

Looking Back: The Story of a Collection. The Papunya Permanent Collection of Early Western Desert Paintings at the Australian Museum

KATE KHAN

Senior Fellow, Australian Museum Research Institute,
Australian Museum, 1 William Street Sydney 2010, Australia

ABSTRACT. The Papunya Permanent Collection of 94 early western desert paintings was sold to the Australian Museum by Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd in 1983 on condition that it remain together for future generations of Aboriginal people to visit and view the collection. The paintings came with little or no documentation. This report documents what happened when now well-known, mature artists were asked to “look back” to a time when the art movement was in its infancy, struggling to survive. Many paintings brought back memories of Country, Dreamings and passed-away artists. At the date of publication, only two of the artists are still alive. This invaluable information has enriched an already historically important collection of early Western Desert art.

KEYWORDS. Papunya Tula paintings; Australian art; Western Desert art; material culture

KHAN, KATE. 2016. Looking back: the story of a collection. The Papunya Permanent Collection of early Western Desert paintings at the Australian Museum. *Technical Reports of the Australian Museum, Online* 25: 1–95.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3853/j.1835-4211.25.2016.1647>

This publication is dedicated to the three artists—Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, Billy Stockman Tjapaltjarri and Long Jack Phillipus Tjakamarra—who, in the early 1970s, served their community and its fledgling art enterprise (Papunya Tula Artists) as members on the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council.

Artworks. Copyright permission on all artworks has been granted through the estates of the artists licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd, 2015 and 2016.

Central Australian Aboriginal people are respectfully advised that
this publication contains names and images of deceased persons.