

The Dream of Aboriginal Art

The author reflects on the visual richness and symbolic complexity of an art form that has come to occupy a significant place in the history of modernism.

BY RICHARD KALINA



Rover Thomas: Baragu Country, 1989, pigment and gum on canvas, 43¼ by 27½ inches. Courtesy Peter Nahum At The Leicester Galleries, London.

was genuinely surprised to see a piece of modern Western art that seemed to be in synch with his own practice.

Thomas's Aboriginal-centric view of Western art makes sense, for Aboriginal art comprises a worldview every bit as complex (and contained) as ours. But what about the other side of the coin? What preconceptions do we bring to Aboriginal art? Unfortunately, all too often that

“Who's that bugger who paints like me?” asked Rover Thomas, one of Australia's greatest Aboriginal painters, when, in 1990, he first encountered Mark Rothko's 1957 #20 at the National Gallery of Australia. The question is a revealing inversion of the often Eurocentric view of Aboriginal art. Thomas, an artist from the Western Desert, painted seemingly simple, often blocky forms using a range of natural ochre pigments. Like Rothko's, his work is spare yet symbolic and emotionally resonant, and though he lived in a very remote area and came to art late in his life, he achieved great acclaim in a relatively short time. When he visited the National Gallery in Canberra, Thomas was on his way to Venice—it was to be the first time he would leave the country—to represent Australia in the Biennale. He



art is diminished or patronized; viewed as a bastardized modernism, a marginally interesting branch of folk art or simply a subject for cultural anthropology. In fact, the week before I visited “Dreaming Their Way,” a magnificent exhibition of art by 33 Aboriginal women, at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum in New Hampshire (it originated at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.), I mentioned my interest in Aboriginal art, and this show in particular, to a very senior American critic. He dismissed it all out of hand. I don't remember the exact words, but “third-rate lyrical abstraction” would certainly convey his judgment.

The best-known form of modern Aboriginal art, characterized by all-over dotting and associated with desert communities, didn't get started until 1971. That was when a nonindigenous art teacher named Geoffrey Bardon began to encourage the men of Papunya, a small settlement about 100 miles from Alice Springs, in Central Australia, to channel their artistic energies and experience into painting murals on the local school walls using Aboriginal motifs. The final project was a 10-by-33-foot mural of the Honey Ant Dreaming, its form the result of complex negotiations between tribal elders and the painters. The mural was a great success, and soon the men were painting traditional stories and motifs on board and canvas. It should be noted that Papunya was essentially a place of exile officially opened in 1961, its inhabitants trucked in by the government from the outlying deserts so that they might be “civilized.”

The development of the Aboriginal art we know now thus grew from a decision by the elders to reassert, in circumstances of forced assimilation, an Aboriginal identity, especially for the younger generation. The



Emily Kame Ngwarreye: Alhalkere (My Country), 1991, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 47 1/2 by 118 inches. Collection Ann Lewis, Sydney. All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

story of the movement is long, complex and fraught, but complexity and mystery seem to go along with an art whose interpretation is rarely clear, at least for outsiders. The iconography of any particular painting can be very difficult to decode. Even a painting's facture may encapsulate mysteries: many people feel that the dotting technique has been used to overlay and hide secret information, a response possibly to what was deemed the overly accessible work of the early years. (In fact, a strong desire has been expressed by some senior artists and elders that certain early and important works currently in museums be removed from public display.)

Its complicated history has led some critics to judge Aboriginal painting even more harshly from a political point of view than a formal one. While sympathizing with the artists, some writers have seen the whole enterprise as flawed (and one-sided) from its very conception—a nexus of complicity, arrogance, insensitivity, greed and naivete. To these skeptics, the very idea that an outsider could even begin to approach Aboriginal art with anything other than cultural bias is absurd, yet another example of the arrogance of the powerful. As Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis wrote in this magazine, the "drift towards cultural pluralism (multiculturalism) can be seen not so much as enlightened accommodation of other world views but as a violent ripping of signs from the sites of their primary significance."¹ It can, to their way of thinking, only lead to cultural erasure: far better to encourage politically engaged activities, such as Aboriginal radio and television stations.

Certainly Aboriginal art has not gained all that much traction outside Australia (although the opening this past June of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, with its collection of Aboriginal art, might help). I was

told by Brian Kennedy, director of the Hood, and formerly the director of the National Gallery of Australia, that "Dreaming Their Way" had been offered to 50 other museums in the United States. It was turned down by them all.²

Discovering the riches of Aboriginal art was the great surprise of my trip to Australia and New Zealand a couple of years ago. I wrote about the art of both countries,³ but Aboriginal art was too complex a subject: it demands an examination of its own. In today's Australia, Aboriginal art is displayed prominently in museums, galleries and private and corporate collections, as well as in public buildings, tourist shops, airport lounges and street stalls. In fact, it is almost the first thing you see of the country—at least if you fly in by Qantas. Their planes are emblazoned with Aboriginal motifs, and the patterns of the ties and scarves their flight attendants wear are in the colors and designs of classic desert dot painting. Aboriginal art seems to have stepped into a design void and has become, for all intents and purposes, Australia's national visual brand—ironic and rather sad, considering the overall invisibility of Aboriginal people themselves in the society. The generic material is on the whole pretty good, at least from a design perspective, but it wasn't until I encountered first-rate work in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne at the beginning of my trip that the real power of the art hit me. My interest has continued, and the exhibition at the Hood only strengthened it.

It should be noted that not all art by Aboriginal people looks like what we might expect. There are quite a few art-school-trained urban Aboriginal artists who, like Tracey Moffatt, make multimedia, installation or photo-based work. While their art might touch on Aboriginal themes, it looks perfectly at home in a Chelsea gallery or a European biennial. "Dreaming Their Way" contains work by several artists who have roots in



Alice Nampitjinpa: Tali at Talaalpi (Sand Hills at Talaalpi), 2001, acrylic on linen, 54½ by 36 inches. Private collection, North Carolina.

both worlds. Brisbane-based Judy Watson (b. 1959), for example, paints elegantly stained abstractions, such as *waterline* (2001), that juxtapose washes of intense color with carefully calibrated linear elements—in this case a thornlike branch and a large symmetrical shape outlined in white that evokes (to me) an animal head, a shell or possibly a water vessel. Watson is very much aware of the Aboriginal content of her work, but these paintings also sit quite comfortably in the center of late modernist abstraction.

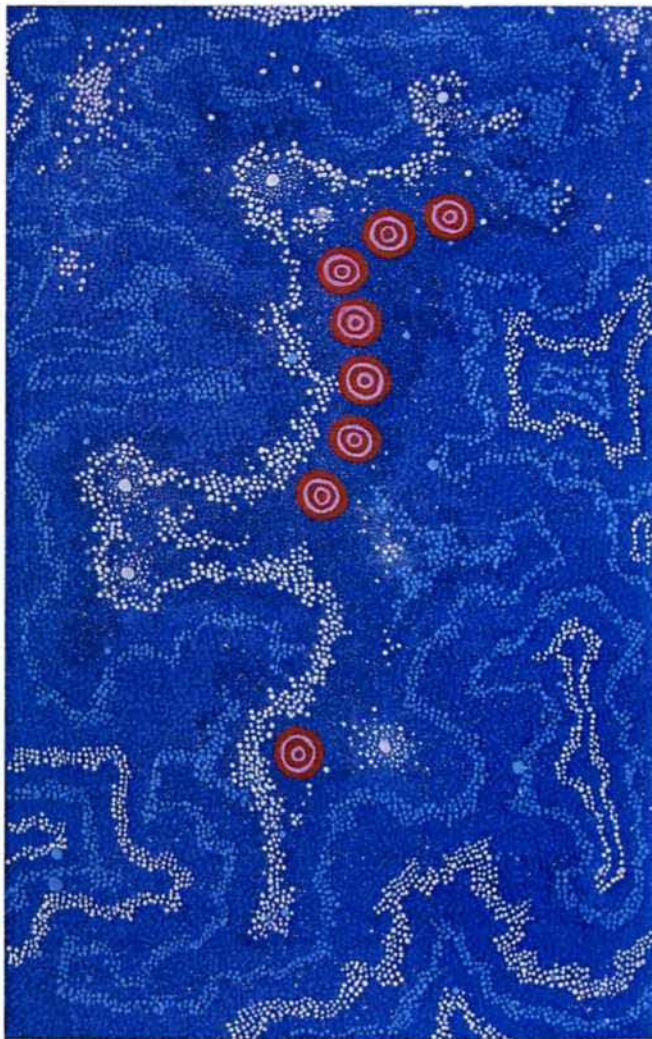
Some of the traditionally oriented artists in "Dreaming Their Way," like Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1916-1996), Queenie McKenzie (ca. 1930-1998),⁴ Gloria Tamarre Petyarre (b. 1948) and Dorothy Napangardi Robinson (b. 1956), are relatively well-known and command high prices on the international market. Kngwarreye's work is the most valuable of them all. Highly prolific—she is thought to have produced some 3,000 works of art in eight years' time—she was also, particularly in her later years, the fre-

est and most overtly expressive of the major Aboriginal artists. A painting like *Anooralya* (Wild Yam Dreaming), 1995, with its rootlike intermeshings of gestural red and pink lines, displays a force and immediacy that is both abrasive and viscerally appealing.

Work like this stands on its own in any setting, but it should be made clear that, at heart, her art and Aboriginal art in general are Australian and are best seen on native ground. Aboriginal art is intrinsically local. It is about places, people, myths and activities that belong to discrete environs. Whether for artists in the Western desert or museum-goers in Adelaide, the outback is alive in the Australian consciousness—the particular colors, the dryness, the emptiness, the sense that human presence makes a small and often shifting mark on the land. Art that embodies a place, not just depicts it, carries with it an aura that is strongest either in that place or in another that is in some sort of dialogue with it.

It is also important to note that in Australia, Aboriginal art is seen as a vital school of contemporary art by museums, collectors, critics and other artists. Depending on curatorial preference, it is either shown in relation to other stylistic groups (as Constructivism, for example, is positioned next to Cubism and de Stijl) or placed in a general regional, genre, thematic or chronological ordering, like any other art. Nonindigenous Australian artists, however, seem to have a particular attitude toward Aboriginal art. Even though they appear uniformly to like and respect it, they give it a wide berth in their own practice. Aboriginal art has some very distinct (and appealing) formal and semiotic characteristics, and in a world where the borrowed or sampled motif is altogether common, you might think

Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi: Milky Way Seven Sisters Dreaming, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 39¼ by 25¼ inches.



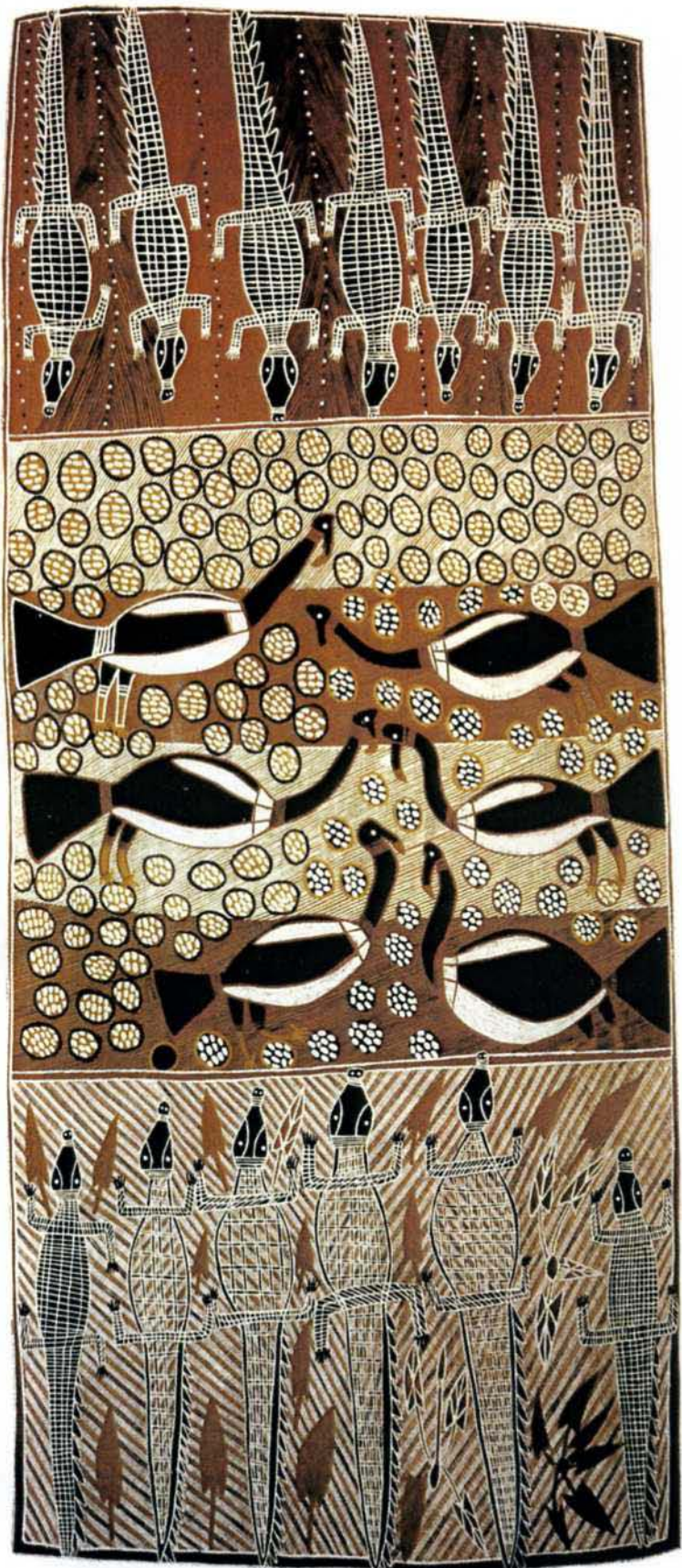
“Dreaming Their Way,” a recent U.S. exhibition by 33 Aboriginal women, presented a worldview every bit as complex as our own.

that nonindigenous artists might wish to avail themselves of something so potentially useful. But artists like Tim Johnson, who do borrow from Aboriginal art on occasion, are rare. This is in marked contrast to the way that New Zealand artists deal with Maori motifs. Those are seen more as common cultural property, not surprising really in a society much more at ease with its indigenous people.

The history of the Aboriginal people and their relation to the rest of Australia lend support to those who see the Aboriginal art phenomenon as a contemporary example of cultural and economic exploitation. White Australia's treatment of its native people is perhaps the culture's most shameful mark (not that the treatment of the indigenous peoples of North America was much better). Australian Aboriginal culture is the world's oldest. Traditionally a nomadic people, the Aborigines have been on the continent for some 40,000 years and have managed to survive quite well in some of the harshest natural conditions in the world. But unlike the Maoris, they proved to be little match for the colonists, and over the years were pushed off their lands, forcibly assimilated, stripped of their culture and, often enough, simply killed. The prejudice and disdain they were shown (and in some quarters still are) is astounding, and not surprisingly the depredations have taken their toll. The levels of poverty, illness of all sorts, lowered life expectancy, family disintegration and incarceration—almost every marker of social breakdown—far outstrip those of the rest of the Australian population. Even now, in a society marked by wealth and a relaxed egalitarianism, Aborigines reside at the bottom of the social order. That an extraordinary art should be able to spring up under such conditions speaks volumes about resistance, resilience and the transformative power of art.

“**D**reaming Their Way” is, as has been noted, a show of women artists. This focus does not arise from quite the same impulses as do other exhibitions that feature only women. It is not as if special attention is being paid to women because of historical underrepresentation or because, as with the Gee's Bend quilters, this is an art made only by women. Women in the desert of central Australia were little involved with painting in the beginning, not really coming into their own until the '80s, whereas women in the Northern Territory began making art in the '60s when their painter fathers included them in the process. In both cases, women have now been an integral part of the history of Aboriginal art for a good many years, and, if anything, are becoming more central to it. I can scarcely think, for example, of a Western woman artist who occupies the same position in her sphere as Emily Kngwarreye now does in the world of Aboriginal art. But Aboriginal art is certainly not exclusively a woman's domain. What is true is that Aboriginal art and life are highly compartmentalized. Women do different things than men do, and that division shows itself in the use of different subject matter.

It is a given that modern Western artists are free to choose whatever subject or style they wish. This is not true for Aboriginal artists—or, at least, traditional Aboriginal artists, for whom a particular subject is something that one has the right to depict by virtue of family, tribal grouping and level of initiation. Central to the meaning of virtually all Aboriginal art is its relation to the cosmological structure of the Dreaming. This is a topic much too complex to detail here, but a crucial concern is topographical variation, which looms large in the spiritual life of a people who traverse and occupy a desert land of large vistas and vast, forbidding empty spaces. Finding food and water is key to survival, and the stories of the ancestors and mythic beings of the Dreaming are connected to important sites and



Dorothy Djukulul: Magpie Geese (Mutyka) and Crocodile, ca. 1990, ochre on bark, 87½ by 39½ inches. Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. © Artists Rights Society, New York.

Old age is highly respected in Aboriginal society, and elders like Kngwarreye have the right to be more experimental in their visual motifs.

pathways. Aboriginal art tells these stories, but not directly, and certainly not directly to us. Aboriginal society holds its multilevel secrets closely—from non-Aboriginals of course, but also from other tribes and family groupings and, within those groupings, from noninitiated members. Men have their private information, duties and tools, as do women. The paintings, while done at the highest levels by both sexes, have quite separate motifs. For example, in the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer society, women are the gatherers, although they do hunt smaller game, while men hunt larger animals, like kangaroos. Paintings that depict, say, the gathering of berries are done by women, as are paintings that either feature parts of women's bodies (mostly breasts) or use the ceremonial body markings that are the province of women.

Gaining the right to depict certain information is very often a function of age. The longer you have lived and the more ceremonies you have participated in, the greater the honor you are likely to have in your family, provided, of course, that you have led an exemplary life. Old age is highly respected in Aboriginal society, and thus elders like Kngwarreye and Queenie McKenzie

have not only wielded considerable power in their communities and served either directly or indirectly as spokespersons for land-rights issues,⁵ but have had the prerogative to be more experimental in their range of visual motifs—in Kngwarreye's case, painting richer and more complex versions of the Wild Yam Dreaming. A younger artist like Abie Loy Kemarre (b. 1972) has less to work with. Her *Body Painting* (2004), with its sinuously deformed white grid on a black ground, is stunning, but tells, to knowing eyes, a much simpler tale. Its power comes largely from its formal character, its masterful play of space and line. But even in that regard, Kngwarreye's paintings are stronger, and grew more so over the years. *Alhalkere* (*My Country*), 1991, a 4-by-10-foot softly dotted expanse of yellows, oranges and reds, seems to breathe as you look at it, pulsing with light, heat and air. *Soakage Bore* (1995), executed four years later, is composed of 12 15-by-20-inch canvases arranged in a grid, each separated by an inch or so of bare wall; its palette has been simplified to white on black, and the dots have given way to a series of tangled, quickly brushed lines.

The early generation of artists from the vast deserts of the central and western portions of Australia, including Rover Thomas, Billy Stockman Tjapaltjarri and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, as well as Kngwarreye, began painting for the wider world in their later years. This is scarcely surprising, since there was no desert dot Aboriginal painting as we know it until the 1970s. The other major school of Aboriginal art, the natural pigment on bark paintings from Arnhem Land in the north, well represented in "Dreaming Their Way" by artists such as Dorothy Djukulul (b. 1942) and

Dorothy Napangardi Robinson: Bush Plum Dreaming, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 34 1/4 by 49 1/4 inches. Kelton Foundation.

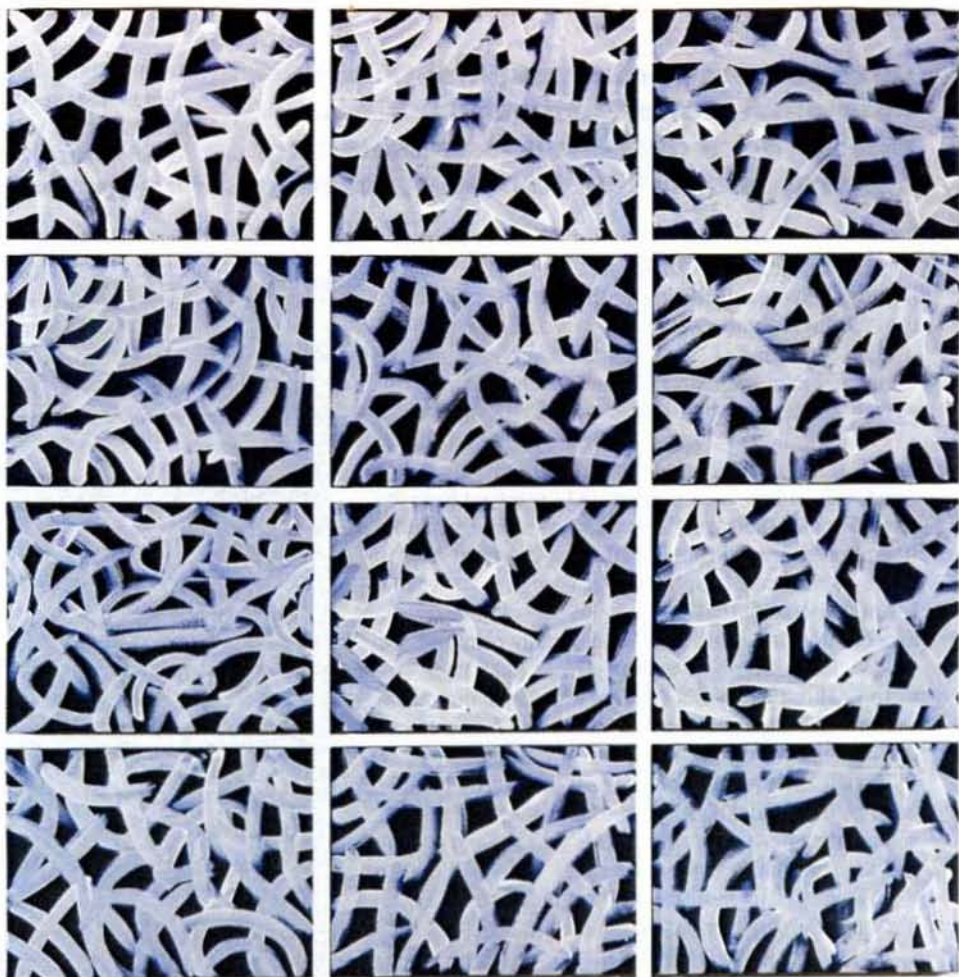


Galuma Maymuru (b. 1951), began earlier; the women of the region started painting in the 1960s. In a land with plentiful trees, bark was an available commodity with which to make art objects. The desert offered nothing comparable. In any case, the idea of durable, portable works of art for public display was not something that figured in the traditional Aboriginal worldview. The art (although there wasn't a separate word for it) of the desert Aboriginal people was body, sand and rock painting. All were closely tied to ceremony and ritual. Body and sand paintings were made for specific ceremonies, then cleaned away or obliterated. Rock painting marked sacred sites—the focus and locus of tribal rites.

Something that has seemed to particularly annoy Aboriginal art's detractors is that the modern paintings are done, for the most part, in acrylics. The use of that quintessentially postwar painting material has been deemed a marker of inauthenticity. Acrylics can have a plastic look, and they tend by their material nature to evoke some aspects of Western postwar art, particularly Color-Field painting and the lyrical abstraction of the '70s. Needless to say, the inhabitants of the remote deserts of Australia had no idea how the nuances of Greenbergian formalism were playing out in New York. They used acrylics because that was what was provided them at the community centers in which most nonurban Aboriginal artists have worked, and because the medium manifestly suited their needs. (They are also often provided with primed and underpainted canvases; in remote areas a trip to the art supply store is scarcely feasible.) Acrylics dry fast, decrease the possibility of unwanted smearing and allow for easy over-painting. Importantly, the flexibility of acrylics makes it possible for the completed paintings to be quickly rolled for storage and transportation without cracking. Acrylics are also the best paints for working on unstretched canvas laid out on the ground, and easily lend themselves to a dotting technique (using Q-tips or brushes) that values clear, clean edges and a smooth, low-relief texture. Finally, these paints are also highly pigmented (an advantage when working on the customary dark grounds), and the colors, even the earth tones, are crisp and declarative. One might speculate on the use of the dark grounds—mostly reds, browns and black. Since the paintings are derived from sand, rock and body art, and the land is red and brown and the bodies are dark, it stands to reason that the paintings would reflect those underlying hues.

The use of modern materials and the assimilation of contemporary Aboriginal art into the larger Western cultural and economic field lend this art a certain hybridity. Rather than seeing that breach of purity as a qualitative (even moral) impediment, it is far more rewarding to value it for the complexity, multiplicity of reference, and ambiguity it yields. Alice Nampitjinpa's (b. 1943) *Tuli at Talaalpi (Sand Hills at Talaalpi)*, 2001, for example, with (in one version) undulating yellow, red and white vertical stripes made up of fat, overlapping dots, can bring to mind a number of Western and non-Western craft and fine-art references, from weaving to Color-Field painting. It also relates to body painting and obliquely narrates the Dreamtime story of Tjilkamata, the echidna ancestor (the echidna or spiny anteater is a native burrowing nocturnal mammal) which is said to have traveled through the sand hills near Walungurru and passed close to two carpet snakes that lived in the waters of the nearby swamp.

Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi (b. 1967), the daughter of Clifford Possum



Emily Kame Kngwarreye: *Soakage Bore*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 12 panels, each 15 by 20 inches. Wolfensohn Family Foundation. All Kngwarreye works © ARS.

Tjapaltjarri, makes densely dotted paintings that combine more abstracted motifs with recognizable ones. In the bottom part of *Goanna Dreaming* (1991), a complex, maplike composition in muted ochers and browns, the camouflaged but clearly identifiable form of a large lizard can be seen crawling along. Her blue, white and red *Milky Way Seven Sisters Dreaming* (1998) can read as an allover pattern, or as a map—in this case a star map. It also gives us the story of the seven Napaltjarri sisters, who were pursued, to their dismay, by a man named Jilbi Tjakamarra. Resisting his advances, they ran away and transformed themselves into stars (those known in the West as the Pleiades), while Jilbi became the Morning Star (in Orion's belt). He continued to chase after them. The eight red and pink targetlike forms in the painting, set among the blue-and-white-dotted heavens, represent the participants in the story.

Over the years a number of Aboriginal artists have developed their art in ways that seem to parallel the stylistic evolution of Western artists. Style may change, but there is always an underlying Dreaming story. This "development" is a complicated business. Kngwarreye's art, for example, certainly changed in response to the great enthusiasm it generated, and she told new stories with increased inventiveness. There is disagreement, however, about whether the looseness of her late work is a result of freedom and exuberance, or reflects the effects of aging and the pressure to produce. In addition, it is thought that the larger tendency of Aboriginal art to become more abstract over time reflects community decisions to not reveal information thought too sensitive—to move certain stories, by means of what we might see as a stylistic shift, further from the public eye.

For whatever reasons change has occurred, the result is an art that

Despite postwar improvements, the Aboriginal world is still under siege. One purpose of this art is passing on cultural information to new generations.

is rarely static. That can be seen in the paintings of Dorothy Napangardi Robinson. Her early work, such as the colorful and intricate *Bush Plum Dreaming* (1996) with its scattering of small flowers, is very much in the traditional Papunya manner of setting identifiable icons against a densely dotted background. By 1998, however, she had developed a quite different approach. Based on the story of the Women Ancestors from Mina Mina, which tells of how their digging sticks emerged from the ground and of their travels to sacred sites, her paintings began to feature delicate dotted webs, lines and grids in white on black and black on white. They have an elegant, restrained quality that feels remarkably akin to certain aspects of Minimalist and conceptually oriented art. Indeed, Robinson's *Salt on Mina Mina* (2002) was lent to the exhibition by Sol LeWitt, who finds, one might assume, affinities with Aboriginal art in his own recent two-dimensional work.

Though the precisely delineated, the overtly maplike and the diagrammatic are important aspects of this art, some artists have allowed a greater gestural and compositional freedom to enter their work. This was the case with Kngwarreye, and it is also true of her niece, Gloria Tamerre Petyarre, whose large *Leaves* (6 by 13 feet; 2002) features white leaf forms that unfurl across a black background, each painted with a single sure brushstroke. There is no preplanning, and the allover patterning creates a richly articulated, sensuous space.

The desert school of painting is better known in the West, but artists from Arnhem Land in the tropical north have been making paintings on bark for an outside audience since the 1930s, frequently in its initial stages with the encouragement of the Christian missions. These paintings are executed on bark in matte natural ochers, the patterns laid down with close parallel strokes. Remarkably detailed and technically masterful, these paintings tend to look more like traditional tribal art—they are a bit drier and more ordered than the desert paintings. Often they contain stylized but quite recognizable human or animal figures, such as the rows of upside-down bats in Dorothy Djukulul's *Warrnyu* (1989) or the geese and crocodiles in her *Maggie Geese (Mutyka) and Crocodile* (ca. 1990). Some artists, like Galuma Maymuru, work with clearly delineated figurative elements, as in *Djarrakpi Landscape* (1996), which refers to a complex Dreaming connected with the area around Lake Djarrakpi, as well as in a seemingly completely abstract mode, as in *Yirritja Dhuwa Gopu II* (2004), a marvelously compact yet expansive composition of diagonally oriented crosshatched bands. (Again, this tendency toward abstraction, in the North as well as in the desert, has been construed as an act of "hiding.")

To eyes accustomed to postwar Western painting, Aboriginal art can seem overly familiar, and its distinctive characteristics therefore easily overlooked. It is true that it is an art of our time, but it is also profoundly an art from another world. Aboriginal art speaks directly to the Western viewer in its formal beauty, and in its very contemporary tendency to layer meaning,

to incorporate in a single work a multiplicity of references and modes of representation. An Aboriginal painting is a shifting, hybrid site, combining diagram, map, story and time line with pure esthetic appreciation. It is not clear and straightforward, not even in the sense of setting up orderly dialectical oppositions. Its ambiguity is structural, inherent in the work.



While the postwar period has led to certain improvements, Aboriginal society is still under siege. One of the main purposes of this art has been to pass on deep cultural information to new generations. Much of Aboriginal art is seen and discussed by people in the community as it is being made. It is also often exhibited in cooperative galleries, and even when potential outside buyers leaf through stacks of paintings, Aboriginal people gather round and talk about the work. Their traditional culture is distinctive with respect to everything from the notion of private property to determinations of familial relationships and the obligations they entail. It is a profoundly conservative culture, one whose greatest wish is to leave no mark on the landscape, to change nothing in a natural world that is, in itself, the timeless expression of the laws and the stories of a people. Writing is not traditional to

Aboriginal culture; its connective tissue is instead the web of kinship and the Dreaming stories. Aboriginal art has proven, by and large, to be an extremely positive force, providing money to remote and impoverished settlements,⁶ giving purpose and focus to many individuals, and allowing for the transmission of information vital to a stressed

is scheduled to open in January 2009. It will travel to the Fowler Museum at UCLA in April 2009, and to New York University's Grey Art Gallery in September of that year.

3. Richard Kalina, "Report from Australia: Down Under No More," *Art in America*, April 2005, pp. 77-85, and "Report from New Zealand: A Change of Empires," *Art in America*, October 2005, pp. 83-89.

4. Birth dates for older Aboriginal people can be imprecise, since the sort of official



culture's cohesion. All of this is valuable in itself, but there is also the fact that the art is of extraordinary quality. Indigenous cultures all over the world produce art and artifacts; few have managed to create a modern art as rich and affecting. □

1. Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, "Aboriginal Art: Symptom or Success?" *Art in America*, July 1989, pp. 108-17, 159-63.

2. American interest in Aboriginal art is lively if sporadic. A newly dedicated gallery at the Seattle Art Museum largely devoted to Australian Aboriginal art opens May 5th. Probably the most important exhibition in the United States of Aboriginal art, "Dreamings, the Art of Aboriginal Australia," was organized by the Asia Society in 1988. It traveled widely, to considerable acclaim. Other exhibitions in commercial galleries followed in the next few years, notably at the John Weber Gallery in New York in 1989. Weber became, for a number of years, an enthusiastic supporter of Aboriginal art. "Icons of the Desert: Early Paintings from Papunya," organized by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University,

Gloria Tamerre Petyarre: *Leaves*, 2002, acrylic on canvas, 70" by 157 1/2" inches. Collection Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan/Seattle Art Museum. © ARS.

interest that would mandate precise record keeping in their lifetimes was absent.

5. McKenzie, from the Kimberly region in Western Australia, was active in the unsuccessful fight to keep mining interests from disturbing the Barramundi Dreaming Place.

6. The money earned from painting sales tends to be distributed by the artist to members of the community, most often to kin. Kinship is not limited to blood relations, and success in the art market can sometimes lead to unhealthy dependencies and pressure on the artist.

"*Dreaming Their Way: Australian Aboriginal Women Painters*" was on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. [June 30-Sept. 24, 2006], and the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H. [Oct. 7-Dec. 10, 2006].

Author: Richard Kalina is a painter who writes about art.