

FORT GANSEVOORT

MARTIN CID
MAGAZINE

Iwantja Rock n Roll! Fort Gansevoort

By Martin Cid Magazine – June 20, 2022



Kaylene Whiskey. *Kungkas in Hollywood*, 2021. Acrylic on linen. 65.75 x 78 inches. © Kaylene Whiskey, Courtesy the artist and Fort Gansevoort

New York...Fort Gansevoort is pleased to announce *Iwantja Rock n Roll*, a group exhibition of new works by Australian artists Vincent Namatjira, Kaylene Whiskey, and Tiger Yaltangki, three leading members of the indigenous Indulkana Community in the northwestern region of South Australia on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. On view from Thursday, July 7, 2022, their combined paintings, complemented by recent video works by Whiskey and Yaltangki, offer insight into the confluent global influences – from contemporary Western pop culture to traditional Anangu culture – that vivify the extraordinary artistic outpouring from Iwantja Arts, one of eleven indigenous owned and governed Aboriginal art centers in the APY Art Centre Collective. Iwantja Arts supports the artistic practices of more than forty members, working across various mediums, including painting, sculpture, video art, and printmaking.

On view through August 20, 2022, *Iwantja Rock n Roll* is the first gallery exhibition in New York City for Namatjira, Whiskey, and Yaltangki. Renowned in Australia, the three artists are part of a movement in contemporary art emerging from Indigenous communities across their nation. Despite originating from

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remote locations, their works look outward to address global concerns while simultaneously reflecting the reality of everyday life in APY lands.



Vincent Namatjira. *Elizabeth and Vincent (on Country)*, 2021. Acrylic on linen. 48 x 60 inches. © Vincent Namatjira, Courtesy the artist and Fort Gansevoort

Vincent Namatjira's bold portraits explore the complexities of colonial history and its lasting effects on Aboriginal Australians. Inserting his own likeness into many of his paintings, Namatjira renders himself in fictional encounters with international political figures, including Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and, in particular, members of the British Royal family. Painting with broad strokes in acrylic, Namatjira often exaggerates the physical features and expressions of his subjects to satirical effect. In his five-part portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, entitled *Elizabeth (on Country)*, 2021, Namatjira juxtaposes the aging Queen's visage with the rugged Australian landscape of his homeland. The continuous majestic mountain range fluidly links the individual portraits into a unified composition. "On Country" is a turn of phrase used by Aboriginal Australians to describe the experience of physically standing on the land and engaging with the site of one's ancestral home. Placing the Queen alone in the vast and barren environment, Namatjira subverts the formality of his subject's public persona, and locates her in foreign Indigenous territory. This artistic strategy speaks to the complicated relationship between the British Royal Family and the entrenched history of marginalization of Indigenous Australian communities.

Packed with irreverent comedy and cross-generational influences, Kaylene Whiskey's work celebrates heroic women, pop culture idols, and Anangu heritage. Her practice blends the traditional culture of her community's elders with the experiences of a younger generation that has grown up under the influence of contemporary Western media. Whiskey's chosen subjects include Wonder Woman, Cat Woman, , Cher, Dolly Parton, and Princess Leia. In her painting *Kungkas In Hollywood*, 2021, Whiskey inserts herself into a fantastical scene where she appears in conversation with Beyoncé and Dolly Parton. The artist

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refers to these iconic singers as her Kungkas, or her female cohort. In the Yankunytjatjara language the word “kungka” can refer to a woman of any age, but most often describes young women. Painting her figures in bright colors and in a superflat style, Whiskey fills the entire surface of her works with a kaleidoscopic design formed from images of commercial objects, plants, and wildlife. Utilizing the comic book convention of speech bubbles, the women humorously quip about their activities. With meticulous detail, Whiskey uses clothing and adornment’s means to communicate characteristics of each figure. Beyoncé’s crown identifies the almost monarchical quality of her popstar status, while the decorative pattern of her garment evokes the aesthetic of traditional Aboriginal dot painting. Her earrings take the form of tjala (honey ants), a traditional food source across the Northern Territory and South Australia. The Honey Ant is an important link between Anangu mythology and inter-dependence on the environment. In contrast, Dolly Parton wears an American-flag-patterned top, while strumming a pink guitar and singing about Mary and Jesus. In Whiskey’s eyes, both women equally represent aspirational American women. In all her work, Whiskey conflates the opulence of Western celebrity and material culture with Anangu as a vibrant expression of her cross-cultural interests. A recurring motif across many of her works, a decorative clock appears to signify that it is always “party time” in the world of Whiskey’s paintings.

Tiger Yaltangki’s richly colored canvases combine elements of fantasy with his interpretation of Anangu culture and references to contemporary life. His imagery reflects the artist’s concept of land and country, as well as his immersion in and love for the music of AC/DC and Hank Williams, and a fondness for science fiction. Many of Yaltangki’s acrylic paintings feature Mamu—spirit people, creatures, or monsters—who appear in traditional stories told to children to deter them from exploring dangerous places. Yaltangki renders these entities with bold linear outlines, highlighting their toothy grins, bulging eyes, and flailing limbs. He often titles his paintings Malpa Wiru (Good Friends), casting the characters he summons both as spirit beings and companions.

About the artists

Kaylene Whiskey was born in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia in 1976. In 2022, The Melbourne Art Foundation in partnership with ACMI, commissioned Whiskey to create an original 8-minute video Ngura Pukulpa – Happy Place. Whiskey’s work has been exhibited in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Gympie; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and the Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs. The artist has received awards including the Digital Art Prize, Heathcote Cultural Precinct, Perth; General Painting Award, Telstra NATSIA Awards, MAGNT, Darwin; and Sir John Sulman Prize, AGNSW, Sydney. Her work is held in several public and private collections including the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Artbank, Australia; ACMI, Melbourne; Foundation Opale, Lens, Switzerland; Sims Dickson Collections, New South Wales; and the Heathcote Cultural Precinct, Perth.

Vincent Namatjira was born in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia in 1983. His work has been exhibited at the British Museum, London; TarraWarra Museum of Art, Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Hazelhurst Gallery, Gympie; THIS IS NO FANTASY, Melbourne; and the Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria. In 2020, Namatjira was the first indigenous artist to receive the Archibald Prize. He is the recipient of many other awards, including the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2020 and the Ramsay Art Prize in 2019. His work is held in several public collections including the British Museum, London; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

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Tiger Yaltangki was born in Ernabella (Pukatja), South Australia in 1973. His work has been exhibited in Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria; Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland; ACCA, Melbourne; Westspace Gallery, Melbourne; and the Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs. The artist's work is held in collections including Artbank, Australia; Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Berndt Museum, Perth; and Western Australia Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra; and Fondation Opale, Lens, Switzerland, among others.