



*Wana Jukurpa by Andrew Spencer Japaljarri.
Photographed by Graham Prichard*

Living people - Living language - Living symbol

By Craig San Roque, Australia

'Wanampi is there, you don't see him with your eyes, like ordinary things, but you know he is there, you feel him there, you can feel him moving.'
Indigenous woman describing the movement of a Jukurrpa snake at a specific site in central Australia. July 2014.



*Aerial view, dry river system and eroded hills, central Australia.
Photo J. McFarland. Alice Springs.
As used on the cover of Placing Psyche, Spring, 2013*

The ARAS site gathers images and symbols from many of the worlds' peoples and cultures. ARAS serves as a cultural custodian. ARAS is a modern way of preserving and protecting the memory of our beloved cultures. It is timely for ARAS to help protect indigenous cultural forms. Many of those forms are of ancient origins.

ARAS is now beginning to look into the ways to respectfully include images and patterns from some of the most ancient living traditions in the world. These are people of Australasia. The ARAS Board has been patient and cautious, waiting until natural human relationships have been established with people who are directly involved in the Australian indigenous culture.

It may be true to say that for many of the images (from the Northern

Hemisphere) collected in the archive, there are no known, personally remembered individuals alive who designed the symbolic forms now nesting in the archive. The images are inherited and may be present to us, but the persons who created those images are no longer living.

Such original peoples may have lived thousands of years ago in the Caucasus, the Tigris basin, the Danube or on the islands of Crete. They have left behind their imagery - but they cannot be spoken to directly - "What do you mean by that image and how do you use it in story, ceremony or initiation?" Though in some cultures the living thread is tended and passed on, many connections in the thread of memory have broken in the course of thousands of years; and so we have the images from the past without the living custodians who made those images.

The situation in present day Australia is unusual. The people who are custodians of the symbolic languages of Australian first peoples are alive and continually engaged in relationships with the creatures, objects, movements and terrain that form the symbolic language of Australian indigenous tribal groupings.

In Australia, the people who make the images are living people and though some may live in fraught, fractured and embattled conditions, the tradition and lineages of meaning are in existence. It is possible to talk with the people who make the images and tell the stories; it is even possible to enquire respectfully, cautiously, personally into the meaning and intent and use of symbolic objects, actions, narratives, images.

It has been reassuring for me, (a Jungian Analyst and community mental health worker in remote Australia) to discover that the symbolic and ceremonial forms of Australian indigenous peoples are alive and active in the present, and these forms can be drawn upon with healing intent. While I recognize at the same time that the memory and practice of those forms is fading or changing, or being rediscovered.

ARAS would like to introduce you to Australia through some of the people who we know personally. We do this by courteously introducing people who we hope you will get to know through the ARAS site. In this first entry of Aboriginal material into ARAS Connections we bring you some works from Andrew Spencer Japaljarri and family and the Warlukurlangu Art Gallery in Yuendumu, central Australia. If you take the trouble to go to the Warlu website you will meet some notable artists and glimpse the iconography of the Warlpiri. Warlukurlangu Artists Gallery has graciously agreed to partner ARAS on this project.

<http://warlu.com/>

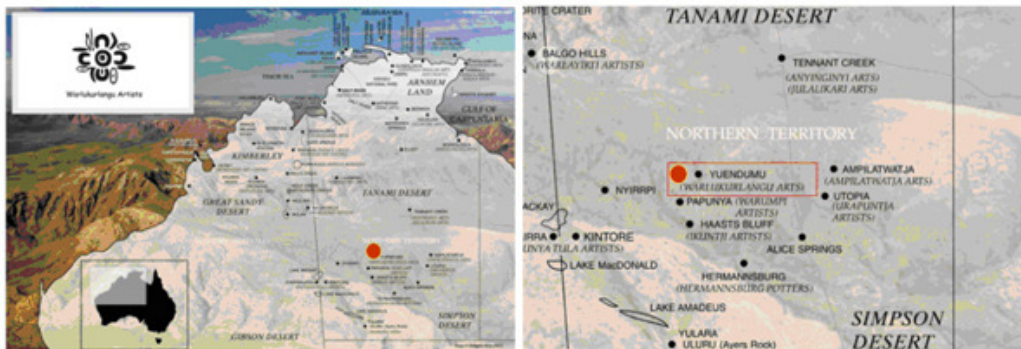
And while you are on the net please introduce yourself to contemporary young Warlpiri and Pintubi people through the website of the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC/Mt Theo Program.)

This will give you a feel for the environment, context and circumstances of the Warlpiri and Pintubi tribal family groups settled now around Yuendumu, Nyirripi, Willowra and Lajamanu.

www.mttheo.org/

For instance, go to Home/the featured pages, The Mt Theo Story, About -see the Red Sand Culture clips, Look up Japangardi Hooker Creek and Peggy Brown, Strong Fathers story and the Talking Story section.

MAP - Featuring Central and Northern Australia -



From the www.warlukurlangu also at www.palya.org

Why Begin With The Warlpiri?

The Warlpiri and neighboring Pintubi tribal country is within the northern sector of the central desert country (shown in this map). These people are among Aboriginal families who remember seeing the white man for the first time in their lives. The Pintubi were among the very last to have been contacted by the European Australians and 'brought in' during the 1960s and late 1970s.

aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/the-last-of-the-nomads/

We are making a selected beginning in the Warlpiri region by way of introducing ARAS members to the complexity of Australian cultures. Forms of indigenous imagery, dance and language change throughout the country, and throughout the 300 or so original tribal/language groups or 'nations'. If you

are familiar with the Americas' different environments, languages, forms and ways of life you will appreciate that in Australasia too, there is diversity of original cultures among the peoples who have been establishing themselves over the past 50,000 years or so on the mainland and the islands.

So, if you may be expecting an ethnographic, mythographic, introduction to Australian Aboriginal imagery with all the variety and depth of analysis, to which you may be accustomed on the ARAS site, please be aware that ARAS is developing an interactive relationship with living custodians of a unique culture. There are protocols of relationship and steps of courtesy. We are proceeding slowly.

You may wish to do some research yourself. Australian Aboriginal artists and their work can be found on the Warlukurlangu (Fire Story) Gallery - <http://warlu.com/>, and also on <http://palya.com.au/warlukurlangu-artists/>

The images and painting stories that you see are known as *Jukurrpa*. *Jukurrpa* are sung stories about creation beings and their acts, featuring native animals, serpentine beings, mythic creatures, edible and dangerous plants, natural forces, wind, water, fire, geographical sites. *Jukurrpa* is a Warlpiri/Pintubi term referring to such Story/Song Line/Cultural Lore - sometimes translated as 'Dreaming'. The mythic narratives of the First Australians are the sources of cultural knowledge - precious and carefully managed. Other language groups have their own terms for the same powerful phenomena. (e.g. In Arrernte language -*Altjirra*)

Such ancient forms and images are alive and active in the minds and experience of contemporary people. There are strict protocols over who has the custodianship of images and stories from the *Jukurrpa*. The paintings you see on the warlu.com site are painted by those custodians; for instance, look carefully at the images from the *Jukurrpa* stories of the Japaljarri/Jungarai custodial group, as represented by Paddy Sims Japaljarri, Paddy Stewart Japaljarri and their next (male) generational custodians - who you will be able to identify because they carry the name *Jungarai*.

Look, for instance, for 'Milky Way' stories - this group of men are custodians of the Milky Way story. Alas, these two old men have recently passed away, but do see works by Japaljarri's son, Otto Sims Jungarai; for instance his Fire *Jukurrpa* images.

You can carry out some rewarding research by getting to know the Warlukurlangu Gallery range of painting stories and images. These are authentic and verified images. Go to the *Shop* site and scroll through the list of painters offered. Note the names.

On the women's side, start by looking for paintings by Napaljarri women and Nungarai women. This will get you started. After a while you will become familiar with the different custodial groups (known sometimes as 'skin groups' - The www.mttheo.com site has a section explaining 'skin groups').

If you are interested, for instance, in water (Nappa Jukurrpa), look for the Nangala and Nampijimpa women and the paintings of father/son men with the skin name Jangala and Jampijimpa. They are custodians of the Water Dreaming.

These Jukurpa stories, as cross country saga, have many parts and verses of the songlines as they travel over much of the country. Meanings and versions may change according to circumstances or according to who is telling the story to whom, in what setting or context. So do not be surprised to find contradictions or alternative versions. Contemporary indigenous artists form, reform, reuse and reinterpret traditional shapes, images and meanings within the boundaries of law, customary lore and understanding. Indigenous Australians are simultaneously ancient and contemporary in their works. We hope that their works will enrich the ARAS site.

Two stories.

We begin Connections with two works by Andrew Spencer Japaljarri; renowned as a cultural thinker and healer he has worked tirelessly to address contemporary problems. His paintings are socio cultural reflections on the challenging situations of Aboriginal life and at the same time use traditional iconography to tell his story. This will lead us to his serious Wana Ngangkari Jukurrpa- a healing story based on the travels of a mythic black snake.



*Andrew Spencer Japaljarri
photographed by Delphi San Roque,
October 2013*

Story 1. Thinking About The Future

This painting, chosen for the Connections introduction, shows some representative iconography derived directly from traditional central desert forms. At the same time this painting addresses a contemporary sociocultural problem.



Thinking About The Future. By Andrew Spencer Japaljarri, and family. 1993 Alice Springs. Acrylic on Canvas 2m x 3m. Warlpiri/ Pintubi iconography. Subject - a concept painting addressing socio cultural issues.

On a large canvas, Andrew spreads out a map of the central desert region, rendered in traditional iconography style. This painting is based on a symmetrical underlying pattern, typical of the implicit order in many traditional Aboriginal designs.

These are the elements:

1. First find the 6 roundels/ concentric circles spread across the map. This is a typical icon used to indicate a site, or a camp where people gather around a fire, a water hole (essential in a desert) or in this case to indicate an important meeting taking place.



Men meeting. Japaljarri himself is present in this meeting (Back to the camera, dressed in khaki police uniform and hat) - discussing the very issues represented in his painting. If this meeting were painted it would appear as a circle of men sitting represented by the u shaped imprints of their seated bodies, gathered around the subject for discussion. (1993, Mission Creek)

The six meeting places represent different tribal groups, North, South, East and West, gathered on their own specific territories. This includes representative tribes such as, Pintubi, Warlpiri, Anmatjerr, Kaytetye, Arrernte, and Pitjantjatjara. In the story all these men meeting are worrying about present problems of the Aboriginal life.

2. Crossing the country, in the background of the painting, you will see representations of animal tracks, there are lizards, kangaroo, possum, snake, emu and water Jukurrpa, as samples- representing different Jukurrpa (dreaming songlines) traveling across all the countries connecting people through their cultural narrative. This is an image of connectivity.

3. On the left side of the painting is a symbolic representation of the core of indigenous traditional culture. In this case Andrew is representing a concept of law, rather than depicting a place, though because of the concentric circles you might assume a specific place is intended. Symbolically, it shows five main elements of culture, (represented as circles) all are bound together by another circle, symbolically- hairstring rope - representing traditional law. It is an image of culture that holds.

4. The centre piece. The people at the meetings are thinking about the chaos and confusion represented in the centre of the painting. This is a scene that is in everyone's minds eye.

You will note the U-shaped/horseshoe indicating the figures, black, brown and white, representing multi racial persons looking into the scene depicted in the centre; here are problems of illness, drug and alcohol abuse, family breakdown, men in prison, premature death. Loss of law (Anomie). This is a condition that the Pintubi/Warlpiri have had to grapple with only in the last 60 years.

As Japaljarri tells this, people in the present time are caught up in a dust storm. This is a condition of human confusion and cultural disintegration.

(The situation depicted by this contemporary image may be considered as archetypal; that is to say, a group of human beings meeting in concern about circumstances that threaten their livelihoods and survival.)

It is a fact that Aboriginal cultural integrity is under duress. Japaljarri paints a graphic map of dire events - a people moving toward an unforeseen future - he urges senior men and women to positive action and purposive thinking.

5. To the right of the painting is an ideogram representing, for Japaljarri, an idea of a future that is composed of some elements of the original tradition, and some elements of the western culture. There are now five circles not four, surrounding the centre. The eventual nature of the multicultural composition is uncertain. An Aboriginal future may well hold together, integrating aspects of white culture.

He says - There will be a future and the white people will be there but we cannot yet see what will hold us altogether. There is no hair string to bind us.



Japaljarri works with specific traditional iconographic elements that you will see in other paintings from the Warlpiri /Pintubi region. The WYDAC Mt Theo youth project is concerned with finding positive solutions for this social stress. So too is Andrew's wife, Marlene Nampitjimpa. She is a tireless worker for her kin and the Pintubi Homelands Health and the innovative Western Desert Aboriginal Dialysis service.

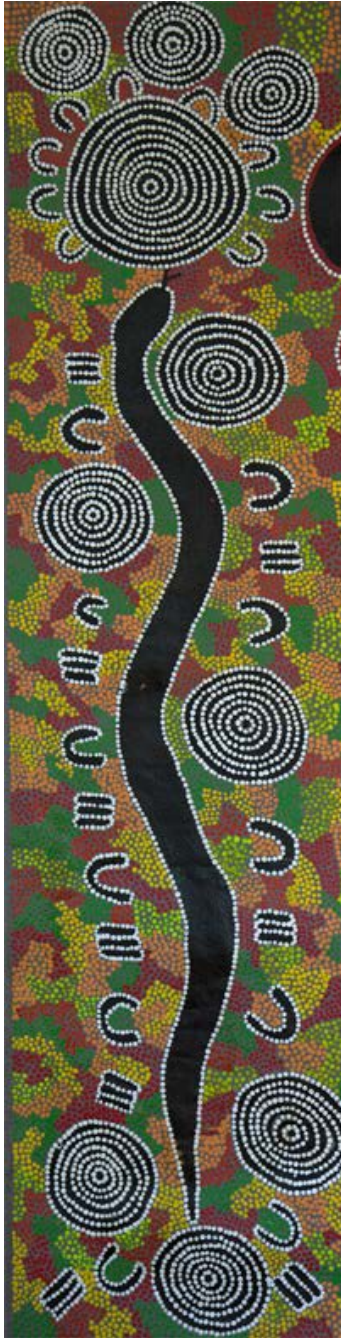
www.westerndesertdialysis.com/

Exploring this site will give you more understanding of health conditions in the Pintubi tribal homelands.

Marlene Nampitjimpa, Andrew's wife working with him on the psychological teaching painting, Eagle and Crow Story, (in the San Roque house, Alice Springs, October 2013)

Story 2. Wana Jukurrpa/ A Snake Story

Narrated by Craig San Roque from account by Andrew Spencer Japaljarri, Warlpiri tribal group, Central Australia, 2014. Image of a travelling snake known as the Wana Jukurrpa. Traditional custodianship within the Jungarai Japaljarri kinship group. A teaching story for ngangkari and collaborating professional therapists.



Wana Jukurrpa by Andrew Spencer Japaljarri. Photographed by Graham Prichard

Now we can pass to a traditional healers' (Ngangkari) cultural story for which this Japaljarri/Jungarai kin group are custodians. Andrew has shared and taught underlying meanings in this and related traditional stories with many co-workers in the health and psychiatric services. This story is offered to ARAS members in recognition of CG Jung's contributions to individual and cultural psychotherapy.

Account. This is a snake from a Jukurrpa. I am telling this from Japaljarri who speaks for this story. I cannot tell you the layers of meaning in this story. Interpretation of the subtle meanings in this story is the responsibility of the custodians. Japaljarri is a custodian who has specified that this story can be told for the education of doctors and therapists and in this sense it can be shown here. As a doctor who works together with Spencer Japaljarri I am in a position to describe some of this story to you.

This is a moment in the activity of this snake. It is part of a long cultural story, known in this region as Jukurrpa. This image is only part of that dreaming story or Jukurrpa. This image is like one scene in a long film.

This black snake is moving. He is travelling from east to west, across country. He passes through dreaming sites. You could see those places if you travelled in Central Australia. The concentric circles might mean a water hole or a hill, or cave - some significant place. You see these circles in many desert paintings. The people who know the story will tell you which site is which. The names are not written on signposts. The names are

recorded in Jukurrpa songs. The concentric circles signify places where creatures, spirits or people gather for a purpose. ⁱ

These stories are not stories in a book. These stories are travelling across the country from place to place. They travel in the mind and they travel in the country. They are travelling right now. In the Warlpiri language we call these travelling stories *Jukurrpa*. Some Jukurrpa are very strong and very old and carry law and power. Other countries in the world have strong cultural lore/law stories. Such stories make and hold the cultures of the world. ⁱⁱ

You see this black snake, this Jungarai, travelling East to West. He passes places that are part of the story and he is heading to a place way out west, a water hole. He will go down into the secret water place and he will be changed. He will transform into something powerful.

You will ask - what does he change into? Well, look at those horseshoe shapes; you can see two near his tail. You can see many arranged around the circle near his head. You can see them sitting along his body as he moves along. In the desert region this sign means 'a person'; people. That curved shape is like an imprint left in the sand by people sitting on the ground. Animals leave tracks and many aboriginal paintings signify animals, birds and humans by their tracks; their footprints. Sometimes you see the body of figures represented, (like this snake), but you also see the imprints, the tracks. This is an easy, shorthand way to show people and creatures. Its' like hieroglyphs. ⁱⁱⁱ

So now, when you look at the travelling Jungarai snake, you can see he leaves a place where two men are sitting and he is going to a place where many men are sitting. They are waiting for him. Well perhaps they have gathered to remember the story and acknowledge him. Along the way men are watching him. Who are those men? They are Ngangkari, traditional healers. ^{iv} Why are they shown sitting there? This is because the travels of Jungarai Wanu, the ngangkari snake, have deep meaning for the Jungarai /Japaljarri who are part of this ngangkari story.

This is their profession story, their training manual. Japaljarri suggests- This story doesn't live only in the mind; it lives in the land. It moves in my/your body. This story, this Jukurrpa, this Snake passes through many experiences. You can see him travelling along. He is attacked. He is injured. His skin is torn from his body. His guts are dragged out and dragged across the country. His heart is taken. He is rolled in the salt of a dried out salt lake. Many things happen to this snake but he keeps going. Japaljarri says that these things are happening in the present time. He goes through pain. "The Jungarai Ngangkari snake carries the pain. He carries the pain. He passes into that place in the west, that water hole that you see there. Deep inside that hole

after a very long time his spirit, (*kurunpa*), and his power (*mapanpa*) changes. He becomes the spirit support to the *ngangkari*, (the indigenous healers) who follow in his line. *Ngangkari* call upon him. They call on him. They use him to heal sickness of body/ spirit. He becomes a spirit being. He carries '*mapanpa*' healing power. You see him there in the shape of a snake. What is he really? He is *Jukurrpa*.'

This is how I understand it when *Japaljarri* tells this story. The snake, *Jungarai Wanu* is a spiritual power (a potency within the psyche) that helps the doctors in their work. They call on him. *Japaljarri* says, He carries pain for people. He takes the pain upon himself. He carries the suffering of the patient. The suffering passes through the doctor and into the snake who carries it away. That is how healing takes place. (A transmission of pain)

The men sitting looking at the snake are singing to him, they love him. They know his story. They are a part of him. He is them. They are a part of him, that snake. They are him, those *Jungarai* men, those *Japaljarri* men. They know how this works. That is the story that this scene is telling you.

(as told from Spencer *Japaljarri*, to Craig San Roque and Leon Petchkovsky, Alice Springs, Inteppe Camp, April 2014.)

Notes ⁱ Link to Warlukurlangu Artists site to see a range of Warlpiri paintings.

ⁱⁱ On *Jukurrpa*. For more information on *Jukurrpa* see; Warlpiri Dreamings and History. *Yimikirli*. Recorded and translated by Peggy Rockman *Napaljarri* and Lee Cataldi, Sacred Literature Series, Harper Collins 1994 (Sponsored by AIATSIS)

^{iv} On Custodianship and ownership.

Throughout most of indigenous Australia every traditional image is in the custody of a specific kinship group that carry knowledge of that story and hold the right to depict and tell the story. Because there are many tribal groupings in Australia and regional differences in custom, so the kin names vary and the ownership systems vary, and the rights, accountabilities and responsibilities may vary, according to custom.

This particular snake story belongs to the *Japaljarri* /*Jungarai* men's group. They are called the *Kirda*. The owners. The female side of the story is in the custody of the female kin. There is another group who watch over this story and work in reciprocity with the owners to help manage it. They are called the *Kurdungurlu*. The *Kirda*/*Kurdungurlu* reciprocal management system is a very important part of how indigenous cultural integrity and continuity is managed. Living people hold the copyright. It is very important to recognise that traditional indigenous images, symbols and stories belong to specific groups of people. There is a very careful system of accountability, authority and responsibility for a story and the images.