

Gracie Greene

Frog Dreaming, 2023

acrylic on canvas, 60 x 120 cm

Mangkaja Arts 235/23

Frog took water from the land in the dreaming.

They were living happily on this land, country. Hunting and gathering food, they were happy. They had a lot of water that country, all over. 'Til one day the frog played a trick on the animals there.

The frog on his own. Frog thought of plan to gather all water from waterholes. From rivers, creeks, waterholes and swamps. That day animals got thirsty for water, very thirsty. Went down to the lake and when they got there they saw it was damp but no water.

"Where's all the water from here? What happened? I wonder who took the water?" They were asking each other.

Noticed that frog wasn't there for that meeting.

Animals look up, saw frog up on the cloud hiding away with coolamon full of water.

"He's got all the water! What will we do with the frog?"

One said, "Lets make weapons. Boomerangs and spears."

They all started throwing boomerangs, but they didn't reach. They threw spears, but they didn't reach either.

Then, the brolga threw an egg with all its might up to the frog. The egg broke and all the sharp parts poked him all over. Ugly, that's why he looks ugly.

From there he spat out the water to fill the waterholes and they were all happy to get the water back for their land.

For punishment the frog have to come out in the big monsoon when there's thunder. After the dreaming they all turned into proper animals.

My mum told me this story.

Gracie Greene

[Not titled – bush food], 2024

acrylic on canvas, 90 x 60 cm

Mangkaja Arts 417/24

Gracie Greene

Goanna Dreaming, 1999

acrylic on canvas, 80 x 120 cm

Berndt Museum [2001/0049]

Kartamarti, 2023

acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm

Mangkaja Arts 286/23

Gracie Greene told key stories that were later transcribed in Kukatja and English and published in *Tjarany: Tjaranykura Tjukurrpa ngaanpa kalkanpa Wangka tjukurrtjanu / Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizard and other stories told by the Kukatja*.

These are narratives that span different language groups and Country and connect the many diaspora populations that gathered at Balgo. The Roughtail Lizard Tjukurrpa tells how Roughtail Lizard man gave stories as songs to the people. As he painted each man with white ochre, he sang and showed them dances, so that each had a different song for each camp. This is the foundation of the Kukatja kinship system. As Greene describes:

Tjiikura turlkuku kutjun-kutjunpa.

Tjunamatjananya mawuntu nayakarralu.

Parratjananya watjarnma,

“Ngaanpa kuwarrirnanyurranya tjuninpa puntungka. Turlku kanyirnin ngaantu laltulu mawuntulu. Katjinanyurranya tjunku ngarrkangka tjiitjanyurra turlku yinkalku.”

Tjiitjanu turlkutjanampa yinkarnma.

Yinkarnu nintitjunutjananya wiyarnukatjitjanampa watjarnu,

“Puntululpinyurra ngaatja turlku kanyila ngurra kutjupangurra kutjupatjanulu.”

Kakarralu, yurlpayirralu, kayililu, wiluralu turlkuya tjiitja manu tjukurrpa. Kuwarri katjin yanku kakarra Wirrumanukutu. Yankun nyaku tjiitja kalyu Ngamarlu.

One by one he gave each man a different song.

Over and over he put the white ochre on them, telling them, “This day I’m giving all these songs to the men. When I put this stuff on your chests, you may start to sing.”

Then he began singing for them and as he sang he showed them dances.

When he had finished he said, “I give these songs to the men to keep, each one in his own camp, a different song for each.”

And so from north to south, from east to west, each has his song from the Dreamtime. Today if you go over there to Wirrumanu you can see this waterhole called Ngamarlu.

Top to bottom

Gracie Greene

Kartamarti, 2012

acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

Mangkaja Arts 86/12

Kartamarti, 2024

acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

Mangkaja Arts 171/24

This my country, my painting, my dreaming. This country called Kartamarti, blue tongue lizard was living in this country. They were people in the dreaming, they were there for my people to hunt. After that dreaming, that country was named Kartamarti, meaning (Big Hat), all the small dots were the sand dunes, and that big dot, that was the waterhole. This story comes from my mother, from her country, this country Kartamarti, our dreaming, my mother's dreaming.

Gracie Greene

Liturwarti, 2023

acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

Mangkaja Arts 255/23

My Grandfather's country called Liturwarti. That's the place now.

Emu dreaming story, emus were living in that place.

Gracie tells the story of Karlaya Kamu Kiparapula/The Emu and the Turkey who were friends and would hunt together. Both had children and Emu became jealous of Turkey's two chicks and so tricked her:

Katjiya yakayanu

Karlayalura yanu

Kiparakurnu ngurrakutu.

Watjarnulu Kiparalu

"Wiyarnatjananyaya ngayulu tjiitji kanyirninpa.

Ngayulurnatjana tjiitji pungu," watjarnulu Karlayalu

"Puwapulanya tjiikutjarralpi!"

watjarnu Karlayalu.

Karlayangkura yanu ngurrakutu. Nyangamara yakalu

Ngurraťjanulu.

Pungupulanya nyankawana kuturukurlu

kapula mirringu.

When the emu chicks were hiding, the emu went over to turkey's camp and said to her, "I killed all my children!" The turkey was very shocked. "Why did you do that?" she asked. "Because I don't like having chicks around me," emu told turkey. "It's too much trouble for me getting feed for them and looking after them all the time." Then emu said to the turkey, "Why don't you kill your two little ones?"

Then the emu went away to her camp.

She was peeping from her camp, watching to see if the turkey would kill her two little ones. The turkey hit them on the neck with a nulla nulla and the two little chicks were dead.

Text from *Tjarany: Roughtail* by Magabala Books. Used with permission.

On finding that she had been tricked, Turkey cried and mourned. In retribution, Turkey collected the seeds of the bush tomato (this is one element of the story that is illustrated on the opposite wall) and smeared them on Emu's eyes while she was sleeping. Emu woke and rubbed her eyes and the seeds made her blind. It was only with the assistance of her cousin, the little dove Kurlukuku's maparn (healing magic), that her sight was restored.

Left to right

Gracie Greene

Not titled [bush tomato], 1996

acrylic on paper, 37.4 x 52.8 cm (sheet)

Berndt Museum [1998/0021]

Not titled [serpent and figure], 1996

acrylic on paper, 75.3 x 52.7 cm (sheet)

Berndt Museum [1998/0022]

These works on paper demonstrate Greene's accomplishment at painting figures. In both, she utilises visual devices – such as the division of the picture plane – to indicate a layering of stories and the use of repeated elements. For example, she uses the bush tomato as a design feature for strong visual impact and as a means of obscuring sensitive cultural information. Greene will continue to exploit the power of these visual techniques throughout her 40 year painting practice.

Gracie Greene

Throwing Bush Tomato, 2022

acrylic on canvas, 89.5 x 119.5 cm

Mangkaja Arts 562/22

In the dreaming, when the sky was low, all the people and animals of the land had to crawl around. Two boys could smell the sweet smell of bush tomato. They crawled over the tomatoes and laid on their backs to eat. One boy started throwing them in the sky. The boys noticed the sky started rising as they were throwing them and the tomatoes started turning into the stars. The boys were happy because now they didn't have to crawl anymore and could stand up.

Gracie Greene

Nyana, Lake Stretch, 2025

acrylic on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

Mangkaja Arts 74/25

*When the moon was travelling it was putting down the Murungkurr
(little people) all along the Sturt River.*

*That's how the river was made, from the dingos and that emu after they
killed it. They were fighting over the emu meat.*

Gracie Greene

Not titled [Moon Man story], 1986

acrylic and natural pigment on canvas, 71 x 119 cm

Berndt Museum [1987/0007]

My Grandfather's country called Litorwarti. That's the place now.

Emu dreaming story, emus were living in that place.

Later on two emus went out country, went bush and travelled away looking for bush tucker. When they were hunting they got caught up with those two dingoes who chased them. They got killed in the end. That's how the lake was formed, including Lake Stretch and Lake Gregory.

Lynley Nargoodah, co-curator, recalls:

Gracie sat me down one afternoon and strictly instructed me that I need to start painting a bit more. Then during our conversations, she said, "Well, that story belongs to you. It was your Great grandmother that allowed me to paint that story..." So that was the Moon Man story and also Walkarli, which is part of the Seven Sisters Dreaming.

Left to right

Gracie Greene

Ninmi Waterhole, my Ogee Country, 2024

acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

Mangkaja Arts 312/24

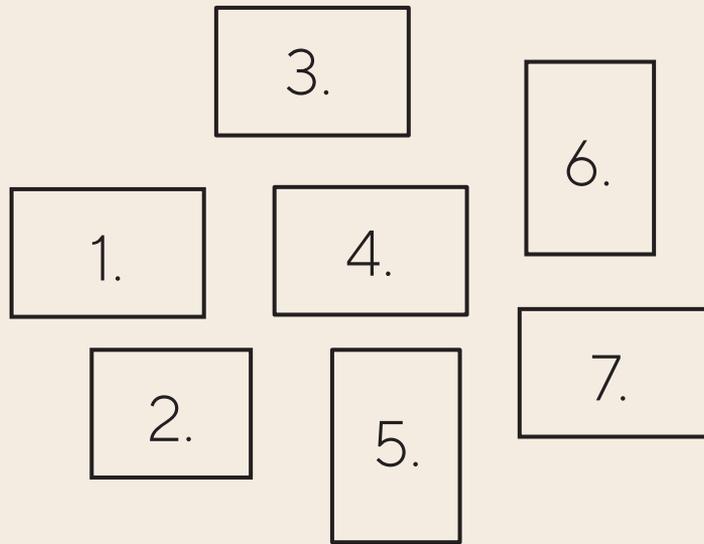
Ninmi Waterhole, my Ogee Country, 2018

acrylic on canvas, 120 x 90 cm

Mangkaja Arts 51/18

Greene developed several strands of visual styles and determined which to utilise for the telling of particular stories. These two works demonstrate the aspect of her practice that more closely aligns with the colour, dotting and abstraction that has come to be associated with Balgo painting. In each case, the central motif relates to Ninmi waterhole, a reliable source of good drinking water on her father's mother's Country.

This is turkey dreaming where he set down to lay eggs. This waterhole is soak water, good water to drink, called Ninmi.



These works were completed by Gracie Greene during the upsurge of painting activity that occurred in the St John's Adult Education Centre in preparation for the exhibition of Balgo paintings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, *Art from the Great Sandy Desert*, 29 November 1986 – 4 January 1987. This opportunity allowed women to have greater access to art materials and support as they began to develop their own painting practices.

1.

Gracie Greene

Not titled, 1986

acrylic on canvas board, 50.7 x 76.2 cm

Berndt Museum [1990/0027]

This painting communicates in a non-figurative visual language as appropriate to the work of art's subject matter and audience. Greene has delineated areas to indicate that there are at least three individual but related narratives that run across the painting. It includes the story of two sisters: one who went looking for witchetty grubs, found a suitable tree, and sat down to dig out the grubs from the roots. Her sister became worried when she did not return home, found her, and together they danced back to camp. Panel number 5 is a figurative work describing these two sisters and the food they have collected.

2.

Gracie Greene

Two boys and the bush tomatoes, 1986

acrylic on canvas board, 51 x 61 cm

Berndt Museum [1987/0010]

This work was shown in the AGWA exhibition, catalogue number 36, and is an earlier depiction of the story of the boys throwing bush tomatoes. A comparison between these two paintings, produced 36 years apart, reveals both Greene's consistency in the style of her visual storytelling but also charts her evolving and innovative practice.

3.

Gracie Greene

Tracks across the countryside, 1986

acrylic paint on canvas board, 51 x 76 cm

Berndt Museum [1987/0014]

4.

Gracie Greene

The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades, 1986

acrylic on canvas board, 51 x 76 cm

Berndt Museum [1987/0008]

Notes from *Art from the Great Sandy Desert* exhibition, catalogue number 34:

The Seven Sisters did not always live in the sky. In the creative era, they lived in a cave within a hill. One day a man was walking along when he saw the youngest of the Sisters, and he wanted her as his wife. She resisted his advances and cried out. Her sisters heard her. They ran through a secret passage of the cave and climbed up into the sky. The youngest Sister managed to hit the man over the head with a digging stick and also escaped into the sky. On recovering, the man followed her. The Sisters turned into the Pleiades, and the man became a large star nearby. He has never been able to catch up with them.

Creative time is a merging of distant past with the present. Ancient stories that contain elements that can still be seen today, such as this story. As Gracie Greene explained, "All this is still here today."

Tjarany: Roughtail, p. viii

5.

Gracie Greene

Not titled, 1986

acrylic on canvas board, 76.2 x 50.6 cm

Berndt Museum [1990/0028]

6.

Gracie Greene

Not titled [Luurnpa (kingfisher)], 1984

acrylic on canvas board, 70.5 x 50 cm

Berndt Museum [1987/0015]

Notes from *Art from the Great Sandy Desert* exhibition, catalogue number 37,
Gracie Greene, *The mythic Kingfisher*, 1984:

During the creative era of the Dreaming, Kingfisher gathered together all the people to follow him to where there was fresh water. First he took them to a rockhole in the creek at Balgo and, later, flew to Ayers Rock in Central Australia, with all the people following him. It was there that he transformed himself into a rock.

7.

Gracie Greene

Story by Nancy, 1986

acrylic on canvas board, 50.9 x 76 cm

Berndt Museum [1990/0026]

On the back of this painting is a pre-stamped label documenting that Gracie Greene painted this work, while the story was provided by Nancy Waniwurra, Minnie Napanangka and Sarah Napanangka. This information is entirely consistent with the act of painting as performative and collaborative practice as groups of people participate in the discussion of content and determine what is appropriate, and how best to represent that in visual form. Painting, talking, singing, dancing – all are social, interactive ways of telling and listening, in an ever-shifting re-staging of stories. It is an immersive practice whereby individuals exist in different spatial and temporal sites simultaneously – the past in the present.

Gracie Greene

[Dialysis machine painting], 2024

acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm

Collection of the WA Country Health Service, Fitzroy Crossing Renal Hostel

Greene traces her movements within the Health Clinic during a dialysis treatment – you see her move from the chair to the machine, and the transfer of blood. The other footprints belong to the nurse who tends to Greene and moves between her and the medical equipment.

This work was commissioned by the Fitzroy Crossing Renal Hostel and is painted using Greene's characteristic colourful hues and merging of representational and desert icon painting styles. In it, Greene takes time to record the care that she receives as a regular patient at the centre. She is held in this space, and this painting acknowledges the reality of dialysis treatment that was such a big part of Greene's latter life. In this extraordinary re-telling of her journey, Greene charts yet another of her life stories.

Lynley Nargoodah commented:

I remember Gracie painting that. I looked at her and I think Gracie was also painting herself going home. She was excited about Purple House being set-up in Balgo. As soon as it was ready she would return home to that place.

Sadly, Gracie Greene passed away in 2025 and so did not live to see her first survey exhibition or return to Balgo/Wirrimanu.