

# Fame finds Emily at borehole

By TONY STEPHENS

Emily Kame Kngwarreye could not make it to the opening of her art exhibition in Sydney on Saturday. She stayed at Soakage Bore, which is about 30 kilometres from Utopia, which is about 400 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs.

After all, she is 80-something, has never left the desert for more than a day or so and made it to the Alice for the first time only recently, when she bought a car.

Kngwarreye's exhibition, at Utopia Art Gallery in Stanmore, is the first solo show in Sydney by a Central Australian Aboriginal woman.

Kngwarreye does not speak English, is uncertain of her age and has been painting on canvas for less than two years. But she has been part of the Utopia women's group since its formation in the late 1970s, when they started making batiks.

She bought the secondhand car with funds from a \$10,000 scholarship sponsored by the Robert Holmes à Court Foundation.

She won the scholarship through the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association, following praise for her work when it was shown as part of a Holmes à Court collection at the S. H. Ervin Gallery a year ago.

"Emily has taken to stardom very happily," said Christopher Hodges, artist and owner of the Utopia gallery. "She bought food and clothing for her immediate family, is driven around in the car



Emily Kngwarreye ... her art "has a sense of greater meaning".

by a grandson and has ambitions on a four-wheel drive."

Kngwarreye is represented in the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, the National Gallery of Victoria and in private collections like that of Mr Holmes à Court.

"Emily has an important role in the Utopia community beyond her paintings," said Mr Hodges. "She is the leader of a number of 'song cycles' which the Aboriginal Media

Association has just recorded. She has a lot of prestige among her people.

"She has never left the desert, apart from the trips to Alice Springs. She is only about 5 feet tall, but with plenty of character and spark. She likes a bit of a joke," Hodges said.

Her 15 works now on show at Stanmore range from \$300 to \$9,000 for a five-panel painting.

"Emily has created her own distinct image.

"The surface layers contain great beauty but because of the underdrawings — ceremonial body designs, symbols and dreaming maps — there is a sense of greater meaning. Her most recent atmospheric landscapes have enormous depth and sense of light, uniquely capturing the quality of the desert," said Hodges.