

FORT GANSEVOORT



Fort Gansevoort's 'Iwantja Rock N Roll' Exhibit Assembles the Work of Indigenous Australian Artists

By Ken Scrudato – August 08, 2022



Kaylene Whiskey, *Mingkulpa 4 Sale*, 2021, Acrylic on linen, 48 x 60 inches. ©Kaylene Whiskey. Courtesy of the artist and Fort Gansevoort.

The recent and excitedly received exhibition 'Emily: Painter of the Desert' at Gagosian's rue de Ponthieu Paris gallery (January 21 - March 26) was certainly strong evidence of the Western art world's increased interest in the work coming out of Australia's Aboriginal communities. Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910 - 1996) had actually achieved genuine recognition in her lifetime, but her experience was very much uncommon.

Another formidable gallery, this time New York's venerable Fort Gansevoort, is currently exhibiting the riveting group show coolly titled 'Iwantja Rock n Roll', on view through August 20. It gathers together the works of three of the most prominent members - Kaylene Whiskey, Vincent Namatjira and Tiger Yaltangki - of the Indigenous Indulkana Community of remote northwestern South Australia, on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Though the town that gives the exhibition its name has a

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population of only about 250 - 300 people, it has a vibrant art center, Iwantja Arts, that supports the careers of dozens of Yankunytjatjara artists.

The show's common thread would be that all three are noted for their figuration, within a community that is much more inclined towards working in abstraction.

"They all have very unique aesthetic styles that are quite different from one another," enthuses Fort Gansevoort's Adam Shopkorn. "All three artists' works blend traditional indigenous cultural elements with Western pop culture influences. This melding of various aesthetics and references surfaces in different and dynamic ways."

Namatjira, for instance, confronts the continuing effects of colonialism by painting local scenes into which he drops incongruous characters, like a portrait of himself wearing an AC/DC t-shirt seated next to a quite uncomfortable looking Queen Elizabeth. Yaltangki's works have a more fantastical edge, employing the Mamu - mythological monsters or spirit people from children's stories. Though his affinity for music shines through via a seemingly randomly placed AC/DC logo at the bottom of one painting.

Kaylene Whiskey's work is especially powerful in its employment of towering female icons like Dolly Parton and Tina Turner, as celebrating the potent female energy and power overcoming the oppressive nature of a still male dominated entertainment industry. There is also a keen celebratory feel to each of her paintings.

But Shopkorn emphasizes the inherent significance of showing these works in a high-profile Western context. To be sure, he sees it as something of a mission at a time when the wrongs wrought upon Indigenous communities around the world are attempting to be righted.

"The socio-political effects of the global art world and art market on Indigenous communities is nuanced and complex," he explains. "Increased economic success and media attention impact different communities in different ways. At Fort Gansevoort, we are fortunate to continue to cultivate relationships with established Indigenous art centers, such as Iwantja Arts in Indulkana, South Australia, and West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative in Kinngait, Canada. As community-run organizations, these centers foster the careers of numerous artists by providing studio space, access to art materials, and support with professional development."

'Iwantja Rock n Roll' will be on exhibit at Fort Gansevoort, NYC, through August 20.