

Desert Dreamscapes: Contemporary Aboriginal Paintings
from the Collection of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan

(Helena, Montana – April 14, 2005) *Desert Dreamscapes* will open at the Holter Museum of Art in Helena, Montana on June 14th 2007. The exhibiton, curated by David Betz is comprised of 16 major paintings from Seattle's Levi and Kaplan Collection – one of America's premier collections of Australian Aboriginal Art.

Desert Dreamscapes reveals the world as seen through Aboriginal eyes. The breathtaking abstract canvases on display depict expansive desert landscapes, shaped and given meaning by the events of the mythological creation time known as the Dreaming.* To Aboriginal eyes the stark desert landscape of the Australian bush is alive with mythological significance and undercurrents of sacred power which continue to resonate there today. These contemporary paintings are all informed by the songs, dances, and designs used to channel this sacred power in ceremony, for the purposes of ordering both culture and nature: defining kinship, rights to resources, and responsibilities to the land and to one another.

Each painting is a rich text with complex layers of meaning, which can be stripped away to reveal core issues of aboriginal identity – how these former desert nomads continue to define their place in the world. The aesthetic strategies at work in these dazzling abstract canvases amplify and project these timeless concerns and serve as portals into rich cultural traditions and an age-old way of life.

Desert Dreamscapes features many of the most highly regarded artists this 36 year old movement has produced including: Emily Kngwarreye, Kathleen Petyarre, Dorothy Napangardi Robinson, Eubena Nampitjin, Tjumpo Tjapanangka, Makinti Napanangka, Elizabeth Nyumi, Abie Loy, Regina Wilson, Kayi Kayi Nampitjinpa, Fred Ward Tjakamarra, Johnny Yungut, Simon and Estelle Hogan, Eileen Napaltjarri, Paddy Japaljarri Sims (subject of the documentary *Singing the Milky Way*) and Andrea Nungurrayi Martin, who will be artist-in-residence at the Holter from September 24th through October 5th.

The Levi and Kaplan collection, assembled by husband and wife Robert Kaplan and Margaret Levi, is one of America's premier collections of Australian Aboriginal Art. The Levi and Kaplan Collection has been on view on a rotating basis in the Seattle Art Museum for over ten years and the collection has loaned work to a number of important exhibitions, most recently the National Museum of Women in the Art's *Dreaming Their Way*. Levi and Kaplan were recently ranked for the second time among America's top 100 collectors by *Art and Antiques* magazine.

Desert Dreamscapes is the third museum exhibiton for curator David Betz, who, in 1995, curated *Songs of the Earth* at the Susquehanna Museum of Art and *The Awakening Dream* at the Helen Day Art Center. Mr. Betz began his career in Aboriginal art in 1992 as Director of New York's Australia Gallery – the first U.S. gallery devoted exclusively to Aboriginal art – and has for the last ten years been curator of Songlines Aboriginal Art, San Francisco – Amsterdam. Mr. Betz's most recent project a 60 minute documentary *Singing the Milky Way* – follows 90 year

old artist, Paddy Japaljarri Sims, his fellow artists, family, and friends, on an emotional journey 'out bush' to reconnect with their hunter-gatherer roots and the source of their spiritual and artistic inspiration. The film explores the way of life and age-old cultural knowledge underlying an aboriginal painting – the connections between the Dreaming, Aboriginal people, the natural cycles, and the land. It examines how this knowledge is passed on today, and considers Paddy Japaljarri Sim's heavy burden, as the last man to hold this vast body of traditional knowledge about his country in its entirety. Over the last year, the film has been shown to great acclaim in Utrecht, Hanover, Lausanne, and Berlin, and will be a featured element of *Desert Dreamscapes*.

The Holter Museum, a regional contemporary art museum in Helena, Montana, is noted for its international programming. The Museum's Cultural Crossroads program, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the MetLife Foundation, and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, brings resident artists of diverse cultural backgrounds to exhibit work and participate in the Museum's education programs. In conjunction with the *Desert Dreamscapes* exhibition, the Museum will host Andrea Nungurrayi Martin, a painter from the community of Yuendumu in Northern Territory of Australia, starting September 24, 2007.

The Holter Museum of Art (12 E. Lawrence Street, Helena, Montana) is open Tuesday through Sunday, and offers free admission. For more information, contact Liz Gans, Executive Director, Holter Museum of Art, 406.442.6400, x103, liz@holtermuseum.org. or visit http://www.aboriginal-art.com/museum_ex_toc.html for supplementary materials.