





Anatjari No. 1 Tjampitjinpa (1927-1999), Pintupi, *Tingari at Panmapalinya*, 1980, acrylic on canvas, 159.5 x 126 cm. Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection [1981/0156] \otimes Estate of the artist licensed by Aboriginal Arts Agency Ltd, 2019.



 $\label{eq:mick-norm} \begin{tabular}{ll} Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri (c1926-1998), Pintupi, $Many Dreamings, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 202 x 337 cm. \\ Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection [1978/0037] © Estate of the artist licensed by Aboriginal Arts Agency Ltd, 2019. \\ \end{tabular}$

OUT OF THE BOXES AND INTO THE DESERT

The thing to remember about the start of the painting movement is that there's many origin stories according to where you're standing and what you're seeing. Geoffrey Bardon has his version because he was in the school looking at the honey-ant mural; Kaapa Tjampitjimpa has his because he'd occupied the Old Settlement Office and he had his own group there; and Bobby [West] has his own story that reflects his experience as a young man at the time.

John Kean interviewed by Jason Gibson 2019 [1]

Through the process of exploring the Berndt Museum of Anthropology's (BMA) collections we are constantly reminded about stories of origin. The idea of origins within Aboriginal Australia can stretch across families and back thousands of years – yet we still must seek to celebrate the hand of the teller who reflects the ancestral meaning to new audiences, and the potential for paintings to be the proof of this longevity for future generations. What John Kean highlights in his interview is that the individual is just as important as the collective, even though the collective never sits far from the central point of the individual.

Out of the Boxes and into the Desert is just one particular investigation into the paintings by senior desert artists from the c1970-80 period in our collection. This is the first time that many of these works have been on display due to their previous storage; rolled up in boxes over the past three decades. Artists like Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, Anatjari No. 1 Tjampitjinpa, Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri and Yala Yala Gibbs Tjungurrayi are familiar names in terms of Aboriginal art history and these works were some of the first to be travelled, exhibited and/or acquired through commission, through the support of Mary Macha, John Kean and of course Ronald Berndt. To ensure that we position this exhibition within a contemporary context, we have also included a work by women artists Bessie Nakamarra Sims, Raelene Napurrulu Kennedy and Lorna Napurrulu Fencer. We know that from the early period of art practice it was often easier for women to paint because their narratives were linked to bush foods and therefore open to the public, though they were not as highly regarded as the men until the likes of the Batik makers turned painters at Utopia came onto the scene.

The accumulation of works from the Central and Western Deserts in the BMA's collection are extensive and represent some of the earliest points of production. This has much to



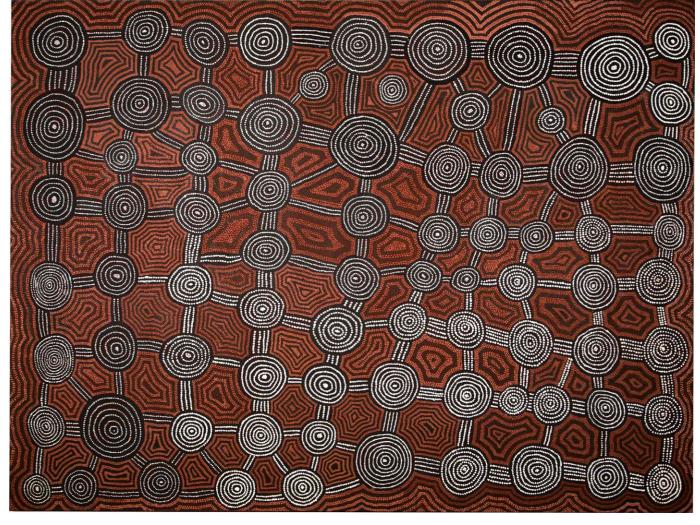
Bessie Nakamarra Sims (c1930-2012), Lorna Napurrula Fencer (c 1925 – 2006), Raelene Napurrurla Kennedy (1957-), Warlpiri, Walya-Walya Jukurrpa (Watersnake Dreaming), 1986, acrylic on canvas, 171 x 190.5 cm. Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection [1986/0097] © Estate of the artist licensed by Aboriginal Arts Agency Ltd and Warlukurlangu Artists of Yuendumu. 2019

do with the relationship that Ronald and Catherine Berndt had with the likes of Robert Edwards and Mary Macha, whose influence as facilitators of art acquisition is evident throughout our collection. It also has much to do with the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB), which was renowned for its innovation in terms of driving a market. As art historian Ian Mclean has often noted, the 1980s were the boom of Aboriginal art, which may be true in terms of sales prices but not necessarily in terms of early production, often viewed as tourist trade material before it reached the art market. This seems to be a time when cultural knowledge transforms painting itself. Here we not only have the individual expression of an origin story – of place, location or site with creation story – but the artistic expression of a community as represented through the individual is evident in the expressive nature of the artist's hand. We need to keep in mind that all of the works presented in this exhibition were carried out by artists who had not had the opportunity to attend a Western art school. As Ian Mclean argues, there was a crisis of contemporary art in the 1970s within the Western art world in Australia which allowed Aboriginal art to be considered contemporary art [3]. Although there is evidence that the original boom in Aboriginal art may have actually occurred in the 1950s, it was during the 1980s when Aboriginal art began to question the idea of Australian art. 'What is

Australian art about it?' writes Mclean and more to the point what are the boundaries that define Australian art? [3] He believes that Aboriginal art has redrawn these boundaries because there is no simple answer to what contemporary Aboriginal art is today. Fred Myers wrote in *Painting Culture: The making of Aboriginal high art*:

Acrylic paintings are intercultural objects, their social biography begins in the Aboriginal communities where they are manufactured but their production is not so simply rendered. The paintings do not fall easily into the category of "primitive art" for example, which is usually reserved for objects as dense with local meaning as these. Deeply resonant of Indigenous culture and value, celebrated for their testimony to the survival of those cultural traditions, they are nonetheless objects as much of the present as of the past [2].

Each work in this exhibition has a deeply held story which was captured at the time the work was made and this has been presented in its current context, with the aim of encouraging the viewer to think about the way we all view these stories so differently. These works allow us to think about the size of the artist's country and the distance between places where



 $Yala\ Yala\ Gibbs\ Tjungurrayi\ (1924-1998), Pintupi, \textit{Possum Dreaming at Tutanya}, 1988, acrylic\ on\ canvas, 182\ x\ 242.5\ cm.$ Berndt\ Museum\ of\ Anthropology\ collection\ [1989/0029]\ @\ Estate\ of\ the\ artist\ licensed\ by\ Aboriginal\ Arts\ Agency\ Ltd,\ 2019.

reserves corralled Desert people and stations allowed them to revisit important sites through stock work. During the period noted there was a transformational process underway in a number of remote communities like Papunya and Yuendumu. The artworks reached substantial size on canvas or almost a 'suitcase-size' on board. The experiments with colour and the depth of the Dreaming (Creation Stories) reflected the recent transition to Western education, which opened up opportunities to explore new mediums such as acrylic paint and Belgian linen, following a long period of using chipboard or whatever could be found. For the skilled hand, creating items for sale and trade was certainly an opportunity for income.

The BMA's history of collecting during the 1980s is similar to that of the National Museum of Australia which included support from the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council. Created in 1973 the members of the AAB were all Indigenous Australians. Its aim at that time was to foster Aboriginal arts, literature, theatre, dance, music, painting and craft, and it also provided grants for Aboriginal communities to employ managers and to help preserve and sustain Aboriginal culture, arts and crafts [2]. The BMA was fortunate through Ronald Berndt's advocacy to be one of the recipients

of the generous donations of artworks from places like Papunya. Such gifts assisted in raising the profile of Aboriginal art in the commercial art market and the BMA is proud to be continuing to advocate for art centre based acquisitions.

This exhibition includes additional engagement between community and the collections supported by Dr Jason Gibson from Deakin University, who has worked closely with the BMA to ensure that the community and families know that these works have been reinvigorated and that their interpretation reflects the living nature of Aboriginal art.

Dr Vanessa Russ

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