



CLIFFORD POSSUM TJAPALTJARRI

Art Gallery of South Australia
31 October 2003 – 26 January 2004

**An ancient tradition 50,000 years in the making inspired
Australia's most innovative contemporary art movement ...
Clifford Possum was its brightest star**

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (c.1932 - 2002) was the undisputed star of central Australian Western Desert 'dot' painting. Through the sheer power and beauty of his paintings, Clifford Possum introduced his ancient culture to the rest of Australia and then, to the world. Now for the first time in his home country, Clifford Possum will be honoured with a national touring retrospective mounted by the **Art Gallery of South Australia**, Adelaide.

Comprising 48 paintings and 2 sculptures by the artist, the exhibition includes masterpieces drawn from public collections around the nation and private collections in Australia, Europe and America, reflecting Clifford Possum's international success. Nearly three years in the making, the Clifford Possum exhibition is the first comprehensive retrospective of any Western Desert painter's work, staged by a major art museum.

Of all the Western Desert artists, Clifford Possum was certainly the most innovative and accomplished. This exhibition will be a celebration of his stellar thirty-year artistic career and will refocus attention on the awesome beauty and technical brilliance of his work, away from the scandals of forgery and burial rites that sadly haunted Clifford Possum in life and in death.

Born in the early 1930s at Napperby Station, north-west of Alice Springs, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri lived and worked in his ancestral Anmatyerre country for most of his life. He was an expert wood-carver and took up painting long before the emergence of the Papunya Tula school in the early 1970s. When Clifford Possum joined this group of 'dot and circle' painters with his brother, the late artist Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, he immediately distinguished himself as one of its most talented

members and went on to create some of the largest and most complex 'dot' paintings ever produced.

Clifford Possum led a groundbreaking career and was the first Indigenous Australian artist to be recognised and fêted by the international art world. When his iconic work, *Man's Love Story* 1978 was purchased by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1980 it became the first 'dot' painting to enter a major public art collection. Like Albert Namatjira before him, Clifford Possum blazed a trail for future generations of Indigenous artists; bridging the gap between Aboriginal art and contemporary Australian art.

Sadly, this great pioneering artist died on 21 June 2002 in Alice Springs, the day he was to be presented with a medal awarding him the Order of Australia for his services to art and to the Indigenous community.

The exhibition is curated by **Dr Vivien Johnson**, a highly regarded scholar of Western Desert art and personal friend of the late artist, with the assistance of Co-Curator **Tracey Lock-Weir**, Associate Curator of Australian Paintings & Sculpture and **Ron Radford**, Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

A new, fully-illustrated book about Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, written by Vivien Johnson and published by the Art Gallery of South Australia will accompany the exhibition. Extensively researched and with lavish illustrations it is the most comprehensive text ever produced on the subject, offering new and revealing insights into the artist's life and work.

The Clifford Possum exhibition will be officially opened on 30 October 2003 at the Art Gallery of South Australia by Hon. Mike Rann, Premier of South Australia.

This important retrospective will tour to major venues in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in 2004 and is generously supported by Major National Sponsors, SANTOS.

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Art Gallery of South Australia
www.artgallery.sa.gov.au
North Terrace, Adelaide
Daily 10am – 5pm (except Christmas Day)

Vivien Johnson, Tracey Lock-Weir and Ron Radford are available for interview. Interviews with members of Clifford Possum's family may also be possible.

For more information contact:
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- Media preview:** Thursday 30 October 2003 11am – 12noon
- Official opening:** Thursday 30 October 2003 at 6pm by the Premier of South Australia and Minister for the Arts, Mike Rann. Clifford Possum's children Gabriella, Michelle and Lionel are expected to attend.
- Exhibition dates:** Friday 31 October 2003 – Sunday 26 January 2004
- Hours:** Daily 10am to 5pm (except Christmas Day)
- Free guided tours:** Saturdays, Sundays & Wednesdays at 1pm
- Admission:** Adults \$10 / Concession \$8 / Members \$6 / Students over 16 \$4 / Under 16 free
- National tour:** National Gallery of Victoria: 24 March – 3 May 2004
Art Gallery of New South Wales: 14 May – 11 July 2004
Queensland Art Gallery: 7 August – 24 October 2004
- Further information:** Phone 8207 7000 or visit www.artgallery.sa.gov.au