

An impressionistic painting of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, there's a sandy beach with some green and yellow foliage. A line of white surf separates the beach from a deep blue sea. In the background, two large, rugged cliffs rise from the water. The cliffs are painted with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of brown, orange, red, and blue. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

BILLY BENN

Before I Go Home...

16TH AUGUST – 6TH SEPTEMBER



8 Hele

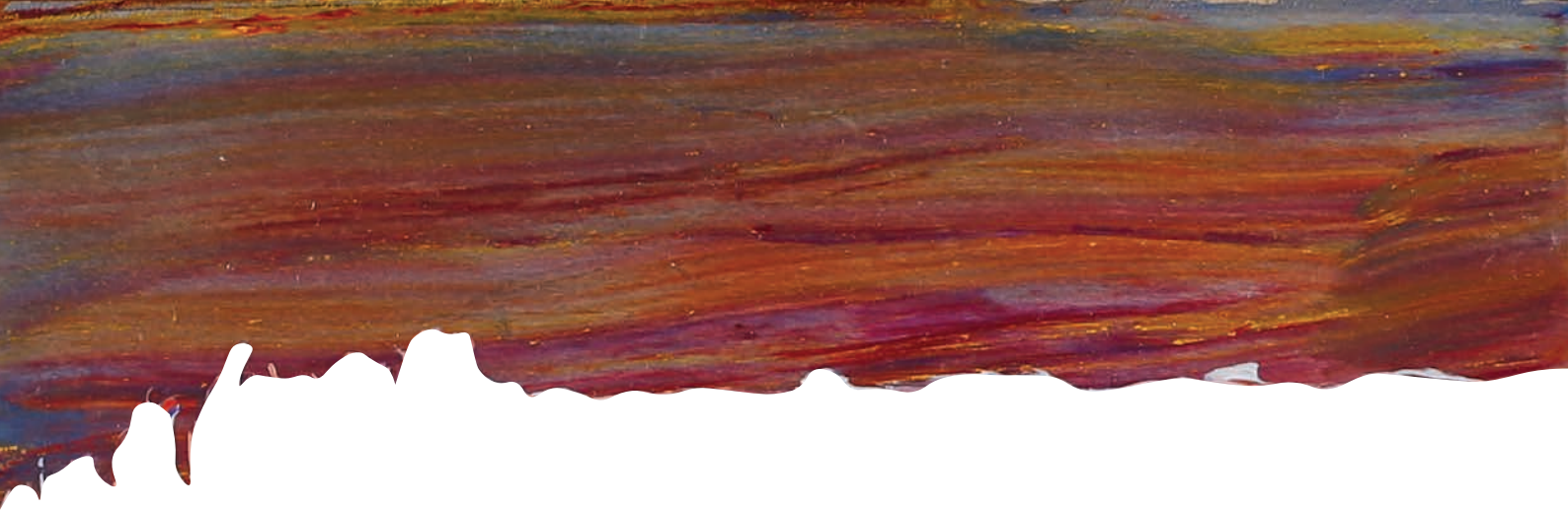


8 Hele Gallery respectfully acknowledges the Arrernte as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are situated. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

8 Hele Gallery
Chapman & Bailey, Mparntwe /
Alice Springs
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8-hele.com



8 Hele Gallery



BEFORE I GO HOME

"I go back with my spirit and see that land before man"

For a long time, Benn's works existed in obscurity, on the walls of the Bindi where he worked as a gardener, metalworker and woodworker. However, when people started to take notice of these charming landscapes there was an attempt to categorise the works as 'Outsider' or 'Naïve' art.

However, his unique style—at once expressive and restrained—bears traces of an early encounter with Chinese calligraphy, taught to him by the Chinese wife of a mica miner, who he met when working on the mines before the close of industry in the 60s. The influence emerges in the elegant, slanted brushstrokes that gesture toward the folds and peaks of escarpments. These gestures carry more than formal beauty: they inscribe the fraught histories embedded in Country. Harts Range, once the centre of Australia's mica mining industry, is a place marked by the extractive violence of settler capitalism and ongoing colonial intrusion. In

Benn's hands, even the softest mark carries the weight of resistance. The mining industry—a threat to his homelands—both imperils and catalyses his work. There is grief in Benn's palette—muddied ochres and dusky greens that seem to summon what teeters on the edge of loss. And yet, with each rasping stroke, something is brought back into being.

Harts Range is also a place fraught with painful personal memories for Benn, it was here that during his first mental health episode he shot his uncle, followed by his escape into the wilds of Mt. Brady and dramatic final surrender. He was jailed and then eventually committed to the Hillcrest institution in Adelaide. His brush moves through these tensions, mapping a vexed yet vital relationship between art, Country, and survival.

In Benn's paintings, the landscape breathes. The wind's passage traces the ridgelines and stirs the gum leaves. Its presence is geological and ancient—felt before we arrive, and long after we leave. The wind cools and warms, dampens and dries, singing in broken rhythm to the multitudinous life of the world. Benn's strokes move with this rhythm, marking time that cannot be contained. In this way, even in the smallest of canvases, we are immediately placed into the insurmountable feeling of being within this Central Australian landscape, reminded of our smallness in the world and surrendering to the all-encompassing beauty that envelopes us.



There is a distinct change in Benn's style over the years, from more detailed and controlled to bolder and freer, shifting from distant vision to immediate presence, reflecting the painter's change in circumstance; his experience of being in the country that he had been separated from for so many years.

Benn's time as a stockman on cattle stations that blanket his country has created a key layer in his visual knowledge of landscape. "Work on cattle stations meant that local people experienced a slower, more drawn-out integration into the settler world than was the case for many groups in this region". "Aboriginal men earned status and respect in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds."

Benn's love for Country also recalls a fleeting childhood encounter with Albert Namatjira. In both artists' work, landscape is not merely observed—it is felt, known, embodied. Each painting carries a persistence, a spirit that exceeds any fixed notion of land or style. "He seized upon Namatjira's example to make paintings his personal redemption as an Aboriginal man."

It is important to note that Benn's creative journey was shaped in part through Bindi Enterprises, where he began painting on off-cuts of timber and metal in the 1990s, following his diagnosis of schizophrenia. Benn's tenacity inspired the establishment of the Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists studio, a cooperative of artists working with a disability, and the fostering of the talents of his colleagues, including Adrian Robertson, Aileen Oliver, Seth Namatjira and many more.

Guided also by the teachings of his sisters, Ally and Gladdy Kemarre, and grounded in Utopia-style body painting traditions, Benn's work is both personal and collective. His dulled colours, calligraphic gestures, and soulful textures speak not only of land, but of memory and survival.

In the first show of works since his passing *Before I go home* speaks to Benn's lifelong pull towards the Country from which he was separated. His paintings trace the journey back, transforming memory, grief, and survival into landscapes where he could stand, once more, on the ground that made him.

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- i Perkins, H. (2024). Billy Benn Perrurle | Art Gallery of NSW: <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/perrurle-billy-benn/>
 - ii Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 44
 - iii Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 19
 - iv Tristen Harwood, (2025). 65000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art. Thames & Hudson. Pg. 312
 - v Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 14
 - vi Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 6
 - vii Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 4
 - viii Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 64
 - ix Billy Benn Perrurle and Peattie, C. (2011). Billy Benn. Iad Press. Pg. 64
 - x Tristen Harwood, (2025). 65000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art. Thames & Hudson. Pg. 312
 - xi Perkins, H. (2024). Billy Benn Perrurle | Art Gallery of NSW: <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/perrurle-billy-benn/>
 - xii Perkins, H. (2024). Billy Benn Perrurle | Art Gallery of NSW: <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/perrurle-billy-benn/>





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050822

28 x 23cm

\$ 1,600





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050616

43 x 29cm

\$ 2,300





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050839

31 x 19cm

\$ 1,500





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005

Acrylic on board

BB060795

29 x 20cm

\$ 1,500





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2007

Acrylic on linen

BB080340

87 x 30cm

\$ 5,000





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2007

Acrylic on linen

BB080336

50 x 17.5cm

\$ 2,000





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2007

Acrylic on linen

BB080537

50 x 20cm

\$ 2,300





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2003

Acrylic on linen

BB040824

33.5 x 10.5cm

\$ 965





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005

Acrylic on board

BB061204

19 x 19 cm

\$ 1,000





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050501

59 x 27cm

\$ 2,350





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050217

62.5 x 24cm

\$ 2,200





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050815

19 x 10cm

\$ 565





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB051122

24.5 x 21.5cm

\$ 1,400





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005
 Acrylic on board
 BB060974
 20 x 20cm
 \$ 1,050



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005
 Acrylic on board
 BB061133
 20 x 20cm
 \$ 1,050



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB070690

60 x 30cm

\$ 2,350





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0123-22

20 x 11.5cm

\$ 650





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0092-22

30 x 15cm

\$ 1,200





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005

Acrylic on board

BB060949

30 x 15cm

\$ 1,200





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2006

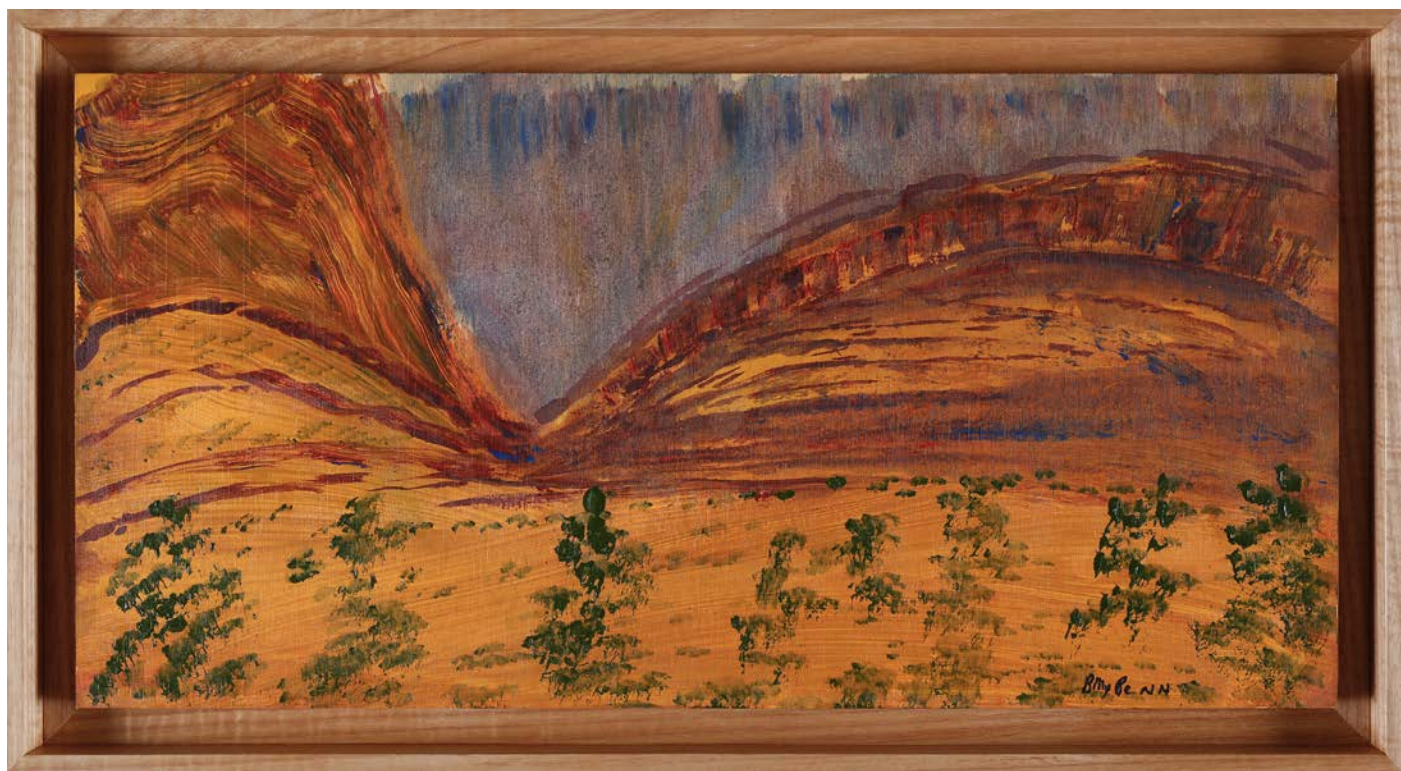
Acrylic on board

BB011195

40 x 18cm

\$ 1,600





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050207

60 x 35cm

\$ 3,950





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB011194

40 x 20cm

\$ 1,800





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0138-22

15 x 10cm

\$ 500



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

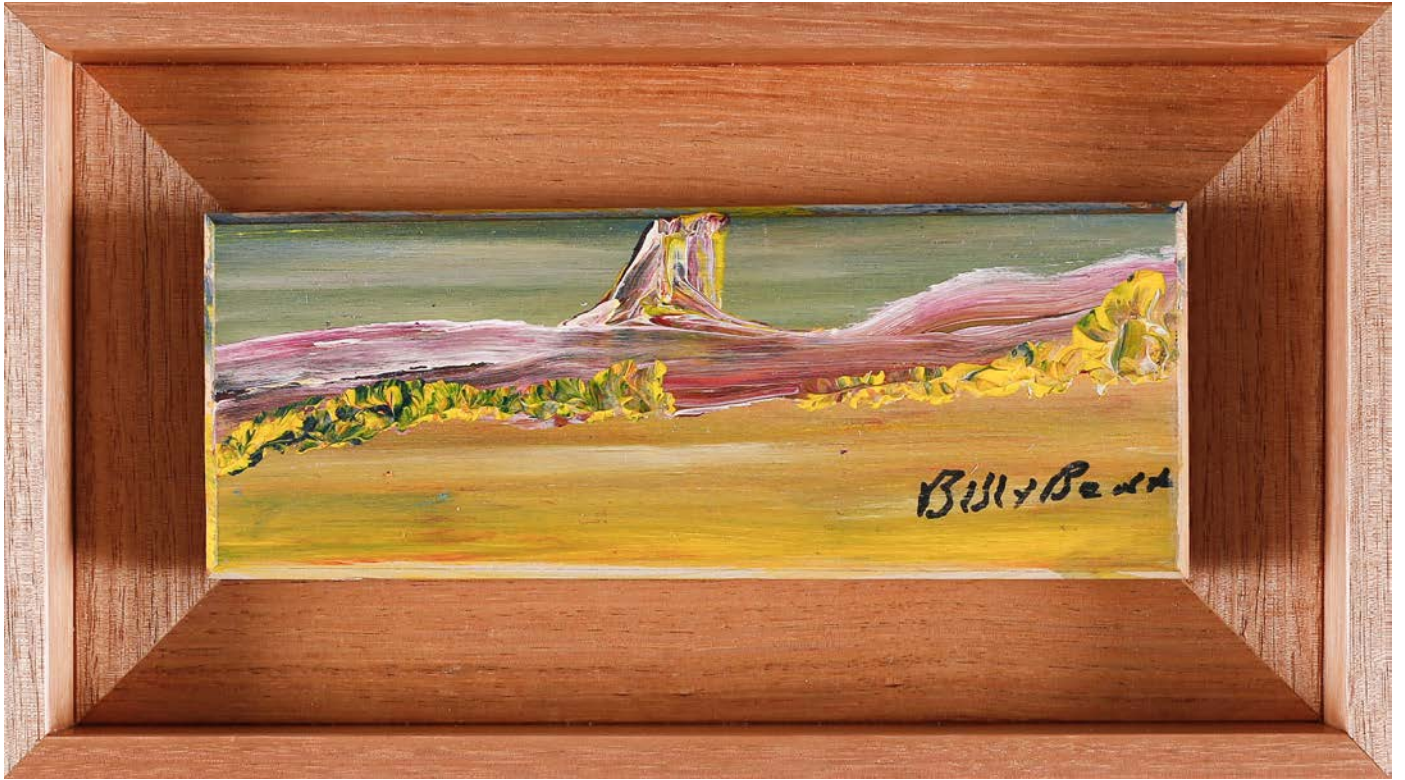
Acrylic on board

BB0140-22

15 x 9.5cm

\$ 500





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0114-22

20 x 7.5cm

\$ 500





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0112-22

20 x 20cm

\$ 1,100





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2007

Acrylic on board

BB080188

30 x 30cm

\$ 2,000





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0024-22

60 x 27.5cm

\$ 2,400





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2004

Acrylic on board

BB050834

44 x 9cm

\$ 1,150





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005

Acrylic on board

BB061143

30 x 20cm

\$ 1,500





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB070846

37.5 x 18.5cm

\$ 1,600



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0106-22

27.5 x 7cm

\$ 650





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2005

Acrylic on board

BB061236

50 x 20cm

\$ 2,150





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB011182

50 x 20cm

\$ 2,150



8 Hele Gallery



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0099-22

29 x 7cm

\$ 650



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

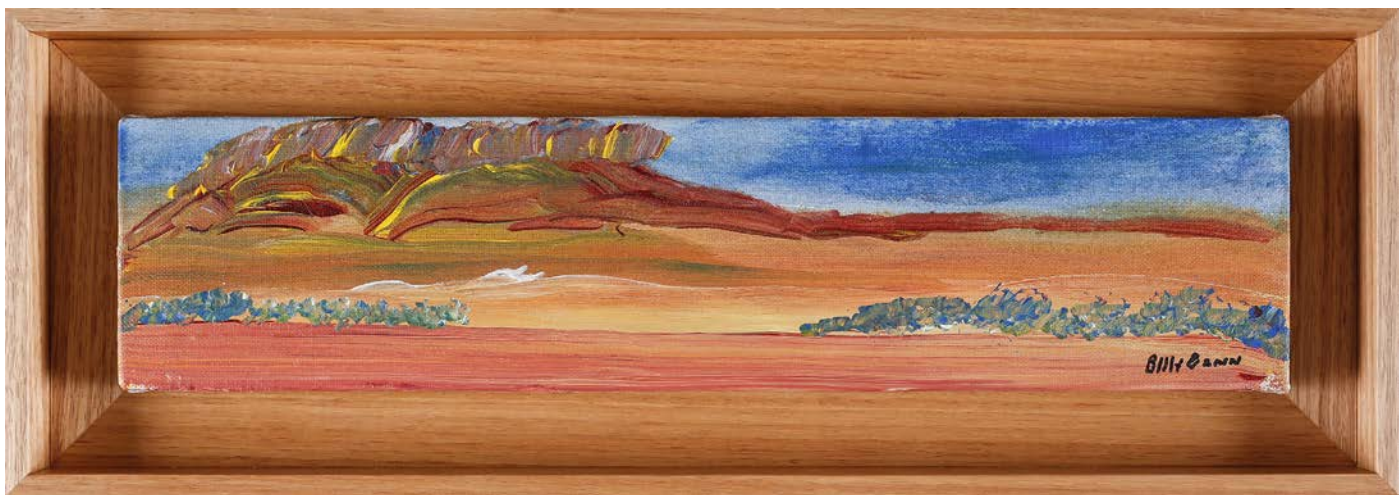
Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0098-22

30 x 7cm

\$ 650



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB070742

44 x 10cm

\$ 1,200



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0084-22

37 x 6.5cm

\$ 650





BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Untitled

Acrylic on board

BB0097-22

30 x 7cm

\$ 650



BILLY BENN PERRURLE

Artetyerre, 2006

Acrylic on board

BB070425

20 x 10cm

\$ 560





BILLY BENN

Language: Arrernte

Place of Birth: Artetyerre

Billy Benn Perrurle was born circa 1943 in Artetyerre (Harts Range) and passed away 15/10/2012. His two older sisters, Ally and Gladdy Kemerre, taught Bill how to paint on skin when he was a teenager, while living at Kurrajong/ Urapuntja (Utopia). Bill also remembered the Chinese wife of a mica miner, Jane, showing him how to paint.

Their father, Jimmy Kemerre, was also an artist, making more traditional artifacts, wooden sculptures, boomerangs and spears. Jimmy worked in the mica mines and also mined for gold out at Altunga, transporting people and mail from Alice Springs to Altunga by camel whilst working for a man, Simon Reef. Bill worked extensively in his country. He began working as a young boy, aged approximately 10, in the mica mines of Harts Range with Simon Reef's younger brother Norman. He recalled a lot of Italian people working there, and the large flagons of wine they carried with them, imported from Italy. He also

recalled the lunches of spaghetti...."Good food, those Italian people"... Billy was not paid for his work, instead receiving tucker and clothes. Later he began pumping water for cattle, again being paid in flour, sugar and tea. He spent most of his working life in the North Eastern area of Central Australia, droving sheep and cattle for Pastoralists, Cameron Chalmers, Joe Mangel and Peter Hayes. It was whilst working with Chalmers that Bill grew up to be a man. He spoke in particular of a special trip, droving with his cousins from Arrkngenangerre (Mount Swan), where they drove a herd of cattle to deliver to Neutral Junction Station, East of Barrow Creek, also returning on horseback.

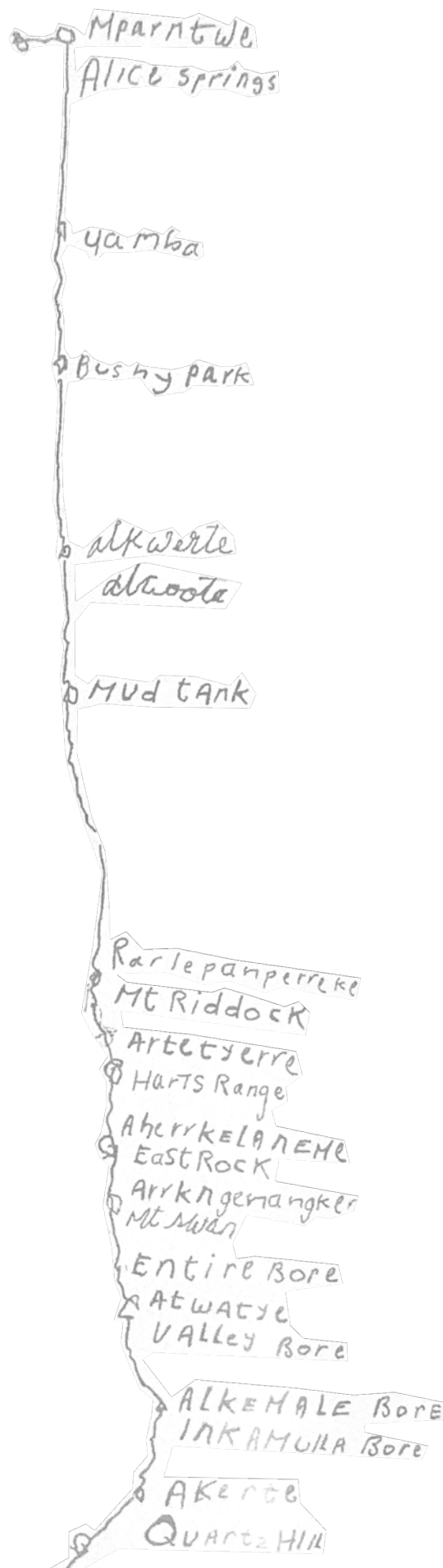
Since 1981, Billy worked at Bindi Inc, an organisation established to provide employment opportunities, support and advocacy for people with a disability in Alice Springs. During his time constructing metal boxes in the Brown Street workshop, he identified a space which became his corner to paint in. He began to visually map out his father's country via the painted image, using old boards discarded by the Alice Springs Timber Mill. Working as many outsider artists do, with second rate materials, on any surface that appealed, Billy painted using his fingers, cloth, glue and varnish. Despite the brilliant landscapes being created, they were only shown once prior to 2000 in an exhibition of artworks done by people with a disability in the 'Beyond Passions' exhibition in Alice Springs.



All his work sold, and yet, the low profile of the exhibition, meant that his work had still not been viewed by the wider market. The Mwerre Anthurre Artist collective was founded around his talent in 2000.

It was many years before Billy was able to return to his homeland. Meanwhile he continued to paint primarily Harts Range, his father's country. His images were found from memory and feeling. By painting his land, Billy brought the country into himself. Only when he had painted every hill from his country, would he stop and return home. Bill's paintings cover a wide scope of style, born of his own lack of preciousness, his vivid imagination and colour, texture and material experimentation strategies, rather than the study of other painterly influences. One sees hints of Turner, Cezzane, Van Gogh and the Orientalists within his work, yet these were images never seen by Bill. We are reminded of these other great painters in the variations of light that he captures, rolling ranges painted in deep reds, reminding viewers of the raging seas Turner exposed. From the Central Australian context, they remind one of the great inland sea which once existed here. Yet Bill remarked only on Albert Namatjira being a great painter.

Bill's paintings communicate a well informed knowledge and relationship of the space that exists in this country. Belgian Art Historian, Georges Petitjean, was excited by Bill's breadth and continuance of horizon, never curving at the edges but continuing their travel overland and on into the distance.



BILLY BENN

- 2025** Billy Benn Perrurle - Art Gallery New South Wales. Sydney, NSW
- 2014** Billy Benn: Returning Home - Art Leven. Redfern, NSW
- 2011** Billy Benn - Alacaston Gallery. Melbourne, VIC
- 2007** Magic - Alcaston Gallery. Melbourne, VIC
- 2003** Billy Benn - Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi. Melbourne, VIC
- 2002** Billy Benn - Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi. Melbourne, VIC

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025** 65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art - Potter Museum of Art, Parkville, Victoria
- 2019** Inbetween | the gaps | act I - Marché aux Vins. Beaune, France
- 2015** In the Wild - Talapi Gallery. Alice Springs, NT
- 2014** Bindi Magic - Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists - Alice Springs - Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists. Alice Springs, NT
- 2014** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2013** Bindi Eye - Tali Gallery. Rozelle, NSW
- 2012** Bindi Magic - Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists. Alice Springs, NT
- 2012** Desert Colour - Talapi Gallery. Alice Springs, NT
- 2012** Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery - Melbourne, VIC
- 2012** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2011** Bindi Magic - Bindi Mwerre Anthurre Artists. Alice Springs, NT
- 2011** Ways of Seeing - Art Leven. Redfern, NSW
- 2011** Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi - Melbourne, VIC
- 2011** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2011** Cross Cultural Art Exchange - Darwin, NT Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin, NT
- 2010** Karen Brown Gallery - Alice Springs NT
- 2010** Woolloongabba Gallery - Brisbane, QLD
- 2010** Gallery Gondwana - Alice Springs, NT
- 2010** Alcaston Gallery - Melbourne, VIC
- 2010** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2010** Raft Gallery - Alice Springs, NT



- 2009** AP Bond Dealer - Adelaide, SA
- 2009** Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery - Melbourne, VIC
- 2009** Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin, NT
- 2009** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2009** Indigenart - Perth, WA
- 2008** Gallery Gondwana - Alice Springs, NT
- 2008** Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin, NT
- 2008** Big Country - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2008** Land Sea and the Universe - Melbourne Art Fair. Melbourne, VIC
- 2008** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2007** Alcaston Gallery - Melbourne, VIC
- 2007** Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi - Melbourne, VIC
- 2007** AP Bond Gallery - Adelaide, SA.
- 2007** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2007** Indigenart - Perth, WA
- 2007** Big Country - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2007** Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin
- 2006** Landmarks - National Gallery of Victoria. Melbourne, Vic
- 2006** Alcaston Gallery - Melbourne, VIC
- 2006** Big Country - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2006** Salon des Refuses - S.H. Ervin Gallery. Sydney, NSW
- 2006** Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin, NT
- 2005** Desert Mob. - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2005** Big Country - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2005** Telstra Art Award - Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. Darwin, NT
- 2005** Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi - Melbourne, VIC
- 2004** Apmere - Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi. Melbourne, VIC
- 2004** Big Country - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2004** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2004** Australian Culture Now - National Gallery of Victoria. Melbourne, VIC
- 2004** Telstra Art Award - Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. Darwin, NT
- 2004** Karen Brown Gallery - Darwin, NT
- 2004** From little things big things grow - National Gallery of Australia. Canberra
- 2003** Telstra Art Awards - Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. Darwin, NT
- 2003** The Bindi Perspective - Gallery Gondwana. Alice Springs, NT
- 2002** Bindi The Bush And Beyond - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2002** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2002** Grant Pirrie Gallery - Sydney, NSW



- 2002** Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi - Melbourne, VIC
- 2001** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT
- 2000** Desert Mob - Araluen Art Centre. Alice Springs, NT

COLLECTIONS

ARALUEN ART CENTRE

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL GALLERY OF QUEENSLAND

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

AWARDS

- 2009** Finalist - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards
(NATSIAA - Telstra)
- 2006** Winner - 34th Alice Prize - Araluen, Alice Springs
- 2006** Finalist - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards
(NATSIAA - Telstra)

