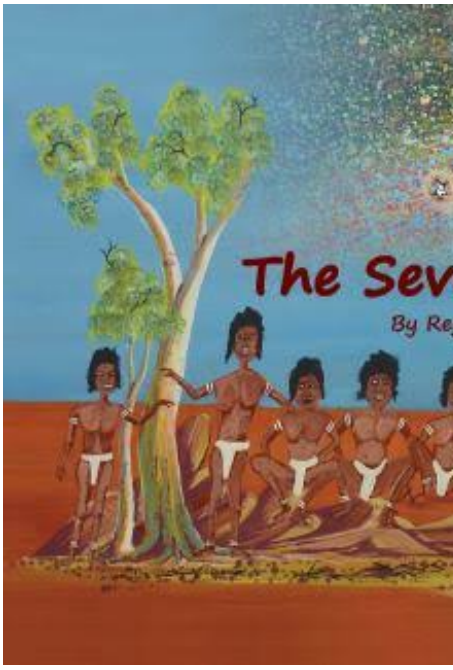
Margaret Bromley, "Entry on: The Seven Sisters by Reggie Sultan", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1465. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Reggie Sultan

The Seven Sisters

Australia (2012)

TAGS: Creation Myths Indigenous Myths Pleiades



Courtesy of the Publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	The Seven Sisters
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Reggie Sultan, *The Seven Sisters*. Virginia, NT: David M. Welch, 2012, 33 pp.
ISBN	9780987138941
Genre	Legends, Myths
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Margaret Bromley, University of New England, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au
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Creators

Reggie Sultan painting the cover of one of the books yet to come. Courtesy of the Publisher.

Reggie Sultan , b. 1955
(Author, Illustrator)

Reggie Michael Sultan Apengarte is a Kaititja Aboriginal man from the Barrow Creek, 280 kilometres north of Alice Springs, the north Central Desert area. Born in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, in 1955, he is an artist and writer who depicts the traditional stories of the Central Desert, his mother's country. Apengarte is his Kaititja skin name from his mother's people. His father was descended from Afghan camel drivers.

Reggie's father, Sumat "Sammy" Sultan, wouldn't allow Aboriginal people in the house and forbade them to talk their language, yet he employed his mother's family members to help with fencing contracts. Reggie suffered brutal beatings from his father. Reggie's mother, Lorna Ross Peperill Sultan was a full-blood Kaititja woman from Barrow Creek who had led a traditional life and had several children before she met Sammy Sultan. She taught her children to find bush tucker (bush food) – bush onions, bush bananas, goanna (monitor lizard) and rabbits. She could not read or write. From the age of five Reggie attended Alice Springs Convent School. Whilst still in primary school Reggie was introduced to drawing and painting by people from the Santa Teresa Mission, landscape painters who taught him to mix colours. Intermittently over the years, Reggie was taught to paint by descendants of renowned Aboriginal artist, Albert Namatjira, whose high colouring of desert landscape changed the face of art in Australia.

Eight year old Reggie began to run away from school, at first to steal painting equipment. Then he kept getting into trouble and was sent to Engadine Boys Home, south of Sydney, New South Wales. Until the age of seventeen Reggie was sent to boys' homes across the country, in New South Wales, South Australia, and the Northern Territory from where he escaped and began car stealing. After a stint in gaol Reggie began working as a stockman.

One day Reggie inadvertently transgressed traditional lore by driving with two women across a bush camp which was men's territory. Caught by the traditional owners and forced to undergo the

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circumcision ceremony, he was made a man in Aboriginal law and thereby entitled to go on any land and "do any painting and this is where my artwork began"*. Becoming an artist was transformational for Reggie as a catalyst for painting the stories of his traditional country. He was told the story of the Seven Sisters by the mother of his brother's Pitjanjara girlfriend.

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* Sultan, Reggie, *An Uncontrollable Child; the autobiography of an Aboriginal artist*, Coolalinga, Northern Territory: David Welch Publications, 2008, 53.

Source:

Sultan, Reggie, *An Uncontrollable Child; the autobiography of an Aboriginal artist*, Coolalinga, Northern Territory: David Welch Publications, 2008.

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Additional information

Summary

This story reveals how the stars of the Seven Sisters visited the earth and asked the Milky Way to bring them down in a creek in the desert, where they were turned into people. Seven hunters showed them the emus, goannas (monitor lizards) and the blackbirds. It was the first time the sisters had seen human men. The hunters showed the sisters where to collect plant food in their coolamons (carved wooden dishes for carrying food and small babies). At night time six of the sisters jumped onto the Milky Way and became stars again. One of the hunters pleaded with the seventh sister to stay on earth. Realising what was happening, the seventh sister climbed into the sky where all her sisters were glowing. The seventh star represents the seventh sister trying to catch up with her sisters. Finally, the hunters, now old men with white hair, tell this story to their children and grandchildren, sitting around a campfire.

Analysis

Reggie Sultan's *The Seven Sisters* introduces child readers to Aboriginal astronomy. Older readers can interpret the narrative for its depiction of transgressive behaviour regarding relationships between men and women. Knowledge surrounding food collecting and hunting as well as knowing where to find water and looking after country is implicit to this story.

Reggie's illustrations for *The Seven Sisters* reflect his fusion of contemporary and traditional styles. The naïve earthly figures of the hunters are boldly depicted against Namatjira* style landscapes of recognisable iconic Northern Territory landforms. The perspective of the celestial seven sisters is told against speckled splotchy backgrounds, in the dot painting style from Reggie's mother's country of Barrow Creek and Neutral Junction.

Reggie's naturalist realist style reiterates that of Albert Namatjira*, his predominant influence as an artist, as well as the contemporary naïve figurative work of Namatjira's* Arrernte Hermannsburg community.** Painting his Country and telling the story of the Seven Sisters offers Reggie Sultan a spiritual reconnection to his Aboriginal culture.***

Creation stories, or Dreaming stories, are vital to teaching Indigenous

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children their culture and responsibilities. Dreaming stories tell people how to interact with their environment and other people. Stories are told at different levels, accessible to different people; sometimes teaching children and adults the consequences of a mistake, regarding human relationships or eating the wrong foods. Respecting the natural environment also teaches children about its dangers. Dreaming stories also make sure that children obey their parents and elders. Aboriginal paintings express these narratives visually.**** "The Dreaming is also the 'everywhen', embracing the past, present and future".******

For Pleiades in Greek and North American mythologies see the entry *The Legend of the Seven Sisters: A Traditional Aboriginal Story from Western Australia*.

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* Albert Namatjira, (1902–1959) an Arrernte painter from Central Australia, was one of Australia's most important artists who changed the face of art in Australia. His name should be pronounced *Namatjeera.*

** McCulloch, Susan and Emily McCulloch Childs, *McCulloch's Contemporary Aboriginal Art: the complete guide*, Fitzroy, Victoria: McCulloch & Mc Culloch Australian Art Books, 2001, 50, 90.

*** Caruana, Wally, *Aboriginal Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2012, 111.

**** Nicholls, Christine, *Art, History, Place*, Adelaide, SA: Working Title Press, 2012, 38.

***** AIATSIS with Bruce Pascoe, *The Little Red Yellow Black Book*, Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012,13.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Creation Myths Indigenous Myths Pleiades

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Coming of age Desires Family Innocence Journeys Knowledge Relationships Tradition Transformation

Further Reading

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