

Albert Namatjira

Albert Namatjira (1902–59) was one of Australia's most notable artists. His work, watercolour landscapes of Central Australia, is represented in all Australian State art galleries.

Namatjira was born into the Arrernte community at the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, near Alice Springs, Northern Territory. He was first named Elea but then christened as Albert when his parents adopted Christianity. At 13 years of age Namatjira was initiated into the Arrernte community and taught the traditional laws and customs. At 17 he married Ilkalita (Rubina) of the Luritja community. Namatjira met Australian artist Rex Battarbee who visited Hermannsburg in 1934. Battarbee tutored Namatjira in the western tradition of painting and helped him to organise his first exhibition in Melbourne in 1936. This exhibition was a success and Namatjira was encouraged to exhibit his work in Adelaide and Sydney. Other exhibitions of his work followed, especially during the 1950s.

Success brought Namatjira money, which he used to lease a cattle station. Granted in 1949, the lease was cancelled in 1950 when it was realised that cattle grazing in the area would not be viable. Namatjira then attempted to build a house in Alice Springs, but was hampered under the terms of the *Aboriginals Ordinance (NT) 1918–1947*. Namatjira was granted full citizenship rights in 1957. Unlike many other Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, Namatjira was then entitled to vote, to live where he wished and to purchase alcohol.

In 1958 the Alice Springs Police charged Namatjira with supplying alcohol to Aboriginal people. He denied the charge and fought the sentence he received in both the Supreme Court and the High Court. His appeals were unsuccessful and he was sentenced to two months in prison. Albert Namatjira died in 1959.

Records relating to Albert Namatjira held by the National Archives

The National Archives holds many records relating to the life and work of Albert Namatjira. Most of these records are held in Canberra or Darwin, but scattered material may also be found in other offices of the National Archives. Issues such as the questions over Namatjira's citizenship rights and his 1958 imprisonment resulted in many personal protests to the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory. These are held in the Department of Territories' records series [A451](#), and can

be identified on RecordSearch by searching on series 'A451' and narrowing the result by the keyword 'namatjira'.

Examples of records relating to Albert Namatjira

Canberra

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Grazing licence – Albert Namatjira – artist</u>	1949	A89, 1377
<u>Namatjira, Albert – question of ownership of land in NT</u>	1951–52	A431, 1951/1200
<u>Albert Namatjira – general</u>	1951–57	A463, 1957/17
<u>Government House – acquisition of painting by Namatjira for Government House</u>	1953–54	A462, 163/3
<u>A Namatjira – general welfare</u>	1958	A452, 1958/1070
<u>Albert Namatjira – prosecution and sentence on liquor charge</u>	1958	A463, 1958/3861
<u>Albert Namatjira – imprisonment for alleged supply of liquor to Aborigines</u>	1958–61	A452, 1958/3670

Photographic records

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Albert Namatjira with one of his paintings</u>	1946	A1200, L7838
<u>Rex Battersby [Battarbee] displays a Namatjira painting – Alice Springs</u>	1954	A1200, L17573
<u>Albert Namatjira</u>	1957	A1200, L23737

Melbourne

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Namatjira, Albert (welfare case file)</u>	1958	B337, 561

Darwin

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Department of Aboriginal Affairs – Register of Wards – census – Hermannsburg</u>	1928–51	E745, C2
<u>Finke River Mission, Hermannsburg – reports</u>	1937–42	F1, 1942/286, Part 1
<u>Finke River Mission, Hermannsburg – reports</u>	1937–42	F1, 1942/286, Part 2
<u>Finke River Mission, Hermannsburg – reports</u>	1937–42	F1, 1942/286, Part 3
<u>Welfare Branch – Finke River Mission, Hermannsburg</u>	1944–45	F1, 1944/325
<u>Albert Namatjira – grazing licence – 1377 Areyonga Copper Deposit</u>	1949–53	F1, 1952/496
<u>Aranda Arts Council</u>	1951–54	F1, 1952/445
<u>Albert Namatjira – grazing licence</u>	1953–59	F1, 1955/651

<u>Finke River Mission reports</u>	1948–66	F133, 63/536
<u>Finke River Mission reports</u>	1948–66	F133, 63/537
<u>Finke River Mission reports</u>	1948–66	F133, 63/540
<u>Finke River Mission – Lutheran Hermannsburg – policy and development</u>	1953–60	F1, 1954/76
<u>Finke River Mission – Lutheran Hermannsburg – policy and development</u>	1953–60	F1, 1955/254
<u>Finke River Mission – Lutheran Hermannsburg – policy and development</u>	1953–60	F1, 1957/1881
<u>Conditions of Aboriginals – Hermannsburg Mission – correspondence from Mrs N Dore</u>	1956–58	F1, 1956/1213
<u>Welfare Branch – Namatjira, Albert – enquiries and offers of assistance</u>	1956–59	F1, 1956/2637
<u>Welfare Branch – Namatjira, Albert – financial matters</u>	1956–60	F1, 1956/2691
<u>Hermannsburg</u>	1956–61	NTAC1976/23, 22

Further information on Commonwealth records relating to Albert Namatjira can be found in the National Archives' guide: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Commonwealth Records: A Guide to Records in the Australian Archives ACT Regional Office* (compiled by Ros Fraser, AGPS, Canberra, 1993). Although out of print, the guide is available in National Archives research centres and many libraries.