painting movement. Born near Napperby Station in the Northern Territory, he belonged to the Anmatyerre people and was among the first generation of artists to translate traditional sand and body painting motifs onto canvas in the early 1970s. His practice, deeply rooted in the Dreaming stories and topographies of his ancestral lands, transformed these ancient narratives into vast, dynamic compositions — maps of Country that intertwine myth, geography, and memory.

Possum's large-scale paintings are characterised by their rhythmic structures, layered symbolism, and sophisticated use of colour and pattern. They reflect both a meticulous knowledge of Indigenous cosmology and an intuitive grasp of modern abstraction, positioning his work at the intersection of cultural preservation and contemporary expression. Today, his paintings are held in major institutions worldwide, including the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the British Museum, affirming his legacy as a central voice in 20th-century art and a bridge between traditional knowledge and global modernism.





## **CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

**By Adrian Newstead, President of the  
Aboriginal Art Association of Australia.**

Clifford Possum was the first recognised star of the Western Desert art movement and one of Australia's most distinguished painters of the late twentieth century. Following his father's death, he was initiated into manhood at Napperby Station under the tutelage of One Pound Jim, a legendary figure in Central Australia, who acted as guide to early travellers and anthropologists, and other senior Tjungurrayi men.

He began his artistic career at Glen Helen producing carvings that were renowned in Central Australia for their brilliant craftsmanship and became a member of the Papunya Tula artists working with art teacher Geoffrey Bardon in February 1972. From the outset, Clifford's singular artistic style, characterised by an innovative use of spatial configuration, conveyed a remarkable sense of mood and atmosphere in his paintings. His small early career works, however, were a mere foretaste of the grandeur of the paintings he would create, on an unprecedentedly massive scale, during the late 1970s. Described by his biographer Vivien Johnson, as 'beautiful palimpsests' they featured multiple Dreaming sites, seen from shifting viewpoints in space. (Johnson 2003: 79)

As he developed his art practice, Clifford introduced Western iconography and figurative imagery to convey certain elements in his narratives. This played a dual role in both making them more intelligible to Western audiences and allowing him to create imaginative compositions within the parameters of the 'law'. He invented his own secular, non-traditional, motifs in paintings such as 'Man's Love Story'.



Clifford Possum as Young Boy

This story of the Tjungurrayi man who desired, against kinship rules, a Napangardi woman, and wooed her by spinning hair string while singing love songs, became a recurrent theme in his art. His works from the start of the 1980s onwards, are characterised by a complex of designs rendered with modulated tone and broken colour. The fractured shaping of the in-filled fields of dots achieves an extraordinary visual effect, 'flat but with a thin three-dimensional disguise' (Bardon 2004: 82).

It was only towards the end of Clifford's life that there was a dramatic reduction in his palette. His most emblematic final works are bleak depictions in black and white; boys skeletal remains float starkly on unadorned backgrounds as if ethereally infused with the artist's 'own impending sense of death' (Nicholls 2004: 24).

## CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

Though Clifford was associated principally with Papunya Tula during the first decade of his art practice, he had almost completely abandoned the company by 1983. He preferred instead to be a free agent and represent his own interests as an independent artist. As he travelled the country Clifford worked with a number of dealers and friends, but none more so than Adam Knight, whose close relationship with the artist and his family began when he was a teenager. During their time together, Clifford took Knight to visit to most, if not all, of his secret Dreaming sites and Knight also developed close and nurturing friendships with Clifford's daughters Gabriella and Michelle (both painters), son Lionel (until he passed), and Clifford's grandchildren and great grandchildren. Upon his death Knight was a requested pallbearer at Clifford's funeral.



Clifford Possum and Adam Knight

Knight has curated and presented more exhibitions of the art works by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri across Australia and internationally than any other industry participant. He is widely regarded as the leading authority on the artist's oeuvre and career, and is the primary point of reference for dealers, collectors, institutions, and auction houses in the authentication and verification of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's works.

The retrospective of his work that toured extensively throughout Australia from 2002 included works spanning the artist's 30-year career with the wonderful examples of his early smaller works of 1972-1973, and the dramatic skeletal sketches of the final years acting as the bookends to a great artistic adventure.

No life was written larger across the page of the Aboriginal Art Movement than that of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. During a career, which lasted more than 30 years, he produced several masterpieces that will come to be seen by Australians as amongst the most important works created in this country's artistic history.

His inclusion in major national and international exhibitions and his presence in the literature rivals that of any other Australian Aboriginal artist. He received an order of Australia for his contribution to the Western Desert art movement, was chairman of Papunya Tula in the late 1970s and early 1980s, had a private audience with Queen Elizabeth II in 1990, and was the first real Ambassador for Aboriginal art around the world. He was honoured posthumously by a solo retrospective by the Art Gallery of South Australia which toured state galleries and, moreover, was the subject of two books on his life and work written by Vivien Johnson, his long-time friend and biographer.

© Adrian Newstead

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**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI**  
**AVAILABLE WORKS**

**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*LOVE STORY AT NGARLU, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
127 x 180 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia





**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

LOVE STORY AT NGARLU, 1994

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
127 x 180 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

In this painting, the artist speaks of a young Tjungurrayi man, who in the Dreamtime, fell in love with a Napangati woman from Willowra, and created love magic, at the sacred site of Ngalu (Red Hill), to win her heart.

In accordance with Aboriginal law, a union between a Tjungurrayi man and a Napangati woman was not allowed; they were the wrong skin. Nevertheless, the young man created a special sand painting, then cut his hair and proceeded to spin it on a spindle, that he made from sticks and kangaroo claws. While spinning, the ancient ancestors sang a love song, that was carried by the wind to the woman, who soon after became spell bound, then made her way south, as the footprints show toward the Tjungurrayi man. Represented in this work, by the symbolic U shape and footprints, which lead to the idea of the young man meandering over his territory, before sitting down at this sand painting with his 'nulla nulla' or fighting stick which also doubles as a phallic symbol.

The groups of varying coloured lines represent the desert landscape. Though forbidden by law, the couple in this story have remained in love at Ngalu since Creation, for the young man's love magic was so strong, it convinced the tribal law men (elders) to allow the pair to exist without interference or retaliation. The story operates on multiple levels: it is a "love story" with tensions of law and kinship, but also a ritual/ceremonial narrative about traditional country, ancestral movement, and relationship to land, people and law.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY CREEK, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
137.5 x 199.5 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia





**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

NAPPERBY CREEK, 1994

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
137.5 x 199.5 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Napperby Creek is the birth place of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, it is a part of the wider Napperby (also known as Laramba or Larumba in Anmatyerre language) system of lakes, claypans, and watercourses on Anmatyerre Country – is a site linked to ancestral movement, the flow of seasonal waters, and the abundance of food resources that appear after rain. In Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's work, Napperby Creek forms a major narrative setting within his broader Water and Country Dreamings.

In the Dreaming, seasonal waters move through the creek channels and claypans of the Napperby region, carrying the imprint of ancestral beings who travelled along these waterways. As the ancestors moved across country, they shaped the courses of the creeks, created waterholes, and left behind tracks and ceremonial sites still recognised today. During these journeys, the ancestors encountered areas rich in: bush berries, native plums, honey ants, roots and seeds and other foods drawn to the moisture lines of the creek. The presence of these resources marks Napperby Creek as an important ecological and spiritual zone. The Dreaming teaches how water moves across the land, how country transforms after rainfall, and how people must care for the places where water gathers and disperses.

Possum often overlays these systems to show both surface water and subsurface flow, a method critics (Johnson 2003) describe as one of his greatest innovations. Institutional catalogues highlight Napperby Creek works as cornerstones of Clifford Possum's 1990s innovations and masterworks mapping how physical landforms and ancestral history intertwine.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM**  
**TJAPALTJARRI**  
**(1932-2002)**

*EAGLE DREAMING, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
145.3 x 74.5 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

*EAGLE DREAMING, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
145.3 x 74.5 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Eagle Dreaming—associated with the Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*) and its ancestral counterpart—is an important story on Anmatyerre Country and appears in several narrative works by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri. The Eagle is a powerful hunter and a guardian figure whose movements across the desert are linked to law, authority, and the protection of country.

In the Dreaming, the Eagle Ancestor travels across the landscape searching for prey, marking out hunting grounds and establishing places of significance. As he moves through country, he leaves behind: tracks, resting places, feeding sites and ceremonial locations associated with his authority as a sky-dwelling hunter. The ancestor's flight path connects multiple sites, forming a songline that stretches across plains, rocky rises, and desert woodlands.

The Eagle is known for its keen sight, strength and dominance—qualities that are reflected in the Dreaming's teachings about vigilance, respect for law, and the responsibilities of custodianship. In some publicly shared versions across the Western Desert, the Eagle Ancestor interacts with other beings—sometimes confronting tricksters, thieves or rivals—reinforcing the moral lessons embedded in the story.

Clifford Possum focuses on the movement, presence, and impact of the Eagle rather than on restricted ceremonial details. This work depicts the nest and footprints of the sacred Eagle. Institutional texts describe Eagle Dreaming in Possum's oeuvre as an expression of ancestral surveillance and protection—a reminder that country is watched over, cared for, and shaped by beings whose presence persists today.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY WORM DREAMING, 1996*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
122 x 153 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

*NAPPERBY WORM DREAMING, 1996*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
122 x 153 cm.

PROVENANCE

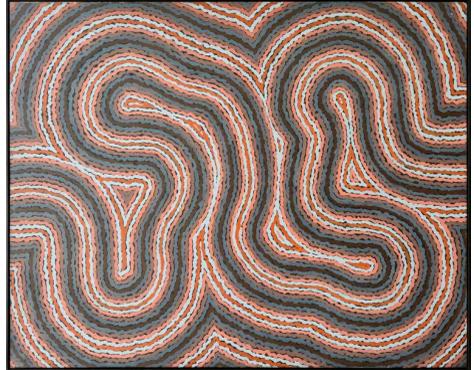
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

This work represents the Worm Dreaming, it is a love story – the male worm is singing love songs to attract a female. The singing attracts a crow that is able to find the worm by the patterns he has left as he travels under the ground.

The meanders, which can only be seen after rain, represent the worm's path and also represent the resonance of the song. The design was drawn in the sand to represent this Dreaming, it is a site close to the artist's birthplace at Napperby. Napperby Lake, also known as Larumba, lies on Anmatyerre Country near the western edges of the Tanami Desert. It is a salt lake formed across a chain of claypans, sometimes appearing and disappearing as water moves beneath the desert surface. This landscape, and the ancestral narratives linked to it, form one of the most important subjects in Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's mature work.

In the public Dreaming story associated with Napperby, ancestral Tjapaltjarri and Tjungurrayi men travelled across the claypan country. Their footprints, shown in Possum's paintings as pairs of oval shapes, chart their movements across the lake. The ancestors searched for bush foods— notably plums, berries and seasonal fruits— which appear in the paintings as clusters of rounded, dotted forms.

The defining feature of Clifford Possum's Napperby works is his use of layered grounds and shifting surfaces, echoing the way the salt lake itself forms and dissolves along the claypans. In institutional catalogues (NGA & AGNSW), this method is described as a major breakthrough in 1992: the painted surface becomes an analogue for the movement of water beneath country, the illusion of rising and receding ground, and the constant presence of ancestral forces.



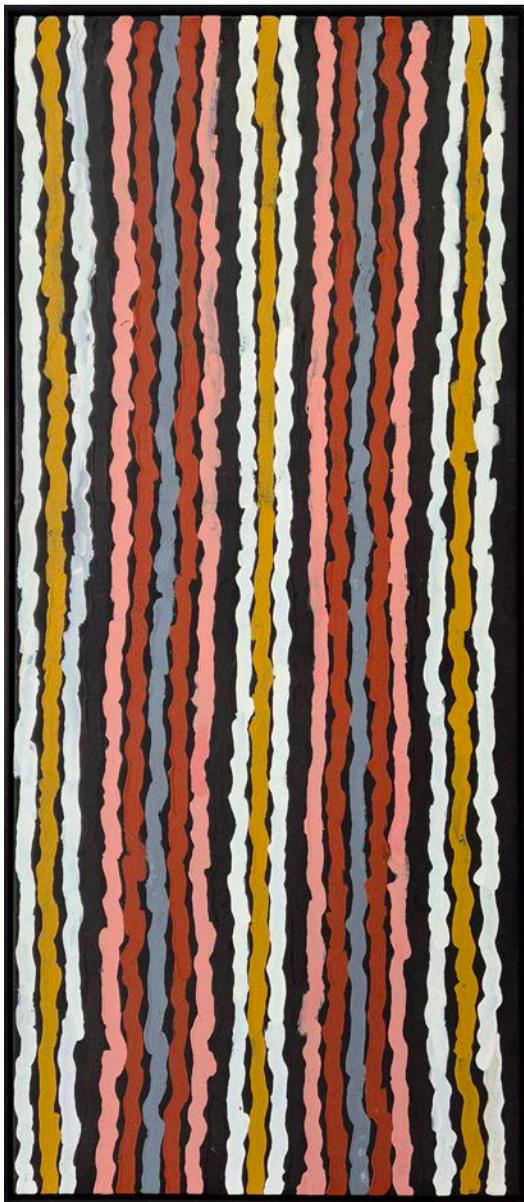


**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY WATER DREAMING, 2000*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
152 x 65 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY WATER DREAMING, 2000*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
152 x 65 cm.

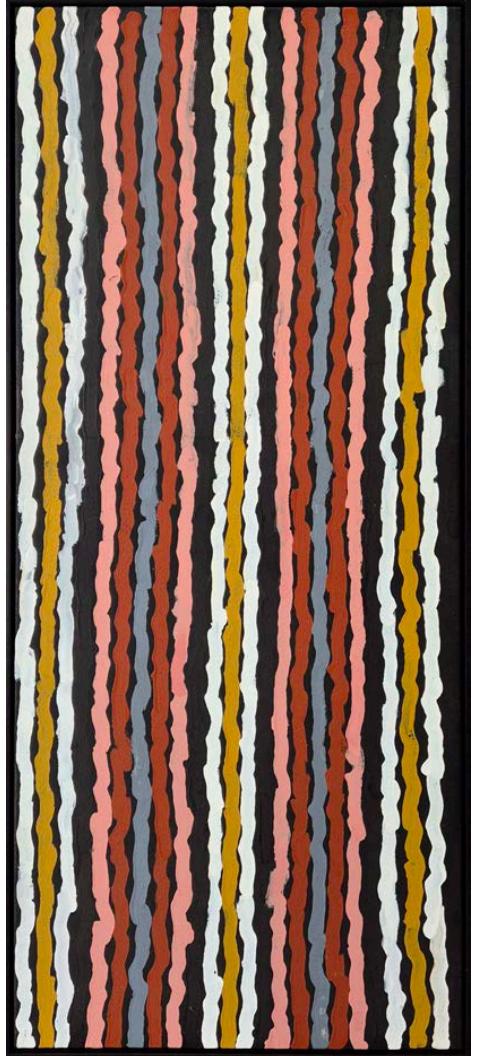
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Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Napperby Water Dreaming takes place at and around Lake Napperby, more accurately and commonly known as Lake Lewis - also known as Larumba. It lies on Anmatyerre Country near the western edges of the Tanami Desert.

It is a salt lake formed across a chain of claypans, sometimes appearing and disappearing as water moves beneath the desert surface. This landscape, and the ancestral narratives linked to it, form one of the most important subjects in Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's mature work.

In the public Dreaming story associated with Napperby, ancestral Tjapaltjarri and Tjungurrayi men travelled across the claypan country. The defining feature of Clifford Possum's Napperby works is his use of layered grounds and shifting surfaces, echoing the way the salt lake itself forms and dissolves along the claypans. In institutional catalogues (NGA & AGNSW), this method is described as a major breakthrough in 1992: the painted surface becomes an analogue for the movement of water beneath country, the illusion of rising and receding ground, and the constant presence of ancestral forces.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*TJUNGURRAYI AND TJAPALTJARRI DREAMING, 1998*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
120 x 237 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

TJUNGURRAYI AND TJAPALTJARRI DREAMING, 1998

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
120 x 237 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

This masterful painting gives symbolic expression to a secret/sacred Malierra (initiation) ceremony, which rests at the heart of this Tjungurrayi and Tjapaltjarri Dreaming that is associated to a men's business camp at Larumba, or otherwise known as Napperby, which forms part of Anmatyerre territory. The Tjungurrayi and Tjapaltjarri men are two closely related Anmatyerre subsections whose Dreamings are linked to significant ancestral journeys across Central Australia. These travels form the basis of several of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's most important multi-layered compositions.

The arc motifs resting in front of the men (U-shapes) lend expression to the men's ceremonial body paint designs, as do the straight parallel bands shown along the picture plane. Likewise the linear dot patterning along the centre of this painting also represents ritual body art, though at the same time it represents Napperby Lake, which flows beneath the earth's surface at Larumba where the men and youths are in ceremony.

The star-like motifs represent native spinifex grass. Ash from burnt spinifex is also used in Malierra. One of the most fundamental elements in this ceremony is the men's sacred ground design, which is depicted in this work as three concentric circles.

In the public version of the story, ancestral Tjungurrayi and Tjapaltjarri men moved across the desert following ancient ceremonial routes. As they travelled, they left behind distinctive footprints, shown in Clifford Possum's paintings as paired oval imprints. Along their journey they visited numerous sites connected with water, food resources, ceremony and law, many of which appear as concentric circles, radiating lines, or interlocking dot formations in the paintings.



These ancestors hunted, gathered food, performed ritual actions, and interacted with the landscape in ways that shaped its features. Their movements created a network of songlines stretching across Anmatyerre Country. In Clifford Possum's work, each symbol—footprints, tracks, meeting places, ceremonial objects—forms part of a greater map of this ancestral system.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*DREAMING STORY AT WARULUGULONG, 1996*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
101.5 x 76 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

*DREAMING STORY AT WARLUGULONG, 1996*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
101.5 x 76 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Warlugulong, a site west of Yuendumu on Anmatyerre Country, is one of the most important ceremonial and mythological places in Central Australia. In Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's paintings—especially his monumental 1977 work now held by the National Gallery of Australia—the site becomes the centre of a vast narrative relating to the Seven Fires, the Brothers' Feud, and the actions of ancestral men whose conflict shaped the landscape.

In the *Dreaming*, a group of ancestral Tjungurrayi and Jampijinpa men gathered at Warlugulong to perform ceremonies involving fire, hunting spears, and sacred law. A dispute arose between the ancestral brothers, resulting in one brother lighting a series of great fires across the country. These fires swept outward from Warlugulong, burning tracks into the land and leaving behind scars, charred trees, and smoke.

The story describes how the fires moved across hills, claypans and grasslands, transforming the terrain. Eventually, the ancestors brought the conflict under control, leaving the landscape marked with the physical and spiritual traces of their actions. These marks—hills, rock formations, burnt ground and sacred sites—are still part of the land today.

This artwork depicts the location where the fire was started. The charcoal grey areas indicate the burnt out country, and the white dots and grey background represent burnt ground and ash. The shapes surrounding the central fire depict the explosive nature of the fire as it spreads.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY LAKES MOUNTWEDGE, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
136.7 x 213.3 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Harold Mitchell AO Collection  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

NAPPERBY LAKES MOUNTWEDGE, 1994

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
136.7 x 213.3 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Harold Mitchell AO Collection  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Napperby Creek is the birth place of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, it is a part of the wider Napperby (also known as Laramba or Larumba in Anmatyerre language) system of lakes, claypans, and watercourses on Anmatyerre Country – is a site linked to ancestral movement, the flow of seasonal waters, and the abundance of food resources that appear after rain. In Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's work, Napperby Creek forms a major narrative setting within his broader Water and Country Dreamings.



In the Dreaming, ancestral men travelled across the salt lakes, claypans, and creek networks that feed into the Napperby system. As they moved, they created the channels, waterholes, ridges and ceremonial grounds that still define the landscape. Their journeys connect the lakes to nearby significant features, particularly Mount Wedge, whose slopes and rocky outcrops mark another point of ancestral activity. Mount Wedge itself serves as a kind of spiritual vantage point—a place where ancestral figures observed the surrounding plains, marked law, and established pathways followed in later generations. The Dreaming teaches the movements of water, the responsibilities tied to water places, and the relation between powerful landforms and the ancestral beings who shaped them. Clusters of bush food shapes showing the richness of the land after rain. These visual systems let Possum depict, simultaneously, the surface, subsurface and ancestral strata of the land—a signature feature of his 1990s masterworks.

Institutional catalogues highlight Napperby related works as cornerstones of Clifford Possum's 1990s innovations and masterworks mapping how physical landforms and ancestral history intertwine.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*CORKWOOD DREAMING, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
137 x 214 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*CORKWOOD DREAMING, 1994*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
137 x 214 cm.

PROVENANCE

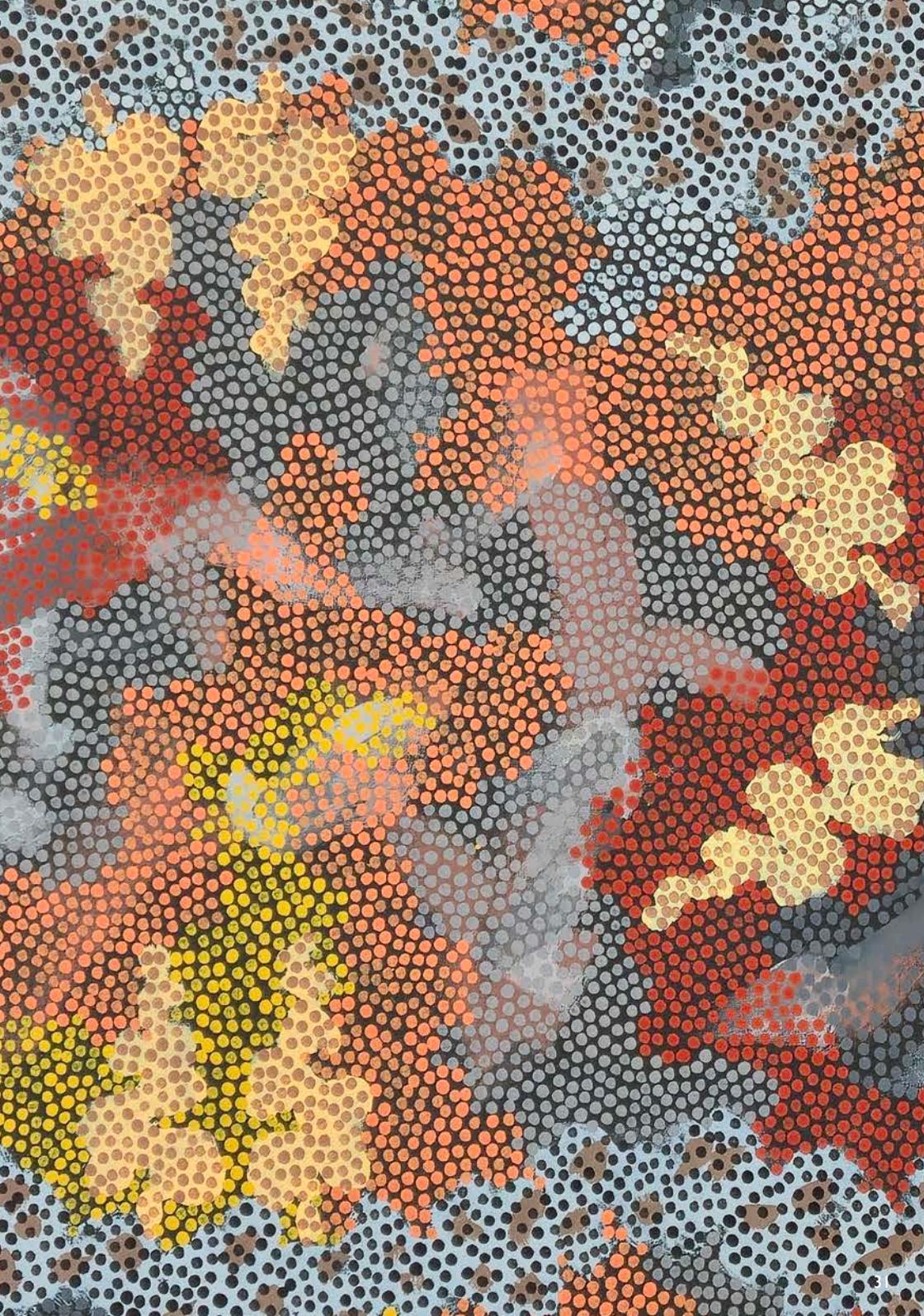
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Institutionally, Corkwood Dreaming is recognised as one of the key ecological Dreamings in Possum's body of work and an important contributor to his early Papunya period. Corkwood Dreaming refers to the ancestral narratives associated with the Corkwood tree (*Erythrina vespertilio*), known across Central Australia for its soft wood, medicinal uses, and important role in ceremonial life. On Anmatyerre Country, the Corkwood is linked to the travels and actions of certain ancestral men, whose journeys shaped the land and established laws relating to food gathering, fire use and ceremonial responsibility.

In the Dreaming, ancestral figures travelled through country where Corkwood trees grew in abundance, stopping to camp, gather food and carry out ritual obligations. The Corkwood tree provided materials for, making tools, creating ceremonial objects, kindling fire, and producing natural remedies from its inner bark. These ancestral travellers followed a set of traditional routes across the landscape, marking sacred places associated with the Corkwood and its uses. At various sites they left behind footprints, camp circles, fire places and markings, which today are represented through the symbolic language of Western Desert painting.

For Clifford Possum, Corkwood Dreaming offered both a narrative theme and a structural device, giving him a way to anchor complex stories within recognisable terrain. It reflects the deep botanic and spiritual knowledge embedded in Anmatyerre law and the role of artists like Clifford Possum in mapping these systems for public view.





**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*BUSH FIRE DREAMING, 1997*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
93.5 x 146 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

*BUSH FIRE DREAMING, 1997*

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
93.5 x 146 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

This dreaming can be known as Bush Fire Dreaming, Tjungala brothers and Warlugulong, Warlugulong is the place where the ancestral fire first began. At this site, Lungkata, the Blue-tongue Lizard Man, had stopped to rest while travelling through the country. His two sons followed behind him. Along the way they speared a kangaroo, cooked it, and—breaking the strict laws of sharing—ate the entire animal themselves.

When their father realised how long they had been delayed, he understood what had happened. Angered by their greed and their breach of law, Lungkata took up a fire-stick, blew on it until it glowed, and touched it to the dry grass. Instantly the bush ignited, sending a great fire sweeping across the desert, just as Clifford Possum depicts in his paintings. The flickering flames echoed the darting tongues of lizards and snakes, a reminder of the ancestral act.

The two Tjungala brothers tried desperately to contain the blaze. They broke branches and beat at the flames, but each time the fire leapt ahead of them, advancing faster than they could move. Their tracks, shown in the painting, mark their retreat before the burning front. Eventually, far to the south, the brothers were overcome. They sank into the ground where the fire's fury finally eased and died out.

Lungkata and his two sons remain at Warlugulong, the place where the great fire was first set, nearly 300 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs—a site of immense ceremonial and mythological significance in Anmatyerre country. It sits within a broader system of Anmatyerre knowledge, where fire is a ceremonial, ecological and spiritual force.



In public institutional commentary (NGA, AGNSW, Papunya Tula), this Dreaming is recognised as central to Clifford Possum's storytelling because it links multiple sites, laws, and resource areas across the desert, revealing the complexity and scale of Anmatyerre ancestral systems.

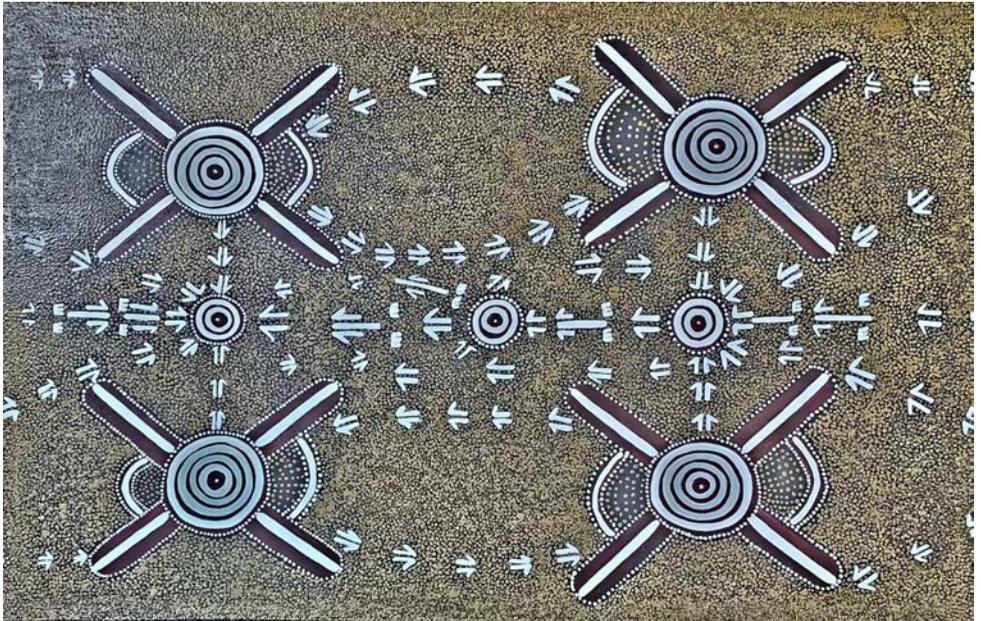


**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

ROCK WALLABY STORY, 1976

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
102.5 x 152.5 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

ROCK WALLABY STORY, 1976

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
102.5 x 152.5 cm.

PROVENANCE

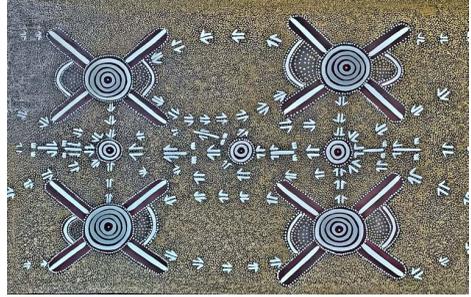
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

The Rock Wallaby Story relates to the travels and activities of the Ancestral Rock Wallaby, a fast and agile animal that moves among the rocky outcrops, cliffs and spinifex country of Anmatyerre lands. In Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's paintings, the Rock Wallaby Dreaming forms part of a broader network of animal and hunting narratives that map the behaviour of creatures across the desert.

In the Dreaming, the Rock Wallaby Ancestor moves swiftly across the landscape, shown as pairs of angled ovals or V-shaped marks representing the wallaby's distinctive hopping pattern. Travelling between rocky hills, cliffs, gorges, creek beds and spinifex rises. As he journeys, he establishes: feeding sites, shelter places, tracks and paths through rocky terrain, safe refuges in crevices and caves and ceremonial sites associated with the species.

The Rock Wallaby Ancestor's footprints and paths are left imprinted in stone-soft areas and sandy pockets between rocks. These tracks became markers for hunters and custodians who learned from the Rock Wallaby's movements how to navigate the rugged country.

The Dreaming also teaches agility, adaptability and survival, all qualities associated with the wallaby itself. For Anmatyerre custodians, animals like the Rock Wallaby are not just wildlife—they are ancestral beings who shaped the land and remain spiritually present. Concentric circles depict resting places, feeding spots, or important points in the ancestor's journey. Dot-field backgrounds illustrate the texture of stone country, spinifex fringes and the heat haze of the desert.



These works demonstrate Clifford Possum's remarkable ability to visualise the interaction between animal beings, landforms and ancestral law. Possum weaves these elements into a tightly structured composition, capturing both the physical landscape and the ancestral presence running through it.

**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

WARLUGULONG, 1988

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
136 x 213 cm.

PROVENANCE

Artspeak Studio

Private Collection, Switzerland

Private Collection Melbourne, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

Warlugulong is the site of the epic Fire Dreaming that connects the Anmatyerre, the artist's people, with several other groups across the western deserts. The site lies about 300 kilometres northwest of Alice Springs, in the far west of Anmatyerre country. The narrative concerns the two sons of Lungkata the ancestral Blue Tongued Lizard who refused to share their catch of kangaroo with their father, as is customary. Angered by their greed, Lungkata creates a bushfire that spreads across the land after the fleeing sons. It eventually engulfs the two men and burns them to death. The Dreaming is a cautionary tale about Aboriginal customs. Fire is also used as a tool to manage the land across Aboriginal Australia: burning tracts at various times of year engenders new plant growth that in turn attracts large game to be hunted.

In this painting, Clifford Possum focuses on the aftermath of the boys' demise. Their skeletons lie either side of a fire burst that was created by Lungkata by striking the earth with his flickering tongue. The meandering patchwork of coloured dots that form the ground of the canvas suggest an atmosphere of smoke and haze. The sons' hunting weapons are depicted beside their skeletons: the spears, spear-throwers, stone-blade knives and tasseled fire-beaters. The symmetrical arrangement of these elements is characteristic of Anmatyerre paintings of ancestral subjects. The significance of the Fire Dreaming at Warlugulong to the artist is attested to by the frequency with which he returned this theme. The earliest known examples are two bushfire paintings on board, painted in 1972.

**WARLUGULONG, 1988**

synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
136 x 213 cm.

**PROVENANCE**

Artspeak Studio

Private Collection, Switzerland

Private Collection Melbourne, Australia



Clifford Possum's first large scale work about Warlugulong was painted with the assistance of his brother Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri (c.1929-1984) in 1976 and it now hangs in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Johnson 2003:90-1). Another version was commissioned by the Federal Airports Corporation in 1991 and now hangs in the passenger terminal at Alice Springs airport. Another version of this story is Clifford Possum's Warlugulong, 1977 which is the current world record aboriginal sale at \$2,400,000 purchased by the National Gallery of Australia.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*ROCK WALLABY AND POSSUM DREAMING, 1996*

synthetic polymer paints on canvas  
82 x 152 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

ROCK WALLABY AND POSSUM DREAMING, 1996

synthetic polymer paints on canvas  
82 x 152 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Rock Wallaby and Possum Dreaming is a sophisticated expression of interconnected Dreaming narratives, mapped across Country through rhythm, repetition, and ceremonial order. In this work, Clifford Possum reveals the deep intelligence of the land—how animals, people, and ancestral forces move in harmony through space and time.

The vertical structure of the painting evokes long ceremonial pathways cutting through Country. These are not roads in a Western sense, but ancestral tracks—routes taken by Rock Wallaby and Possum ancestors as they travelled, hunted, gathered, and shaped the land. The repeating patterns suggest continuity: journeys undertaken again and again through generations, reinforcing law, knowledge, and responsibility.

Circular motifs punctuate the composition as key sites—places of significance where Dreamings intersect. These are locations of gathering, ceremony, and transformation. From these sites, directional forms extend outward, indicating movement, interaction, and the passage of ancestral beings across the landscape. The Rock Wallaby's agile presence is felt in the sense of rhythm and vertical motion, while the Possum Dreaming brings associations of shelter, survival, and night-time movement.

The flowing, sinuous bands that run through the painting resemble watercourses or energetic lines within the land itself. They divide and connect at the same time, suggesting the unseen forces that bind Country together—knowledge passed through song, dance, and ceremony rather than written record.



Clifford Possum's masterful use of dotting creates multiple visual registers. At a distance, the painting reads as a strong, formal abstraction; up close, it dissolves into countless individual marks, each one an act of memory and intention. This layered approach mirrors the way knowledge is held in Aboriginal culture—revealed gradually, respectfully, and never all at once.

Rock Wallaby and Possum Dreaming is not simply a depiction of animals, but a statement of balance and law. It affirms that Country is alive, animated by ancestral presence, and sustained through the careful maintenance of story. Through this work, Clifford Possum invites the viewer to witness—not decode—the enduring intelligence of the land.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

LARUMBA, 1995

synthetic polymer paints on linen  
83 x 122 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

LARUMBA, 1995

synthetic polymer paints on linen  
83 x 122 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

In Larumba (also known as Napperby Lake), Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri presents a living map of Country—one that breathes with movement, memory, and ancestral presence. The painting does not describe a single moment in time; instead, it unfolds like a songline, where past, present, and spiritual knowledge exist simultaneously. Across the surface, flowing bands of colour ripple like wind moving through spinifex or water travelling beneath the earth. These rhythmic lines speak of journeys—ancestral beings moving across the land, shaping hills, waterholes, and ceremonial sites as they travelled. The repeating paths remind us that Country is never still; it is activated through movement, story, and ceremony. At key points, powerful circular forms anchor the composition. These are places of gathering and significance—sites where knowledge is held, shared, and renewed. From them radiate star-like bursts of energy, evoking the presence of ancestral forces emerging from the ground, asserting their power and continuing guardianship of the land. These are not passive symbols, but active presences—ancestral beings who remain embedded in Country.

The layering of dots and colours reflects Clifford Possum's masterful ability to weave multiple narratives into a single surface. Beneath the visual harmony lies complexity: overlapping Dreamings, intersecting journeys, and sacred knowledge revealed only in part. What is seen is intentional; what is withheld is equally important. Larumba is both a map and a meditation. It invites the viewer not to read the land as an object, but to understand it as a living system—one that remembers footsteps, ceremony, and song. Through this work, Clifford Possum affirms that Country is alive, sentient, and enduring, carrying the stories of its people forward through time.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY LAKE, 1993*

synthetic polymer paints on linen  
140 x 200 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Private Collection Victoria, Australia



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932–2002)**

NAPPERBY LAKE, 1993

synthetic polymer paints on linen  
140 x 200 cm.

PROVENANCE

Private Collection Victoria, Australia

Napperby Lake is tied to the the birth place of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Napperby Creek, it is a part of the wider Napperby (also known as Laramba or Larumba in Anmatyerre language) system of lakes, claypans, and watercourses on Anmatyerre Country – is a site linked to ancestral movement, the flow of seasonal waters, and the abundance of food resources that appear after rain. In Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's work, Napperby Creek forms a major narrative setting within his broader Water and Country Dreamings. In the Dreaming, seasonal waters move through the creek channels and claypans of the Napperby region, carrying the imprint of ancestral beings who travelled along these waterways. As the ancestors moved across country, they shaped the courses of the creeks, created waterholes, and left behind tracks and ceremonial sites still recognised today.

During these journeys, the ancestors encountered areas rich in: bush berries, native plums, honey ants, roots and seeds and other foods drawn to the moisture lines of the creek. The presence of these resources marks Napperby Creek as an important ecological and spiritual zone. The Dreaming teaches how water moves across the land, how country transforms after rainfall, and how people must care for the places where water gathers and disperses.

Possum often overlays these systems to show both surface water and subsurface flow, a method critics (Johnson 2003) describe as one of his greatest innovations. Institutional catalogues highlight Napperby Creek works as cornerstones of Clifford Possum's 1990s innovations and masterworks mapping how physical landforms and ancestral history intertwine.



**CLIFFORD POSSUM  
TJAPALTJARRI  
(1932-2002)**

*BUSH FRUIT DREAMING*, 1991

acrylic on canvas  
65 x 90 cm.

PROVENANCE  
Peter Los, Western Desert Art,  
Private Collection France,  
Private Collection, Victoria



## List of Works

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*LOVE STORY AT NGARLU*, 1994  
synthetic polymer paints on linen  
127 x 180 cm.



SOLD

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY CREEK*, 1994  
synthetic polymer paints on linen  
137.5 x 199.5 cm.



CHF 90,000

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*EAGLE DREAMING*, 1994  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
145.3 x 74.5 cm.



CHF 30,000

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY WORM DREAMING*, 1996  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
122 x 153 cm.



SOLD

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY WATER DREAMING*, 2000  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
152 x 65 cm.



SOLD

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*TJUNGURRAYI AND TJAPALTJARRI DREAMING*, 1998  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
120 x 237 cm.



SOLD

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*DREAMING STORY AT WARULUGULONG*, 1996  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
101.5 x 76 cm.



CHF 30,000

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*NAPPERBY LAKES MOUNT WEDGE*, 1994  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
136.7 x 213.3 cm.



CHF 120,000

**CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)**

*CORKWOOD DREAMING*, 1994  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
137 x 214 cm.



CHF 75,000

## List of Works

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

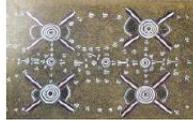
*BUSH FIRE DREAMING*, 1997  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
93.5 x 146 cm.



SOLD

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*ROCK WALLABY STORY*, 1976  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian linen  
102.5 x 152.5 cm.



CHF 80,000

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*WARLUGULONG*, 1988  
synthetic polymer paints on Belgian Linen  
136 x 213 cm.



CHF 210,000

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*ROCK WALLABY AND POSSUM DREAMING*, 1996  
synthetic polymer paints on canvas  
82 x 152 cm.



CHF 32,000

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*LARUMBA*, 1995  
synthetic polymer paints on linen  
83 x 122 cm.



SOLD

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*NAPPERBY LAKE*, 1993  
synthetic polymer paints on linen  
140 x 200 cm.



CHF 90,000

### CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI (1932-2002)

*BUSH FRUIT DREAMING*, 1991  
acrylic on canvas  
65 x 90 cm.



CHF 20,000



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