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FURTHER READING FOR THIS EXHIBITION

Footprint of the Spirits – The Burrinja Collection
www.burrinja.org.au/arts/

New Insights from the Burrinja Collection – Exhibition Education Kit
www.burrinja.org.au/education/

REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

Contemporary Aboriginal Art, A guide to the rebirth of an ancient culture.
McCulloch S. Allen & Unwin 1999

Dreamtime Aboriginal Art, The dark and the light.
Editors Sammlung Essl 2001

Kunwinjku Spirit, Creation Stories from Western Arnhem Land.
Nganjmirra N. Melbourne University Press 1997

Papunya Tula, Art of the Western Desert.
Bardon G. J.B. Books Australia 1999

Urban Dingo, the art and life of Lin Onus 1948-1996.
Queensland Art Gallery Craftsman House 2000

In conversation re Djunba. Kevin Shaw - anthropologist
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David Mowaljarlai (Mowaljarlai, Derby WA)
Creation Story, c.1994
FRONT COVER Michael Aspinall (Yalata SA)
Tracks, 1999



Nawakadj (Bobby) Nganjmirra (W. Arnhem Land)
Namarrkon Thunder & Lightning Man and
Mongerrk Mongerrk Man with Spear
c.1935

> arts < performance / community < education

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THE KIMBERLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Covering more than 400,000 square kilometres, the Kimberley is one of the most spectacular and beautiful regions of Australia. Within the region there are four main communities, each producing different styles of art: Warmun, Balgo, Kalumburu and Fitzroy Crossing. A number of artists who were from the Warmun community are featured in the exhibition, including Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie and Paddy Bedford.

The Warmun community was one of the first communities to produce art for sale when in the late 1970s boards painted with ochres and produced for ceremonies started to be collected. Today most works are painted on canvas using traditional ochres.

Works from the Kimberley region in this exhibition include one of Australia's most respected artists, Rover Thomas Julama (1926-1998). Rover Thomas had a profound effect on Aboriginal art, moving it to the forefront of international contemporary art. His works are characterized by minimal imagery and a sense of space, while portraying the most complex of experiences with highly textured ochre surfaces.

Queenie McKenzie Nakarra (1920-2000), stands out through her unusual use of pink and purple tones of ochres in contrast to the more usual browns, yellows and reds. *Limestone Hills at Old Texas Station* is a beautiful example of her work, depicting the hills of her birth place, Texas Downs cattle station in East Kimberley.

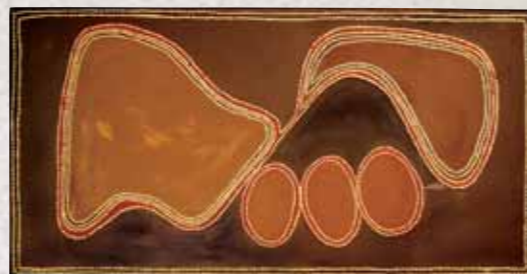
The Djunba, or 'dance board' work by Paddy Bedford (1922-2007) comes from a genre of dance that is traditional to Ngarinyin and other Aboriginal people of the Kimberley. It continues to play an important role in the lives of the Mununburra, senior people, who were also the backbone of the Kimberley cattle industry in its halcyon days.

Djunba is dance and theatre, and evidence of the continuous link with the Narrungunni, or Dreaming that forms the foundation of indigenous religious perspective and relationships to land. *Djunba* is commemorative as it celebrates the great deeds of mythic ancestors and events. Many *Djunbas* are expressions of particular attachments to land; although on festive occasions they can be simply good humoured entertainment.

Djunba brings together elements of design expressed in choreography, body painting and ornamentation, and the warrungu, or sacred sculptures that represent the essences and powers of the ancestral spirits and title to land. In former times warrungu tended to be frame-like structures that supported patterns made with string spun from human hair coated with grease and ochre. More recently, the construction of warrungu has centred on large boards painted with ancestral images and designs, like Paddy Bedford's *Krill Krill*, carried on the shoulders of the principal dancers.



Paddy Bedford (KIMBERLEY, W.A.)
Krill Krill, 2001



Rover Thomas (KIMBERLEY W.A.)
Lundari Barramundi Story c.1983



Jack Dale (DERBY W.A.)
Me and My Fathers' Country (Native Title) 2008



Djawida Nordjorle (WESTERN ARNHEM LAND)
Nawura and Rainbow Spirit, 1999



Eva Nganjmirra (WESTERN ARNHEM LAND)
Kunarlaku - Spirit Woman, 1996

In his large scale *Creation Story Argula Spirit*, artist, anthropologist and respected Aboriginal law man David Banggal Mowaljarlai (1925-1997), relates the story of how the Wandjina taught the Argula to have sex and procreate. The life force is *Wungud*, which is the essence of the Wandjina, the spirits who create rain. All living things have Wungud that gives body and soul to the newborn.

Jack Dale (c. 1920) of the Derby region is one of only a few entrusted custodians of the Wandjina spirits rock art sites of the Kimberley. Jack may not have survived his childhood if not for the resistance of his mother Moddera, a traditional indigenous woman of the Komaduwah clan who hid him from his violent white father. Following his father's death, Jack learned Traditional Law (Narrungunni) from his mother's father.

Jack became a stockman and earned a reputation as a respected bushman. Now a senior law man he is revered amongst his people for his extensive cultural knowledge. In recent times Jack has sought to document his experiences, stories and culture through art.

ARNHEM LAND, NORTHERN TERRITORY

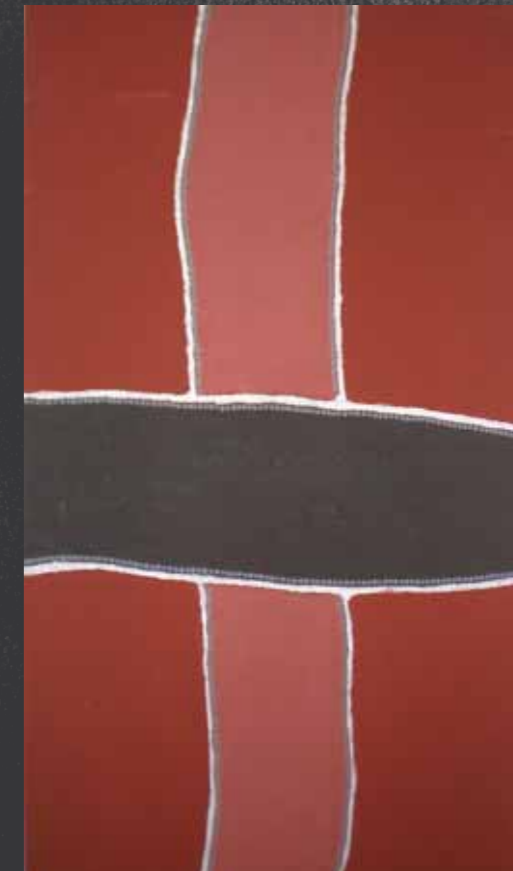
Situated in the 'Top End' of Northern Australia, Arnhem Land is home to some of the oldest rock art sites in Australia. There are seven major communities producing art in Arnhem Land today. Featured in the Burrinja Collection are many works from the Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Western Arnhem Land region. The art of this region is known for superb crosshatching or 'rarrk' work, as seen in paintings like Djawida Nordjorle's *Nawura and Rainbow Spirit*, and the depiction of the internal organs of animals, birds and fish, often described as X-ray art.

Today, Arnhem Land works are produced on bark, paper and canvas. While artists from the Central and Eastern Arnhem Land areas like Jimmy Mamulnhawuy of Yirrkala (*Sword Fish and Artist Totems*) usually fill the whole board or canvas with crosshatching, the Western region artists generally only fill in defined figures with crosshatching on plain backgrounds.

Nawakadj (Bobby) Nganjmirra (1915-1992) was a respected story-keeper and one of the last rock painters in Arnhem Land. His *Namarrkon, Lightning and Thunder Man* (c.1935) shows the story of an ancient spirit Namarrkon rising from a waterhole. Namarrkon brings Arnhem Land's dramatic electrical storms. He can make thunder and lightning and strike people down. The power of Namarrkon comes from his genitals. In the wet season, he lives in the clouds.

The work of Alex Nganjmirra (1961-2007) followed in the proud tradition of his father 'Bobby', as does that of Nawakadj's niece and nephew, Eva and Robin. They are part of a continuing art tradition that has been handed down through the Nganjmirra family for many generations, ensuring the continuation of a living culture and its history.

ABORIGINAL ART ACROSS AUSTRALIA



An exhibition of key works from the
Burrinja – Shire of Yarra Ranges Indigenous Collection

CURATOR: TIRIKI ONUS

WORKS IN THIS EXHIBITION HAVE BEEN DONATED BY NEIL MCLEOD
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BURRINJA GALLERY – UPWEY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.



Curated by Tiriki Onus, this feature exhibition aims to highlight the vast diversity in Aboriginal cultural and artistic practice across Australia. The exhibition features key works from the Burrinja Collection including paintings and barks from the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, Central, South-Eastern and South Australian regions.

Traditional and contemporary works from both established and emerging artists have been chosen for the exhibition. The artists represented include some of the most internationally respected artists in Australia.

Michael Aspinall	Paddy Bedford	Jack Dale
Emily Kame Ngwarreye	Queenie McKenzie	Ralph Nicholls
Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown	Rover Thomas	Lin Onus
Jimmy Mamulunhawuy	David Mowaljarlai	Gloria Petyarre
Nawakadj (Bobby) Nganjmirra	Alex Nganjmirra	Eva Nganjmirra
Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula	Robin Nganjmirra	Djawida Nordjorle



Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown (YALATA, SA)
Initiation site near Miniri Waterhole, 1994



Queenie McKenzie (WARMUN, KIMBERLEY)
Hills at Old Texas Station, 1995



Robin Nganjmirra (WESTERN ARNHEM LAND, NT)
Kumwinjku Ancestors and Totems 1985



Alex Nganjmirra (WESTERN ARNHEM LAND)
Yawk Yawks at Malwon, 1998



Jimmy Mamulunhawuy (EASTERN ARNHEM LAND)
Sword Fish and Artist Totems, 1990



Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula (PAPUNYA, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA)
Pangkalangu Men

MARKING NEW IDENTITIES: ABORIGINAL ART TODAY

Art always has been the most significant tool available to Aboriginal people, not only a written account of history, or a method of teaching children, but the quintessential part of almost all religious practice in Australia prior to invasion. In the North of the country we see the well known rock art of the Arnhem land escarpment with the rarked depictions of *Namarrkon* the Lightning Man and *Yingarna* the earth mother, and the finely painted bodies of men as they undergo *Mardayin* ceremony. The Kimberley gives us the *Wandjina* Spirits, creators who come in hundreds of different guises, the most common being the tall haloed figures we know from books. The Desert has its history of ground painting and artefact production such as the sacred *Churingas*. And here in the south east we see *Bora* (dancing) grounds, rock etching, *Dendrogyphs* (tree carving) and painting and dyeing animal skins and cloaks.

And this is how we choose to see Aboriginal art still, a snapshot back in time at a dying culture. The image of a static society, unchanged for millennia, traditions practiced exactly the same way over and over, generation after generation. This is what makes Aboriginal art 'safe', this is why it is so commercially popular the world over. Any art produced by an Aboriginal person is first viewed with an ethnographic eye and then with an aesthetic one.

Aboriginal art however, has never been stagnant, every new artist brings something else just as in other cultures the world over. Aboriginal art has always been conceptual, it is about ideas where the act of producing the work is just as important (if not more so) than the final piece.

Art always has been the most important tool to Aboriginal people and it continues to be so, it has changed its role from being a passive act of teaching and worship, it is now a weapon; no land claim is even attempted without several major works being produced by a senior member of the group concerned about their country. Old men paint stories of massacres that happened within their lifetime, and urban artists tell us of their alienation from two worlds.

Urban Aboriginal art, whilst still not recognised like its 'traditional' counterpart, has taken on the role of forging a new existence for Aboriginal people in the cities. People turn to art once again in their search for identity and a sense of self, a new identity, but one still forged by a consensus of artists as it was thousands of years ago.

The Burrinja Collection is exceptional in that here is a small regional gallery housing a body of work to rival that of many of the major institutions of this country. A **Gloria Petyarre** that spans an entire wall, early **Rover Thomas** boards, the final works of **Johnathan Kumintjara-Brown**, and one of only eight sculptures ever made by **Lin Onus**.

Here we have an entirely new show for Burrinja, as many of these works will not have been seen before. The Collection has travelled domestically and internationally and yet each time a show is assembled something new and wonderful is born. This is the first Burrinja Collection show I have been involved with in over eight years and so much has changed. The Neil McLeod Gift has bestowed an amazing collection (and a great responsibility) on the gallery and its staff and made it possible for more and more people to see into another world that they have unknowingly co-existed with all their lives. Old personal favourites such as the giant **David Mowaljarlai** are back along with new masterpieces such as **Jack Dale's** *Me and My Father's Country* (*Native Title*) and many works with which I was not previously familiar.

The exhibition is here to showcase the amazing depth of culture and artistic ability across Aboriginal Australia today, but also to show perhaps another side, that Aboriginal art is not what it was, is, or may be. Aboriginal art is now what it always has been; an ever-changing form of expression that identifies a people and makes for them their own place in the world.

Tiriki Onus, August 2008.

REGIONS – ABORIGINAL ART

Aboriginal art is itself a reflection of the diversity of indigenous culture across Australia. The roots of this art are deep within its culture, but artists today are also expressing issues of social justice, cultural practices and spirituality born from the last two hundred years of colonisation.

Historically across Australia more than two hundred Aboriginal languages were spoken with many more dialects. People were often multi-lingual. As there was no written language all learning, history, law and beliefs were passed on orally or through ceremony, dance and art. Around Australia art traditionally took many forms. For example in South-Eastern Australia designs were found on bark implements and possum skin cloaks while ground designs and body paint designs were traditional in Central Australia. Rock paintings, engravings and paintings on bark were found in the Kimberley and Arnhem Land regions. Today contemporary works are executed on a wide range of both traditional and contemporary mediums. This exhibition provides an overview of Aboriginal art from five significant regions.

SOUTH EASTERN AUSTRALIA – VICTORIA

Aboriginal artists from South Eastern Australia are visionaries, activists, commentators and messengers. Experiences are expressed through their artwork, often dealing with issues of social justice, spirituality, and cultural practices and interpretation.

Widely acknowledged as a pioneer in the Aboriginal art movement in urban Australia, **Lin Onus** (1948-1996), was from a very early age instilled with a strong social conscience and desire to fight for the underdog.

Lin had a long association with Aboriginal Elders from Arnhem Land, which led to the development of his distinctive style, incorporating traditional *rarrk* work from Arnhem Land with his realist western style landscapes, as well illustrated here by his significant diptych, *Fish and Leaves*.

Activist and artist **Ralph Nicholls** (1949-1996) was the son of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls (1906-1988), the first Aboriginal person to become a state governor. Ralph spent most of his adult life tirelessly promoting Aboriginal culture throughout Australia and internationally, pioneering education programs on Aboriginal culture in schools.

Ralph started painting later in his life, being mentored by Neil McLeod. He often painted with fellow artist Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown, working in the medium of natural ochres and sand. The Yorta Yorta *'tree design'* featured in the Burrinja Collection demonstrates the chevron-type lines commonly found in South Eastern Aboriginal art, including possum skin cloak designs.



Lin Onus (MELBOURNE, VIC)
Fish and Leaves (DETAIL), 1995



Ralph Nicholls (MELBOURNE, VIC)
Yorta Yorta Conteragunaa Land (Tree Design), 1995



Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown (YALATA, SA)
Patterns in Country, 1994



Emily Kame Ngwarreye (UTOPIA, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA)
Avalatyite Dreaming, c.1994



Gloria Petyarre (UTOPIA, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA)
Bush Medicine, 1998

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Born at Yalata, South Australia **Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown** (1960-1997) was a member of the Pitjantjatjarra tribe. He was separated from his parents at an early age and raised by a white family. In the early 1980s, he returned to South Australia and rediscovered his true heritage. He learned that his traditional country included Maralinga where nuclear testing by the British and Australian Governments took place between 1953 and 1957.

Jonathan turned to painting to express his emotions about the overwhelming devastation of his country by these tests. He painted images of the land, with its red earth bare after the explosions. Haunting large-scale portraits of lustred sandhills in yellows, browns and whites became his hallmark.

Another Pitjantjatjarra artist from Yalata, **Michael Aspinall** (1965-) is a contemporary of the late Jonathan Kumintjara-Brown, and one can see similarities in their techniques, using raised sand and ochre to create textured surfaces on the canvas. His work is iconic and humorous, such as his top-down view depiction of aspects of Aboriginal life in *'My Old Car'* and *'Broken Down Kingswoods'*.

A member of the 'stolen generation' like Jonathan, Michael's work also reveals a strong social and political narrative, and communicates a subtle depth and complexity regarding contemporary Aboriginal culture with a wonderful simplicity of design.

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

The vast Central and Western desert areas of Australia are home to the most widely represented form of Aboriginal art, the 'dot' style of work, often executed with acrylic paints.

Emily Kame Ngwarreye (c.1910-1996), acknowledged as one of the most brilliant Aboriginal artists of all time, is represented by her work *Avalatyite Dreaming* (*Bush Potato dreaming*). Emily came from Utopia, an area 275 kms north of Alice Springs, Central Australia. In a career that spanned just 7 years, Emily painted over 3,500 works on canvas, and single handedly repainted the art history books of Australia. Emily painted her own unique vision of her country. Her paintings are visual songs and a celebration of life.

Born c.1945 at Utopia, **Gloria Petyarre** grew up living a traditional tribal lifestyle, speaking Anmatyerre, hunting and gathering lizards and bush tucker. Her work reflects her culture: central to this are the women's ceremonies (*awelye*) conducted at Utopia. Singing, dancing and the painting of ancestral dreaming designs onto one another's bodies are integral to the ceremony. Many of her paintings are based upon these body paint designs.

Gloria Petyarre has the highly esteemed role of healer or medicine woman in her community. It requires not only knowledge of plants and animals but also a sixth sense which the Anmatyerre people believe one must be born with. "I paint awelye...people have to use their imagination" she has stated. As shown by the work *'Bush Medicine'*, the substance of her paintings is her country.