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Aboriginal arts in relation to multiculturalism

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Because of Australia's history as a battleground in which wars were fought and lost, with tens of thousands of casualties and the destruction of many cultures in resistance by indigenous peoples to conquest by invaders, *the first concern in any policy of multiculturalism as a national ideal must therefore be the fate of Aboriginal people.* That this is not always the case is the greatest of all the perils of Australian multiculturalism, always threatening to reduce its proclamations of good intent to what, I am told, can, in the eyes of many Aborigines, seem yet another example of white deceit. Some of the beneficiaries of multiculturalism in Australia do despise the Aborigines as an 'uncultured people'—white racism speaks not only English, but all the languages of Europe—but even those of us who are innocent of this run the risk that, in espousing Australian multiculturalism, we might be seen as fellow conspirators in white hypocrisy (Horne, 1983, emphasis added).

This chapter addresses a number of issues concerning Aboriginal arts in relation to Australia's multicultural society. First, Aboriginal Australia, as a multicultural society in its own right, will be explored before some considerations of Aboriginal Australia's relationship with mainstream multicultural Australia are presented. The problematic relationship between art (or the arts) and culture, as has already been noted by Sneja Gunew, will be examined in relation to Aboriginal society before the central theme of Aboriginal arts and multiculturalism is taken up. All of these issues—Aboriginal multiculturalism, Aboriginal relationships with mainstream multicultural Australia, and the relationship between art and culture—find critical expression in Aboriginal arts.

Aboriginal Australia is itself a multicultural society and has been since time immemorial. At the time of the permanent arrival of the first 'boat people' in 1788, the continent was occupied by some one million people in 250 or so tribes (Tindale, 1974), speaking as many languages in about twice as many dialects (Schmidt, 1990, p. 1). Today, Aboriginal Australia remains ethnically diverse with many new permutations and combinations added as a result of relationships with the new settlers—themselves also of increasing ethnic diversity. Many Aboriginal people today also have multi-ethnic ancestry as a result of the past policies carried out by a number of state governments of forced removals of Aboriginal people onto reserves and missions. In 1938, Yarrabah, for example, the reserve on which I was born, had people from forty-eight different tribes; Palm Island had sixty tribes represented (Tindale, 1938). Thus, many Aboriginal people can trace their ties to a number of tribes and ancestral lands. In north Queensland, for example, traced from their grandparents, one might find an Aboriginal person of Chinese-Kunggandji-Kuku:Yalanji-Irish descent. Traced back to the great-grandparents, it is of course possible to have eight ethnically distinct ancestors including four or five who are from different Aboriginal tribes each geographically remote from one another. Since kinship networks are an integral part of Aboriginal society, it is possible, in the Queensland context, to have uncles, aunties, cousins, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces in Cloncurry, Mapoon, Wujal Wujal, Fraser Island and Palm Island.

To this Aboriginal ethnic panoply can be added the factor of the diverse situations in which Aboriginal people now live, which has a great impact on our culture and identity. At one extreme, there are communities or tribal groups who speak their language and whose traditions and customs are still practised. At the other extreme, there are Aborigines who, for three or four generations, have lived in urban environments and for whom Aboriginal identity is more a matter of their ancestry, upbringing and their heart. These diverse living situations can be broadly categorised as:

- remote-area reserves (as found across the Top End and in central Australia);
- rural reserves (Cherbourg, Point Pearce, Brewarrina, Robinvale);
- rural dispersed (small Aboriginal communities and families scattered in the rural and pastoral regions and sometimes forming 'fringe camps' on the outside of country towns; for example, Mareeba, Wilcannia, Murray Bridge);
- urban communities in large cities (in the larger urban areas these communities tend to concentrate in particular suburbs—Redfern

(Sydney), Fitzroy (Melbourne), Port Adelaide and West End (Brisbane)).

Because the kinship networks are extensive, Aboriginal mobility is high with relatives visiting one another across all of these situations providing cultural and identity reinforcement. Thus, it is impossible and inaccurate to stereotype Aboriginal people according to these situations—and particularly into the categories 'urban' and 'traditional', a separation beloved of so many non-Aboriginal commentators on our affairs. The inference is that 'urban' Aborigines have 'lost their culture' and therefore should not be considered to be 'real' Aborigines (Langton, 1981). Lin Onus (1990, p. 14) also points out not only the inaccuracies of such stereotypes, but also that considerable artistic exchange takes place between Aboriginal artists from both remote and urban areas (see Mundine, 1990, pp. 8–9). This exchange process, often formalised, is also embedded in tradition: 'Artistically, the song lines and trade routes are being rediscovered and fashioned anew'. And, of course, many Aboriginal artists of mixed Aboriginal ancestry have rights to several quite distinct cultural traditions.

This situation also raises one of the greatest bugbears of Aboriginal people: the continuous challenging of our identity. While it is true that many Aboriginal people have minimal Aboriginal ancestry (the so-called 'quarter-castes' and 'octoroons' of yester-year), this was sufficient for them to be officially classified as Aboriginal under the various Aboriginal protection Acts which dominated our collective lives for more than two generations (roughly 1900–1960)—a time which Aboriginal people refer to as 'living under the Act'. Consequently, they were removed to reserves and subjected to the imposition of all manner of restrictions by such legislation (see McCorquodale, 1987, for a succinct summary of the legislation to which Aboriginal people have been subjected since colonisation). It is therefore the cruellest of ironies that, having been identified as Aboriginal for the purposes of this body of legislation and treated as such, these 'fair-skinned' Aborigines should now have their identities questioned and mocked as not being 'real Aborigines'. The point is that these individuals, and many others born of mixed ancestry since the protection era, grew up on reserves or within an Aboriginal cultural and social environment and therefore identify as Aboriginal. It is also the case that many Aboriginal artists who have been raised in such contexts, while identifying as Aboriginal, enthusiastically acknowledge and explore their non-Aboriginal artistic heritage. Gordon Bennett is one such artist who exemplifies this point (Butler and O'Ferrall, 1991).

While there are strong unifying elements in the Aboriginal com-

munity, nevertheless tribal divisions and identities are still strongly maintained, recognised and respected making it inappropriate for individuals to speak on behalf of particular tribal groups on such issues as land, law and cultural heritage without the due authority of the tribal elders. The Aboriginal community, in general, accepts the fact that many people either have been forced to or have chosen to live in urban and settled areas away from their country and have adopted essentially Western urban lifestyles. Aboriginal people often describe this as 'living in the mainstream', an expression made popular by the Aboriginal band, Yothu Yindi.

This brief analysis asserting the multicultural nature of contemporary Aboriginal Australia is necessary before its relationship with mainstream multicultural Australia can be discussed. There is no doubt that Aboriginal people view official policies of multiculturalism, when the 'multicultural net' is cast to include them, with suspicion, and show a great resistance to being 'ethnicised'—that is, simply being seen as just another ethnic group among the many which now comprise Australian society. Indigenous peoples, virtually by definition, constitute the 'First Peoples' or 'First Nations' and demand that their specific status and particular situations be recognised (Sambo, 1993). There is also the issue of much 'unfinished business'. Through the multitudinous acts of colonisation, dispossession, past management policies and marginalisation, culminating in the present legacy of low life expectancy, poor health, high rates of imprisonment, low levels of education and employment and a culture of dependence, there remain a number of issues to be addressed which are specifically between governments (federal and state) and the Aboriginal community. These issues concern the original manner in which the continent was claimed by the British Crown (now only just being addressed by the Mabo decision in the High Court). They are:

- recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, land rights and compensation (which currently extends to concerns about some form of a treaty between the Australian government and Aboriginal Australia);
- recognition and guarantees of indigenous rights in the Australian constitution or through a Bill of Rights;
- reconciliation;
- the possibility of an Aboriginal state (the 'nation within a nation' concept).

While there is a certain confidence in the federal Labor Government's willingness to address these issues (Keating, 1993), this confidence does not extend to the opposition parties, informed as they are by

certain views emanating from such organisations as the Institute of Public Affairs (Brunton, 1993). There is apprehension that the current arrangement, whereby separate departments and agencies at federal and state levels specifically address Aboriginal affairs, might be lost, or at least changed, under a Liberal–National Party coalition government. The Aboriginal community fears being ‘mainstreamed’—that is, it fears the abolition of those agencies for which many Aboriginal people fought in the early 1970s (for example, medical, legal and childcare services) to address their specific needs.

In addition to this log of ‘unfinished business’, is the vital and fundamental difference in the cultural situation of Aborigines compared to those of other ethnic communities in Australia. Namely, that the cultural sources of these communities remain intact in their countries of origin and to which most (political refugees excepted) can, in principle, return, even if only for a brief visit. The same cannot be said of Aboriginal cultures. Many, for all practical purposes, have already had their cultural heritage, as embodied in their land, language and ceremonies, destroyed while those with various degrees of integrity still remaining are suffering. One only need look at the parlous state of Aboriginal languages in Australia. Of the original 250 or so languages only about ninety are still spoken with the possibility that there may only be twenty viable languages at the beginning of the next century. It is estimated that only about 10 per cent of Aboriginal people today speak their indigenous language (Schmidt, 1990, p. 1). This represents an overall language extinction rate of about one per year since colonisation. This surely necessitates policies and support programs which are outside of the domain of multiculturalism and its state and federal funding and service structures (see House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 1992).

This also begs the whole issue of Aboriginal cultural survival and maintenance. Despite official policies of self-determination and self-management (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1990), the covert agenda remains implacably assimilationist. Aboriginal people, through such factors as the denial of our rights to cultural privacy (Fourmile, 1989c), the denial of the rights to own and control important aspects of our heritage (Fourmile, 1989a; 1990), the lack of Aboriginal community cultural facilities (Fourmile, 1991) and because of institutional barriers (Marrie, 1987a; 1989), are denied rights equal to those which other non-Aboriginal Australians enjoy to pursue and promote their ‘ethno-cultural’ identity when they so choose.

The major institutional collections of Aboriginal cultural property and resources are in state museums (Meehan and Bona, 1987;

Cultural Ministers' Council 1993). Thus, important collections of cultural objects bearing clan and totemic designs (important resources for Aboriginal artists wanting to use their own ancestral designs to inspire their own works) are geographically remote from them, effectively rendering them inaccessible (Fourmile, 1989b). In addition, state governments continue to fund the museums in terms of their Aboriginal cultural heritage collections while failing to fund Aboriginal communities so that they can build their own cultural centres and keeping places. It is to be deplored that of all the state capital cities, only Adelaide has a major Aboriginal cultural facility capable of functioning at a state level: the Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute. Thus, the state effectively monopolises and controls precious Aboriginal cultural resources and, by their retention, effectively promotes our assimilation into mainstream society (Fourmile, 1992b). Aboriginal culture has been co-opted and institutionalised by mainstream agencies, both public and private, which then act as the interpreters and mediators to the general public on all things to do with Aboriginal culture and the arts. Our own roles as interpreters of ourselves to others has been usurped. Thus, Aboriginal communities are unable to represent or interpret their cultures on their own terms and in their own ways to others: a severely limiting factor in our ability to participate in a multicultural Australia.

Another aspect of official cultural policies regarding Aborigines is that they tend to focus just on the arts, thus reducing our cultures to their arts and crafts as the most marketable forms of expression. A further consequence of this is that, as any survey of the literature will attest, the Aboriginal visual arts enjoy the focus of attention to the near total exclusion of Aboriginal music and dance. The number of books or articles about our music and dance could be counted on one's fingers compared to the thousands concerning our visual arts. This distortion is also reflected in funding policies (Marrie, 1988). Rowse (1983), with respect to the Northern Territory, notes the grave difficulties that 'settler society', with its political, legal and economic institutions, has in maintaining the modicum of respect essential if Australia is truly committed to admitting Aboriginal society to its multicultural framework. As Rowse concludes:

For settler Australians it will not be adequate to salute 'Aboriginality'. It is both the strength and weakness of that notion that it specifies so little. It may merely acknowledge another ethnic minority within the multicultural panoply. What we need is a commitment to a stronger and deeper pluralism that can take the measure of settler/Aboriginal difference. Pluralism in legal codes is only one concession out of many that settler society needs to make if Aborigines are really to be given a choice not to assimilate. The

Australian multiculturalism of recent years has left us with the innocent illusion that culture can be reduced to artefacts. That will not do if we are serious about Aboriginal choice, for their choice includes the persistence of institutions, and the understandings embodied in them. (Rowse, 1983, p. 82)

Much Aboriginal artistic endeavour is commercially driven, aimed particularly at the tourist dollar (Altman and Taylor, 1990). The visual arts are the mainstay of many community economies (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1989) and many communities also promote dance groups, but both these activities are for outside consumption. However, this is not so much the case for Aboriginal music, drama and literature. The Aboriginal musical, *Bran Nue Dae* (Chi and Kuckles, 1991), for example, enjoys enormous popularity with Aboriginal audiences, many returning again and again. However, with an enormous current emphasis on Aboriginal cultural tourism, one senses that much of the revival and maintenance of aspects of Aboriginal traditions will be dependent on, and therefore modified to suit the needs of tourism. We need look no further than Hawaii to glimpse the end-point of such a dependence relationship and the devastation it has wrought on native peoples and their cultures (Trask, 1993). To avoid this consequence, Aboriginal communities must be able to control tourism ventures to suit their own particular needs and capacities (Fourmile, 1992a).

The commercialisation of aspects of Aboriginal culture is also linked to the generally impoverished circumstances of most Aboriginal communities, dependent as they are on government funding. This has created a culture of dependency (Howard, 1982; Beckett, 1987, pp. 171–210) and an Aboriginal industry for non-Aborigines (Van Oosterzee, 1987). The lack of economic wherewithal and independence has created a certain cultural impoverishment. It is a fundamental tenet of Western democracies that economic independence finances a high degree of political and cultural autonomy. As long as they remain within the law, citizens of whatever ethnic background can enjoy a high level of cultural freedom: as long as they, as a community, can finance it. Thus, many ethnic communities in Australia (but by no means all) have been able to build or finance their own places for religious observance, their own schools, halls in which cultural activities can take place, newspapers, shops, restaurants and sporting clubs in a way in which it has been impossible for Aboriginal communities. Again, this places severe limitations on the ability of the Aboriginal community to contribute towards and participate in Australia's multiculturalism.

In Sneja Gunew's chapter, she briefly discusses the two dominant meanings of culture drawing on the oft-quoted Raymond Williams'

(1984) summary of the various meanings ascribed to the term. For the development of her arguments, she has opted for its more restricted usage—namely, ‘culture defined as the arts’—rather than its more comprehensive anthropological/sociological meaning. Although Gunew herself recognises that arts are always embedded in a sociopolitical context, her usage runs the risk of being complicit with the traditional Eurocentric and elitist view of culture by which the ‘arts’ have come to be considered as a separate and autonomous pursuit distinct from other aspects of life. Consequently, the philosophy of ‘art for art’s sake’ has largely encouraged the arts to evolve into one of Western culture’s most distinctive institutions (Albrecht, 1968). The diametrically opposite situation exists within Aboriginal societies, as Wandjuk Marika has explained:

There is no real distinction for us between art and life; art is the expression of our beliefs, it upholds the laws by which we live, and is an important element in the way in which we relate to the physical world around us. It is an integral part of our lives, not separate as it is so often in the life of Western man, but an important function in our ritual and of prime importance in our learning process. (Marika, 1978, p. 7)

Furthermore, Ronald Berndt has made the point that:

. . . in traditional Aboriginal Australia the arts were closely interwoven and interdependent. Separating them out into individual categories is useful for the purpose of dividing a book into chapters, or focusing on one art form rather than another; but we must not lose sight of the overall linkages, the continuing interaction between them. In that traditional setting, no one art form was more significant than another. (Berndt and Phillips, 1978, p. 53)

Thus, this total integration of the arts into the whole social, religious and economic fabric of Aboriginal existence, where all had to be practitioners in the course of their ‘rites of passage’, is an absolute negation of the entrenched Western ‘art for art’s sake’ ethos. But, it also has to be acknowledged that many Aboriginal people have now become artists in the Western professional sense. They are living their lives as professional artists and adopting much of the Western cultural baggage of what it means to be an ‘artist’. Some Aboriginal artists, while acknowledging their Aboriginality, also wish to be free of the stereotyping and constraints which they invariably attract, and wish to be considered simply as artists in their own right. Referring to such individuals as Trevor Nickolls, Harold Thomas and Tracey Moffatt, Djon Mundine has pointed out that:

While to them their Aboriginality was never in question, and their

art says that in many ways, their white peers strived to confine them within this category. (Mundine, 1990, p. 9)

In resisting non-Aboriginal peer categorisation, such artists often take an internationalist or eclectic approach to their art. Tracey Moffatt's recent film, *Bedevil*, for example, owes much to the influence of Japanese film-makers Ozu and Kobayashi (Stratton, 1993). But, as Lin Onus suggests:

Artists the world over tend to be interested in each other. There is an innate curiosity about different imagery, technology and lifestyle. Creativity in all art forms transcends language barriers and that interest is closely paralleled within Aboriginal Australia. (Onus, 1990, p. 14)

The problem is that, virtually as a matter of policy, the Western institutional, fragmentary and marginalising approach to the arts is increasingly dominating and intruding into Aboriginal cultural life to the point that our cultures are being 'reduced to their artefacts', and that cultural funding policies are encouraging fragmentation, specialisation and individualism (see Marrie, 1988). The process might be defined as one of cultural colonialism. It is one which has not been given adequate attention by scholars (Marrie, 1985). It is apposite here to reflect upon Donald Horne's (1985) discussion of matters of cultural equity and cultural rights about which he expressed the concern that:

. . . the lack of participation in the arts is a predicament unique to modern industrial societies. The exploration of creativity may be achieved only through personal participation and most people are culturally deprived of this experience. 'Art' is something done for them, and to them and can even be used against them, to reinforce divisions between art and life. The healing of that imposed division is a question of equity so enormous that it might be thought of as a kind of cultural revolution. (Horne, 1985, p. 8)

The vast store of wisdom and knowledge of human affairs and the natural world accumulated over more than 40 000 years of continuous occupation of this continent still remains unrespected, unacknowledged and unwanted by the majority of Australians: 'dis-valued by our conventional European outlook' (Stanner, 1979, p. 340). Minds of the calibre of W.E.H. Stanner and T.G.H. Strehlow had barely begun to plumb the depth and grasp the potential of this contribution thus far denied humanity. As Professor Stanner expressed in his Boyer Lectures of 1968, '. . . there is stuff in Aboriginal life and society that will stretch the sinews of any mind which tries to understand it' (Stanner, 1979, p. 228). Adelaide journalist, Paul Lloyd (1986), in reviewing *Kakadu Man: Bill Neidjie*,

writes of Neidjie: 'He is acutely aware that it is black people, not whites, who have the story of how to live in Australia' (Lloyd, 1986, p. 20). And then Lloyd makes a comment which aptly sums up the situation:

. . . in the long run it could prove that whites have more to learn from the original inhabitants than the other way around, not only for giving Aboriginal people a fairer deal at least but for coming better to terms with ourselves and our environment. (Lloyd, 1986, p. 20)

Aboriginal people can ourselves, free of alien interpretation, make contributions to all the major European-defined branches of knowledge in such fields as the arts, philosophy, law, politics, ethics, theology, ecology, sociology and so on, if given the respect and encouragement to do so. As Larry Lanley has pointed out:

For many, many years our ancestors worked out how we should live in this country, how to use everything around us and what to do to keep our relationship with it strong. This is our culture. The whole Aboriginal way—painting, songs, dance, laws, medicine—fits properly with the land. There are many things the Europeans don't understand about the way the bush can help us. These things can help Europeans too when their own way of living makes minds sad. We can teach Europeans all about these things, they are things we have known always. (Lanley, 1980, p. 38)

The role of the arts in Aboriginal society therefore provides one instance of a contribution we could make if we were empowered and resourced to do so. Brokensha and Tonks (1986) in their study concerning the arts in South Australia, while looking at, among other considerations, the qualitative rather than the quantitative involvement of the community in the arts, suggest that the society of 'tribal Australian Aboriginals' might be a 'benchmark society where art and cultural life are inextricably intertwined' (p. 4). Brokensha himself has had considerable involvement with both the study and marketing of Aboriginal arts, and together with Tonks they suggest that:

. . . societies like the Pitjantjatjara can indicate to us the potential for the arts; to integrate into the way of life, to explicate problems of social change, to unify groups around matters of group concern and to provide the opportunities for individuals to extend their creative and emotional levels of experience.

Thus . . . we could use this Aboriginal paradigm, to assess the qualitative involvement of other Australians in the arts and how this involvement relates to cultural development. Whilst such qualitative assessment will of necessity be subjective it is, in our view, necessary to start this task if we are to understand the potential relationship

between the arts and the community. (Brokensha and Tonks, 1986, p. 4)

The integration of what the Western world refers to as the 'arts' into Aboriginal life is so complete that there appears to be no reason why we should have developed a concept of art, as a distinct social institution, with its own body of doctrines which separate it from other social institutions such as politics, economics, education, religion and law. This contrasts with a view held by many that:

. . . in Australia the arts are seen as an activity quite separate from mainstream social, economic and religious pursuits and that the relatively high levels of professional interest and involvement in the arts . . . are not as widely translated into the sorts of deeper group and personal experiences suggested by our Aboriginal paradigm. (Brokensha and Tonks, 1986, p. 5)

At the other extreme, to cite an instance of the disavowal of Aboriginal knowledge, the management of the natural environment in those areas where Aboriginal traditions are still practised is probably unsurpassed, but, as Rowse (1983) points out in relation to a land management scenario involving uranium mining, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the tourism industry and Aboriginal interests:

Traditional knowledge is marginalised in favour of technical knowledge oriented to scientific techniques and the maintenance of a tourist facility. (Rowse, 1983, p. 81)

The National Parks and Wildlife Service when it 'trains' Aborigines for jobs within the organisation 'is subtly redefining the legitimacy of the different kinds of knowledge of the area'.

Earlier, mention was made of the creation of the 'Aboriginal industry', whereby a host of non-Aboriginal people in various ways owe their livelihood to the existence of Aboriginal people. For example, nearly 60 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission's 1446 staff are non-Aboriginal (Maiden, 1993). In the Aboriginal arts industry, commentary on our arts is heavily monopolised by non-Aboriginal academics, critics and publicists. Of the 1300 entries in *A Topical Bibliography of Australian Aboriginal Visual Arts* (Marrie, 1987b) about thirteen were by Aboriginal writers. Fortunately, there has been a dramatic improvement in the last six years with Aboriginal people such as Roberta Sykes, Marcia Langton, Gary Lee, Djon Mundine, Lin Onus, Banduk Marika, Fiona Foley and Brenda Croft regularly contributing articles to exhibition catalogues, art journals and books (see Britton, 1990; Caruana and Isaacs, 1990; and Mundine and McNeill, 1992). Aboriginal curators are also emerging to take responsibility for some

major exhibitions—for example, Djon Mundine (1988) and Hetti Perkins (1991). However, we still remain a people spoken for by others, the consequences of which, in terms of our arts, have been outlined by Loretta Todd (1992), a Metis Indian:

But what of our own theories of art, our own philosophies of life, our own purposes of representation? By reducing our cultural expressions to simply the question of modernism or postmodernism, art or anthropology, or whether we are contemporary or traditional, we are placed on the edge of the dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter its realm of art.

When we assert our own meanings and philosophies of representation we render the divisions irrelevant, and maintain our Aboriginal right to name ourselves. However, when we articulate the dichotomy of the traditional versus the contemporary, we are referencing the centre, acknowledging the authority of the ethnographer, the anthropologist, the art historian, the cultural critic, the art collector. We have to play 'catch up' to the academic and other institutions of art, and we set up an opposition within our own communities that keeps [us] in our position of 'other'. We are caught in the grasp of neocolonialism, in the gaze of the connoisseur or consumer, forever trapped in a process that divides and conquers. (Todd, 1992, p. 75)

This situation is encapsulated by Marrie (1985) when, for the purpose of a proposed book entitled *Killing me softly: Cultural colonialism and the Aboriginal art industry*, he defined Aboriginal art as:

Aboriginal artefacts which appear in a Western art context (for example, in art galleries/museums, exhibitions, art auctions, art/craft and tourist shops, art books, art/craft catalogues, etc.). (Marrie, 1985)

This definition reflected the 'reality that it is by Western definitions and categories that Aboriginal "art" is defined, and the lack of a satisfactory cross-cultural definition of art' (Marrie 1985). In this context, it is worth reflecting upon an observation made by Nancy Williams (1976): 'Just as the role "artist" developed from white buyers' demands for the works of specific artists, "art" is what is sold and Aborigines' judgements of "art" are based on their interpretations of buyers' criteria'. (Williams, 1976, p. 278). The monopolisation of the Aboriginal art industry by non-Aborigines, other than at the level of producers, therefore presents yet another obstacle inhibiting the Aboriginal community's ability to contribute towards and participate in Australia's multicultural society.

Not wishing to end on a gloomy note, the Aboriginal community can take heart from the fact that the status and appreciation of

Aboriginal arts has risen immeasurably in the last two decades. In 1964, Professor A.P. Elkin wrote of the Aboriginal art of central Australia that:

Pictorial art in this region is poorly developed. Cave and rock paintings, which are not numerous, are usually of conventional designs. The naturalistic paintings are crude. Both wooden and stone sacred objects (the *churinga*) are usually incised with concentric circles, u's, arcs and parallel wavy lines. The same designs may have different meanings for different groups; that is, it refers to different traditions.

This poverty of local pictorial art in Central Australia in particular, provides a justification for the lines taken by the Aranda 'school' of watercolour artists. They have deserted nothing, for there was almost nothing in their own art tradition which could be developed. (Elkins, 1964)

In 1988, the National Gallery of Victoria paid around \$200,000 for a large painting from Papunya, now the artistic centre of the region characterised by Elkin as being artistically impoverished. James Mollison, director of the National Gallery of Victoria, described Aboriginal art (with the current focus on the art of the Western Desert) as 'the most interesting art Australia has produced' (Attwood, 1990, p. 58). In 1980 Professor Bernard Smith (1980) expressed the view that the:

. . . black culture . . . for the rest of the world . . . has come to be regarded as more interesting, coherent, and identifiable as a unique human achievement than our own European-derived culture . . . (Smith, 1980, p. 10)

In 1990 'Black art breaks into a white world' was the cover story in *Time Australia* (July 16) and two Aboriginal artists, Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls, were Australia's official representatives at the Venice Biennale (Attwood, 1990). A survey carried out by the Australia Council (1990) in that year established that: 'Half of the visitors to Australia (49%) are interested in seeing and learning about Aboriginal arts and culture' (Australia Council, 1990).

Beside the spectacular successes of our Aboriginal visual artists, in the field of literature people such as Kevin Gilbert, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Jack Davis, Mudrooroo Narogin, Robert Bropho and Sally Morgan are becoming household names. The musical talents of Yothu Yindi, Jimmy Chi and Kuckles, the Warumpi Band, Archie Roach, No Fixed Address, and Maroochy Baramba are now widely appreciated. Ernie Dingo, Lydia Miller, David Gulpillil, Justine Saunders and Boba Maza have regularly featured on stage and in film and television productions. Tracey Moffatt is widely acclaimed as one of Australia's foremost photographer and film-making talents.

The Tjapukai Dance Theatre, based in north Queensland, has won major state and national awards for cultural tourism. Dance productions by the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre Company are regularly toured nationally and overseas. All these people are making proud contributions to Australia's national identity, the multicultural nature of which is gaining international respect as one of the most successful societies in today's world.

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