



# ARRARNTENH

**Motorbike Paddy Ngal**

SOLO EXHIBITION

2 – 20 MARCH 2024



*Outstation*  
art from art centres





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# ARRARNTENH

**Motorbike Paddy Ngal**

In association with Utopia Art Centre

SHOWING 2 – 20 MARCH 2024

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Director Matt Ward

**Outstation**  
art from art centres

# MOTORBIKE PADDY NGAL

**There is nothing deep down  
inside us except what we  
have put there ourselves.**

- RICHARD RORTY

In the early 1930s when Paddy Ngal was born, pastoral activity was expanding across the lands of the Anmatyerr and Alyawarr people. Paddy's mother and father worked for periods at the old Utopia Station, thus his early life oscillated between time at the Station, and life in the bush. During time-off in the rainy season they camped in a nearby rock shelter, these-days earnestly referred to as 'Paddy's first house'. On other occasions the family journeyed further to his mother's country at Ngkwarlananim, where Paddy spent time with family who 'grew him up proper way'.

*Motorbike Paddy Ngal*

COURTESY OF  
UTOPIA ART CENTRE  
PHOTOGRAPHER:  
RHETT HAMERTON



In his teenage years, Paddy began employment as a casual station hand. First tending to a troublesome herd of goats, and later working with horses. Alongside his older brother Jimmy, Paddy's strong work-ethic impressed the Station Manager, Alec McLeod, who encouraged him to attend to a variety of jobs on, and beyond the Station. His primary task was the mustering and droving of cattle. During the muster Paddy and his Countrymen moved between numerous bores gathering a large herd which they eventually drove to Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Remembering these times, he recollects the pastoral landmarks like old friends. The Stations: Utopia, Mount Swan, Ammaroo, Mount Skinner and Woodgreen. The bores: Lily, Kurrajong, Soapy, Bitter, Tomahawk, Boundary and Mulga. The cattle yards: Number 9, Lily Bore and Three Mile.

In the mid-1950s, Paddy was provided with a motorbike for use around the Station. At this time on the stations throughout Central Australia, motorbikes were a rare commodity. Motorbikes like Paddy's however, with three wheels, chopper handlebars and a long saddle seat, were unheard of. 'I like'em class' he stated recently. Class indeed. Upon this handsome machine – and the more modest two-wheeler that followed – he oversaw the servicing of station bores. He 'chased bullock and brumbies' and hunted kangaroos. His sons speak of his love for riding in the rain and slop, and remember that whenever you rode with Paddy, you held on for dear life. One famous story captures the moment when Paddy – hunting without a rifle – 'popped a wheelie' causing his front wheel to crash down on-top of a kangaroo – killing it instantly. Such stories fed into

the folklore that surrounded this remarkable man, and so the name Motorbike Paddy was struck by McLeod and never went away.

After a life of travel and toil on the Station, Paddy settled into a quiet life at Camel Camp with his beloved wife, Kathleen Ngal. One of sixteen outstations situated in the Utopia region, Camel Camp was where his uncle, Camel Jack laboured with two well-remembered camels; Ruby (or Ropey) and Rain Camel, who with harness and chain drew water from the bore. It was at Camel Camp that he came to observe the artistic activity of Kathleen and her sisters, Polly and Angelina, all of whom began their artistic careers in batik before taking up canvas. The paintings they produced centred upon their shared cultural identification with *arnwekety* (Conkerberry, *Carissa spinarum*) and *arrarntenh* or *artapaly* (Native currant, *Psyrdrax latifolia*). Paddy too is a custodian of these plants and the story of their dispersal across Arlparra country.

In 2015, when he was over 80 years old, Paddy began fashioning wood carvings of small human figures. Two years later he began producing occasional paintings of body paint designs, interspersed with figurative scenes of station life including depictions of his fabled motorbikes.

Then in 2021, Kathleen passed. A grief-stricken Paddy – following cultural protocol – set fire to her material belongings. The resulting blaze reduced part of the roof of their home to nothing more than a charred frame and white ash. Paddy moved to a nearby house and in sadness continued painting. His practice became increasingly focussed

upon the *arnwekety*, so often colourfully celebrated by Kathleen. In contrast, Paddy's *arnwekety* paintings typically feature stark black marks on a pale background. It would be too simple, too naive, to interpret these paintings as figurative depictions of the tiny egg-shaped fruit that ripens black. To settle our understanding on anything so tangible is to limit the infinite possibilities these paintings have.

Watching him paint recently, I see him content. His face relaxes, his eyes drop, his slight frame momentarily inflates. First, a large brush pushes white paint in every direction. He pulls, scrapes, drags, dabs, shuffles, smothers and teases. He reaches as far as his arm will take him, until family – waiting to assist – stand the substrate upright allowing him to reach its centre. As they dutifully rotate the canvas – paint drips and dribbles downward, sideways, inwards, and backwards. As it rests to dry Paddy gathers an arsenal of brushes, their bristles hardened and bent. He begins to mark the surface, which is worked, and re-worked, seemingly finished then undone. White, black, white, grey. Sometimes raw umber, sometimes red, magenta, and pink. Particles cluster, ideas disappear, time and space, expands and contracts. Granular, atomic, ethereal, these are the paintings of now.

LUKE SCHOLLES

February 2024

The writer is indebted to Motorbike Paddy Ngal for having me on his Country. Also, to Sam Jampijinpa Mpetyan Dixon, Harry Dixon Mpetyan, Matthew Mpetyan and Andy Mpetyan for their hospitality, guidance, and generosity. Many thanks to Sophia Lunn, Manager Utopia Art Centre for her insights, energy and enthusiasm.

# SELECTED BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

1938 Born in Kalgoorlie

Country Arlparra

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 *Tarnanthi*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

2023 *41st National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards*, MAGNT, Darwin

2023 *Arrarntenh, Arnwekety, Aynikw, Ayteyikw*, Outstation Gallery, Darwin

2022 *Tarnanthi*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

2022 *Living Water*, RAFT Artspace, Alice Springs

2022 *Arrarntenh, Arnwekety, Aynikw, Ayteyikw*, Outstation Gallery, Darwin

2021 *Desert Mob 30*, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs

## COLLECTIONS

UNSW Art Collection

Art Gallery of South Australia

Artbank

Foundation Opale

Richard and Harriett England collection

Kaplan and Levi collection

This old man was born in the bush between Arlparra country and Utopia Homestead. When old people were still walking around their country in the old days. His mother and father are Minnie and Fred. They were bush people living here in Arlparra and Ngkwarlaniam. He was living near Keep Hole. Apungalidum way. Growing up with his brother as young fellas. Bush way. A long time ago.

His family walked onto the station. Old Utopia Homestead. They were working there. The whole lot were milking the nanny goats. He was taking care of those mad goats. He was growing up mix up. Station and bush. Walking from Utopia Homestead to his mother's country Ngkwarlaniam. A long way to visit his uncle and people living there. Growing him up proper way.

When he was a young fella, he started with horses. Station work with horses. And with motorbikes. Mwerr-one. Old bikes like Japanese ones with three wheels. People started putting that name on him after that. Calling him Motorbike. He was riding all over the county between Utopia old station and Kurrajong bore. The back roads. The station boss gave those young fellas those bikies. His was big and shiny. Class one. Flash with big wheels. A white one. "I likem class."

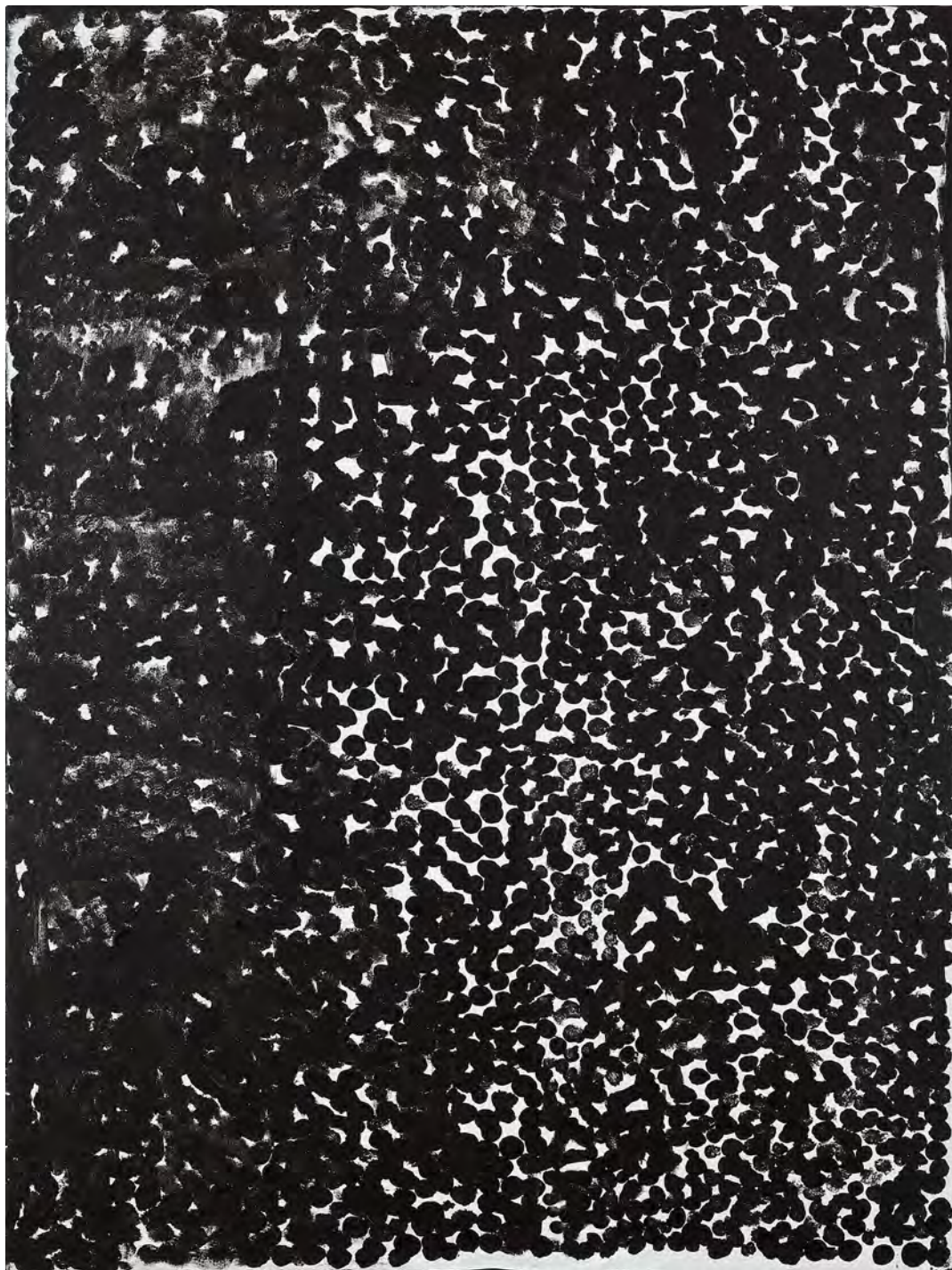
He was on motorbike mustering those cattle. Chasem nanny goats. Kangaroos too! He was working at the stations for long time. Mustering them bullock. Horse mob. Different station work. Sometimes cooking. Driving trucks. Old man was looking after those camels too. That Rain Camel and Ruby Camel. Making the yard and locking them up. When those camels passed away that's why they call it Camel Camp now.

Arrarntenh.  
That old man's painting.  
It's ... the first one.  
Growing like a strong tree.  
That tree made all the rest.  
All the bush plums growing all over.  
The seeds came from that first one.

– EASU KEMARR NELSON

Just like water he goes.  
In the underground.  
He comes out in our country, that's the story.  
That's the country.  
That's the song.

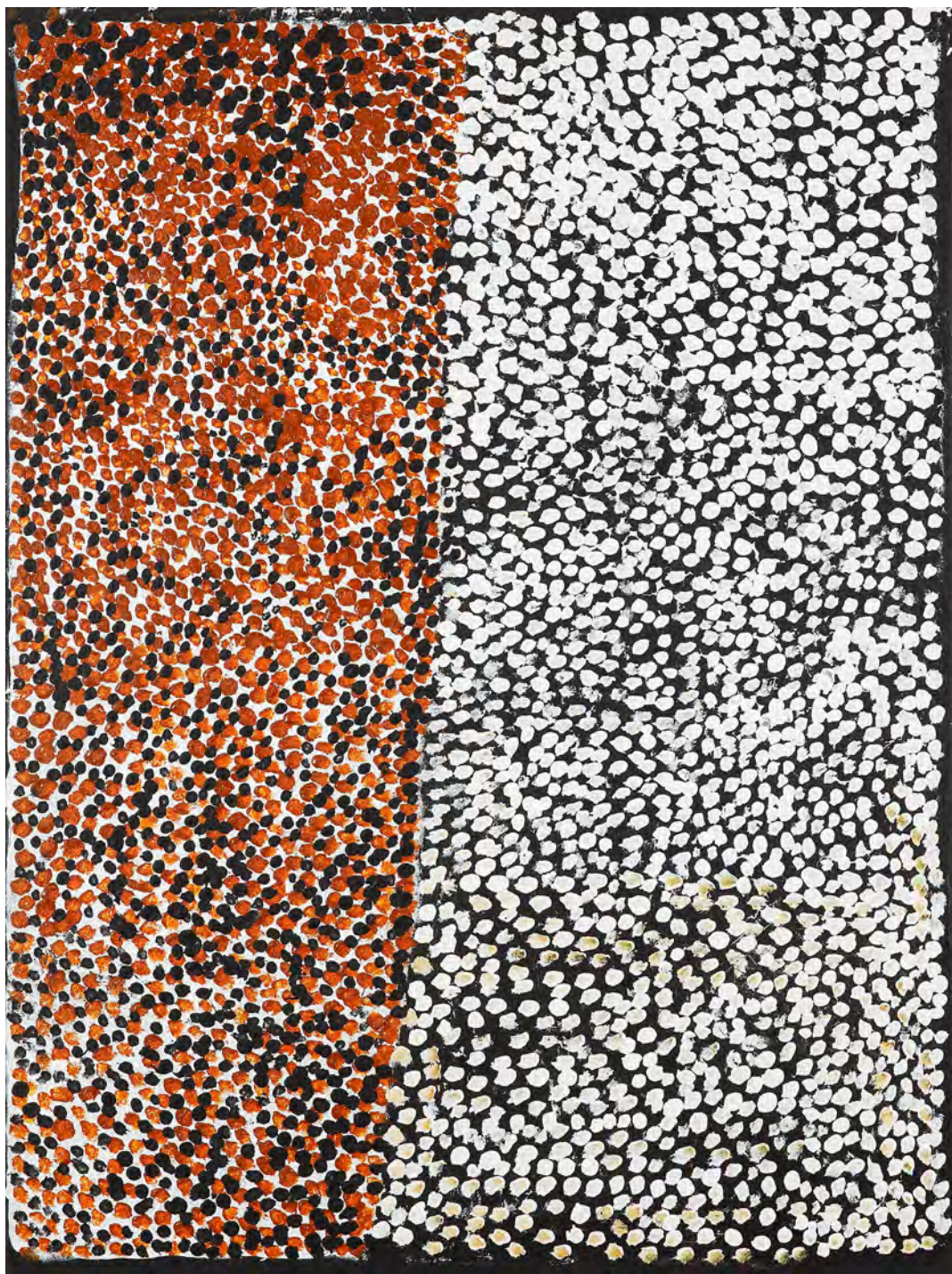
– RAY PWERL LOY



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
76 x 101 cm  
196-23

\$4,000





*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
76 x 101 cm  
189-23

**SOLD**



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
90 x 137 cm  
207-23

\$6,000



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
65-23

\$7,500

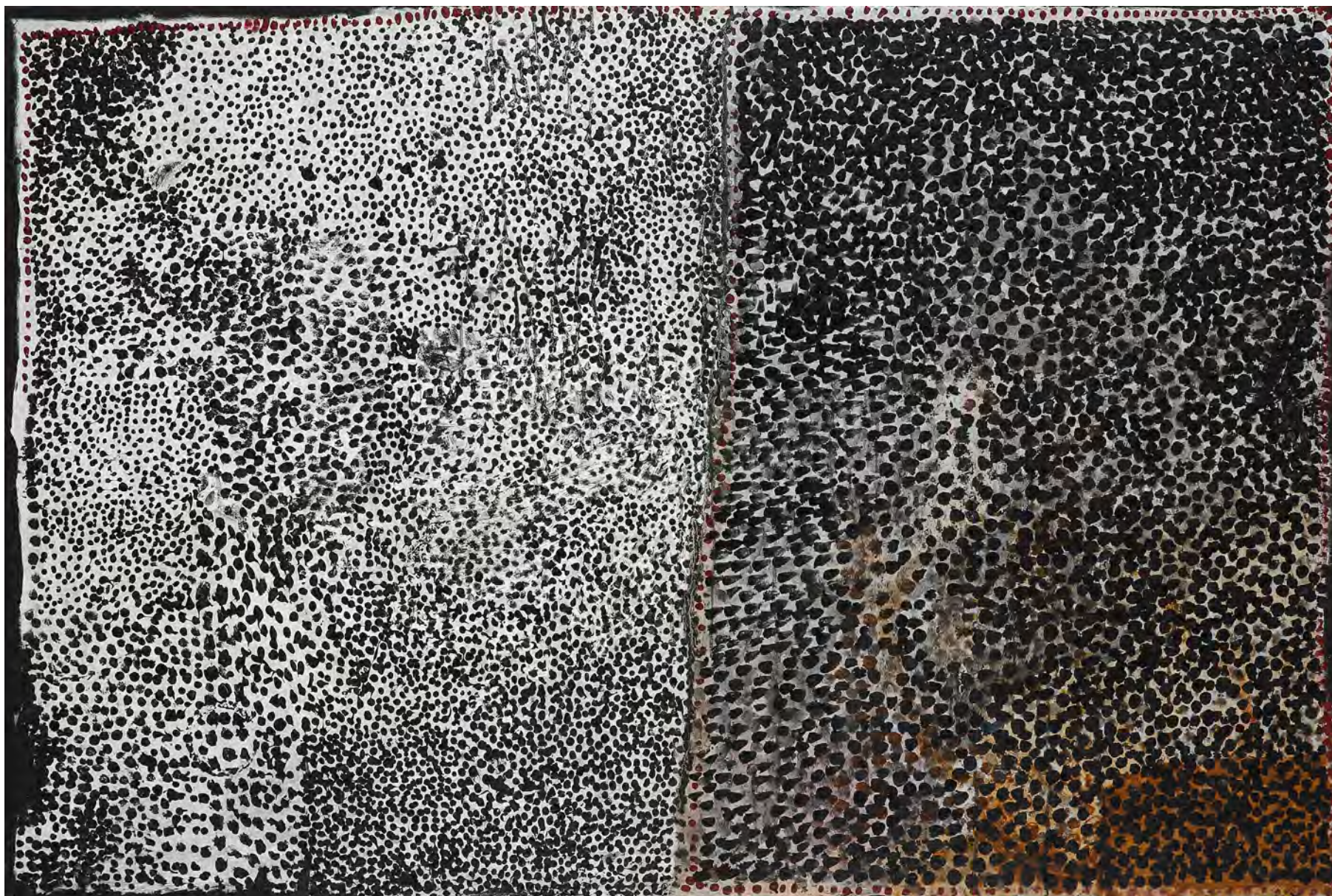


*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
325-23

**SOLD**



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
159-23



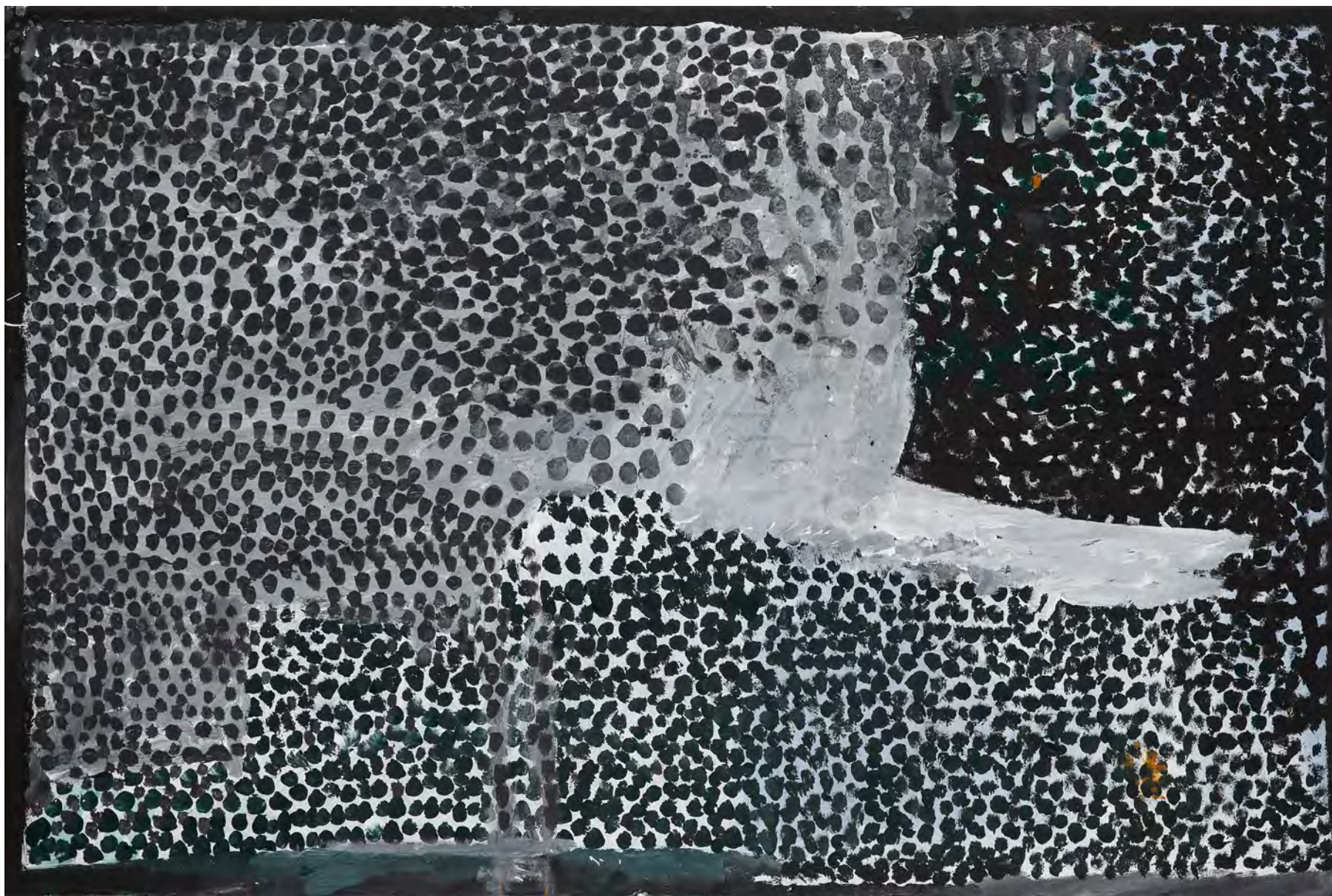
*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
187-23

\$7,500



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
348-23

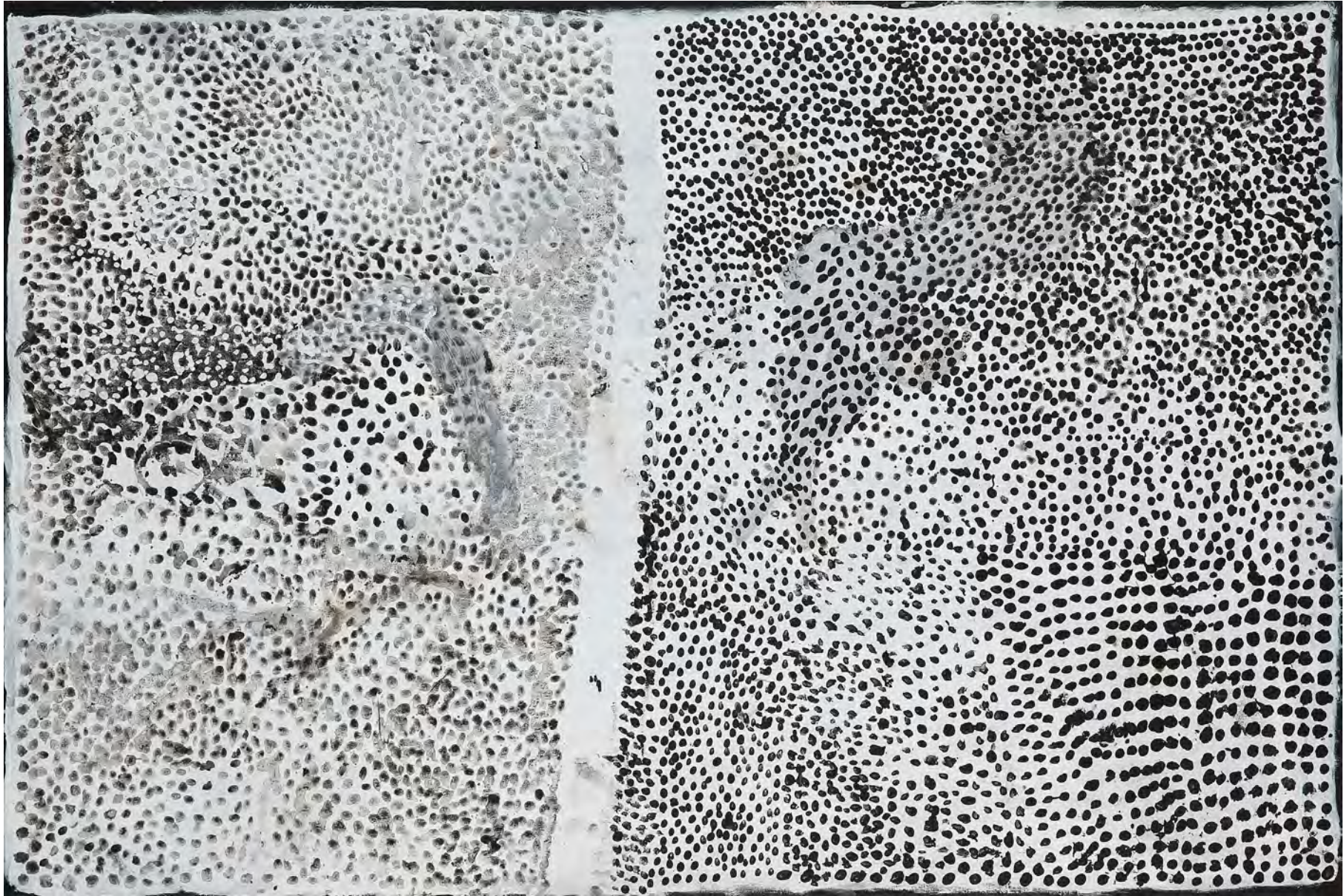
\$7,500



*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
223-23

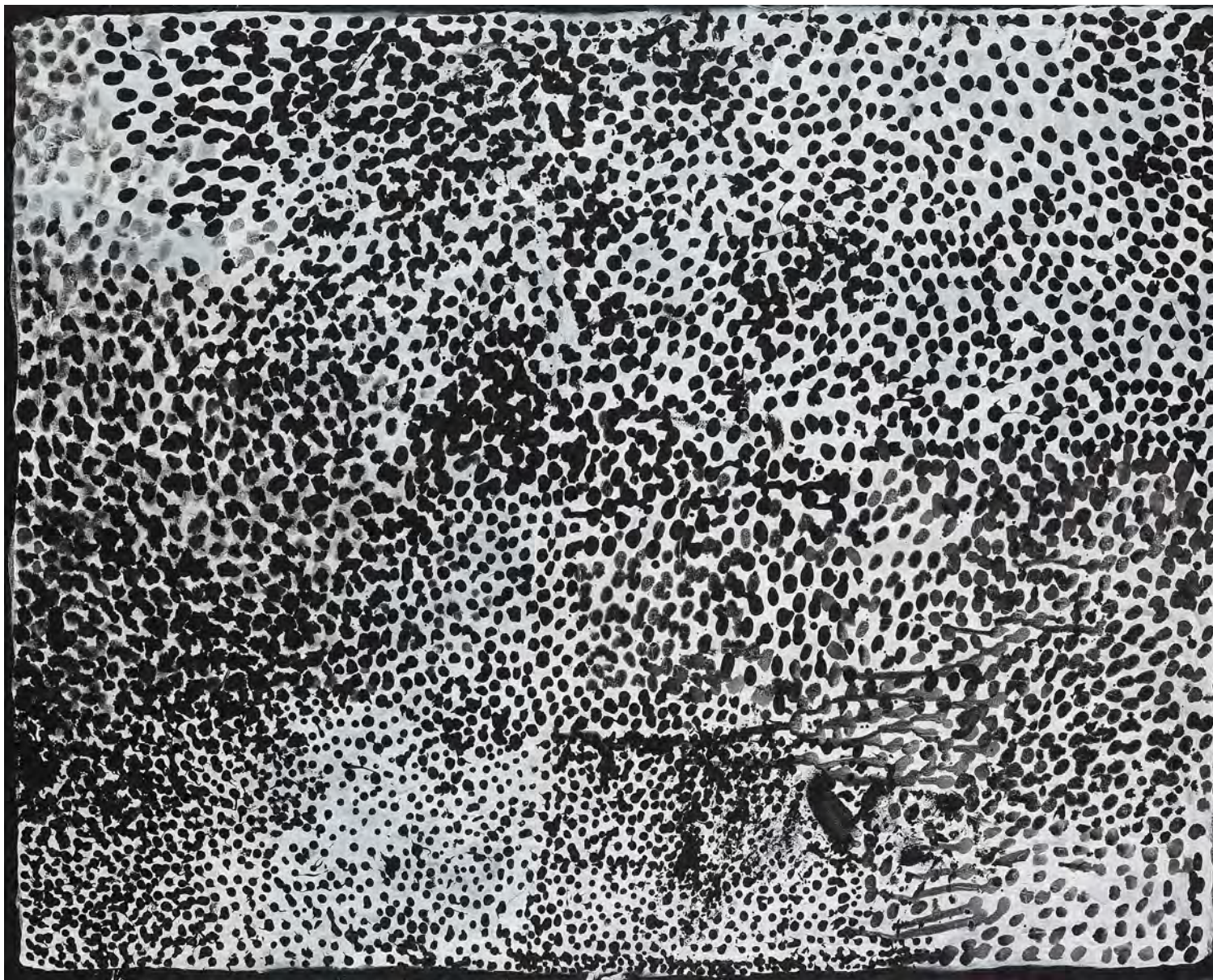
\$7,500





*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
102 x 152 cm  
286-23

\$7,500



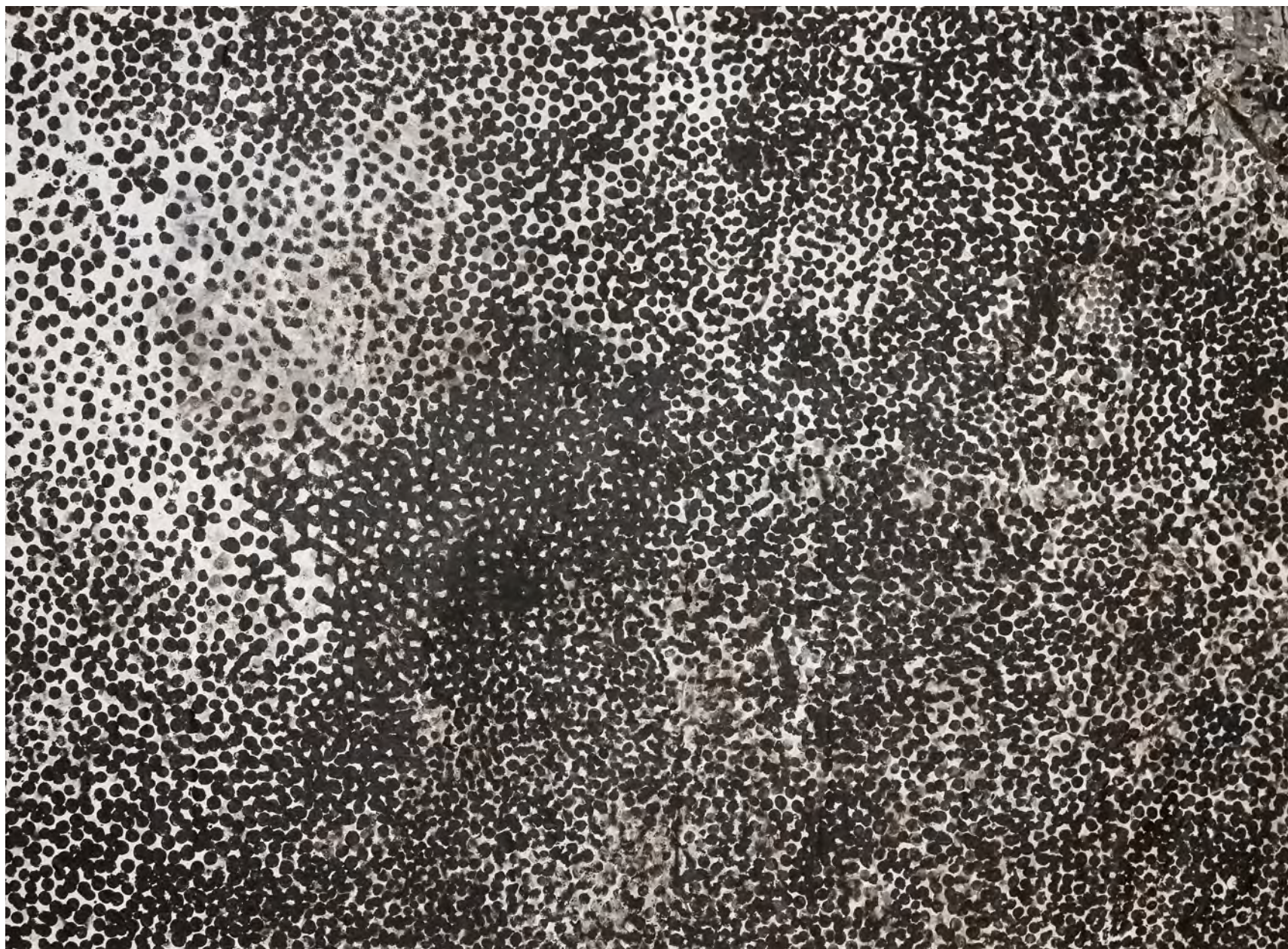
*Arrarntenh*  
2023  
acrylic on linen  
122 x 151 cma  
251-23

\$9,000



*Arrarntenh*  
2022  
acrylic on linen  
122 x 151 cm  
008-22

\$9,000



*Arrarntenh*  
2024  
acrylic on linen  
152 x 213 cm  
474-23

\$16,000



For further information or to see high resolution images please contact the gallery.

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