



# ANANGU ART

*Anangu* art has traditionally taken the form of rock paintings, sand drawings and body painting. This fact sheet is an introduction to the art work and the symbolism of the paintings you will see on your visit to the park.

### Why *Anangu* paint

*Anangu* paintings are created for religious and ceremonial expression and for teaching and storytelling. *Anangu* still create sand drawings and body paintings for these purposes but have largely abandoned the use of rock paintings to teach and tell stories. Today they use a range of new materials including acrylic paint on canvas. *Anangu* artists use the same symbols and meanings that have been used by their ancestors over many generations. This enables *Anangu* to continue passing on *Tjukurpa* through storytelling as well as providing the community with a source of income. *Tjukurpa* (pronounced chook-oor-pa) is the traditional law that explains existence and guides daily life for *Anangu*.

The gallery in the Cultural Centre exhibits art work that shows this adaptation of sand and rock paintings.

### Rock paintings

*Anangu* painted the art found in the caves of Uluru to illustrate stories they tell or the *Tjukurpa* they teach. Several rock shelters along the *Mala* and *Kuniya* walks provide visitors with the opportunity to observe evidence of this ancient tradition. The paintings are of considerable historical significance to *Anangu*, who continue to ensure their preservation and protection.

### Painting today

*Anangu* paint today to tell visitors the *Tjukurpa* stories they have told for generations. The same symbols and stories you see in the caves at Uluru are used in sand drawings and paintings. Artists fill in the background with a series of dots that represent the different vegetation types of the area they are painting. *Anangu* first begun transferring sand and rock paintings onto canvas during the 1970s. The popularity and demand for western desert paintings has been increasing ever since, with paintings being sold locally, nationally and internationally.

Traditional designs can have modern meanings. For example a dot painting that tells the story of *Lungkata* (blue-tongue lizard) burning the country around Uluru and Kata Tjuta also shows us how *Anangu* and rangers are continuing this tradition in the park today.

### Body painting

The same symbols and paints used in rock art are also used in body painting. People paint themselves with ochres to represent the *Tjukurpa* ancestors and the events they depict during *inma* (ceremonies). The paintings, songs and dances of some public *inma* can be seen on the DVD shown at the Cultural Centre daily.



### Painting materials

*Anangu* make paints from natural mineral substances mixed with water or sometimes with animal fat. They most commonly use red, yellow, orange, white, grey and black pigments. Red, yellow and orange pigments are iron stained clays called ochres. Calcite and ash are used to make white pigment and calcite and charcoal are used to make black pigment. Calcite is a chalky mineral which occurs naturally in calcrete deposits common in this area.

### The art and its meaning

The symbols and figures on the shelter walls at Uluru are similar to those found at many sites throughout Central Australia. These symbols and figures include geometric symbols such as concentric circles, figures representing animal tracks, and the outlines of animals.

Artists may use these symbols and figures to represent different meanings. The specific meanings are clear when the story of the painting is told. The true meanings of rock paintings at Uluru rest with the artists and their descendants.

The concentric circles symbol is a good example of how artists may use the same symbol to represent many things. In some paintings, concentric circles may mean a waterhole or a camping place. In others, the same symbol may indicate a *tjala* (honey ant) nest, or *ili* (native fig). The symbol usually represents a site that is a part of an intricate story being recorded and told by the artist.

### *Muṯitjulu* art site - *Kulpi Muṯitjulu*

During the 1970s, anthropologist Robert Layton recorded two old men (now deceased), explaining some of the paintings at the *Muṯitjulu* art site. These explanations show how the painted designs convey *Tjukurpa* and the personal histories of the men.

Paddy Uluru pointed out horizontal lines painted on the rear wall which he said had been put there by his brothers in his presence a long time ago. Low down on the left hand side of the wall is a figure which Paddy Uluru said he had painted himself as a small boy. In one of the shelters at *Muṯitjulu* a row of concentric circles represents the eggs of the *kuniya* python, while another design depicts the small apron worn by women.

Verses from the *Kuniya inma* or song cycle are associated with the site. Each verse refers to a particular place and a specific event that occurred there. One of the verses relating to *Kulpi Muṯitjulu* describes how during the fight between *Kuniya* and *Liru* which occurred nearby, the *Kuniya* woman used her digging stick to attack a *Liru* warrior. Another verse describes the *Kuniya* women dancing in their *mawulyari* skirts, while in another the *Kuniya* are described painting their bodies with designs seen in the rock shelter.

### Art site protection

Rock paintings around Uluru are easily damaged. Natural elements like water, rock minerals and lichens make them fade or flake off. Dust has an abrasive effect on the paintings and can cover them. Mud nests built by swallows and wasps can also damage the art. Art sites also deteriorate when careless people touch the artwork or graffiti the sites.

*Anangu* and park managers have established methods for protecting art sites. They have erected viewing platforms and interpretive signs at many popular public sites along the *Mala* and *Kuniya* walks. Silicon drip lines are located where paintings are vulnerable to water flowing over the surface. The drip lines change the surface tension, diverting the path of the water away from the paintings. Specialist consultants have developed a comprehensive system of documenting all known art sites around Uluru. Sites are mapped, photographed and where appropriate, cultural information is recorded.

Help us to protect the World Heritage art on Uluru by remaining behind the protective barriers and inform the Cultural Centre staff if you see any graffiti, or persons damaging or interfering with the art work.

