

**Extract from (*dreamings*)**

To relate to Kngwarray's art, it is necessary for the viewer to understand the sorts of replications, reiterations, and resubstantiations of the Dreamings she undertakes in the landscape around her—unlike the Tate Modern's supplementary materials in the exhibition, which include an aerial photograph of the Australian bush in Alkather County near Alice Springs but no sense of the linkages and language held between the paintings themselves—the Dreamings are “Anengker” in the Anmatyerr language—signed (as many Aboriginal languages are signed alongside spoken words) with the Anmatyerr word for snake (“Exhibition Guide: Emily Kam Kngwarray,” “Anengker”). To form the word Dreamings: cup the left hand into a shallow bowl. Let the right draw up toward the mouth from the shallow bowl, led by whorls on the right thumb.

Like Kngwarray, “Audre Lorde explored criss-crossings throughout her life” (Farber 148). Lorde also found solidarity with the black Aboriginal women of Australia, the word black here signifying an arlpaw, a wide-open space, a landscape uniting people of color subjected to (neo)colonial forces of ongoing domination in the twentieth century (“Arlpaw”). In “The Master’s Tools,” Lorde asserts these political connections and interdependencies with other black and lesbian women is “the way to a freedom which allows the *I* to *be...* creative” (ed. by Roxane Gay 40).

The methods by which Lorde imagines this freedom allowing the “I” to enact both the quotidian, the fantastical, and the erotic in poetry is via “a disruption of the tests that insist on sameness,” on repetitions of the irreducible fantasy of a symbolic political order which precludes sad, brown lesbians from tangible futures (Turpin 4, 24-25).<sup>1</sup> Let *I* enter the arlpaw, a wide-open space, a landscape uniting people of color subjected to (neo)colonial forces of ongoing domination in the twentieth century. Let *I* enter another form of dreaming, adjacent Kngwarray’s enaction of the word Dreamings.

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<sup>1</sup> Turpin points to Butler’s work with the substantiation of gender performativity and identity in *Bodies That Matter*, where Turpin asserts that [narrative] “disruptions” [which challenge societal norms] such as those in Lorde’s poetry offers a liberating space of “erotic subjectivity” for Black women (4).

To form the word Dreamings: cup the left hand into a shallow bowl. Let the right draw up toward the mouth from the shallow bowl, led by whorls on the right thumb. An “organizing principle of Audre Lorde’s life and work:” building connections transnationally among black diasporic women (Bolaki and Broeck 1-2). Another form of dreaming, adjacent Kngwarray’s Dreamings: Maori writer Coco Solid envisions a collective future for women in the South Pacific: “when I walk forward into the Western idea of a linear future, I... [step] back into my past... Time is a spiral... of repetition and returning... an immortal coil... an unfurling [koru] fern” (323). I imagine Kngwarray’s spirals of yams, yam seeds, emu tracks, connecting one mouth to another mouth, thumbprint descending from blue sky to kiss thumbprint caked in red sand. To form the word Dreamings: cup the left hand into a shallow bowl. Let the right draw up toward the mouth from the shallow bowl, led by whorls on the right thumb.

“It’s not our place to understand [and embody] Kngwarray’s art,” Niharika asserts when I share my friend’s question:

(“What would happen if we tried to replicate Kngwarray’s process in paintings featuring present-day London?” my friend asks me as we walk along the Thames from Tate Modern to the National Liberal Club, where he’ll show me a display illustrating the party’s work for LGBTQ marriage equality in the UK and a portrait of Winston Churchill in the foyer which is removed every few years for Churchill’s noncommittal stance toward the Liberal party during his lifetime.

“Merely imitative... lacking in substance... a form of appropriation devoid of feeling and context,” I suggest, aware of the uninhabitability of Kngwarray’s Dreamings for those outside her Aboriginal culture.)

In the penultimate room of the Kngwarray exhibit, I ask: What type of Dreamings is Kngwarray's "Body Markings (Sorry Cuts)" linked to, if any?



Emily Kam Kngwarray. *Body Markings (Sorry Cuts)*. 1994, Acrylic on canvas.

I see other paintings in the exhibit linked to sand drawings, songs, emus, yam seeds, the linkages between red earth-blue sky-clear water, but this series of four paintings feels less expansive and more corporeal, quiet, intimate. Red, purple, brown and lines both a series of injuries and matrilineal stories.

“But you know how it is here in Britain: the items in museums are devoid of context and histories,” says Niharika, and I hold the violence implicit in the word d/Dreamings and its various reiterations and resubstantiations across cultures alongside its capacity for movement-building and solidarity amongst black and brown women. Perhaps Kngwarray’s Dreamings hold both the violence and solidarity with the Anmatyyer women ancestors and futures. To return to Lorde, who alerts white feminists to the conditions of racism and homophobia: “*I urge each one of us... to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that*” violence, that “*terror...of any difference that lives there*” (ed. by Gay 43). A spiral motion in which the queer body is aware of the mortality of such languages and civilizations; that an arrival in the Future is a screen; such a queer spiral understands an arrival at a point in the linearly-conceived Future is “mere repetition and just as lethal as the past” (Edelman 31).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Aboriginal Noongar poet Elfie Shiosaki writes: “First Nations storytelling recognises the human agencies of Aboriginal women to resist, survive, and renew. We find freedom in storytelling, to restore humanity to... intergenerational story cycles... [carving] bidis [paths] between ancient and new worlds [e.g., futures]” (141).

(from another dreaming)

(this is not a replica)

because there is nothing else besides this:

the startle of a bird on a branch

in a country

—an Empire—

I have never met

until now,

a woman's bones laid out

in a tomb by the Thames as a sacrifice for the Mother

God, skull pushed

down into the sand

restless

and waiting to see where the map of the museum has fallen

between the pane of glass and the wall

in the next room my ancestors,

indentured,

make do with a replicated history glossed

over in the London Museum

missing the place labeled "whaling"

skeleton faces and can we call it a replica if the bricks

on the house are the same?

I miss the house I have never known. I miss the chirp puncturing

the rustle on the leaves.

the holes in the woman's hip thrash at the air.

Arlpaw, a wide-open space:

Kingwarray's paintings have a meditative, hypnotic quality to them: they move the viewer's eye both inward—to each dot or spackle, to each texture and thickness of line—and outward—in sweeping movements of roots, rivers, landscapes, asemic stories.





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