

## Painting the Dreaming White |

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Observations of Aboriginal rock paintings and engravings in the Port Jackson area date from 1788. This body of work was greeted with surprise by members of the fledgling colony. The fact that Aborigines possessed an aesthetic sense and were able to realise it through artistic expression was thought to be anomalous to their condition of savagery, noble or other. Governor Phillip considered the artwork questioned ‘the rules laid down by the theory for the progress of invention’.<sup>1</sup> Foreshadowing the appraisal that would endure into the twentieth century, early observers of Aboriginal art sought representation and pictorial accuracy. Robert Brough Smyth’s comments in 1878 are typical: in noting that ‘the practice of ornamenting caves, rocks, and trees, and cutting figures on the ground by removing grass, is characteristic of this people’, he regarded their efforts as ‘the first attempts of a savage people to imitate the forms of natural objects, and to portray ... incidents in their lives’.<sup>2</sup> Convinced of its rudimentary nature, little attempt was made by anyone to understand the various motifs and symbols, and Aborigines were not asked their meaning or significance.<sup>3</sup>

Despite bark paintings being displayed in the 1879-80 Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition, little general interest was shown in Aboriginal art until the 1930s. At the forefront of a nascent curiosity was the National Museum of Victoria’s major exhibition of 1929, which included two Arrernte

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men alongside a *mia mia* demonstrating toolmaking and ceremonial performances.<sup>4</sup> A series of mostly small exhibitions commenced in capital cities in the late 1940s, and in 1956 the state galleries each received from the Commonwealth Government twenty-four paintings from the collection procured by the 1948 American-Australian Expedition to Arnhem Land.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1960-61 that the first large touring exhibition of Aboriginal art was convened. Organised by J A Tuckson, the Deputy Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, it toured all Australian states. On display were bark paintings, carved figures and other sacred and secular objects: 115 items in all.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the curiosity shown this exhibition was not the catalyst for the popularity of Aboriginal art; it tapped into an already rapidly burgeoning market that had been developing over the previous three decades.<sup>7</sup>

Today, Aboriginal art is the most ubiquitous symbol invoking the presence of Australia's autochthones, but beyond that, what is actually signified varies considerably. It can be a statement of continuing cultural integrity with implied political rights and demands, or part of Australia's national cultural iconography doubling as advertisement, as exemplified by the boast of Aboriginal artwork on aircraft fuselages, or the official Sydney Olympics logo, emblem of the 2000 games, featuring stylised boomerangs formed into the fluid shape of a running athlete. The figure is based on the Aboriginal track competitor and Olympic silver (Atlanta) and Gold (Sydney) medallist Cathy Freeman.<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister John Howard is quoted as finding the image 'distinctly Australian'.<sup>9</sup>

My purpose in this paper is to explore some of the uses to which settler-Australian painters have put Aboriginal art and myth, and to demonstrate how in their application of Aboriginal cultural property they attempt to paint the Dreaming white. The visual impact of art makes this an important consideration, for it broadens considerably the appeal—depending on artist both popular and recondite—that Aboriginal culture has as a site of further colonial conquest. As well as finding fresh terrain in the field of culture that can be usurped in order to satisfy familiar grievances and longings, new rationales justifying appropriation are established. Rather than considering a wide range of work, I have chosen two artists who highlight key issues that enable different aspects and intended purposes of this artistic colonisation to

be explored. As the focus here is the use of non-material cultural property, the portrayal of Aborigines in non-Aboriginal art is not analysed.<sup>10</sup> Nor do I focus on the paintings or illustrations themselves, but on the uses to which they are put, and the supporting arguments of the artists.

Robert Hughes has written that ‘it is meaningless to speak of an “Australian” school of painters before 1885’.<sup>11</sup> Until then painters remained faithful to English artistic traditions.<sup>12</sup> But in the 1880s and 1890s the Heidelberg school emerged from a series of artists’ camps established in what was then rural land, a few kilometres to the east of Melbourne. Through the *plein-air* approach to painting, these artists attempted to capture the light and subtleties of the Australian landscape. Their slogan was ‘truth to nature’.<sup>13</sup> Whilst the art produced by this school and those it influenced lacked the exuberance and the at times vociferousness of the nationalist literature of the 1890s, thematically there are clear parallels and, in the artists’ desire to express a cultural identity, a discernible nationalist sentiment.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, just as the writer Henry Lawson dismissed attempts to interest him in Aborigines during this nationalist phase, Aboriginal concepts (and mostly also subjects) were not bent to the painters’ cause.<sup>15</sup>

Following the frustrated nationalist ideals of the 1890s, artists, still with their gaze firmly set upon the landscape, turned from attempting to paint it ‘true to nature’ to efforts aimed at evincing its ‘soul’,<sup>16</sup> or to what Hughes has defined as ‘an allegorised essence of place’.<sup>17</sup> Aboriginal belief systems and concepts, which are now held to offer so much in this respect, were not utilised or even considered. It was to nineteenth-century European conventions of nymphs and wood-sprites that the artists turned, not figures from the Dreaming such as *mimi* spirits or ancestral beings, or the symbols invoking their presence. The artist Sydney Long expressed his concern over this use of European subject matter in a 1905 article ‘The Trend of Australian Art Considered and Discussed’. In seeking an evocation of ‘the weird mystery of the bush’, Long believed that the nymphs and naiades of European mythology and fables would ‘never look convincing among the gum trees’ unless a ‘special Australian brand’ was invented.<sup>18</sup>

Long’s concern is especially revealing, for it is certainly arguable that had he known, in his searching for an expression of the spirit of

place, of an ‘Australian brand’ of mythical beings which were inscribed in the landscape, he would have advocated their use. Giving this argument more credence is the fact that Long thought the eulogised bushmen—such as the shearer, drover, swagman, and bullock driver—were primarily populist devices that failed to ‘express the lonely and primitive feeling of this country’.<sup>19</sup> But rather than turning to Aboriginal concepts and/or artistic symbols to help capture what he feared may be beyond the capacity of the medium of paint, he calls for the use of Aborigines as subjects. Instead of replacing Pans and Centaurs with Aboriginal mythical beings, he wanted to replace the bushman and ‘utilitarian person’ with Aborigines in the belief that this would achieve the desired effect. The artist ‘will bid the Aboriginal blossom out in all the graceful proportions of manly vigour; when sufficient time has intervened to allow us to forget his failings’.<sup>20</sup> As heroic tribal figures, or children adorning ‘graceful pastorals’, Aborigines had a role to play in ‘the creation of an imaginative school that will be truly Australian’, and presumably one capable of depicting, through the Aborigine as object, the mystery, loneliness and felt primitiveness of the country.<sup>21</sup>

Sydney Long’s exhortations went largely unheeded.<sup>22</sup> The landscape *sans* Aborigine, particularly in the work of the Heidelberg school and those that bore its influence, especially Arthur Streeton, remained in the eyes of the critics the true Australian art. As Bernard Smith comments, there was ‘the tendency to make [these] paintings . . . national symbols, and to champion such painting as the only form of national art’.<sup>23</sup> Spiritedly challenging this assertion was the modernist painter Margaret Preston. In 1928 she was arguing that Australia had not yet produced Australian art. It was simply the case that Australian subjects painted by Australians in Australia had deluded the buying public into believing that such art captured the national essence.<sup>24</sup> In what is obviously a critique of the Heidelberg school and the following so-called Australian landscape tradition, Preston asked:

Does it not occur to them [the purchasers] how very similar is this ‘Australian’ picture to those of other countries? The mountains may be smaller or the skies bluer, but let them examine the picture intelligently, and, apart from such immaterial things, they will find their Australian art very much ‘School of.’<sup>25</sup>

All Australian artists could do, Preston went on to argue with characteristic force, was, like their American counterparts, imitate the dead and living artists of Europe.

Preston did not want to facilyly 'enrich an imported tradition', but wanted to find forms that she thought would truly 'suggest Australia'.<sup>26</sup> In her quest to forge a nationalist aesthetic she turned to the Aborigines. However, she was not interested in peopling landscapes with Sydney Long's idealised visions of tribal heroic man or dusky children of nature, but in what she could learn from Aboriginal art. This she made apparent in an early article in *Art in Australia* where she stated her objectives:

In wishing to rid myself of the mannerisms of a country other than my own I have gone to the art of a people who had never seen or known anything different from themselves, and were accustomed always to use the same symbols to express themselves. These are the Australian aboriginals, and it is only from the art of such people in any land that a national art can spring.<sup>27</sup>

Thus Preston saw in Aboriginal cultural property, as manifest in their artistic expression, a method to create a nationalist aesthetic that could resist the alien influences that had so far tarried the development of a national art. The same concerns over cultural imperialism motivated the Jindyworobaks, a nationalist literary movement, and it is not surprising that Preston supported them. In a 1941 letter to Rex Ingamells, the founder of the Jindyworobak Club, she gave as her reason for wanting to join the fact that the Jindyworobaks 'make it definite that we are firstly Australians and after that British'.<sup>28</sup> Her illustrations appear in several Jindy anthologies, including the 1948 *Jindyworobak Review*. Through her friendship with one of the Jindy poets, Ian Mudie, she was also introduced to the neo-fascist Australia First Movement, whose anti-imperialist objectives she empathised with.<sup>29</sup>

Preston believed that a nationalist aesthetic could not emerge from recondite expressions appreciated or understood by an informed few. To be successful it must have popular acceptance and appeal, at least in the first instance.<sup>30</sup> For this reason she advocated the use of Aboriginal design and motifs as decorative art to be applied to the full range of home furnishings. Fittingly in 1924 she began her long campaign in *The Home* magazine. Aware that the 'primitive' art of other countries was influencing European artists and artisans, Preston feared that Aboriginal art would be similarly appropriated by others before

settler-Australians had taken the opportunity to develop what she regarded as ‘our own material in an Australian spirit’.<sup>31</sup> If others were to make use of this resource before Australians, the chances of creating a unique national aesthetic would be jeopardised if not dashed, she reasoned.<sup>32</sup>

Thus Preston offers the design from a Kimberley ‘dancing board’ as being suitable—almost without alteration—for curtain material. Another from South Australia is reworked into a suggestion for a cushion cover. She urges potters to abandon the ‘horror-realistic display of fish, fowl or fauna’, and instead make use of Aboriginal forms and colour. Preston assures readers that such ‘primitive’ imagery ‘could be very modernly interpreted or applied’ and used effectively to ‘kill the [pervasive] South Kensington dullness’. For further inspiration she urged readers to visit the Australian museum (Sydney) for the purpose of viewing Aboriginal designs.<sup>33</sup>

These ideas are more fully developed in a 1925 article appearing in *Art in Australia*.<sup>34</sup> Besides explaining the intended function of Aboriginal art in forming a national aesthetic, it too is basically a home decoration guide. It offers suggestions for pottery, hand-painted china, cushions, curtains, sofa and chair covers, mats, bracelets, tablemats and light shades, all based on Aboriginal designs. Although she states that ‘our relation and most intimate connection with our aboriginal art is almost mystic and religious more than merely commercial and industrial’, any such feelings of spiritual affinity are not derived from sensitivity to the often profound significance of the appropriated designs and motifs to Aborigines, or interest in their metaphysical realm. Preston was not at all concerned with the contextual significance, sanctity, or inherent meaning of Aboriginal art to Aborigines. Thus a design taken from a taphoglyph<sup>35</sup> at Dubbo in New South Wales is made by Preston into a ‘practicable’, ‘smart’ outdoor bed cover.

Preston’s advocacy was in keeping with modernism’s non-contextual interest in primitivism.<sup>36</sup> Form and design were privileged over ethnographic considerations. Yet the 1920s and 1930s saw a growing sympathetic awareness of Aboriginal issues and interest in their cultures. The 1929 exhibition of Aboriginal art at the National Museum of Victoria and James Barrett’s reporting on Aboriginal affairs for the *Herald* are two indications of this.<sup>37</sup> Australia’s first Chair in Anthropology was established at the University of Sydney in 1925—the peripatetic Preston had settled in Sydney in 1920—and from 1930

the Department's journal *Oceania* regularly carried articles attesting to the spiritual significance of Aboriginal art. One of the early contributors, Ursula McConnel, wrote a lengthy article for *Art in Australia* in 1935 in which she stressed the relationship between Aboriginal design and their ancestral stories, social relations and initiatory stages. Preston frequently wrote for this journal, and as the same volume in which McConnel's article appeared also carried a review of Preston's recent work, it is unlikely she did not know of it. Nevertheless, Preston's zeal in pursuing her goal of developing a nationalist art form derived from Aboriginal visual expressions was not diminished, nor did this growing body of knowledge introduce cultural sensitivity to her arguments. She continued to dismiss the relevance of such matters. This is made clear in a 1930 edition of *Art in Australia* in which her reasoning demonstrates an awareness that contemporary research was revealing the contextual significance of Aboriginal art. In yet another article replete with practical, utilitarian suggestions for the use of Aboriginal motifs on homely furnishings and trappings, Preston advises her readers to abandon any interest in (and presumably concern over) the significance to Aborigines of the appropriated designs. She gently chides: 'please do not bother about what the carver meant in the way of myths, rites, etc.; that is not the decorator's affair'.<sup>38</sup> Mythology and symbolism were the province of anthropologists, not the artist or home decorator.<sup>39</sup> Aboriginal art was nothing but a resource to be plundered in what Preston regarded as the national interest.

Ure Smith's editorial in this edition of *Art in Australia*—1930—reflects the extent of his, and Preston's vision.<sup>40</sup> A keen supporter of Preston's work and her aesthetic and cultural mission, he writes in excited anticipation of the establishment of 'great industries' churning out wallpapers, textiles, plates, furniture, rugs, in short, 'everything in daily use', all bearing designs taken from the 'wealthy mine of admirably evolved motives and forms' found in Aboriginal art. He envisages these being retailed through specialist shops, and argues for an Australian School of Design that would train students in the design and applications of the anticipated emergent national aesthetic.

In the mid 1940s Preston was still discounting the contextual significance of Aboriginal art. By now openly admitting to its sophistication and the reasons behind its production—both sacred and secular—Preston somewhat foolishly and revealingly suggests that: 'The totemic part of their work is another branch of study which does

not come into the latitude of plastic art, any more than the religious views of the Van Eycks in their magnificent, aesthetic and cultural art'.<sup>41</sup> This is duplicitous, for Preston is imbuing the appropriated designs, form, palette, and composition in her serious work, and the symbols and motifs in her decorative furnishings, with profound cultural, spiritual and social significance. The appropriations are to form the basis of a new national culture no less,<sup>42</sup> one that captures the 'spirit of the country',<sup>43</sup> and that is in sympathy with the 'spiritual vision' of settler-Australians.<sup>44</sup> Therefore Preston is not really arguing for disciplinary divisions being imposed upon the appreciation or understanding of the function of the plastic arts as her above statement suggests. She is attempting to discount or erase from the appropriated elements the social and religious significance which arises from their former context, thereby removing from them one set of meanings so that they can become the bearers of her own. As Elizabeth Butel argues, 'the quest for "the spirit of the country" was of central importance but was not to be confused, in her opinion, with the spirituality inherent in the totemic aspects of Aboriginal art'.<sup>45</sup>

Preston's attitude towards Aborigines did moderate between 1925 and the 1940s. When in 1925 she was encouraging people to go to the museum in order to see what Aboriginal designs they could apply in their houses, she felt it necessary to state that anyone showing interest would not be demeaning themselves 'or being kind to [Aborigines]'.<sup>46</sup> Though greatly admiring the economy of Aboriginal artistic expression and championing the use of certain concepts and methods, Preston believed it the product of an inferior intellect. The irregular nature of Aboriginal designs was due to the fact that 'the minds of very primitive beings are not capable of working on set lines'.<sup>47</sup> Determining a racial hierarchy based on observation of art forms, Preston thought the Pacific Islanders to be more advanced than Aborigines because their manufacture of tapa indicated 'greater mental effort than merely picking up a piece of wood'.<sup>48</sup>

Ten years later, however, Preston is arguing that a study of Aboriginal art should remove the 'unfortunate impression' that the 'Australian aboriginal is in the lowest grade of humanity'.<sup>49</sup> This revised opinion coincided with what is commonly regarded as her 'Aboriginal Period', lasting from 1940 to 1945, during which she completed her most successful paintings in which she incorporated Aboriginal elements and influences. It should be noted that it was not just design and symbols that Preston appropriated for her artwork, but

also, especially in her landscapes and some still life paintings of native flora, a palette of colours drawn from Aboriginal art. In some of her landscapes she also adopted the perspective of looking down as if from above, a technique she learnt from Aboriginal art forms. Nevertheless, Preston did not come to any understanding, or at least act upon it if she did, about her role as a coloniser of Aboriginal culture. In 1947 for instance, she was commissioned by Silk and Textiles Pty Ltd to produce a fabric for sale in retail stores across Australia. Her design for silk screen on wool bears much influence from Aboriginal art.<sup>50</sup> As Elizabeth Butel comments, 'her championing of Aboriginal art was accompanied by a virulent artistic colonialism, which advocated the adoption of Aboriginal methods and ways of seeing but at the same time, denied the culture that gave them meaning'.<sup>51</sup> This is despite the fact that, like the Jindyworobaks, she was sensitive and responding to the colonising influences from overseas that they all saw as threatening the development of an Australian culture.

Although by 1941 Preston had come to realise that the Aboriginal artist is 'a true and sensitive artist whose work should be studied and treated with the respect that is due to true art',<sup>52</sup> apparently save for considering any ownership provisions or copyright issues, there is no expression of concern for the plight of Aborigines in her art or writing. An inveterate traveller, Preston travelled extensively throughout Australia, particularly in the north from Queensland through to the Kimberley, including a 10,000 mile return journey to Darwin in a utility in 1947 at the age of seventy-two.<sup>53</sup> On these journeys Preston visited many Aboriginal sites gathering material for her paintings and decorative work. She would have witnessed the generally appalling living conditions of Aborigines many times over. Additionally, by the late 1930s, on the heels of the depression and the approaching onset of war, a humanist conscience was increasingly evident in Australian art, particularly in the work of those influenced by—though not necessarily following—communism. The art critic Basil Burdett in 1943 glimpsed in the ensuing humanist outlook 'an authentic national vision'.<sup>54</sup> As opposed to seeking a national art-form, the focus was changing to a belief that artistic tradition is borne through the struggle of the people. Bernard Smith expressed this sentiment in 1945:

A national tradition in Australian art should be sought for, not in the hopeless endeavour to create an art-form peculiar to this continent—as aboriginal art was—but an art the nature of which will grow from the features of a changing Australian society.<sup>55</sup>

Reflecting this movement, Aboriginal oppression and their status as outcasts began appearing in paintings in the early 1940s, led by the Jewish immigrant artist Yosl Bergner.<sup>56</sup> Although it must be admitted that this was a new generation of artists coming through, Preston did not respond to the changing climate. The premise that propelled her into exploring Aboriginal art in 1924 persisted, and was still being reiterated in the mid 1940s. ‘It was to learn what this art could do to help clean up the minds of our people and give them a national culture that I have given many years of my life to the study of this aboriginal art’, she reflected.<sup>57</sup> Beginning with the 1924 article in *The Home* magazine, this rationale can be found in one form or another in most of her articles discussing her interest in this field. Preston’s unchanging goal was to build a national aesthetic that would assist in the development of a unique and resilient Australian culture upon a foundation derived from Aboriginal art that was divorced utterly from its context and from which all embedded meanings were ousted. A social conscience is largely absent from her work,<sup>58</sup> and even when the painterly skills of Aboriginal artists is finally realised, Preston remained focussed on what Aboriginal cultural property could offer her. Little interest was taken in the Aboriginal struggle. Activism on their behalf was certainly not part of her agenda.

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Preston has been described by a Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia as ‘arguably Australia’s greatest artist in the twenties and thirties’.<sup>59</sup> She was also the first artist to crusade for the incorporation of Aboriginal visual expression into non-Aboriginal artwork, and her long campaign began in and extended beyond this period. Despite her prominence, her exhortations initially made little impact.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, her tireless advocacy in lectures, print and painting gave Aboriginal artistic styles considerable exposure, and consequently many artists have been and continue to be influenced by Aboriginal art in a variety of ways. Certainly Preston and Ure Smith’s vision of Aboriginal motifs and symbolism finding their way into homes, cafes and theatres—in the form of placemats, curtains, carpets, rugs, china,

T-shirts and so on—and being marketed through specialist shops, has come to fruition. On a research trip to Australia in the early 1960s for his *Old and New Australian Aboriginal Art*, Roman Black thought that Preston ‘must find it very satisfying to watch the increasing production of pottery, textiles, and designs based on aboriginal art, and to remember that she prophesied this trend nearly forty years ago’.<sup>61</sup> All the designs Black is referring to were produced by non-Aborigines.

Humphrey McQueen writes approvingly that Margaret Preston ‘never attempted to cannibalise Aboriginal myths’.<sup>62</sup> However, despite the fact that there is both sacred and secular Aboriginal art, myth and artistic expression seldom constitute discrete entities within Aboriginal culture.<sup>63</sup> Painting calls forth the associated narrative and in the telling of myths, a visual dimension, even if it is just lines in the sand where one is sitting, is usually added. Therefore the appropriation of Aboriginal visual expression is also an incursion into Aboriginal myth, a point overlooked in McQueen’s defence of Preston. This same issue—the supposed disjunction between art and myth—arises in consideration of the work of the artist Ainslie Roberts. In two significant ways Roberts’ paintings provide an illuminating contrast to Preston’s work. Firstly, his art has never been critically considered ‘high art’.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, where Preston sought from Aborigines the ‘ways of seeing’ that she felt could serve as the foundation for an Australian aesthetic and paid no heed to the mythological and cultural context of Aboriginal design, Roberts took the converse approach. He endeavoured to illustrate Aboriginal myths and legends through paintings not in any way derived from the Aboriginal visual arts.

Based in Adelaide, Roberts was a very successful commercial artist with his own advertising agency. He viewed his art as a tool by which he earned his living, and was not interested in pursuing his own creative expression. His art was business, not a personal vision.<sup>65</sup> In 1950, to aid his recovery from a nervous breakdown and physical collapse, Roberts’ wife and business partner decided to send him somewhere with no personal or business attachments and chose Alice Springs. During his four months sabbatical he developed a love for the Centre. Whilst there he also decided to commence painting upon return to Adelaide, where a chance meeting was to influence the direction his painting would take. Photography was one of his hobbies, and at a Kodak sponsored award evening where he was to receive a medal he met the ethnologist Charles Mountford, another medal recipient, and a lasting friendship began. Roberts and Mountford spent

as much time visiting Aboriginal rock art sites as possible. Several extended trips to Central Australia were made, including Uluru and expeditions to a large pastoral station—Central Mount Wedge—300 kilometres to the north west of Alice Springs.

Mountford's chief interest was collecting Aboriginal myths and legends, the Northern Territory and Tiwi Islands being his main source. In 1959 he asked Roberts if he would be interested in supplying line-drawings for a book of myths he was planning. With open access to Mountford's extensive collection of material, Roberts found line-drawing too restricting to convey his interpretation of the myths, so he turned to paint. This led to the first exhibition of the so-called 'Dreamtime' paintings, which opened in Adelaide in 1963. Roberts' friend and biographer, Charles Hulley, says of these paintings that they 'were the first successful attempt to energise this tradition in Western consciousness and to make it available in a transformed but comprehensible visual form'.<sup>66</sup> In two days the exhibition sold out.

Ian Mudie, publishing manager of Rigby, Adelaide, aware of the success of the exhibition and of Mountford's collection of myths, also suggested a book combining them both. Given Mudie's history of association with endeavours to incorporate Aboriginal heritage into the dominant culture—the Jindyworobaks and his enduring friendship with Preston—there can be little doubt that the proposed publication was of great personal interest. Roberts took total control over all design aspects and the resulting book—*The Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings*, first published in 1965—was an extraordinary success. It spawned a series of nine books based on the same formulae: reproductions of Roberts' paintings illustrating Mountford's, and later Roberts' wife's, rendering of Aboriginal myths. By 1989 *The Dreamtime* had been reprinted nineteen times, and the flyleaves on reprints of books in the series dating from the late 1980s claim over a million copies sold.<sup>67</sup>

What, however, did Roberts (and others) believe he was doing? Following the success of his first exhibition—and before the first book appeared—Roberts wrote a 'manifesto' in which he declared that the myth itself must determine the painting, not public or personal preference. He believed the paintings to be more than mere 'surface decoration'. They were an interpretation of beliefs emanating from an ancient, 'nearly extinct' culture, and Roberts hoped the paintings

would speak for that culture.<sup>68</sup> Many years later he reiterated these ideas in response to a question from Hulley, and it is worth quoting at some length:

The myth is always more important than the painting ... from the beginning I felt an obligation to remain true to the myth—no tampering or touching up. That extended itself into a feeling that I should let the myth dictate not only colour, shape and composition, but the whole mood of the painting ... the big job is to get rid of me, the things I know, the conventional ideas I was taught and brought up with, so that the myth can come through. I become a channel, a communicator, scarcely a painter at all.<sup>69</sup>

Though Roberts admits to the impossibility of removing himself entirely from the paintings, the emphasis is on establishing the veracity of the paintings as a record of Aboriginal myth rather than personal expression. He maintains this line from his 1964 ‘manifesto’ to an interview given in 1989 to the journal *Australian Artist*.<sup>70</sup> The flyleaf on the 1989 reprint of *The Dawn of Time* also claims the entire ‘Dreamtime Series’ are a ‘genuine record of Aboriginal mythology’, and the paintings are regarded as integral to that record. In the introduction to the larger format *Echoes of the Dreamtime*,<sup>71</sup> Roberts’ daughter-in-law claims that he had achieved what no other artist had in painting, ‘not the landscape of the myth but the myth itself’.<sup>72</sup> She claims the paintings ‘vividly bring to life the myths of [Aboriginal] culture’, and that ‘he brings us to a closer understanding of the Dreamtime beliefs’, thus assisting in bridging the gap between two cultures.<sup>73</sup> Roberts, his family, and the promotional material enclosing the books, all contribute purposefully to establishing a supportive context which attests to the notion that the paintings are genuine expressions of Aboriginal mythology. Contemporary reviews by Olaf Ruhen,<sup>74</sup> Cameron Forbes,<sup>75</sup> and Aldo Massola,<sup>76</sup> a former Curator of Anthropology at the National Museum of Victoria and Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, seem to accept the notion that the paintings are more representative of the myths than interpretative, and will lead to an increased understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Generally, however, the greater one’s knowledge of Aboriginal culture, the more circumspect the review. The author Roland Robinson, the former Jindyworobak poet who spent much time with Aborigines and maintained friendships spanning many years, and whose publications include books on Aboriginal mythology, cautioned readers in his review of the book that began the series. The work of

both Roberts and Mountford was, he argued, very much ‘the white man’s reaction to, and interpretation of’ Aboriginal mythology.<sup>77</sup> Anthropologists, with the exception of Massola who had also published in *Bunjil’s Cave*<sup>78</sup> a collection of Aboriginal ‘myths, legends and superstitions’ that had been re-worked into a more conventional European fairy-tale form, were even more critical. Elkin made the straightforward comment in his review of *The Dawn of Time* that the book did not attempt to increase understanding of Aboriginal mythology, a point that Roberts would almost certainly have rejected, for he considered he was attempting that very thing.<sup>79</sup> For the anthropologist David Moore, the paintings were so ‘European fairy-story-like in feeling’ that any sense of Aboriginality still faintly discernible in the rendered myths was lost.<sup>80</sup>

It should be noted that the myths upon which the paintings were based were radically contracted and simplified for publication in what proved to be a successful attempt to broaden their appeal. Myths comprising of up to ten pages of small type when first transcribed were reduced by Mountford to between two and four hundred words. Nor are the myths given any context. The cultural or language group from which they have been taken is not given. Roberts, however, explained that he based his paintings on the full-length transcriptions. That was what determined the ‘whole mood of the painting’, not the summaries prepared for publication.<sup>81</sup> There is a hint in this that perhaps the paintings are a more complete record of the myths than the accompanying narratives, for whilst the text is an abridgment, Roberts is suggesting his paintings manage to encapsulate and express the whole.

Nevertheless, Roberts appears to have no understanding of, or concern for, the contextual basis of the myths he paints. Despite his travels he does not go beyond the manuscript transcription to explore how and in what form the myths were conveyed in the setting from which they were taken. To have done so would have been to discover that few if any myths in Aboriginal culture, sacred or secular, stand alone as story. Beside the fact that most are in some way related to explaining affiliation with place, even if not directly expressed, they exist in a wider network of song and all manifestations of the visual arts, including dance.<sup>82</sup> In other words, beyond their narrative form recounted as stories within an oral tradition, issues such as the colour, shape, and composition of the myths when expressed through a visual medium are already determined. Thus Roberts felt obligation to

remain true to the myth with ‘no tampering or touching up’, and his claim to be simply acting as a conduit and not an artist in conveying the myth in visual form, is specious.

Apart from the fairy-tale quality of most of the paintings as noted by Moore,<sup>83</sup> which accentuate the reworking of the myths into popular fable form—for instance, how the Jenolan caves were made, why native swans are black, how the Bogong moth lost its brilliant colours—in radically altering the method, style and composition of how the myths are portrayed by Aborigines, the paintings distort the original concepts upon which they are based. Taken in conjunction with the fact that the wider sociopolitical and economic aspects of the myths have been ignored, together with the contextual basis of their performance, recital, or portrayal, the paintings have the obvious potential to impose new meanings altogether or omit crucial elements. Given that Roberts declared the paintings to be an accurate portrayal of the myths they are illustrating, these are not insignificant concerns.

Roberts defended his style in terms of it not being appropriate to ape Aboriginal art:

The Aborigines’ own interpretation of their mythology ... has resulted in some of the finest abstract art in the world ... [They] have done it so well and so completely that for a white man to attempt it would not only be presumptuous, but an insult to the whole Aboriginal community.<sup>84</sup>

Is it not equally as presumptuous to take their myths, meld them to an alien imagery, and assert the result to be a ‘genuine record of Aboriginal mythology’? In justification Roberts believed that through painting the myths in a ‘white man’s way’, he was assisting in bringing the ancient heritage of Aborigines to a wider audience, and that hopefully greater respect for Aborigines would grow as a result.<sup>85</sup> But it is very much a case of only being prepared to meet Aborigines on non-Aboriginal terms. This is not to suggest that it is possible for us to become them in order to facilitate understanding, but that within the realm of what is possible interpretation needs to be contextually based, or meaning risks being distorted. In the *Dreamtime* series the myths are taken from their context and reworked into a form acceptable to non-Aborigines. They are then re-presented as authentic

examples of Aboriginal mythology. In so far as the myths can be rendered into packages that immediately resonate with meanings to a non-Aboriginal person, then Aborigines will be accorded respect.

Hulley argues that such criticism is akin to:

complaining that Leonardo's *Last Supper* lacks authentic Middle Eastern flavour and fails to communicate the world-view of Judaea at the time of Christ ... Conceptually, the use of Aboriginal myths as a source of inspiration is no different from drawing upon the stories of the Bible and Christianity, or the myths of Greece and Rome.<sup>86</sup>

Hulley goes on to say that painters have made use of this material for centuries, and in such ways that a citizen of Periclean Athens or first-century Alexandria would not find familiar. This defence has no merit. Firstly, Roberts is claiming something of far greater significance than finding the myths a mere source of inspiration. He is a 'communicator', not Roberts the artist, channelling the myths to a non-Aboriginal audience. Secondly, the myths that Roberts is drawing upon are not of the past, but have been collected from contemporary Aboriginal cultures where their relevance continues. How this mythology is interpreted, used and understood can have an impact upon the very people from whom it has been taken. Whilst an interpretation of an ancient Greek myth is not going to affect a citizen of Periclean Athens, it is flippant to suggest that the rendering of Aboriginal mythology is similarly inconsequential. In terms of the Aboriginal struggle for land rights, equity, and justice, it does make a difference if their mythology is understood by non-Aborigines as simple explanatory fables of the moon cycle and the like, or in addition to this as also indicating affinity with land, territorial boundaries, and religious, social, political, and economic responsibilities. Furthermore, as Talal Asad points out, ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity all form a constituent part of how the West, in contradistinction to other cultures that exist beyond the parameters of this collective, defines its unique historicity.<sup>87</sup> It is one thing to draw inspiration from within this heritage, quite another to draw from without, and then something else again to reflect the image derived back upon the culture from which it has been taken and claim its representativeness.

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We learn from Hulley, without surprise, that Roberts was not successful in removing himself from his paintings. Memories, such as a haunting evening when camping whilst surrounded by a howling dingo pack, or wildflowers in Central Australia, return in the portrayal of various myths.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, those completed in the mid 1970s ‘show a demonstrably personal content’, reflecting a troubled period.<sup>89</sup> Recovering from a creative drought and illness, Roberts confided in a letter to Hulley that in painting one myth he had attempted to break his malaise by avoiding its ‘depth and scope ... settling instead for the comic-opera climax’.<sup>90</sup> From here it is only a small step to the claim that in Aboriginal mythology Roberts ‘found a powerful mode of access to his own inner world’ and that this is reflected in his art.<sup>91</sup> In touching upon the personal unconscious, Hulley then argues from a Jungian perspective that the paintings evince universal themes. This supposedly guarantees the accuracy and veracity of Roberts’ portrayal of the myths. All the paintings do is ‘relocate this timeless material in a Western inner landscape. They do not falsify it, for in itself it is the product of something universal’.<sup>92</sup> Here again we find a denial of the specificity of Aboriginal cultural property. Their mythology is interpreted through a non-Aboriginal paradigm—the Jungian model of the psyche—and determined to have general relevance.

Roberts’ wife, Judy, frames the entire series in these notions. Commencing with the fifth book—*Dreamtime Heritage*—she took over the responsibility from an aging Mountford of summarising the myths from his notes and writing the introductions. Whereas Mountford gave a very basic explanation of Aboriginal life, culture, and beliefs in his introductions, Judy Roberts proffers the view that Aboriginal beliefs were once shared by all humankind in that distant epoch called ‘the dawn of consciousness’:

The fascinating thing is that, in so many ways, [the Dreamtime stories] shimmer upon the edges of beliefs similar to those held by other religions. When the whole of mankind lived in the Stone Age, then perhaps these Dreamtime stories were the common currency of belief ... [They] may demonstrate a deeper brotherhood than we are yet willing to concede. It is a brotherhood stretching back to the very dawn of time, when all men were of one race and all sought the keys to mysteries which still remained concealed.<sup>93</sup>

There is a deliberate process being executed here, where by degrees the relevance of Aboriginal mythology is first extended beyond its

original context, then new meanings are imposed. The process can be traced through the introductions, Hulley's biography,<sup>94</sup> promotional material on the books' flyleaves, and Roberts' comments upon his own work. Firstly, the artist is simply channelling the myth in visual form from Aboriginal culture to the Western viewer. Then we discover that the paintings reflect Roberts' inner world, and from there they become symbols conveying archetypal images mirroring 'some of our earliest racial memories'.<sup>95</sup> In other words, no longer is Roberts presenting Aboriginal mythology to a non-Aboriginal audience in an attempt to engender respect for Aborigines or their cultures. He is delivering that audience back to their long lost sacred truths. He is reconnecting non-Aborigines with their mythopoeic core from which they have been alienated.<sup>96</sup> The righteous assertion of a unidirectional flow through Roberts as a 'channel' and 'communicator' has been deftly reversed.

In supposedly representing the spiritual condition of all humankind in the dawn of consciousness, another familiar notion is promulgated. Whereas non-Aborigines represent rationality and logic, Aborigines have continued to dwell in the emotional, instinctive realm. Their beliefs are 'simple, immaculate, pure' truths that have 'survived unchanged' since the Stone Age.<sup>97</sup> Judy Roberts posits that:

Primitive instincts lie buried in even the most sophisticated adult, and in those blurred areas of the mind known as the unconscious there are powerful forces which most of us glimpse from time to time. The difference between ourselves and tribal Aborigines is that we have erected barriers of logic which prevent us from seeing clearly into our own Dreaming.<sup>98</sup>

This notion is then extended so as to embrace and explain the concept of place. Mentioning how birds are supposedly imprinted with a permanent sense of place immediately after birth to which they can unerringly return, Roberts extrapolates this to assert that other animals, and all people living in a 'state of nature', feel the same instinctive pull. However:

we who have surrendered our instincts to technology feel it only vaguely, though most people feel themselves to be more 'at home' in one specific place than any other in the world. This feeling pervaded the consciousness of tribal Aborigines to such depths that it dictated their *entire* way of life.<sup>99</sup>

Thus Aborigines are totally controlled by their instincts. They do not exist on the conscious plane at all save for fulfilling the instinctual demands made upon them, one of which is satisfying their acutely felt sense of place. As for the birds it is for the Aborigines. The affinity that they feel towards specific tracts of land is a product of Aborigine as homing pigeon rather than the fruits of a consciously derived system of territorial management bound within a complex of beliefs that enables effective transmission through the medium of oral literature. But to admit agency in the development of religious systems and spirituality, and to see Aboriginal culture as the product of a creative intelligence, raises issues that have the potential to obstruct the colonisation of their cultural property. As Lattas argues, 'Aboriginal culture is positioned as our unconscious. It is precisely in its role as the unconscious, that Aboriginal culture is seen to speak the truths of humanity'.<sup>100</sup> By finding agency in the development of Aboriginal beliefs, or in admitting rationality within their explanations of their greater environing reality, Aborigines come not to speak the truth of humanity, but the truth of their own existence. As this invalidates one of the key arguments justifying the colonisation of their cultural property, it must not be countenanced.

Another ploy in universalising aspects of Aboriginal culture is taken up by Hulley. When Roberts first arrived in Australia in 1922 as an eleven-year-old, he stayed for eight months with his cousin who was housekeeping on a property—Parara—on Gulf St Vincent near Ardrossan in South Australia. Roberts continued to holiday there until sixteen years of age. Hulley states that for Roberts Parara was a 'sacred site: the place of his initiation, the gateway to an unseen world of heroes and life-giving powers'.<sup>101</sup> But what Roberts recalls is not a brush with the metaphysical world and numinous, telluric powers, nor years of learning specialist knowledge, but the delights of a carefree childhood:

Whenever [Roberts] described it in later years, the images were still vibrant and immediate to him. The great log-fire still burned in the homestead hearth and a smell of wood-smoke flavoured the air; the harness creaked and the big draughthorses champed and clattered at Brown's farm; the kangaroo dogs barked, and a .22 rifle cracked in the fresh morning air; the sea teemed with fish, and the days were long and clear and full of enchantment.<sup>102</sup>

Beside the fact that here we have another explanation as to how Aborigines represent the lost child within, two other related issues are

of concern in this evocation of Edenic childhood. There is the relation drawn between the joyful memories of the carefree child and sacredness itself. The world of the child is posited as the sacred site. Yet Aborigines learn the spiritual significance of their landscape and the sacred realm through knowledge sequentially taught as they progressively leave childhood and adopt the status and responsibility of adults. Thus sacredness is something separate and distinct from the untrammelled experiences of the child. Secondly, it is equating the ‘unseen world of heroes and life-giving powers’ which feature in much Aboriginal mythology—though not so much in the guise of hero—with the world of childhood fantasy. The ancestral beings of the Dreamtime and the powers said to be inherent within the earth are made the world that non-Aboriginal children conjure in their imagination.

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Whereas Preston argued that the mythology accompanying Aboriginal artistic expression was of no concern to the artist (or the home decorator), Ainslie Roberts, in taking Aboriginal myths and attempting to portray them in paint, argued it was inappropriate to use Aboriginal artistic styles. His claim to be bringing Aboriginal culture to a wider audience with ‘no tampering or touching up’ is only possible because he first shapes Aboriginal mythology and the Dreamtime so as to fit Western psychoanalytical mythologies,<sup>103</sup> and his belief in the universal applicability of these. Hence, rather than pointing the way through the window of Aboriginal mythology to an understanding of Aborigines as a people or peoples, Roberts, we are led to believe, is pointing the way to an understanding of ourselves. As with Preston, alien meanings and significance are grafted onto Aboriginal cultural property in order to satisfy non-Aboriginal interests, needs, desires, and beliefs. Also as with Preston, Aborigines are denied the opportunity to speak for themselves. They are not given the authority to assert their own cultural meanings.<sup>104</sup>

Writing of the almost surreptitious manner by which cultural colonialism usurps cultural property, Kenneth Coutts-Smith has argued that the practice ‘does not massacre and imprison and institutionalise a subservient people, but more gently, absorbs the values of a peripheral culture into the larger system of the dominant one’.<sup>105</sup> This process is apparent in the work of Margaret Preston and

the rationale behind the once popular paintings of Ainslie Roberts. But more is involved than absorption. The original meanings of the cultural attributes selected by the artists are divested, ignored, or subordinated to the new meanings that are grafted onto them. As Lattas discusses, in this way Aboriginal culture is made to ‘speak [our] own cultural truths’.<sup>106</sup> Neither of the artists discussed, in work spanning a period from 1924 to the late 1970s, indicate much concern for the enduring conditions suffered by Aborigines. Whilst Roberts takes care to ensure that his respect for Aborigines is clearly articulated, this does not manifest in activism in support of their cause. The appropriations are put in the service of non-Aboriginal interests alone. Unfortunately this is common. Despite the considerable influence that Aboriginal art has had and is still having upon non-Aboriginal artists, few lend support to the struggle.<sup>107</sup> Whilst Aboriginal practitioners of all the arts are speaking loudly and clearly for themselves, this does not absolve non-Aborigines from a responsibility to desist from continuing another form of dispossession. Bernard Smith argued in his 1980 Boyer Lectures that until Aborigines achieve equity, any ‘borrowing from the blacks and marketing their products will continue, as in the past, to be a form of exploitation’.<sup>108</sup> Aborigines have not yet reached that position of equity.

- 1 Quoted in Gary Catalano, ‘Changing responses to Aboriginal art’, *Meanjin*, vol 36, no 4, December, 1977, p 574.
- 2 Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, Volume 1, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1878, p 291. Robert Brough Smyth held a number of public service appointments in Victoria, including the position of Victorian Secretary of Mines, and influential honorary secretary to the Victorian Aborigines Protection Board. Indicating the colonial government’s interest in disseminating knowledge about Aborigines, in 1878 the Government Printer published his two volume *The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*.
- 3 F D McCarthy, ‘The art of rock-faces’ in Ronald M Berndt (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Art*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1964, p 33.
- 4 Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996, pp 181-83.
- 5 Ronald M Berndt, ‘Preface’ in Berndt, op. cit., p 1; Catalano, op. cit., p 573. See Charles P Mountford, *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land 1: Art, Myth and Symbolism*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1956, for an account of the artwork seen by the Expedition. Mountford was the Expedition’s planner, organiser and leader. Although Baldwin Spencer amassed at the National Museum of Victoria—of which he was the Director for many years—a very large holding of bark paintings from Arnhem Land—collection commencing during 1911-12—he never convened a formal exhibition of this

- work. Nor did Spencer's valuable private collection of Australian art include any *Aboriginal paintings*. Spencer had left Australia before the Museum's 1929 exhibition. See Derek John Mulvaney and John Henry Calaby, 'So much that is new': Baldwin Spencer, 1860-1929, Melbourne University Press, 1985, pp 250, 303-04, 359.
- 6 Berndt, op. cit., pp 1-2
  - 7 ibid., p 1
  - 8 J Mendelssohn, 'A visual pun within different layers of meaning', *Australian*, 16 September 1996, p 3.
  - 9 Quoted in P Weekes, 'Games logo wins support and cliché claim', *Australian*, 16 September 1996, p 3.
  - 10 Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, and his *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art since 1788*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1979 [1945] discuss this. See also Geoffrey Dutton, *White on Black: The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art*, MacMillan, South Melbourne, 1974; Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, George Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1985; For brief discussion on certain artists such as Russel Drysdale, Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1970; and Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1988, for discussion on the portrayal of Aborigines by artists in the 1930s-40s.
  - 11 Hughes, op. cit., p 36.
  - 12 Smith, *Place*, op. cit., p 112; Leigh Astbury, *City Bushmen: The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp 1-14.
  - 13 Smith, *Place*, op. cit., pp 120, 120-25.
  - 14 ibid., pp 125, 133; Hughes, op. cit., pp 59, 67; Astbury, op. cit., passim.
  - 15 C Symes and B Lingard, 'From the ethnographic to the aesthetic: an examination of the relationship between Aboriginal and European Culture in Australian Art 1788-1988' in Paul Foss (ed), *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1988, p 194.
  - 16 Smith, *Place*, op. cit., p 172.
  - 17 Hughes, op. cit., pp 75-6.
  - 18 Sydney Long, 'The trend of Australian art considered and discussed' in Bernard Smith (ed), *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period 1170-1914*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1975, pp 263, 266. The children's author Patricia Wrightson took up this same theme in the early 1970s. In the epilogue to her *An Older Kind of Magic*, winner of the 1973 Australian Children's Book of the Year, she explains her reasons for using Aboriginal spirits as magical figures. 'It is time we stopped trying to see elves and dragons and unicorns in Australia. They have never belonged here, and no ingenuity can make them real. We need to look for another kind of magic, a kind that must have been shaped by the land itself at the edge of Australian vision'. Patricia Wrightson, *An Older Kind of Magic*, Hutchinson Group, Richmond, 1973, pp 150-51.
  - 19 Long, op. cit., pp 266-67.
  - 20 ibid., p 267.
  - 21 ibid.

- 22 The artist Tom Roberts did paint several portraits of Aborigines between 1890-95. In assessing these works within the context of Roberts' other paintings, Helen Topliss finds that they are in accord with his other 'outback' pictures. In these Roberts was thinking in terms of time and place, and hence in terms of national identity. See Helen Topliss, 'Tom Roberts' Aboriginal Portraits' in I and T Donaldson, op. cit., pp 110-36.
- 23 Smith, Place, op. cit., p 177.
- 24 Margaret Preston, 'Australian artists versus art', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 26, December, 1928. Preston citations without page numbers refer to unpaginated articles.
- 25 *ibid.*
- 26 G Long, 'Some recent paintings by Margaret Preston', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 59, May, 1935, p 18.
- 27 Margaret Preston, 'The indigenous art of Australia', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 11, March, 1925.
- 28 Quoted in Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: The Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944*, Alternative Publishing Cooperative, Sydney, 1979, p 161.
- 29 Elizabeth Butel, *Margaret Preston: The Art of Constant Rearrangement*, Penguin Books, Sydney, 1986, p 51. The Australia First Movement, although overtly racist in their espousal of anti-Semitic and anti-Asian views, did support Aboriginal activists. Their anti-imperialism led them to focus on place and land as determining factors in developing national characteristics, hence their interest in Aboriginal culture, and the overlap with the views of Preston and the Jindyworobaks. See Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin, 1996, pp 236-37.
- 30 Preston in McQueen, op. cit., p 146.
- 31 Margaret Preston, 'Art for crafts: Aboriginal art artfully applied', *The Home*, vol 5, no 5, 1 December, 1924, pp 30-1.
- 32 Preston in Ian North (ed), *The Art of Margaret Preston*, Art Gallery Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1980, p 10.
- 33 Preston, 'Art for', op. cit., p 31.
- 34 Preston, 'The indigenous art', op. cit., unpaginated.
- 35 Carved tree marking a grave.
- 36 See Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, pp 97, 119-37.
- 37 See Griffiths, op. cit., p 145.
- 38 Margaret Preston, 'The application of Aboriginal designs', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 31, March, 1930.
- 39 *id.*, 'Away with poker worked kookaburras and gum leaves', *Sunday Pictorial*, 6 April 1930.
- 40 Sydney Ure Smith, 'Editorial', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 31, March, 1930, (not paginated).
- 41 Margaret Preston, 'An art in the beginning', *Society of Artists Book 1945-46*, Ure Smith, Sydney, n.d., pp 14.
- 42 Margaret Preston, 'New development in Australian art', *Australian National Journal*, vol 2, no 6, 1 May, 1941, p, 13; Margaret Preston, 'Aboriginal art', *Art*

- in *Australia*, Series Four, no 2, June, July, August, 1941, p 46; Preston in Sydney Ure Smith (ed), 'Influence of Aboriginal art—Margaret Preston's paintings', *The Studio*, Australia in art edition, vol 124, no 595, October, 1942, p 122.
- 43 Preston, 'An art', op. cit., p 14.
- 44 *ibid.*, 'Australian artists', op. cit.
- 45 Butel, op. cit., p 53.
- 46 Preston, 'Indigenous art', op. cit.
- 47 *ibid.*, 'Application of', op. cit.
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 *id.*, 'Paintings in Arnhem Land', *Art in Australia*, Third Series, no 81, November, 1940, p 61.
- 50 Butel, op. cit., p 64.
- 51 *ibid.*, p 50.
- 52 Preston, 'Aboriginal art', op. cit., p 46.
- 53 Butel, op. cit., p 54.
- 54 Quoted in Haese, op. cit., p 135.
- 55 Smith, Place, op. cit., p 30.
- 56 Haese, op. cit., pp 150-51, 159-60.
- 57 Preston in Smith, 'Influence', op. cit., p 122; see also Preston, 'An art', op. cit., pp 14-15, 18-19.
- 58 See McQueen, op. cit., p 142.
- 59 North, op. cit., p 3; see also McQueen, op. cit., p 143.
- 60 Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, (1980 Boyer Lectures), Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1980, p 32.
- 61 Roman Black, *Old and New Australian Aboriginal Art*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1964, p 123.
- 62 Humphrey McQueen, op. cit., p 161.
- 63 See for example Nancy Munn in Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p 346. Nancy Munn worked with the Warlpiri of the Northern Territory. She found that story-telling and drawing were 'treated as complementary channels of communication; each is a repository of narrative meaning, and the production of one may evoke the other'.
- 64 All his paintings are privately owned. I have been unable to locate any records of gallery ownership. Also, each reproduction in his books states the owner; no galleries are listed. McCulloch and McCulloch's *The Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* (1994, 6) includes those artists who have won major prizes, or whose work has been purchased by national, state, or regional galleries. Ainslie Roberts is not listed. See Alan McCulloch and Susan McCulloch, *The Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p 6.
- 65 Charles E Hulley, *Ainslie Roberts and the Dreamtime*, J M Dent, Knoxfield, 1988, pp 30, 41.
- 66 *ibid.*, p 85.
- 67 I am primarily concerned with Roberts for it was his artwork which was largely responsible for the unprecedented sales of this series. See Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991, pp 71-90, for a discussion on Mountford's textual distortions of the myths he has translated.

- 68 Roberts in Hulley, op. cit., p 86.
- 69 *ibid.*, pp 80-1.
- 70 See E Seppelt, 'A non-Aboriginal painter's view of the Dreamtime: Ainslie Roberts talks to Australian artist', *Australian Artist*, vol, 6 no 1, July, 1989, p 31.
- 71 Ainslie Roberts and Melva Jean Roberts, *Echoes of the Dreamtime: Australian Aboriginal Myths in the Paintings of Ainslie Roberts*, J M Dent, Knoxfield, 1988.
- 72 *ibid.*, p 7.
- 73 Dale Roberts is the daughter of Douglas Lockwood, author of *I, the Aboriginal*, another Rigby publication. (Douglas Wright Lockwood, *I, the Aboriginal*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1962).
- 74 Olaf Ruhen, 'Dreamtime wizardry', *Australian*, 11 May 1974, p 25.
- 75 Cameron Forbes, 'Joy from some myths of the Dreamtime', *Age*, 7 September 1974, p 17.
- 76 Aldo Massola, 'Myths in paint', *Age*, 20 February 1971, p 15.
- 77 Roland Robinson, 'White man's reaction to Aboriginal art', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1966, p 13. This review also contains the interesting snippet that the former Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies was the owner of one of Roberts' Dreamtime paintings. Roberts only exhibited in Adelaide, and at the time of this review—April 1966—there had been only two exhibitions of his work and one book of the Dreamtime series published.
- 78 Aldo Massola, *Bunjil's Cave: Myths, Legends and Superstitions of the Aborigines of South-East Australia*, Landsdowne Press, Melbourne, 1968.
- 79 A P Elkin, "Book Review" of A Roberts and C P Mountford', *The Dawn of Time: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1969', *Oceania*, vol 41, no 2, December, 1970, pp 149-50; A Roberts and C P Mountford, *The Dawn of Time: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1969.
- 80 David Moore, 'The end of the Dreaming', *Bulletin*, vol 94, no 4797, 11 March, 1972, pp 48-9.
- 81 Roberts in Hulley, op. cit., p 80.
- 82 Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt, *The Speaking Land: Myth and Story in Aboriginal Australia*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1989, pp 5-11.
- 83 Moore, op. cit., p 48.
- 84 Roberts in Hulley, op. cit., p 96.
- 85 *ibid.*
- 86 *ibid.*, pp 96-7.
- 87 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993, p 18.
- 88 Hulley, op. cit., pp 71-2, 62.
- 89 *ibid.*, pp 116-17.
- 90 Roberts in *ibid.*, p 118.
- 91 *ibid.*, p 99, see also pp 81, 116-21.
- 92 *ibid.*, p 99.
- 93 Ainslie Roberts and Melva Jean Roberts, *Dreamtime Heritage: Australian Aboriginal Myths in Paintings*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1975, pp 14-15.
- 94 Hulley, op. cit.
- 95 *ibid.*, pp 99, 109, 139.

- 96 *ibid.*, p 109; see Andrew Lattas, 'Primitivism, nationalism, and individualism in Australian national culture' in Bain Attwood and John Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, La Trobe University Press, Bundoora, and National Centre for Australian Studies, Clayton, 1992, pp 56-7; Andrew Lattas, 'Aborigines and contemporary Australian nationalism: primordiality and the cultural politics of otherness', *Social Analysis*, no 27, April, 1990, pp 62-3.
- 97 Roberts in Roberts and Roberts, *Echoes*, *op. cit.*, p 9.
- 98 Roberts and Roberts, *Dreamtime Heritage*, *op. cit.*, p 9.
- 99 *ibid.*, p 10, my emphasis.
- 100 Lattas, 'Aborigines', *op. cit.*, p 62.
- 101 Hulley, *op. cit.*, p 19.
- 102 *ibid.*, p 19.
- 103 See *ibid.*, pp 59, 98, 99-100, 109, 116-17, 139.
- 104 It is one of Roberts' line drawings of a bearded Aboriginal elder that appears on the two dollar coin. The Reserve Bank of Australia did not obtain permission from Roberts to use this. It is ironic that copyright actions previously brought against the Reserve Bank by Aboriginal artists who had had their work appropriated without authorisation for the use on currency, appears to have facilitated Roberts' legally negotiated settlement (see Hardie, *op. cit.*, p 40).
- 105 Kenneth Coutts-Smith in Vivien Johnson, 'A white shade of palaeolithic' in Cramer, *op. cit.*, p 14.
- 106 Andrew Lattas, 'Nationalism, aesthetic redemption and Aboriginality', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol 2, no 3, 1991, pp 314-15.
- 107 C Symes and B Lingard, *op. cit.*, p 214; see also Smith, Spectre, *op. cit.*, p 32.
- 108 Smith, Spectre, *op. cit.*, p 46.