



Peggy Griffiths at Keep River National Park, 2013
Photo courtesy Waringarri Aboriginal Arts

Peggy Griffiths Daybreak

Senior Waringarri artist Peggy Griffiths' recent 'Daybreak' series is inspired by the ethereal early morning light as her world gently transitions between night and day. Her motifs of spinifex clusters become jewel forms refracting light as she presents a delicate examination of her precious traditional country.

"The early morning sunlight brightens the country with soft colour..."
Peggy Griffiths

Over the past year, Griffiths has taken photographs of her country when she rises, assisting the forming of this new series. Her carefully hand-mixed ochres of pale hues convey the ephemeral tones of the nascent light of day.

Larrgen, the Keep River gorge, with its concave curves, silently takes

central form on the canvas amongst a landscape of spinifex clusters and grasses moved by the wind and confirming a cultural presence. In other images of traditional country a river flow becomes the gestural movement of a dance.

As a senior dancer herself, the artist reveals in these river images the fluidity of a performers' movements; in dotted outlines she alludes to the painting of dancers where dabs of ochre mark bodies and faces; in the clusters of spinifex and grasses expressing movement, she indicates the presence of cultural energies unseen and ubiquitous.

"I know my culture is alive... you see it in the wind as it moves across the country..."



Her images shift between the mapping styles apparent in the tradition of East Kimberley Aboriginal artists into spaces patterned by colour and form and often representing not only the grounded earth but also the elusive skies with cloud forms and sometimes stars. Her Jalin (Beasley Knob) pieces from this series celebrates an important dreaming site and one that Griffiths daily awakens to. The dreamtime story of Jalin concerns a dispute between a hill and plains kangaroo regarding ownership of country which references the traditional boundaries of country for the Miriwoong and Gadjerrabeng peoples. Griffiths depicts Jalin in stark contrast to the surrounding countryside mixing sand into deep rich ochre, creating texture and realism.

Unlike her Larrgen paintings, the central focus of the theme is unmistakable; Jalin looming in the foreground or burgeoning off the canvas into real space. Adjacent spinifex clusters glisten in subtle hues, magnifying Jalin's intriguing form. Not intended to be an accurate depiction, Griffiths plays with Jalin's shape, heightening certain features, enabling her numerous visual points of view to evolve on the canvas. Ultimately, these paintings express Griffith's veneration of this site from a personal connection and one of wider cultural significance within her community.

Each Larrgen or Jalin image expresses the artist's total engagement with her

cultural practice. The reverence with which she paints reveals the essence of Griffiths' connection to country and her mature development as an artist.

Born at Newry Station, east of Kununurra, Griffiths grew up learning from her cultural leaders as well as working on Newry Station. She experienced many of the tragedies affecting Kimberley Aboriginal people as a result of police and welfare hunts, although escaped capture herself. Griffiths began working with Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 1985, carving and painting boab nuts and boomerangs. She progressed to painting on canvas and working with limited edition prints. She was the first Indigenous artist to win the prestigious Fremantle Print Award. Her work is represented in many public and private collections nationally and internationally.

Having developed her practise over more than 25 years Griffiths confidently expresses her individual presentations of country. She is deeply committed to keeping her cultural traditions alive and with her husband Alan, often painting side by side, also teaches traditional dances for their community. Griffiths continues to reside on Newry Station which is now a National Park. Here she has learned to understand and respond to the natural environment; its subtle transitions and often unseen connections.

© Waringarri Aboriginal Arts - 2015

Left:

Title: Spinifex and water
Medium: Ochre on canvas
Size: 120 x 90cm
Year: 2013

Cover page:

Title: Larrgen
Medium: Ochre on canvas
Size: 125 x 130cm
Year: 2014



Jalin - morning light, 2014
Photo courtesy Peggy Griffiths