



## Brunstrom donation brings significant Utopia artworks to Kluge-Ruhe

[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 9, 2024] Gerald R. (Jerry) and Mary Reid Brunstrom have donated a collection of 33 artworks by Indigenous Australian artists from Utopia to the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. Situated north of Alice Springs in Australia's Central Desert, Utopia is the name given to the traditional lands of the Anmatyerre and Alyawarre people. The Brunstrom gift substantially increases the museum's representation of early artworks from this region.

Mary said, "Kluge-Ruhe will be a wonderful home for these works. For my husband and I, it serves the purpose of placing them in a trusted, professional environment where they can participate in serving the goals that prompted me to represent the artists in the first place."

This significant collection of art from Utopia was amassed by Mary Brunstrom through the Austral Gallery, which she founded in St. Louis in 1988 and directed until it closed in 2000. Austral Gallery was among the first galleries to introduce work by contemporary Australian artists, including Aboriginal artists, to audiences in the U.S.

Kluge-Ruhe director Margo Smith recalls Mary Reid Brunstrom as one of the first people she met when she began working with Kluge's collection. "Mary worked tirelessly to place important First Nations Australian art in major museums and, through a number of innovative projects, to increase its visibility in the United States."

A group of six acrylic paintings on 8 x 10 inch board painted in 1989 by senior Utopia women, working side by side and sharing their paint pots, stand out as jewel-like images. The painting by Emily Kam Kngwarray—who later achieved international acclaim for her expansive, sumptuously textured images of Country—anticipates future directions in theme and style that would come to characterize her widely appreciated art. Among the first half dozen paintings that the artist produced, this diminutive piece is a significant addition to Kluge-Ruhe's holdings of her works. Kngwarray is the subject of a [retrospective at the Tate Modern](#) scheduled to open in 2025.

Kluge-Ruhe curator Eleanore Neumann said: "The incredible group of artworks given by Gerald and Mary Reid Brunstrom provide vital context to the large-scale works from Utopia that John W. Kluge



Emily Kam Kngwarray, *Untitled*, 1989, acrylic on canvas board, 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm). Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection. Gift of Gerald and Mary Brunstrom, 2024

collected after 1990, which is especially important for our research and teaching here at the University of Virginia.” The prints also significantly expand and complement the works from Utopia currently in Kluge-Ruhe’s collection. Altogether, this gift presents an extraordinary snapshot of the emergent painting movement at Utopia.

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THE KLUGE-RUHE ABORIGINAL ART COLLECTION IS THE ONLY MUSEUM OUTSIDE OF AUSTRALIA DEDICATED TO THE EXHIBITION AND STUDY OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART.

#### OUR VISION

A world in which Indigenous peoples are listened to, and their arts and cultures are honored and celebrated.

#### OUR MISSION

To expand knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian arts and cultures to cultivate greater appreciation of human diversity and creativity.