

Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park Note

Anangu art

Anangu art has traditionally taken the form of rock paintings, sand drawings and body painting. This park note is an introduction to the artwork and the symbolism of the paintings you will see on your visit to the park.

Why Anangu paint

Anangu paintings are created for religious and ceremonial expression and for teaching and storytelling. Anangu still create sand drawings and body paintings for these purposes but have largely abandoned the use of rock paintings to teach and tell stories. Today a range of new materials including acrylic paint on canvas are used. Anangu artists use the same symbols and meanings that have been used by their ancestors over many generations. This enables Anangu to continue passing on Tjukurpa through storytelling as well as providing the community with a source of income. The word Tjukurpa (pronounced chook-oor-pa) used in this note is the traditional Law that explains existence and guides daily life for Anangu.

There are two galleries in the Cultural Centre that exhibit art work that shows this adaptation of sand and rock paintings, Maruku Arts and Walkatjara Art.

Rock paintings

Anangu painted the art in the caves of Uluru to illustrate stories they were telling or the Tjukurpa they were teaching. Several rock shelters along the Mala and Kuniya walks provide visitors with the opportunity to observe evidence of this ancient tradition. The paintings are of considerable historical significance to Anangu, who continue to ensure their preservation and protection.



Examples of rock art found in the park



Painting today

Today, Anangu paint to tell visitors the Tjukurpa stories they have told for generations. The same symbols and stories you see in the caves at Uluru are used in sand drawings and paintings. Artists fill in the background with a series of dots that represent the different vegetation types of the area they are painting.

Anangu first begun transferring sand and rock paintings onto canvas during the 1970s. The popularity and demand for western desert paintings has been increasing ever since with paintings being sold locally, nationally and internationally.

Traditional designs can have modern meanings, for example a dot painting that tells the story of Lungkata (blue-tongued lizard) burning the country around Uluru and Kata Tjuta also shows us how Anangu and rangers are continuing this tradition in the park today.

Body painting

The same symbols and paints used in rock art are also used in body painting. People paint themselves with ochres to represent the Tjukurpa ancestors and events they represent during inma (ceremonies). The paintings, songs and dances of some public inma can be seen on the DVD shown at the Cultural Centre daily.

Painting materials

Anangu make paints from natural mineral substances mixed with water and sometimes with animal fat. They most commonly use red, yellow, orange, white, grey and black pigments. Red, yellow and orange pigments are iron-stained clays called ochres. Calcite and ash are used to make white pigment and calcite and charcoal are used to make black pigment. Calcite is a chalky mineral which occurs naturally in calcrete deposits common in this area.

The art and its meaning

The symbols and figures in the caves at Uluru are similar to those found at many sites throughout Central Australia. These symbols and figures include geometric symbols such as concentric circles, figures representing animal tracks, and the outlines of animals.

Artists can use these symbols and figures to represent different meanings, the specific meanings are clear when the story of the painting is told. The true meanings of rock paintings at Uluru rest with the artists and their descendants.

The concentric circles symbol is a good example of how artists can use the same symbol to represent many things. In some paintings, concentric circles may mean a waterhole or a camping place. In others, the same symbol may indicate a *tjala* (honey ant) nest, or *ili* (native fig). The symbol usually represents a site that is a part of an intricate story being recorded and told by the artist.

During the 1970s, anthropologist Robert Layton recorded the following explanations from two old men relating to some of the paintings at the Mutitjulu art site. These explanations show how the painted designs convey *Tjukurpa* and the personal histories of the men.

At Kulpi Mutitjulu (the large cave near Mutitjulu Waterhole) Paddy Uluru pointed out horizontal lines painted on the rear wall which he said had been put there by his brothers in his presence a long time ago. Low down on the left hand side of the wall is a figure which Paddy Uluru said he had painted himself as a small boy.

In one of the shelters at Mutitjulu a row of concentric circles represent the eggs of the *kuniya* python, while another design depicts a *mawulyari*, the small apron worn by women.

Verses from the *Kuniya inma* or song cycle are associated with the site. Each verse refers to a particular place and a specific event that occurred there. One of the verses relating to artwork in Kulpi Mutitjulu describes how during the fight between *Kuniya* and *Liru* which occurred nearby, the *Kuniya* woman used her digging stick to attack a *Liru* warrior. Another verse describes the *Kuniya* women dancing in their *mawulyari* skirts, while in another the *Kuniya* are described painting their bodies with designs seen in the rock shelter.

Art site protection

Rock paintings around Uluru are easily damaged. Natural elements like water, rock minerals and lichens make them fade or flake off and dust has an abrasive effect on the paintings and can cover them. Mud nests built by swallows and wasps can also damage the art. Art sites also deteriorate when careless people touch the artwork or graffiti the sites.

Anangu and park management have established methods for protecting art sites. They have erected viewing platforms and interpretive signs at many popular public sites along the Mala and *Kuniya* walks. Silicon drip lines are located where paintings are vulnerable to water flowing over the surface and the drip lines change the surface tension, diverting the path of the water away from the paintings.

Specialist consultants have developed a comprehensive system of documenting all known art sites around Uluru. Sites are mapped, photographed and where appropriate, cultural information is recorded. Help us to protect the World Heritage art on Uluru by remaining behind the protective barriers and inform the Cultural Centre staff if you see any graffiti, or persons damaging or interfering with the art work.



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