

Lawrence Pennington

Pitjantjatjara language group
Spinifex Country

Pukara

2014

Acrylic on linen

Collection of Robert Kaplan and Margaret Levi

Lawrence Pennington is a “senior initiated man,” which means he has been taught all the sacred stories and rituals about his region in Australia. He was born in the 1930s before Spinifex people had contact with the settler culture and grew up as a traditional hunter-gatherer. He has knowledge of “country” that is both profoundly physical and spiritual and Pennington is considered a caretaker or “traditional owner” of “country.”

Pennington often paints the Pukara waterhole, a major site in the story *Two Men Dreaming*, which is about two snake men. The waterhole is where the two men, a father and son, once lived. Before he was properly initiated, the son ambushed and ate some of the local people. The survivors insisted that the father take him away to be properly taught. This story and the subsequent adventures of the two snake men, are often the subject of paintings by senior men. The stories also form the basis for many creation narratives related to landforms in Spinifex Country.

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