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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

Newly Reviewed: Vincent Namatjira, Kaylene Whiskey, Tiger Yaltangki

By Aruna D'Souza – July 28, 2022



Vincent Namatjira's "Elizabeth and Vincent (on Country)," 2021. Credit. via Vincent Namatjira, Iwantja Arts and Fort Gansevoort

Finding balance between humor and colonialist critique, three artists from Iwantja Arts, an Aboriginal collective celebrated in Australia but hardly known in the United States, offer up work that galvanizes joy for the world-weary.

In the show, "Iwantja Rock n Roll," Vincent Namatjira's 2021 painting "Elizabeth and Vincent (On Country)," depicts a fictional meeting between Namatjira and the British colonizer-in-chief, set on his Indulkana homeland. Neither Namatjira, who wears a concert T-shirt, nor the friendly dingo holding pride of place seem overawed by their visitor. Nearby, "Albert Namatjira Meets Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Canberra, 1954" (2021) is based on a photograph of a presentation to the royals of Namatjira's great-grandfather, a distinguished artist and the first Aboriginal person to be granted Australian

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citizenship. Namatjira, raised in foster care like a disproportionate number of Indigenous children, only learned about his ancestor as an adult.

The playful mythological creatures in Tiger Yaltangki's "Malpa Wiru" (2021) have a fondness for rock music, AC/DC in particular. Equally raucous are Kaylene Whiskey's works like "Dolly and Catgirl" (2021), which render a cartoon-inflected, girl power celebration of pop icons in the brightly colored "dot painting" technique that has become a signifier of certain Australian Indigenous communities. As with her equally lively videos on view nearby, including "Ngura Pukulpa — Happy Place" (2022), an undertone of cultural pride and insistence on Aboriginal land claims runs through the fun. All in all, "Iwantja Rock n Roll" is politics you can dance to.