

EMILY KAM KINGWARRAY

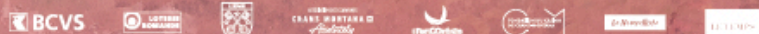
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FONDATION OPALE

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FONDATION OPALE

PRESS KIT

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PRESS RELEASE

From 14 June to 8 November 2026, Fondation Opale (Lens/Crans-Montana) presents Emily Kam Kngwarray, a monographic exhibition coinciding with the 30th anniversary of her passing. Dedicated to one of the most significant figures of 20th-century contemporary art, Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Kngwarray (c. 1914–1996), the exhibition is organised in close collaboration with Tate Modern and the National Gallery of Australia. It 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, senior Anmatyerr custodians from the Utopia community and relatives of the artist

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.

EXHIBITION NARRATIVE

ALHALKER

The ecosystem of Alhalker Country is typical of the arid zone of Central Australia. It includes low-lying ridges, rocky outcrops, woodlands and undulating sandplains, some permanent waterholes and winding ephemeral watercourses. Alhalker is home to the many plants and animals that inspired Emily Kam Kngwarray's artworks.

Alhalker is the place where Emily Kam Kngwarray was born, and where she lived during her younger years. The name refers to a particular place, but also to a broader geographic area for which certain Anmatyerr people have custodial rights and responsibilities. This thread of inheritance has continued through countless generations.

Alhalker Country is closely related to Anangker Country to the north-west. The two places are regarded as siblings by Anmatyerr people. Anangker is the elder one. Some Dreamings and songs are shared between these Countries.

The family groups connected to these places are close kin, with many similar life experiences. Women from Alhalker and Anangker worked together in the preparation of this exhibition.

While throughout her painting career Emily Kam Kngwarray worked predominantly with acrylic paint, this series is distinguished by its material and ceremonial provenance and sits alongside a broader late-career openness to experimentation.

The *Arlatyey* paintings draw directly on the embodied processes of *awely*, in which ochre (natural earth pigment) is applied to the body following long-held cultural protocols. During *awely* (ceremony, song and dance), women first anoint the chest, breasts and upper arms with emu fat. The shimmering surface created by the fat prepares the body to receive the ochre that carry the substance and authority of Country.



Emily Kam Kngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Mon Pays II / My Country II, 1992
Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
© Emily Kam Kngwarray/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

AWELY

In 1993, Emily Kam Kngwarray started painting bold lines on canvas and paper, beginning a new and prolific period of image-making. Some were black and white, while others included her familiar palette of reds and yellows, along with bursts of colour. The power of these works comes from the energy of her repeated lines and brushstrokes. Some people have interpreted these paintings as representing designs painted on the body for *awely* (women's ceremonies).

Some works were included in the 1997 Venice Biennale; Emily Kam Kngwarray was one of the three Aboriginal artists selected to represent Australia that year.



Emily Kam Kngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Anmatyerr people
Untitled (awely), 1994
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2022
with the assistance of the Foundation Gala Funds 2021 and 2022, in
celebration of the National Gallery of Australia's 40th anniversary, 2022
© Emily Kam Kngwarray/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich

BATIK

Batik is a form of textile art, originally from Indonesia. Artists draw their designs on the fabric with hot wax, using a brush or a small spouted tool called a *canting*.

A batik artist must work quickly, before the wax cools. When the fabric is immersed in dye, the wax resists the dye, so only the parts without wax take up the colour. After the fabric is dry, the cloth can be waxed and dyed again to create elaborate, multicoloured designs. The beauty of the batik is fully revealed after the wax is removed.

Emily Kam Kngwarray made batiks for 11 years before beginning to paint in acrylic on canvas.



Emily Kam Kngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Alhalker, 1987
Batik sur coton / Batik on cotton
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
© Emily Kam Kngwarray/Copyright Agency/
2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

ANKERR

In Anmatyerr culture, the emus are highly respected. A rich and extensive lexicon of terms exclusively applies to them. For example, there are specific words for young and old emus. There are also particular terms for parts of their bodies - their necks, feet and feathers - that do not apply to any other bird or animal.

Emus are one of the main themes in the women's *awely* ceremonies from there. Emily Kam Kngwarray's work also references their different behaviours.

Old Man Emu with babies reflects the fact that this is the male emu who cares for the emu chicks. Their three-toed footprints spread across the canvases and batiks, showing their paths as they travel between water sources.



Emily Kam Kngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Pays de l'Émeu / Emu Country, 1991
Acrylique sur toile / Acrylic on canvas
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
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Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

I AM KAM

Anwerlarr (pencil yam) is an important Dreaming for Alhalker, Emily Kam Kngwarray's Country.

The plants flower and then seed underground as well as above the ground. Their seedpods and encased seeds are called *kam* - Emily Kam Kngwarray's namesake. *Kam* change colour. The transformation of colour are likened to the life stages of people - the white ones are *ampa akely* (children), the yellow ones *awenk* (teenage girls), and the reddish-brown ones are *arelh ampwa* (old women).

UTOPIA

Alongside the exhibition, Fondation Opale presents a display dedicated to the artistic production of the Utopia community and its associated territories, and explore the art movement that emerged in the early 1990s.

The Sandover region in Central Australia, Northern Territory, is vibrant and expansive, layered with billowing grassyplains, clusters of spinifex mounds, water soakages and sacred springs. It is marked by winding riverbeds that traverse the ranges and hills that ascend across Country.

Revered in the paintings are topographical views of Country, ceremonial scenes, sacred grasses, bush medicine and associated dreaming stories of the Anmatyerr and Alyawarr artists, connected through cultural ties, ceremony, language and Country. The hues that reverberate are reminiscent of the Country, which the Ancestors have walked for millennia.



Ada Bird Petyarre (c.1930-2009)
Peintures corporelles / Body Paintings, date inconnue / unknown date
Acrylique sur toile de lin / Acrylic on linen canvas
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
© Ada Bird Petyarre/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

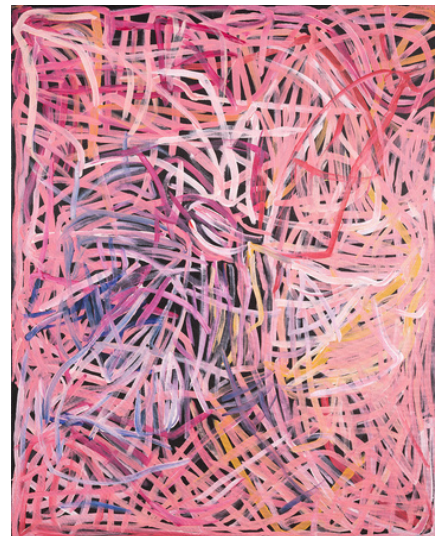
PRESS PICTURES



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Mon Pays II / My Country II, 1992
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat,
 Courtesy Fondation Opale
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/
 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Abondance de l'été / Summer Abundance, 1993
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat,
 Courtesy Fondation Opale
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/
 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Ignames du début de l'été / Early Summer Yams, 1995
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat,
 Courtesy Fondation Opale
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/
 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Mern Ntewerrk / Fruit sec de groseille indigène / Dry Fruit of Native Currant, 1991
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
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Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Kam Summer Awely / Cérémonie de l'Igname d'été des femmes / Summer Yam Women's Ceremony, 1992
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/
 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

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Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Alhalker, 1990
 Acrylic on canvas
 Collection Bérengère Primat,
 Courtesy Fondation Opale
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 Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996)
Alhalker, 1987
 Batik on cotton
 Collection Bérengère Primat,
 Courtesy Fondation Opale
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/
 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
 Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996), Anmatyerr people
Untitled (awely), 1994
 National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, purchased 2022, with the assistance of the
 Foundation Gala Funds 2021 and 2022, in celebration of the National Gallery of Australia's 40th
 anniversary, 2022
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich



Emily Kam Ngwarray (c.1914-1996), Anmatyerr people
Yam awely, 1995
 National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, gift of the Delmore
 Collection, Donald and Janet Holt 1995
 © Emily Kam Ngwarray/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich

PRESS PICTURES



Josie Kunoth Petyarre (1959)
Miel sauvage / Sugar Bag, 2018
Acrylic on linen canvas
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
© Josie Kunoth Petyarre/Copyright Agency/2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier



Ada Bird Petyarre (c.1930-2009)
Peintures corporelles / Body Paintings, date inconnue
Acrylic on linen canvas
Collection Bérengère Primat, Courtesy Fondation Opale
© Ada Bird Petyarre/Copyright Agency/ 2026, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo : Vincent Girier Dufournier

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FONDATION OPALE



VISION AND PURPOSE

Established in 2018, Fondation Opale is the sole contemporary art center dedicated to the promotion of Australian Aboriginal art in Europe. It strives to facilitate dialogue between peoples and cultures through art. The foundation is based on Bérengère Primat Collection which includes over 1,900 works by nearly 440 artists, making it one of the world's largest collections of contemporary Aboriginal art in private ownership. Fondation Opale is a non-profit organisation with strictly cultural and artistic objectives.

PARTNERSHIPS / OFFSITE COLLABORATIONS

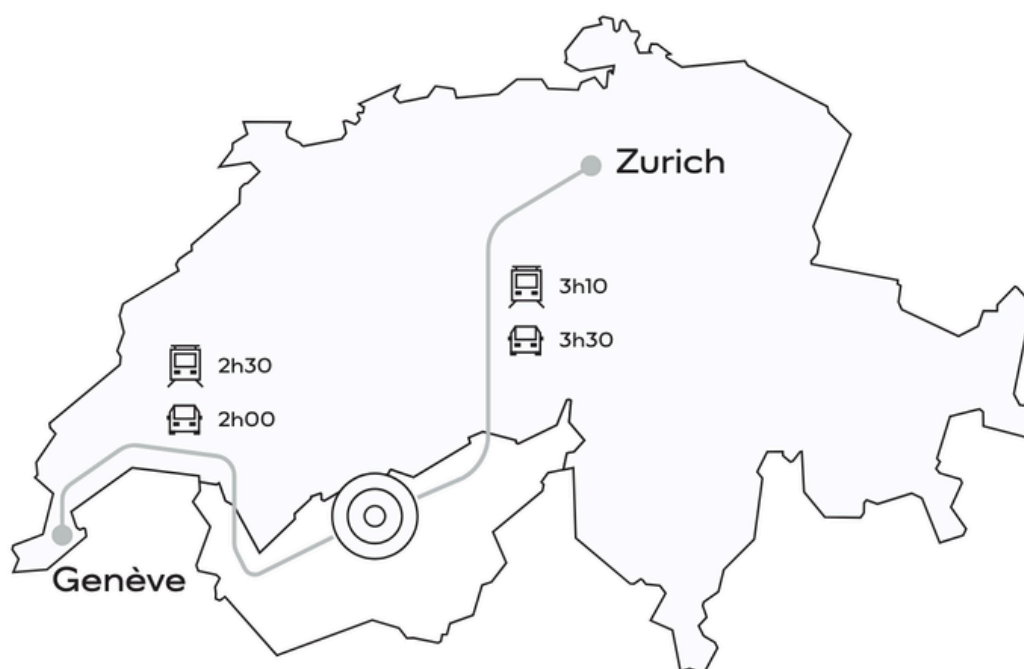
September - December 2026 Lyon Biennale

The 18th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art, *“To pass from one dream to another”*, will take place from 19 September to 13 December 2026, curated by Catherine Nichols. As a partner of this edition, Fondation Opale is proud to support the works of seven Indigenous Australian artists featured at the biennale.

April 2027 Art Paris

From 1 to 4 April 2027, Art Paris returns to the Grand Palais. This 29th edition will be renewed in 2027 with the unprecedented guest country invitation of Australia, supported by the Embassy of Australia in France and Fondation Opale, and featuring the commission of a monumental installation by an Indigenous Australian artist for the forecourt of the Grand Palais.

USEFUL INFORMATION



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OPENING HOURS

Art centre & shop

Wednesday - Sunday : 10 am - 6 pm

EXHIBITION

EMILY KAM KNGWARRAY

June 14 - November 8, 2026
Wednesday - Sunday : 10 am - 6 pm

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