



**4—23 SEPTEMBER 1978**

**FINE ARTS GALLERY  
UNIVERSITY CENTRE**

**Weekdays: 10 am — 4 pm  
Saturdays: 10 am — 12 noon**

**FINE ARTS COMMITTEE  
UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

**ART OF THE WESTERN DESERT**

The Fine Arts Committee wishes to express its thanks to the following organisations for making this exhibition possible:

Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council  
Australian Gallery Directors Council  
Peter Stuyvesant Cultural Foundation

# ART OF THE WESTERN DESERT

## THE NATURE OF ABORIGINAL ART

Art is an important and integral part of Australian Aboriginal culture. Its place is very different from that of its counterpart in western-European style society.

There are no professional artists, only some who are recognised as being more outstanding, or more competent, than others. They are mostly men and they do not constitute an occupational category who make their living solely in this way.

Art productions are not specifically sold, but in some contexts they do have economic significance. With a few outstanding exceptions they are not intended to be retained permanently. This is particularly so with nearly all ritual and ceremonial regalia and emblems.

Some of them concern only a particular ritual sequence, and when that sequence is completed they are destroyed or abandoned. Probably only the rock engravings and paintings, the sacred tjurunga, and carved and incised boards, are expected to remain intact over a long period of time.

Aboriginal art is both sacred and secular. There is no doubt that most can be classified as sacred art. It is painting or engraving which generally, through its symbolic representations, conveys some aspect of myth.

Usually this concerns the Great Spirit Beings of the Eternal Dreaming, the creative era. These Beings set the pattern of living for all the natural world, including man. In Aboriginal belief they are still alive today, in spirit, much as they were at the beginning of time.

The material symbolic representations which are used in ritual, through which sacredness itself is expressed, are not simply works of art in the western sense.

Aboriginals themselves do not evaluate them in that way. It is what they stand for that is important: there is an emotional connotation; they are constant reminders of the reality of the myth, a tangible expression of its contemporary relevance.

The dry, sandy deserts of Central Australia allowed no better medium for artistic expression than the ground itself. Preparations for ceremonies amongst the Desert people included elaborate ground paintings which formed part of their religious rituals.

Often these took days to prepare, as each artist worked on his particular story-pattern. The materials used were charcoal and natural ochres, the choice of colours predominantly red, yellow and white, being determined by their symbolic significance.

Red ochre, symbolic of blood and therefore the life-force of man, was highly sought after and people travelled many hundreds of miles to obtain the correct colour for their artistic needs.

Feathers, twigs, seeds, animal and human hair, were also used to recreate the story-pattern and were adhered to the ground with human blood.

Finally the participants in the ceremonies decorated their bodies, repeating the totemic motifs they had used for their ground paintings. Ultimately, as the ceremony was enacted on the prepared ground, the paintings were slowly destroyed by the stamping and shuffling movements of the dancers.

'Art of the Western Desert' is a collection of paintings in the old tradition but executed with modern equipment by Aboriginal artists in the Western Desert. Each painting is accompanied by the artist's description of his work.

Desert country Papunya, an Aboriginal settlement about 190 miles west of Alice Springs in Central Australia, is the home of over one thousand Walbiri, Pintubi and Aranda people.

Today's art of the Papunya painters emerged in 1971 with the help of a young art teacher there, Geoff Bardon. While teaching children, he attracted the interest of older Aboriginal men. As a consequence he was able to assist them to transfer their traditional art to the medium of hardboard, using modern paints.

### **THE ABORIGINAL ARTS BOARD**

The Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council has taken the initiative in bringing the art of Australian Aboriginals to the attention of the community. The Board holds as one of its main objectives, that of letting the artist's voice be heard.

The Aboriginal Arts Board was established as a part of the Australia Council. Its fifteen members are all Aboriginals, and they are solely responsible for the allocation of Government funds for the development of Aboriginal art and culture. Aid is being given to urban and tribal communities all over Australia, and to support projects designed to foster and preserve traditional art, crafts, music and dance, and to encourage Aboriginal involvement in non-traditional artistic expression.

The Board is also intent on developing an extensive exhibition programme which will create an awareness, both in Australia and overseas, of the unique value and beauty of Aboriginal art work. It is only through such a programme that appreciation will develop and that Aboriginal art and culture will come to hold its rightful place in the total gamut of Australian art and cultural expression.

### **THE PETER STUYVESANT CULTURAL FOUNDATION**

The Peter Stuyvesant Cultural Foundation's purpose is to encourage the arts and to collect, purchase and offer the public various forms of art which would otherwise not be available. Works from either plastic arts or the performing arts are gathered together often, sometimes from all over the world, to form a collection for presentation. This is the Foundation's fourteenth major exhibition.

DREAMTIME POSSUM ANCESTORS  
AND THE SACRED KANGAROO

MEN'S DREAMING SITE AT ILPITIRRI

MEN OF THE DREAMTIME

THE FLYING SNAKE MEN

HONEY ANT ANCESTORS

THE POSSUM ANCESTORS

THE ORIGIN OF THE WILD TOMATO

THE WINPARRKU SERPENTS

WATER COMES TO THE WILD POTATO MEN

MEETING OF TOTEMIC HEROES

THE DREAMTIME TINARI MEN AT MINARITALNA

THE MEDICINE MEN

TWO MEDICINE MEN

TINARI MEN DREAMING AT MAYILINNA

THE WATER ANCESTORS

### ***Anmatjira Group***

Billy Stockman Djabaldjari

Billy Stockman Djabaldjari

Billy Stockman Djabaldjari

Billy Stockman Djabaldjari

Tim Leura Djabaldjari

Kaapa Mbijana Djambidjimba

Kaapa Mbijana Djambidjimba

Kaapa Mbijana Djambidjimba

### ***Kukatja Group***

Mick Walankarri Djagamara

Mick Walankarri Djagamara

### ***Pintubi Group***

Anatjari Djagamara

Anatjari Djagamara

Freddy West Djagamara

Freddy West Djagamara

Jack Phillipus Djagamara

TWO MEN AT WILKINKARRA

Jack Phillipus Djagamara

THE LEGENDARY POSSUM ANCESTORS

Jack Phillipus Djagamara

HAIR STRING AT PANGKU

Jack Phillipus Djagamara

THE SNAKE AND THE BUSHFIRE

Jack Phillipus Djagamara

THE WATER DREAMING

Jonny Warankula Djuburula

DREAMING AT JIKARRI

Jonny Warankula Djuburula

FIRE AND SNAKE AT LAKE MCKAY

Nosepeg Tjunkata Djuburula

CEREMONY AT MITUKATJIRINYA

Charley Tawara Djungarai

TINARI DREAMING AT MITUKATJI

Charley Tarawa Djungarai

THE WILD POTATO DREAMING

Charley Tarawa Djungarai

SACRED OBJECTS IN THE DREAMTIME

Shorty Lungkata Djungarai

WOMEN'S CEREMONY AT MANGURI

Turkey Tolson Djuburula

### ***Walbiri Group***

THE LEGENDARY WOMEN

Charlie Egalie Djabaldjari

WARRU THE WALLABY

Charlie Egalie Djabaldjari

BUDGERIGAR ANCESTORS

Charlie Egalie Djabaldjari

