

ABORIGINAL ART: WARBURTON RANGES, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The content for this case study is taken directly from the Masters Thesis entitled "ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND GROUNDWATER" by Bradley J. Moggridge (University of Technology, Sydney, 2005). For full details, refer to the original thesis document, including a comprehensive set of references.

WARNING – THE AUTHOR OF THIS MATERIAL APOLOGISES TO ANY ABORIGINAL PERSON WHO MAY BE DISTRESSED BY THE MENTION OF THE NAMES OF PERSONS WHO MAY NOW BE DECEASED.

Aboriginal art is described as the oldest continuous tradition of art known. There is no known fixed notion of traditional Aboriginal art, for it is not a static relic of a bygone era but a vital and pertinent expression of current human concerns. Through their art Aboriginal people celebrate the ancestral mythologies which form the basis of their life.

Aboriginal art has played a significant role in classifying, representing and describing significant groundwater sites for Aboriginal tribes, as knowledge of water sources is so important for a tribe's survival. Aboriginal art was not painted on canvasses or linen as modern society now demands, but Aboriginal people used many mediums such as on the body for ceremonies, rock shelters and platforms, ground designs (sand drawings and ground mosaics also for ceremonies), implements or artefacts, ceremonial poles and the bark off a tree.

Aboriginal art especially originating from desert regions of Australia and in the dot art form such as the Warlpiri and Pintupi Language Groups of the north central part of Australia will constantly make reference to and represent groundwater sources such as soakages and springs. Some good examples of desert art indicating groundwater sources (springs); along with explanations is given in Stokes (1993).

Aboriginal art uses traditional symbols which can be read in many ways. Because of this, even the secret/sacred parts of a story can be painted but still protected, for the artist is the only person who fully understands the meaning.

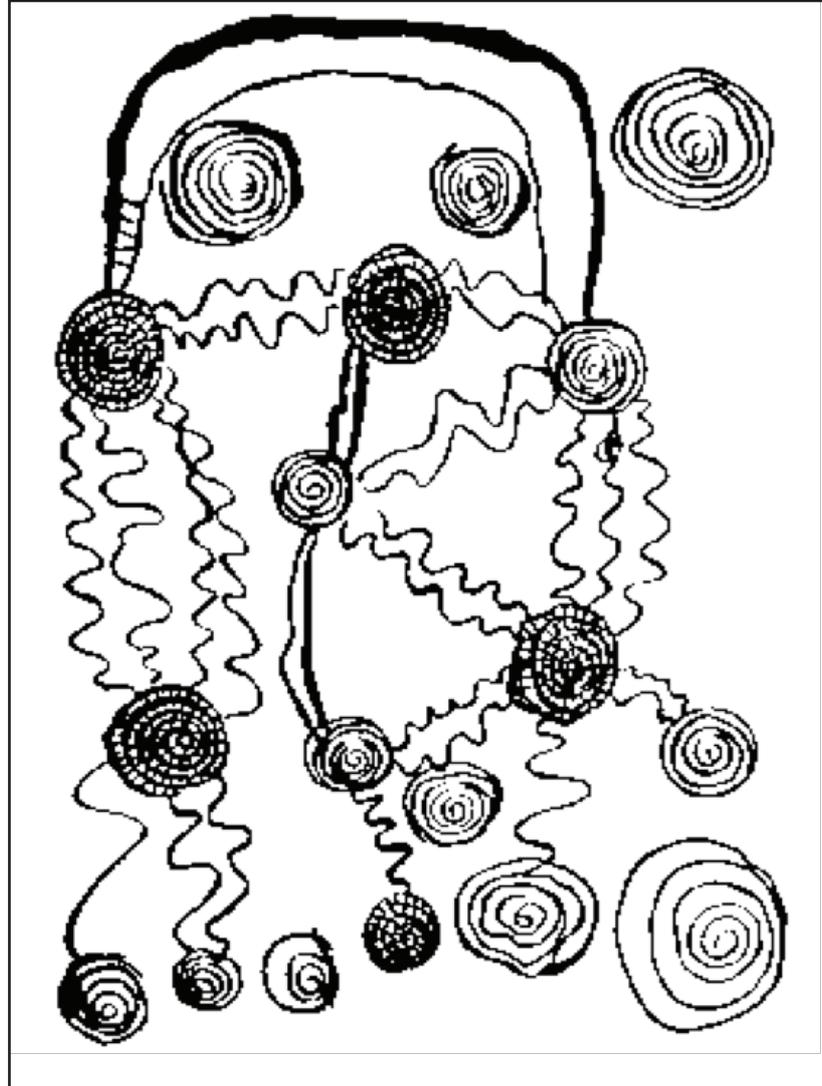
The following geographical drawing was done by Katabulka of the Ngadadjara tribe of Western Australia, who camped at Warupuju Soak in the Warburton Ranges.



Western Australia
Source: Aboriginal Australia Wall Map, Horton D R (1996) Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS Canberra, Australia and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz.



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The original painting was four times as large and depicted in red and black. The painting depicts a geographical map of water sources showing pools and soakages.

Across the top of it Tjurtirango the rainbow lies, and between it are two concentric spirals representing Kalkakutjuara, the "heavenly breasts" ['kalka] nipple and ['kutjara] two, which gave rain that flows into ['kapi] or waters. These are the balance of the concentric spirals. Five darker ones possess mythical ['koneia] carpet snakes therefore are considered never-failing; the others are temporary waters. Down the middle runs a stream bed, dry except during rain. On it are marked three waters, of which the top one is Warupuju. Zigzag lines from water to water are the tracks or native roads of men wandering in search of food (Tindale, 1974).

Figure 2
Geographical drawing by Katabulka of the Ngadadjara tribe in the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia. Tjurtirango the rainbow yields water to storage wells, and sand soaks symbolised by concentric spirals. Tracks made by men join the various waters. Source: Tindale (1974) Fig. 23 page 68.

Reference:
Tindale N B (1974) *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*. Australian National University Press, Canberra Australia.



Australian Government
National Water Commission



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