

MEDIA RELEASE

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*September 29, 2019 to January 12, 2020*

MY MOTHER COUNTRY – PAINTINGS OF THE ABORIGINALS

Pierre and Joëlle Clément Collection, Zug

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EMILY KAME KNGWARREYE

Works from Australian private collections

## **POWERFUL, EARTHY, VIVID**

### **Contemporary Aboriginal painting in the Kunsthhaus Zug**

**The Kunsthhaus Zug is exhibiting some 80 works by 50 artists from between 1998 and 2008, all on loan from the private collection of Pierre and Joëlle Clément (Zug). This is the first-ever thematic exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal painting in a Swiss art museum. Works by the most significant, internationally renowned representative of this tradition can also be seen here in a separate solo exhibition: twenty paintings by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, on loan from two private Australian collections.**

Outside it's getting cold, wet and grey, but inside the Kunsthhaus Zug, warm colours are shining from a faraway land – the deserts of Australia. These are large-scale, mostly abstract paintings, earthy and sensuous, and they possess an immense visual power. They appear astonishingly contemporary, and yet tell mysterious stories of rituals and of a great sense of attachment to the physical and spiritual strength of nature in their home country.

The history of the area from which these intense, luminescent colours originate is in fact a dark one. They are from the Northern Territory – more precisely, from the region around Alice Springs, where Aboriginals were once put in reservations. In their broad desert lands, these uprooted people took to paintbrush, paint and canvas to express their identity in a new, unique manner. It was to this area that the Australian artist and art educationist Geoffrey Bardon travelled with painting utensils in 1971. First the local children started working with what he had brought, but soon the adults joined in too. Bardon was interested in the Aboriginals' own aesthetic ideas, in their myths, and in their custom of creating art on their bodies, in sand and on material. He was also interested in their origins and in their attachment to the land. Their new, powerful pictures on canvas soon became highly regarded in art circles, and today they are found in the important art museums of Australia and in art collections in the USA and Europe. Although Aboriginal painting displays a startlingly close relationship to Western art, it nevertheless has a ritual, mythical background in the so-called "Dreamtime".

#### **"The collection came to us"**

Joëlle Clément and her husband Pierre live in Canton Zug, and they also travelled to the Northern Territory. "I never wanted to accumulate anything. I would say that the collection – and everything that has arisen from it – imposed itself on us", says Joëlle Clément. Since the late 1990s, she and her husband have repeatedly returned to the Aboriginal area in the large region around Alice Springs in order to meet the artists themselves. It was through this

personal contact that they acquired the top-class selection of works that they are now exhibiting for the first-ever time in the Kunsthau Zug. The painting of that region is characterised by a particular degree of abstraction.

This is the first-ever thematic exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal painting in a Swiss art museum, though its significance has already been revealed in an artistic context in important institutions in Europe, Japan and the USA. This exhibition of the Pierre and Joëlle Clément Collection comprises a carefully chosen selection of some 80 works by 50 artists, both men and women, painted between 1998 and 2008.

### **The first-ever solo exhibition of Emily Kame Kngwarreye in Europe**

One of the most important and internationally celebrated artists among the initial representatives of this tradition can be seen here in a separate solo exhibition: Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910 – 1996), who grew up in Utopia in the region outside Alice Springs. After the end of the Aboriginal reserves, she lived and worked on a farm where she also found encouragement for her artistic potential. In 1988/89 she embarked on her major oeuvre on canvas, which has been shown in thematic exhibitions all over the world – including at the Venice Biennales of 1997 and 2015. Her paintings are also found today in major collections in Australia and the USA, such as in the collection of the concept artist Sol LeWitt. The Kunsthau Zug will be exhibiting an exclusive selection of 20 paintings by Emily Kame Kngwarreye from different periods of her career, some of them in a large format, which will be the first-ever time she has been given a solo exhibition in Europe. These paintings are on loan from two private Australian collections. With her multi-layered, all-over structures comprising simple lines and dots, Kngwarreye is regarded as one of the most radical artists of her generation in Australia.

The transition into these paintings is provided by works by several relatives of Kngwarreye from the Clément Collection. They demonstrate in exemplary fashion a sense of individualism, joy in experimental innovation, and a cognisance of the conditions of the Modern; but we can also perceive close connections among these indigenous artists, who work against a backdrop of thousands of years of tradition in what is truly a kind of “world contemporary art”.

This is only the second-ever solo exhibition of an Aboriginal artist, after the exhibition of John Mawurndjul’s bark paintings at the Tinguely Museum in Basel (2005/06).

These exhibitions will be complemented by a supporting programme in which the lenders from Zug and Australia will participate, along with specialists in art history and ethnology.

This exhibition, which is being curated by Matthias Haldemann, will be opened on Saturday 28 September 2019 at 5:30 p.m., in the presence of the collectors.

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*For immediate release by the media.*

For further information on the exhibition programme and for visual materials, please go to:  
[www.kunsthauzug.ch/Medien](http://www.kunsthauzug.ch/Medien)

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