AFFIRMATIONS of IDENTITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists Resource Kit

Gallery and Artists

Warning
This text might identify Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are now deceased in ways that inadvertently give offence to particular families or communities.

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Thanks also to the following people and organisations because without their time and contributions this resource would not have been possible:

Art Gallery of New South Wales; Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative Ltd; Shirley Gilbert; Dr Vivien Johnson; Rhonnie Toole.

The information on Thancoupie is extracted from a biography prepared by Jennifer Isaacs in 1994.

A note on spelling

The anglicising of Aboriginal words has resulted in many of them having a variety of spellings. The spellings in this resource kit are generally consistent with those used by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Horton, D (ed), Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), but it is acknowledged that there are other spellings that are equally valid.

More (Please link to www.clc.org.au/ourculture/language.asp)
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Galleries and Art Centres
The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative
Ernabella Arts Incorporated
Tobwabba Art Co-operative
Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Association

PowerPoint presentations
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Introduction

The *Affirmations of Identity: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists Resource Kit* was first published in 1999 as a series of books with a supplementary set of 35 mm photographic slides for use in the classroom. The other resources in that kit (which is now no longer available) were: *Protecting Australian Indigenous Art*, and the *Teacher’s Handbook*. These now all appear together in this Aboriginal Art section of the ‘Aboriginal Educational Contexts’ website.

*The Affirmations of Identity: Gallery and Artists* is an edited and updated amalgamation of two books in the kit, titled ‘National Artists’ and ‘New South Wales Artists’. Some of the artists and artworks that appeared in those books are not in this resource because copyright approval could not be obtained.

*Affirmations of Identity* is support material for Aboriginal Studies. It is designed specifically for Visual Arts students and teachers; however, the material is also relevant to other subjects — Australian History and Geography, for example — since it highlights the role of art in the traditional culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as in their continuing struggle.

While this material will help Visual Arts students in their own art study and artmaking, they should always bear in mind the sensitivity of copyright issues. These are discussed in the ‘Considerations for teaching and learning’ section of *Protecting Australian Indigenous Art*.

It is recommended that teachers follow the guidelines in the *Teacher’s Handbook* to make the best use of this kit.

We hope that the discussion of artists, artworks, communities and organisations in these resources will contribute to the breakdown of intercultural barriers and to the enhancement of the process of Reconciliation.
Ian W Abdulla
b. 1947
Language Group: Ngarrindjeri
South Australia

Bike Riding at Night
1994, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm

The artist …
Ian Abdulla was born at Swan Reach, South Australia. His mother was a Ngarrindjeri woman from Point McLeay, which is situated on the lower part of the Murray River, and his father was partly of Afghan descent. As a young man he moved to Gerard Aboriginal mission near Berri, South Australia. His family followed a typically rural Aboriginal lifestyle, taking on seasonal agricultural work in fruit picking and labouring. The meagre income was supplemented by hunting and gathering from the Murray River and surrounding country — a riverland lifestyle that has been irrevocably changed by environmental pollution and government legislation.

Ian W Abdulla began painting in the 1980s, recording rich experiences that have been largely overlooked in the annals of Australian history. He is a very successful artist and his work can be found in many private collections, and in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. While he is in constant demand for exhibitions and private commissions, he says he prefers to walk along Lake Bonney in South Australia’s Riverland.

… and his artmaking practice
Ian W Abdulla’s paintings are a narrative of his life and evoke specific personal memories. He annotates each one with a description of the event. Painting helps him remember his family, friends and people that have now passed away. His bright paintings relate scenes and episodes — often told over several canvases — from his childhood memories, and they look back on community life with humour and fondness. His unique style and perspective bring these remembered times to life, creating the effect of a visual diary. Since he began exhibiting in 1988, Abdulla has become well known for his portrayal of mission life through numerous exhibitions and the publication of two autobiographical books: As I Grew Older (Omnibus Books, SA, 1993) and Tucker (Omnibus Books, SA, 1994).

Brook Andrew
b. 1970
Language Group: Wiradjuri
Cowra, NSW

Reconstructing More Whiteman’s Kitsch
1994, acrylic and ink on 200 screenprinted tea towels

The artist …
Brook Andrew was born in Camperdown in inner Sydney and grew up in western Sydney, attending high school at Penrith. His family is from Erambie mission in Wiradjuri country and he regularly visits relatives in and around Cowra. He has always expressed himself through art and was encouraged to draw as a child by his grandfather, mother and father. After leaving school, he started a course in marine biology, but was persuaded by his mother to fulfil his artistic ambitions. In 1991 he began a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. After graduating in 1993, he supported his art practice by lecturing at the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, on Aboriginal art and culture.

While at university, Andrew participated in numerous group exhibitions, including The Post Modern Experience at the Casula Powerhouse Museum. Group exhibitions since then have included True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag (Australian and UK touring exhibition); Wring at The Performance Space and Claiming Title (US touring exhibition) at the Australian Museum. Solo exhibitions have included Dispersed Treasures (1996, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter UK) and contention (1999, contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide). In 1994, Brook started working as a tutor/councillor at Jumbunna, the Aboriginal centre at the University of Technology, Sydney. In 1995 his work was included in Australian Perspecta, a biennial exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW highlighting new art movements, methods and ideas in contemporary Australian art. The Art Gallery of New South Wales, the University of Western Sydney and the Australian Museum have acquired works by Brook Andrew for their permanent collections.

… and his artmaking practice
Brook Andrew’s work subverts stereotypical notions of Aboriginality in a positive way: it looks to the future and involves a so-called ‘alternative’ view of Australian history (that of Indigenous Australians).

Since colonisation, images of Aboriginal people have tended to originate in the dominant culture of ‘white Australia’. Aboriginal artists and ‘cultural activists’ often strive for self-representation in the arts in order to replace those negative, stereotypical images with ones created by Aboriginal people,
from the ‘inside out’. Brook maintains that his art practice is primarily part of this process of self-representation, directed at both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences: ‘My work has always been in an interdisciplinary style, politically and socially provoking. It mainly deals with the subverting of any institutionalised ways of thinking, representation and labelling of Aboriginality, people and culture’.

Andrew notes that there are ‘many Kooris out there representing themselves in all fields’. However, the media and academia often bypass their achievements to perpetuate negative and/or ‘ethnographic’ images. Andrew’s work confronts and contradicts neo-colonialist and ethnocentric ideologies surrounding Aboriginal culture — ideologies that often materialise as kitsch.

The use of screenprinted tea towels in Andrew’s 1994 installation *Reconstructing More Whiteman’s Kitsch* exemplifies his work’s relationship with kitsch and the everyday.

Andrew uses materials and images that most people can identify and relate to; his work enters the safe (suburban) haven of the kitchen, the hearth and the home. Indeed, when coupled with a potent undertone, the familiarity of these domestic objects has the ability to shock. In Andrew’s ‘advertisement’ for *Australian Perspecta* 1995, the audience are invited to call ‘Gwange Cook’ on a number which emerges as Invasion Day, 1788. The work comments further on today’s consumerism that encompasses and devours every feature of our lives — not only goods, but also images, concepts and people.

Andrew’s university education has enabled him to explore and experiment with new technologies and media — photography, computer technology, screenprinting and sculpture all contribute to his interdisciplinary style. Specific projects may take advantage of a particular method while others might juxtapose contrasting media. When he includes text in the work he plays on mainstream expectations that a mystical story must accompany ‘authentic’ Aboriginal work. He cites the focused spatial composition and ‘clean lines’ of eminent artists Rover Thomas and Fred Williams as influential in his work. Andrew says his work reflects his connections as a Koori with the local community, and as an Aboriginal person with all Aboriginal people: ‘Aboriginal art is a powerful movement that promotes self-representation and affirms the survival of Aboriginal nations all over Australia.’

*More* (Please link to [www.brookandrew.com](http://www.brookandrew.com))
Bronwyn Bancroft
b. 1958
Language Group: Bundjalung
Northern NSW

*You don’t even look Aboriginal*
1991, gouache on Stonehenge paper, Art Gallery of New South Wales

The artist …
Originally from Tenterfield in NSW, Bronwyn Bancroft is renowned as a visual artist and textile designer. Her artistic career began at a Presbyterian Sunday school where Bea Moreton, a teacher, fostered her passion for art.

Bronwyn Bancroft gained the Higher School Certificate in 1975 and then attended the Canberra School of Art where she graduated with a Diploma of Visual Communication in 1980.

Her experiences during her tertiary education as one of the ‘first wave’ of Koori artists to gain recognition led her to further explore her Aboriginality when she moved to Sydney in the
early 1980s. While in Sydney, she became involved in the Aboriginal Medical Service’s fashion parades, culminating in the 1987 Aboriginal Design show *Australia Down Under*. This show travelled to Paris where the all-Aboriginal contingent of models and designers showcased at *Au Printemps* department store. The show was successful in giving international exposure to Aboriginal fashion and design.

In 1985 Bancroft started her company *Designer Aboriginal Pty Ltd* and opened a shop in Rozelle, Sydney. The shop ran successfully for five years, selling Aboriginal fabrics and fashions as well as training Koori women in fabric and jewellery design.

Bancroft’s textile design *Campfire Calling* was chosen to be part of *Australian Fashion*, a contemporary art exhibition held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. The Powerhouse Museum has acquired Bronwyn’s component of the Paris exhibition *Australia Down Under* and, in 2000, exhibited the pieces in an exhibition titled *Koori Culture*.

Bronwyn Bancroft was one of the ten founding members of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in 1987. She had her first solo exhibition in 1989. In 2007, The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October, featuring the works of many of Boomalli’s founding member artists including Bronwyn Bancroft.

Since 1989, her paintings have been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including several solo shows at contemporary art spaces such as Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in Melbourne, Craftspace in Sydney and the Jan Weiss Gallery in New York (*The Urban Aboriginal* in 1993/94). In 1994, she was named the Australian candidate for the UNICEF – Ezra Jack Keats International Award for Excellence in Children’s Book Illustration. More recently she was awarded the May Gibbs Fellowship for children’s book illustration. Bancroft’s work has been represented in numerous group exhibitions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian artists, and of indigenous and non-indigenous artists from around the world such as *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery)* in 1993. Her fabrics and paintings are included in both public and private collections. Aside from her artistic commitments, Bancroft has held executive positions as Chair of the Aboriginal Arts Management Association, as a member of the Visual Arts Committee of the NSW Ministry for the Arts and as a Council Member for the National Gallery of Australia.

Bronwyn Bancroft was granted an Australia Council Fellowship from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board for the period 1999–2000.

**… and her artmaking practice**

Bancroft’s work involves interpretations of her Aboriginal identity together with issues relating to the struggle of humanity to exist without destroying itself and the world. As she wrote in 1990:

‘When I draw and paint, I just absorb myself in imaginative lines, textures and dots. This creates a passage to freedom and to creating visual stories that mean something to me. The things that I create are all personal stories, some understood, some not … I just allow my creative drive to take me on continuous journeys that enable me to tell stories from what is instinctively in my heart. The journey to be human, to feel, to be Koori.’ (*Artlink*, 1990)
Bancroft’s work also directly addresses the contemporary political climate in Australia, challenging the racism that pervades our society and the lack of government response to Indigenous concerns such as the need for a treaty. Her work is inspired by ‘everything cultural and Aboriginal’ and she cites the art of indigenous nations around the world, as well as artists such as Kandinsky, Miro and Georgia O’Keefe, as influential to her practice. She describes her distinctive style as a ‘three-dimensional textural understanding through painting’. This style, she notes, has evolved over the years from earlier experimental work and has become ‘second nature’ to her. She says that this developmental approach enables the artist to respond to and work through themes more closely.

Bancroft has constantly campaigned for Aboriginal self-management in the arts. She says that being an artist has enabled her to express herself freely while maintaining self-employment — ‘art is my independence’. Her art is well known through countless commissions for a wide variety of products including posters, publications and computer-screen designs for Amnesty International, Community Aid Abroad and a Federal Government Aids initiative.

Her public profile has meant she has had to develop public speaking skills. This has led to an interest in writing and she is currently developing her own manuscript for a children’s book that she will also illustrate.

While Bancroft remains disappointed at the misuse and misappropriation of Aboriginal art, she says she is proud to be part of a constantly evolving art movement. Aboriginal art is still often marginalised within the Australian arts but Bancroft believes the movement is gradually attaining the elevated position it deserves. As she says, ‘Art is everything to Aboriginal people — the economic, political and cultural’.

More (Please link to www.bronwynbancroft.com )
June Barker  
b. 1935  
Language Group: Yorta-Yorta/Wiradjuri

The artist …  
June Barker was born on the Cummeragunjah Mission on the Murray River. June’s mother’s people were the Yorta-Yorta from the Murray River and Moira Lakes area. June’s father was Wiradjuri, from Waragesda and Darlington Point on the Murrumbidgee River. As a young girl, June moved to the old Brewarrina Mission Station with her family. Although the mission life was harsh, she did have the opportunity to learn ‘Dreaming’ stories from her senior Aboriginal aunties. June relates stories, such as ‘Garnie the Bark Lizard’, ‘Ammorilla the Desert Pea’ and ‘Moongangarli the Googar (Goanna)’ to Aboriginal and other interested people, and she has recorded a tape, *Now I’m passing these stories on to you*. June and Roy Barker set up an Aboriginal Culture Centre at Lightning Ridge and together they work to pass on their culture artistically and orally.

‘… We are holding a lot of mission history. These branding irons we found in the rubbish heap after the Mission was closed. We saw these brandmarks burnt on everything, from horses, cows and bulls to wood. “AP” stands for Aboriginal Protection. “A” [with a crown symbol] means Aborigines come under the Crown (King or Queen from England)’.

*More* (Please link to [www.gadimirrabooka.com/storytellers.php](http://www.gadimirrabooka.com/storytellers.php))
Roy Barker  
b. 1928  
Language Group: Muruwari  
Northern NSW

The artist …  
Roy Barker was born on the old Brewarrina Mission Station. His mother had been taken as a girl from Bulgandramine Mission on the Bogan River, near Peak Hill, and sent to Brewarrina Mission.

His father, Jimmie Barker, was one of the last speakers of the Muruwari language. Before his death in 1972, Jimmie Barker recorded on tape hundreds of hours of stories and songs and words of the Muruwari. Martin Thomas, a historian with the National Parks and Wildlife Service of NSW, has described his feelings when he listened to the tapes:

‘These revelations, so immediate 30 years on, convey a sense of loss as layered as the proverbial onion and similarly conducive to tears. It’s a reminder that the past is not so distant as we often assume. Much of the knowledge Jimmie Barker conveys was gleaned in his early years with Muruwari elders on the Culgoa River. Some were in their 80s in 1910 when Jimmie was a boy. Their births would have coincided with or even predated European arrival in that part of the world. Years later he went out to verify their stories of conflict and massacre. He found bones, teeth and musket balls still lying in the dirt’. (Thomas, 2000)

… and his artmaking practice  
In his art practice, Roy Barker continues the skills of carving and moulding weapons and tools that were taught to him when he was a boy by senior Ngemba and Muruwari men at the Brewarrina Mission Station. Craftsmen such as Billy Campbell, Hero Black and Albert Kelly passed on skills that they had been taught by their elders.

Roy Barker’s work shows that Aboriginal traditions and their attachment to land have been modified by colonisation, but they have endured.

Barker works mainly in gidgee and mulga woods, but he also uses coolabah, sandalwood and gum. The protocols of creating and using the weapons are highly complex. The range of weapons includes many different kinds of boomerang and spear, as well as the nulla-nulla (hunting and fighting club), boondie (throwing club for hunting), lil-lil (throwing club for fights) and woganurra (hand-to-hand fighting club). Barker also makes yam sticks and coolamons (used by women for gathering bush foods) and clap sticks. He says he enjoys sharing his experiences and culture with Aboriginal people and with the wider community.
Gordon Bennett
b. 1955
Queensland

Sleeping Man, Hanging Man (After Robert Gober)
1993, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

The artist …
Gordon Bennett was born in Monto, Queensland, and now lives and works in Brisbane. His mother is Aboriginal and his father English. Bennett became aware of his Aboriginality when he was 11. He left school when he was 15, completing an apprenticeship in fitting and turning. He then worked at Telecom (Telstra) for about ten years before deciding to pursue a long-standing interest in art by commencing studies at the Queensland College of Art in 1986. He graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Gaining recognition for his uncompromising paintings and installations, he had his first solo exhibition in Brisbane in 1989. Since then, Bennett has exhibited in a multitude of solo and group exhibitions, nationally and internationally, including the 1992 and 2000 Biennales of Sydney, and the International Biennale in Venice, Korea, China, Nouméa and Cuba. In 1991, Bennett won the prestigious Moet & Chandon Australian Art Fellowship.

… and his artmaking practice
Gordon Bennett works in a variety of media including video, installation, painting and drawing. Setting an Aboriginal perspective against the dominant non-Aboriginal version of recent Australian history, he makes works that contain a number of dialogues. They discuss the juxtaposition of two cultures: two interpretations of history, religion, racism and identity. Although Bennett’s work addresses fundamental questions of colonisation, he often approaches these subjects in a personal manner through exploring issues of his own identity and experiences. Viewers are drawn into the work and are forced to question their own ideas about the definition of Australia as a post-colonial nation.

Bennett has a refined sense of art history and his theoretical framework is heavily influenced by contemporary deconstruction theory. He also alludes to classical sculpture and religious iconography. The use of dots in many of his paintings and in his video work draws on both traditional Aboriginal painting styles and the dot screen of contemporary reproduction technologies, thus conceptually linking Aboriginal and European ‘fields’ of representation. His works are literally and metaphorically about the language of art, culture and racism.

The historian Henry Reynolds claims that ‘Black memories are too deeply, too recently scarred’ to ‘forget’ the past (Reynolds 1982, p 201). This is reflected in Bennett’s depiction of the historical and contemporary experiences of Aboriginal communities, an example of which is ‘Sleeping Man,
*Hanging Man*’ which starkly portrays a situation of injustice and conflict comparable with America’s Deep South or South Africa’s years of struggle.

Namiyal Bopirri
b. 1930
Language Group: Galwanuk-Liyagalawumirr
North East Arnhem Land

Guruwana Story
1993, earth pigments on bark, 220 x 80 cm

The artist …
Namiyal Bopirri was born and has lived all her life in North East Arnhem Land. She began her artistic career as a weaver (having been taught this craft by her mother) and has been selling her distinctive tightly woven and brightly coloured pieces for more than 30 years. Through assisting her late husband Tony Djikululu, she learnt the techniques of bark painting and was ‘given’ his stories. Like several other Yolngu women (Yolngu are Aboriginal people from east Arnhem Land), Namiyal Bopirri began to paint independently and to gain recognition as a painter in her own right. Since 1991, her work has been included in several major exhibitions, and in 1993 she was awarded a fellowship from the Australia Council.

… and her artmaking practice
Namiyal Bopirri’s work is primarily concerned with the Wagilag Sisters creation narrative and Guruwana, which is her country on the northern end of the Hutchinson Strait. The distinctive wayanaka (oyster beds and itchy caterpillar that often appear in her work are features of the rocky saltwater environment and can be seen in Guruwana Story (The Fish Trap). These images, along with other creation beings or ‘ancestors’, come from Bopirri’s knowledge of her Yolngu culture and her experience gathering bush foods.

As well as weavings and bark paintings, she sculpts and paints dupun (hollow log coffins) using design elements belonging to her people. Although Yolngu women have been involved in the creation of bark paintings for many years, they have only recently received widespread recognition as painters. That is, women’s art practice has been predominantly classed as ‘craft’ and as separate and secondary to the men’s art. Namiyal Bopirri is still one of the very few women producing dupun, a practice that was previously exclusive to men.

More (Please link to www.aboriginalartprints.com.au/ab_namiyalbopirri.cfm )
Euphemia Bostock  
b. 1935  
Language Group: Bundjalung  
Northern NSW

*Contemporary Koori Masks*  
Chicken wire, plaster, painted with mix of powder, ochre and wood glue  
Photo by Kath Burton

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**Possum Skin**  
1992, white on black, 100% cotton

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*The artist …*  
Euphemia Bostock was born at Tweed Heads in northern NSW. Her Bundjalung heritage is from her mother who was born at Nymboida, near Grafton. Because her father worked for the Department of Main Roads, much of her early life was spent travelling through rural New South Wales. When World War II broke out, the family settled in Brisbane where they stayed until the early 1960s. Euphemia Bostock then moved with her two daughters to Sydney, became involved in the Aboriginal struggle and was present and agitating for Indigenous rights at the original Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972.
It was during this time that she became involved in the arts, working with textiles at the University of Technology, Sydney. Her work was represented in the landmark exhibition *Koori Art ’84* at Artspace in Sydney — an exhibition that signalled the emergence of a powerful Koori voice through the visual arts.

Bostock’s designs were features in a series of fashion parades in Sydney and Paris that were organised by the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern in the mid-1980s. At this time the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative was established and incorporated, with Bostock joining as a founding member.

Euphemia Bostock has been involved in many exhibitions with Boomalli, including *Recent Works* with her daughter, Tracey Bostock, at the Craftspace, Sydney. One highlight of her artistic career was an exhibition in Paris, at *Au Printemps* in 1987, where her fashion garments were enthusiastically received. Her textile design *Possum Skin*, from which Boomalli derives its logo, was featured in *Urban Focus* at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. In 1993 she was awarded a full Fellowship from the Australia Council through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Unit.

In the 1990s Euphemia Bostock was a director of the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association (NIAAAA). This an organisation, dealing with copyright protection and advocacy, was instrumental in establishing a significant legal precedent concerning copyright breach which resulted in the High Court awarding a payment for cultural damages.

Euphemia Bostock has exhibited extensively, in Australia and overseas, and is still active in Indigenous art organisations.

…and her artmaking practice

Whether she is working in sculpture, textiles or mixed media, Euphemia Bostock responds to the movement and texture of the materials as she designs and develops her work. Her sculptural works in glass, cement and wood explore the dynamics of contrasting surfaces, forms, densities and textures. She says that because her art is abstract it does not fit stereotyped definitions of ‘Aboriginal art’ that are based on notions of what is deemed ‘authentically Aboriginal’ — usually art from regions that are remote from the cities. She defines ‘Aboriginal art’ as ‘work produced by an Aboriginal person’.

The influences on Bostock’s practice range from early NSW Aboriginal carvers of trees, boomerangs, spears and other ceremonial and utilitarian works, to contemporary sculptors from around the world. She describes her inspiration as ‘a mixture of everything — people in and around my cultural memory’. While her Aboriginality remains fundamental and constant in her work, her style changes as she is always experimenting with new media and combinations of media. She credits her success to the support she has received from the community through organisations such as Boomalli and the Aboriginal Medical Service. She says ‘If I can get there, every Koori no matter what age can do it’, and she hopes that her work will encourage other Aboriginal people to express themselves through the arts. She aims her work at a wide audience and hopes that through exhibiting she can help assert and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal art practice today.

More (please link to
Robert Campbell Jnr
1944–1993
Language Group: Ngaku
Kempsey, Northern NSW

Death in Custody
1987, acrylic on canvas
81 x 120 cm

Aboriginal Tucker
1987, acrylic on canvas

The artist …
Robert Campbell Jnr was born in Kempsey, NSW and had a typical rural Aboriginal childhood as part of an extended family, living in close contact with the bush and coastline of Ngaku country. He attended school on Burnt Bridge Aboriginal Mission until he was fourteen. He first learnt to draw by making images on boomerangs that his father carved from local wattle and mangrove woods. He would draw the images of animals, kangaroos and birds and his father would then trace the images with red hot wire to burn them into the wood. His father was well known as a boomerang carver.

For many coastal Aboriginal communities at this time, the sale of arts and crafts to tourists helped supplement incomes based on insecure employment opportunities. Although he continued to draw and experiment with painting, and sold some landscapes that he had painted in gloss paint on cardboard, Campbell did not have the opportunity to receive further art training at this time. He moved to Sydney to make a living and worked as a labourer and factory hand and in other manual jobs.
Returning to Kempsey in the 1980s, Campbell began painting on canvas and board, developing the unique and distinctive style for which he is now renowned. His work quickly gained acclaim and by 1987 his works were included in exhibitions such as *Aboriginal/Australian Views in Print and Poster* at the Print Council Gallery, Melbourne. In the same year, Campbell held the first of six annual solo exhibitions at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney. His 1991 solo exhibition also travelled to the Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London. Since 1987, his work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including *A Myriad of Dreaming* which toured Harvard University and galleries in America in 1990.

Major public and private galleries, including the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra have acquired his work. His paintings have appeared in numerous exhibitions at the National Gallery including *Flash Pictures by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists* in 1991 and *Urban Focus: Aboriginal and Islander Art from the Urban Areas of Australia* in 1994.

Robert Campbell Jnr’s success encouraged an awareness of cultural and artistic continuity among NSW Aboriginal communities. In 1989, he received an Aboriginal Arts Board Grant to travel to Ramingining, Arnhem Land, to work with Yolngu artists.

Campbell fostered artistic talent within his own community and encouraged the establishment of Kempsey Koori Artists, with whom he exhibited in 1988 at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney. His achievement and influence as an artist prompted many tributes when he passed away in 1993.

**… and his artmaking practice**

Robert Campbell Jnr drew on traditional art styles and techniques such as dot painting, cross-hatching and X-ray art, sometimes combining these techniques in one piece of work. Full of bright colours and with an ‘overlay’ of dots and lines, his paintings are busy with active figures. Campbell’s canvas is often divided into sections, each depicting a scene in a political or historical sequence. Works such as *Deaths in Custody* relate ‘case studies’ in Australian social and political history from an Aboriginal perspective. His portrayal of political leaders and of subjects such as racial segregation in small country towns led John Kean of the Museum of Victoria to describe Campbell’s work as conceived ‘within the framework of Indigenous resistance’.

Campbell also portrayed his favourite country and western singers, and everyday life in the Aboriginal community.

Often the present and past are juxtaposed on the same canvas, bringing the transformations of the Aboriginal experience over two centuries sharply into focus (eg *Aboriginal Change of Lifestyle*). A distinguishing characteristic of Campbell’s human and animal figures is their necktie-like motifs. These have been explained both as representing the restrictive and conformative nature of twentieth-century Australia and as reductive versions of the depiction of internal organs by bark painters from Western Arnhem Land.

Isabell Coe
b. 1951
Language Group: Wiradjuri
200 km west of Sydney

Redfern Dreaming
1994, coloured inks layered on acid-free card

The artist …
Isabell Coe was born at Erambie Mission, Cowra, in Wiradjuri country. After leaving school in 1968, she travelled to Sydney where she enrolled in an art college at Manly. However, her artistic vocation had to be temporarily deferred during this period. The early 1970s in Sydney was a significant period for the Aboriginal community. Coe was heavily involved with numerous community initiatives including the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Housing Company and Murawina Pre-school. The establishment in 1972 of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra (portrayed in her work Tent Embassy with Mum Shirl) was a sign of the political turmoil of the times. After this period she again found time to pursue painting and participated in classes for Aboriginal artists in 1983 at Randwick TAFE. This original group of twelve artists eventually grew into the Eora Centre, Visual and Performing Arts, Redfern, now the Eora Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Chippendale. (please link to www.eora.net/default03.htm)
Coe then returned to Cowra as a teacher, establishing the first Koori art classes as part of Skillshare. Her first solo exhibition, held in Cowra in 1988, was the first in Cowra by an Aboriginal artist. During this period she undertook a number of commissions, including the illustrations for *Windradyne – A Wiradjuri Koori* written by Mary Coe, and promotional material for the Department of School Education. She then returned to Sydney to assist the Aboriginal Children’s Service. In 1992 she was arrested for occupying the old Parliament House in Canberra during protests to mark the twentieth anniversary of the original Tent Embassy. Also in 1992 she exhibited at First Draft West, Sydney, and exhibited at Cowra (with H J Wedge) and at Leichhardt Council. In 1994, she was granted a Fellowship from the Australia Council that enabled her to work on and exhibit a large number of paintings in ink in a group show at Boomalli. Isabell Coe is the claimant in the Wiradjuri Land Claim that was precipitated by the Mabo decision of the High Court in 1993. This case failed in the courts.

… and her artmaking practice

Although Isabell Coe has been expressing herself through art all her life, it was only after her training at the Eora Centre that she began to work professionally as an artist. Her work encompasses a wide range of interests within Aboriginal history and culture. She cites Albert Namatjira as an aesthetic influence, but it is the knowledge and skills of Wiradjuri elders such as Harry ‘Buck’ Williams, Uncle Frank ‘Doc’ Simpson and Uncle Joseph ‘Sunny’ Simpson that have inspired her as she was growing up and throughout her adult life. Although her style has changed and evolved, her paintings have always remained anchored in the reality of both contemporary and historical issues affecting Aboriginal people.

She often builds up layers of coloured inks onto acid-free cardboard. This method enables the artist to translate ideas into artwork very quickly, but she can also build up the image over months, adding layer upon layer. Coe also goes on to develop certain ideas using oils and acrylics on canvas. She has explored many different media throughout her career, and is interested in sculpture and writing, as well as illustration.

Isabell Coe describes her message as the portrayal of Aboriginal history since colonisation, the genocide and loss of land, and the struggle of a 200-year war — a war in which the visual arts have become increasingly used as a weapon. Her work is a process of relating her peoples’ history (‘telling it as it happened in the past, for the future’) as well as a personal process of ‘therapy’. As she states, ‘Our Dreamtime has turned into a nightmare; we are in a healing period and this [the art] is part of my healing’.

She has dedicated her work for the Aboriginal Curriculum Unit to Mary Coe, her youngest sister, who, she says, ‘has inspired me, supported me all of her life and throughout my life’.

More (please link to www.eniar.org/news/ate1.html)
Brenda L Croft
b. 1964
Language Group: Gurindji
Northern Territory/Western Australia

Billie — Flowers, Knees and Cigarette
From the Strange Fruit series, 1994
Layout stat colour print, 29 x 23.5 cm

The artist …
Brenda L Croft was born in Perth and has lived in several places throughout Australia. Her people are the Gurindji of the Northern Territory, who are acknowledged for initiating the Land Rights movement through an eight-year pastoral strike at Wave Hill beginning in 1966. Although her father was taken away as a child (in accordance with Government policies of the time) Croft has been able to maintain strong links with her extended family since the early 1970s when her father Joseph (c. 1926–1996) was reunited with his mother Bessie.

In 1985, Croft moved to Sydney and commenced her studies in art at Sydney College of the Arts. During her early days in Sydney, she worked with various Indigenous community organisations and media including Radio Redfern/Skid Row. Along with nine other Sydney-based Indigenous artists, Croft was a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in 1987; in 2007, The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October, featuring the works of many of Boomalli’s founding member artists including Croft. She was Boomalli’s Coordinator and then its General Manager. She later returned to Perth to take up the position of Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. She went from there to become the Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art in the National Gallery of Australia in 2002.

Croft has been extremely active in the Indigenous arts and culture nationally and internationally. Her achievements include overseas residencies, participation on many boards and advisory committees, curating influential art exhibitions (including the 47th Venice Biennale (1997) and Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art), commissions, consultancies and lectures in Australia and abroad. She is an accomplished artist with work exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions, nationally and internationally; including in the 1992 Biennale of Sydney, the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale, the 1999
Melbourne International Biennial and the 1999 Venice Biennale. Her work is held in public collections including those of the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

... and her artmaking practice
Brenda L Croft describes her heritage as the stimulus for her creativity as an artist, curator, writer and lecturer. She began exhibiting her work in 1986. Working in photographic mixed media, she is well known for her powerful images of urban-based Indigenous people, especially Kooris living in Sydney. Her method is collaborative: her ‘subjects’ appear at ease in familiar surroundings, but this does not diminish their strength and resolve. In this way, Croft’s images contradict popular perceptions of Indigenous people that were influenced by a history of studio and documentary photography.

The concept of the Strange Fruit series developed from a variety of sources:
• from a line in the song ‘Strange Fruit’, sung by Billie Holiday, relating to the tales of lynchings of African-American people in the Deep South of USA — ‘Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh, then the sudden smell of burning flesh’
• from a line in the poem by First Nations Canadian writer Cheryl L’Hirondelle underlining her despair at being ‘invisible’ and mistaken for white by virtue of her skin pigment yet in her heart and soul knowing who she is — ‘but what kind of strange fruit would you call someone, who’s white on the outside but red to the core?’
• from heroes among Indigenous people in Australia, such as Walyer who was a Palawa resistance fighter in Tasmania in the early 19th century. Although she led her people in uprisings against the colonisers, she is given the barest acknowledgement in history texts
• from childhood memories associated with specific sights, sounds and scents.
• from talented women of colour who are separated by time and geography, yet have similar stories that have not been heard or told often enough
• from Croft’s family (on both sides): mother, aunties, grandmothers
• from the way in which Indigenous men and women are categorised — falsely, incorrectly, inhumanly and separately.

Part of the text and song are incorporated into Croft’s work. She has stated:

‘We are not Strange Fruit to be classified at some scientific whim. However, simultaneously we are Strange Fruit; hybridised, surveyed, subject to experiments both physical and psychological. Yet we refuse to go under, disappear or be silenced. We learn to thrive and move beyond the limitations of others. It hurts, but we do it.’

More (please link to www.nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/00000002.htm)
**Destiny Deacon**
b. 1957  
Language Group: Kuku/Meriam Mir  
Northern Queensland

*First Wish, Second Wish and Third Wish*
1995, *Three Wishes* triptych, bubble jet prints from Polaroid photograph, 85 x 50 cm each

The artist …
Destiny Deacon was born in 1957 in Maryborough, Queensland and was raised in Melbourne. She now lives in Brunswick, Victoria. She came into prominence as a photographic artist when she first exhibited her photographs at the Melbourne Fringe Festival in 1990, and since then has been involved in numerous group exhibitions, including the 1993 Australian Perspecta, and several solo shows in Melbourne and Sydney. In 1993 Deacon travelled to the Havana Biennale with the exhibition *Tyarabarrbowaryaou II: I shall never become a white man*, and to Johannesburg for South Africa’s first Biennale in 1995. Deacon exhibited a reconstruction of her living room at the 1996–97 Asia Pacific Triennial, at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane.

Her work has been acquired by several State collections and the National Gallery of Australia. She also writes, lectures, makes videos, performs and broadcasts on radio. She has been a tutor in the English Department at Melbourne University and has hosted a weekly radio program (*Not Another Koori Show* on 3CR).

… and her artmaking practice
Primarily working in photography and film, and drawing her imagery from many sources, Destiny Deacon uses her work to confront stereotypical perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the city. She achieves this in a quirky and humorous way, depicting scenarios from the suburban everyday, from popular culture and from fiction. Like Brenda L Croft’s work, Deacon’s photographs are often collaborative; the ‘models’ are friends and the end product reflects ‘a collective Indigenous experience’ (Perkins, 1993a). Using friends and relatives and a personal archive of props including black dolls, kitsch crockery, souvenirs, tea towels and other knick-knacks, Deacon illustrates, condemns, makes fun of, and arouses contempt for, cultural and racial stereotyping. Deacon shoots her photographs on polaroid film and then manipulates and enlarges them using bubble jet, ink jet and laser prints.

More (please link to [website](http://www.nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/00000003.htm))
Mini Heath
b. 1955
Language Group: Biripi
Taree, NSW

Design for Murrumbidgee Agriculture College representing college land and agriculture features
acrylic on canvas board

The artist …
Mini Heath was born in Taree — Biripi country — in northern NSW. He later moved to the Hunter Valley. Attending art school in Newcastle for eight months enabled him to explore various techniques and media, but he is essentially a self-taught artist. As Heath says, he acquired his skills ‘on the job in commercial art’. After completing his first commission for Awabakal Aboriginal Co-operative in 1977, he became one of the first Aboriginal artists in New South Wales to explore the commercial potential of their artwork: designing T-shirts, posters and many other products. He was a screenprinter for 17 years, selling his work through a market stall, and his designs were used for promotional material for many Aboriginal initiatives including the Aboriginal Medical Service, Aboriginal Legal Service and the Redfern All-Blacks.

Heath built on his screenprinting and painting skills so he could create more personal artworks and gradually he turned more to the natural world for inspiration.

In 1985 Heath won the inaugural NSW Aboriginal Artist of the Year Award. In 1987 he travelled to Paris with Euphemia Bostock and Bronwyn Bancroft for the 1987 Australis Down Under fashion show which displayed Aboriginal designs on fabrics, and featured Aboriginal models and Aboriginal dancers.

The National Gallery of Australia and private galleries have Heath’s work featured in their collections.

In 1987, Heath moved to Mallabula, a hamlet in Port Stephens, where he became a Sites Officer for the Worimi Land Council. He has conducted workshops covering Aboriginal art, culture and music in schools, colleges and community centres throughout Australia and overseas.

… and his artmaking practice
Over the twenty years or more that Mini Heath has been practising as an artist, his designs and subject matter have increasingly reflected his feelings for the environment. He points out that this is consistent with Aboriginal culture and law which have always gone hand in hand with the
environment. The belief in the need to achieve a balance with our natural surroundings is reflected in Heath’s teaching, in which he attempts to convey a better understanding of life cycles that occur in nature, especially those close to the particular school or group of students with whom he is working.

Heath’s art is grounded in his Biripi heritage, and he employs the symbols and concepts from this rich culture in his work. A symbolic oyster pattern, for example, can represent not only oysters, but also the presence of waterholes, the contours of the land, and cloud and tree configurations. Heath emphasises the potency of such beliefs, and that he cannot paint symbols that he is not entitled to ‘know’. However, contrary to notions prevalent in Australian society, these belief systems are not rigid or limiting to the artist. Heath, for example, has developed his own contemporary style around his spirituality.

As an alternative to words, Heath uses his paintings to make statements about his feelings towards a variety of issues affecting his life. His works are political, but in a subtle way. A painting of koala country, for example, can convey messages concerning the decrease in numbers of these animals, the infiltration of introduced species, and the way Aboriginal people have been dispossessed of this country.

Alice Hinton-Bateup  
b. 1950  
Language Group: Kamilaroi (mother)/Wonnarua (father)  

Ruth’s Story  
1989, screenprint

The artist …  
Alice Hinton-Bateup was born in Redfern, Sydney, but her father’s employment with the railways soon took the family to Broken Hill. When she was fourteen, the family moved to the western suburbs of Sydney, and she has been based there since. Hinton-Bateup recognises her affiliations with both the Kamilaroi — her mother’s people — and the Wonnarua — her father’s people. It is with Wonnarua country along the Hunter River area of NSW that she identifies a particular spiritual connection.

In 1983, Hinton-Bateup pursued a long-held interest in art by beginning her training with the community arts group Garage Graphix. She was trained in screenprinting techniques using fabric and paper. During this time, she designed and printed posters for local Aboriginal groups and began working with local Koori children printing T-shirts and calendars. In 1985, Garage Graphix received funding from the Aboriginal Arts Board.

Hinton-Bateup was involved in the 1992 project Hypothetically Public at the Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Art Gallery. For this project, she created an installation that paid tribute to the Dharuk people, recognising the western Sydney area as ‘their country’.

In 1993, she began a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, in order to explore and work with different mediums, particularly sculpture and public art. Her work Dispossessed was donated to the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and included in the 1994 exhibition Urban Focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from the Urban Areas of Australia.

For Hinton-Bateup, work with young Kooris in local high schools is particularly important for its part in developing their skills and building strength in their own cultural identities.

… and her artmaking practice  
Hinton-Bateup’s work with Garage Graphix included the designing and printing of a range of items including posters, fabrics and even jigsaw puzzles. She cites Mara Guppy, an artist-in-residence at Garage Graphix, as the main inspiration in her practice. Hinton-Bateup’s designs are sourced from
and influenced by her everyday life as an Aboriginal woman and the social issues affecting all Aboriginal people. As a medium particularly suited to delivering a message to a wide audience, screenprinting is often associated with social and political concerns. It was particularly important as a visual messenger to urban-based Aboriginal people during the years of heightened political activity in the 1970s and leading up to the Bicentennial Commemoration of Invasion Day in 1988.

Hinton-Bateup directs her message of social change to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences: she aims to make wider society aware of ‘hidden’ Aboriginal culture — ‘to make known Koori lives and views’ — while contributing to the revitalisation and strength of Koori people and their culture. Hinton-Bateup feels that her art practice has given her strength, and she hopes that her work with young Kooris may help them to develop confidence in their cultural identities.

In her practice, Hinton-Bateup reacts to contemporary issues and events as they happen: ‘I’m dealing with the impact of colonisation from 1788 right up until today’. In 1994, for example, she addressed issues as diverse as athlete Cathy Freeman’s victory lap with the Aboriginal flag at the Commonwealth Games, previous government policies of taking the children away, and alcoholism.

Hinton-Bateup’s sculptural work in clay and wood explores her connections with her father’s country. By interpreting the image of burial poles used in ceremonies through the use of clay, and by reworking the shape of the burial poles, Hinton-Bateup aims to escape the stereotypes associated with ‘traditional’ Aboriginal art that affect both ‘traditional’ artists and urban-based artists working with traditional symbols and meanings. For example, Hinton-Bateup compares the established tributes of Anzac Day with the lack of recognition for Aboriginal people who died fighting for their country.

Hinton-Bateup applauds the success of Aboriginal artists and believes that non-Aboriginal Australians have now begun to ‘sit up and take notice’ of the Aboriginal art movement.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye  
c. 1910–1996  
Language Group: Eastern Anmatyerre  
Utopia, NT

*Untitled (Alhalkere)*  
1990, acrylic on linen, 122 x 153 cm  
Courtesy of Utopia Art Sydney

The artist …  
Emily Kame Kngwarreye was born in Alhalkere in the Northern Territory. She did not see a white person until she was nine years old. She then worked as a stockhand for the pastoralists who had annexed Alhalkere land in the 1920s.

She was active in the land rights movement, and in 1979 she participated in the return of Utopia Station, a cattle property, to the Alyawarre and Anmatyerre people.

Kngwarreye began practising as an artist in the late 1970s, using as her medium the batik that the Utopia community is so renowned for producing. Her paintings have been acquired by major private and public collectors such as the Holmes à Court collection, the Australian National Gallery, the Vatican, and other collectors in London, Europe, and the USA. Kngwarreye exhibited in many exhibitions around Australia and around the world. She received an Australian Artists Creative Fellowship in 1992 and her work was selected along with that of two other Aboriginal women artists (Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson) to represent Australia in the 1997 *Venice Biennale*.

… and her artmaking practice  
Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s Dreamings were Yam, Yam Seeds, Wild Potato, Wild Flowers, Sand Goanna, Wild Orange and Emu. The subjects and themes for her painting included bush food, her Dreamings, Atnetyeye country, Alhalkere country and body designs. As a senior member of the Utopia community, and also the leader of a number of song cycles, Kngwarreye had been painting bodies for women’s ceremonies most of her life. In 1988, she began translating the ceremonial body designs and associated stories onto canvas with acrylic paint. She described her paintings as encompassing a total vision of the whole of her country and associated stories.

She worked in a diversity of mediums including cotton and silk batik, acrylic paint on canvas and printmaking. Commencing with sacred Anmatyerre body designs and site references, she then usually covered the surface with layers of dotted paint. In some works, such as *Untitled (Alhalkere)*, the underlying sacred structure is almost completely hidden. The concern to conceal sacred information from outsiders is essential to many Aboriginal artists.
When Kngwarreye painted, she methodically worked from the edges inwards, applying paint in deliberate vigorous strokes. Once started, she did not break the painting flow until the work was completed. Her style changed over the years, starting with delicate batiks on silk and then intricately layered, dotted paintings on canvas. She then moved into experimenting with vibrant colours and larger brushes, and in later years with simple, gestural paintings. She became a prolific painter, producing more than 3000 paintings over eight years. Perhaps lack of time was why she stopped painting the intricate layered dotted paintings, together with the fact that she was the major income earner for her community.

She was a very innovative and dynamic painter who painted her country and her Dreamings, and events and cultural knowledge that only she knew.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye died in 1996 when she was in her 80s. She had lived on the edge of Utopia Station, near the Simpson Desert, 230 km north east of Alice Springs. This meant that she worked in one of the country’s most remote and isolated regions.

Lawrence Leslie  
b. 1952  
Language Group: Kamilaroi  
Gunnedah, NSW  

Banks of the Mehi  
1994, oil on canvas  

The artist …  
Lawrence Leslie was born in Gunnedah and his family is from the Moree community in Kamilaroi country. Leslie’s artistic inclinations led him to begin screenprinting in 1982. Mainly a self-taught artist, he studied technique at Tranby Aboriginal college in Sydney before printing for Linda Jacks in 1983. Having received a grant from the Aboriginal Arts Board to continue his practice, Lawrence has his first show — a solo exhibition and fashion parade — at the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre in Sydney in conjunction with Linda Jackson. 

The first showing of Leslie’s work was a major success, with the majority of his designs and fabrics being sold at the opening. The national gallery of Australia was among those acquiring work and this purchase confirmed Leslie’s position as a leading textile designer. During 1983 and 1984 he participated in several group shows at leading arts centres, including the Sydney textile Museum and Australian Craftworks. As well as these works for exhibition, Leslie also began supplying his designs to retail outlets, designers and private collectors. 

In 1985 Leslie moved to Alice Springs. He participated in exhibitions at the Araluen Arts Centre there and with the aboriginal Artists gallery in Sydney. In the same year, he was able to further a long interest in Tiwi designs by working with the artists and printers on Bathurst island. This facilitated a technical and cultural exchange between Leslie and the Tiwi artists. Leslie then moved on to Ramingining, Central East Arnhem land, where he set up a print workshop for local bark painters and other artists. Exchanges of this type are particularly important in that they enable Aboriginal people of different backgrounds and regions to discuss and build on common experiences. 

Returning to Moree in 1989, Leslie participated in the Gamileroi–Moree Mob exhibition at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative and the Moree Regional Art Centre. Living and working in Moree, Leslie was instrumental in the establishment of Yurandali Artists, the local artists’ printmaking cooperative. He exhibited with Jim Stanley at Moree Plains Gallery in 1993 and participated in untitled?, the 1994 NSW Aboriginal Artists show at Boomalli. Leslie’s work Mute Yuli Baia, possum-skin cloth, was also included in Urban Focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from the Urban Areas of Australia at the national gallery of Australia. In 1995, Leslie returned to Ramingining to continue the print workshop there.
... and his artmaking practice
Lawrence Leslie sources his designs from the Kamilaroi country where he grew up. He interprets the features of the rivers and countryside in a contemporary medium and style. His practice has similarities with that of many other Aboriginal artists in that it involves the dual process of recovering histories and practices of the past, and adapting and creating traditions for the future.

He says that his work leads him back to his culture — the culture that had been lost for hundreds of years because the older people were not allowed to pass it on to younger generations.

The Aboriginal peoples of NSW suffered mass dispossession of their lands and culture, and languages such as Kamilaroi are not widely spoken today. Leslie has researched the language as well as the traditional art practices of his people, and he uses the insights he has gained to inform his artworks.

Peta Lonsdale
b. 1972
Language Group: Kamilaroi
North West NSW

The Koori Flag
1993, acrylic on canvas board

The artist …
Peta Lonsdale’s family is from the Kamilaroi nation in the Warrumbungles — an area which has now been declared a national park. Her people were forced off their lands to escape capture and massacres. (The bones of the deceased were frequently offered for sale to museums, collectors anthropologists and archaeologists.) The family moved around the state to survive, finally settling in the lands of the Dharuk people of Western Sydney, where they have lived for the past five generations.

Lonsdale is self-taught. She began painting professionally when she was thirteen years old. As well as doing graphic design and public art, she teaches women’s culture and expresses herself though dance with the women’s group Pemul-Kudjaries, which she co-founded.

Lonsdale has had works in several exhibitions, including sayin’ something and Narratives at Boomalli. In 1994, she conducted workshops with victims of domestic violence to create public sculptures in Western Sydney.

… and her artmaking practice
Peta Lonsdale expresses both the personal and the political in her work. She dramatically portrays the pain of post-colonial Aboriginal histories and experiences. Her paintings have evolved from this perspective to offer a vision for future regeneration. Painting can be a form of healing for Lonsdale, and although her style has been fairly consistent, the mood of each work mirrors thoughts and emotions at the time. In addition to this process of ‘looking inward’, her paintings also take on a more outwardly educative role. She emphasises how art can be communicative, a media ‘tool’ for Aboriginal people.

The mother of two, she credits her family as her main inspiration. A familiarity with the work of Frida Kahlo has also encouraged her to communicate through painting.

In her work, Lonsdale incorporates ancestral figures such as the crow woman. The theme of the power of the natural world has a dual presence in her work: nature as the executor of both justice and healing.
For Peta Lonsdale, the term ‘Aboriginal Art’ is adaptive, encompassing a wide diversity of ways of expressing identities today. Art is one way in which Aboriginal people are evolving new cultures — cultures which are formed by, and spring from, the older ways.
Peter Yanada McKenzie
b. 1944
La Perouse, NSW

North of Broome
1990, 35mm colour transparency

The artist …
Peter Yanada McKenzie cites the La Perouse Koori community as his people. He was born there and has lived there all his life. His mother was from La Perouse and his father came from Tamworth. The family worked in the tourist trade in La Perouse, which meant that Peter was involved in the arts from a young age. After leaving school, he began working in the packaging and printing industry, but he wanted to further his artistic skills so he took up part-time study.

From 1962 to 1969, McKenzie studied a broad range of art techniques at East Sydney Technical College. This enabled him to begin working as a commercial artist. Apart from this initial period of formal training, he mainly gained ‘on the job’ experience, designing and illustrating in commercial art studios.

In 1982, McKenzie received an Aboriginal Overseas Study Award. This enabled him to travel to Massachusetts, where he studied commercial illustration, printmaking and photographic techniques. As a photographer, he has documented many political and sporting events and day-to-day life in the Koori community, particularly La Perouse.

McKenzie has also worked in a curatorial, administrative and lecturing capacity in several Sydney institutions since 1983, including the Powerhouse Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW. In 1989, he accompanied six Yuendumu artists to the Paris exhibition Magiciens de la Terre, where they created a ground painting installation. Aside from his work in the visual arts, McKenzie is a musician and has been involved in many bands over the years as a songwriter and guitarist.

… and his artmaking practice
‘Yeah, I come from La Per!’

As a Koori photographer documenting his own people, Peter Yanada McKenzie has had access to many local situations and events, and this familiarity with the community has enabled him to convey very ‘real’ images of Kooris — images of a type seldom seen in the wider community. His photographic series on the La Perouse Football Club, for example, conveys the pride and sense of community between the players and their supporters.
McKenzie’s style has remained fairly constant. He mainly works in black and white but he has experimented with various techniques and occasionally uses colour transparencies. He says black and white film is an expressive medium to work in — conducive to conveying the mood of each image more easily. Additionally, by being involved in the development process, he can manipulate the image more easily. He says he has been influenced by photographers such as Josef Koudelka and Eugene Smith.

As a practising artist for more than thirty years, McKenzie has worked in many different capacities and in a wide variety of mediums. Although he is well known as a photographer, he has worked in watercolours, pen and ink illustration, acrylics, computer imaging, printmaking, jewellery design, pottery and graphic design.

In the past Aboriginal people have suffered from misrepresentation and the persistent use of negative images. Many Koori artists have now gained or retained control over their own images. McKenzie believes that Kooris ‘are there technically and artistically, using new technologies’, and that a truth emerges from their images — a truth that does touch society at large. He defines Aboriginal art as art produced by Aboriginal people: ‘The work is categorised intentionally and it [‘Aboriginal content’] doesn’t have to be obvious’.

More (please link to www.nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/0000000c.htm)
Pantjiti Mary McLean
b. mid-1930s
Language Group: Ngatatjara
Northern Territory/Western Australian border

Collecting Bush Tucker
1994, acrylic, natural pigment and plant dye on canvas, 160 x 350 cm
courtesy of collection Tandanya, National Aboriginal Cultural Institute

The artist …
Pantjiti Mary McLean grew up in Ngatatjara country near Docker River on the Northern Territory/Western Australian border. She later worked as a stockhand on sheep stations, taking leave whenever possible to visit her son at Mount Margaret Mission and her daughter who was put into Sister Kate’s and various other institutions. Today, Pantjiti Mary McLean lives in the small community of Ninga Mia, Kalgoorlie, where she is highly respected as an elder, artist, and singer/speaker of Western Desert language. She has been a proficient craftsperson since childhood but only began to paint, draw and sculpt later in life with the support of the Wartu Kutju project and her mentor Nalda Searles. Her large distinctive figurative works have been featured in several group and solo exhibitions. She was the winner of the Telstra 12th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 1995.

… and her artmaking practice
In a similar manner to the method used in Western Desert dot paintings, Pantjiti Mary McLean paints with the canvas flat on the ground and uses the dot technique to make the background. The backgrounds of her works differ only subtly as all contain a bright mixture of red, orange, yellow and white dots. In contrast to the backgrounds, she adds richly ornamented snakes and other animal forms and stark, black, human figures. Each work tells a different story, describing the drama and magic of a utopian life prior to Western cultural influence and depicting luminous spring waters, goannas etc. The works are often whimsical and there is the authority and knowledge of a tribal elder in every stroke.

Collecting Bush Tucker refers to Pantjiti Mary McLean’s memories of her childhood in the Western Desert. Her community had little contact with non-Aboriginal people at this time and they had access to most of their ancestral lands. Bush tucker was plentiful (this work shows a goanna, kangaroo and the carpet snake Kunea captured for eating) and illnesses such as diabetes, cancer and tuberculosis were virtually unknown. Her landscapes are busy with figures hunting, gathering and celebrating life in a bountiful environment.

More (please link to www.aboriginalartprints.com.au/ab_marymclean.cfm )
Ginger Riley Munduwalawala
mid-1930s – 2002
Skin Group: Mara
Ngukurr, South East Arnhem Land

This is my country — This is my story
1992, acrylic on canvas, 144 x 150 cm
Winner of The Alice Prize, The Alice Springs Art Foundation, 1992

The artist …
Ginger Riley Munduwalawala was born in Ngukurr, South East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. His skin group was Mara and he was a community elder. He painted his story since about 1987, drawing on his vast knowledge of the creation narratives and characters that formed the area. An accomplished artist, Munduwalawala exhibited in national and international group and solo shows from 1989 and his work is held in the collections of all six State galleries. In 1993 he won the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Art Award. He was the first Aboriginal artist to be given a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1997.

… and his artmaking practice
Dividing the canvas according to sequential events or the different guises of creation beings, Ginger Riley Munduwalawala related the story of his mother’s country in the Limmen Bight area. Certain figures — such as snakes Bandian, Garimala or Kurra Murra, the Gori-y-mar ancestral people and Wawalu the Rainbow Serpent — appear regularly. The omnipresent sea eagle Ngak Ngak watches over the Limmen Bight river and Four Arches hills.

Munduwalawala’s unique style of painting graphically alerts us to the complexity of many Aboriginal spiritual beliefs: the existence of spiritual beings as ancestors and as part of the here and now. His use of brilliant colours and a sweeping style make his work highly distinctive. His work is often on a heroic scale that is dazzling in its virtuosity.

More (please link to
**Dennis Nona**
b. 1973
Badu Island, Torres Strait

*Imanoh*
1992, linocut, 58 x 38 cm

**The artist …**
Dennis Nona is originally from Badu Island in the Torres Strait and he grew up on Badu and Thursday Islands. There he learnt to dive for pearls and crayfish, the main industry of the area. He was not encouraged to do traditional art although he did practise traditional carving on wood. He did not pursue an interest in art until he moved to Cairns to complete his high school education. Here, away from the Torres Strait, Nona felt strongly about retaining his culture through art. He began research and artistic studies at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Centre at Cairns TAFE College in 1992. In 1995 Nona graduated from the Australian National University’s School of Arts with an Associate Diploma in Printmaking and subsequently embarked upon a Masters in Printmaking at Griffith University. Nona’s work has been included in several exhibitions including *New Tracks, Old Land*, which toured galleries in the USA and Australia in 1993–94 and *Ilan Pasin ('This is our Way'): Torres Strait Art in 1999–2000*, which was the first comprehensive Torres Strait Island exhibition to tour nationally. His first solo show was held at the DELL Gallery, Queensland College of Art in 2005 and toured other Australian and overseas galleries. His work is also represented in collections in most State galleries, including the National Gallery of Australia and several overseas institutions.

**… and his artmaking practice**
In keeping with his father’s Papua New Guinean heritage, Dennis Nona refers in his work to the coastal Papuan designs and symbols used on masks, drums and other trading items. He creates lino prints, works on paper and canvas, and carves sculptures. The skill involved in his linocut prints derives from his wood-carving experience on Badu Island: they are often highly intricate, representing traditional stories about marine creatures — stories that he has absorbed since childhood. These, Nona explains, are ‘reflections of our knowledge and understanding, who we are from time immemorial, the core factors of our culture and our customary law to be handed down from generation to generation’.

*More* (please link to

Lin Onus
1948–1996
Language Group: Yorta Yorta
Upway, Victoria and Sydney, NSW

*And on the Eighth Day ...*
1992, acrylic on canvas, 182 x 245 cm

The artist …
Lin Onus grew up in Belgrave in Victoria. After leaving school at 13 he worked as a motor mechanic and at his father’s art-and-craft souvenir shop in Belgrave. In 1974, he began painting landscapes using the photorealist style that became his trademark. A self-taught painter and sculptor, he had his first show in 1975 at the Aborigines Advancement League in Melbourne, and then exhibited regularly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He was included in exhibitions such as *Koori Art ’84* and *Art and Aboriginality* in 1987. Onus was one of the pioneers of the urban movement of Aboriginal artists and one of the first urban Aboriginal artists to be recognised outside their community. Pivotal to Onus’s artistic development was his visit to Gamardi outstation near Maningrida in Arnhem Land in 1986. He worked with Aboriginal artists and was given the authority to incorporate traditional imagery and cross-hatching into his landscapes. He returned many times, gaining knowledge that infused his work. In 1993, he was made a member of the Order of Australia for his services to the arts as a painter and sculptor and for his promotion of Aboriginal artists and their work. His work represented in all the State gallery collections and the National Gallery of Australia. From August to October 2000 the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney hosted a major retrospective exhibition, *urban dingo: the art and life of Lin Onus.*

…and his artmaking practice
Much of Lin Onus’s work involves enigmatic combinations of Western surrealism and Aboriginal motifs that make statements about the Australia in which he lived. His work examines the dialogue between urban-based and ‘traditional’ Aboriginal culture. *And on the Eighth Day ...* was included in the 1994 exhibition *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag* that toured galleries in Australia and England. Referring to the mission system and other aspects of colonisation, the work depicts two angels flying over Aboriginal land with a Bible, introduced species, boundary wire and a gun in their hands. Despite the issues of colonisation and republicanism raised in his work, Onus delivers his message with humour — note, for example, the toilet duck as representative of unnecessary and useless items.

Onus juxtaposes photorealist landscapes with more ‘traditional’ imagery. His use of *rarrk* (cross-hatching) images from Central Arnhem Land alludes to his deeply felt association with this region,
engendered by his relationship with several of the area’s artists. His time in Japan as an artist-in-residence in 1989 also had an influence on this prolific artist’s work.

Maria Josette Orsto
Other names: Parpitayiyu, Mangie
b. 1962
Skin Group: Jarpijapinga (March Fly)
Tiwi, Bathurst and Melville Islands

The Kurlama
1995, fabric design

The artist …
The Tiwi people live on Bathurst and Melville Islands, approximately 80 km north of Darwin. The Tiwi have a rich and unique artistic and cultural tradition and are well known for their sculpture, particularly the tutini (grave-poles) associated with the Pukumani mortuary ceremonies. In the late 1960s, Tiwi artists began to express their artistic heritage through ‘new’ media. Screenprinting fabric has been particularly successful, with Tiwi Designs being established at Nguiu on Bathurst Island in 1969.

Maria Josette Orsto’s father, Declan Apuatimi, was a highly innovative sculptor, carver and painter as well as a respected ceremonial leader of the Tiwi. Orsto began learning from her father as a young girl and was later able to participate in and complete much of his work. She was the first Tiwi woman to exhibit her work as a solo artist at a commercial gallery (Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, in 1989) and has participated in numerous group exhibitions throughout Australia. In 1993 Orsto was commissioned to paint a work for permanent display at Darwin Airport, and her work is represented in private and public collections.

… and her artmaking practice
Maria Josette Orsto is a highly versatile artist currently working with acrylics and ochres on canvas, gouache on paper, and in lithography, etching, batik, fabric design, wood sculpture and painted ceramics. Like many Tiwi artists, including her sister Carmelina Puruntatameri, Maria Josette Orsto continues to carve and paint ironwood sculptures.

‘I find more life in doing art work. My father, Declan Apuatimi taught me to paint and carve. I am happy that I became an artist. My designs are growing stronger. I am always building up a new design in my head — sometimes I combine old Tiwi designs with my new ones’.

— Maria Josette Orsto

**Hetti Perkins**
b. 1965
Language Group: Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon
Central Australia

Hetti Perkins as ‘Billie’ from *Strange Fruit*, 1994
by Brenda L Croft
cibachrome photograph
Courtesy of The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased with funds provided by the Young Friends of The Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1994

As one of the few Indigenous curators working in major galleries today, Hetti Perkins aims to promote self-management in the visual arts.

She was born in 1965 in Sydney where she still lives. Although she has spent most of her life in the eastern states, she identifies strongly with her Central Australian community and country. Her commitment to Aboriginal arts and politics began at an early age.

After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1986, she began working at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Sydney where she was involved with exhibitions of Indigenous art from all over Australia. During this time she also travelled to New York with the *Dreamings* exhibition. In 1991 she curated the *Aboriginal Women’s Exhibition* for The Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In 1992, Perkins began working as a curator at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative. She organised national and international exhibitions for Boomalli including *True Colours* which toured England and Australia. Until late 1993 Hetti Perkins also worked part-time as the curator of Aboriginal art at the Art Gallery of NSW, and was involved in the establishment of the Yiribana Gallery. She was co-curator for *fluent* (featuring Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson), Australia’s representative exhibition at the 47th *Venice Biennale* in 1997.

Since February 1998, Perkins has been the curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the Art Gallery of NSW where she curated the major exhibitions *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival and *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art* in 2005.

Part of her role as a curator is to write catalogue essays and articles for art journals. Paying tribute to the diversity and vitality of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, Hetti Perkins has stated that she considers her involvement with the movement to be a privilege. [More](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/archives_2004/crossing_country)
Jimmy Pike  
b. early 1940s, d. 2002  
Language Group: Walmajarri  
Great Sandy Desert, WA

Woman Carrying the Two Boys  
1990, colour screenprint, 76 x 56 cm

The artist …

Jimmy Pike spent the first part of his life in the Great Sandy Desert in central Western Australia. He was born near Japingka, the main jila (permanent waterhole) of his people, the Walmajarri, who are a nomadic people moving from waterhole to waterhole around the desert. Pike’s early life was spent hunting and gathering with his family. During this time he absorbed and learnt ceremony, the country and his Dreaming stories. He did not come into contact with non-Aboriginal people until he was a teenager. Shortly afterwards he went to Cherrabun, a cattle station near Fitzroy Crossing, where he worked as a stockman. Pike’s first experiences of expressing his country through traditional designs were as a wood carver. Although he carved hunting and fighting implements for many years, he did not begin painting and printmaking until 1981. A few years later he set up an isolated camp in the desert, which has since grown into a small community. He is recognised today as a prominent contemporary artist.

… and his artmaking practice

Most of Jimmy Pike’s work is about the land and his bond with it. His spiritual knowledge and close association with his country are reflected in his paintings, prints and the more commercial ‘Desert Designs’ range. The lines and images that purposefully explore the surface of each work refer to ‘journeys of mystical beings’ and stories that Pike experienced as a child.

As well as the ancestral creation beings, Jimmy Pike draws on incidents and events of contemporary life, such as camp life, cars, helicopters, and ships.

His studio is the open air, a table and some shade. He has an arresting style involving brilliant and contrasting colour combinations. His use of intense colours and sinuous lines draws the viewer into and across the canvas, taking them for a visual journey. His prints are just as visually stimulating, intensifying the shimmering, radiating colours of his paintings.
‘Some people got no country. Some people lose their country. We got a country that can be shown in pictures. People been living in that place. The country got names … I get ideas from carving and from body painting. Carvings are like blackfella books.’

— Jimmy Pike

More (please link to www.aboriginalartprints.com.au/ab_jimmypike.cfm
www.artprints.ch/aapn/e/pike_j/fs_body.htm )
Michael Riley
1960–2004
Language Group: Wiradjuri
Central West NSW

Delores
1990, black and white print

Still photography from film ‘Quest for Country’
1993

Three images (untitled) from the Sacrifice series
1992, silver gelatin prints on archival paper, 25.4 x 20.3 cm each

The artist …
Michael Riley was born in 1960 in Dubbo and lived as a child on Talbragar mission, just east of that city. His career as a photographer began in 1982 when he did a photography workshop
at the Tin Sheds Art Workshop, University of Sydney. Riley worked as a technician in the Sydney College of the Arts darkroom and as a freelance photographer before being offered a training position at Film Australia in 1987. He was then employed by Film Australia in 1988. He worked at the Australian Broadcasting Commission and was a member of Blackfella Films, an all-Aboriginal production company. He regularly gave lectures on his work as an Aboriginal filmmaker and photographer.

Riley was one of the founding members of Boomalli (please link) which was formed in 1987 as a studio and exhibition space to address the lack of facilities and support for urban-based Koori artists in the Sydney area. In 2007, The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October featuring the works of many of Boomalli’s founding member artists, including Michael Riley.

He participated in Koori Art ‘84 at Artspace in Sydney, the first exhibition to highlight urban-based Aboriginal artists and also participated in the first exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal photography in Sydney in 1986.

From 1984, Riley’s photographic work was included in numerous group shows, including Art and Aboriginality at the Opera House and Portsmouth (England) in 1988 and Aratjara: Art of the First Australian, which toured to Dusseldorf and London in 1993. He also had several solo shows both in Australia and overseas. His images are included in many private and State collections.

As a filmmaker, Riley worked at Film Australia and in the Aboriginal Program Unit at the Australian Broadcasting Commission. In 1987 while he was still training he made Boomali — Five Koori Artists. He went on to direct and produce further innovative productions both in drama (Poison) and documentary (Dreamings, Malangi, Quest for Country). In Quest for Country, shown on SBS, Riley portrayed his country from his ‘world view’ as an Indigenous and dispossessed person living in contemporary Australian society. Malangi was about a day in the life of the eminent bark painter. Riley also directed An Afternoon in Brunswick, a comedy written by and starring Destiny Deacon, in 1993.

Aside from these major productions, Riley directed several short films and magazine pieces, including comedy segments for Blackout on ABC television.

... and his artmaking practice
As a photographic artist, Riley became well known for his uncompromising and often personal images that show his people on their own terms, countering stereotypes of Aboriginal people as victims. This was a contrast to the ‘ethnographic’ images of Aboriginal people prevalent at the time. Early portraits of friends and family depicted their worldliness, glamour and sophistication within the urban environment. These portraits showed ‘people as they are’: positive images of Aboriginal people that revealed the individual and defied popular generalising notions of urban (and cultural) decay.

The spirit of trust and empathy that pervades Riley’s depiction of his ‘subjects’ is particularly evident in his work featuring his own family and country. These images were exhibited in A Common Place: Portraits of Moree Murries in Sydney and London.
His work consistently portrayed Aboriginal life, while showing pictorial qualities such as delicate light, activated space and tone.

Working primarily in black and white, Riley explored tone and textures in the *Sacrifice* series (1992). About this series of fifteen images the artist said, ‘These works were the first conceptual exhibition of my work’. The subject matter reflects Christianity, mission life and rationing. The series also explores dispossession, replacing images of people with interspersed and symbolically loaded images of poppies, fish and crucifixes. ‘It allowed me to be more creative, take control, manipulate technical aspects. My direction shifted from mainly portraiture, although staying on track’. Riley’s work constantly shifts between the literal and the allegorical.

The row of fish, the crucified hands and the misty cross from the *Sacrifice* series refer to the prevalence of the mission system in Indigenous communities. The individual images can be read on several levels: as self-sacrifice through drug abuse, as the sacrifices Aboriginal people endured to survive, and as Christian and non-Christian acts of sacrifice.

The filmic, fluid nature of his photography meant that transferring his style to screen was inevitable: ‘… [I was] using images I would normally use in photography and transferring that to film and putting some sort of story with it.’ By using media as popular and potent as photography and film, Riley’s work and messages were able to reach the wider Australian community.

Elaine Russell
b. 1941
Language Group: Kamilaroi
Northern NSW

*Ceramic Pot*

*Inspection Day*
1994, acrylic on cardboard
This is what happened to Aboriginal people in the 1950s.
Art Gallery of NSW collection

The artist …
Elaine Russell was born at Tingha in northern NSW. (The local Aboriginal community knew this locality as Nuccrimla.) Russell’s early life was spent on the mission at Murrin Bridge on the Lachlan River near Lake Cargellico. When she was about 12 years old she entered a local art competition and won the first prize of a trip to the Philippines. Fearing the government policy at the time of taking fair-skinned children away from their parents, her mother refused to allow her to go. Russell can remember children just ‘disappearing’ from the mission, never to be seen again.

After marrying at Purfleet, Russell moved to Sydney, where she still lives, Having already achieved a Certificate in Catering and Nutritional Management and Small Business Management from the Eora Centre in Redfern, she enrolled in the Certificate of Visual Arts course in 1993 and was finally able to realise her lifelong ambition to be a painter.

Russell became a member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative and participated in the 1993 NSW artists’ exhibition, *sayin’ something*. Since this first show, her work has appeared in several group exhibitions, including *Continuity*, a show featuring work from Aboriginal artists from all areas of Australia, and *untitled?*, the 1994 NSW artists’ exhibition. With Kerry Giles, Peta Lonsdale and Panjiti Mary McLean, Russell participated in *Narratives* at Boomalli. This exhibition highlighted the diversity of art practice and the shared concerns of Aboriginal
women today. Russell had her first solo show with the Aboriginal and South Pacific Gallery in Sydney in 1995. The appeal of her unique style has meant her work is quickly gaining popularity and recognition, and she has received many commissions for book illustrations and saleable items for the Museum of Sydney. In 1994 she won the prestigious Museum and Art Gallery Award in the National Aboriginal Art Awards held in Darwin. Her work is represented in private and public collections such as those of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Westmead Children’s Hospital and the Board of Studies NSW.

... and her artmaking practice

Elaine Russell is one of several Aboriginal artists whose work is informed by their mission experiences. She cites Ian Abdulla as an influence on her work. Like Abdulla, she draws her main inspiration from memories of her family and their life on the mission: ‘It’s like it’s a part of me’. Her artwork depicts incidents, daily routines and episodes from her childhood. She described these experiences as ‘the things I can never forget’. Russell says that she ‘always knew she could paint’; this confidence is evident in her assured style.

Working with the full spectrum of colours, she uses acrylic or gouache on canvas and board to communicate her stories. The style Russell describes as ‘childlike’ originates partly from the content of these childhood stories, and partly from the need to ensure the works’ accessibility to a wide audience. She also directs her work towards the Aboriginal community, especially those people who have undergone similar experiences. Although her work may take many on a journey through their childhood, the paintings are not embedded in nostalgia. People of all ages relate to her work and Russell emphasises that she paints for the future generations of Aboriginal people. She joins many artists in maintaining the continuities and ties that link the Aboriginal identities of yesterday with those of today and tomorrow. As Elaine Russell states, Aboriginal art may be diverse, ‘but from cave paintings through to the artists of the present, everybody is working towards the same thing — expression of themselves’.

More (please link to www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Detail.cfm?IRN=122184 )
Jeffrey Samuels
b. 1956
Bourke, NSW

Brolga War Dance
2000, acrylic, ink and gouache on waterboard

The artist …
Jeffrey Samuels’ early childhood was spent on a sheep property at Carinda in the far north-west of NSW. He remembers vividly an interest in painting and drawing as early as seven years of age. ‘I used to copy comic illustrations, pictures of landscapes and photos of people from newspapers, magazines and books,’ he explains. He attributes his passion for drawing and painting to the inspiration of the great Arrente watercolour artist Albert Namatjira.

Samuels finished school in Grafton, NSW, in 1974, and completed a Diploma in Fine Arts at Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education in Sydney in 1978. In 1983, he returned to full-time art studies at the City Art Institute in Sydney, where he gained a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Arts.

Samuels’ involvement in Australian contemporary urban Aboriginal art has spanned 30 years. He is a co-founding member of Boomalli; The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October 2007, featuring the works of many of Boomalli’s founding member artists, including Jeffrey Samuels.


He has held Aboriginal art workshops and has worked as an Aboriginal artist-in-residence in government and non-government schools, TAFE, universities and jails.

… and his artmaking practice
He recalls that, as a young Aboriginal visual artist and art student, ‘Western art theories and European Australian culture did not inspire. Traditional and contemporary Aboriginal dancing, music, theatre, poetry, literature, language and visual arts along with Aboriginal social and political issues were a source of inspiration and influence. Like other young Aboriginal artists who were creating in different mediums and genre, I began to visually question the “dominant
art discourse” of the “dominant hegemony”. I experimented with Aboriginal cultural items and symbols to develop my own style.’

James Simon
b. 1959
Language Group: Wiradjuri
Wellington, NSW

At the Crack of Dawn
1994, acrylic on canvas, 81.5 x 116 cm

The artist …
James Simon identifies the central to western region of NSW as his country. His family moved to Newtown, Sydney, for employment reasons when he was six. Even at this age, Simon was painting and drawing: he won both first and second prizes in Redfern Primary School’s art competition when he was seven. Simon attended Wellington Technical College after leaving school, but devoted much of his time to sport, playing for numerous NSW football clubs. Simon maintained his interest in art and by 1979 he was beginning to make a living by selling his work. While he describes himself as a mainly self-taught artist, he did enrol for formal study at Randwick Technical College in 1983. With three other Koori artists, including Isabell Coe, he was involved in the founding of the Eora Centre for Visual and Performing Arts in Redfern, Sydney (now the Eora Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Chippendale).

The establishment of the Eora Centre and the contacts he gained through his formal training enabled Simon to begin exhibiting his work. Besides annual exhibitions at the Eora centre, he also participated in Koouri Art ’84 and in Two Worlds Collide (1985) at Artspace, Sydney. His work was selected for exhibitions in State Parliament House, at St Peters Gallery in Sydney and, in 1986, for the prestigious Biennale at The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Simon has taken a keen interest in public and community art, designing and working on several murals, illustrations and logos. At Darlington Primary School, he painted a mural depicting ‘a day in the life and imagination of an Aboriginal child’. In 1993 he worked on a mural in Eveleigh Street, Redfern, with fellow Koori artist Danny Eastwood. The University of Technology, Sydney, Jumbunna Aboriginal Centre commissioned him in 1994 to design a logo and illustrations for one of their resource publications. Since becoming a member of Boomalli, Simon has exhibited in the 1994 NSW artists show untilted? And in a group show with Isabell Coe, Robyn Caughlan and David Spearim (Fernando). He has been involved in many group exhibitions nationally and internationally, and his work is represented in public and private collections, including the Holmes à Court collection.

… and his artmaking practice
Simon describes his art as positive, and this attitude permeates his subjects, from landscapes and the natural world to political events. Through his images, he aims to promote peace and harmony, so he uses warm, vibrant colours, mingling figures and scenes on the canvas.
Utopian rural settings and evocative animal tableaux contrast with bleak mission scenes. Simon maintains that both his style and his method vary with his mood: ‘There are many different ways of approaching it … I just let the work happen.’

Simon’s art practice, in which he uses oils and acrylics on canvas and board, has broadened over time. He often includes text, usually his own poetry, so the words both inspire his artwork, and are visually articulated in it. The work is a means of expression and a way of interpreting life:

‘[Painting is] like lifting a blind up from in front of my eyes so I can see things more positively.’

He says artists who have influenced him include Picasso, Dali, Albert Namatjira, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. He hopes that his art and his teaching at the Eora Centre will inspire other Kooris to express themselves through the arts and to seize any opportunities they have to reverse situations of despair. He believes that many Kooris are trapped by stereotyping when they are young and that art can help them to overcome such restraints. Simon emphasises the need for ‘role models’ within the Aboriginal community, and at the same time he welcomes ‘new blood’ with fresh artistic ideas and styles into the movement called ‘Aboriginal art’.

David Spearim (Fernando)
b. 1956
Language Group: Kamilaroi
Moree, NSW

Invasion Day
1988, acrylic on canvas

The artist …
David Spearim (Fernando) has lived and worked in Kempsey for many years, but he was born in Moree and identifies this (Kamilaroi) area as his country. While still at school, he moved for a few years to Sydney, boarding in an Aboriginal hostel. He completed his School Certificate in Sydney and went on to begin a Visual Arts Certificate at East Sydney Technical College in 1975. Although he has painted throughout his life, he did not begin to work professionally as an artist until he began training with the renowned artist Robert Campbell Jnr in Kempsey. This experience encouraged him to start exhibiting and in 1988 he took part in the Kempsey Koori Artists exhibition held at Boomalli. Around this time he also completed a Commerce Certificate at Kempsey TAFE.

In 1989 Spearim’s work was included in another show at Boomalli: Gomileroi–Moree Mob, and an exhibition to open the Armidale Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place. In 1991 he exhibited with the Macleay Valley Arts and Crafts Co-operative in Kempsey. In the International Year for the World’s Indigenous Peoples in 1993, the Kempsey Macleay committee held an exhibition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists’ work, in which he was involved. Since becoming a member of Boomalli in 1993, he has exhibited with Richard Bell, H J Wedge, Vince Serico and Ian Abdulla in Been Gone Is, a tribute to Robert Campbell Jnr (who passed away earlier that year). In 1994, he exhibited with NSW artists Isabell Coe, James Simon and Robyn Caughlan, in a show at Boomalli. David Spearim (Fernando) was also commissioned in 1994 to illustrate several children’s books on Kamilaroi stories. An interest in passing on his skills led him to take on casual teaching at primary schools and Kempsey Skillshare in 1987. He has been a long-standing member of Kempsey Primary School Committee. He emphasises the need for young Aboriginal people to have access to ‘role models’ in the community.

… and his artmaking practice
David Spearim (Fernando) paints landscapes, dancers, food gathering and so on for sale among his local audience, and he dwells on political and historical issues affecting Aboriginal people in his works for exhibition. These exhibition works challenge the viewer to think about a range of issues
such as mission life, the White Australia Policy, the Mabo case and land rights. Spearim describes these works as being about ‘life and the hard times’.

Whether he is working with acrylic on canvas, screenprinting, or using craft-based materials, Fernando employs ‘hot’ colours — bright colours that he refers to as ‘Koori style’.

Spearim acknowledges Robert Campbell Jnr as a major inspiration. He also cites other Aboriginal artists such as Sally Morgan, Trevor Nickolls and Richard Bell as influential in his work. His interests in reading and in issues of justice in society are often reflected in his subject matter, which he describes as political and ‘from the heart’. He developed an individual style early in his career and later began including text in his canvas paintings. Although Spearim stresses that most issues can be addressed through conventional painting practice, he says there are some ideas that need to be literally spelt out on the canvas. Stories that accompany the works serve to clarify ideas that may not be immediately clear, especially to a non-Aboriginal audience.

David Spearim describes the changing of non-Aboriginal peoples’ attitudes, especially those in country towns, as the next frontier for Aboriginal people. Shifting racist attitudes is the main aspiration in his art.

He points out that the need to express feelings and thoughts — to communicate a message, political or otherwise — is a common theme in most Aboriginal art.

Thancoupie
b. 1937
Language Group: Thanaquith
Napranum (Weipa), Western Cape York

Left: Guiree, the flying fox
Hand-built stoneware fired at 1240 degrees (oxides and clays), height 34 cm
Right: Thawaal the black and white eagle fights with Cheth the red and white eagle
Hand-built stoneware, height 27 cm

The artist …
Thancoupie, also known as Thanakupi, is Australia’s first well-known Aboriginal ceramicist. She initially worked on paper at school, then later on bark, before going to East Sydney Technical College and studying pottery. Thancoupie had her first solo exhibition in Sydney in 1972. Her distinctive spherical pots quickly gained recognition and have been included in numerous group exhibitions as well as many solo shows. In 1986 Thancoupie’s work toured galleries in Brazil and Mexico. Two years later, her work was included in a Crafts Council of NSW travelling exhibition that featured twenty leading Australian craftspeople. Thancoupie’s ceramics are represented in several major galleries in Australia and overseas. She has also been commissioned to produce a number of ceramic murals. After working and teaching in Cairns for a number of years, Thancoupie returned to her country to work with children on an outstation she set up near Napranum.

Thancoupie’s work as an artist has been compared to that of Albert Namatjira, the great Arrernte watercolour artist of the 1930s–1950s: both artists successfully pioneered the use of a new medium to express traditional beliefs (Namatjira used watercolours, Thancoupie uses ceramics); and like Namatjira, Thancoupie is an important and knowledgeable community elder who understands the professional expectations of the non-Aboriginal art world.

… and her artmaking practice
Thancoupie uses hand-building techniques and stoneware clay to create spheres, then carves and paints onto the shaped clay with slips and oxides. Her imagery comes from ancestral figures, such as Guiree the flying fox and Knool the mosquito man, which cover the surface of her hand-built ceramic spheres. Other themes and subjects include the land, the sea, animals, plants and the stories of her people. Like many other Aboriginal artists, Thancoupie works in a ‘new’ medium to express cultural knowledge that has been passed down through thousands of generations.

‘Clay at Weipa was sacred, we only used it for ceremonial purposes and each colour had a meaning. We didn’t need pottery because we had shells to drink from and the tea-tree bark and leaves to wrap and cook food in.’

— Thancoupie (quoted in Isaacs, 1982)

More (please link www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/storyplace/artist_thancoupie.htm )
Michael Nelson Tjakamarra
b. late 1940s
Language Group: Warlpiri
Yuendumu, Central Australia

Untitled
1990, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 153 cm
courtesy of Utopia Art Sydney

The artist …
Michael Nelson Tjakamarra (also spelt Jagamarra and Jagamara) was born at Pikilyi (Vaughan Springs), Northern Territory. He grew up in the bush and has vivid memories of hiding in fear at his first sighting of a white man. He attended a mission school at Yuendumu and was initiated at the age of thirteen. As a young boy he was taught sand painting, body painting and shield painting by his grandfather. He worked as a buffalo hunter in Kakadu, drove trucks, was a stockman and served in the army before he eventually moved to Papunya where he settled down with his second wife, Marjorie. Tjakamarra observed the older painters at Papunya and he began to paint regularly, and on canvas, in the early 1980s. In 1985 he painted Five Stories, which brought him renown.

His work became highly sought after and it is represented in both public and private collections in Australia, including in Parliament House, Canberra, the National Gallery of Australia, and the Holmes à Court collection. He is also represented in international collections. His prominence as an artist is reflected in his two major public commissions: the Sydney Opera House Mural and the forecourt mosaic at Parliament House, Canberra. In 1984, Tjakamarra won the prestigious National Aboriginal Art Award, and in 1993 he was awarded the Order of Australia for services to Aboriginal art.

… and his artmaking practice
Michael Nelson Tjakamarra is one of the ‘second generation’ of Papunya Tula artists (please link to www.papunyatula.com.au). The ‘first generation’ were those who, at Papunya in the early 1970s, began using acrylics on board and canvas to paint representations of cultural traditions. Some dispersal from Papunya took place during the 1980s as people chose to resettle their homelands, with the result that the Papunya Tula communities are now widely scattered.

Michael Nelson Tjakamarra’s country, Pikilyi (Vaughan Springs), lies at the intersection of several major Dreaming paths and his paintings depict these sacred sites. He always plans a painting in his mind.
Using acrylic paint on large canvases, he composes detailed symmetrical designs displaying
extensive artistic skills. The paintings are informed by deep knowledge of ceremony and spiritual
attachment to the country west of Yuendumu.

Ronnie Tjampitjinpa
b. early 1940s
Language Group: Pintupi
Kintore, Western Desert

*Untitled*
1994, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm
courtesy of Utopia Art Sydney

The artist …
Ronnie Tjampitjinpa was born near Muyinnga, Western Australia, about 100 kilometres west of the Kintore Ranges. His family moved extensively across Pintupi territory through the Gibson and Great Sandy Deserts, in the traditional lifestyle that his people have led for thousands of years.

Tjampitjinpa was initiated into manhood in the early 1950s near his birthplace. He and his family moved to Haasts Bluff and then later joined relatives at the newly settled Papunya community in the 1960s.

A founding artist of the ‘Papunya Tula’ (please link to [www.papunyatula.com.au](http://www.papunyatula.com.au)) school, Ronnie Tjampitjinpa has been part of the desert painting movement since the early 1970s. Tjampitjinpa paints some of the most intriguing paintings to emerge from the Papunya Tula artists group. He was one of the group of men who, provided with materials by art teacher Geoff Bardon, began painting traditional designs on boards to educate children of the Papunya community. This was the first time Aboriginal Law men (please link to [www.abc.net.au/message/tv/ms/s1076046.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/message/tv/ms/s1076046.htm)) had produced artworks for non-ceremonial purposes using non-traditional materials — acrylic paint on canvas and boards. Their actions precipitated the Western and Central Desert art movement and changed perceptions of the term ‘Aboriginal art’, making it portable and economically viable.

Tjampitjinpa’s work has featured in many solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally. His work is represented in collections such as the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of Victoria.

… and his artmaking practice
Ronnie Tjampitjinpa is a dynamic painter whose work follows the strict Tingari style of concentric circles or squares joined together by connecting lines in designs that relate to the people, the land and the Dreaming. Tingari is the ancient and secret post-initiatory ‘higher education’ for Pintupi men. The teachings are conveyed in lengthy song cycles for which the designs are complementary mnemonics. Tjampitjinpa’s work is well known for its vigour, bold designs and sense of profound spirituality, reflecting his direct and strong ties with his culture. He minimalises Pintupi imagery into contrasting
lines of paint and works with the concentric circles of the classic Pintupi iconography, while maintaining power and an energetic rhythm. His work also has a simplicity that makes it appealing, yet mysterious, as outsiders and the uninitiated try to understand what he is communicating. As a Pintupi elder and as a contemporary, highly individual painter, Tjampitjinpa refutes all stereotypes that locate the desert dweller in an unchanging world. 

Paddy Fordham Wainburranga  
early 1930s – 2006  
Language Group: Mayali/Rembarnga 
Katherine, South West Arnhem Land

*Manjhikilyo — Malevolent Mimi Spirit*
1994, natural ochres with PVC fixative on timber, 180 x 58 cm

The artist …
Paddy Fordham Wainburranga was an elder of the Rembarnga people. He was fully literate in the music, dance, stories, painting and sculpture of his country in the escarpment of South West and South Central Arnhem Land. This area is inaccessible and isolated in places and has produced a number of distinctive and highly individual artists. Wainburranga grew up under the traditional tutelage of his father and uncles and worked as a stockman on the cattle stations. He lived in Maningrida for more than 20 years before establishing Bumdubu, his outstation near Bulman Station. Wainburranga saw many changes in his life, such as the beginning of the homelands movement and developments in Land Rights as well as the emergence of the welfare system in Australia. His work has been included in landmark exhibitions in Australia, UK, USA and Germany, and is represented in private and public collections throughout Australia. He completed 30 of the 200 hollow log coffins that form the 1988 Aboriginal Memorial (please link to [www.nga.gov.au/Dreaming/Index.cfm?Refrnc=Ch2a](http://www.nga.gov.au/Dreaming/Index.cfm?Refrnc=Ch2a)), now housed in the National Gallery of Australia. He won prestigious art awards such as the National Aboriginal Art Award and he was the subject of several films and biographies.

… and his artmaking practice
Paddy Fordham Wainburranga explored many themes in his paintings, including the coming of the welfare system, Land Rights, human rights and World War II. Thus he played a major role in revealing Aboriginal history from a unique traditional Aboriginal perspective. In addition to his large-scale thematic paintings, he also depicted the creation ancestors responsible for Rembarnga culture and land. In major narrative paintings he told such things as how Aboriginal life began; how
his people became divided into moieties and skin groups; how ‘pay back’ works in Aboriginal society. He also found inspiration in the vast water and stone environment and the spirit figures that share this country with the Rembarnga. Wainburrranga worked on paper, canvas and bark as well as doing sculptures. He said that Mimi spirits are like humans — some good, some bad. Manjhkikilyo has a habit of eating people and clearly falls into the latter category. Wainburrranga made a film entitled *Too Many Captain Cooks*, an Aboriginal interpretation of the arrival of the Europeans.

In the film he said, ‘I’ve got to tell about the war-making people. All the new Captain Cooks came and called themselves “welfare mob”. They wanted to take all of Australia … . They could shoot people. New Captain Cook mob! But now we’ve got our culture back.’

Judy Watson
b. 1959
Language Group: Waanyi
North West Queensland

*Travelling*
1995, Rotorua mud, acrylic, pigment, ink and oil stick on canvas
courtesy of Collection Moet & Chandon, Epernay, France

The artist …
A descendant of the Waanyi people of the Gulf region, Judy Watson grew up in Brisbane and attended the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education in Toowoomba and the University of Tasmania in Hobart.

Watson is one of many Aboriginal artists who express their attachment to the country of their heritage. A trip she made in 1990 to her grandmother’s country around Riversleigh Station was an important part of her self-education about her heritage and inspired a series of paintings.
She works in painting, printmaking, drawing, mixed media and installation. Since 1990 Watson has served as an artist-in-residence in Italy, Norway, Canada, India and throughout Australia. In 1995 she won the prestigious Moet & Chandon Australian Art Fellowship. She has had many solo exhibitions in Australia and overseas, including at Baudoin Lebon in Paris, Dhoomimal Gallery in New Delhi, Mori Gallery in Sydney and Edith Cowan University in Perth. Her work has also featured in many group exhibitions, nationally and internationally.

In order to more fully understand her heritage and the attempted genocide of Aboriginal people and the personal tragedies that they have suffered, she does research and spends time visiting her relatives and travelling in her country. Her illustrated book, under the act(please link to www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Detail.cfm?IRN=164902) published in 2007, is based on Queensland State Archives documents relating to her being taken from her mother when she was a baby.

\[\ldots\text{ and her artmaking practice}\]

Judy Watson’s paintings are autobiographical. Her work has an affinity with Utopia artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye, whose effusive, seductive expanses of dots allude to the changing colours of the landscape. Both artists follow the Aboriginal tradition of depicting the landscape from an aerial view, as if above it. Unlike Kngwarreye, who hides her imagery under her dots, Watson floats her imagery above, exposing concealed histories and events to which the land stands as witness. These works are intensely personal and relate Watson’s learning process and knowledge gathered from journeys to her country. They feature the drama and histories of the land, as well as past experiences, a general history of Aboriginal identity and politics, and her relationships with her Waanyi relatives.

In common with Western Desert and Central Desert painters, Watson works with the canvas on the ground. She rubs powder pigment onto the surface and then often adds dashes of spiralling pastel marks. The inclusion of fragments of the landscape such as shells, dried leaves, tufts of grass and representations of fire rings in some of her works alert us to the destructive nature of invasion as well as Aboriginal ways of caring for the country. This is typical of Watson’s multi-referential approach. Her works not only represent the place from which they come but also consist of it. Other recent works explore her response to other peoples’ countries: travelling and hot pools, rotorua, for example, refer to Watson’s experiences connecting with Maori and other Indigenous artists in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

More (please link to www.aboriginalartprints.com.au/ab_judywatson.cfm)
H J Wedge
b. late 1950s
Language Group: Wiradjuri
Cowra, NSW

Captain Cook Con Man
1991, acrylic on masonite

Wiradjuri Warrior
1990, acrylic on canvas

The artist …
H J Wedge was born at Cowra in New South Wales — Wiradjuri country — and he grew up on Erambie Mission, west of Cowra. While Wedge recognises Erambie as home, he identifies the entire continent as his country. Imposed European boundaries and place names have no relevance for him. The oceans that surround its shores define his ‘country’. In the 1970s, employment opportunities around Cowra were extremely limited for Kooris, so Wedge attempted to advance his interest in photography by contacting various government departments for assistance. He was told that the equipment was too expensive and to forget about his aspirations. Almost a decade later, Wedge learned from a cousin about the Eora Centre for Visual and Performing Arts (please link to www.eora.net/default03.htm) in Redfern, Sydney. So in 1989 he left Cowra to live in Sydney and enrol at the Eora Centre.

Wedge’s interest in photography was supplanted when he was introduced to painting. He graduated with a Diploma in Visual Arts from Eora in 1992. Since that time, he has exhibited regularly with Boomalli and in other commercial galleries in Australia. He work has also been collected and displayed in international and national public galleries and museums. In 1993, he travelled to Hungary to participate in the Budapest Autumn Festival and in 1994 his work was included in True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag which toured several galleries in England. Wedge’s triptych Mabo country — Kingsize was
selected for inclusion in the 1993 *Australian Perspecta* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. During the *Perspecta* exhibition, Wedge was the artist-in-residence at the gallery and an exhibition of work from this residency was displayed there for three months.

He has lectured at numerous arts and educational events, including presenting a slide lecture about his life and work for Artists’ Week at the Adelaide Festival in 1994. Wedge has been commissioned to produce promotional/design material, including the cover of Midnight Oil’s *Truganini* single and the publicity image for the Concert for the International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. His work was represented in *Don’t Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* at the National Gallery of Australia in September 1994. In 1995, Boomalli and Australia Books published a monograph of his work with the support of the Australia Council.

… and his artmaking practice

A recurring presence in H J Wedge’s work is the spirit man, a non-gender being which undergoes metamorphosis from one painting to the next. This figure is characterised by its halo of radiating hair and sometimes this figure, in its various or multiple forms and roles, emerges from the artist’s dreams. At other times the ideas expressed in Wedge’s paintings are sourced from conversations, television reports and childhood experiences: ‘I try to paint what I dream; what I hear on [television]; things you hear people talking about on the train, or when you sit down with other blacks, especially when they’re from other tribes and they sit there and talk about what happened in their life. How their Dreamtime got destroyed as well, but not all of it because most of them really kept it — a lot of people on other missions was too scared to even speak it, and even pass it down.’

One of Wedge’s continuing themes is Aboriginal history prior to and after colonisation. He draws historical analogies and dramatises incidents from his own individually conceived perspective. While a painting might only depict a single episode of a story, Wedge usually narrates the entire story which is transcribed into text to accompany the image.

Despite his success with painting — a medium he prefers — Wedge has maintained his interest in photography and printmaking and intends to devote more time to these. He is also interested in working with watercolours, pencils, sculpture and poetry. While he acknowledges the support and encouragement of the Eora Centre and Boomalli and admires the work of many other Koori artists, Wedge maintains that their influence has had little impact on his own style.

From the beginning, he has maintained a dual approach, depending on his mood: a ‘dot’ technique for works he can deliberate over and ‘straight out’ paintings for subjects or themes that need to be resolved quickly. Ideas and storylines sometimes take months to develop. However, dream sequences are often realised quickly as the dream figures and events remain in his head until they find expression in paint.

Wedge’s work is part of the process of re-writing the chronicles of popular history to reveal and include ‘alternative’ accounts. Works and stories such as *Captain Cook Con Man* and *Not Believing in Myths* proclaim his view that it was not Aboriginal people who were the savages in the ongoing invasion process. Wedge’s works have a didactic role, and he would like his messages to reach as wide an audience as possible. He hopes his paintings make the viewer ‘stop and think.’ As he explains, some of his works may shock or upset various people, ‘but this is all art, and as a Koori artist, you can only paint what you think about, what you feel.’

*Receiving Stolen Goods (diptych)*
After 1881 everybody was forcing all the tribes off their land, for farming and building townships. The farmers found it very hard as they had to clear the lands so they could grow their crops to make money. So they could buy more equipment and whatever stuff they needed to upkeep their farms. They also had many helping hands to keep the crops going, they even put native people on the farms and paid them in tobacco and clothes and paid the gubs in cash. While the women looked after their chores around the home, like cooking, washing etc. Sometimes the children stayed behind and chopped the wood and fed the chickens and things like that.

Over the centuries the farms were handed down to the next monster and they were proud of their fathers’ past. They continued the work of their families, getting greedier and greedier. Talking about their new life as if native people were never there, and today when they hear about land rights or Mabo, they’re always the first ones to whinge. Our ancestors’ blood has been shed across these lands and farmers whine the loudest about land tax going to the Land Councils, which is only paying rent for the land which had been stolen from our ancestors anyway. It should be backdated with interest accrued, as our people are still fighting and are yet to be compensated for their loss of their people and homelands.

Whiteman’s law really annoys me as it only works one way. Everybody is supposed to be equal but they’re just not. I am happy that I wasn’t born white and proud of being black today. The Whiteman’s history has been shameful or their ancestors were shameless, but I can hold my head up and feel proud of my history. Just say that my people went and knocked off the royal crown two hundred years ago and they found out today, they probably would have us up on charges for receiving stolen goods. Like all my brothers and sisters in jail — the white man’s law has worked against them, as their system only works for them but it don’t work for us as many of our people are still being institutionalised.

I know when we walk down the street today we can’t even get a cab to go anywhere. The only lift we get is in the back of the police paddy wagon, when they give us some more justice with a few batons and whack a few more charges on you without even investigating the case.

Like it shows in this painting, the father, mother and son are proud to hand down their farm to their son. But why isn’t the son up for receiving stolen goods? It’s funny how they have only been working the land for about 150 years, but my people have been
living on this land since time began and why has the law worked unbalanced, always in
the Whiteman’s favour?

Like in this second painting, it shows a very unhappy little boy who knows there is
nothing really good to look forward to. As he knows when he gets older he has no place
to call his home and may probably end up like many others who have landed behind
bars, struggling in the white man’s laws. I have no sympathy towards the farmers who
are suffering with droughts as they didn’t care about the sufferings of my ancestors. I
believe it’s our spirit ancestors repaying them back with black man’s law.

— H J Wedge

More (please link to www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Detail.cfm?IRN=166452 )
Lena Yarinkura
b. late 1930s
Language Group: Rembarnga/Kune
Maningrida, Central Arnhem Land

*Nayuyungki kun-kod (Ancestors in paperbark)*
1994 bark of *Melaleuca* spp., red and white ochres,
fibre of *Brachychiton* (Kurrajong) spp., dimensions variable

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The artist …
Lena Yarinkura is one of the few Aboriginal women sculptors to have gained recognition. She lives in the Maningrida area, Central Arnhem Land at Bolkdjam, an outstation. Yarinkura began as a weaver and was then encouraged to begin bark painting by her husband, a Rembarnga artist. Although she still paints on bark, including hollow log coffins, it is Yarinkura’s paperbark sculptures that attracted the interest of the major galleries and that gained recognition in the 1994 National Aboriginal Art Award. Paperbark forms are occasionally used in a sacred and ceremonial context, but Yarinkura is unique in her creation of secular figurative sculptures. Except for a few examples photographed in the 1950s, there are not other examples of secular paperbark sculptures in Arnhem Land art.

… and her artmaking practice
Yarinkura has worked in a number of diverse art forms including fibre work, coiled baskets, dilly bags, string bags, Mimi spirit sculptures, pastel on paper, etching and screenprinting. Her subjects or themes consist of local flora, fauna and Mimi spirit figures.

As a woman artist in Central Arnhem Land, Yarinkura is unusual in her use of such a diverse range of media. Her recent innovative work has been instrumental in generating community interest in fibre craft, sculpture and re-creation of ceremonial forms for an outside audience.

The paperbark sculptures created by the artist are three-dimensional representations of well-known mythologies told by elders of the Rembarnga, Kune, Dangbon and eastern Gunwinggu people of Western and Central Arnhem Land. The figures are totally secular in nature.
Yarinkura shapes and binds the paperbark using string and bark fibre from the kurrajong tree. The figures are then usually painted with red and white ochres. Exhibited as an installation, the characters appear to be acting out their roles in Central Arnhem Land stories.

Galleries and Art Centres

The Art Gallery of New South Wales

The Art Gallery of New South Wales is situated in the Domain parkland in the centre of Sydney. It was the first institution to gain a major collection of Aboriginal art — a gift of 24 paintings on bark and paper from the Commonwealth Government in 1956. Tony Tuckson, an avid admirer of Aboriginal art, became Deputy Director of the Gallery in 1957. Between 1959 and 1962 more bark paintings and other works, including a specially commissioned set of Pukumani Grave Posts, were acquired.

The installation of the Pukumani Posts in the gallery in 1959 received a mixed response which was indicative of the attitudes towards Aboriginal art at the time. While some artists found the works inspirational, some art critics and viewers objected to their presence in an art gallery. Collected on various anthropological expeditions, which Tony Tuckson himself sometimes went on, the bark paintings were mainly from north east Arnhem Land. They dealt with aspects of religious belief and the law and laid the foundations for a ‘classic’ collection of Aboriginal art.

After this initial period of active acquisition, the gallery’s collection became static, mainly due to a general lack of funds and the absence of a specific curator for Aboriginal art. The collection also suffered the loss of Tony Tuckson’s patronage and enthusiasm in 1973. The gallery’s commitment to Aboriginal art was not revitalised until the 1980s, when contemporary art curator Bernice Murphy included works by Papunya Tula artists in the first Australian Perspecta exhibition. The appointment of Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine as curator-in-the-field in 1984 saw the acquisition of significant bark paintings by David Malangi and Dorothy Djukulul among others.

Although some large-scale exhibitions were mounted, such as the Aboriginal Women’s Exhibition (1991) and My Story, My Country (1992), both of which involved curator Hetti Perkins (appointed to the then part-time position of curator of Aboriginal art after the Aboriginal Women’s Exhibition), the gallery lacked both a coherent policy concerning Aboriginal art and a specific department and resident curator. It was becoming increasingly recognised that the gallery’s collection and exhibition space was inadequate — particularly given the enormous tourist interest in Aboriginal art.

Between 1991 and 1993, through the Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund, the collection expanded with works purchased from a diverse selection of Aboriginal artists from all areas of Australia. The gallery also began to develop an acquisition policy that acknowledged its geographical responsibility to NSW artists.

In November 1994, the Yiribana Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gallery (please link to www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/archives_2001/yiribana_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_isla) was opened to the public. Covering more than 1000 square metres of gallery space, Yiribana is now Australia’s largest gallery devoted to the permanent exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Yiribana translates as ‘this way’ from the Eora/Dharug language spoken by the Indigenous people of the Sydney area.

The collection now represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from many different communities, experiences and backgrounds — reflecting the diversity of Aboriginal
art and culture. Former curator Daphne Wallace formulated an Aboriginal art department that is entirely Aboriginal-run and the gallery is explicit in its objective of consultation with artists and communities at every level. The establishment of an Aboriginal performer-in-residence position and programs of storytelling, dance and films all contribute to the gallery’s aim of exhibiting Aboriginal art as part of a living culture.

The gallery aims to exhibit Aboriginal art in ‘an original and contemporary manner that is based on themes which reflect the continuing tradition and values of the Aboriginal people, and how those ideas persist in the modern world’.

In 2007, The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October, featuring the works of many of the artists in this resource who were Boomalli’s founding members: Bronwyn Bancroft, Brenda L Croft, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels, among others. More (Please link to www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/simple_search)
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative

Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative is the oldest and most distinguished contemporary art organisation in Sydney that is owned and run by Aboriginal people. The cooperative was formed in 1987 by a group of ten Sydney-based Aboriginal artists and since its inception it has endeavoured to be at the forefront of contemporary Aboriginal art practice and discourse, and also to provide a supportive base for its members and the artists it represents.

In 2007, The Art Gallery of New South Wales celebrated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Boomalli with an exhibition throughout September and October, featuring the works of many of the artists in this resource who were Boomalli’s founding members: Bronwyn Bancroft, Brenda L Croft, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels, among others.

*Boomalli* means to strike, to make a mark, and it is a language word used by at least three nations (Bundjalung, Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri) from the region now known as New South Wales. The use of the word is very appropriate because the first members wished to make a mark by exhibiting their art on their own terms. They refused to be confined by misconceptions, held at the time by most of the non-Aboriginal arts community, about what constitutes authentic Aboriginal art and how it should be presented and promoted. They particularly sought to address issues of urban-based artists and their artistic practices.

As well as a full exhibition schedule, Boomalli provides a commissioning service and advises artists on collaborations. The cooperative also acts as an information and resource centre, with an extensive slide and publications archive that is accessed by students, arts industry professionals and other interested individuals and organisations.

Boomalli’s exhibitions focus on the promotion, marketing and education of urban Aboriginal contemporary artists, and it tours exhibitions to regional, national and international audiences.

Boomalli is committed to hosting exhibitions for its members, for artists in custody, for NSW artists and for young artists. These artists work in many mediums including painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture, installation, fabric design and multi-media.

Boomalli artists are creative people stretching boundaries and producing art at the cutting edge. They challenge stereotypes and are not afraid of being controversial. Their works illustrate the complexity and diversity of black cultural life and provide opportunities for the wider community to participate in contemporary Indigenous cultural expression.
Exhibitions at Boomalli have included:

1988: ANCAAA – Association of Northern & Central Australian Aboriginal Artists


1998: Wik: Takeback

1999: Flyblown: Michael Riley: video and photography

2001:
• Centenary vs Eternity: Centenary of Federation: Open Invitation
• Restrospective of Kevin Gilbert
• Jeffrey Samuels: Stylin Up
• Euphemia Bostock and Bronwyn Bancroft: Back to Back – Black to Black
• Gordon Hookey and Gordon Syron: In Ya Face

2002:
• Harry J Wedge: Biennale of Sydney
• Vee Thornbury: Solo
• Darren Cooper: Solo

2003:
• Nicole Phillips: Reflections
• Native Title Exhibition
• Urban Myths: Annual Members Exhibition

2004:
• Gordon Syron: New Works and Old
• Dorsey Smith: Finding Me
• Geoffrey Ferguson: In Defence of Identity

2005: 10th anniversary of the Deadly Awards, Sydney Opera House

2007: Founding Members Exhibition 1987–2007: Works by Fiona Foley, Bronwyn Bancroft, Michael Riley, Fernando Martin, Raymond Meeks, Jeffrey Samuels, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda L Croft, Tracey Moffatt and Avril Quail

More (Please link to www.boomalli.org.au)
Ernabella is located on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands along the South Australian/Northern Territory border. Textile production began at Ernabella in 1948 as a by-product of the sheep industry, and the Pitjantjatjara women were among the first Aboriginal people to produce artworks for an outside audience. When sheep farming finished in the 1970s, the Presbyterian mission workers at Ernabella introduced the artists to batik. The technique was ideally suited to the rhythmic fluid forms that the women had been using in their weaving and in their paintings on paper. (The artists refined their batik technique through studies in Indonesia in 1975 and 1992.)

Since the 1950s, the Ernabella artists have developed a highly distinctive and subtle abstract style that nevertheless allows for individual expression. Unlike many desert painters, the artists do not attach specific ‘meanings’ to their work. They do, however, acknowledge the inspiration of their country and traditions of milpatjunanyi (sand drawing) and body painting for inma (ceremony). Artists such as Nyukana Baker, Atipalku Intjalki and Angkuna Kulyuru are recognised as leading Australian textile artists. Ernabella batiks have been included in many major exhibitions in Australia and overseas and are collected by major State galleries.

Ernabella artists are also becoming well known for their delicate carvings of animal and bird figures and for their prints and acrylic paintings on canvas. Since printmaking began in 1986, several younger artists have built a small industry in screenprinting their designs onto lengths of cotton and silk. Continuously experimenting with new media, the artists have also travelled to the Northern Territory University in Darwin to participate in workshops in lithography and etching, and they continue to develop their work in this area.

Batik on silk organza
by Angkaliya Purampi
hand-drawn wax detail, Naphthol azoic dyes, 600 x 90 cm
Ernabella Arts Incorporated
Batik on silk crepe and satin
by (left) Alison Carroll and (right) Angkuna Kulyuru
hand-drawn wax detail, Naphthol azoic dyes, approximately 325 x 115 cm
Ernabella Arts Incorporated

Woodcarving: Large piti
by Dora Haggie
carved red gum root with incised poker work designs
Ernabella Arts Incorporated

Ngalpi (Leaf)
by Nyuwara Tapaya
1995, print on paper: etching
Background: Kililpi Tjuta (Stars) and Puti (Bush)
by Nyuwara Tapaya in collaboration with Nyukana Baker
Ernabella Arts Incorporated
Minyma Kaanka (Crow Woman’s Story)
by Awulari Davey
1993, painting (acrylic on canvas),
Ernabella Arts Incorporated

More (Please link to www.ernabellaarts.com.au )
Tobwabba Art Co-operative
Founded 1992
Forster, NSW

Most of the members of the Tobwabba Art Co-operative are Worimi people from the Great Lakes region of coastal New South Wales. The Worimi nation encompasses several *nurras* or local groups, including the Buraigal, Gamipingal and Garawerrigal peoples, each with their own country. Before colonisation, Worimi country extended from Port Stephens in the south to Forster/Tuncurry in the north and as far west as Gloucester. The Worimi people of the Wallis Lake area, called Wallamba, numbered at least five hundred and had one central campsite in the area known as Coomba Park. Their descendants used this campsite until the 1840s, when the growing presence of settlers and the consequent loss of land, sacred sites and hunting grounds made the established lifestyle impossible.

Survival became increasingly difficult for the Worimi and surrounding people as massacres, poisonings and the spread of European diseases caused Aboriginal populations to decline drastically. Today, there are fewer than two hundred Wallamba people.

The Tobwabba Art and Culture Group was founded in 1992 by the artists (who are mainly Wallamba people), their Land Council and the Skillshare organisation in Forster. Tobwabba means ‘place of clay’ and refers to a hill on which the descendants of the Wallamba now have their homes. The group was set up as a business enterprise, and the artists now largely fund themselves through sales of their art work. Most of the Tobwabba artists began as painters and sculptors. Using these forms, the artists exhibited in *saying something*, the NSW Aboriginal artists’ show at Boomalli in 1993. Since then, the artists have been involved in numerous group exhibitions in art spaces in Sydney, including the Rainbow Serpent Gallery and Macquarie University, and in various NSW towns. Tobwabba Art also participated in the Santa Fe Art Show in the United States.

The popularity of the Tobwabba artists’ work and the commercial demand for Aboriginal designs have led them towards working in a more market-based system. The artists have responded by expanding their skills in graphic design, marketing, curating and woodworking through courses provided by the local CES (now Centrelink) and Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Tobwabba designs can now be seen on products as diverse as Westminster china dinner sets, bookmarks, umbrellas and socks. In 1994, a range of tiles designed by Tobwabba artists was launched on the market.

Tobwabba artists also continue to exhibit their range of fine art, artefacts and decorative wear. Their website increased international sales in paintings and merchandise and received the Holiday Coast website award. The artists continue to reach out to other communities by training and inspiring Aboriginal people to develop self-esteem and pride in their heritage.

Although the artists use a wide variety of media, forms and styles, their art expresses common concerns and interests: some works recreate the life of Worimi ancestors, others express Aboriginal life today. The coastal environment also influences much of the Tobwabba artists’ work: the middens in Wallamba country suggest that before colonisation the Worimi had abundant natural resources. It would also seem that fire was a significant element in their life, both for the campsites and for the periodic burning of the land. The knowledge of a hunting and gathering lifestyle has been passed on to many of the Tobwabba artists and is expressed
in their designs and artworks. Using the symbols, culture and impressions of their rich history, Tobwabba artists have developed a unique style of ‘Coastal Urban Koori Art’.

More (please link to www.tobwabba.com.au)
The Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Association was set up as a community-based organisation in 1985 at Yuendumu, a mainly Warlpiri settlement north-west of Alice Springs. Acrylic painting had begun in 1983 when some of the older people, concerned that the children were lacking in their Aboriginal education, decided to paint the school doors with ‘the true Dreaming’.

More than half of the artists are women. The women’s expression of their ceremonies and knowledge in paintings highlights the equal and complementary role women have played in Aboriginal society.

The success of the school doors project and the need for a ‘Toyota’ to visit ceremonial sites encouraged the artists to begin working on canvas for an outside audience. Using a dotting technique, the artists employ various symbols and colour gradations to highlight landscape features, vegetation, and the movement of ancestor beings and people through the landscape. The full understanding of a painting is limited to Warlpiri men or women of the appropriate skin group.

A ‘Yuendumu style’ developed, characterised by bold application and use of vibrant colours. The artists refer to designs that have been used in body painting, rock art, tool decoration and sand painting for thousands of years. These practices remain strong and vital to Warlpiri society.

Since forming their association in 1985, the Warlukurlangu artists have been included in many major exhibitions in Australia and overseas. In 1989, Warlpiri men were commissioned to install a ground painting using materials from Australia in an important Paris exhibition entitled *Magiciens de la Terre*. Several artists have received individual recognition, and the Warlukurlangu Association is recognised worldwide as a major Aboriginal artists’ centre.

*More (please link to www.warlu.com)*
PowerPoint presentations

3-D works

**Thancoupie**
*Guiree, the flying fox*
hand-built stoneware fired at 1240 degrees (oxides and clays), height 34 cm

**Thawaal the black and white eagle fights with Cheth the red and white eagle**
hand-built stoneware, height 27 cm

**Lena Yarinkura**
*Nayuhungki kun-kod (Ancestors in paperbark)*
1994, bark of Melaleuca spp., red and white ochres, fibre of Brachychiton (Kurrajong) spp., dimensions variable

**Euphemia Bostock**
*Contemporary Koori Masks*
chicken wire, plaster, painted with mix of powder, ochre and wood glue
photo by Kath Burton

Landscape

**Emily Kame Kngwarreye**
*Untitled (Alhalkere)*
1990, acrylic on linen, 122 x 153 cm
Courtesy of Utopia Art Sydney

**Ginger Riley Munduwalawala**
*This is my country – This is my story*
1992, acrylic on canvas, 144 x 150 cm
winner of the Alice Springs Art Foundation, 1992

**Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Association**
*Ngapa (water), Pamapardu (flying ant), Wardapi (goanna), Ngarlkirdi (witchetty grub) Dreaming*
by Jeanie Nungurrayi Egan and Thomas Jangala Rice
1994, acrylic on canvas, 181 x 120 cm

**Lawrence Leslie**
*Banks of the Mehi*
1994, oil on canvas

Photography

**Brenda L Croft**
*Billie — Flowers, Knees and Cigarette*
from the ‘Strange Fruit’ series
1994, layout stat colour print, 29 x 23.5 cm
Destiny Deacon
First Wish, Second Wish and Third Wish
1995, ‘Three Wishes’ triptych, bubble jet prints from Polaroid photograph, 85 x 50 cm each

Michael Riley
Three images (untitled) from the ‘Sacrifice’ series
1992, silver gelatin prints on archival paper
25.4 x 20.3 cm

Michael Riley
Delores
1990, black and white print

‘Quest for Country’
1993, still photography from film

Peter Yanada McKenzie
North of Broome
1990, 35 mm colour transparency

Recollections

Ian W Abdulla
Bike Riding at Night
1994, acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm

Pantjiti Mary McLean
Collecting Bush Tucker
1994, acrylic, natural pigment and plant dye on canvas, 160 x 350 cm

Michael Riley
Three images (untitled) from the ‘Sacrifice’ series
1992, silver gelatin prints on archival paper
25.4 x 20.3 cm

Judy Watson
Travelling
1995, Rotorua mud, acrylic, pigment, ink and oil stick on canvas
courtesy of Collection Moet & Chandon, Epernay, France

Bronwyn Bancroft
You don’t even look Aboriginal
1991, gouache on Stonehenge paper
Art Gallery of New South Wales

Alice Hinton-Bateup
Ruth’s Story
1989, screenprint