Spirit of Khourabene

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Michelle Bateman
Acrylic on canvas, 2026

Michelle gives us an insight into her painting: “Reading from the book ‘An Australian Parsonage’, I see him as a tall, majestic man who had high status. It was coming to me at night, dreaming it – my connection with Khourabene. Sometimes I feel his presence at places where he is likely to have been and it’s these places that I have illustrated here.

When I paint I have to envision the colours first before anything else. Here I’ve used traditional,ochre based colours. The plain circles represent the two mountains, Walwalying/Mt Bakewell, the place of weeping - and Wongborel/Mt Brown, the sleeping woman. The Bilya/river runs through it; then, there would have been lots more water and fish. The granite rocks represent his home area, which to this day is called Karabine Rocks. The Church, to me I look at that church and I see her, Janet Millett.
I feel Khourabene was comfortable with the Milletts.

I have included ochres that he would have used to paint his body and emu and kangaroo tracks represent the animals he would have hunted. I have shown spears and tools which were made from bush wood, he would have known which trees to use.

The feathers are emu feathers which we know from the book he used as part of his headdress and also wore on his arms. There’s a lot to understand in the painting and it’s York, that’s the important thing, it’s York. Khourabene symbolises for me the traditional Aboriginal culture of York”.