



FONDATION OPALE

PRESS RELEASE : EXHIBITION

## EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

14.06 – 08.11.26

**From 14 June to 8 November 2026, Fondation Opale (Lens/Crans-Montana) presents, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of her passing, a monographic exhibition dedicated to one of the most significant figures of 20th-century contemporary art: Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Kngwarray (c. 1914–1996). Organised in close collaboration with Tate Modern and the National Gallery of Australia, the exhibition brings together more than 80 works and constitutes the most comprehensive retrospective dedicated to the artist in Europe.**

Born in the Sandover region of Australia's Northern Territory, Emily Kam Kngwarray began painting at around the age of 74. She first encountered batik in the late 1970s within the Utopia community, before turning to acrylic painting on canvas. Her early works are characterised by chromatic vibrations within a restrained palette. In the final years of her life, she underwent a radical stylistic shift towards powerful compositions of lines and an expanded palette.

At the heart of her work lies Alhalker, her Country: a living entity, inseparable from those who inhabit it, to which she is deeply and intimately connected. Her work also gives form to key elements of her land and culture, including women's ceremonies and songs (*awely*), the yam and pencil yam (*anwerlarr*, *arlatyey*) and their seeds (*kam*), as well as the emu (*ankerr*).

*"These paintings are real - what Kngwarray painted is alive and true"*  
Jedda Kngwarray Purvis and Josie Petyarr Kunoth

Between 1988 and 1996, during an eight-year period of creation that was as brief as it was exceptionally prolific, Emily Kam Kngwarray produced more than 3,000 works. In just a few years, she developed a pictorial language of remarkable richness, establishing herself as one of the major artistic figures of the 20th century. Far beyond the field of Aboriginal art alone, her work fully engages with the history of modern and contemporary art. In 1997, she posthumously represented Australia at the Venice Biennale.

Bringing together works from more than 25 lenders, including five Australian institutions, the exhibition highlights both the depth of her artistic journey and the evolution of her practice. It features batiks from her earliest artistic workshop in Utopia, alongside works representative of her entire career — including some shown at the Venice Biennale — attesting to the richness and diversity of her work.

The exhibition has been developed in dialogue with the Utopia community and is presented in partnership with Tate Modern and the National Gallery of Australia. The project is jointly curated by Kelli Cole, a Warumungu and Luritja independent curator, Georges Petitjean, curator at Fondation Opale, and Bérengère Primat, whose collection includes around thirty works featured in the exhibition.

Alongside the exhibition, Fondation Opale presents a display dedicated to the artistic production of the Utopia community and its associated territories. The works on view celebrate Country through topographical perspectives, ceremonial scenes, and Dreaming narratives by Anmatyerr and Alyawarr artists.

# THE EXHIBITION

**EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY** | 14 June – 8 November 2026  
Co-curators: Kelli Cole, Georges Petitjean, Bérengère Primat

**Guest Curator:** Kelli Cole, a Warumungu and Luritja curator from Central Australia, is the Director of Curatorial & Engagement for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Gallery of Australia project in Alice Springs. She has contributed to numerous publications, both nationally and internationally, on various aspects of First Nations art.

Art centre open Wednesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 6 pm

## PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

**Tate Modern:** Opened in 2000 in London, Tate Modern houses and presents the UK's national collection of modern and international contemporary art. It is widely regarded as one of the most influential museums of modern and contemporary art in the world.

**National Gallery of Australia:** The National Gallery of Australia is the country's leading visual arts institution. Its mission is to collect, preserve, and promote Australian and international art. Its collection comprises over 155,000 works, including the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

The exhibition *Emily Kam Kngwarray* was shown at the National Gallery of Australia from 2 December 2023 to 28 April 2024, curated by Kelli Cole (Warumungu and Luritja peoples) and Hetti Perkins (Arrernte and Kalkadoon peoples), and at Tate Modern from 10 July 2025 to 11 January 2026, curated by Kelli Cole. Its presentation at Fondation Opale takes the form of an expanded iteration, featuring major works from the Bérengère Primat Collection, some of which are being shown publicly for the first time.

## FONDATION OPALE

Founded in December 2018, Fondation Opale is the sole contemporary art centre in Europe dedicated to the promotion of Australian Aboriginal art. It fosters dialogue between cultures and communities through art. Its exhibitions are primarily based on the Bérengère Primat Collection, which comprises more than 1,900 works by over 440 artists and represents one of the most significant collections of contemporary Aboriginal art in private hands.

## CONTACTS

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