Left

Richard Bell
Uz vs Them (stills) 2006
single-channel digital video, sound
2:48 minutes, edition 1/5
Museum of Contemporary Art,
purchased with funds provided by
the Coe and Mordant families, 2008

Bell's Theorem

Richard Bell

Introduction
This paper was written in November 2002 to articulate some thoughts on this subject. I am the primary source for most of the information gathered (often through personal experience or discussions with numerous people). I must say here that I am not an academic. Consequently, the style and tone of delivery will chop and change. It will be conversational, playful, serious, tongue in cheek, moralistic, tolerant, sermonistic and informative.

Aboriginal Art has become a product of the times. A commodity. The result of a concerted and sustained marketing strategy, albeit, one that has been loose and uncoordinated. There is no Aboriginal Art Industry. There is, however, an industry that caters for Aboriginal Art. The key players in that industry are not Aboriginal. They are mostly White people whose areas of expertise are in the fields of Anthropology and "Western Art". It will be shown here how key issues inter-relate to produce the phenomenon called Aboriginal Art and how those issues conspire to Condemn it to non-Aboriginal control.

Western Art: Its effect
During the last century and a quarter Western Art has evolved into an elaborate, sophisticated and complex system. This system supplies venues (museums, galleries, etc), teaching facilities (art education institutions, drawing classes, etc) and referees (art critics) and offers huge rewards for the chosen few elite players in the game (including artists, curators, art critics, art dealers and even patrons). This arrangement is not dissimilar to modern spectator sports. It is also not unlike ancient religions – substitute Gods, sacrificial offerings, High Priests, etc.

Like some voracious ancient God, Western Art devours all offerings at will. Sometimes the digestion will be slow and painful. However, it is resilient and will inexorably continue on its preordained path, that is to analyse and pigeonhole everything.

Western Art is the product of Western Europeans and their colonial offspring. It imposes and perpetuates superiority over art produced in other parts of the World. For example, the African Masks copied by Picasso. Westerners drooled at Picasso's originality – to ***copy*** the African artists while simultaneously ignoring the genius of the Africans.

Any new “art movement” is, after the requisite hoopla and hype, ***named*** and given an **ISM**, that is duly attached to the end of a noun, e.g.. “Modernism”. This “nounism” doesn’t transfer to non- Western art. Words like primitive, ethnographic, provincialist or folk-art suffice. Below the ISMs are “Schools”. A noun followed by School. For example, the Heidelberg School.

Aboriginal Art is considered a “movement” and as yet has not graduated to ISM status by being “named. I shall do so now. I **name** Aboriginal Art ***HIEROWISM***. It is the modern hieroglyphics. Also, there is always controversy (lotsa rows) so I think it’s appropriate. So. How is it that an unqualified Black **can’t** name an Art Movement?

Prior to the 20th Century, art produced by Westerners from former colonies was not considered to be up to the standard of art produced by resident Europeans. The North Americans demanded, and begrudgingly attained, parity with their European cousins. In fact the axis of power has actually shifted away from Paris to New York and their artists are at the forefront of Western Art today. Not so their Antipodean counterparts, who struggle with what has been called **The Provincialism Problem** (Terry Smith in his 1974 article of the same name). This has produced a cultural cringe of massive proportions that requires artists from provincial outposts to be able to merely aspire to mediocrity.

Provincialism permeates most levels of Australian society. Consequently, it weighs heavily on the industry catering for the art of Aboriginal Australians and renders most of those involved in that industry unworthy of the roles ***they*** have given themselves. It is unwise to market Aboriginal Art from the Western Art aesthetic and *attach* an Aboriginal Spirituality (an exploitative tactic that suggests that the purchaser can ***buy*** some). Perhaps it would be wiser to market this form of art from a purely Western construct. Demand that it be seen for what it is – as being among the World’s best examples of Abstract Expressionism. Ditch the pretence of spirituality that consigns the art to ethnography and its attendant ‘glass ceiling’. Ditch the cultural cringe and insert the art at the level of the best in western art avoiding the provincialism trap.

Spirituality and Ethnocentricity

There is no doubt that attaching Spirituality during a sale of Aboriginal Art helps greatly in closing a deal. Western dissatisfaction with Christianity since the 1960s has sharpened focus in this area. However, important matters haven’t been given due consideration. Matters such as:

- The number of artists holding the knowledge is declining rapidly and the younger people are reluctant to take up the “Old Ways”;
- Given the above. A dying, soon dead, culture is being raked over;

- The image of the “Noble Savage” (from whence comes the spirituality) implies a position of racial superiority (consciously or not)
- It is not necessary to invoke spirituality when promoting artists as individuals. Who they are. Where they’re from. What they know. What they’ve done. These things become crucial. Perhaps the curators of the early shows were in such a rush to show the works that they hid their unprofessional (and superior) behaviour behind the “collective CV”
- That a proliferation of white ***experts*** is belittling the people who own the culture. For example, the ***NAMED*** white *expert* is far better known than the mostly ***unnamed***
- Aboriginal artists from the famous **Papunya School** of painters
- That the lack of Aboriginal input into areas of concern is continually overlooked has created the feeling that the culture is being stolen, etc.

Other important issues arise out of the “Ethnographic” approach to Aboriginal Art. Anthropologists play a crucial role in the *interpretation* of Aboriginal Art. Their approach is, by definition, ethnographic and its classification system fits cosily into Ethnographic Art. Consider the classification of “Urban Aboriginal Art”. This is the work of people descended from the original owners of the heavily populated areas of the continent. Through a brutal colonisation process much of the culture has disappeared. However, what has survived is important. **The Dreamtime** is the past, the present and the future. The Urban artists are still telling dreamtime stories, albeit contemporary ones. The Dreamings (of the favoured “real Aborigines” from the least settled areas) actually pass deep into Urban territories. In short, the Dreamings cannot be complete without reciprocity between the supposed real Aboriginals of the North and the supposed Unreal or inauthentic Aboriginals of the South.

Many Urban artists have rejected the ethno-classification of Aboriginal Art to the extent they don’t participate in Aboriginal shows. They see themselves as **artists** – not as *Aboriginal* artists.

The real problem arises out of the very nature of Western Art. Westerners need to sort and categorise everything in order to make sense of the World. That they do so in an ethnocentric manner is academic. The world of music is not dominated by Western Classical music – different styles stand alongside each other with extensive cross-fertilisation from different cultures. Not so in visual art.

The Art Centres

Aboriginal Art has foreshadowed the establishment of community art centres throughout remote areas. These centres assist by providing advice, marketing oppportunities/ strategies, art supplies and documentation. The contact person is the Art Advisor, who is almost always White. These centres are run according to the community's needs and aspirations.

The Art Centre takes a one-third commission of the (wholesale) price for the services it provides. It consigns work to a network of galleries throughout Australia and overseas at an agreed retail price. For example, the art centre values a work at $600 and its share is $200. The gallery takes a 40% commission for selling the work; therefore the retail price is $1,000. Thus the artist receives $400, or 40%, plus the applicable service provided by the art centre.

That scenario works well for artists operating on that level of income. If the artist is on a tenfold larger income, the level of costs incurred by the art centre may be the same, or comparable, yet the artists cut remains at 40%. Well below the 60% (minus costs) that other Australian artists receive. In any event, the amount of money an Aboriginal artist gets, rarely, if ever, stays in his/ her pockets. Generally, it is shared among family and friends or their community.

The Government's continued financial support of the Art Centre movement ensures some level of Government control over the industry that caters for Aboriginal Art. Their considerable contribution makes it look good. They think it justifies their appropriation of Aboriginal imagery in advertising campaigns, etc. They think that they have bought our culture. Well, soorrreee. It never happened.

The New Tribal Order

It is now approaching the fourth decade of Art Centres and they have spawned a new tribe of people called **BINTs** (been in the Northern Territory). It must be said, though, that the largest tribe in Australia is the **Lyarmee**, who get their name from their ability to tell very convincing lies – especially to themselves. There is emerging, as we speak, a tribe of honorary Bints known as the **bookee** (because they learn everything about Aboriginals from books and fully fledged Bints). The Bookee rarely, if ever, deign their presence upon the Aboriginal People about whom they have become recently ***expert***.

Bints get close to Aboriginal People and culture to ultimately return South, where they proclaim their newly acquired "pseudo-Aboriginality". They believe this modern form of *Aboriginality* is superior to the Urban Aboriginality of the Blacks from these long-ago-conquered lands. And, if they don't actually believe this to be true, they have a sneaking suspicion that it is.

This phenomenon further clouds the authenticity or "realness" of Urban Blacks. That is, we (urban blacks) can be authentic Aboriginal People. We are not purebred *Aborigines*. Our culture was ripped from us and not much remains. Most of our languages have disappeared. We don't all have black or even dark skin. We don't take shit from you. We look disdainfully at you bringing our people from the North to parade them like circus animals to your audience. An audience ever curious to see a live version of the noble savage and one no less keen to congratulate themselves for not wiping out the entire Aboriginal race. We resent how you keep them away from us and we feel sorrow and sadness for OUR People. We have been consigned to the dustbin of history. Still, we survive.

The Regional System

You have erected and maintain barriers between us Aboriginal Peoples. Those barriers serve to re-enforce the *Regional System* (classification of Aboriginal Art based on geographical areas – for example, Western Desert, Eastern Arnhem Land, Urban, etc).

Within this system does there lie an insidious, sinister coincidence to ponder? Whether or not, the racial purity of the artists is a serious consideration. Given the previously discussed issues of spirituality and noble savages it is difficult to believe that it is not. Then is this system of classification not therefore racist? Or should we believe that it is a coincidence and purely accidental? That it is not a postcolonial plot to divide and rule. That Australians are indeed the kindest, most humane colonialist power in the history of the World and that Australia is without doubt the best country on the Planet Earth.

These questions are intricately and intrinsically enmeshed within the Australian legal system, its society and in its national psyche. The Native Title Act, 1993 (NTA) is the manifestation and embodiment of these issues – its flagship is Aboriginal Art. It is the new symbolism of the new Nation.

The Native Title Act

The NTA specifically requires Aboriginal People to prove that Native Title exists (in the claimed area) by means of song, dance, storytelling, etc. We have to prove that we are related to the birds, the animals, the insects, the microbes, the Earth, the Wind and fire. This is an extremely difficult task even for the Aboriginal People with minimal "White" contact.

The task for Urban Blacks becomes monumental and mostly impossible. To date, every determination by the Federal Court of Australia has been appealed to, or is on appeal, to the High Court of Australia.

The degree of difficulty facing Aboriginal People in proving their right of inheritance is in direct contrast to non-aboriginal people, who merely have to prove they are related to another human being. Is this not therefore racist?

The High Court, during its Mabo decision (which precipitated the NTA), overturned the legal fiction of ***Terra Nullius.*** Under both International and British Law at the time of settlement of Australia there existed three methods by which Sovereignty could be *acquired* by foreign States:

1. Conquest
2. Cession
3. Terra Nullius (Latin for 'land with no people' or 'empty land').

The British Government chose the doctrine of Terra Nullius as its method of acquisition of Sovereignty over Australia. It is safe to assume that they did this to avoid the need to negotiate with the Native Peoples about the terms of the exchange of Sovereignty (Treaties) which was required had they chosen to invoke either *Conquest* or *Cession*.

The High Court of Australia must be admired for its creativity. It invented a **NEW** element to enable acquisition of Sovereignty. They called it ***IMPLIED*** CESSION. This element has no legal precedent in either British Law **or** international Law. It is another legal fiction. They have inserted a lie for a lie. As it must be admired for its creativity so the High Court must be condemned for its audacious land grab.

The relationship between the NTA and Aboriginal Art is undeniable. The relevant requirements of proof are inextricably linked:

- The relationship to the land – with the song, the dance, the painting
- The White interpreters – with the Art critics, the anthropologists
- Law versus lore – with lawyers, anthropologists
- The legal industry and the "industry" that caters for Aboriginal Art trot out from within their respective ranks ***"experts"*** who are interchangeable between them.

White Australia uses Aboriginal imagery and native fauna and flora to promote tourism and other industries. These things belong to the Black Fella. However, an underlying assumption that arises out of this use of our imagery is that there has been a conciliation process through which an equitable partnership between Black Australians and White Australians has been created. Patently, blatantly, gratingly, this is not true. Never, ever has the White Fella sat down and talked with us about all of the things they now call their own (they even call us *their* Aborigines – as if we are their chattels). It is true, however, that they have talked to and at us on many, many occasions. But only on relatively minor matters like Native Title.

Paternalism

The paternalism and social engineering of the old colonial regimes are cynically matched and even surpassed by the new postcolonial ones. The Australian Government continues to assert Aboriginal People don't have rights – that we have privileges. Of course, this is also conveniently misconstrued to project to their electorate that Aboriginal People are somehow more privileged than are Whites. Another recent example is the "Reconciliation" process that once again suggests conciliation at some prior date. It never happened. Reconciliation was a con. Now they find that they have to begin to re-con their silly nation. Denial is a crucial part of Government strategy.

The underlying essence of land tenure in Australia is paternalism. That Aboriginal People don't own the land; couldn't own the land; never owned the land; that we don't understand ownership of land; that we couldn't/can't understand ownership of land. That Aboriginal People aren't/weren't fully evolved human beings. That we can't manage our own affairs. That we can't do without you. That we were lucky that the English "settled" our lands. That you have been here too long to be denied your ***Land Rights.*** This IS the prevailing attitude in this country.

You don't believe this is to be true? Then ask yourself the following questions.

Please circle either Yes or No.

Do you believe, and I mean **REALLY** believe, Aboriginal People:

1. Once owned all of Australia? Yes | No
2. Still own all of Australia? Yes | No
3. Still have rights to land that have not been properly negotiated? Yes | No
4. Had a recognisable form of land tenure? Yes | No
5. Were "civilised"? Yes | No
6. Are "civilised"? Yes | No
7. Deserve to own all of Australia at any time? Yes | No
8. Deserve to own all of Australia now? Yes | No
9. Deserve to own any of Australia at any time? Yes | No
10. Deserve to own any of Australia now? Yes | No
11. Deserve to own any of the good parts of Australia? Yes | No
12. Can manage their own affairs? Yes | No
13. Should be thankful for everything you have done for us? Yes | No
14. Should be thankful for some things you have done for us? Yes | No

Now. Ask yourself what you believe. Then what you think the average punter believes. And don't Bullshit.

Having confirmed your paternalism, if not racism, consider your view and position in relation to Aboriginal Art and indeed Australian Society. Perhaps you should also consider that you are an uninvited guest behaving like a *"Star Boarder"*.

No one ever consults Aboriginal People on important matters. No one asked if they could take our gold out of our land. No one asked us if they could run up a credit bill for hundreds of millions of dollars. Little wonder then that people like Osama bin Laden think they can interrupt our peaceful resistance without having to consult the Aboriginal People. If you can do it. He can do it.

Appropriationism

It is time, now, to discuss the distasteful and discomforting subject of the appropriation of Aboriginal imagery. This practice has been accruing for centuries throughout the World (according to Jacques Derrida et al). It has become an accepted movement in Western Art called, appropriately, Appropriationism. The Aboriginal People of Australia and people from other former colonies are most upset about Appropriationism and consider it to be stealing. We couldn't care less about Western artists appropriating one another. But, we object strongly to the appropriation of "our" artists' work by non-aboriginal people.

There are several causes of distress arising from appropriation and its so-called "death of the author" argument. Firstly, the artist may not be the sole owner of the copyright of the "story" or the imagery contained in the artwork. Secondly, the "sharing" of imagery between the coloniser and the colonised is suggestive of an equitable agreement between the artists. Not true. Otherwise, the works would be collaborations. Thirdly, Aboriginal People all over the world are adamant that

their respective cultures are not for sale – that our cultures are the only things we still own and that we will own and that we will struggle mightily to maintain that ownership.

Aboriginal People have stated our case against Appropriation. We are not asking artists to do the impossible or even to do something that is difficult. A vow never to pick your nose is impossible to keep. A vow for monogamy is difficult to uphold. That a desire by non-Aboriginal artists to overcome the aforementioned provincialism problem may urge them to appropriate Aboriginal imagery is not an excuse. Artists appropriate because they can. So too, a dog can lick his balls because he can. To all those artists who have resisted the temptation or who now desist, congratulations and thank you.

Anthropologists

Aboriginal cultures throughout the World have been infested by plagues of Anthropologists down the Ages. Never more so than during the last three decades here in Australia. We have been the most studied creatures on earth. They ***KNOW*** more about us than we know about ourselves. Should you ask an Aboriginal how they're feeling, the most appropriate answer would be "Wait 'til I ask my Anthropologist." They are stuck so far up our arses that they on first name terms with sphincters, colons and any intestinal parasites. And behold, the DO speak for us.

Countless books have been written about Aboriginal People by White folks. All their information (including photographs) is taken ***as*** and ***for*** free. Come the book launch and the Aboriginal informants are nowhere to be seen, *naturellement!* Of course, this shabby treatment is readily rationalised thus: "But they were so nice. I thought they didn't mind". Or: "But I didn't have any money then." Whaatt! No advance from your publisher? Perhaps they're just bums. However, it is suspected that they and their publishers are of the opinion that we are so desperate to talk to them, that they are sooo kind to be even talking to us, that we must be thankful. How superior! I should suggest that the Australian Government advise publishers and the ologists with their praying mantras that it is prudent (and decent) for them to budget for these costs as a matter of due process. Information costs. The bank should also equip all Aboriginal People with an EFTPOS facility to rectify this blatant exploitation.

The work of anthropologists merely serves to perpetuate the prevailing hegemony inserting their anthropocentric-theological twist on the studied culture, thereby paving the way for their religious allies to wreak their havoc.

Essentially, it is felt among Indigenous Peoples, that the anthropologists really have better things to do than to delve into our cultures. For example, they could analyse the colonialist cultures to understand the relationship between the imposition of powerlessness and terrorism. This would be an extremely useful (and welcome) contribution that would go a long way towards redeeming anthropology's appalling reputation.

Exploitation

The most emotive issue to arise out of Aboriginal Art is the "E" word. No – not ecstasy. Exploitation. Despite or in spite of the Aboriginal Art centre system, exploitation of Aboriginal artists has proliferated. In fact exploitation has become an art form that is so proficient that it is thoroughly deserving of an ISM. I give you ***Exploitationism.***

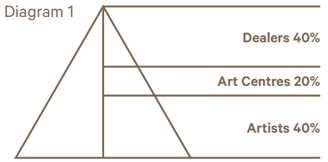
There are numerous instances that can be quoted of Artists relinquishing works at extremely low prices to unscrupulous dealers to resell to realise exorbitant profits. One profitable and exploitationismistic practice is to bring the artists to the "Big Smoke" to paint for a wage. In these cases the artists are paid a weekly sum that negates any further claim for payment. The dealer is not required to set aside any percentage to the artists even though the works are sold for considerable sums of money. Don't believe it? Consider whether any dealer would bring to the smoke anyone other than the artists whose work is saleable and at good prices. This practice should be monitored and audited.

There is also the example of profiteering by accident. A teacher at a remote settlement is delightedly surprised at the artistic abilities of the natives and begins to collect (cheaply alright! Ridiculously cheaply) the earliest examples of those works. Some of those works surface decades later at auctions with reserves that resemble telephone numbers. The profit margin in the reserves of these works in some cases was upwards of 1,000%. Is the teacher the sole beneficiary of this "accident"? Or, is there an arrangement in place where the artist (or their families) too benefit? If not, is this not also an example of gross exploitation?

The Triangle of Discomfort

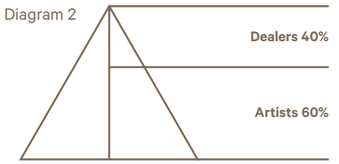
Earlier in this essay, reference was made to the fact that the artists (through the Art Centre System) receive 40% of the consigned retail price for their work. While this is not ideal, there is a strong argument that it is fair. Let us assume it IS fair; for example, a work sells for $1,000, the artists receive the obligatory $400, the Art Centre receives its $200 and the dealer gets their $400. See diagram 1.

Diagram 1



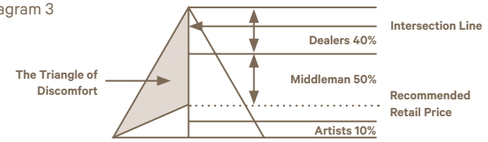
Of course if the artist is directly involved the artist (Black, White or Brindle) must receive 60% (or $600) of the retail price. See diagram 2.

Diagram 2



Unfortunately there are severe variations to these scenarios. For example, a work retails for $1,000. The dealer takes the requisite $400. A middleman emerges who takes the remaining $600 having already paid the artist (or promised to pay) $100 or 10% of retail. Clearly, a case of exploitation. In this situation, what I have called the Triangle of Discomfort comes into play. See diagram 3.

Diagram 3



The Triangle of Discomfort measures the excess above the recommended retail price, which is 1.5 times whatever the artist receives. It can be seen in diagram 3 that the dealer and the carpetbagger do exceedingly well in comparison TO THE ARTIST. Ultimately the cooperation of dealers is essential to overcome these sorts of problems.

Should an Art Centre not be involved in the sale of Aboriginal Art, and instead a middleman is involved, then that person should be permitted no more than 20% of retail as commission. Please note, these middlemen are there in numbers and they won't go away. They need to be regulated in order to avoid the Triangle of Discomfort.

It might be said that this is difficult, almost impossible, to do. Not so. The Art Centres are well equipped, with the latest technology widely available to them. Due diligence towards the authenticity of the work would confirm the price paid to the artist should an Art Centre not be involved. There must be cooperation between the dealers and the Art Centres, even when the middlemen are involved. Any dealer or Art Centre not prepared to go though this process should be liable to legal sanction. Or, they must engage in some other activity.

Conclusion

It is a great source of discomfort to Aboriginal People that Aboriginal Art is not controlled by Aboriginal People. Indeed that is so for many other people. It has been shown that there are numerous issues and mechanisms that impact on the phenomenon known as Aboriginal Art. Its sustainability and the ability of the artists to re-invent themselves are not discussed here.

Aboriginal Art is bought, sold and promoted from within the system, that is, Western Art consigns it to "Pigeon-holing" within that system. Why can't an Art movement arise and be separate from but equal to Western Art – within its own aesthetic, its own voices, its own infrastructure, etc?

Please permit the proposal for the recommendation of an Ombudsman for the Arts in Australia to look after the interest of all of its artists. The Ombudsman must be able to intercede on behalf of artists with investigatory powers and with legal sanctions available to effectively deal with issues such as those mentioned above and any other important matters that may arise from time to time.

It is extremely doubtful whether Aboriginal People in Australia will ever be able to regain control of this important part of our culture. Obstacles and barriers have been cruelly and thoughtfully placed to deprive us of an equitable future. For example:

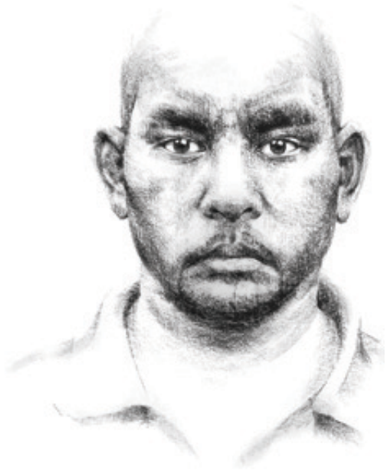
- The Native Title Act
- Stereotyping of Aboriginal People as lazy-good-for-nothing drunks
- Valorising one group of Aboriginal People whilst demonising another on the basis of racial purity
- Inflicting anthropologists upon us
- Sanctioning a new tribal order
- Subjecting us to paternalism and exploitation
- Appropriating our images etc.

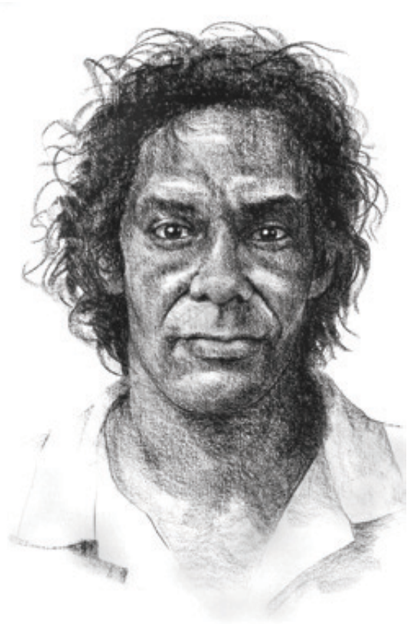
All these crimes serve the purpose of dehumanising us to justify to ALL non-Aboriginal Australians that it's okay to deny us justice. Forever.

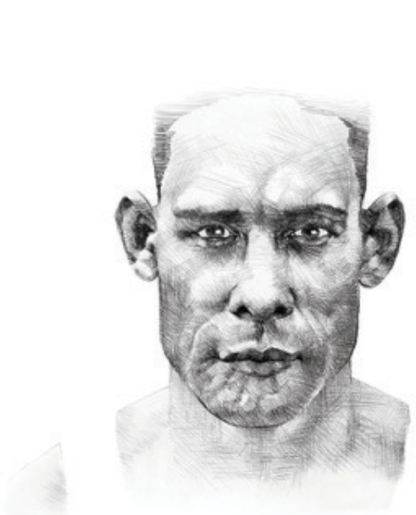
There is no hope.

Acknowledgement

I would sincerely like to thank all the Aboriginal People who have kindly shared their knowledge and experience and to whom I owe everything, and I dedicate this to them.







There goes the neighbourhood – it is in the language

Vernon Ah Kee

Left

Vernon Ah Kee
(top to bottom, left to right)
George Draham, Michael Gilsenan, Leonard Andy, and *Mick Miller (Pop)* from the series *fantasies of the good* 2004
charcoal on paper
13 parts, each 102 x 67.5 cm
Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the Coe and Mordant families, 2006

It is an odd sensation to look at a movement in art and see that the progenitors and current practitioners at the movement's core, the makers, have almost no determining influence on the critical impact it has on existing canons or the economic impact brought about by the many industries spawned by its success.

When approaching Aboriginal Art we hear terms like 'pre-contact' and 'post-colonial' being bandied about and think that it is Aboriginal Art and culture that is being discussed. In reality the 'talk' is of a people. It is a White Australian idea of the Aborigine that is being academically, scientifically and politically structured, and enforced; the 'piggybacking' of arbitrary, ethnographic and anthropological ideas about a subject onto the backs of that very subject; a weight, a burden, that the subject, the Blackfella, is not only expected to bear but expected, still, to be grateful for. It is the White people's idea of the Black man refined and distilled and made palatable. Molded to soothe the Australian psyche, crafted to convince us all of this country's 'goodness'.

It is the language; words and terminology, used like grappling hooks to paint themselves into the canvases as tightly and as deeply as the canvases paint the land. It is the language; designed to frame the art in Aboriginal distinctiveness while excluding the artists whose very hands put paint to canvas. It is the language that ensures the Aborigine, having no part in its construction, remains largely unfamiliar to its descriptive use of technical terms and the flowery references to 'art' words like 'Abstract Expressionism', 'Conceptualism' and 'Modern'. It is the language; its colourful hooks punched effusively through the canvases and into the back of the Aborigine, holding him static, unable to speak, never lifting him higher than 'dirt floor'. It is the language that ascribes for the Aborigine what he should be, that describes him and defines him. And the Aborigine is left striving to realise himself in an idealised role so fantastical that the life of Aborigine and his position, by consequence or design, can only be maintained on the fringes of the fire that is Aboriginal Art, on the fringes of language, on the fringes of influence, on the fringes of financial reward.

The often overly eager language originally applied exclusively to Aboriginal Art, has become synonymous with all Aboriginal endeavour and life in this country. Additionally, the success of Aboriginal Art now has seen a proliferation of related economic initiatives and government policy and programs that, by extension, all draw nourishment from the *perception* of Aboriginal people and culture created initially by the language itself but more so now by its having been

applied so readily and so arbitrarily to the commodification of Aboriginal culture.

For the Aborigine, however, the language is the problem. The language was and still is designed to popularise Aboriginal Art for western appreciation and consumption. In modern western terms, to popularise an art style is to commodify it. When reading Aboriginal Art, it is the language that provides entry points; points through which the art can be appreciated and made accessible; points through which it becomes not only possible but appropriate to rationalise the purpose and purchase of it; the trade and possession of it. Don't we all feel the virtue and nobility emanate when standing near to it?

And because the language has never really strayed from the narrow, strictly controlled, heavily sloganised formula required to popularise any product, the Aborigine, by unavoidable association, has been subject to this same exacting definition. It is many an Aboriginal artist who, to varying degrees of success, strives so very hard to populate and gather between the ever-narrowing margins of accepted Aboriginalism – the popular, though myopic, representation of Aboriginal people and language that would have us all believe is a kind of authentic pan-Aboriginalism. Any wonder all fail. Any wonder too that many Aboriginal artists seek recognition outside the definition.

When approaching any art, we first look for entry points. To do this we inform our sensibilities (trained or otherwise) with experience in order to recognise and evaluate an artwork's accessibility to the viewer and then our own individual appreciation of it. The artist, if he/she desires acknowledgement of his/her ideas and strategies, incorporates compositional, material, and design elements into an artwork with specific entry points in mind. Aboriginal artists, ie the romantic ideal of what we have come to know and accept as Aboriginal 'artists', do not follow this strand of practice. Instead, what we know of Aboriginal artists (those not trained in the western idiom or aesthetic) is that they simply sit on the ground (or some suitable metaphor) and paint their 'stories' (over and over) and the work is instantly valuable (if not masterful). And if the work isn't at once worthy (ie worth money) then, it seems, brighter colours will do the trick. Galleries do what they can to make Aboriginal Art accessible for the western reader: white walls, lighting, canvas, paint, colour, etc, but it is the language that is really the sole provider of the entry points. If not for the language that cocoons Aboriginal Art, the artwork would be impenetrable to all but the eye of the trained anthropologist or ethnographer.

Visual art, as with all specialised industries, requires an interface between the manufacturer and the western art appreciator, the public consumer. What is clear in the case of Aboriginal Art is that not only is a specialised interface vital to the industry but it is equally vital that this interface appear in the form of White people. As much as the art must 'authentically' be the product of an Aboriginal life and invention, so too must the language be a product of White Australian invention, because it is the language that makes sense of such 'calamity' and provides a space within the consciousness of the consumer. So Black hands must produce the work and then hand the work over to White hands; the White hands commodify the work by framing it in a language that makes it accessible and saleable to the primary market, White people.

Black people find it difficult to position themselves at the interface between the public consumer and the manufacturer, because the language required to draw the consumer sounds false when Black people speak it. As much as a work of Aboriginal Art is rendered fake and inauthentic when produced by non-Aboriginal hands, so too is an interface between maker and consumer rendered false when an Aborigine speaks the language that describes it.

The problem still for the western art appreciator of Aboriginal Art is, needless to say, finding or developing an entry point into an equal appreciation for the Aboriginal artist that complements and strengthens the art. An entry point into the artist, but not the abstracted, narrow, or truncated idea of the Aboriginal artist; dark skin, smiling, non-threatening, benign. Or If not smiling, then static and still; speaking very little, if at all, or not at all but in a lilting, broken speak; and very quietly. Or be like the artwork; virtuous, noble, spiritual; be the land; be history; be worthy. Again, it is the language. And at the mere hint of instability in the mythology, or controversy in the media, it is the language, the grappling-hooked wrapping of the paradigm, its sequestering away of precious pieces of cargo at the minder's request. It is the language that reverts Aboriginal Art to type; that keeps it afloat when it is listing; that 'knows it best'.

Many may argue that Aboriginal Art has been, and continues to be, an ever-evolving art form and that it is this aspect, as much as anything, that defines the paradigm, and there is evidence to support this notion. But, as has been demonstrated innumerable times over the last three decades, Aboriginal Art, ie Aboriginal culture as visual art, has always been corner-stoned in the exotic, the primitive, and the decorative stone age. And for the Aborigine,

in art, as in other related 'Aboriginal' fields, the signifiers and identifiers that would make up the chief indicators, or even the cultural markers, are not currently in the hands and minds of the Aboriginal people themselves.

However, the practices and core principles of the Aboriginal Art paradigm in Australia do seem to be experiencing incrementally small shifts in artistic and economic direction away from the current ports of power that control the flow of revenue, language and the descriptors of Aboriginal Art towards the hands and minds of Aboriginal art-makers in remote, regional and urban city communities. Artists do seem to be developing a sense of themselves outside of the art centre regimes. Though staggered and halting it may be, this current directional change is certain and is logical if Aboriginal Art is to retain any kind of validity as a form of high art or even as a form of critically engaging art. And the reasons for the shift are many. There seem to be too many questions going unanswered. Questions concerning quality control, the authenticity and attribution of artworks, the authorship and authority over artworks and styles, concern over the distribution of monies to regional art centres and the distribution of monies by those centres, the very obvious disparity between the success of the art and the income and living standards of the artists, the lack of real or accurate critique, and the general worth of Aboriginal art production today.

The crux of the problem seems to be tied to the idea of the Aborigine in the role of 'cultural practitioner as producer of visual art', or vice-versa, the 'visual arts practioner as producer of culture'. The growing difficulty that Aboriginal people have with the Australian art industry is that no one has explained the following in clear and concise enough terms to the Aboriginal art-makers: What is it to be an artist? What construes art? What are the pitfalls to being an artist? In the context of art making, what is investigation? What is progression? What is resolution? What is the value of art? How is art valued? What is a contract? What is copyright?

The prevailing beliefs and attitudes within the Aboriginal industries informing the visual arts is that the Aboriginal 'ideal' is something like a stone-age people who have learned to speak English and wear clothes. Which is not to say that the 'culture' or the homogenous collection of cultures that 'Aboriginalism' seems to represent lacks any depth of intelligence or sophistry, it's just that, whatever it is that informs current representations, the end result is always framed in the exotic, the primitive, and in particular the romantic ideas of spirituality and virtue that, it seems, infuses all Aboriginal Art, all 'real' Aboriginal Art that is. Whatever

the 'meaning' behind the work, the intention, in exhibition and representation, is always to portray the Aborigine as non-threatening. And not only non-threatening as a physical thing when being encountered but a thing of political and economic benignity also. It is an approach designed to keep the Aborigine dumb. The use of the word 'dumb' here is not an attempt to render the Aborigine in terms of being imbecilic or incapable of thinking; rather, the word 'dumb' refers to the art industry's ability to keep the Aborigine silent, and held static in his 'way-of-life' while saying nothing of his *way of life*.

Gallerists, curators, writers, the many industry theorists, and expert collectors can say what they want to try to convince all and sundry of the control and influence that the artists supposedly exert over their works and careers, but the end result in the rise of Aboriginal Art over the last forty years or so has seen generations of Aboriginal people as 'artists' die poor and often in ill health while generations of gallerists, curators, writers and experts profit immeasurably from this exploitation industry and the related roles and careers that it has spawned.

Or maybe Aboriginal Art, the accepted, idealised form that we're all so wonderfully comfortable with, is a kind of tulipmania. There are parallels to tulipmania in the way Aboriginal Art is presented today and the way in which the tulipmania gripped Europe: narrow parameters for production, promotion of colour, and, in the end, artificially inflated pricing. Perhaps tellingly, tulipmania gives us an idea of where Aboriginal Art may find itself in the next few years. Tulipmania did last forty years approximately and then imploded under the weight of outrageous pricing. Aboriginal Art, we have been assured by various pundits and sundry authorities, is no fad. Pointedly, that forty years surely does not constitute a fad. But maybe it will end as suddenly as it began. Maybe, like many Aboriginal communities, the 'end' of Aboriginal Art has already begun and is merely in a long-established period of 'slow burn'. And those of us who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo around the language and the current power structures of Aboriginal Art should start to panic.

Left

David Daymirringu Malangi
Rainbow Serpent c 1970
ochres on bark
57.5 x 41 cm irreg
Museum of Contemporary Art,
gift of Arnott's Biscuits Ltd, 1993

The Spirit Within: A story of bark painting in Arnhem Land

Djon Mundine OAM

The Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala takes its name from the feeling on your face as it is struck by the first rays of the sun – indicating that we are at the most easterly place in the top end of Australia – Miwatj or the 'sunrise country'. As the major creative beings followed the sun, the song cycles associated with them also traverse the land from east to west. The song cycles define an area from Yirrkala on the Gulf of Carpentaria in the east, to the island of Milingimbi off Cape Stewart, to the Glyde River in the Crocodile Islands area in the west, and possibly even to Maningrida on the Mann River a little further west. The people of this region call themselves Yolngu, meaning, simply, 'the people', and others, Balanda, are 'outsiders'.

> The story was that the people got the story from the government that if they made spears, clubs, stone knives, carvings of all kinds, bark paintings, spear thrower – Balanda want this craft – it's up to you Yolngu (to do it).
>
> David Daymirringu Malangi conversation with Djon Mundine and Philippe Peltier, 1995

Following a visit to the Crocodile Islands in the early 1920s, where they saw large numbers of Yolngu, Methodist church missionaries planned to establish a mission station in this area. After initially trying Elcho Island, the mission was moved in 1923 to Milingimbi Island, which appeared to have a permanent water supply. The explorer and adventurer Sir George Hubert Wilkins probably made the first sighting of bark paintings of the area on the mainland, opposite the mission. He also witnessed a sand sculpture cleansing ritual at Milingimbi. Later, from 1926 to 1929, an American sociologist, W Lloyd Warner, visited the region to complete research for his ground-breaking book *A Black Civilization*.[1] During this time he collected a number of bark paintings among a wide range of items of material culture. Bark painting, however, did not become a popular in the public consciousness until after World War II.

A Methodist mission was established at Yirrkala in 1935 in response to what came to be called the 'Caledon Bay' massacre of 1932.[2] That year a large number of families were camped with Wonggu[3] and his family at Caledon Bay. The massacre happened when men from the camp, feeling they had been insulted by the Japanese crew of several trepang boats, killed all the Japanese crew except one, who managed to escape with a number of indentured Goulburn Islanders. An Australian policeman sent from Darwin to investigate was also killed. Eventually, western justice prevailed when the killers were persuaded to surrender. As a result of this incident

a Methodist Christian mission was set up to provide a moderating, civilising influence. It was at this point that art pieces began to be marketed in a serious manner.

Anthropologist Donald Thomson and new missionary Reverend Wilbur Chaseling noted the making of bark paintings and encouraged locals to make them. In the 1970s some artists, recalling this earlier period, commented that this was first time 'white people' had shown interest in bark paintings. A collection of ochre paintings on stringy-bark, carved wooden sculptures and figures made from native beeswax put together in the 1930s by Reverend Chaseling – who also sold other objects to curio collectors, museums and anthropologists – is now housed in the Queensland Museum. The paintings are drawn on coarse pieces of bark with a free, flowing hand, showing a less rigid approach than barks painted years later after a 'school' had developed. Even in this early set of works, the now-familiar style can be seen in its nascent form. This is now defined as a bark with a border that follows the outline of the bark, within which the area is completely covered in cross-hatching. The inlay may be centred or composed around a solidly painted human spirit or animal figure (or figures), a crucial feature of land or episode in a creation story. Compared with the later barks, the 1930s pieces have generous borders and do not necessarily fill the bark surface – it is possible that these works reflect body designs painted on the chests of dancers in ceremonies.

At Yirrkala in Arnhem Land in the 1930s and 1940s, as had occurred with Baldwin Spencer at Oenpelli nearly two generations earlier, artists were paid for their art with tobacco sticks and other trade goods, a form of exchange that persisted until 1943. Chaseling insisted that all goods be genuine and therefore innovation was not promoted.[4] He also thought that encouraging artists to follow traditional practices would maintain a pride in their culture.

With the coming of World War ll, an Australian Air Force base was built on Milingimbi Island: it was bombed in 1943, which led to an even larger one being built near Yirrkala. The peninsula was named Gove Peninsula after an airman who died during the war. Revered Rupert Kentish, who worked at Yirrkala during the war years, sold carvings, weavings and other items to the local servicemen – but few bark paintings. Kentish forbade trade in sacred ritual objects and the attendance of 'white' servicemen at sacred rituals, which he saw as trivialising ritual and spiritual significance, turning ceremonies into tourist entertainment.

Kentish established a set of criteria for the evaluation of bark paintings and wood carvings which would be used by succeeding art advisers up until the 1960s. The criteria were as follows:

1 The quality of 'craftsmanship'
2 Did the painting have 'a story'?
3 Will the painting be aesthetically pleasing to a 'white' buyer?
4 The size of the bark painting or carving (and implicitly the amount of time expended in its production).[5]

When I began work in this field in the mid-1970s in a commercial gallery in Sydney, I was advised by my supervisor that there were a similar set of attributes to look for and I tried to use them when I went to work at Milingimbi and Ramingining at the beginning of 1979:

1 Authenticity – did the artwork come from a tradition or reference a tradition?
2 Was it technically well made? Did the artwork display that the artist was technically proficient? Was the paint applied consistently, would it stay on the bark or canvas? Would the carving remain in one piece?
3 Finally, was it aesthetically pleasing [using western aesthetic standards]? Did its composition, form and message compel an emotional response?

What I look for is a form of 'Gestalt' – a holistic gesture and response, and an honesty in art. People always look for

the 'story' with Aboriginal art from the desert and the north – now we should recognise that every Aboriginal artwork has a serious story. If we replaced the 'authenticity' in the preceding points of reference with 'honesty', these could almost apply to any art form and any culture.

> It may be said (for stimulating the attitude) that all Aboriginal art is automatically depreciated by any connection with the art market. So many different questions are confounded by any totalising analysis, when precise distinctions and particularisation are much needed.
>
> Bernice Murphy, 1988[6]

Bernice Murphy's comments were made in response to a criticism of allowing Aboriginal artists to interact with the western art market. In 1988 it was still argued that Aboriginal art forms, if subject to cultural interaction, would descend and be trivialised to the level of tourist trinkets. Yet all art is influenced by new meetings and experiences.

In the 1950s Reverend Edgar Wells at Milingimbi mission in the west, and lay missionary Douglas Tuffin, began to actively encourage the creation of bark paintings and made efforts to market them at higher prices. The missionary art advisors experimented to make the artwork more presentable, more saleable. Different shapes and sizes of barks were used and split-stick wooden restraints were introduced to maintain the flatness of the paintings. By the mid-1960s sales had succeeded such that demand always exceeded supply. It appeared that the 'white' market sought large paintings with serious sacred stories or 'Dreamings' and other large paintings with 'hunting' scenes. When I came to Milingimbi at the beginning of 1979 artists spoke of 'story' (sacred) paintings and 'picture' (secular) paintings. Of course, even supposedly secular subject matter generally had a sacred reference. The scale and subject matter of paintings to some degree developed along gender lines, with women tending to create small 'tourist'-type paintings of various animals, fish and other creatures (with some exceptions). On the receiving side of the market, the Art Gallery of New South Wales began collecting bark paintings and collectors started to travel to Yirrkala, Milingimbi and other communities to buy art on a regular basis.

In 1949 a trading post had been set up on the mouth of the Mann River to monitor the local groups and to stem the drift of Yolngu from this area to the city of Darwin. By the 1960s the trading post had grown and was comparable in size to any of the mission settlements. On the border of Eastern and Western Arnhem Land painting traditions, Maningrida became a hub: it became associated with a group of major bark painters who would set the pace in this field over the next three decades. A generously government-funded settlement from the start, it was at Maningrida that the outstation movement had one of its biggest expressions. Most of the MCA's Arnott's Collection of Aboriginal Art was purchased in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, by which stage bark paintings had been marketed and encouraged for nearly three decades, developing in form and conceptually as a result. At Yirrkala in the east, under the threat of bauxite mining in the area from the 1960s, large and often collaborative paintings were produced, the

stories revealing as much as was possible to tell. The best examples of these are the 'Yirrkala Church Panels' now housed in the Buku-Larrnggay Museum at Yirrkala. For the artists, the impetus for this series of panels was to record stories in the face of feared, imminent social destruction. The artists used three small bark paintings to petition national Parliament in 1963 for land rights, but to no avail.

In the 'white' mining town of Nhulunbuy, the park at the centre of town is somewhat pompously and provocatively called Endeavour Square, and when a new shopping centre was built in the 1990s it was called The Captain Cook Shopping Centre even though James Cook didn't go anywhere near the Gove Peninsula. Mapping is a crucial tool of colonialism, and from the 1960s trying to read one system of signs with another system of signs took on a certain intensity. Mapping indicates implicit power relations: Who authors maps and for what reason? What exactly are they mapping? In 1929, for instance, the Surrealist Map of the World[7] scaled continents and nations according to their perceived cultural practice and cultural depth. It was obvious that the mining company at Yirrkala was neither mapping, nor mining, cultural creativity.

Bark painting compositions, considered as mapping exercises, contain iconic places, data and systems of information. They work spatially and temporally: they are concerned with the naming and implicit ownership of places across a particular area, the scale of its elements relating to actual distances and directions but contained within an art aesthetic. Through placing and naming, associations emerge.

This is dream time. This Yolngu was camping there, this tree was there. A shade where they lived. When he died, one Yolngu, one who died, *yakumirr* (dead person). The *djagamirri* (who looked after the ceremony). The *bunguwa* (the boss): Hey what happen here? One boy died here.

David Malangi to Djon Mundine and Philippe Peltier, 1995

Mortuary rites for Gurrmirringu the great ancestral hunter (c 1969) by David Daymirringu Malangi, for instance, where Gurrmirringu's body lies 'in state' in the centre of the work framed by Räga, the white berry bush in flower, and fruit denoting a seasonal time, scale emphasises his importance, and the flower the power of his life force. Gurrmirringu had walked around the eastern bank of the mouth of the Glyde River collecting the fruit of the white berry bush, which he placed in a bag he carried around his neck. As he reached for the fruit from the bag, some of it fell and took root, so that in Johnny Apple-seed fashion, wherever he walked, the white berry bush now grows. And where he walked, footprints were left in stone that are still there today. Another version of this story on bark by Malangi was purchased by Karel Kupka and shown to the Australian Reserve Bank, which, in 1965, incorporated it into the design for the new Australian one dollar note.

It was not until 1967 that a national referendum first recognised Aboriginal people as Australian citizens and, following this, all missions were handed over to local Aboriginal councils. During the times of the missions, non-specialist

Left

David Daymirringu Malangi
Mortuary rites for Gurrmirringu the great ancestral hunter c 1969
ochres on bark
69.4 x 50.6 cm irreg
Museum of Contemporary Art, gift of Arnott's Biscuits Ltd, 1993

staff marketed the artwork, usually on a part-time basis, but, under the local Aboriginal councils, formal positions of art-and-craft advisors were set up by the Government to carry out this function in various locations. These positions continue to this day and are at the heart of developments in bark painting.

> The inclusion of Aboriginal work is important, and it is hoped that it will continue with more substantial exhibitions from these tribal, and from urban sources, in the future. The few curators who have included tribal Aboriginal work (Nick Waterlow, Bernice Murphy and Bill Wright) are to be congratulated for surfacing the problematics of Aboriginal vis-à-vis European culture. The inclusion of tribal Aboriginal work, its preservation and exposure, is to be applauded, however we must be wary of its context of display.
>
> Suzanne Davies and Richard Dunn, 1983[8]

By this stage bark painters from Ramingining had been included in the 1979 and 1982 Biennales of Sydney, in the 1983 *Perspecta* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and again in the 1986 and 1988 Biennales of Sydney.

As the viewing of Aboriginal bark paintings shifted from the curio and the ethnographic to the contemporary art world, the puzzle of the individual creative impulse becomes more fascinating. The components within a painting are interconnected – what is the meaning contained within the painting? Why make this particular painting now? What is the focus? Is it about seasonality? A ceremony? Are they reminders of someone's connection to a particular event or time? W Lloyd Warner, during his research for his book *A Black Civilization* in the late 1920s, had asked his collaborators to describe their dreams while in restricted ceremonies, and many other psychological tests have attempted to analyse the artist's intent. In the history of western art every feature or attribute of an artwork has been researched and documented in order to 'get inside' the creative moment. Likewise with bark painting, numerous systems have been used to determine provenance and introduce a critical registration of barks. While a basic accounting method has been widely used – with each painting being assigned a number in calendar sequence, sometimes with the artist's initials (as practised at Papunya in the desert) – this tells us little of the moment of creation. During my time in Ramingining in the 1980s, I introduced a more complicated system: a number indicated where the artist was living at the time of creating the work, a code of letters recorded the price paid to the artist, and the date of purchase was added to the end. By including the place where the artist was living, it was possible to describe the artist's social context, which could then act as a mnemonic to the artist or art advisor to recall the time and place of the work.

Barks often reveal religious beliefs – the creation of the world, its continual growth and the nourishment it needs to be sustained. Many famous and important people have visited and experienced life in this vast and vibrant region: Gough Whitlam, before he was prime minister, was based at Gove with the Australian Air Force during World War II, and the entertainer Rolf Harris visited Maningrida in the 1970s,[9] as have many other famous artists, politicians, scientists and anthropologists since. However, the most talked about visitor was Jimmy the Chimp – he was on a yacht, the *Sea Fox*, which became beached near Galiwinku in 1959, where he was looked after until being taken to Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney.[10]

Since the earliest days of contact with white Australians, the exchange of Aboriginal art has become an extremely sophisticated practice – the artists and their cooperatives have become large institutions who deal directly with government departments, international galleries, cultural festivals and institutions. In 2004 the artists of Ramingining collaborated with internationally famous film director Rolf de Heer on the feature film *Ten Canoes*, which won many awards here and overseas.[11] Artists' cooperatives write and publish their own books – at Yirrkala the commissioning of the 'Saltwater' collection (and resulting exhibition) was complemented by a significant publication in both English and local Aboriginal languages.[12] In fact, the community has experimented in myriad ways to successfully maintain a cultural tradition of their own while reaping the fruits of the modern world. Utilising the oral histories of its elders, fiercely retaining the local languages and religious practices, and funding its activities through strategic marketing, the community provides a model for us all – in economics but also in encouraging a rich and meaningfully productive existence.

Extract from *The Sprit Within: North-Eastern and Central Arnhem Land*, first published in *They Are Meditating: Bark Paintings from the MCA's Arnott's Collection* (exhibition catalogue), Museum of Contemporary Art, 14 February – 3 August 2008

Notes

1 William Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Study of an Australian Tribe*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1937, pp 594
2 Ted Egan, *Justice All Their Own: The Caledon Ban and Woodah Island Killings 1932–1933*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic, 1996
3 Wonggu was a charismatic and influential leader, born in the early 1880s into the Djapu clan from Caledon Bay, north-east Arnhem Land, who died in 1959 in Yirrkala.
4 Nancy Williams, 'Australian Aboriginal Art at Yirrkala: Introduction and Development of Marketing', Nelson HH Graburn (ed), *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1976, pp 272
5 ibid, p 273, 277, 15
6 Bernice Murphy, 'Provincialism "Refigured" or Culture Disfigured?', *Australian and International Art Monthly*, ed, no 15, October 1988
7 Artist unknown, 'Surrealist Map of the World 1929', *Variétés*, Brussells, 1929, np
8 Suzanne Davies and Richard Dunn, 'Grappling with Diversity: Australian Perspecta 1983', *Art Network*, Richard McMillan (ed), vol 2, no 10, April 1983, pp 10-15, p 3,4,10, pp 3 ff
9 Rolf Harris, *Rolf Goes Bush*, AH & AW Reed Pty, Ltd, Terrey Hills, Australia, 1975
10 Ella Shepherdson, *Half a century in Arnhem Land*, One Tree Hill, South Australia, 1981, pp 47
11 Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr (directors), *Ten Canoes*, Fandango Australia, Vertigo Productions, 2006
12 *Saltwater: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country*, Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, in association with Jennifer Isaacs Publishing, 1999

Above

MCA Aboriginal Art: The Maningrida Collection, installation view, MCA, 1994

Right

Nancy Kaybbirama
Kunmatj/Manjabu (burney vine hunting bag) 1985–87
burney vine and hand spun bark fibre string
79 x 62 cm approx, diam irreg
Museum of Contemporary Art and Maningrida Arts & Culture with financial assistance from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council, 1994