

Elizabeth Kunoth KNGWARREYE



Dates: 1961
Language: Anmatyerre
Community: Utopia
Art: Occidental
Region: Central Desert
State: Northern Territory



Elizabeth Kunoth Kngwarreye is a prominent Utopia artist who lives in Mosquito Bore, about 250 kilometers northeast of Alice Springs, in the heart of the desert in the Northern Territory. Daughter of the late artist Nancy Petyarre and granddaughter of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, one of the most revered artists in Aboriginal art, Elizabeth is one of the custodians of her people's traditions. With an arid climate, her territory has different seasons, especially the rainy season, which allows the flora to bloom and to adorn the landscape of plains and rocky hills with multiple colors. The people who have lived there for thousands of years have obtained in 1979 the reappropriation of some 3 500 km² of land on which their territory extends, especially thanks to the commitment of aboriginal women. They were initiated before the men to the art of batik on silk in the mid-1970s. This first use of a medium from another culture allowed them to begin to represent the major themes of the sacred female ceremonies which are based on the representation of the flora: yams, seeds and fruits that they find on their territory.

In this painting, Elizabeth Kunoth depicts the seeding of the land as the women throw the seeds of a local species of yam into the wind to sustain themselves in the dry season. The thousands of dotted lines of different colors meticulously applied symbolize the movement of the seeds pushed by the wind and the shimmering of the seeds under the sun. She uses color to represent the seeds and leaves of the yam that have dried and those that are still soft. Yam is a tuber that is cooked over a wood fire. It has both nutritional value and spiritual significance. Elizabeth Kunoth stretches each stitch to give them direction. She also superimposes them to give a sense of relief to her canvas. In this way, she creates an optical dimension for the viewer looking at her work. Her artworks are also symbolic maps of her territory seen from the sky on which she has decided to cover with droplets the paths taken by the ancestors of her people so as not to reveal sacred roads to the uninitiated that we are.

Elizabeth was a finalist for the 2013 Blake Award, a finalist for the Art Gallery of New South Wales Wynne Award for Landscape Painting in 2008 and 2010, and in 2008 she won the coveted Churchie Award.